

After the Budget: Step up the fight against austerity!

The editorial of this week's issue of the Socialist, below, was written the day before [Chancellor Hammond's budget statement](#), but its points remain fully valid - including that we can't wait until 2022 to get rid of the Tory government and its austerity; the trade union and Labour leaders must organise an urgent programme of action to remove it, as outlined in the editorial.

Hammond's budget offered no reprieve to millions of public sector workers whose pay is being held down, while rising inflation adds to their plight. Predictions of - at best - ongoing low growth rates show that for the Tories, austerity is here to stay, without end in sight.

- Tuition fees: nothing at all offered to reduce fees or student debt.
- Money to the NHS: nowhere near enough to even meet basic needs.
- Universal Credit: No more devastatingly long waits before money is paid out, but no increase in the too-low amount of the benefit. The £1.5 billion annual 'cost' of ending the long waits shows how much has been robbed through placing people in particularly desperate circumstances.
- Housing: New homes will be increased to 300,000 a year by the mid 2020s, but the Tories won't be making these actually affordable to those who need them. No measures to even reduce the vast profits of the property developers in favour of people needing housing. A miserably inadequate £125 million of funding to 'help' just 140,000 people out of the over 5 million households in the private rented sector.
- Catastrophic cuts forced on local authorities will continue. £1.7 billion was committed to the 'Transforming Britain Fund', half of which will be put in the hands of the metro-mayors with the rest 'open to competition' - which for the Tories will no doubt be judged on who can offer the most pro-austerity and big-business friendly policies, as the Tories also expect from the metro-mayors.
- No reversal of the [previously announced](#) cut in corporation tax from 19% to 17% by the end of 2020. So billions more pounds will be channelled to the wealthy that could instead be used for vital welfare and services.
- No ending of any of the youth exemptions from the National Living Wage; nor will the NLW be raised to a real 'living' level.

On the budget's consequences for public sector workers, National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) chair Rob Williams commented:

"Millions of public sector workers face a full decade of real terms pay cuts after the Tory budget. Two million local government workers and half a million civil servants didn't even get a mention, while NHS workers got a vague promise that a rise above the 1% pay cap may be on its way.

"But rightly, they will be waiting to see the detail, particularly as the chancellor talked about 'restructuring' NHS pay. This is part of the Tory strategy to attempt to divide workers into 'deserving' and 'undeserving'; but health workers already know that the rises awarded to the police and some prison officers is half the real inflation rate of [nearly 4%](#).

"Enough must surely be enough! The public sector unions must immediately meet to set out a strategy of coordinating strike ballots that could mobilise millions to take action together against a weak and divided, crisis-ridden government."

Editorial of the Socialist, issue 972:

Budget: lying Hammond says no unemployed

- Answer the Tory budget with a fight for a socialist alternative
- Unite to kick out the Tories

"There are no unemployed people" [says Chancellor Philip Hammond](#). "I disagree" that wages are falling.

Hammond's foray into Trump-style "alternative facts" [on BBC's Andrew Marr Show](#) shows the Tories' true face.

The real facts are [1.42 million](#) unemployed and a [10% fall](#) in wages since 2007. But the Tories exist to rule for big business bosses, not for the 99%.

We cannot wait until 2022 to get rid of them and their austerity. Despite the Tories' unpopularity and divisions we need action to prise their fingertips from the death-grip they have on staying in power.

The trade union leaders and Jeremy Corbyn should immediately call a mass demonstration of all of those who are unemployed, underemployed or have seen their wages fall - and their families.

This could be over a million strong if properly built for. It should be the launch pad for building a powerful [24-hour public sector general strike, including on the issue of the public sector pay cap](#), which could push the government to call a general election within months.

The Tories are desperately trying to [come up with budget measures](#) that will [appeal to young people](#).

Any crumbs they offer will not compete with [Jeremy Corbyn's anti-austerity election manifesto](#) which contained free education, a £10 an hour minimum wage and the building of council homes. It gave a glimpse of how a future could be secured for the next generation.

