

Editorial of the Socialist, issue 947

Race against time for May as Corbyn sets out anti-austerity case

A bold socialist stand can beat the Blairites and the Tories

Theresa May is in a race against time on the deteriorating state of the economy. She needs the general election to be over before it worsens more decisively. Economic growth is slowing. Inflation is rising while pay is held down, so real wages are falling. No wonder the Tory prime minister has been minimising her exposure to questioning and debate, as her course of action will be to inflict ongoing brutal austerity - to make working and middle class people pay for British capitalism's inability to provide sustained and healthy economic growth.

May will also try to make the majority in society pay for whatever hits to the profits of the top corporations result from Brexit. So she and her party, in the service of big business, want five more years without having to face the electorate. More time to continue their agenda of smashing up the welfare state and grinding down the living standards of ordinary people.

The ideology in the government's agenda was illustrated by [a recently published report](#) by the Association for Public Service Excellence. It showed that the massive funding cuts being inflicted on local authorities are not because the spending of those authorities will become a greater burden on the economy. On the contrary, by 2020-21 local government spending as a percentage of economic output is on course to be its lowest level for 60 years. In addition, [the biggest cuts in spending on services](#) have been in the most deprived local authority areas.

So desperate are councils for money that many are gambling on the property markets, which [even the Financial Times pointed out](#) is highly risky. This reckless way of trying to solve their cash crises amounts to "[a gigantic game of Monopoly with taxpayers' cash](#)" commented investment manager Matthew Oakeshott, with "real echoes here of Northern Rock... and the Icelandic bank scandals."

Labour's manifesto

Therefore it's very welcome that Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell are speaking out publicly against austerity and for improved services before they engage in the final stage of their battle over the party's election manifesto with Labour's right wing.

A [Guardian editorial](#) snidely accused Corbyn of overriding party democracy when it suits him because he wants to ensure the manifesto contains the policies he supports rather than those agreed by Labour's manifesto-deciding committee. That accusation was a deliberate disregard of the reality that [the Socialist Party has long pointed out](#) - and that is [now widely acknowledged](#) - that the Labour Party is in substance two parties in one.

The manifesto committee consists of Labour's NEC, shadow cabinet, officers of the backbench MPs and the heads of the National Policy Forum, so doesn't have a majority in support of Corbyn. Yet Corbyn knows that his policies are supported by the overwhelming majority of the party's membership. They were the very reason he was propelled twice into the leadership position and why he was also [vindicated in the Unite general secretary election](#) - a de facto third leadership contest.

A [genuinely democratic party](#) would be one in which its membership would debate and decide the full programme. Election manifestos would be drawn up on the basis of that programme, at the very least by elected, fully accountable and recallable representatives of the membership. But Jeremy Corbyn is at the head

of a party that now has no semblance of such democracy, so he is correctly trying to override what are undemocratic, right-wing controlled bodies at the party tops. In doing this he should be urgently backed by pressure from all his supporters across the trade union and labour movement.

Sabotage of Corbyn

Meanwhile, the nature of this battle is shown by the [many Labour MPs](#) who are [refusing to endorse Corbyn](#) as a future prime minister and want to remove him at the earliest opportunity after the election. Some, [like Exeter MP Ben Bradshaw](#), are saying that as polls indicate a Tory government is 'certain', local people can vote for Labour candidates like himself without a Corbyn-led government being the result.

With no reselection contests for Labour MPs who are standing for re-election, and only 13 standing down, there are few opportunities for new Corbynite candidates to enter onto the stage of the safest Labour seats. It's also the case that in some of the selections held so far for the 13 seats, the victor has not been a pro-Corbyn candidate, for instance in Leigh, near Manchester, and in Hull West and Hessle.

Tony Blair, following [his unpersuasive denial](#) that he was suggesting votes for non-Labour candidates if they are softer on Brexit, has made the laughable assertion that a return to the 'centre ground' would make Labour electable. Over the three general elections in which he was Labour leader the party lost four million votes, a decline that was clearly brought out in the [extract carried in last week's issue of the Socialist](#) from Peter Taaffe's new book 'From Militant to the Socialist Party'. However, although Blair is given a hearing in the capitalist media to turn history on its head, he carries little weight among ordinary people who rightly view him as a war criminal, closet Tory and careerist money-grabber.

It is precisely the [toxic legacy of Blairism](#) that is the main obstacle to a Labour victory on 8 June. The Blairites and their successors are the main liability, not those on the left who are trying to divorce the party from a right-wing agenda. But the Corbyn wing faces a major task in getting its policies out over the heads of Labour's machine and most of its MPs and councillors. Also, as previous Labour governments didn't carry out policies in the interests of the working class, it faces the task of convincing voters that it could and would carry out its promises.

Not succeeding on these fronts risks an election defeat. After all, Labour's equivalent in France, the PS, only received 6% of the vote [in the first round of the French presidential election](#). Its equivalent in Greece, Pasok, went from receiving 44% of the vote in 2009 to just 6% in 2015. While Labour is not in power at present, the memory of the Blair years weighs heavy.

But this fate can be averted. Even though many potential Labour voters view Corbyn as disappointingly low-key, his left policies - and the desire of the hundreds of thousands of 'Corbyn surge' party members who want to see them implemented - if promoted strongly and convincingly, could reach and inspire enough people to bring down the Tories.

A programme for victory

Some of the vital issues Jeremy Corbyn raises are commented on in other parts of this issue of the Socialist, including the need to increase public sector pay, provide genuinely affordable housing and cap rents, stop education cuts and improve workers' and trade union rights. Who in the majority in society wouldn't support these proposals? Only the directors and rich shareholders of big business wouldn't, together with their representatives in parliament, the media and other capitalist institutions.

Widespread support for such policies shows that there isn't "an unprecedented swing to the right" as Guardian columnist [Polly Toynbee wrongly argued](#). Rather, the polls, which in any case can't be relied on, reflect that most of the vehicles transmitting the policies - the capitalist media and institutions, and the Labour right - intentionally distort and discredit them as well as denigrating Corbyn himself.

This is not to say that the left Labour leaders haven't made mistakes - which are more likely as the influence of rank-and-file trade unionists on the Labour Party has been much reduced, as has been active working class participation in the unions and Labour. This was shown when Jeremy Corbyn, under pressure from the Blairites, [advocated the UK staying in the bosses' EU](#).

Since that referendum he has made some good demands in workers' interests regarding Brexit, but he also needs to clearly counter [the likes of Keir Starmer](#), Chuka Umunna and Sadiq Khan who want to serve the interests of the top corporations by seeing Britain remain in the EU single market.

On this issue and others Corbyn and McDonnell need to disassociate from the Labour right and launch a strong offensive against the Tories. There are no shortage of issues to target. How about crushing [the Tories' accusation](#) that Corbyn would mean "very dangerous chaos," by quoting back Defence Secretary Fallon's admission that May would be willing to launch a first nuclear strike? This issue would help bring young people to support Corbyn, as would his call for free education.

Already [a poll has shown](#) a "strong lead" for Labour among 18 to 24 year olds and "equal pegging with the Conservatives among 25 to 34 year olds". Those young people need to be inspired enough to register before 22 May to vote - if they haven't done so yet - as well as to actually cast their vote on election day.

Left of Labour candidates?

The Socialist Party is part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) that is contesting 80 council seats on 4 May against right-wing Labour councillors who are slashing vital services. However, due to the different circumstances of a general election at this point in time, the Socialist Party is not preparing to stand candidates in it. [As TUSC said](#):

"Our local election campaigns will also lay the groundwork for building the support Jeremy will need against the capitalist establishment, including the Blairites within the Labour Party, if he does win in June.

"But a general election intervention is different to building a campaign against local Blairite councillors, and in a hastily called snap election especially so. So the TUSC steering committee will be discussing... how best we can take forward our founding aim of helping to create a mass vehicle for working class political representation, in the general election itself and, even more importantly, in the new political situation that will present itself after 8 June."

