

[Socialist Party](#) | [Print](#)

Scotland 'indyref2' for socialist independence not the capitalist EU

Philip Stott, Socialist Party Scotland

The Scottish parliament will vote next week in favour of triggering a second independence referendum. With a pro-independence majority in the parliament, the vote itself is a formality.

The exact timing of a referendum is not clear. [First Minister Nicola Sturgeon has said](#) that a new 'indyref' should take place either in autumn 2018 or spring 2019.

However, a legally binding referendum cannot take place without an agreement from Westminster. Tory prime minister Theresa May therefore has three options in front of her.

The first is an outright refusal to grant the referendum. The second is to agree, but seek to delay the timing until after the Brexit negotiations have concluded. The third option is to accept the timeframe as outlined by the Scottish National Party (SNP) leadership.

The nuclear option for the Tory leadership would be to refuse a second indyref altogether. This would massively inflame national tensions and drive up support for independence, introducing a new explosive element of instability into an already volatile political situation.

The SNP delayed calling a referendum following the Brexit vote. In large part this is because of the static polling that, even now, still has the No side ahead by 52% to 48%.

At present it is most likely that a second indyref will go ahead. Socialist Party Scotland will give critical support to a vote in favour of independence, [as we did in the 2014 referendum](#).

Our criticisms are squarely aimed at the SNP leadership, which promotes and defends big business interests while carrying out cuts across Scotland. Their vision of an independent capitalist Scotland is one that would do nothing to tackle the horrific levels of low pay, inequality and poverty that are rooted in the profit system.

In contrast to a Scotland for the super-rich 1%, we stand for an independent socialist Scotland. For public ownership, wealth redistribution, and an end to privatisation. A living wage of £10 an hour without exemptions, and a massive programme of investment in public services to reverse the impact of austerity.

Socialist

That is only possible with socialist policies, and the building of a new mass working class party to fight for them.

Meanwhile, in Northern Ireland - where, like Scotland, a majority voted to remain in the EU - Sinn Fein has ratcheted up its demands for a 'border poll' on the unification of Ireland.

Such a referendum in the North would quickly become a naked sectarian conflict. For that reason, our sister party in Ireland does not support such a demand as representing any way forward in uniting the working class - Catholic and Protestant, and North and South.

The timing of Sturgeon's announcement was deliberately chosen to trump May's plan to trigger Article 50, the beginning of the formal talks with the EU over Brexit. This is now likely to take place at the end of March.

In part, the calling of a new referendum is a continuation of the SNP's strategy to win concessions from May over access to the single market. This is very much in line with the overall interests of British capitalism -

which, ironically, Sturgeon is reflecting more consistently on this issue than the traditional party of British big business, the Tories.

An estimated 400,000 people who backed independence in 2014 voted to leave the EU. Because a second indyref would have the bosses' EU as a central issue - alongside the SNP's role in carrying out Tory austerity - a big space to the left of the nationalists will open up.

[Socialist Party Scotland is for leaving the EU](#) with policies that advance working class interests. For example, the renationalisation of all privatised transport services, and utilities like gas and electricity, the post and all water services. In contrast, the EU treaties champion privatisation and neoliberal policies.

- Read the [full article at socialistpartyscotland.org.uk](http://socialistpartyscotland.org.uk)

State surveillance of unions: PCS assistant head demands inquiry

Tory government schemed against socialists in the CPSA

Secret government files released under the 30-year rule show that Margaret Thatcher's government directly meddled in the internal affairs of civil servants' union CPSA, the predecessor of the Public and Commercial Services (PCS) union.

The government was concerned about the growing influence of the forerunner of the Socialist Party, the Militant - in particular, Militant supporter, [the late John Macreadie \(died 2010\)](#).

John won the general secretary election in the CPSA in 1987. "Subversives ... cannot be tolerated in such jobs" one official memo has been reported as stating. So the union's right wing had him undemocratically removed (see extract below from 'The Rise of Militant').

Socialist Party member Chris Baugh, assistant general secretary of the PCS, worked alongside John Macreadie. Chris spoke in a personal capacity to Neil Cafferky for the Socialist.

I believe you were targeted for some smear campaigns in the 1980s by the right-wing press?

We were subject to a number of press smears attacking the six of us Militant supporters that were on the union's national executive committee at the time, by various articles in broadsheets and other newspapers.

But this was, of course, in the context that many of the tabloids during CPSA elections used to run the right-wing 'moderate' slate, with an encouragement for readers to vote for them in order to keep out the left, and in particular the supporters of the Militant like myself.

The papers show government officials - at the behest of Margaret Thatcher - met with unnamed leaders of the CPSA, when the CPSA was controlled by the right, to discuss the rise of Militant. So why was the left - and particularly Militant - growing in the CPSA in the 1980s?

Well I think you have to understand the nature of the civil service. Contrary to the media caricature of Whitehall mandarins, in actual fact the civil service is a vast network of public service organisations across the whole UK. And CPSA represented a largely young, female, low-paid section of the workforce.

Now, it's interesting to note that in the infamous Ridley Report that was produced before Thatcher took up office in 1979, which set out a plan for undermining trade union power, there was specific reference to the civil service trade unions.

And of course we saw a massive strike, the biggest civil service strike in history, in 1981, when Thatcher scrapped the pay agreement that had been in place since the 1950s.

That was the prelude to what Cabinet Office ministers called the "bonfire of regulations" as various national agreements were ripped up. And there was a systematic attack on pay, jobs and conditions reflecting the government's attacks on trade union conditions and workers' rights at that time.

In the CPSA membership, many of us joined the civil service - contrary to the impression given by the right wing in the union that the problem was Militant recruiting us in the first place to be sent into the civil service - we just joined the civil service looking for work in different parts of the country.

The idea we were parachuted in to subvert the workings of the civil service, of course, is a ridiculous proposition.

What happened is that people like myself and many other CPSA members were drawn to the ideas of socialism. In particular Militant, whose track record was to provide the most militant defence of members conditions, faced with the attacks that took place at the time; led a whole series of notable disputes.

And it was Militant who played - I would argue - a pivotal role in building up a network of activists into what was then the Broad Left [alliance in the CPSA]. And that attracted many activists who were appalled not just at the scale of the attacks being inflicted by the government at the time, but the abject failure of the right-wing leadership to offer any sort of resistance.

And this [the union's right wing] is a political grouping who we have been able to show has links to the state and to business. And their whole purpose was to counter what they regarded as left-wing subversion within the civil service. It was reflected in their election material.

