

Massive demo shows battle to save the NHS can be won

Hannah Sell, Socialist Party deputy general secretary

For hours they poured off coaches and out of Euston and other stations as over 100,000 people - some estimates were as high as 250,000 - streamed to London in order to march in defence of the NHS. Stop [STPs](#) 'slashing, trashing and privatising our NHS' was repeatedly chanted by the predominantly working-class marchers and from the platform. The Socialist Party's placards 'build a movement to save our NHS - campaign, strike, occupy' were all snatched up.

The demonstration was organised from below; initiated by local health campaigns via the Health Campaigns Together umbrella group. Mike Forster, Socialist Party member and chair of one local campaign that helped initiate the demo, ['Hands off Huddersfield Royal Infirmary \(HRI\)'](#), described how he had first raised the idea on a protest of a few hundred the previous autumn. Across the country the Socialist Party mobilised all-out for the demonstration - distributing over 100,000 leaflets advertising the 4 March.

While the demonstration was initiated by community campaigns, there were also large contingents of trade unionists. By the day of the march, 13 national trade unions had supported the demonstration. Three general secretaries - Len McCluskey of Unite, Mark Serwotka of the PCS, and Dave Ward from the CWU addressed the march. Shamefully, Dave Prentis, the general secretary of the biggest health union, Unison, did not speak and the union's leadership only belatedly and half-heartedly supported the march. It was a different story among Unison members, however, who came to the march in their tens of thousands.

Possible to win

Without doubt the size and determination of the demonstration will have given confidence to health workers that it is possible to win the battle to save our NHS; not only to stop the current, potentially fatal, round of cuts and privatisation but to kick out the privateers leaching the NHS dry.

The Socialist Party gave out 30,000 leaflets on the demonstration calling for the march to be the first step of a mass campaign to save our NHS. We sold over 1,000 copies of the *Socialist*.

Young Socialist Party members led a youth and student contingent, together with Socialist Students. Socialist Party member and disabled people's activist Amaliah Loizidou spoke on the platform of the disabled and pensioners' shorter march.

Throughout the day we pointed out that the Tory government - with a tiny majority and an unelected prime minister - is weak and can be defeated. The NHS STPs (Sustainability and Transformation Plans) could become Theresa May's poll tax. We called for a national day of action with massive local demonstrations in all 44 STP 'footprint' areas to stamp on the STPs. The idea that such a day of action could take place on 1 May was raised from the main stage.

We also demanded that the trade union movement and the Labour leadership call a second - even bigger - national demonstration, using the full power of the TUC's six million plus members to protest in defence of the NHS. Such measures would further boost the confidence of NHS workers to take coordinated strike action against the pay freeze and the destruction of the NHS. Occupations to stop hospital closures could also play a role.

We explained that this movement should not be limited to saving the NHS, but stand for defence of public services as a whole. Peter Taaffe, general secretary of the Socialist Party, spoke at the National Shop Stewards' Network (NSSN) stage outside the Department of Health, saying: "The trade unions should organise a massive demonstration not just in defence of the NHS, but against all the cuts in councils, schools

and other public services. This should be a step towards a one-day general strike to show our determination to defeat this government."

Strike action

The case for coordinated strike action was widely understood by marchers. There was huge support for the heroic junior doctors' strike, and an understanding that future groups of strikers could not be left to fight alone. The case for coordinated strike action was put repeatedly from the NSSN stage.

On the main stage, Jacqui Berry, staff nurse, one of the demo organisers and member of the Socialist Party, put it clearly: "The age of pay restraint has lasted longer than World War Two. If pay restraint continues our unions have to ballot for strike action." She went on: "Today we've made history marching together, but we may well have to strike together."

Mark Serwotka, general secretary of the PCS, also called for coordinated strike action against pay restraint. It is urgent that the left unions come together to discuss making this correct idea a reality.

It is to the credit of Jeremy Corbyn, Labour leader, and John McDonnell, shadow chancellor, that they both supported the demonstration and spoke at it. John McDonnell declared: "Whatever it takes to save the NHS, including industrial action if it takes place, Jeremy Corbyn and I will be with you in parliament and on the picket line."

Pressure from big business

Jeremy Corbyn rightly pointed out that Nye Bevan and others who founded the NHS faced relentless hostility from the big business supporting media just as fighters for the NHS get denigrated today. The only answer, he rightly declared, "is to say it like it is".

Without doubt leading a movement to save the NHS and oppose austerity would be the most effective way to fight back against the constant attacks that the representatives of the capitalist class are raining down on Jeremy Corbyn. 'Saying it like it is', however, means recognising that the representatives of big business are inside the Labour Party as well as outside it.

The privatisation of the NHS has accelerated under the Tories but went a very long way under New Labour in government via the Private Finance Initiative and other measures. The Blairite politicians are now determined to defeat Corbyn exactly because he was elected on policies that include renationalisation of the NHS.

The morning after this magnificent demo John McDonnell told the Andrew Marr show that he wanted to sit down with Peter Mandelson and Tony Blair and 'have a cup of tea'. To continue to call for unity with the Blairites, who support the private sector profiting from our public services and who aided them doing so when in office, is the very opposite of 'saying it like it is'.

To continue to compromise with the Labour right would inevitably mean continuing to retreat on anti-austerity policies and handing victory to the pro-capitalist elements of the Labour Party.

Fighting for socialist policies, campaigning, as Dave Ward put it, to "take back control of our NHS, our railways, our postal and telecoms services, our workplaces" via democratic public ownership, requires standing up to the Blairites as well as the Tories and the right-wing press.

One immediate step that must be taken is to call on Labour councils to reject the STPs. As Jacqui Berry put it when she spoke: "We've heard from the leader of Hammersmith and Fulham council (which rejects its STP); it would be remiss of me not to ask the leader of the opposition to write to every Labour council asking them to follow its lead." Jeremy didn't refer to Labour councils in his speech, but should now urgently write to them.

Saturday's demonstration was a tremendous success, and an important step to building a movement capable of defeating the Tories. Now it needs to be built upon.

Mike Forster, Hands Off HRI

Saturday 4 March will go down in history as the day Britain said 'no!' to NHS funding cuts and closures. Some estimates put the numbers at an incredible 250,000!

This is on a par with the anti-poll tax demos, which helped to force Thatcher out. It could spell the beginning of the end of the Tories if we build on this momentum.

The crowds came from all quarters of the country and flooded Tavistock Square for the opening rally. From the stage it was obvious we were completely swamped by the sheer numbers which continued to swell all day long. The march snaked back the whole one mile route from Euston to Parliament Square.

And all of this from an idea which only took root towards the end of October. When our campaign from Huddersfield met with the Lewisham activists outside the Department of Health following our much smaller gathering of 300 to hand in petitions, we developed the idea of a national demonstration.

This was taken up by [Health Campaigns Together \(HCT\)](#), although not without some hesitation. Previous demos had not met with a big response - but this time the entire climate has changed.

A small group of us have been meeting to plan and organise the event. On a shoestring budget, we have proved people will respond to protests and action.

The mood was dynamic, buoyant and electric. They came from all corners of the country with banners and flags.

The very clear message was: 'we will not let them take our NHS and we are going to fight for it'.

It's vital we kick on from here and use this demonstration to map out a strategy for forcing the Tories back.

HCT will be meeting very soon to organise the next steps and will be reaching out to all health campaigns to get organised and maintain the energy.

Socialist Party members will be demanding as immediate steps:

- For the TUC and Labour Party to urgently name the day to organise a second, bigger demo
- For coordinated strike action by health and other trade unions to stop cuts and closures and win a decent pay rise
- For every local authority to refuse to sign up to Tory STP plans to cut budgets by a further £22 billion
- For coordinated regional protests in every STP area to highlight the impact of the cuts and a 'hot summer' of action to keep up the pressure. Start by turning International Workers' Day - May Day - into a day of protest in defence of the NHS

What you thought

Birmingham Central Socialist Party helped organise a Socialist Students coach to get to the demo, while Birmingham South East branch went on the trade union-organised coaches.