Whatever the result of the general election, the discussions around Corbyn's programme that are taking place are raising and spreading an idea of what a socialist alternative could mean. These discussions will inevitably bring up the issue of how much can be gained with left policies under the present system and will lead to welcome debate on the Socialist Party's call for public ownership of the main banks and corporations that dominate the economy. Discussions will also need to encompass the crucial question of how a socialist programme can be delivered, as TUSC's statement rightly highlights.

Jeremy Corbyn's workers' charter

To be scrapped

- Tories' Trade Union Act
- Zero-hour contracts
- Public sector pay cap
- Employment tribunal fees
- Unpaid internships
- EU undercutting of pay agreements

To be introduced

- £10 an hour minimum wage
- Collective bargaining
- New rights for trade unions

We say

- Build on these pro-worker policies
 - Get them in the Labour manifesto
 - Mobilise workers and young people to fight and win them
-

Freeing workers and unions

Rob Williams, Socialist Party national industrial organiser

Workers will welcome Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell's [20-point workers' charter](#) to fix the "rigged economy" in the workplace.

Restoring, defending and strengthening trade union rights - as the most effective way to fight for more secure employment and better wages - is a major theme of the programme. These policies, on condition they are made part of Labour's manifesto, could open the door to challenging mass casualisation and low pay.

The commitment to repeal 2016's Trade Union Act would be a major step forward. It needs to be a first step towards removing all of the anti-union laws.

Thatcher's additions to anti-union legislation were maintained by Tony Blair - [who boasted that on his watch](#), they were "the most restrictive union laws in the Western world." Incidentally, the right to strike should be restored to the POA union of prison officers and allied workers.

The policy of abolishing Tory employment tribunal fees would also be a big advancement. Just a year after their introduction, there was a [70% fall in workers challenging bosses](#) at tribunals.

The pledged [public inquiry into blacklisting](#) is also much needed, to expose and redress persecution of trade unionists.

In some respects, the charter doesn't just seek to reverse the anti-working class policies of the last seven years of Tory government, propped up for the first five by the Lib Dems. It could also undo some of the [anti-working class policies of Blair and Gordon Brown's 'New Labour'](#).

And it is an effective answer to the fatalists and pessimists within Labour and the unions, who have totally misunderstood why millions of workers voted to leave the EU - in part, as a blow against the capitalist establishment and its neoliberal 'race to the bottom' in the workplace.

These policies represent a far stronger defence of workers' rights than the limited protections of the EU - and without accepting the [EU's undercutting of collective agreements and pay](#).

It is explicit: "Ensure that any employer wishing to recruit labour from abroad does not undercut workers at home - because it causes divisions when one workforce is used against another."

Overall, the current programme can and should be strengthened - but it is an important foundation that will be attractive to workers. The Corbyn movement must seriously campaign on it so that workers are convinced it would be implemented, taking it into factories and offices as well.

Doing this - as well as pledging policies like [renationalising rail](#), [energy](#) and [Royal Mail](#) - could really inspire workers to vote to put Jeremy into government.

And it would totally expose the hypocrisy of Theresa May, who has tried to style herself as pro-worker, aware of the massive anger against the counterrevolution in workers' pay and conditions over the last decades.

But it has to be campaigned for alongside socialist policies that challenge capitalist ownership of the economy, as the essential guarantee for workers' rights and a decent future for us and our families.

Fighting poverty pay

Glenn Kelly, Socialist Party industrial department

Millions of workers in Britain are condemned to low pay and insecure contracts. [Corbyn and McDonnell's 20 points](#) offer a significant step forward for many. They must be welcomed as a great first step.

The programme's key measures on pay include a pledge to raise the minimum wage, which Corbyn has [previously promised to lift to £10 an hour](#) in 2020. Ending the public sector pay cap, banning zero-hour contracts, and reinstating collective bargaining are other key policies.

With [six million workers earning less than the \(real\) living wage](#), £10 an hour in particular is very welcome.

Corbyn must head off Blairite attempts to undermine this by pledging its immediate introduction, not waiting three years. He should also explicitly state there will be no exemptions for youth and training, unlike the Blairite and Tory minimum wage rates.

Public sector workers, whose living standards have fallen for over a decade, will cheer the lifting of the pay cap. But they will rightly demand the thousands stolen off their pay packets returned.

They will want to know how Labour will fund this, and the billions stolen from public services. If Labour were to cancel all 'PFI' privatisation debt, and send the private profiteers packing, that alone would free up billions.

It's not just the rate of pay that pushes people into poverty. Insecure contracts, no guarantees of hours, and being at the beck and call of the boss can force workers to accept bullying and intimidation - or face losing work.

The programme's [ban on zero-hour contracts](#), right to guaranteed hours - and equal employment rights from day one, including part-timers and temps - begin to address this.

It does need more: putting minimum hours up to and including full-time work, as well as flexibility, in workers' hands, not the bosses'. Corbyn should also add to "equal" employment rights from day one, calling as well for full employment rights from day one, including the right to claim unfair dismissal.

Women and young people are the workers most often forced into insecure, part-time work.

The charter's promises to tackle gender pay discrimination and victimisation of pregnant women are good, but need more detail. In particular, free childcare would help ensure women have access to work.

No doubt bosses will complain and try to resist these reforms. Corbyn and McDonnell must give a clear warning to all firms who try to use attacks on workers to pay for these measures.

If the big companies say they can't afford even these modest reforms, despite their massive profits, then Corbyn should tell bosses we can't afford them, and nationalise their firms under democratic workers' control and management.

Public ownership and big business levies could also fund support for small businesses to implement the policies.

Corbyn and McDonnell's 20-point "workers' charter"

- Give all workers equal rights from day one, whether part-time or full-time, temporary or permanent - so that all workers have the same rights and protections whatever kind of job they have.
- Ban zero hours contracts - so that every worker gets a guaranteed number of hours each week.
- Ensure that any employer wishing to recruit labour from abroad does not undercut workers at home - because it causes divisions when one workforce is used against another.

- Repeal the Trade Union Act and roll out sectoral collective bargaining - because the most effective way to maintain good rights at work is through a trade union.
- Guarantee trade unions a right to access workplaces - so that unions can speak to members and potential members.
- Introduce four new Bank Holidays - we'll bring our country together with new holidays to mark our four national patron saints' days, so that workers in Britain get the same proper breaks as in other countries.
- Raise the minimum wage to the level of the living wage (expected to be at least £10 per hour by 2020) - so that no one in work gets poverty pay.
- End the public sector pay cap - because public sector wages have fallen and our public sector workers deserve a pay rise.
- Amend the takeover code to ensure every takeover proposal has a clear plan in place to protect workers and pensioners - because workers shouldn't suffer when a company is sold.
- Roll out maximum pay ratios - of 20:1 in the public sector and companies bidding for public contracts - because it cannot be right that wages at the top keep rising while everyone else's stagnates.
- Ban unpaid internships - because it's not fair for some to get a leg up when others can't afford to.
- Enforce all workers' rights to trade union representation at work - so that all workers can be supported when negotiating with their employer.
- Abolish employment tribunal fees - so that people have access to justice.
- Double paid paternity leave to four weeks and increase paternity pay - because fathers are parents too and deserve to spend more time with their new babies.
- Strengthen protections for women against unfair redundancy - because no one should be penalised for having children.
- Hold a public inquiry into blacklisting - to ensure that blacklisting truly becomes and remains a thing of the past.
- Give equalities reps statutory rights - so they have time to protect workers from discrimination.
- Reinstate protection against third party harassment - because everyone deserves to be safe at work
- Use public spending power to drive up standards, including only awarding public contracts to companies which recognise trade unions.
- Introduce a civil enforcement system to ensure compliance with gender pay auditing- so that all workers have fair access to employment and promotion opportunities and are treated fairly at work.