A mass movement fighting to make Jeremy Corbyn's anti-austerity policies real now could see the [young people who surged to the polls in historic numbers](#) in June struggling alongside workers.

Such a movement would have to fight to remove the anti-Corbyn, pro-cuts elements from the Labour Party to build a mass, working class, socialist political voice that stands in the interests of the 99%.

One Tory MP [told the Guardian](#) their main hope for the budget was a "non-disaster". Another source [told the Sunday Times](#) they wanted it to be "big" and "revolutionary".

Both are mainly thinking in terms of how it affects the Tory party, not us. We don't yet know the content of the budget - and following Chancellor Philip Hammond's gaffes they are under greater pressure to deliver something positive.

But austerity will continue. That means it will be a disaster for working class and young people.

The indications are that Hammond may not even fulfil the [pledges outlined](#) in the Tories' general election manifesto on NHS funding and education.

It's estimated that there were [30,000](#) excess deaths linked to NHS spending cuts in 2015 alone and that there are real-term spending cuts in up to [88%](#) of schools. Without doubt there is an appetite for an end to austerity.

113 economists and trade union leaders recently [sent a letter to the Guardian](#) calling on Hammond to end austerity. He has no intention of that. We must act to end Tory rule.

Tories "disintegrating"?

John McDonnell has [correctly said](#) with regard the Tories: "I think they're disintegrating, on a slow retreat to oblivion, but I never underestimate them and their ability to cling on."

That ability to cling on is motivated in particular by the fear of a Corbyn-led government and the pressure it could come under to implement far-reaching socialist measures.

The mood for this is indicated by a new poll, not conducted by the trade unions or by Corbyn, but by Matthew Elliott, the founder of the pro-capitalist TaxPayers' Alliance, and others.

They wanted to assess attitudes to capitalism and [report their findings as "concerning"](#). That's because they found that support for nationalisation is up: water (83%), electricity (77%), gas (77%) and railway (76%) sectors.

Elliott says he and other defenders of capitalism need to 'up their game' in making the case for capitalism.

Capitalism's main aim is not meeting the needs of people but the pursuit of profit. While the number of [hospital bed days in England taken up by patients being treated for malnutrition has almost trebled](#) over the last ten years, there are now [more UK-based billionaires](#) than at any time in history.

It is unsurprising that Elliott found that the majority of people "hold an unfavourable view of 'capitalism' as a concept, viewing it as 'greedy', 'selfish' and 'corrupt'" and "a more favourable view of 'socialism' than 'capitalism'."

The most important message from this polling is that Corbyn and McDonnell should be bolder in making the case for a socialist alternative and in how they take the fight to the Tories and the pro-austerity elements in the Labour Party.

In advance of the budget John McDonnell [has called](#) for an end to austerity and for investment in five areas. This is a good start but there would be huge support for John and Jeremy Corbyn to go further.

They have called for a "pause" to "fix" universal credit. [It should be scrapped and benefits restored.](#)

They call for proper funding of health, education and local government. They should specify that this includes a commitment to scrap university fees and write off student debt.

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[Socialist Students wrote to Angela Rayner, shadow education minister](#), calling for Labour to use budget day as an opportunity to push for the full scrapping of tuition fees.

A free education amendment would have huge support, as indicated by the 'youthquake' on 8 June. In October Tory Brexit Secretary David Davis [urged the Treasury](#) to write down some of the historic student debt - an indication of the panic which grips the Tory party, especially in relation to their unpopularity among young people. Only [19%](#) of 18 to 24-year-olds back the Tories.

New research shows how the housing crisis is contributing to inequality. Some of the poorest have seen their [housing costs rise](#) 32% since 2007-08, while the richest households have enjoyed a 17% cut.

[Over 78,000](#) households in England are living in temporary accommodation and [1.2 million](#) are on council waiting lists. There is enormous pressure on the government to act.

Last month even [Communities Secretary Sajid Javid called for large-scale public borrowing to fund a housebuilding programme](#), with his allies later saying this could amount to [£50 billion](#).