Along with the Socialist, we sold well over 50 NHS badges saying "underfunded, understaffed, under attack."

Once in London, we had members on campaign stalls and in the crowd with our papers and banners. Even on the approach to Tavistock Square, it was immediately clear that this event was going to be bigger than the early predictions of 50,000.

The mood of the crowd was striking. NHS workers, people from all walks of life, young people out in force, making clear demands for political change, not lip-service.

Among the union and campaign banners and homemade signs, Socialist Party placards flooded the crowd.

Having pushed hard for this demo to go ahead, with or without the support of the TUC, it was brilliant to see the scale of support, the burgeoning of left ideas and the strength of the intervention of the Socialist Party.

Siobhan Friel, Birmingham Socialist Party

80 people attended the demo from the Save Glenfield Heart Unit campaign in Leicester and had a very vibrant bloc on the march.

Many local campaigners are increasingly seeing the links to the national attacks and the need to link up with trade unions.

We were all really pleased that Unite general secretary mentioned our campaign from the platform.

Steve Score, Leicester Socialist Party and Save Glenfield Heart Unit

Socialist Party members from Manchester, Salford and Lancashire divided between three trains and a coach put on to get people to the march.

It was a really good protest, with lots of working class people attending their first demo. People from our area really enjoyed the Socialist Students block and hearing Peter Taaffe speak on the NSSN stage.

Lots of people agreed with the Socialist Party's demand for building campaigns in every STP area. A meeting of Keep Our NHS Public in Manchester in two weeks' time will plan the next steps locally.

Becci Heagney, Manchester Socialist Party

Amazing demo - hundreds of thousands marching to stop cuts and privatisation, with a brilliant atmosphere. Just imagine what kind of a movement we could be building if the TUC had officially supported the march and pledged resources to the campaign!

Sam Morecroft, Sheffield Socialist Party

While some of us from the Socialist Party in Cornwall attended the national demonstration, others joined a simultaneous one in Truro.

Around 200 people took part and we sold 13 copies of the Socialist. A Unite member helped us hand out our leaflets.

Gill Birchall, Cornwall Socialist Party

See also: [Build a movement to save our NHS](#)

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Fight the cuts: Demand no-cuts council budgets

Tony Mulhearn, Former Liverpool socialist councillor (1983-87)

In tandem with the attacks on the NHS is the ongoing savagery of council cuts. Only some six Labour councillors nationally in Labour-run councils have carried out their historic duty to vote against cuts - and

have been suspended by the Blairites for their stand.

The magnificent [NHS demo on 4 March](#) reflected the willingness of millions to fight to defend public services.

Savage cuts in social care are being implemented by councils, including Labour councils. These cuts place enormous strain on the NHS, which is replacing the function of the hundreds of care homes closed or reduced by councils.

During February and March, many council budget-setting meetings are taking place across the country, slashing millions more pounds off vital services. The Tories' government budget, with its promise to create 'reserves' to deal with Brexit, will mean still more cuts.

Birmingham's Labour council has already cut around £590 million from its annual budget since 2010, and is expecting to cut another £180 million.

Liverpool's Labour council has already cut £330 million with a further cut of £90 million budgeted for. This, according to Blairite mayor Joe Anderson, could see Liverpool council unable to provide even statutory services for the neediest.

Their idea of opposition is to cry crocodile tears, wring their hands, and hide behind the claim that they have 'no choice'.

But there is a choice.

In Scotland, [North Ayrshire's Labour council has set a budget](#) which spends reserves to reduce service cuts. This gives a glimpse that councils can act. But, unfortunately, it does not stop the cuts, let alone reverse them. It also relies on a council tax hike, which punishes working class residents. West Dunbartonshire has taken similar steps.

Reserve spending - while an important tactic - can only be a stopgap. And to be effective it has to reverse the cuts, not just carry them out more slowly. Councils and devolved governments can use tactics including borrowing, pooling reserves and cancelling debts to achieve this.

The breathing space a genuine no-cuts budget built on this approach would provide should be used to develop a mass movement of opposition to Tory cuts, with Jeremy Corbyn well placed to make the call.

The 4 March demo confirmed the existence of a mass movement crying out for leadership which could transform the political landscape, by forcing the Tories to retreat - and, in the process, isolating the Blair-Mandelson saboteurs.

- Read more about Scotland's reserve-spending budgets: ['Labour's "no cuts" budgets fail to offer a fighting alternative to austerity' at socialistpartyscotland.org.uk](#)

One million workers on zero-hour contracts

Fight for secure jobs for all

Roxy Castell, zero-hour contract worker

910,000 workers in Britain are on zero-hour contracts - a six-fold increase since 2008 - [according to analysis by the Resolution Foundation think-tank](#). The Trade Union Congress expects it to top a million shortly.

The rise of zero-hour contracts in place of more secure ones leaves workers facing insecure futures where homelessness is a week-to-week threat.

I have first-hand experience of trying to survive, and raise a daughter, on zero-hour contracts. I can attest to the stress and hopelessness that can accompany this situation.

Living on a zero-hour contract often means having very little idea of weekly income, making planning for the future impossible. In order to sustain themselves, workers are sometimes having to take on more than one zero-hour contract at a time, leading to a chaotic and stressful lifestyle.

At one point I had two zero-hour contracts and one 12-hour one. But due to the instability of the hours I was given, I was still having to sign on to survive in the weeks where I was earning less than I would be on the dole.

This caused intense stress not only for me, but also for the job centre staff who had to deal with my claim, highlighting that the current benefit system is insufficient to deal with the prevalence of zero-hour contracts.

Never knowing where the next electric payment or food shop is coming from, let alone what the future holds in terms of employment, means workers are trapped in a hand-to-mouth cycle. This has inevitable consequences for their mental wellbeing, and subsequently wider social implications.

In order to tackle this, the Socialist Party fights to scrap zero-hour contracts, and guarantee full-time hours and permanent jobs for all who want them. We campaign for trade unions to take the lead on achieving this, through membership drives, protests and strikes.

Tories change law to dodge rulings against disability benefit cut

- Restore full disability benefits

Amalia, Socialist Party disabled people and carers' group

Despite two tribunals ruling that the Department for Work and Pensions should expand the reach of the 'personal independence payment' (PIP) disability benefit, [the government is bringing emergency legislation to stop it](#).

Theresa May might want to present her government as one for 'hard-working people', but the reality is that the austerity era continues.

PIP is received by some people with disabilities as a compensation for the extra costs a disabled person has. It is given for expenses for "daily living" and for "mobility". There are two rates - the standard rate at £21.80 a week, and the enhanced (for more severe cases) at £57.45.

The Tories brought PIP in to gradually replace 'disability living allowance' (DLA). That already meant reduction in the amount of money received by disabled people. PIP is also points based, so many people stopped getting the payments because of their score, including Paralympic athletes!

If they go ahead with this, 160,000 disabled people will be affected. To rub salt into the wound, Tory policy chief George Freeman said in an interview that money should only go to "the really disabled people" and not those "who are taking pills at home, who suffer from anxiety"!

Once more the Tories show their utter contempt - despite their proclamations to the contrary - for people who live with disabilities. And they try to divide and rule by claiming disabilities related to mental health issues are less real than physical disabilities.

For disabled people, this move is another blow on top of constant attacks to their rights and welfare. DLA and PIP money is important for being able to live a dignified and independent life.

Scrap the Tories' welfare counter-reforms; scrap the points system in PIP; abolish work capability assessments; invest in jobs, homes and services for all. Organise and fight back!

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MPs take £1k raise while living standard growth plummets

Put MPs on workers' wages

Josh Asker, Southampton Socialist Party

18% worse off. The Institute for Fiscal Studies calculates that UK households will have [living standards 18% lower by 2021](#) than they would have been had the economic crisis never happened.