Corbyn pledges a million homes and landlord regulation

We say

- Build all million as council homes
- Bring in rent caps and lifetime tenancies
- Nationalise banks, land and building firms

Paula Mitchell, secretary, London Socialist Party

Jeremy Corbyn has promised 100,000 council homes a year if elected to government. Combined with 100,000 private sector homes, that totals [a million new builds](#) over the possible course of the next parliament.

And speaking at the end of London's recent May Day demonstration, John McDonnell rightly pledged to reinstate housing benefit for under-21s. Corbyn has also announced ["tougher" standards](#) for private landlords.

We face a massive lack of genuinely affordable housing, coupled with the 'bedroom tax', benefit caps, pay cuts and job losses. There are 800,000 too few homes in London alone, according to a [2013 estimate by London councils](#).

The current government, the government of the rich, wants to safeguard massive profits for landlords, building companies and property speculators, while driving working class people into misery.

So these recent policy announcements on housing will inspire many. Corbyn's job now is to build on them so they can start to really satisfy the needs of the working class, and to propose socialist measures to finance them.

'Regeneration' of council or housing association homes [means gentrification and a loss of social housing](#) - working class people's homes are replaced by luxury accommodation.

The Socialist Party fights for renovation without loss of social housing, lifetime tenancies, and the right of residents to vote on all changes. Corbyn should make these part of his programme.

Only [30% of the most upmarket homes in London are occupied full-time](#). Corbyn should also pledge to take over empty property for council housing.

Thousands of families have been forced out of London. [Over 50,000 have been placed outside of their borough](#) by local councils. Ending social cleansing means also promising to stop the sell-off and demolition of council homes - by Labour councils as well as others.

The Tories have already [attacked the pledge](#) to clamp down on bad landlords, saying higher standards will drive up rents. This is why it's important for Corbyn to reintroduce his [policy of rent controls](#) - which should mean caps, not just rules on how much prices can go up.

The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition stands for a compulsory register of private landlords, to guarantee decent standards and control rents.

A million new homes is a very good start. Let's make that a million new council homes, rather than leaving half of them to market vultures.

Nationalising the large building companies and land would clear the way for that. And nationalising the banks under democratic control could ensure cheap mortgages for new buyers.

McDonnell promises reversal of Tories' tax cuts for the super-rich

We say

- Don't stop there - set the super-rich's tax rates higher
- Nationalise the banks and top corporations to prevent tax dodging

Tom Baldwin, Socialist Party national committee

Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell is promising to [reverse cuts to corporation tax and capital gains tax](#), instead giving NHS staff a pay rise and hire 10,000 more police officers.

The Tories have handed big businesses tax cuts, while workers have been hit by rises in VAT and council tax.

The general election could provide a chance to end these 'Robin Hood in reverse' policies. McDonnell has said: "We've got to end the giveaways to the rich and have a fair taxation system."

While he hasn't said what rate a Corbyn government would set corporation tax at, this is a step in the right direction. He has also promised not to raise lower bands of income tax and hinted he won't hike VAT - attacks the Tories are not ruling out.

Corporation tax, which is charged on companies' profits, has been steadily cut under the Tories. It has fallen from 28% to 19%, meaning that - outrageously - the biggest businesses now pay less than the standard rate of income tax for workers. Under current plans it will keep falling until 2020.

The Tories want to use Brexit as an opportunity to turn Britain into something resembling a tax haven for their fat-cat friends. The contrast between their policies and those of Corbyn and McDonnell is clear.

However, even if a Corbyn government restores the 28% rate, it will still be well below the 40% charged when corporation tax was introduced in the 1960s.

He would also face the immediate problem of businesses using every trick they can to avoid paying tax. Already, uncollected, avoided and illegally evaded tax [costs £34 billion a year](#). Undoubtedly firms will respond to any tax rise with threats to pull investment out of the country.

While the fat cats are in charge they'll do anything to make the most profit for themselves. [The only way we can control these corporations is to own them ourselves](#).

The finance sector and top 150 biggest businesses that dominate the economy should be taken into public ownership, with compensation only paid on the basis of proven need, and run under democratic working class control and management. Corbyn should call for this.

We have the chance to change direction under a Corbyn-led government. But his popular, anti-austerity policies can only be realised if backed with a bold socialist programme, and actively fought for by organised workers.

Corbyn pledges end to uni fees and school cuts

We say

- Introduce a living grant for university students
- Scrap free schools, academies and grammars

Claire Laker-Mansfield, Socialist Party national youth and student organiser

What is your offer for the next generation? This is a question that should be front and centre in the debates that surround the upcoming general election.

After almost seven years in government, it is a question that has already been definitively answered by the Tories: school cuts, student debt, low pay and a housing crisis are among the features of their toxic legacy. But what about Jeremy Corbyn?

When John McDonnell used his speech at London's May Day rally to promise that, if Corbyn wins on 8 June, his government will [abolish tuition fees](#), it drew rapturous applause. This was a policy that helped generate the huge enthusiasm that saw Jeremy catapulted into the position of leader in the first place.

But it is also a stand that has drawn derision and outright opposition from the pro-austerity, pro-fees rump that still dominates the Labour Party in parliament and local councils.

It is therefore very good that Corbyn and McDonnell have chosen to prioritise the interests of working class and young people over a futile attempt to appease the Blairites on this issue. That is the approach that they should continue to adopt.

As well as pledging free education, Corbyn has promised to [reverse the £3 billion of school cuts](#) that are in the pipeline. Again, this pledge will enthuse teachers, parents, school students, and all those with a stake in the education of future generations.

These positive promises are a big step forward and will go a long way towards answering what it is a Corbyn administration might have to offer young people. Now, he should go further.

Not only should Corbyn pledge an end to tuition fees, but the introduction of living grants to help ensure university is accessible to students of all backgrounds. Not only should he reverse the school cuts and introduce free primary school meals - but scrap free schools, academies and grammars, bringing them into a [fully funded, high-quality comprehensive system](#).

If Corbyn approaches the coming weeks with audacity and fights this election on clear socialist policies, he can score a victory on 8 June and hugely advance the fight for a decent future for the 99%.

Corbyn government would lift NHS pay cap

Roger Davey, Unison health sector conference delegate (personal capacity)

At public service union Unison's recent health sector conference, Shadow Health Secretary Jon Ashworth promised that any forthcoming Labour government would end the NHS pay cap.

This vicious policy imposed by the Tories and Lib Dems has led to [real-terms wage cuts of 12%](#) in the NHS over seven years, an unprecedented fall in living standards for health workers.

Theresa May, interviewed on the Andrew Marr show, repeatedly refused to blame the pay cap for nurses being forced to use foodbanks to survive. A record [700 nurses and healthcare assistants](#) applied for hardship grants last year, while more and more turn to payday loans.

So all health workers will welcome this policy announcement.

Ashworth stated there would be an independent 'pay review body'. Unfortunately, previous pay review bodies have proved to be totally ineffective - like the current one, which just works to the government "pay envelope."

What a Labour government needs to do is immediately bring in a minimum wage of £10 an hour without exemptions, as a step towards a real living wage, plus a new pay settlement that would [recover all the money workers have lost over the last seven years](#).

This should be part of an overall plan for a publicly owned, democratically run, fully funded comprehensive health service, free at the point of use: a socialist NHS.

- Full report from Unison health conference

Stop press

- [Jeremy Corbyn has announced](#) he would scrap the Tories' ['STP' cuts programme](#) for the NHS
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Support for socialist programme in Labour Liverpool rally

Tony Mulhearn, Liverpool 47 and Liverpool Socialist Party

700 Jeremy Corbyn supporters packed St George's concert hall on Friday 28 April. If a rally advertised in good time had taken place on the plateau, a crowd in excess of 10,000 could have been mobilised. In the

event, they cheered every radical declaration from the speakers. The more radical the declaration, the louder the ovation.