McDonnell has called for a large-scale public housebuilding programme. But given the Tories are now countenancing the building of council homes, Corbyn and McDonnell should instruct Labour councils to start building and creating council homes without delay. Who would dare to stop them?

The latest [Opinium survey](#) for the Observer puts Labour just two points ahead of the Tories - 42% against 40%.

The Labour leadership should take confidence from how their bold manifesto shifted the polls so decisively before the general election.

The fact that people's day-to-day experience of Labour at council level, [like Haringey in North London which is carrying out large-scale social cleansing](#), is of austerity not anti-austerity enormously undermines the trust

in a Labour government to be different.

On Sunday morning Andrew Marr barely raised an eyebrow to Hammond's claim that there are no unemployed people in Britain.

But he sharply questioned McDonnell on how he would fund investment to end austerity and his nationalisation plans. McDonnell correctly pointed to [the vast sums exposed in the Paradise Papers and the need to clamp down on tax dodging](#).

He [pointed out](#) that the Conservatives were giving away about £76 billion in cuts to corporation tax, capital gains tax and "the rich" during the life of this parliament. This could go a long way to filling some of the funding gaps.

But he should also be bold on nationalisation. [We need socialist nationalisation, which means the democratic control of nationalised industries](#) and compensation only paid on the basis of proven need. That would maximise the benefits to society.

There is also support for boldness in the scope of the nationalisation programme. Taking the banks into public ownership is now supported by half the population and a clear majority of under-45s, according to Elliott's polling.

Just as when the hung parliament was announced in June and [John McDonnell said](#) Labour could form a minority government and put their policies in front of parliament, they should do so now in the form of an alternative budget.

Dare MPs to vote against free education. Dare them to vote against a mass campaign of council house building. Dare them to vote against nationalisation of the railways and utilities.

Those opposing it would no doubt include the majority of the parliamentary Labour Party and of Labour councillors.

Labour's right wing

The anti-Corbyn MPs, such as those featured in the BBC's '[Labour: the summer that changed everything](#)', have largely remained quiet since the general election when their shock and disappointment at the popularity of Corbyn's manifesto was obvious.

But have the likes of Tom Watson, who made a [2016 Labour conference speech](#) in defence of capitalism and Tony Blair, changed their spots? No. They remain committed to undermining Corbyn's anti-austerity stand.

Corbyn and McDonnell should instead appeal to the trade unions, the students and the millions suffering under austerity to march against a parliament that only rules in the interests of the 1%.

This should be used to popularise the idea of a 24-hour public sector general strike which could force the Tories to call a general election.

This would have to be linked to transforming Labour - not by a long-term review but by [Corbyn bringing a new constitution and programme to the members to debate and vote on](#) to remove the undemocratic structures, introduce mandatory reselection and provide the opportunity for local government manifestos to be in the hands of the membership. This is a matter of urgency.

McDonnell is right to warn of the Tories' plans to cling on - but he also needs to [warn of what will face a Corbyn-led government](#).

It was a mistake [when he said](#): "There is never going to be a run on the pound. Business leaders are coming to me for certainty and the one thing they are getting from us is openness and transparency about what we want to do, and they are welcoming it."

A Corbyn-led Labour government, elected against the background of the weakened economic foundations of British capitalism and possibly facing a new world crisis in the near future, would experience huge pressures exerted by the working class to go further than they have outlined so far.

But it would also be seen as a threat to British capitalism and a Corbyn-led government would need to nationalise the 100 or so major corporations and banks that dominate the economy, to take control of the economy into the hands of the working class to start to plan society democratically rather than being subject to the tiny greedy capitalist elite.

[According to Elliott](#): "In our poll, the notion that we live in a time of 'responsible' capitalism finds little credence among the public."

It is time for bold socialist policies to be put forward with a programme of action to end austerity and get rid of the Tories.