Doesn't this sound like a punishment for working class people? Meanwhile the bankers who caused the crash have pay that is soaring.

And MPs who handed public money over to them - while imposing ruinous pay restraint on public sector workers - [are awarding themselves an extra £1,000 a year](#).

MPs clearly think they deserve rewarding for carrying through the bosses' austerity and privatisation programme.

Of course, most MPs see themselves as representatives of the capitalists, not the workers who elected them. Every pay rise takes them further away from the experiences of the ordinary people who they claim to represent.

Where the Socialist Party has had MPs, they have only taken the average wage of a worker in their constituency.

Dave Nellist was a Labour MP from 1983-92, and a supporter of Militant, the Socialist Party's predecessor. He [gave over half of his salary to the movement](#), to live on the pay of a sheet metal worker. Pat Wall and Terry Fields made similar sacrifices. And our sister party in Ireland has MPs today, with the same policy.

The only way we can improve living standards for the majority is to put the 99% in charge. Elected politicians should be subject to recall by those who elected them. There should be no material privileges for being an MP.

Aristocrats to hold byelection for one of their 92 reps in parliament

Alison Hill

There's a [byelection coming up on 21 March](#). There are 27 candidates, all hereditary peers, all men, and all very rich.

The only people who can vote in the election are... hereditary peers.

"The best day care centre for the elderly in London." Probably an old joke about the House of Lords, but no harm in cracking it again.

Lord Taylor (Lib Dem, posh) was happy enough to play for laughs when he appeared in the new [BBC2 programme 'Meet the Lords'](#). But the House of Lords is not so much a joke - more a dangerous scandal.

OK, there's quite a lot of parading about in comedy outfits, sitting around in comfy chairs and collecting £300 a day just for turning up.

But this bunch of old fogies, mostly men, actually gets to influence legislation.

The details of the Lords byelection candidates and their riches are pretty sickening, but no worse than some who allowed themselves to be shown on BBC2. One bloke - Lord Palmer - boasted he had the only silver staircase in Europe in his house. More 'Mappin & Webb' than 'B&Q'.

Baroness D'Souza, a former speaker of the Lords, blew the gaff when declaring there were "many, many peers who contribute absolutely nothing, but who claim the full allowance."

She also spoke of watching a peer keeping a taxi running outside while he popped in to sign on. Not much chance of him getting his benefits sanctioned.

Clearly this outfit needs abolishing. Not just because a load of rich people have found themselves a nice little earner at public expense.

But because - even though their powers to stop the Commons have been limited - they could still be used in the future against a government which actually tried to bring in measures to benefit the majority.

The Socialist Party isn't too excited about the Lords byelection. But we do campaign for a democratically elected legislature, where representatives can be recalled from their seat at any time. And for them to receive no more than the average wage of a skilled worker.

TUSC supports Irish MPs' call on Corbyn to fight for socialist Brexit

The [Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition \(TUSC\)](#) has added its support to an appeal to Jeremy Corbyn by socialist members of the Irish parliament (TDs). Both groups see Brexit negotiations as an opportunity for an international anti-austerity campaign.

The TDs, members of the Socialist Party's sister party in Ireland and the Anti-Austerity Alliance, had written to Jeremy Corbyn earlier this year.

TUSC chairperson and former Labour MP Dave Nellist, a member of the Socialist Party and backbench rebel colleague of Jeremy Corbyn in the 1980s, said: "It is fighting socialist policies that are needed to 'fill the gap' and undercut the far right, not efforts to conciliate with establishment politicians.

"Only young people, workers, and middle class people hit by austerity have an interest in ensuring that the Brexit negotiations don't give a new impetus to the pro-market, privatisation and anti-worker policies that have shaped the EU treaties.

"To reach them, Jeremy needs to more decisively break with the failed establishment politicians, here and in Europe."

- Read more at tusc.org.uk
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Second front in battle over driver-only operation opens on Northern Rail

A striking Northern Rail RMT member

Northern Rail train guards have voted by an overwhelming majority in favour of strike action against the introduction of [driver-only operation \(DOO\)](#). Our first strike date is 13 March and is planned to coincide with our striking brothers and sisters on Southern and Merseyrail.

There are despicable Labour councillors, in Liverpool of all places, praising DOO as safe. We're going to get the same across all the other big metropolitan cities such as Sheffield, Manchester, Leeds and Newcastle.

We know where these so-called Labour councillors stand on austerity, so we can expect no support from them on running a safe, accessible railway.

Many of our RMT parliamentary group are northern MPs - the shadow rail minister and shadow transport secretary are MPs on routes that will go DOO. They've told us in private they are against DOO and Jeremy Corbyn said the idea of running trains with just the driver "was a daft idea"!

But when we held an '[Action for Rail](#)' leafleting protest in January over the annual fare increases, all publicity produced by local Labour activists omitted all traces of the RMT. We were even cropped out of all the pictures.

I made a point that this was the first time we had any support from the Labour Party in all the years I've been in the union.

The Socialist Party, Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition and National Shop Stewards Network have always supported us on demos and picket lines.

The battle against DOO has now opened on a second front and we are determined to win. It's going to be harder to introduce DOO up north as we don't have the rolling stock or infrastructure, but we must show management that we will fight against DOO come what may.

All my colleagues are prepared to stand united in the forthcoming fight to keep the railway safe and accessible for all.

Leaked document threatens jobs and conditions at Ford Bridgend

Dave Reid, Socialist Party Wales

[Ford workers' warnings](#) of a rundown of the Bridgend plant have unfortunately proved correct. Ford has leaked documents indicating the rundown of the plant over the next four years. [The document projects the loss of 1,160 workers](#).

And by linking the rundown to overtime payments, the company is clearly trying to use the threat of closure to force through cuts in pay and conditions at the plant. [Like at Tata Steel](#), it is likely gunning for pensions too.

There must be a determined response to such blackmail. If Bridgend workers follow the advice of Welsh first minister Carwyn Jones and submit to the blackmail, then the company will continue the offensive and probably close the plant anyway.

Ford must be told that any attempt to run down Bridgend plant or attack pay, conditions and pensions will be met with UK-wide strike action. The company must be set a deadline by which time if they have not guaranteed the plant's future then action will be called.

And until the sourcing is confirmed, the union must tell Ford that any attempt to take machinery from the plant will be stopped - this will send a clear message that the union is serious.

Instead of backing up Ford, the Welsh government should be backing Ford workers and making it clear that unless sourcing for engines is secured it will be calling for the nationalisation of the Ford plants.

Workers have made big sacrifices to get promised sourcing and the Welsh Government has given £15 million, but management is ripping up its promises.

Rob Williams, ex-Swansea plant convenor and National Shop Stewards Network chair, said: "The Ford unions must put pressure on the Labour Welsh Assembly to commit to nationalisation if Ford threaten to pull out. This would put added pressure on Ford and send the clear message that these jobs cannot be allowed to go!"

Oxford bus drivers' strike: Huge anger at bosses' attacks

Nick Chaffey

Over 400 bus drivers at the Oxford Bus Company, owned by Go Ahead, have started strike action in a dispute over pay and attacks on terms and conditions. This is the first Oxford bus strike in 40 years and came to a head when management refused to pay agreed rates for the legally recognised bank holidays over Xmas - drivers lost £100 a day due to unpaid enhancements over that period. This came on top of management's refusal to enter annual pay negotiations which should have started in November.

The mood on the picket line and at the Unite union protest with over 200 drivers attending, was angry and determined. Especially since management have further escalated the dispute by derecognising the union and suspending two union members for posting their views on social media.

The Oxford Motor Services company posted profits for 2015 of over £4 million, with Go Ahead taking £99 million in profits for 2016. Workers see their long working hours and anti-social hours under threat of increasing, only to make even greater profits for management.

With a skyrocketing cost of living in Oxford, it is no wonder that these attacks have been met with such anger.