And of course, [Thatcherite journalist] Woodrow Wyatt, for example, reports in his diaries that Kate Losinska, leader of the 'moderates' at the time, visited Margaret Thatcher at the time of the ban of unions at GCHQ. Bernard Levin, a Times journalist, used to reproduce the entire list of the right wing.

As we opened up discussing, the media were always very supportive of the right wing and assisted the right wing in their attacks on activists - who won support because they were seen by union members to be the most serious in fighting back, and the most serious in offering an industrial and political alternative.

It's clear, isn't it, that the right wing of the CPSA, the leadership, were colluding with the government, in effect colluding with the employers. But of course that wasn't the only underhanded methods they used in the battle with the left. There were also bureaucratic methods within the union in the 1980s and 90s.

One of the other reasons that Militant's ideas attracted support from all the best and most active CPSA representatives is that we were those that fought to hold the leadership to account, and to make the union democratic.

It was we that were fighting to extend elections; to ensure that the elected leadership carried out the decisions of conference. And the question of the members having a say and exercising control over officials was a crucial theme in building up support among activists.

And this was prompted by the actions of the leadership who simply presided over the ripping up of a whole series of national agreements, including on pay - which, of course has been used to deploy a classic divide-and-rule tactic and limit the union's ability to speak, act and fight back on behalf of its entire membership [due to ending national pay bargaining].

There were all sorts of allegations about discrepancies in how the elections were run, all sorts of irregularities, that prompted us to challenge how the elections were run, and to constantly put the right-wing leaders under pressure to ensure that when they did take place they weren't interfered with.

But the other alarming aspect of this is the discussion at a very senior political level involving interference in the operations of a trade union.

In addition to the latest papers, under the 30-year rule cabinet papers were released in 2014 which revealed that Lord Armstrong, the cabinet secretary, had presented a paper - prompted by MI5 - exposing concerns about the growing influence of supporters of the Militant tendency within the civil service.

It was the intelligence services that had raised this with the cabinet secretary and prompted him to present this paper to Thatcher.

To cut a long story short, it explored how - to use their words - they could "quietly purge" supporters of the Militant from within the civil service.

The reason they opted to do this quietly rather than publicly is actually set out in Armstrong's papers, which show that in particular the chancellor, Nigel Lawson at the time, was very concerned - having just banned unions at GCHQ. And of course, given that in the autumn of 1984 the miners' strike was still underway.

They were very alarmed about opening up another front against unions, creating martyrs, and instead opted for the operation of what they called "purge procedure."

This involved - rather than sacking them publicly for their political affiliation - that they should be monitored quietly, that they should be checked as to whether they're getting promotion, their work performance should be monitored, and their activities should be closely watched, to ensure that they didn't become an overt 'security risk'.

So we know that this has been going on for many years. And of course this is not an entire shock, particularly to those who've been watching and noting the level of state surveillance of trade union activity.

I mean it's significant there's a protest [on the day of this interview, 13 March] in support of the miners that were victimised around [Orgreave](#).

We've seen the results of the magnificent campaign of the Blacklist Support Group in showing the involvement of big construction companies - and, allegedly, the state - in keeping records of workers to effectively blacklist them because of their trade union activity.

This indicates the extent, the massive extent of state surveillance of trade union activities. And I think it would be naive to think that what was taking place in the 1980s, in light of what we know today, that there is not still surveillance of trade union activity.

Which prompts, I think, a perfectly reasonable call for a proper public investigation.

Very much so, particularly in the context of what we know about blacklisting for construction workers. So what kind of action do you think should be taken now, on the heel of these revelations?

I'm effectively John Macreadie's equivalent, as the assistant general secretary of PCS. So I think there should be a discussion about how we raise concerns about what the employer is up to, in particular the Cabinet Office, who've not surprisingly declined to comment.

We should officially ask the Cabinet Office about what surveillance is taking place of trade unionists today. But I think more fundamentally that we now need to raise a call for a proper public investigation into the monitoring of trade union activists.

And in the light of the Pitchford Inquiry [into undercover policing] we need to speak to lawyers involved in that; other trade unionists that have been subjected to monitoring and victimisation.

We should have a discussion about how we raise a very public and clear call for a public investigation into the interference and subverting of legitimate areas of trade union activity. And to expose the extent to which individuals have been targeted because of their support for socialists - in the past, Militant, and we know [through Pitchford, the targeting of Socialist Party members as well](#).

We need to raise this within the union, raise it with the employer, discuss with other trade union colleagues, and think about how we can increase pressure for - if not Pitchford, certainly for a proper public investigation

into what the state and government has been up to.

John Macreadie elected

The following passage on John Macreadie is from 'The Rise of Militant'. This chronicles the political turmoil between 1964 and 1994 and the role of Militant, now the Socialist Party, in leading struggle. A sequel detailing the early history of the Socialist Party is due out in April.

The growing importance of Militant in industry was underlined by developments in the CPSA.

The election of John Macreadie as the new general secretary of the union had sent a frisson of fear through the ranks of the right wing, throughout the trade unions generally as well as in government circles. When the results were announced, John Ellis, the right wing candidate, commented:

"I took a short break because I thought it was the last chance I would get for a holiday for some time. I thought I would be general secretary."

On the most flimsy pretext, the right wing moved to invalidate the results. John Macreadie, nevertheless, declared on national lunch-time TV: "I'm the new general secretary of the CPSA."

The right trotted out the usual accusations of 'ballot rigging', despite the fact that John Macreadie had been elected in probably the fairest election in the history of the CPSA. The right then proceeded to move heaven and earth to have his election blocked. We reported - "Right wing hijack CPSA":

"The right wing have decided to overturn the democratic wishes of the membership... The members voted for a new leadership, but the right wing have declared no confidence in the membership. They have hijacked the union, putting in the defeated candidate."

A ferocious campaign by the left then opened up in the unions. Legal action was also taken in an attempt to stop the coup of the right wing against the democratic wishes of the members.

However, with the help of the judiciary, the right frustrated the members' democratic decision in electing John Macreadie. The courts sanctioned the re-run of the election for the general secretary.

All the stops were then pulled out in support of John Ellis, the right's candidate. He won with 42,000 votes to John Macreadie's 31,000.

He was helped into power by the splitting tactics of 'Broad Left 84', dominated by the Communist Party, who put up its own candidate, Geoff Lewtas, who received 13,000 votes.

In the House of Commons, a right-wing Tory MP, Peter Bruinvels, and two other Tory MPs welcomed "the victory of John Ellis in the ballot." There was a tremendous sense of disappointment amongst left activists in the union. But rather than undermining Militant's support, it strengthened it for the battles to come.

Indeed, John Macreadie was soon elected onto the general council of the TUC, the first ever Militant supporter to hold this position.