The Socialist Party calls for:

- Tories out - there's no mandate for May, Hammond or the defenders of capitalism
- Organise, strike, resist to make Corbyn's anti-austerity programme real now
- Corbyn and the unions must act. The trade union movement to call a national 'Tories out' demonstration against austerity - calling for free education, council housing, a £10 an hour minimum wage and nationalisation
- Coordinate strike action to break the public sector pay cap
- [No more cuts budgets from Labour councils!](#) For people's budgets and support for Jeremy Corbyn's policies at the 2018 council elections
- Prepare for a general election - that means [mandatory reselection contests for the Blairites](#) and a bold socialist programme of public ownership of the banks and big monopolies
- Open up the Labour Party. Restore the rights of the trade unions within Labour. Re-admit the socialists, with the right to organise in an inclusive federation
- [Fight for a socialist Brexit](#). Organise a campaign with European socialists and workers' organisations to use the Brexit talks to tear up the EU bosses' club rules. For a new collaboration of the peoples of Europe on a socialist basis

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What does the left victory in Scottish Labour mean?

Philip Stott, Socialist Party Scotland

The left have won the leadership of the Scottish Labour Party for the first time with Richard Leonard's victory over the Blairite candidate Anas Sarwar. Socialist Party Scotland welcomes this result, which can potentially open up the possibility of building a real left and anti-austerity Labour Party in Scotland.

However, this will only be possible if the Labour Party under his leadership pursues a consistent anti-austerity policy, ends the acceptance of Labour politicians carrying out cuts, and recognises its mistakes on the national question and Scottish independence.

In addition, a wholesale transformation is needed to the democratic structures of the party to allow for the reselection of councillors, MPs and MSPs who refuse to fight for left and socialist policies in words and deeds.

Leonard, a Corbyn supporter standing on a left platform, [won a 57% share](#) and 12,469 votes to Sarwar's 9,516 (43%). Overwhelming backing [from the trade unions](#) for Richard Leonard was reflected in the 77% vote he polled among the affiliated supporters section of the ballot.

However, the outcome was significantly closer in the Labour Party members section. Here only 51.8% supported Leonard and 48.2% for Sarwar.

Blow to right

As the seventh Scottish Labour leader in the last ten years, Richard Leonard's victory will be a boost to Corbyn at a UK level and a blow to the right. He now has a seat on the National Executive Committee of the Labour Party vacated by Blairite Kezia ["I'm a celebrity - get me out of here"](#) Dugdale, whose resignation as Scottish leader in July triggered the contest.

Sarwar was the candidate of the anti-Corbyn faction of the Scottish Labour Party and represented, [literally](#), the "millionaire tendency". He also had the backing of many more councillors, MSPs and elected politicians than Leonard.

The fact that a millionaire, whose family firm that he was a shareholder in [does not pay the living wage](#) or recognise trade unions and who sends his children to private school, won almost half the votes among Scottish Labour members underlines the lack of a Corbyn surge in Scotland.

Scottish Labour membership only makes up 25,000 of the [nearly 600,000](#) members across the UK. This limited appeal to leftward-moving young people and workers is a reflection of Scottish Labour's right-wing leadership over decades, and their outright opposition to Scottish independence.

Leonard, a member of the Scottish parliament and a former full-time officer for the GMB union, fought his campaign on a number of left policies, including rent control and a programme of affordable house building for social rent, public ownership of the railways, buses and transport, an end to benefit caps and the scrapping of the rolling out of Universal Credit.

A key issue in the election was Jeremy Corbyn's leadership. Although Corbyn mistakenly took a neutral position on who should be the Scottish leader, Richard Leonard was widely seen as representing the Corbyn movement. Sarwar's opposition to Corbyn and his previous backing for the coup in 2016 counted heavily against him.

Sarwar's supporters attacked the Unite union, which played a leading role in Leonard's campaign. Blairite Scottish MP [Ian Murray claimed](#): "The way in which Unite have signed up affiliate members to vote in the leadership election is against the rules of the Scottish Labour Party. It is at best clumsy and, at worst, being rigged."

Not content with attacking the trade unions, Sarwar and co even took aim at Socialist Party Scotland for our backing for Leonard. The [Scotsman newspaper reported](#) that: "The Socialist Party Scotland, which refers to itself as 'formerly Militant', said unity with 'Blairites' like Anas Sarwar is not possible and also supports a second independence referendum.