Drivers have been buoyed by today's turnout and the overwhelming support from the passing public tooting their horns. Further strike action has been organised beginning at midnight on Sunday 5th March for 24 hours, with Len McCluskey, the bus drivers' nominee in the Unite general secretary election, due to visit.

Send messages of support to shaun.noble@unitetheunion.org

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Deliveroo cedes ground in Brighton dispute

Andy Barber, Brighton Socialist Party

Deliveroo has ceded ground to its workers in Brighton by imposing a recruitment freeze so that existing cyclists and scooter riders don't see their hours diminish further. This is in the face of pressure exerted by the strike of 14 February and a petition signed by over 20,000 people.

A public meeting on 28 February, organised by [Brighton Trade Union Council](#) and the riders' union [Independent Workers of Great Britain \(IWGB\)](#), discussed developing a strategy to escalate the campaign. Their demands include ending victimisation, increasing the rate of pay per 'drop' from £4 to £5, and achieving the £8.45 Living Wage plus costs.

The need was identified to increase public awareness of the riders' fight by leafleting and holding campaign stalls alongside a high-profile 'critical mass' cycle ride planned for 14 March at 3pm.

The rise of casualisation of the workforce is clearly illustrated by the fact that [Deliveroo uses between 500 and 600 riders in Brighton and Hove](#) with work averaging 15 hours a fortnight. It can be as infrequent as one to four times a month, with pay effectively falling to as little as £1 an hour considering time spent waiting at the 'zone centre'.

Precedents stemming from recent and ongoing legal cases surrounding the status of individuals are important. For example, exclusively contracting for a particular company over an extended period has been construed as affording 'worker' status. Such rights as the national minimum wage, sick pay, holiday pay and the right to bring action over discrimination accrue from this.

However, the worthiness of a clear strategy embracing industrial action is apparent as evidenced by the Deliveroo dispute.

Brighton Socialist Party fully supports the struggle of the Deliveroo riders.

Fujitsu workers strike for jobs and union recognition

Today Unite members across Fujitsu took strike action to support the campaign to save jobs and for the right for union recognition for all members.

Fujitsu has [announced 1,800 job losses over the next 18 months](#) through offshoring, outsourcing and automation.

Many Unite members at Fujitsu have been on strike today for their first time and all major Fujitsu sites in the UK have been picketed.

Members of Stevenage Socialist Party went along to support the picket in Stevenage where turnout was good and spirits high.

Unite's combine committee will be discussing future action tomorrow, however continuous action short of strike is in force from today.

A Fujitsu striker in Stevenage

Warrington

Unite members at Fujitsu's Warrington workplaces braved the snow and sleet to mount a picket from 5.30am today.

Workers are worried about threatened job losses and are also campaigning on the issues of union recognition, pay and pensions.

The union's slogan on the strike leaflet: "Strike for your future", is especially apposite with, apparently, 'race to the bottom' company DHL looking to take over the Warrington warehouse workforce. The workers do not see Fujitsu as interested in maintaining, let alone improving, their terms and conditions. The company scrapped the body it had created to oversee that, just before announcing the job losses!

Only decisive industrial action will force back this employer and that's what Unite members are willing to do. Wider support is on offer too, with several trucks and vans turning round and refusing to cross the picket line.

Warrington Socialist Party members are taking this dispute to the local trade union movement to gain maximum support for any future days of action.

Hugh Caffrey

For more info and details for sending support messages, go to:

<https://ouruniontest.wordpress.com/fujitsu-national-dispute/>

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EHRC workers walk out

Becci Heagney, North West Socialist Party organiser

Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) workers took another day of strike action on 1 March after the [disgraceful sacking of ten of their colleagues by email last month](#). The PCS and Unite unions are now demanding the reinstatement of these workers.

EHRC has told the sacked workers that they cannot work the six months' redundancy notice period, despite being paid for it. This means that they do not have access to the internal civil service recruitment process in order to look for new jobs. Management had made an offer that they could work but would not have access to the email, team meetings or the buildings - in effect meaning that they could not proceed with applying for work.

PCS and Unite have one day of strike action each month until May planned. However, members hope that they do not have to take it and that their demands will be met. They have shown already that action gets results.

The original plans were for over 30 people to be made redundant, but successful strikes have whittled that down to the ten that have now been sacked. But, as one person on the picket line in Manchester said: "That's it for the time being, in a few months they will probably come back for more."

Full support should be given to PCS and Unite in their fight for reinstatement for the ten sacked workers and to defend the future of the EHRC.

Workplace news in brief

Library victory

Unite members in Bromley, south London, notched up an important win in their campaign to stop the privatisation of the borough's libraries. The building firm Carillion confirmed it had withdrawn a bid to run the libraries on behalf of Bromley council. The confirmation follows a concerted campaign by the union which included marches, demonstrations and strike action to defend Bromley's library service. This has also seen Bromley Community Link withdraw its bid to run Bromley libraries with volunteers. The campaigners understand that the only bidder left in the running for Bromley libraries is Greenwich Leisure Limited (GLL). GLL currently runs libraries in Greenwich where the Unite branch, led by Socialist Party members, has already taken successful strike action to defend pay and conditions and oppose zero-hour contracts, while at the same time winning permanent jobs.

Bromley Unite branch secretary Kath Smith said: "I want every union branch to be encouraged by this victory so that we can have a united fightback against cuts in local government."

Academy opposition

The governors at Swiss Cottage School in Camden have [agreed to apply to convert to an academy](#). They have received substantial support from Camden council over the years, but have decided they now want to be directly accountable to government commissioners instead of the local authority and local parents.

The governing body organised a very short consultation process for parents and staff to consider the possibility of an academy. But they have decided to defy, as many suspected they would, the responses they received. Only 3% of parents supported the change to an academy. The majority of school support staff rejected the proposals. Twice as many teachers completely rejected the proposals as those that expressed any interest in the possibility of the school becoming an academy.

Hugo Pierre from Camden Unison said: "The governors have not persuaded the vast majority of Unison members, teachers or parents that this is a good move. We know parents will be appalled that the governors chose to ignore this and will get involved in campaigning with us to get the governors to change their position."

Liverpool dock strike

Port of Liverpool dock workers are set to ballot for industrial action after recent unrest among staff employed by contractor Blue Arrow.

A Unite official has explained that a recent wave of sackings "has left morale at an all-time low". Blue Arrow recruitment agency was awarded the managing contract in 2014 and has already seen [another dispute take place last month](#) when external hauliers and dock workers protested against the poor break facilities on offer. That protest exposed the Victorian conditions the workers were enduring for toilet and dinner breaks.

Unite believes that Blue Arrow disciplines and dismisses workers far too quickly whenever there is the slightest problem. The present unrest is based on all of the recent dismissals being highly questionable and the workforce demanding that the union campaign for an employer who is fit to manage and look after the dock workers.

Neil Dunne, Liverpool Socialist Party

Millions protest - now join the Socialist Party to fight to change the world

Sarah Sachs-Eldridge, Socialist Party national organiser

It's only March and already 2017 has been dominated by protests. Millions of people have taken to the streets against the establishment and the status quo.

That includes the [millions-strong international 'women's marches'](#), the magnificent [4 March NHS demonstration](#), the [protests against Trump's Muslim ban](#), the demos in solidarity with refugees and the movements against repressive austerity governments from [Romania](#) to South Korea.

[Eight billionaires own more wealth than the poorest 50%](#) of the world's population - that is a summary of the inequality and injustice of the capitalist system. The marches show that millions of people want to see change.

The Socialist Party has been mobilising for and participating in the protests. We put forward a way to build the burgeoning resistance movements.

We emphasise the need for uniting all those suffering under austerity and capitalist crisis. We fight for every possible improvement in the lives of working people, putting forward what measures are needed to win these gains.

We point to the potential power of the working class - as can be glimpsed when [tube workers strike and London is brought to a standstill](#). And we are proud to raise the idea of a socialist alternative - the democratic running of society to meet the needs of all.