At the TUC congress in September 1987 he emerged as a significant figure, standing for the fighting traditions of trade unionism and opposing the policies of despair summed up in the "New Realism" of the right-wing general council.

This aroused the ire of the capitalist press. Even before the TUC congress had finished, the London Evening Standard carried the statement of John Ellis, CPSA general secretary, under the headline "Militant hounding me out."

He complained that "a campaign of vilification and victimisation" had been taken against him; the union had decided that his Opel Senator car was not his and if he wanted a car he should buy one.

The new left-wing controlled national executive committee of the union had also linked his pay to that of a senior principal secretary in Whitehall and awarded him a £5 per week pay increase. Moreover, his American Express card, to pay for "official union business," was also withdrawn.

He received £26,000 per year while many CPSA members were on as little as a £110 per week after tax.

- 'The Rise of Militant' by Peter Taaffe, £11.99 from leftbooks.co.uk

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 14 March 2017 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

TUSC: Socialist Workers Party suspends its participation in England and Wales

Clive Heemskerk, TUSC national election agent

The Socialist Workers Party (SWP) has announced that it is suspending its participation in the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) in England and Wales.

This follows the debate at the recent TUSC conference which expressed support for standing candidates, on a selective basis, [in this May's council elections](#).

The resolution calling on the TUSC national steering committee to process candidate applications was agreed by the other two constituent organisations of TUSC - the RMT transport workers' union and the Socialist Party - and almost all independent TUSC members.

During the conference debate the SWP spokesperson Charlie Kimber made it clear that the SWP would "not be able to take political responsibility for candidates standing" in England and Wales if that was the decision taken. So suspending their membership is not unexpected.

The suspension does not apply to Scotland, however, where Scottish TUSC organises autonomously. The SWP is standing candidates in the council elections there. This is justified, according to the SWP, because Scottish Labour "is headed up by the anti-Corbyn Kezia Dugdale [and] the rise of the Scottish National Party has raised the question of alternatives to Labour" ([Socialist Worker, 8 March](#)).

The political context in Scotland is clearly different - but qualitatively so? Labour in Wales, for example, is led by the anti-Corbyn Welsh first minister Carwyn Jones, right-wing Blairite councillors dominate local government, and Plaid Cymru is able to pose as a radical alternative. Why does this not mean that TUSC should stand candidates in Wales?

Ruthless cuts

The big majority of Labour's 7,000 local councillors oppose Jeremy Corbyn and, as the Socialist Worker article says, are "ruthlessly imposing Tory cuts". How would giving these councillors a free run at the ballot box in England and Wales help "Corbyn-supporting Labour members" in their fight against them?

Even more importantly, how would it convince working class voters disgusted at their local [Labour council's 'ruthless cuts'](#), not to turn to the Liberal Democrats, Greens or UkIP as an alternative to Labour?

The steering committee is meeting on 22 March and will discuss its response to the SWP's withdrawal.

It will also decide on the latest applications to be TUSC candidates, guided by the conference decision - not to have 'candidates everywhere' but to make sure they are part of a serious campaign against cuts to local public services and will strengthen the battle against the right wing in Labour Party and the unions.

NHS: strikes and protests can stop cuts

Dave Carr

The NHS, our vital public health service, is under relentless attack. The latest spending cuts in England - £22 billion under the Tory government's misnamed '[sustainability and transformation plans](#)' (STPs) - will mean further A&E and ward closures, fewer GPs and unfilled staff posts.

These cuts are despite regular reports of critically ill patients dying because ambulances are having to go longer distances due to A&E closures.

And even when such patients are admitted to hospitals they can often spend hours waiting on a trolley in a corridor because of bed shortages and a lack of staff.

Thousands of hospital beds have been axed over recent years to save costs. Added to this shortage is the lack of social care places in the community, preventing many elderly patients being discharged - again, because of billions of pounds cut by successive governments.

Yet multi-millionaire health secretary Jeremy Hunt continues to push for cuts and to sign off privatisation schemes that fill the cash tills of private corporations at the expense of draining the NHS budget.

Moreover, Chancellor Philip Hammond's single-minded [pursuit of austerity cuts](#) will worsen the social care crisis in local authorities - unless it's Tory-run Surrey council, where Hammond's constituency is located, which got a sweetheart deal.

But health workers and communities have had enough and are fighting back. Proof of this was shown on [4 March in London](#) when at least 100,000 NHS workers, trade unionists, health campaigners and ordinary members of the public demonstrated against cuts and privatisation.

This groundswell of opposition must be built on. The trade union tops must be shaken out of their inaction and Jeremy Corbyn must fulfil his call to defend the NHS 'with all our might'. Every Labour council must refuse to accept the STPs.

Every threat to close or downgrade an NHS hospital must be resisted by a community campaign linked to action by health workers. As the junior doctors' dispute showed, the government will only sit up and listen when confronted by strikes.

And if a health trust closes a hospital it should be occupied by health workers and the public until it's reopened.

Until the cuts are restored and privatisation scrapped, there will be no social peace for Theresa May's government.

Glenfield heart unit: "Children will die" angry parents tell NHS England

Steve Score, Save Glenfield campaign and Leicester Socialist Party

"Can you imagine how we feel knowing that our precious daughter could have to travel for hours in an emergency situation to get to life saving surgery when she may not have hours? If you go ahead with your proposal children will die, it's a simple as that. How can that ever be an acceptable outcome?"

This was one of the moving and powerful speeches from patients, families and campaigners at the 'public consultation' meeting in Leicester on 9 March over the threatened closure of the East Midlands Congenital Heart Centre at Glenfield Hospital by NHS England (NHSE).

NHSE representatives were battered for two hours, not just by the emotions of parents, but crucially the dismantling of the logical flaws in their arguments. What was clear was that the main argument for ending surgery was an unscientific, arbitrary target of 125 operations per surgeon a year.

Cuts mean closure

But NHSE choose to call it a 'standard' below which surgeons do not get enough experience of a wide range of cases and, unbelievably, are attempting to impose this retrospectively.

One controversial point was that many in the audience believed that cuts in the NHS were behind this, which was vehemently denied by NHSE. The hospital trust chief executive, who is opposing the closure, pointed out that it would cost a lot of money to close Glenfield and then create capacity elsewhere.

However Socialist Party members think that the mindset of NHSE that 'centralisation is good' is created by [the context of massive cuts in the NHS](#) and it would probably mean cuts in the long term.

Before the meeting and during it, a protest organised by the Save Glenfield Children's Heart Centre campaign took place outside, highlighting the fact that the public consultation meeting was inadequate and many were not able to get in. We will continue [to campaign](#) through the consultation and beyond to stop this closure.