"A source in the Anas Sarwar campaign said: 'Militant tore the Labour Party apart and at its peak we were never further away from power. It has no interest in uniting the Labour Party so that we can be in government in both Edinburgh and Westminster.'"

Of course, the exact opposite of these Blairite imaginings is true. At its height in Liverpool in the 1980s, [Militant's socialist policies meant Labour was never more electable](#) - winning election after election - as a result of the mass campaign to oppose Thatcher's cuts and win the money to build homes, nurseries and sport centres for the city. It was the Blairite, pro-capitalist takeover of Labour that, especially in Scotland, led to its electoral collapse following the disastrous 'Better Together' campaign in opposition to Scottish independence.

Sarwar also used the Blairite playbook on Brexit and the EU to make a key plank of his campaign continued membership of [the neoliberal single market](#).

Two parties in one

Despite Richard Leonard's overwhelming support among trade unionists and a small majority of Labour members, the reality is that Labour is still two parties in one. The right wing has major influence in the party and is, at council level especially, voting through cuts at an unprecedented rate.

It was therefore a mistake for Richard Leonard to [say following his victory](#): "There is now a consensus established on a radical policy agenda which will form the basis for our unity in going forward in which Anas will have a vital role to play."

There simply cannot be a "consensus" with the pro-capitalist forces of the Labour right on [Richard Leonard's call](#) for "democracy and socialism". The idea of peaceful coexistence between left and right is a utopia.

The right wingers in the Labour Party are ruthless. They will do everything in their power to defeat the left and remove Corbyn and, for that matter, Leonard over time. In this they have the full backing of the capitalist establishment.

A broad socialist Labour Party is one thing. Socialist Party Scotland is in favour of trade unions and socialists from all backgrounds being in one party, with the right to organise into trends and platforms to assist democratic debate and discussion. But the avowedly pro-capitalist and pro-war right is another question altogether.

[They should be removed through methods like democratic reselection](#) of MPs, MSPs and councillors, in order to create a genuine anti-austerity and left-wing Labour Party. Unfortunately, this is something Richard Leonard currently seems opposed to.

Councils

A major test for the left leader of Scottish Labour will come very quickly as councils are now beginning to draw up new budgets for February and March next year. Will Richard Leonard do what Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell have so far not done and [call on Labour councillors to oppose all cuts and draw up plans for no-cuts budgets](#)?

In 12 of Scotland's 32 councils Labour is in the ruling administration. However, the indications are all these councils will be pursuing a cuts agenda over the next few weeks. Nothing can damage the credibility of a left leadership more than if they are seen to preside over yet further cuts and endless austerity.

A fighting left and socialist alternative would be to [set no-cuts budgets by using the powers of the councils over borrowing, reserves and other measures](#). This is a policy currently [supported by Unison, Unite and the GMB](#), unions that supported Richard Leonard's campaign.

The potential for Labour under a new left leader to recover from the shattering impact of the 2015 electoral wipeout was [clearly seen](#) in the June 2017 general election. The Scottish National Party (SNP) lost 21 of their MPs and half a million votes. Labour made a modest recovery but only added six MPs to the solitary one they held on to after the 2015 rout.

Independence

A huge barrier to a recovery for Scottish Labour is its mistakes on the national question. Mistakes that unfortunately seem likely to continue under Richard Leonard's leadership.

Leonard [said at the launch](#) of his leadership campaign that: "For the avoidance of doubt, let me make it clear - there will be no ground ceded to nationalism at the expense of progressive socialism under my leadership... And no second independence referendum".

This approach, if it continues, will be an albatross around the neck of Scottish Labour. It will hamper its ability to reconnect with [vast swathes of the working class](#) in cities like Dundee, Glasgow and across the west of Scotland. Such an inflexible position carries the real danger of taking Scottish Labour down the road of the

'social democratic' Psoe in Spain, which has [disgraced itself by uniting with the Spanish ruling class to deny Catalonia the right to self-determination](#).