In Britain, when Jeremy Corbyn stood as an alternative to the Tory and Tory-lite politics of the Conservatives and the Blairites there was a mass response. But the right wing that dominates the Parliamentary Labour Party has been trying to get rid of him from the start.

The Socialist Party puts forward ideas that help the anti-austerity Corbynistas fight for a party in the interests of the 99% - not the 1% as the Blairites want - including deselection of right-wingers and extending Jeremy's programme to include more socialist measures.

Socialism is about taking the wealth and resources of the world, currently concentrated in the hands of the numerically tiny capitalist class - not even the 1% - and using them to provide for what the 99% want and need as opposed to what makes the most profit. This includes measures to safeguard the environment.

Taking the banks and the largest companies into public ownership, with compensation on the basis of proven need, will allow us to democratically decide and plan how to run society.

[Join us today!](#)

Why I joined: "I am a Labour Party member and I recently decided to join the Socialist Party"

Karen

I joined the Labour Party as a school leaver in 1981 but by the mid-80s I left, completely disillusioned, and became politically inactive. Then, during the 2016 Labour leadership election, I felt enthused by Jeremy Corbyn's anti-austerity policies and the possibility that at last the Labour Party had a chance of defeating the Tories and their vicious cuts.

I wanted to play my part in this and I re-joined the Labour Party and voted for Jeremy Corbyn in the leadership election. As a parent of disabled children I have seen first-hand the effect of Tory welfare reforms.

As a college lecturer, I have witnessed severe cuts to adult education funding and the devastating effect on my students' lives of benefit cuts, sanctions, zero-hour contracts, insecure employment and the bedroom tax.

When Jeremy Corbyn became leader of the Labour Party his policies filled me with hope again. However, I am disappointed that Labour councillors continue to vote through cuts to services and that democratisation of the Labour Party, including mandatory reselection of MPs, seems to have stalled.

Completely complementary

If the Labour Party leadership fails to build a mass anti-austerity socialist party, including uniting with other anti-austerity groups and activists, and instead makes compromises with the centre and right of the party, then those anti-austerity policies will be undermined. Too many people are suffering under the Tories to allow this to happen.

I am a Labour Party member and I recently decided to join the Socialist Party. The Socialist Party campaigned for Jeremy Corbyn in the leadership elections and supported his socialist anti-austerity pledges.

We would vigorously defend and support Corbyn in transforming the Labour Party into a party that opposes austerity and that represents the interests of ordinary people.

I support the Socialist Party's call for Labour councillors to implement 'no-cuts' budgets to defend jobs and services. I see membership of both the Labour Party and the Socialist Party as completely complementary, I support the campaign to readmit expelled socialists, and I would hope to be allowed to continue my membership of both.

Why I joined: "In those 16 pages of the Socialist I found more sense and integrity than in the mainstream media"

Leon Wheddon, Wirral Socialist Party

I have read the Socialist paper occasionally over the years and chanced upon Socialist Party members selling it locally one weekend. In those 16 pages I found more sense, integrity and genuine class pride than in months of propaganda and spin from the mainstream media.

I emailed the party about joining and received a reply from Dave, the Wirral branch organiser, inviting me to attend a meeting. Work commitments stopped me from attending as regularly as I would like but by my second meeting I had signed up as a member.

I found intelligent, eloquent comrades from diverse backgrounds passionate enough to give up their evenings and weekends for a demo, rally or picket line. Wirral Socialist Party provided much-needed support for Wallasey Labour members suspended on baseless Blarite allegations. We are very active locally and have become a regular presence in the area.

I joined because I stand for the woman fleeing an abusive relationship only to find Tory cuts have closed the refuge, with the migrant worker too scared to confront his boss over low pay and long hours. I stand with the pensioner forced to choose between dying from hypothermia or malnutrition as their pension buys less and less by the week.

I stand with the junior doctors and their colleagues in the NHS as they fight a government determined to ruin us all in a failed experiment of austerity. I stand for those who can't stand up for themselves, those who have bought the lie of neoliberalism and found themselves blamed for the greed of bankers and privateers.

Those killed for the colour of their skin or because they loved the 'wrong' person. I stand to make the world better for those not yet born - in the hope their world will be a better one.

Why I joined: "I began to feel really exploited and to think about why"

Calum Ellis, Cardiff Socialist Party

I first heard about socialism from my mum when I was about 7 or 8. I remember being in the car and she had a Billy Bragg album playing. The Red Flag was on it and I asked her what it was about and what it meant and she sort of explained what socialism was.

Being so young, I just assumed that was how everyone thought because it seemed really fair. I took a more serious interest in politics after I had my first job at 18. I didn't stay long as I started to feel really exploited. I began to think about why and realised that a lot of workers are underpaid and overworked.

I began to talk about socialism with my friends and when Jeremy Corbyn was elected Labour Party leader for the first time we were overjoyed.

I first heard of the Socialist Party when I went to a Black Lives Matter demo in Cardiff in 2016 and remember thinking that it was really cool to see a political movement showing solidarity in that way.

The first time I spoke to anyone from the party was at a protest when the far-right Britain First were meant to be coming to Cardiff. It really sickened me that a group like that would be in my city. I went up to the Socialist Party stall and popped my details down and spoke to a few members.

We stuck around for a few hours and Britain First didn't even show up in the end but it felt great to have been there and shown that racism has no place in our society.

The following week I went to a Socialist Party meeting and really liked what I was hearing. I felt it really connected with what I believed. I began to read into Marx and Trotsky and was interested by the fact that this struggle and exploitation of the working class had been going on for so long.

In a nutshell I just felt it was time for change, time to help people and build a better future for everyone.

Why I joined: "I hope that more and more people are going to join the Socialist Party and the fight to end inequality"

Matthew Charleston, Salford Socialist Party

I think the simplest answer to why I joined the Socialist Party is that I saw inequality and wanted to help. I admit though that it was not simple to recognise this inequality, and for a long time I refused to acknowledge it even existed.

I am now 28. At the age of 18 my first vote was for the local British National Party (BNP) candidate in my small northern town. I was naive and didn't really understand what I was voting for, but I had seen the BNP in local media and heard them talked about.

A few years later I began voting for my friend who was an independent candidate, as I knew him from 'down the pub'. I never bothered voting in national elections until 2010 and 2015, in which I voted Conservative!

I was comfortable with my political choices until I became involved with my local trade union branch in the middle of 2016. The two workplace reps and branch officials at my workplace were standing down due to redundancy.

Union rep

I started to see the world from a different perspective while undergoing union rep training with Unite in Salford. I was introduced to the idea of socialism by some very passionate trade unionists.

In addition to the practical elements of being a rep, the training included watching videos such as Charlie Chaplin's speech from the Great Dictator, The Spirit of '45 and an interesting Youtube video about neoliberalism. These were all ideas that I had not been familiar with before, as well as putting a name to it all - socialism.

After these events I decided to attend a local public meeting of the Salford Socialist Party. My brother was already a member and I had met the treasurer Sally quite a few times socially (strictly under instruction from my brother not to mention I voted Tory!).

I signed up that night and have been attending meetings since. I am now starting to get involved with stalls and have got one paper sale under my belt so far. Through the Socialist Party I have started to learn more about trade unionism.

I am now starting to speak to people about politics and have enjoyed hearing the differing opinions on things that are happening in the world and had some lively debates. I hope that more and more people are going to join the Socialist Party and the fight to end inequality.

'Anti-union law' charges against Sheffield trees protesters dropped

"Not in the public interest"

Calvin Payne, one of the charged protesters

The Labour-run Sheffield City Council is almost five years into a 25 year, £2.2 billion, Private Finance Initiative (PFI) 'maintenance' contract with a multinational company called Amey, to resurface and maintain our streets and pavements.