Socialist Party Congress 2017 reports

The Socialist Party's national congress 2017 took place in London from 11 to 13 March, attended by delegates and visitors from Socialist Party branches all over England and Wales, as well as international guests.

Below are reports of some of the sessions on the [world](#), [Britain](#), [Spain](#) and [youth](#). Others included building the Socialist Party, organising our publications and a report of the work of the Committee for a Workers' International. We also heard from Paul Murphy, Irish TD (MP) and member of our Irish sister party, who is facing trial in April [on charges of 'false imprisonment' for a peaceful sit-down protest](#).

A fighting fund appeal raised £13,070 and a membership subs appeal led to 50 members increasing their subs by a total of £576 a month at the event.

All attendees left confident and determined to build the Socialist Party and the struggles of workers and young people in the next 12 months.

Upheaval and fightback in a new, exciting world

Kevin Parslow

The first discussion of the 2017 Socialist Party congress was on the current world situation, introduced by Peter Taaffe, general secretary, and replied to by Judy Beishon of the executive committee.

Peter said that the [previous weekend's demo in defence of the NHS](#) was a fitting curtain raiser to this congress and its angry mood and working-class composition reflected a new, exciting world.

Trump

Peter explained how the [election of Trump as US president](#) has built massive opposition worldwide. The 'whip of counter-revolution' has provoked upheaval both domestically and internationally against an

increasingly uncertain and dangerous background.

Deep splits are opening among the ruling class because of Trump, which the working class will notice and take advantage of as they defend their rights and living standards. Even this early in his presidency, sections of the capitalists are talking about impeachment or other ways of removing Trump, citing the Watergate scandal that removed disgraced President Nixon in 1974.

It is clear that Trump is attempting to pursue an aggressive 'America First' economic policy against other national capitalist classes, the aim being to put the rest of the world on rations. This will provoke a retaliatory 'China First', 'Europe First' and so on.

Trump will also try to pursue a more aggressive foreign policy despite six out of ten people in the US opposing big foreign adventures.

This in a 'multipolar world' dominated by three powers: the US, China and Russia. Although the US is still economically and militarily ahead, China is increasing its military power, challenging the US particularly in the Asia-Pacific region. Yet both are worried by the developing crisis in the Korean peninsula.

Russia, although economically weakened since the collapse of Stalinism and the fall in the price of oil, still has big military spending and its reach is still considerable, as shown in Syria where it has been able to prop up the ailing Assad regime against its opponents in the civil war.

This will have consequences in the Middle East with its patchwork of religious and national groups defending their interests. The situation could be compared to Europe and the 30 Years War of the 17th century. There will be no real peace and no solution to the region's intractable problems on the basis of landlordism and capitalism in the Middle East.

Europe could find itself in conflict with the US over the economy. Europe's economies are very weak. The social catastrophe in Greece continues and German capitalism continues to take a hard line on Greece's debt.

Explosive

The explosive situation in southern Europe was emphasised by comrade Beatriz from Izquierda Revolucionara in Spain, who the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI - to which the Socialist Party is affiliated) is in a unification process with. She highlighted the rising militant mood, particularly among the school student youth who defeated the right-wing government's proposed education laws through their union Sindicato de Estudiantes. Left-wing party Podemos has also rejected a conciliatory approach to ex-social democratic party PSOE, which is divided over backing the right-wing government.

Peter pointed out there is not just a crisis of capitalism and the right but also social democracy and its advocates, which is not 'left' and increasingly unable to put forward solutions to the problems of the working class and youth. A number of elections in European countries this year could see the strengthening of right-wing forces because of the weakness of the left. But this will prove temporary as these organisations cannot solve the problems of capitalism either.

Peter concluded by reiterating that the whole world is in crisis and there are huge changes ahead. The middle layers in society - students, junior doctors in England and others worldwide - are being forced into action and will join the inevitable resistance of the working class.

This mood of anger will present the CWI with big opportunities, as has been shown in the US with our allies in Socialist Alternative since the election in Seattle of Kshama Sawant. The coming battles will then lay the basis for mass revolutionary parties and a mass socialist international.

Volcanic struggles and uncertainty for the establishment in Britain

James Ivens

Two features increasingly define Britain's politics. First: the possibility of volcanic struggle on many various issues. Second: uncertainty, as established powers lose their authority and coherence.

The 'British perspectives' document the Socialist Party's 2017 congress agreed says this: "There is no period of history that corresponds exactly to the times we are living through."

Deputy general secretary Hannah Sell introduced a thorough discussion on political prospects and the strategies socialists need. Following 27 excellent contributors, executive committee member Clive Heemskerck summed the discussion up.

Hannah pointed out that the Socialist Party has already made a qualitative difference in the early skirmishes of this new era.

The victorious [campaign to save the Butterfields estate in east London](#). Tube bosses' retreat in the face of a solid strike by station staff. The mass movements defending [Huddersfield Royal Infirmary in Yorkshire](#) and [the Glenfield children's heart unit in Leicester](#).

All are important local battles where our ideas and members have been central.

But we have had a national impact too. Socialist Party members were key to achieving the tremendous demonstration for the NHS on 4 March.

NHS

We are not alone in seeing that Theresa May's attacks on the NHS could be her '[poll tax](#)' - it could bring down the government. A movement on the NHS would take in not just the towns and cities, but even the rural areas and Tory shires, as reports already show.

The Tories have given a cosmetic impression of unity, aided by media focus on the divisions in Labour. But government defeats in the Lords have shown the opposite is true.

The unprecedented makeup of Northern Ireland's assembly, and the returning question of Scottish independence, could cause constitutional crises.

May's weakness is also highlighted by her retreat on a national insurance hike for the self-employed.

The government is shaky and factionalised. An early general election is possible, but not definite. The capitalist class does not want one. However, May could be forced to call one to regain control.

The EU is the main crack. Hannah reminded congress that "last year we said the working class could pick up the referendum and use it as a stick to hit the Tory party with. We have been proven right on that."

Still, the prospects for Brexit are uncertain. The European Union may not even exist, at least in the same form. A mass campaign for a working class, internationalist Brexit is still needed.

The Leave vote was not based on widespread racism. We can unquestionably win the working class to a socialist position on immigration - on guaranteeing jobs, homes and services for all. But this will not happen on the basis of the Blairites' methods: lofty moralising while implementing austerity.

Nonetheless, anti-racism will be an important area of work. The big demonstrations against Donald Trump's racist agenda have shown the openness to this. Building for 'Day X' school student walkouts could help give structure to this anger.

Schools themselves could be the focal point of a resistance movement. The new funding formula will mean massive cuts to staff. We call for schools to use their power to set deficit budgets, and build campaigns to win back the funding.