The electricity in the hall produced a surreal atmosphere, with applause, inspired by hatred for the Tories, greeting even the most insipid speeches which came from Labour's metro mayor candidate Steve Rotheram, MP for Bootle Peter Dowd and anti-Corbyn Louise Elman who grotesquely continues to be MP for Riverside. It was noticeable that Elman never mentioned Corbyn. Even [king cutter Joe Anderson](#), Liverpool mayor, was greeted with applause.

The loudest cheers were for Margaret Greenwood MP for Wirral West who was unequivocal in her support for the Labour leader, with MEP Teresa Griffin, putative candidate for Walton constituency in the general election, following a close second. It was noticeable that Joe Anderson, who covets the same seat, gave her speech a less than enthusiastic response by clapping as though his palms were covered with super glue.

Then came John McDonnell whose entrance was greeted with rapturous applause. John first declared his pride at returning to his home city, which, he said, was the setting for some of the greatest working class struggles of this and the last century. He mentioned Thatcher's attack on the city and for a moment I thought he was poised to [mention the Liverpool 47](#); he didn't and instead praised Anderson for his sterling work in rebuilding the city! Perhaps the word 'surreal' doesn't really do justice to the occasion.

John proceeded to outline Corbyn-Labour's programme. Correctly savaging the Tory agenda of being weak with the strong and strong with the weak, he ticked the most important boxes. A Corbyn-led Labour government would support the People against the Establishment, outlaw zero-hour contracts, repeal the anti-trade union laws, drive out the privateers from the NHS, introduce a £10-an-hour minimum wage, introduce free education at all levels, launch a crash council house building programme, establish a national investment bank and he declared that one word sums up the programme: 'Socialism'. This produced wild applause.

He drew back from using word 'nationalisation' but I have no doubt that, such was the mood for a decisive break with capitalism, a declaration to nationalise rail, energy, the banks, Royal Mail, etc, would have blown the roof of this historic venue.

The capitalists' hatred of Corbyn will intensify the closer the election date comes. The distortion and lies of the media will reach new depths. The Tory fifth column in the Parliamentary Labour Party will continue to try to sabotage a Labour victory. [This can be overcome](#), not only by meetings in big halls, but by a campaign of mass rallies throughout the country, mobilising the working class, the youth and all those desperate to get rid of the hated Tory government.

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 30 April 2017 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

Beyond the crisis point: saving social care

Social care is "beyond the crisis point" according to providers. This issue, alongside the NHS, could play a crucial role in the snap general election campaign. Trade union organiser 'Glynn Doherty' takes a look at the sector, and proposes a programme for the immediate future.

Over a sixth of the UK's population [has a long-term health condition or is disabled](#). Life expectancy is now [79 years for a man and 83 for a woman](#). Almost [70,000 children and young people](#) are in council care.

As the crisis in NHS funding has developed over the past decades, the need for a robust social care system has become ever more pressing, especially as the number of older people with care needs will [rise by more than 60%](#) over the next 20 years.

One in ten councils have slashed spending [by more than a quarter](#). These are mostly concentrated in urban working class areas; the largest cut in social care spending is in London. The number of people in England

receiving council-funded care services has [fallen by 26%](#) in that period.

During that period, [nearly 1,500](#) residential care homes have closed - with almost a third of the remaining 16,600 [under threat of closure](#), through debt, over the next three years.

There are [900 carers quitting every day](#), with 90,000 [vacancies for social care jobs](#) in England alone.

Spending on day care services has [reduced by 30%](#), leading to a 38% decrease in the number of people using these services. It is not difficult to see why the chair of the National Care Association says "[we are now beyond the crisis point](#)."

Care homes [don't receive the funding from local councils they need](#) to provide an adequate service. They receive between £550 and £750 a week for each person put in there by local councils, but the National Care Association estimates £750 is the bare minimum necessary.

With the cutbacks in staff this inevitably brings, there are more horror stories emerging about life in residential homes for older people.

A [respondent to a recent survey](#) by public sector union Unison commented: "No tea trolley is taken round, there's no regular toileting, residents are left in wheelchairs rather than in a comfy chair, weekly showers are not happening."

It is a sad indictment of capitalism that, in one of the richest countries in the world, older people unable to fend for themselves can't even be granted the dignity of a weekly shower.

That survey also records rationing or shortages of basic supplies like bedsheets, wipes and incontinence pads. We "have been told not to change [incontinence pads] as often," says one respondent, "as the van that calls to collect the yellow bags the pads go in is charging by the bag."

The [UK Home Care Association estimates](#) the minimum cost of allowing someone to live independently in their own home with home care provided is £16.70 an hour. The average paid by councils is £14.58.

This in turn means providers pay only the minimum wage and end up losing workers unable to exist on poverty pay.

This will impact on the '[Better Care Fund](#)' - a joint venture bringing together health and social care provision. A major stated aim is to free up hospital beds by having people discharged to be cared for in the community, but those opportunities for community care are dwindling by the day.

These figures - and more - highlight the plight of social care today.

A cornerstone of the welfare state is taxation on working income being used to provide services such as care, both during and after working lives. That this is under threat of being completely dismantled is becoming more apparent.

Recently, Tory health minister David Mowat stated people have just as much of a duty to look after their elderly parents as they do to care for their own children.

In other words, the government expects (mostly) women to leave paid employment to become unpaid carers for parents and grandparents.

The [slight increase in carers' allowance](#) promised by Jeremy Corbyn is welcome.

But ultimately, the whole care 'industry' must be brought into public ownership, fully funded, and run under the democratic control and management of workers and service users.

Councils can fight the care cuts

"You have broken me." The words were being spoken by a man of nearly 70, the father of a young man with learning difficulties, [to Liverpool City Council's director of adult services](#) on the announcement of the privatisation of the city's day care centres.

The official, in an honest, bleak interview with Community Care magazine about the effect of the austerity measures taken by the council adds: "I stood there wishing I could do something different, but I couldn't."

As an appointed employee of the local authority, his own alternatives may have, indeed, been limited.

But for the elected Labour councillors who - in Liverpool and local authorities throughout the country - have pushed through cuts that threaten the very existence of many essential services, there has always been the option of doing "something different."

They could have voted against the cuts, and launched campaigns to secure the return of funding from central government.

The Socialist Party, and its members who stood as Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition candidates in the local elections, call for legal no-cuts budgets to be set.

This means temporarily using council reserves ([which totalled £22 billion in 2015](#)) to fund the services, while building united campaigns of councillors, trade unions and community groups.

It is a strategy that has [received increasing support among council trade unionists](#). But, sadly, the Labour right has consistently dismissed it, and the left leadership has not fought this.

This meant some Labour lefts calling for the re-election of right-wing, pro-cuts, anti-Corbyn councillors, as a better alternative to Tories winning seats and making 'worse' cuts.

In the 1980s, Liverpool's Labour council - led by supporters of Militant, the Socialist Party's predecessor - fought Margaret Thatcher's hated Tory government, twice winning extra funds for the city.

Interestingly in the thread that follows the Community Care article online, [one commenter has written](#): "Perhaps [Militant] comrades Derek Hatton, Tony Mulhearn and Terry Fields had it right back in the 1980s.

"Maybe it is again time for civil disobedience. I am tired of hearing 'we have no choice, we are just following orders' ... Better to stand and fight than live on your knees."

One of the most difficult times in your life to accept change is when you become old and frail. And moving into 24-hour care is a colossal, life-changing moment.

Imagine what it must be like, once you've accepted this change, to be told where you live is closing down.

This is what happened to a private nursing home in my village. Because of a string of failures, and a loss of interest from owners when it was not making money, the home was unceremoniously shut and its residents moved.