It soon became apparent that part of the deal was that a city that is rightly proud of its trees and green spaces was going to lose lots of them for Amey's profit. A city-wide campaign soon organised itself to challenge the flimsy arguments put forward by the council. However it was impervious to expert opinion from across the world and more direct opposition began to be organised.

In June 2015 the first neighbourhood group organised itself to physically prevent contractors from felling healthy trees, attracting lots of media attention and successfully saving the trees on their street by forming a line of residents across the road. Since then parts of the Save Sheffield Trees campaign have adopted more militant tactics in standing up to the felling programme.

For several months the growing action was achieving success, until 2nd November last year when the Amey contractors, accompanied by South Yorkshire Police, arrived to fell a single tree in Nether Edge. On this occasion they were both waving a copy of the 1992 Trade Union Act - Tory anti-trade union legislation used against pickets in industrial disputes, which threatens a six month prison sentence.

Standing firm

Campaigners were accused of 'hindering workers from using their tools' as we peacefully stood our ground against environmental destruction for private profit. The police spent four hours trying to persuade us to end our stand. They were threatening to arrest us, while also trying to encourage us to go home! It was clear they

didn't know what to make of the situation, however they had instructions from somewhere and the final warning was given to around 20 of us to disperse.

After lengthy discussions about the way forward we decided to call their bluff and two of us refused to move when the final warning was given by a police Inspector. With a dozen reporters and cameramen present [myself and a colleague were very peacefully arrested and taken to the holding cells](#). There we were held for eight hours as the police couldn't find the charge on the computer, as they had never arrested anyone for it before! Two days later confirmation was received that the police and the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) were going to proceed with the charges.

In court

On 1st December the two of us appeared before the local magistrates' court and heard the charge. Around 150 people attended a rally outside the court and national media carried the story. We pleaded 'not guilty' and looked forward to having a full trial with the police, Amey, and Sheffield council representatives being questioned about the secretive nature of their contract dealings.

Over the next couple of months 11 more campaigners, including a Green councillor, were arrested for peaceful, static, protest under the same untested law and the focus on our 9th March trial date became more intense.

Then last week we heard that our charges had been dropped by the CPS as 'not in the public interest' despite our charges and court appearance satisfying the same condition. It isn't clear when it stopped being in the public interest to arrest, charge, and possibly imprison members of the public for peaceful protest. At the time of writing nine of the charges are still standing, awaiting review, and the direct action against tree felling in Sheffield is growing with more people coming forward to risk being arrested if necessary.

The fight against PFI sponsored environmental attacks in Sheffield continues to grow. Cuts are cuts whether they be about social care, jobs, trees, or anything else. People from all backgrounds are fighting back and we need to unite to achieve a real difference.

Breaking news, 3.3.17: 'Anti-trade union law' charges against the remaining nine Sheffield Trees protesters have been dropped because of "No realistic prospect of a conviction". That means all 14 arrestees have now had charges dropped.

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 2 March 2017 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

Sheffielders call for a no-cuts 'people's budget'

Jeremy Short, Sheffield South Socialist Party

Around 40 local trade unionists and community campaigners discussed proposals for a no-cuts 'people's budget' ahead of Sheffield council's budget-setting meeting. They heard speeches from PCS union reps fighting the [closure of Eastern Avenue Jobcentre](#), local government Unison reps campaigning against the closure of the council's last remaining dementia support centre and [Sheffield Mental Health Action Group \(MHAGS\) fighting the loss of their grant](#).

A GMB union officer spoke on the problems of the outsourced waste management service with Veolia and the £2 billion-plus PFI contract with Amey for repairing and maintaining roads. [This contract also involves the felling of trees](#) about which another campaigner spoke. And there were also contributions from the firefighters union FBU.

All the speakers explained the effects of Tory government-imposed austerity cuts on the most vulnerable people in Sheffield, but were also scathing about the Labour council passing these on without any resistance.

We emphasised that all the protests had a common link - the failure of the council to stand up to Tory government cuts and the policy of forcing councils into the arms of private sector developers and contractors.

Sheffield Council is proposing £26 million of cuts in services for 2017-18 at the same time as increasing reserves by £13 million!

The meeting agreed an alternative 'people's budget' using reserves (including those allocated for redundancies) with a modest increase in spending, while campaigning with others to restore the funding stolen from local councils.

The demands include:

- Scrapping the bedroom tax and restoring full council tax support to those on benefit
 - Bringing Veolia waste management contract back in-house
 - Terminating the Amey PFI and bringing highways back in house with suspension of tree felling
 - Keeping Hurlfield View dementia support centre open
 - Restoring MHAGS day centre funding
 - Stopping the sell-off of council assets such as the central library
 - Introducing a £10 an hour minimum wage for council employees from 2018
-

Hands off our Jobcentre!

Kris Houghton, PCS branch secretary, Barrow-in-Furness

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) [has announced a proposed large-scale reduction of its office estate by 20%, including Jobcentres](#) and back-of-house offices with a further reduction of 10% by office co-location.

If the cuts go ahead they will be completed by March 2018, leaving some benefit claimants with further to travel to visit a Jobcentre and some members of DWP staff, with no reasonable chance of redeployment, fearing for their future.

Some remote Jobcentres are also in line for the axe, raising travelling costs for claimants and increasing the risk of benefit sanctions.

Here in Barrow-in-Furness, the only back-of-house office in the country that processes industrial injuries disablement benefit and workers' compensation claims for asbestos-related cancers, could close.

Over 70 vastly experienced members of staff - who have built close working relationships with asbestos charities and support groups and greatly reduced claim times for victims and their families - will struggle to be redeployed within one hour of travel.

Workers from around the country who have developed life threatening and terminal industrial diseases could see a reduction in service and longer waiting times for vital benefit and compensation payments.

In the worst circumstances, families may be left waiting for care and attendance payments after their loved ones have already passed away, denying comfort and peace of mind.

Demonstration:

Saturday 11 March, 12 noon, marching from Spirit of Barrow statue to the back of the Town Hall.

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 28 February 2017 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

Greater Manchester: patients are people not guinea pigs!

Manchester Keep Our NHS Public has responded to a report in the Financial Times that "local [NHS] leaders are offering leading drugmakers, including GlaxoSmithKline, AstraZeneca, Pfizer and Novartis, access to Greater Manchester's sophisticated electronic patient record to test the real-world outcomes of their drugs".

Socialist Party member and Greater Manchester Keep Our NHS Public spokesperson Hugh Caffrey said:

"It seems that Greater Manchester is being turned into a med-lab for big pharma and our sick and injured into unpaid guinea pigs. It's not hard to see why: when our NHS is being handed over to the private companies then our patients will surely follow.

"And when we've not been asked whether we want our NHS privatised, it's no surprise that we haven't been consulted on our apparent new role as profit-feeding guinea pigs.

"The big question is where do Greater Manchester's political leaders stand on this, not least Labour's former health minister and mayoral front-runner Andy Burnham? We expect to see Mr Burnham and his colleagues joining us in condemnation of these plans and demanding their immediate withdrawal."

Bradford: Anti-cuts lobby against poor-bashing budget

Peter Robson, Bradford Socialist Party

Bradford Socialist Party members were in attendance along with other activists at the lobby of the council on 23 February outside Bradford city hall. Some Labour councillors came and talked to us as we attempted to persuade them to set a no-cuts budget.

This was a marked difference from 2016 when they were openly hostile towards us. But our attempts to offer an anti-austerity budget did not stop the Labour-run council making a further £40 million of cuts which, with the already millions that have decimated this city, is a legacy they should be ashamed of.

Not only will these cuts yet again attack the poorest, with the Edmund Street centre already closed as a refuge for the homeless. To add insult to injury, after the dirty work was done, they announced to the local press that they now want to rehouse 20% of people in care homes back into their own homes!

Clearly, some of these people are very ill and it would be unbelievable to send them home. And to what? With these cuts, there will be no carers left at this rate. We will continue to challenge these councillors.