Even under a left leadership, unless there is a change, Labour will struggle to recover. As it is, Scottish Labour's membership has not seen the surge witnessed in other parts of the UK. An anti-austerity policy - in truth only a partial anti-austerity policy because of Labour's acceptance of councillors who vote through cuts - will not be enough on its own to recover ground lost to the SNP.

While the intensity of the mood around a second referendum has dipped - a [majority in polls](#) don't support an indyref 2 in the short term - backing for independence at [around 45%](#) is still at historically high levels. A new upsurge in the national question at a certain stage is very likely and Labour must, under Leonard's leadership, urgently re-examine its position.

As a minimum, a conference of the labour movement should be convened to work out a position that doesn't just see the national question as false binary choice of 'socialism or nationalism'. [It is possible to fight for the unity of the working class across Scotland, England, Wales and Ireland while defending the right of Scotland to self-determination](#).

Scottish Labour certainly needs to make clear that it will never oppose the democratic rights of the people of Scotland to a second referendum if and when the majority wish to have one.

Labour's modest recovery at the June general election - although it only added 9,860 votes to its 707,147 tally in 2015 - and the widespread support and sympathy for Jeremy Corbyn, has not resulted in a major advance in the polls. A fighting socialist policy to oppose all cuts and a class approach towards Scottish independence is essential. The new left leadership in Scotland under Richard Leonard must address these issues urgently.

Zimbabwe: Mugabe gone - but his regime remains in power

Zimbabwe's autocratic president Robert Mugabe has effectively been ousted through a 'soft' military coup led by the old guard Zanu-PF faction gathered around Emmerson Mnangagwa.

Mnangagwa too has a history of organising brutal repression against political opponents and Zimbabwe's organised working class.

Nonetheless, Mugabe's removal may embolden independent workers' organisations to renew their struggles against the regime, as Weizmann Hamilton and Tinovimbanashe Gwenyaya of the Workers and Socialist Party (CWI South Africa) explain.

The [takeover of power](#) by the Zimbabwe Defence Force represents a turning point in post-independence Zimbabwe.

The military takeover was precipitated by the dismissal of Mugabe's most loyal henchman for the past 37 years, Emmerson Mnangagwa.

This was part of 93-year-old Mugabe's manoeuvres in Zanu-PF party structures to ensure his 52-year-old wife Grace would succeed him as president.

However welcome the end of Mugabe's reign may be, the military's intervention is taking place behind the backs of the masses. To pre-empt the independent movement of the masses, such as the [2016 Tajamuka protests](#), the military is drawing the elites, including the opposition, into a political arrangement to impose on the masses a dispensation whose primary aim is to maintain the capitalist status quo.

However, Mugabe's removal may be the trigger that reignites mass movements. Even the [choreographed 'war veterans' demo](#) opened up political space for widespread protest against the entire ruling clique.

Mugabe's actions had in the recent period become increasingly erratic. He had presided over an economy that experienced the [highest inflation rate in world history](#) rendering the Zimbabwe dollar completely worthless.

It led to the forced abandonment of the currency and its substitution with the US dollar and the SA rand.

The catastrophic economic collapse, 90% unemployment and mass starvation led to a mass exodus, mainly to South Africa, of at least a quarter of Zimbabwe's 12 million population.

These developments are taking place against the background of a [deepening economic crisis](#) that has compelled Mugabe to go cap-in-hand to China and the West, including the International Monetary Fund, for economic aid and the lifting of sanctions.

The events leading up to Mnangagwa's sacking and those which have followed are the cumulative outcome of the Zanu-PF government's successive failures since the ['liberation movement' assumed power](#) nearly four decades ago.

The initially popular Mugabe won successive landslide victories in elections until in the mid-90s he implemented a brutal IMF/World Bank neoliberal ['economic structural adjustment programme'](#) which provoked the biggest workers' protests in Zimbabwean history.

However the turn of Zimbabwe's then trade union leaders towards collaboration with capitalists and rich farmers against Mugabe disarmed this movement and allowed Mugabe to pretend he was a champion of the poor.

Since then [Mugabe has been able to stay in power by increasingly authoritarian methods](#) backed up by the very same military that has now moved to oust him.