The bus 'service' to our village is almost non-existent, so to live in the village where your family can visit is vital for quality of life.

The workers who were laid off had to try and find other work outside the village. The low pay they received at the nursing home was marginally compensated by at least not having to travel far to work, plus child care was easier to manage for the staff, who were majority women.

We need fully funded, publicly owned health and social care, not a system where greedy fat cats can make money off the most vulnerable members of our society.

Tom Hunt, Mansfield Socialist Party

Organise care workers

'Glynn Doherty', trade union organiser

Working in the care sector - particularly for private companies - is a precarious existence. The hours are long, pay often at minimum wage levels, and health and safety regimes severely lacking - leaving workers open to assault, false accusations of abuse and even unfair dismissal.

As local authorities privatised care functions, specifically homecare, over the last two decades, the trade unions found themselves on the outside. The main council workers' unions - Unison, Unite and the GMB - were far too slow to react to changing circumstances.

Workers who went from councils to new employers with their job saw little benefit in remaining with unions that had failed to prevent privatisation - or even to fight it - and now had little influence.

More recently, unions have belatedly taken a more active approach to organising in this sector, driven by membership falling through council cuts. But it is still for the most part haphazard, unplanned and done 'from above' without the active involvement of care workers.

Over the last period, unions have concentrated on seeking legal redress over issues such as travelling time, 'sleep-in' payments and holiday pay. Some of these have been victorious, and mean many care workers could now be in a position to recoup back payments owed them by employers.

The tribunals and courts can be an important battleground for workers' rights, but to enforce those rights consistently needs trade union solidarity and action. Simply relying on all kinds of unscrupulous employers to change their ways because of a legal decision is not good enough!

Indeed, almost every care provider has looked at ways of offsetting legal instructions to pay higher wages by cutting other terms and conditions or making redundancies.

The unions should be using legal victories for huge recruitment campaigns. The sleep-in case - where workers were only being paid a supplement for having to stay overnight, rather than their hourly rate - will result in workers being able to claim up to six years' underpayments. This is quite often a significant amount of money to low-paid workers.

But bringing to task such companies and organisations, and making them pay the legal minimum wage, is only half the story.

Many survive on a shoestring budget - although, of course, in most private companies someone is doing very well! But most will not be able to continue providing a service without making staffing cuts, which obviously impinges on the level of service.

There needs to be a political solution alongside unions redoubling their efforts to organise the sector.

Jeremy Corbyn needs to lay out a whole raft of policies on social care for the coming election. They would be hugely popular with service users, care workers. And the huge number of unpaid carers having to cover the gaps and care for their own relatives, often leaving or reducing the hours of their own employment to do so.

What should Corbyn's programme on care include?

- Reverse all council cuts and sell-offs introduced in the last decade
- Commit to new central funding for social care and council services based on the real needs of local communities
- A £10 an hour minimum wage without exemptions for age or training, as a step towards a real living wage
- Proper enhanced pay rates for care workers on nights and during other unsociable hours

- Care companies who fail to pay these rates to have their contracts stopped immediately, with all work, facilities and staff transferring to the local authority
 - Provide proper care at home: an end to the [15-minute visits](#) that are becoming the norm
 - Nationalise the banks and top corporations under democratic control - with compensation paid to shareholders only on the basis of proven need - to pay for these and other anti-austerity measures
-

Packed court laughs down cutter Joan Burton's comparison to Marxist James Connolly

Neil Cafferky

Day four of [the Jobstown protesters' trial](#) began on 2 May in Dublin. Prosecution witness and austerity politician Joan Burton, the former tánaiste (deputy prime minister), took to the stand for a third day, following a torrid two days of cross-examination by the defence.

The prosecution's case hinges on the idea that Joan Burton was in such fear from [peaceful protesters](#) that she was forced to take refuge in her ministerial car - and was thereby unlawfully detained, justifying a charge of "false imprisonment."

This poignant scene largely fell apart under defence questioning.

A devastating video taken inside the car shows her assistant referring to protesters as "the fucking dregs." Other scenes show Burton smiling and laughing. The defence produced pictures of her peacefully reading a newspaper.

When it was put to her these were not the actions of someone who appeared to be in danger, Burton replied that the newspaper article was about the insurrectionary Michael Collins.

Collins was military commander of the IRA during the 1919-21 Irish War of Independence. As well as organising guerrilla attacks on the British Army and Royal Irish Constabulary, he ordered targeted assassinations of undercover Special Branch officers.

Burton claims to have wondered: "What would Michael Collins think of this?"

In one particularly surreal exchange, she claimed to stand in the tradition of Marxist revolutionary James Connolly. This outlandish assertion drew gales of laughter from the packed courtroom.

James Connolly was the founder of Ireland's Labour Party, and cofounder of the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union along with James Larkin. He led the socialist wing of the pro-independence forces in [the 1916 Easter Rising](#). The bosses' suppression of the uprising resulted in wide-scale loss of life.

So it appears Joan Burton is happy to claim the mantle of people who used armed insurrection and guerrilla warfare as tactics. However, working class people engaging in a loud, determined - but peaceful - sit-down protest for two-and-a-half hours... that is beyond the pale!

The record of Labour's 2011-16 period in coalition government with Fine Gael, Ireland's biggest right-wing party, was put under the microscope by defence barrister Kerida Naidoo.

Naidoo repeatedly asked Burton if she was aware of the [anger generated by the policies of her coalition government](#) in Tallaght, the town near Dublin which includes Jobstown.

Burton claimed only a small number of people were angry about austerity in Tallaght.

Here in Britain, the solidarity campaign with Jobstown continues to grow. The London region of transport union RMT has agreed to back the campaign and donated £250. The region pledged to submit a motion to the

RMT's ruling council of executives in order to secure the official backing of the union.

- To back the campaign, and for resources including model motions and email updates, contact jobstownnotguiltygb@gmail.com

Socialist Party members showed solidarity with Jobstown Not Guilty on the May Day march in London. For [around-the-world reports of International Workers' Day see socialistworld.net](#)

Trump's policies hit a wall

- Building a movement of opposition and a working class political alternative are key tasks for the left

Donald Trump's first 100 days in the White House have been characterised by political defeats, administrative chaos and incompetence. For sure he has signed-off several reactionary decrees, especially on undoing environmental protection, but as Calvin Priest of [Socialist Alternative](#) (US co-thinkers of the Socialist Party) argues, Trump's agenda can be halted.

A damaged Trump administration continues to hunt for a way forward from the series of humiliating defeats it has suffered in its first months in power. These setbacks, and in particular the collapse of Republican healthcare plans ("Trumpcare"), have also fundamentally undermined Trump's ability to make progress on key parts of his and the Republican agenda.

The ongoing wave of mass protests since Trump's inauguration have underscored the complete lack of a mandate for his right-wing policies. The defeat of Trumpcare and the Muslim travel ban, as well as the departure of key cabinet appointments under pressure, have shown that the Trump agenda can be beaten back.

When Trumpcare was killed on 24 March, it was after being brought down to just 17% support in the polls following opposition in town halls and at rallies around the country. Trump's approval ratings followed suit, [hitting a new low of 35%](#) in the days after the defeat, worse than Richard Nixon's during the Watergate hearings.

But while Trump is down, he is not out. And there are few things more dangerous than a bully who is bruised and backed into a corner.

The situation remains contradictory and unpredictable. Some of the most right-wing and reactionary parts of Trump's domestic agenda are continuing to forge ahead.

U-turns and zig-zags

Meanwhile, Trump's defeats, which have intensified the crisis in his administration, have also pushed him in many areas toward policies more acceptable to the Republican establishment and the ruling elite, though also deeply hostile towards the working class.

The markets were booming after Trump's election with the prospect of further corporate deregulation, more tax cuts for the wealthy, and handouts to weapons manufacturers. With Trump's standing now weakened and increased international instability, the temporary boom seems to be over, potentially paving the way for deeper economic crisis.