Housing too is in complete crisis. The government is under pressure to retreat on several points of its Housing Act. But Labour councils must share the blame for creating this crisis. They have the financial capacity to

build 100,000 council homes this year alone.

We support any Labour councillor seriously prepared to fight the cuts. That is and always has been our position. But the leaders of the Labour left still refuse to call for anti-cuts council candidates, accepting the right's self-interested blindness to our alternative.

In spite of the fact that councils, like parliament, are strongholds of the Labour right, the sheer scale of the cuts could force some to stand up.

Our programme - using councils' financial clout to stop austerity and build a campaign to win the funding back - resonates well with local authority workers and community campaigners. It is still right for the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition to stand in the elections against pro-cuts Labour candidates.

And it is still essential to take part in the struggle in Labour, and put forward what Corbynism needs to win. Our goal is a mass party of the working class.

But our role in the class struggle outside Labour will have the biggest effect on this movement - on the streets and picket lines, in the workplaces, schools and estates.

Tom Watson's 'Project Anaconda' strangulation of Corbyn is winning. But its final victory is still not certain. A new attempt on the leadership, or a big upswing in class struggle, could still stagger the right and push Corbyn left.

A fresh economic collapse would also cause turmoil. British capitalism has tiny, anaemic productivity. This makes it very vulnerable in a crash.

Under cover of the last crash, the public sector pay cap has been in place for seven years. A million workers are under the yoke of zero-hour contracts. Many more are walled in by personal debt.

New unionism

But, Hannah pointed out, there has been a response. "We are seeing the beginning of a 21st century version of new unionism."

Small, independent unions have led militant action. Even parts of the middle class are adopting the methods of the working class movement, as the valiant junior doctors' strikes showed.

Furthermore, "the battle between capital and labour is getting much sharper on both sides." Employers make attempts to break unions outright; workers increasingly go for strikes to the finish rather than symbolic one-day actions.

The additions to the anti-union laws are a new hurdle. Some right-wing union leaders will be relieved, imagining national or coordinated action is off the agenda. We cannot allow that. Any attempt to victimise trade unionists under the Trade Union Act would immediately pose the need for a 24-hour general strike.

The working class went into the 2007-8 crisis unprepared, with a lower level of trade union organisation, without a mass party of its own, without a broad understanding of socialist ideas. But Corbynism, bitter strikes and mass mobilisations on the streets show that all this is changing.

The Socialist Party is entering the most exciting era in its history. We have learnt a lot.

Our role in events is important, but not yet decisive. If we continue to fight boldly for our ideas, the battles we have led in previous decades will seem tiny compared to the all-out class conflict which is coming.

Spain: Solidarity from our co-thinkers fresh from leading mass struggles

Scott Jones

"We share the same political DNA," said Beatriz Garcia from Izquierda Revolucionaria (IR).

She brought solidarity to our congress and described the massive struggles led by IR members, such as the [huge strikes and demonstrations by the Sindicato de Estudiantes](#) (SE - student union) against right-wing education counter-reforms. This movement led to a victory, defeating aspects of the reforms.

Young people

IR's leading position in the student union has helped the party to develop many youth branches, including five in Madrid alone.

Helen Pattison contributed from the floor about her visit to the conference of SE in the midst of the movement and said she witnessed the "the most amazing thing" she'd seen when hundreds of 14 to 16 year olds formed an orderly queue to join the SE. Many of them also expressed an interest in joining IR.

This mass mobilisation was followed on International Women's Day by a demo of half a million in Madrid, one hour strikes by many students and some workers in solidarity with the movement against violence against women.

Beatriz also touched on the national question in Spain. IR produces a paper specifically for the Basque country.

She also mentioned campaigning in the trade unions where 1,600 shop stewards have signed up to a left initiative started by IR.

Unification

Beatriz pointed out that what impressed IR was the attitude of the CWI to the movements around Jeremy Corbyn in Britain and Bernie Sanders in the US, which are both part of the process of the working class searching for a political alternative to capitalist crisis. It's not an accident that unification between the CWI and IR is taking place now, within this broader context.

Socialist Party general secretary Peter Taaffe said: "The fact we've come together will have an effect, internationally, on those looking to join an organisation like ours."

The unification and tremendous work done by IR have made them "well prepared for the explosive struggles to come in the future" concluded Beatriz. Echoing Peter, she said that together "we are a strong attraction for everyone looking for a revolutionary alternative."

Youth campaigning: Building resistance to austerity and Trump

Helen Pattison

Socialist Party executive committee member Claire Laker-Mansfield's introduction to the discussion on the Socialist Party's youth and student campaigning focused on building a movement of resistance to Trump.

Following the successful student strikes in Spain (see article above) Socialist Students is [calling for students to walk out on 'Day X', the day that Trump comes to Britain](#). While in Britain we haven't seen a struggle on the level of Spain recently, the Socialist Party and its predecessor, Militant, have led student strikes against war and against attacks on young people's rights in the past.

We should organise action in the build up to Day X, particularly on May Day. Everywhere we go Day X is a popular idea and young people are pledging to organise at their school, college or university. Socialist Students groups plan to make a splash on campuses with stunts such as "building walls against trump".

Many young members also contributed to the discussion on the dire working condition they and their peers face. Millions are stuck on precarious, temporary contracts or are bogusly self-employed.

Getting organised

But these workers can organise, even in difficult conditions. By teaming up with student members or workers from neighbouring workplaces, we can build the trade union movement in unorganised areas. There have been successful strikes recently by precarious workers.

The Socialist Party is committed to helping this process, to fight for a £10 an hour minimum wage, and for improvements that make working life more bearable. Where our young members play a role in the trade unions they are able to have a big impact and attract new young people towards the workers' movement.

Offered little future by crisis-ridden capitalism, facing homelessness and poverty, young people's physical and mental health has suffered. 10% of five to 16 year olds suffer a diagnosable mental health disorder. Only fighting for socialism can offer an alternative to this misery, with decent services, housing and jobs.

2,000 workers on three rail networks strike against driver-only operated trains

Over 2,000 workers across three rail networks took strike action on 13 March against driver-only operated (DOO) trains. The long-running dispute against the removal of guards on Southern Rail has spread to Northern Rail and Merseyrail.

[Martin Zee, a Merseyrail train guard, is currently in court on trumped up charges facing a possible prison sentence](#), provoking the action there. Merseyrail itself intends to switch to DOO, as does Northern Rail.

Socialist Party members visited picket lines at Victoria station in London (Southern Rail), Liverpool and across the Northern Rail network.