Mary Creagh should resign not remain

Mick Griffiths, Wakefield and Pontefract Socialist Party

Hundreds of signatures have been collected by Wakefield Socialist Party and Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition members calling for the resignation of Wakefield's Labour MP Mary Creagh.

She recently voted against triggering Article 50 to leave the EU. With [a 66% vote to leave in Wakefield](#), she voted against the wishes of a clear majority of her constituents.

In just one week alone hundreds have signed our petition calling for her immediate resignation.

Throughout Europe workers have suffered cuts and austerity while banks have been bailed out. We intend to lobby our MP in the near future once we have amassed thousands more signatures in support.

Meanwhile, we have organised a public meeting to discuss a socialist Brexit programme on Thursday 9 March at 7.30pm at Black Rock, Wakefield.

Historic demonstration in Barcelona in support of refugees

Esquerra Revolucionària (Izquierda Revolucionaria, CWI co-thinkers in the Spanish state)

On 18 February, [Barcelona held the biggest demonstration in Europe in support of refugees](#) under the slogan "Volem acollir" (we want to welcome them).

Between 300,000 and 500,000 people flooded the streets to show their solidarity with people who risk their lives every day to escape the barbarism caused by imperialism - as well as calling on governments to welcome them and grant them asylum now.

This historic demonstration reflects the enormous popular anger at the monstrous policies condemning refugees, especially those fleeing the war in Syria.

We took to the streets and said, loud and clear, that we reject being accomplices to the crimes of a system that condemns the greater part of humanity to misery and provokes a mass exodus to the advanced capitalist countries. Here the right whip up hatred against immigrants to divide the working class, while big business and its hired politicians profit from all this despair.

They have profited from the situation emigrants find themselves in by paying them poverty wages, and then accusing them of being criminals; they have profited by selling arms to both sides in the Syrian conflict (including the Islamic militants) and accuse the refugees of being Isis terrorists.

But the demonstration in Barcelona of young people and workers has shown that their plans clash with the conscience and instincts of millions.

The working class gains nothing from the establishment's criminal policies, just the opposite.

The governing Popular Party (PP) did not take part in the demonstration, showing its lack of humanity and having nothing in common with the people who are suffering at the hands of the PP-led government.

However, the criticism expressed on the demonstration was not limited to a rejection of imperialism, xenophobia and the repressive policies against immigrants applied by the Spanish right, represented by the PP. Significantly much criticism was also levelled at politicians who mouth about solidarity with the refugees (and other issues) without going any further.

In 2016 the Spanish government took in 609 of the 17,000 people it had agreed to take. In Catalonia, the parliament unanimously agreed to take 4,500 but the number that has arrived is less than 200. So lots of the groups that called the demonstration added the words "enough excuses" to the central slogan "we want to welcome them".

And, in case there was any doubt, one of the most visible posters among the demonstrators made this criticism even more explicit: "Catalan politicians, enough excuses. We want to welcome them now."

Intolerable

Along the route of the demonstration you could also hear different immigrant groups and individuals speaking from lorries equipped with loudspeakers. They were denouncing the intolerable conditions in the refugee shelters, the existence of internment centres, police harassment (in the case of the manteros - street peddlars - in Barcelona) and the workplace exploitation suffered by immigrant workers.

Besides the element of solidarity with the refugees and rejection of imperialism, racism and the policies of the PP, there was also a clear criticism of the right-wing policies being implemented in practice on this and other issues by the Catalan government (Generalitat). Criticism should also be extended to city councils for inaction and a lack of an adequate response.

This criticism and profound social discontent, very much present on the 18 February demonstration, ties in with other mass demonstrations that Catalonia has experienced recently (the national day demos and others). These mobilisations, which express the demand of millions of people for a profound social change, must not be ignored by left-wing organisations with elected representatives.

Faced with "no we can't" and the policies of demobilisation and social pacts, the youth and workers of Catalonia have shown again "yes we can".

It is vital that the left-wing organisations that took part in the demonstration defend the right of refugees to a decent life in Catalonia, the whole Spanish state, and across Europe.

But this demand must be linked to a programme that can mobilise the masses decisively - a programme that also takes up the problems of austerity, unemployment, the housing crisis, etc.

Such a programme must lead to the transformation of society, eliminating the cause of war, ie the capitalist profit system and the imperialism which it generates.

Support the Jobstown defendants: Defend the right to public protest

Neil Cafferky

The international campaign of solidarity with [Jobstown protesters](#) in Dublin took a big step forward in Britain with the backing of Len McCluskey, the leader of Britain's largest union, Unite.

Len made clear his support in a letter co-written with Jimmy Kelly, the secretary of the Irish Region (Unite organises on both sides of the Irish border) addressed to the Irish minister for justice, Frances Fitzgerald.

"Sit-down protests that delay politicians are a part of the fabric of democratic rights that people have won over many years. It is a very serious infringement of the right to protest that the Irish state and judicial system are pursuing these cases, criminalising protest and working class communities.

"It is outrageous that people could face long prison sentences and that a democratically elected parliamentarian - Paul Murphy TD - could be removed from parliament.

"We demand that the charges against the 18 are dropped immediately, failing which we will build support for the Jobstown defendants and for the right to protest among the millions of trade unionists in Britain and Ireland."

Support for the Jobstown protesters has also started to come in from trade union branches across Britain. In the West Midlands, Unite branch 6110 has pledged its support and sent a donation of £100. Salford City Unison branch unanimously backed the campaign along with a donation of £50.

The international campaign of solidarity has grown rapidly with figures such as Noam Chomsky, left-wing French presidential candidate Jean-Luc Mélenchon and a raft of MEPs from around Europe voicing their support.

- Please raise this issue in your union branch. Contact Neil at nlcafferky@yahoo.com for the model motion or see socialistparty.org.uk
-

Seven defendants charged with unlawful imprisonment for participating in a peaceful sit-down protest in front of the then Táinaiste's (deputy prime minister) car in 2014 will face trial on 24 April. Three of the defendants are elected representatives of the Anti Austerity Alliance and members of the Socialist Party - Paul Murphy TD (MP) and councillors Mick Murphy and Kieran Mahon.

If convicted they could face a maximum charge of life imprisonment. 18 adults in total face prosecution.

The Jobstown protest was against the imposition of unjust water charges - subsequently dropped by the current Fine Gael-led minority government as a result of a mass non-payment movement initiated by the Irish Socialist Party and Anti Austerity Alliance. The water charges were part of the previous Fine Gael coalition government's austerity measures - bailout conditions demanded by the EU.

Build a movement to defeat Trump!

Bigoted, misogynist billionaire US president Donald Trump has [reinstated his discriminatory travel ban on six majority Muslim countries](#) and suspending the US refugee assistance programme. He also continues to reward big corporations with tax breaks while attacking healthcare provision, and adopting measures that will wreck the environment but boost the profits of 'big oil', etc.

However, as Socialist Alternative (US co-thinkers of the Socialist Party) city councillor Kshama Sawant says: "Trump can be defeated. But we need to continue to build our united movement of the 99%, independent of corporate politicians, and prepare for the mass nonviolent civil disobedience that will be necessary to defend and expand our rights, and defeat the right-wing!"

- [For more updates and analysis see socialistworld.net](#)
-

Struggling to care against a backcloth of cuts

The following is an account of years of struggle by parents of a disabled child to secure the proper resources to meet their daughter's needs. A situation made more difficult by draconian cuts in funding local services.

Our story by John Morrow

When my daughter was first diagnosed with cancer and a one in ten million neurological disorder side effect, we were told our council house was unsuitable for adaption and exchanged to a house the authorities said was more suitable.

Her condition meant it became dangerous taking her up and down stairs so I contacted Occupational Therapy (OT) to start the adaptations. An OT person came out and took one look at the house and told us "sorry it cannot be adapted you will have to move" (we had spent £2,500 doing it up as it was a dump).

It took two more years to find a suitable house and then five months to adapt. For the first couple of years everything was great.