But perhaps the most fundamental change in Trump's approach is in regards to foreign policy, where Trump appears to be abandoning his earlier isolationist views, and is instead beginning to tap into the established and bloody playbook of diverting attention from domestic troubles by military means.

Trump is increasingly looking to recast his presidency as that of a strong commander-in-chief who is not afraid to reassert American military might. [The airstrikes in Syria](#) and overall shift in the administration's

approach was preceded by a shakeup in the National Security Council with arch-racist and "America First" ideologue Stephen Bannon taken off the body and 'hawkish' mainstream advisers and generals promoted.

Trump had long maintained that he was against intervention in Syria, and greater involvement in the region. The attack is also part of a change in relations with Russia, the major power behind Assad's regime.

Trump had of course long refused to criticise Vladimir Putin in spite of enormous pressure to do so both during and after his election, saying Putin was "doing a great job" and calling him a "stronger leader" than Barack Obama.

Following the Syria attack, secretary of state Rex Tillerson blamed Putin for the chemical weapons atrocity in Syria, as well as for meddling with US elections in spite of Trump's long-time insistence that Russia had not.

While the Syrian attack may be a "one off" event, the door has been left open for further action against Assad, with US ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley coming close to calling for regime change.

The dropping of a "mother of all bombs" on Afghanistan, the strongest non-nuclear device in the US arsenal, for the first time in history, is another demonstration of the many sided shift toward a more aggressive foreign policy.

Civilian deaths have risen substantially in Iraq and Syria as the Trump administration has been giving the generals freer rein in the region.

Trump's recent pivot on China is almost as dramatic as his pivot on Russia. In recent days Trump has abandoned [his claim that China is a currency manipulator](#) after already backing off on his threat to abandon the 'One China' policy. China in turn prepared to make a few concessions to avert an enormously damaging trade war.

But the administration's threats toward North Korea could inflame relations with China, which sees already the moves against the country as a threat to China's authority in the region.

While nervous about many of these developments, leading Democrats, the ruling class, and the corporate media broadly support both Trump's attack on Syria and his shifting position toward Putin.

As socialists, we offer no support for any of these regimes. We completely oppose the vicious dictatorship in Syria. But we also oppose the long history of brutal interventions by US and Western governments in the Middle East, which have led to the rise of Isis and are the main source of the crisis in the region.

We oppose both Assad and Trump, and stand for workers' unity and the building of a broad working-class movement to cut across religious and sectarian divisions and to fight for a socialist alternative internationally.

Republican Party

The deep crisis within the Republican Party was put on full display by the Trumpcare defeat. A section of more moderate Republicans refused to hitch their wagons to the hugely unpopular plan for fear of signing their political obituaries. Meanwhile, the far-right wing of the party grouped around the Freedom Caucus refused to back it on the basis that it did not go far enough in attacking working people.

Trumpcare was also defeated by mobilised opposition. The healthcare bill became increasingly toxic as [Trumpcare was shouted down at town halls](#) around the country and mass rallies and marches against Trumpcare and for single-payer healthcare (like the NHS) were held in many cities.

People got the message that tens of millions would be cut from healthcare; that Medicaid, which covers one in five Americans, would be gutted; and that this 'reform' was really a cover for a massive tax cut and transfer of wealth to the top 1%.

Budget chaos

The defeat of the bill blew a gaping hole in the budget plans, and created major complications for their 2017 agenda. [Budget plans for big tax cuts for corporations](#) and the wealthiest Americans, a 10% expansion in military spending, and the financial space for an infrastructure bill at some stage, is now in disarray.

The budget proposals also include deep cuts to public education, the Environmental Protection Agency, mass transit, renewable energy, public water systems, environmental clean-up, and across-the-board attacks on social services. This is not to mention the ripping up of environmental regulation by executive order.

In the event a stop-gap spending bill was agreed by Congress to avert a government shutdown.

Altogether, the current Republican agenda represents one of the most vicious assaults on the American working class in modern history, as well as an all-out declaration of war on the environment.

Democratic leaders

Much of the Democrats' opposition to Trump has centred on his administration's and election campaign's links to Russia, rather than firmly or consistently opposing his reactionary agenda and appointments, or helping to build social movements.

Kshama Sawant, Socialist Alternative city council member in Seattle, has called repeatedly for Democratic-led state governments in Washington, Oregon and California to take the lead in creating a single-payer alternative on the West Coast.

Support for a single-payer healthcare system is at an all-time high. Yet key Democrats have already rejected the call for it.

Bernie Sanders' talk at a West Virginia town hall in March showed again the dramatic opening for working-class politics as Republican-voting former coal miners embraced his class appeal and call for Medicare for All.

The situation is crying out for a new, class-based political force but the main energy at the moment will clearly go to getting the Democrats back in power.

Socialist Alternative has called on the Democratic Socialists of America (a left activist organisation) to join us in running ten socialist and left independent candidates in 2017 to begin building an alternative to corporate Democrats.

In Seattle, we are supporting the campaigns of Jon Grant and Nikkita Oliver, who are running as left independent candidates, and are rejecting donations from big business.

In Minneapolis, Socialist Alternative is spearheading the campaign for Ginger Jentzen, director of 15 Now Minneapolis, on a campaign for a \$15 minimum wage and rent control, while accepting no corporate money.

There is the space to build a new socialist party in the US with tens of thousands of members, based on social movements and building a fighting opposition to the right wing, as a step towards a new mass party of the working class.

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

NUS leadership: Blairites supported by establishment

Claire Laker-Mansfield, Socialist Students national organiser

Against the backdrop of an impending general election, the National Union of Students (NUS) met for its annual conference. Socialist Students argued for a fighting, democratic union and a strategy to escalate the struggle for free and accessible education for all.

Unfortunately, given the gravity of the situation faced by students and young people - [increased fees and debt](#), housing crisis, internships and low pay, etc - the conference failed to measure up to the tasks.

Last year, [the left took some substantial steps forward](#) - including the election of Malia Bouattia, a more left-wing candidate, as president. This year the right, primarily based around the Blairite Labour Students organisation, had regrouped and were well organised to try and retake control.

They had drawn support based on many of the attacks and slurs that had been heaped on the NUS leadership over the last year, particularly in the right-wing media, but also from other sections of the establishment.

These attacks have been strongly linked to the onslaught on Jeremy Corbyn and the left more widely. In particular, they have focused on seeking to conflate legitimate criticism of Israeli state policies and support for the Palestinian national struggle with [the serious charge of anti-Semitism](#).

Mistakes

This is sometimes made easier for them by the mistaken political position taken by some of the left on the national question in Israel-Palestine, as well as some ill-put or insensitive remarks that individuals have made.

In a striking illustration of the 'two parties in one' which currently exist in Labour under Corbyn - an anti-austerity party and a pro-cuts Blairite majority of MPs and councillors - the discussion on the election saw candidates aligned with Labour Students argue for an essentially non-political approach to the election.

When debating an emergency motion on the election, Shakira Martin, who went on to win the presidency on a right-wing platform, argued for a voter registration drive divorced from the political issues and 'strictly non-partisan'.

In many ways by far the most significant debate was one which took place as part of the 'annual general meeting' on NUS governance.

This included [a raft of undemocratic measures](#) which are designed to put the overwhelming majority of decisions in the hands of full-time NUS officers, and reduce even further the power of ordinary students.

These changes will now be taken to an extraordinary conference for approval - itself an undemocratic manoeuvre. Socialist Students will therefore be organising against this.

Mary Finch, from KCL Socialist Students, gave a fiery speech as part of her campaign for election to the national executive council of NUS. We await the result of the election.