The Northern Rail strike at Newcastle station was strong and in excellent spirits, reports South Tyne and Wear Socialist Party member **Mick Joyce**, with 25 pickets there.

"Absolutely solid"

There was much public support from passers-by and a visit from television cameras. RMT Newcastle steward Mick Robinson said the strike was "absolutely solid" in the North East with no evidence of scabbing. Mick went on to add that the strike was "about placing the safety of the public before profit".

The police had earlier "visited the line in an effort to apply the new legislation following the Tories' [\(anti\) trade union bill](#)", however the strike committee was well prepared as all steps had been taken.

Three bought copies of the Socialist and offered solidarity to the Socialist Party and to members Mick represents in the lift and escalator industry.

Greg Price visited the Manchester Piccadilly picket line to show solidarity. A group of 15 to 20 strikers handed out leaflets telling it as it is.

Northern Rail wants to boost profits and compromise passenger safety by ending the guarantee of a guard on every train. The majority of the rail customers were sympathetic and took leaflets and asked questions.

"Fight back"

One striker said: "If we don't fight back the company will get rid of hundreds of guards and walk all over the remaining employees! We say no to DOO!"

[In Leeds](#) about 25 pickets covered the two entrances at Leeds Station, handing out thousands of leaflets to passengers, explaining why, on safety grounds, they had taken strike action.

Many members of the public stopped to offer support. Two national TV channels were there and union officials took the opportunity to explain how dangerous DOO trains are without the guards, who are trained in 35 different areas of safety competency.

Socialist Party member **Kevin Pattison** offered support from the National Shop Stewards Network and an invitation to address Leeds Trade Union Council.

Derby teaching assistants' all-out strike against Labour council

Charlie Taylor, Derby Socialist Party

Teaching assistants and school support staff in Derby are now on [all-out strike against massive pay cuts](#) imposed by the Labour-led city council. In a recent survey 74% of Derby people said they supported the action by these workers.

A council by-election held on 9 March reflected the anger towards the council. In a former Labour stronghold that was lost to Ukip in a previous council election, [the Tories came out victorious this time!](#)

Despite Labour putting enormous resources into this election - bringing people in from outside areas - they came second to the Tories.

The victorious Tory candidate said, before the result was announced, that he had been told by lifelong Labour voters that they had voted Conservative because they could not "[stand the way that teaching assistants had been treated](#)".

What an indictment of Labour councils carrying out Tory cuts when they have no excuse. Fighting cuts is a choice.

We need councillors who will not only vote against all cuts to jobs, pay, conditions and services but will campaign for the resources to fully fund the needs of local communities.

Unison HE conference: Delegates give the bureaucracy a lesson in democracy

Socialist Party delegates

Unison delegates to the higher education conference on 2 March reminded the service group executive (SGE) who's in charge by defeating them on a number of questions.

The overwhelming mood of conference was one of defiance, with many still visibly angry about the leadership overturning a 55% vote for strike action in the summer of 2016, using low turnout as an excuse to derail any chance of a fightback.

[This decision not only meant that members were forced to accept a further derisory \(1.1%\) pay rise](#) but demoralised activists who had confidently campaigned to win the vote for action.

One delegate explained that he was the only person from his branch at the conference as others had given up, but that he'd be back next year to continue fighting.

Delegates lined up to condemn the lack of a fighting strategy and demand more accountability, passing a motion which committed the SGE to publish voting information on all important decisions.

One motion calling for an independent inquiry into the lack of effective action over pay was opposed by the SGE, but by the time it was heard they couldn't find anyone to speak against it! It was passed with a handful of votes against.

Socialist Party delegates argued for a strategy to win a meaningful victory on pay in 2017 and were instrumental in conference passing a motion committing the SGE to support the £10 an hour minimum wage demand.

Unison members who want a fightback against privatisation, outsourcing and casualisation of higher education services should support and campaign for Unison Action candidates Kath Owen and Sandy Nicoll.

Fight racism and austerity

Jobs, homes and solidarity, not Trumpism!

April Ashley, Unison executive, Black members seat (personal capacity)

Trump's vile racist [ban on people travelling to the US from six Muslim-majority countries](#) and his ban on refugees has been met with a mighty movement of opposition from US workers and young people.

And it's not only in the US that people are taking to the streets, as we saw most recently on [International Women's Day](#). His presidency threatens working class and oppressed communities all over the world. It's a scandal that Theresa May has invited this bigot to Britain to speak.

But the Tory government is also guilty of racism and of blocking refugees, while pursuing wars and 'regime change' in Syria and the Middle East which have created a massive humanitarian crisis.

Many equate Trump's right-wing populism with Brexit. Of course, during the EU referendum the official and the Ukip-led Leave campaigns whipped up anti-migrant feeling, but so too did the Tory Remain campaign.

Unfortunately, the late switch of Jeremy Corbyn to a pro-EU position meant that an independent, working class socialist opposition to the bosses' EU was not heard.

Since Brexit, and Trump's election, there has been a steep rise in racist attacks. However, at root, the vote to exit the EU was not primarily against immigration. For many, Brexit represented a rage against austerity and against a corrupt establishment which benefits the super-rich.

We fight for better terms and conditions for all - including a £10 an hour minimum wage, mass council house building, nationalisation of key industries and rejection of EU directives that attack workers' rights.

- Defend the rights of migrants and refugees. Defend the right to asylum. Oppose all racist immigration controls. Guarantee the rights of EU citizens in the UK to remain. For workers' unity against racism and austerity.
- The establishment of full union recognition rights to negotiate collective agreements for all workers. Stop the 'race to the bottom'.
- Rejection of all trade agreements which increase corporate power and its ability to take over our public services and weaken workers' rights.

March Against Racism - 18 March

- London: 12pm, (BBC) Portland Place, W1A 1AA
 - Cardiff: 11am, Grange Gardens, CF11
 - Glasgow: 11am, Holland St
-

International Women's Day: taking action against capitalist oppression

International Women's Day (8 March) was celebrated with special enthusiasm this year by members of the parties and organisations affiliated to the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI), including the Socialist Party in England and Wales (see reports below). Millions worldwide were on the streets to denounce the reactionary views of US president Donald Trump, especially towards women.

It is also 100 years since women workers of Petrograd chose this day to take the action which sparked the historic Russian revolution.

From 'International Women's Day 2017: A century on from the Russian Revolution' by Clare Doyle (CWI). [The article can be read on socialistworld.net](#)

Spain: Hundreds of thousands in International Women's Day student strike

The call by 'Libres y Combativas' (a working class socialist feminist platform established by the Sindicato de Estudiantes and members of Izquierda Revolucionaria - CWI co-thinkers in the Spanish state) to strike against sexist violence and in defence of the rights of working class women brought out hundreds of thousands of students.