My daughter was given a bath seat, and a comfy chair. However, no thought was given to her growing out of these aids.

When she became ten her replacement chair would not fit in the lift. We kept her old chair in the lift and swapped chairs to get her upstairs as all lift adaptations were for a five year old.

Rejected

We were still using the same bath chair when she reached 13. An occupational therapist told us we needed an extension for a shower room, which the person put in writing, then denied saying it.

We endured six years of fighting the council for the shower room extension. The application was rejected.

We appealed and lost, then won after going to the ombudsman who said Gateshead council broke the rules in its appeals procedure. A council OT came around with an architect - but there were a series of fitting problems.

Relationships between us and the council became increasingly fraught. I was constantly lied to and started recording conversations, but was banned from doing this. This was extremely stressful.

Even once the work was finished we have had ongoing problems. They fitted a bedpan sluice instead of a sink to wash soiled clothes in. We were told it would be possible to use this, but when we asked for a demonstration of how, the penny dropped that it wasn't possible.

We understand that OTs are at the sharp end of council cutbacks. The situation is exhausting for carers of disabled children/adults. There needs to be a better understanding and more resources available to us.

1987 Zeebrugge disaster: a consequence of corporate greed

Simon Carter

[Thirty years ago, 193 passengers and crew drowned off the coast of Belgium](#) after P&O's Herald of Free Enterprise car ferry capsized. One of the dead was seafarer and Militant (forerunner of the Socialist) supporter Geoff Haney.

Years before, Geoff had risked his job to protect three Chilean Socialist Party stowaways, fleeing the brutal dictatorship of General Pinochet, who were caught on board the ship and locked in the hold. Geoff had been politically motivated by events in Chile and his union, the National Union of Seamen, had organised an international boycott against the dictatorship.

In a fitting tribute to Geoff, his sister Sue donated his victim compensation award to finance an office for members of the Committee for a Workers' International (to which the Socialist Party is affiliated) working underground in Chile.

Profit

The Zeebrugge tragedy was no accident. It was a disaster waiting to happen, based on systemic failures by a company driven to maximise profit. In that sense 'Herald of Free Enterprise' was an apt name.

A year earlier Tory prime minister Margaret Thatcher had awarded a knighthood to P&O chairman Jeffrey Sterling for "public service and services to industry".

The Herald was supposed to be a state of the art 'roll-on, roll-off' ferry - but critics described the shallow draft vessel as 'roll-on, roll-over'.

In order to ensure the turnaround time was kept to a minimum the ferry steamed out of Zeebrugge port on the fateful night with its bow and stern doors open. Something the owners had been previously warned of, but ignored.

Sea water poured onto the car deck causing the ferry to capsize into the freezing waters in less than two minutes. If it hadn't sunk onto a sandbank it would've turned turtle with a greater loss of life.

Incredibly, the captain had no view from the bridge of the bow doors, nor was there even a bell on the bridge to indicate that the bow doors were closed.

As could be expected several hapless crew members were later blamed for the tragedy, although several others were named for their outstanding heroism. And, as usual, a charge of corporate manslaughter against the company was dismissed by a judge, despite an inquiry identifying 'corporate negligence at every level of the company's hierarchy'.

Months after the Zeebrugge disaster P&O ferries were still leaving port with open doors and crew training reportedly remained poor.

In 1988 P&O attempted to sack all 2,300 of its ferry workers in Dover over the seafarers' refusal to allow cuts in the workforce which would impact on passenger safety. Free enterprise indeed.

- These events are [covered in more detail](#) in [The Rise of Militant by Peter Taaffe, available at leftbooks.co.uk](#) for £11.99.

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.

Copeland - the reasons

Tony Mulhearn, former Liverpool socialist councillor, sent this letter to the Liverpool Echo following the Copeland byelection.

The outpouring of bile against Jeremy Corbyn since the [loss of Copeland](#) is designed to mask the real reasons for that defeat. Under the Blairites, Labour's majority in Copeland had declined from nearly 12,000 in 1997 to 2,564 in 2015.

Factors in the Copeland result were the wrecking intervention by Mandelson and Blair who slandered Corbyn days before the election, and the continuous sniping by Blairite MPs in the Parliamentary Labour Party.

Corbyn's policy on nuclear power was distorted. He has categorically stated that no nuclear industry worker will lose their jobs under a Corbyn-led Labour government.

May's triumphalist government is determined to continue with its attacks on working class living standards, the NHS and the trade unions. Support for Jeremy Corbyn and the policies he represents should be reaffirmed and the fight stepped up to force the government to retreat.

But to be successful the saboteurs opposed to Corbyn should be replaced by Labour MPs who are prepared to implement the policies which propelled Corbyn to the leadership, and for Labour councillors to fight any further butchery of social provision.

Them and us

I went to sign-on today; as in ['I Daniel Blake'](#). Had filled in the form online and received a text, then a phone call, confirming my appointment for 9am.

I arrived at the dole office to sign on - all for £70 weekly benefit. At the same time elite members of the Lords would be taxiing into their state-funded luxury House each receiving £300 a day just for turning up. Signature done, they'd be on their way. But not me, no not for the working class!

I went to the first floor of Britannia House dole office as designated. Waited for ten minutes then was sent to the second floor. Waited another five mins then sent to the ground floor.

I was then told I had missed my appointment and will have to ring up to make another! Tory Britain 2017!

Keith Gibson, East Hull

Profiting from misery

Mica is used in numerous cosmetic products for its shimmer effect. Koderma District in India's Jharkhand state has the world's largest mica deposits.

It is mined extensively and yet the mining here is illegal and miners have no protection at all. Children as young as six work at these mines, despite child labour being prohibited.

While not all of mica is sourced illegally, these illegal mines are run by cartels that make huge profits while paying the miners a pittance for working in dangerous conditions with cave-ins a sad but regular tragedy.

According to an ITV news report, between five and ten children die in the mines every month. Adult fatalities are much higher but 90% of these deaths are never reported because the cartels do not want unwelcome attention from Indian government officials.

Many of these mines are deep in forests that are official conservation areas. Bureaucracy and competing laws prevent India's government from legalising these mines so there are no health and safety checks to regulate conditions.

Some claim Indian mica is environmentally friendly, but it's certainly not human friendly!

Calvin Fowler, Worcestershire Socialist Party

Pension attack

Frank Field, Labour MP and chair of the Commons' work and pensions committee, has called for the "triple lock" on pensions to be abolished. Under this scheme the government solemnly promised to raise pensions by the same rate as average earnings, the Consumer Price Index or 2.5%.

With breath-taking mendacity, Field argued that this would mean raising the pension age to 70.5 by 2060.

It would mean no such thing and Field knows this very well.

It would only mean that if there were no increase in expenditure on pensions. This would be a measure to save money.

Scrapping Trident would save money but Field is careful not to suggest that. An end to the prestige grammar school programme would save money, indeed stopping MP's expenses would also be a measure to save money - but hell would freeze over before Field would suggest that! What a disgrace.

Derek McMillan

Through the looking glass

In Adam Hochschild's masterful study of the First World War 'To end all wars', I found the perfect metaphor for capitalism.

In 1915 British forces were short of binoculars. In desperation they turned to the world's best manufacturers - Germany! The Germans were more than happy to help the British. In exchange the German military needed the British government to provide rubber from its colonies for the tyres of their military vehicles.

This 'devil's bargain' was conducted via the Swiss but there was no written record of how much rubber Britain provided to the country they would remain at war with another three years. However, Hochschild tells us that by August 1915 the British army had received 32,000 sets of binoculars from her so-called arch nemesis.

Over 17 million people died in World War One with another 20 million injured. How many of these occurred after this deal?

Nothing illustrates the short-sighted greed and stupidity of capitalism than this deal. The anonymous men unlamented by history never recorded their motives or rationale but socialists understand well enough.

Leon Wheddon, Wirral Socialist Party

<http://www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/24854>