Unison health conference: fury over leadership's feet dragging

Roger Davey, Wiltshire and Avon Unison health branch chair (personal capacity)

This year's Unison Health conference was held against the backdrop of the general election and the unrelenting attacks on the NHS. The growing grassroots community fightback shown in [the magnificent 4 March demonstration](#) called by Health Campaigns Together also had a major impact on the debates, which eventually resulted in a significant defeat for the leadership (health service group executive - HSGE).

The composite motion, which was introduced by Socialist Party member Paul Tovey, called on the HSGE to build on the 4 March demonstration and to "support any national calls to lobby and/or assist with developing a

national campaign against sustainability and transformation plans (STPs) involving not only unions but also community campaign groups." This contrasts with the leadership's position of not opposing STPs and, in reality, refusing to build a national campaign against them.

The leadership's amendment attempting to remove this call was heavily defeated. Such was the size of the vote against the leadership they changed their position to support the composite "with qualifications". Activists will need to campaign for the HSGE to now build a national campaign against the STPs.

It was clear during the debate that delegates were furious at the HSGE for initially opposing the demonstration in March and then belatedly giving it only lukewarm support. It also illustrated that delegates are more aware of [the inherent dangers of STPs](#) than the leadership.

Pay

There was an amendment from Mid Yorkshire health branch to a motion on pay. The amendment reiterated the call for a [minimum wage of £10 an hour](#) (current health conference policy but not fought for) and also a 10% pay rise for all staff to recover what has been lost over the last seven years.

Unfortunately this was never debated due to an emergency motion on pay from the HSGE. However, during the conference, delegates who are Socialist Party members raised the need for a national campaign around clear demands in order to build members' confidence and win mass support for strike action.

Socialist Party members and others raised the need for Jeremy Corbyn to insist that his demands - for renationalisation of the NHS and a fully funded comprehensive health service free at the point of delivery - be included in the Labour general election manifesto.

Labour's shadow secretary of state for health, Jon Ashworth, addressed the conference and delegates welcomed his declaration that the pay cap would be ended, that the training bursary would be reintroduced, and that safe staffing levels would be established. However, he was less clear over the need for public ownership and to kick out the market from our health service.

The NHS will be a dominant issue in this election campaign and, as the demonstration showed, has potential for a mass campaign to be launched. If Jeremy Corbyn was to adopt bold socialist policies around the NHS, the Tories could be defeated.

Union leadership and Labour right challenged at shop workers' conference

"It's great to have a Labour Party leader in Jeremy Corbyn who condemns former [BHS boss Phillip Green](#) and [tells him to be scared](#), as opposed to knighting him as Tony Blair did in 2006," I told the annual delegate meeting (ADM) of Usdaw, the shop and distribution workers' union, in Blackpool on 2 May.

I moved a proposition in support of [mandatory reselection of Labour MPs](#) which was narrowly lost but, despite being opposed by the union leadership, was supported by most speakers. Delegates, including Labour parliamentary candidates past and present queued up to speak in support of it.

We pointed out that Corbyn can win with socialist policies but some MPs are undermining him in the most important general election in a generation.

On the same stage [Labour deputy leader Tom Watson](#) had just been challenged by Socialist Party member Isai Priya on why Tony Blair is still in Labour after [calling for a Tory vote](#), to massive applause. Watson was heckled with a call to "support your leader".

Stifle debate

The Usdaw leadership tried to stifle debate by asking branches to withdraw propositions they opposed, This included on reselection by East London branch which we refused to withdraw.

But the leadership did encounter some fiery opposition. The conference literally kicked off with a former Usdaw employee unfurling a banner saying "Respect your workers" in the conference hall before being bundled out.

And a Scottish delegate tried to refer back the entire agenda after it emerged Usdaw had blocked discussion on nine emergency propositions on [the issue of a Scottish referendum](#).

This tone continued when two delegates called for general secretary John Hannett to announce his impending retirement at the same time as the 2018 presidential and executive committee elections to save the union money, which he refused to comment on.

The Usdaw Broad Left at ADM agreed to endorse Socialist Party member Amy Murphy for president and to organise a Broad Left challenge in each division - the biggest left challenge in a generation.

Socialist Party members spoke in debates on the living wage, fighting racism and the battle to support Jeremy Corbyn and his ideas in Labour.

Our fringe meeting discussed these issues and the upcoming union elections with our biggest ever attendance. As we go to press we have so far sold 80 copies of the Socialist and many copies of [the Usdaw Activist](#) pamphlet.

Scott Jones, Usdaw ADM delegate

McDonald's forced to back down on zero-hours

McDonald's has been forced by campaigning to offer 115,000 [zero-hour contract workers](#) to move to fixed contracts. Ian Hodson, president of the BFAWU bakers' union commented:

"The BFAWU has worked hard for a long time now to expose and end the use of zero-hour contracts at McDonald's in the UK and we're glad to see the company has finally relented. These contracts are a shameful scourge on our society - there is simply no place for them at all.

"Once again, we have proved that worker mobilisation works. And we won't be stopping our efforts to hold McDonald's accountable anytime soon. Together with other trade union movements around the world, we will continue to turn up the heat on McDonald's to ensure it respects the rights of workers in the UK and worldwide.

"McDonald's has for too long been a rule unto its own. Finally, it is being forced to change. This news is a step in the right direction."

PCS elections - vote Democracy Alliance

Marion Lloyd, PCS Left Unity chair (personal capacity)

There is just over a week to go before the PCS national executive committee ballot closes on 11 May (and group elections on 16 May). This deadline takes no account of postal delivery so activists have just a couple of days to [maximise the Democracy Alliance vote](#).

- Branches who nominated should remind members to vote and to vote for the branch-agreed Democracy Alliance slate

- Branches which have branch executive committee recommendations for the Democracy Alliance slate should also issue a reminder to vote and recommend the slate
- Wherever possible, branch executive committee members and local reps should do a sweep of the offices to remind members to vote and recommend the Democracy Alliance slate

With the announcement of a general election, it is vital we secure a victory for the Democracy Alliance.

If Jeremy Corbyn wins we need a leadership which will be uncompromising in demanding Labour carries out its anti-austerity programme and public sector pledges. If Theresa May wins we will need a union leadership committed to fighting the Tories' austerity programme and defending our members.

- Vote Democracy Alliance - join PCS Left Unity!
- See leftunity.org.uk

Transport union protests against driver-only operation outside parliament

RMT transport union members and supporters protested outside parliament against [driver-only operation on trains](#) on 26 April. Just over a year after the Southern Rail dispute began, rail workers gathered to send a clear message to the government and rail companies that they will continue fighting to keep guards on the trains.

The rail operators' plan to cut jobs puts the safety of passengers and staff at risk. John McDonnell spoke at a rally after the picket and restated Labour's pledge to renationalise Britain's railways to take the network out the hands of companies like Southern and Govia Thameslink who put profits before delivering a good, safe service.

Paul Callanan, London Socialist Party

Exhibition review: 'Russian revolution - hope, tragedy, myths'

Rare opportunity to see Russian revolution lifted off the page

Mark Milligan, East London Socialist Party

This new exhibition at the British Library draws on an extensive collection to take visitors through the key events of the Russian revolution.

Following a straightforward chronology, it starts at the end of the nineteenth century, with the graphic images Nikolai Rubakin used to demonstrate the extreme inequality of Russian society under the Romanov dynasty.

Historic documents bring to life the struggles of the peasants and the newly urbanised working class to overthrow the yoke of feudalism.

The fast-changing situation is illustrated by reports of the [1905 mutiny on-board the battleship Potemkin](#), and records showing the Tsar's failed attempt to introduce a sham democracy in his '[October Manifesto](#)' the same year.

Placards and proclamations hastily printed on hidden presses show the competing platforms of the political parties. And contemporary paintings and cartoons show the horrors of [the 1914-17 imperialist war with](#)

[Germany.](#)

Red banners faded to white, and iconic Red Army uniforms and arms, lift the drama of [the 1917 revolutions](#) and ensuing civil war off the page.