This is a historic strike, the first time ever that a strike of such dimensions has taken place on International Women's Day. Mass assemblies and protests took place in more than 1,000 schools and campuses.

Hundreds signed up to get involved in Libres y Combativas, to strengthen the ranks of working class, anti-capitalist, revolutionary feminism.

In the evening big demonstrations took place, including 500,000 in Madrid!

Republic of Ireland: Mass protests demand abortion rights

IWD was a major day of action by women and young people in Ireland to protest the archaic 8th amendment to the constitution which bans abortion.

The 'Strike 4 repeal' saw up to 8,000 gather in Dublin city centre in the afternoon. In the evening the 'March 4 Repeal' was 12,000 strong.

Socialist Party members supported the strike by assisting pro-abortion rights group Rosa in organising the 'Bus 4 repeal', which directly linked women to womenonweb.org - a group that posts safe abortion pills to women in countries where abortion is illegal.

Hong Kong: Solidarity with global mass protests and women's strikes"

Over 70 attended the Socialist Action (CWI) candle-lit demonstration in Hong Kong.

"Today, International Women's Day, we go to the streets - not to go shopping or organise dinners and ceremonies. We want a new, fighting feminism against the rule of the undemocratic billionaire 1%," said Sally Tang Mei-ching, Socialist Action (CWI, Hong Kong)

Pakistan

Female members of Socialist Movement Sindh arranged a workers' rally from the Socialist Movement Sindh office in Mirpurkhas to the Press Club.

They put forward demands that female workers and peasants working at home should be registered as industrial workers and given full social security facilities.

Leeds demo

A demo was held in Leeds Millennium Square marking International Women's Day. It was organised by socialist women and non-binary group (SWAN), and Leeds Socialist Party branch.

It was not just a celebration of IWD but a demo standing in solidarity with women striking for their rights across the world and, in particular, the continuing struggle for access to safe and legal abortions in Ireland.

The evening was rounded off by a speech from Amy Cousens from SWAN about the origins of International Women's Day, and how the Russian Revolution was kick-started by women workers refusing to accept their abysmal conditions.

Immediately after the revolution the Soviets adopted the Bolsheviks' policies on divorce, abortion and sexuality, which remain progressive even by today's standards.

Abigail Braybrook

Socialist Students Liverpool

University of Liverpool Socialist Students celebrated IWD with a debate and discussion on "what is the relationship between gender and class equality?"

We discussed events such as the peace and bread strikes which triggered the February revolution in Russia as well as events such as the Dagenham Ford sewing machinists strike in 1968 which was influential in securing the 1970 Equal Pay Act.

We later joined a demonstration held at the university in solidarity with the Strike4Repeal marches in Ireland on the right of women to take their reproductive health into their own hands.

The demonstration was met with some opposition from a group of male passers-by, who yelled profanities and misogynistic remarks. This clearly shows the congruence between harassment and the need for socialist feminism to fight the misogynist establishment which has been encapsulated with the rise of Trumpism.

We spoke to people at the demonstration about the link between fighting women's oppression and fighting the capitalist system and we informed the crowd of the Day X walkouts when Trump visits, and sold copies of the

Socialist.

Afton McNamee

London - revolution past and present

In a room plastered in photos, displays and posters celebrating the Russian Revolution, nearly 100 socialists met on International Women's Day in London, organised by the Socialist Party.

The meeting explained the role of women in the February 1917 revolution and the gains made by the October revolution in attempting to liberate women and unburden them of domestic responsibilities through communal laundries, restaurants and child care.

Other Socialist Party members spoke on fighting sexism today, for abortion rights and women's equality in the workplace.

It was hard-hitting discussion because if the revolutionary movement in Russia had successfully spread internationally then women wouldn't still have to be campaigning for their rights today. But it was also inspiring to discuss with revolutionary women and men who continue to fight for socialism.

Helen Pattison

Kshama Sawant is a Socialist Alternative (US co-thinkers of the Socialist Party) councillor in Seattle, re-elected in November 2015. She has championed a \$15 an hour minimum wage and measures such as rent controls to end the housing crisis. The following is an extract from her IWD speech to supporters.

We are fighting for a socialist world

Today is one of the largest ever celebrations of International Women's Day. In more than 50 countries around the world, women are marching, rallying, and going on strike. Many are protesting against Donald Trump. Because the 'Misogynist in Chief' and his vile right-wing agenda are not just threats to women in the United States, but to millions of working women everywhere.

While the protests today are much smaller than the tremendous Women's Marches just six weeks ago - the biggest single day of protest in US history - today is also historic.

Today's women's strike has brought forward the question of power, of our power as working women. Schools closed down in a number of cities today, and, around the country, thousands of women courageously took the day off, called in sick, or left work early.

We, as women, have begun a crucial discussion about what is really needed to defeat Donald Trump. And what is needed is the enormous potential power of strike action. To hit Trump and his billionaire backers where it hurts - by shutting down their profits!

But, to do so, we will need to get better organised. And we will need to build on a far larger scale.

Women's Day was originally called 'International Working Women's Day'. It began in this country over a century ago. And it wasn't about flowers or chocolate!

It was about working women standing up against their exploitation in their workplaces, for the right to vote and full civil rights, against sexual harassment, for the right to make choices about their own bodies, and for the right to equal pay for equal work.

And it was about capitalism. Because it is not only Donald Trump who is misogynist and racist. The capitalist system is deeply oppressive at its core - it has sexism, sexual violence, and racism written on its DNA.

Capitalism relies on the brutal exploitation of women and other oppressed groups to divide and weaken the working class.

The women's marches in January and today's incredible events are a huge step forward for our movement. And we need to go further.

In order to fully tap into the power of working women and of the broader working class, we need to organise for broad strike action.

This is not only about an end to Trumpism or to corporate politics. We also have to demand fundamental change, and, for that, we will need a powerful movement independent of corporate politicians. We need our own political parties. We need a new socialist party, as a step toward a new mass workers' party.

Like the women in Russia a century ago, we are not just fighting for a less brutal system. We are fighting for a socialist world.

- See socialistalternative.org for Kshama's speech in full

Disabled workers deserve a living wage

Dan Crowter, Coventry West Socialist Party

Rosa Monckton, one of the trustees of Team Domenica, a 'charity' which claims to help disabled people get into work, has said that businesses should be allowed to pay disabled people less than the minimum wage.

Writing in the Spectator about her disabled daughter, she says: "This is not about the right to a minimum wage, it is about the right to have the human dignity that comes with work and with being included."

Monckton is married to Daily Mail columnist Dominic Lawson, who is the son of former Tory chancellor Lord Nigel Lawson. She is the daughter of Gilbert Monckton, 2nd Viscount Monckton of Brenchley. She made a very nice living as chief executive of luxury goods firm 'Asprey & Garrard'.

This doesn't invalidate her points, but it gives an insight into the kind of position she is arguing from.

Monckton couches her argument in the language of equality, using nauseatingly saccharine phrases such as "therapeutic exemption from the minimum wage." But what she is arguing for is nothing less than legalising the wholesale super-exploitation of workers with disabilities, opening up a new section of labour for businesses to take advantage of.

The bleeding-heart liberal mask slips when she writes approvingly of Tory councillor David Scott. Scott said to New Labour-turned-Tory politician Baron Freud: "I have a number of mentally damaged individuals, who to be quite frank aren't worth the minimum wage."

Mentally damaged? Have we just walked out of the 1970s?

Although perhaps I have misunderstood poor Rosa, as she subsequently says she "followed these events with mounting anger." Really, Rosa? What made you angry?

An elected representative calling people like your daughter "mentally damaged"? A former government minister responding: "I know exactly what you mean, where actually as you say they're not worth the full wage"?

Oh, no - what made her angry was the "spectacular backlash" they faced.

The fact that only around 6% of people with learning difficulties are in employment is a disgrace. They should be encouraged and supported in finding work that they are capable of doing, that they enjoy, and that has suitable hours.

The solution is not to allow businesses to pay them a pittance, which would of course have to be topped up by disability benefits. This would inevitably lead to a 'race to the bottom' in wages and conditions.

A new (albeit small) workforce on lower pay makes it possible for bosses to threaten other workers: accept cuts, or lose your job to cheaper labour.

Capitalist society views work and disability in completely the wrong way. The problems faced by people with disabilities are hugely exacerbated by the way they are treated.

There is no "dignity" in an employer throwing us crumbs from the table as 'charity'.

Dignity is people with disabilities being given sufficient state benefits to live and, if they are able to work, being supported in a rewarding job, with a structure that values and encourages them, doing a fair day's work and taking home a fair day's pay.

Only socialist policies - public ownership of society's massive wealth, and democratic planning of production - can ensure the investment needed to guarantee this for all workers of all abilities.

'Nurses are angry and we are ready for action'

Beth Webster, nurse, Cardiff West Socialist Party

[Up to 250,000 people descended on London to defend the NHS on 4 March](#). This was an overwhelming show of solidarity for healthcare workers across the UK, struggling daily under the weight of staff shortages and underfunding.

The situation in Wales is no less critical than in England, despite Welsh Labour's insistence that health and social care over the border are well-resourced and adequately staffed.

These claims seem particularly incredible to nurses routinely working 13 hour shifts without time to go to the toilet, let alone take their allotted breaks; to newly qualified nurses placed in charge of acute medical and surgical wards with only 'bank' or agency staff for support; to nurses hanging drips from curtain rails because there aren't enough drip stands.

Frontline staff and patients have been beleaguered for far too long. Successive governments have blamed everyone but themselves for the crisis.

They say patients are at fault for unnecessarily using A&E departments and 'bed blocking'. They say doctors are at fault for not providing non-emergency services 24/7. Nurses are regularly vilified by the right-wing media, most notably during the Mid Staffordshire scandal.

The contempt in which nurses are held by the government is evident in the 1% pay-rise cap, the scrapping of the student bursary, and the consistent failure to address the chronic nurse shortage.

Nurses are angry and we are ready for action.

Leadership is lacking to say the least. The leadership of Unison, the largest health union, reluctantly and belatedly endorsed the march - yet conspicuously failed to call solidarity action with the junior doctors' strike. The Royal College of Nursing's only recent 'action' has been to set up a petition to end the 1% nurse pay cap.

But all nurses are leaders; we lead change on the wards every day. We should help lead the fight for the NHS.

When healthcare workers take action, we are accused of leaving patients vulnerable, of putting lives at risk. But we must remember that the government's programme of austerity and privatisation is endangering lives.

It is time to take mass action.

We need coordinated campaigns around local services, linked up with national action. We need to call on the health unions and Trade Union Congress to ballot for strike action and occupations.

We need to mobilise the wider working class in defence of our NHS and against austerity, building for a 24-hour general strike as a next step in defending our services.

We need to join the Socialist Party, which is ready to fight for a properly funded, democratically run NHS, with patients and workers the priority. On no account should the momentum of the 4 March protest be allowed to dissipate.

- [Join the Socialists at socialistparty.org.uk/join](http://socialistparty.org.uk/join)
-

Women's struggles reduced to perfume sales and career ladder

[Writing at socialistworld.net](http://socialistworld.net), Clare Doyle pointed out that "only in a few countries - Pakistan and Turkey among them - have demonstrations regularly taken place on International Women's Day."

When I was younger it was seldom marked in Britain, but in Germany it was observed. I remember one year coming back from a trip to East Germany with a photo showing how the Stalinist state celebrated 8 March.

At the time, many of the members of the German Young Socialists thought East Germany was a genuine socialist state.

I didn't agree, and asked them whether a bouquet of flowers, several bottles of perfume and a shop window sign saying "treat her on International Women's Day" was what German socialists like Luise Zietz and Clara Zetkin had in mind when they proposed an International Women's Day back in 1910.

Women in the Stalinist states did enjoy some benefits over women under capitalism, but nothing like the gains first achieved in the Russian revolution. Stalin's rule changed that, and in the Soviet Union just as in East Germany, International Women's Day was mostly a ritual.

In 1965, the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR declared it a holiday "in commemoration of the outstanding merits of Soviet women in communistic construction, in the defence of their fatherland during the Great Patriotic War."

The 'fatherland' and 'patriotic' naming of World War Two give an idea of how rotten the Soviet Union's politics had become. And then they added: "But still, women's day must be celebrated as are other holidays."

Was it encouraging that the United Nations (UN) adopted International Women's Day back in 1977? It did put it back on the international calendar. But UN efforts to tackle illiteracy, poverty and inequality have not achieved much.

An International Women's Day organisation entitled 'Be Bold for Change' mailed this year, asking me "to call on the masses or call on myself to help forge a better-working and a more gender-inclusive world".

Among its advertised events I found "Avon IWD - the beauty of doing good". Other sponsors include BP, Vodafone, Caterpillar, Western Union, the European Bank and Pepsico.

There is more than a century dividing the International Women's Day of revolutionaries like Luise Zietz and Clara Zetkin from the corporate-led drivel about career ladders. AVON CALLING - who's listening?

Sue Powell, Gloucester

<http://www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/25031>