The opportunity to see documents hand-written by Leon Trotsky and annotated by Vladimir Lenin - the co-leaders of the Bolshevik revolution - is rare, and the context is well-established by the exhibition's layout.

I would suggest that more than two hours are needed to read all the commentary and exhibits written in English.

- 'Russian revolution - hope, tragedy, myths' is at the British Library until 29 August - tickets from [bl.uk](#)
-

Mersey metro-mayor TV debate

TUSC Mersey [metro-mayoral candidate Roger Bannister](#) debated in the studio with other candidates on the BBC's Sunday Politics North West programme (30 April). In the short time he was given, Roger explained that [membership of the EU has not protected workers' rights](#) but had led to 'a race to the bottom' in wages and conditions.

He highlighted the chronic deindustrialisation over decades in Merseyside, as well as underinvestment in the region's infrastructure due to government cuts. Roger also exposed the Ukip candidate's divisive education policy of wanting to bring back [secondary modern and grammar schools](#).

- [Watch the full debate here](#)
-

'Socialist Steve' takes on the robots

Steve Williams, [TUSC candidate for Doncaster's mayoral election](#) on 4 May, has participated in 25 campaign stalls and canvasses, two RMT guards strike pickets, a Women's Lives Matters protest and a Jeremy Corbyn rally, as well as holding down a [full-time job as a mental health nurse](#).

Steve's campaign demands include refusing to carry out Tory government cuts to council spending, implementing a £10 an hour minimum wage, and initiating a mass council house building programme, [as part of his 'people's budget'](#).

What a contrast to the robotic rhetoric of his rivals.

Incumbent Labour mayor: "I've got the expertise, I'm an accountant. I'm growing the economy. Working with business, the private sector, the third sector and the council. Team Doncaster." And repeat.

Tory candidate: "As I mentioned earlier, I've got the skills, the business experience, the background in engineering and investment..." And repeat.

TUSC's south Wales challenge to pro-cuts parties

The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) [council election challenge in South Wales](#) received a publicity boost when TUSC candidate and Socialist Party member Ross Saunders was quoted on the BBC website.

Referring to the 4 May elections, Ross pointed out that no other parties had "stood up and defended public services and jobs from the cuts that the Tory government is aiming at them.

"When you elect a representative you expect them to fight for you, to stand up for you, and unfortunately not a single cut demanded by the government at Westminster has been resisted.

"Instead there's been a carnival of collaboration with councils run by all different parties obediently cutting back services, outsourcing them and privatising them."

- [Read the full article at bbc.co.uk](#)
-

Buy your ticket now for the political event of the year: Socialism 2017

20% discount available now!

- 11-12 November, central London
- A weekend of discussion and debate on socialist ideas to fight Trump and the 1% and change the world

We are very excited to announce Kshama Sawant, fresh from the fight against Trump, Seattle's socialist council member who led the successful fight for a \$15 an hour minimum wage and much more!

Sarah Sachs-Eldridge, Socialist Party national organiser

Anger against the rigged capitalist system is a feature in every country now. A recent survey by Generation What found that 85% of responders in Britain believe that money and banks rule the world and over 80% think there is too much injustice.

But most significantly, when asked, would you actively participate in a large scale uprising against the generation in power if it happened in the next days or months? [60% in Europe said yes!](#)

In the US [the millions-strong protests against Trump](#) were the most significant aspect of his first 100 days.

It was not enthusiasm for Trump but profound disillusionment with the political establishment that allowed him to pull off his unlikely victory.

Only 26% of the eligible voting population endorsed him at the ballot box, almost the same as the 24% who voted Tory in 2015 - far from a strong and stable base! It was Hillary Clinton, the 'Wall Street candidate', who decisively [failed to offer voters a break from the rotten status quo](#).

The huge enthusiasm generated by [Bernie Sanders in the US](#), by [Jean-Luc Mélenchon in France](#), and by [Jeremy Corbyn when he is fighting back](#), shows the enormous thirst that exists for an alternative to big business politicians.

Kshama Sawant - a Socialist Alternative city councillor in Seattle who led the [successful struggle for the \\$15 minimum wage](#) there - was among the most prominent figures to call on Sanders to resist the pressure to fall in line behind Clinton and to build instead a new political voice for the working class.

We are very proud that Kshama will be a keynote speaker at Socialism 2017 on 11 and 12 November alongside Socialist Party general secretary Peter Taaffe and many others from the socialist and working class movement. They will provide unique analysis of why the world is in crisis - but, most importantly, ideas of how to change it.

[Get your ticket now at socialism2017.net](#) - and don't let your friends miss out.

Housing association workers' and tenants' alternative awards ceremony

Paul Kershaw , Unite the Union housing workers' branch

On 26 April, housing association (HA) managers filed in to an upmarket hotel in London for the Inside Housing awards (free food and drink for them, £1,980 per table paid for by their associations). Outside ['alternative awards' for the worst HAs were presented](#) in front of a lively crowd of housing association residents and workers.

The newly created Housing Association Workers and Residents network had received 718 nominations for its alternative awards.

Unite housing workers branch secretary and executive member Suzanne Muna spoke: "We're here to have a bit of fun tonight, but our aim is deadly serious - we want to remind HAs what they were set up for, and to demand decent homes, decent services and decent jobs and conditions."

The 'overall lousy landlord' award went to Hyde housing. One of its residents said: "You can see the executives going in looking well-groomed in their bow ties and tuxedos. They're on salaries of over £200,000. Yet we're having to live with mouldy, damp, disgusting conditions because we can't get basic repairs done. My kids are always getting ill and miss school because they're sick.

"Instead of using our rents for posh dinners, why don't they do something to make sure their properties are maintained?"

Disgracefully, Hyde's chief executive [Elaine Bailey has said](#) HAs are guilty of creating a "dependency culture" and that residents need to take more "personal responsibility."

The Bad Awards included: most rotten repairs (Genesis), soaring service charges (Family Mosaic), rocketing rents (One Housing Group), bullying bosses (Clarion), and poverty pay (Sanctuary), among others.

Sheffield mental health campaigner: "austerity kills"

Socialist Party member Tim Jones spoke at Sheffield Trades Council's International Workers Memorial Day commemoration on 29 April on behalf of [Mental Health Action Group Sheffield](#) (MHAGS).

"Austerity kills," said Tim. "A month ago I was in a car coming back from trade union leafleting when I saw a man's body hit the road on Park Square roundabout after he had thrown himself off the bridge.

"A week later, Ali Hassan died of his injuries. He was suffering from mental health illness and had been admitted to hospital the night before but discharged in the morning. If the hospital had more beds, more staff and more resources, then maybe Ali would have been kept in, received treatment and never attempted suicide.

"25 years ago I set up MHAGS - which runs a user-led day centre for people with mental health issues.

"The biggest cause of mental health issues today is work-related stress, anxiety and depression. Last year, [a TUC study found](#) a worker in Britain is made ill through stress at work every two minutes!

"The [Health and Safety Executive reported](#) nearly 500,000 cases of work-related stress last year - accounting for 45% of all working days lost due to ill health.

"Women are more affected than men and stress-related illness is greatest among nurses and midwives, teachers and welfare professionals such as care workers and social workers.

"These are precisely the sections of workers who have been most affected by austerity cuts.

"What should the trade unions do about this? Well a few weeks ago, [250 posties walked out on unofficial strike in Doncaster against bullying management](#) after one of their colleagues who was off sick with stress was sacked. Their strike forced management to climb down, review procedures and move the offending manager out of the depot.

"Mental health affects individuals but the causes of workplace stress, anxiety and depression, demand a collective response from our trade unions. The fight against bullying managers, against increased workloads, against austerity, and against the Tories is the fight for better mental health."

<http://www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/25373>