Mugabe's decision to pick his own successor was the straw that broke the camel's back. Grace Mugabe's exponential rise to power thus played a decisive role in the expulsion of Mnangagwa, precipitating the succession crises now unfolding in Zanu-PF.

Drunk with the euphoria of power, [Grace Mugabe and her G40 faction](#) seemed to have assumed Mugabe's role itself in dictating the programmes of Zanu-PF and by extension those of government.

Mnangagwa, who claims to have survived food poisoning a few weeks before his sacking, [has been leading a faction called 'Lacoste'](#) - which is backed by the military, and securocratic elements within Zanu-PF and who have played a leading role in Mugabe's reign of terror.

With Mnangagwa's flight into exile after his sacking it first appeared that his faction was on the back foot and had been relegated into the political wilderness.

But as subsequent events illustrate, Mnangagwa's military backers were not willing to accept defeat.

The Lacoste faction appears to have moved with the tacit consent of not just South Africa, but also after consultation with China. Mnangagwa himself is reported to have been flown back to Zimbabwe in a South Africa national defence force military plane.

The military claims that this is not a coup, merely an intervention to clear out the ["criminal elements"](#) that surround Mugabe.

This appears to be carefully crafted to allow the Southern African Development Community (SADC), chaired by South Africa's president Jacob Zuma, to allow the military to complete their mission without coming under pressure to take some kind of action to show their disapproval for 'regime change' by unconstitutional means.

A military intervention is ruled out. SADC has not even been able to stabilise Lesotho. A military intervention to force regime change in Zimbabwe would ignite a conflagration they would have no control over.

It is far more likely that the Zimbabwe Defence Forces will be given the time to stabilise the situation by managing Mugabe's exit and to prepare for the elections due in 2018 with Mnangagwa as caretaker president.

Stabilising the situation will entail a purge of the G40 faction - a process that has already begun.

The Zimbabwean masses have largely been spectators in the factional battles of Zanu-PF and have in recent days watched and danced with delight at what appeared to be a self-inflicted implosion and the almost guaranteed demise of the Zanu-PF state.

Sections of the masses will welcome this development seeing in it the lifting of the yoke of the Mugabe dictatorship.

But this would be a mistake. Mnangagwa led the [Gukurahundi operation](#) during the 1980s murdering an estimated 20,000 Ndebele people.

At the same time there is deep distrust in the military and few illusions that it represents hope or an end to the misery of the Mugabe regime.

The military has been critical in sustaining the Mugabe dictatorship, including carrying out systematic terror.

Thus there should be hardly any illusions as to whether or not the military represents a tenable alternative for the working masses and poor.

A [recent report revealed](#) that the illicit outflow of diamond revenue was used to prop up the regime and companies which were linked to the military and the Central Intelligence Organisation.

Neither a transitional government nor its successor will be able to solve the problems of poverty and mass unemployment.

The atrocities of the military remain well documented; its role in kidnapping and killing opposition supporters, particularly during elections, remains unquestionable.

The military coup is not at all a change of the Mugabe-Zanu regime's character but represents its continuation and attempt at the regeneration of the military's control over it in a manner they hope will be self-sustaining.

Its purpose is to guarantee the continuation of its autocratic rule and not to usher in a new democratic dispensation under the control of Zimbabwe's masses.

The experience of recent years shows that many of the working class of Zimbabwe understand this very well.

This was evident in 2016 when there was a massive uprising and grassroots mobilisation in rejection of Mugabe's regime.

The military responded to this by standing firm and emphasising its allegiance to Zanu-PF and Robert Mugabe.

The lesson both of last year's mass mobilisation, as well as the whole of Mugabe's tenure, is that reliance on external forces such as SADC and neighbouring governments is futile and regressive.

All the administrations of the South African government - from Mbeki through to Zuma - have propped up the Mugabe regime.

The South African Communist Party followed suit, demonstrating its contempt for the Zimbabwean masses by [denouncing the mass demonstrations as recently as last year as the work of a "third force"](#) bent on regime change.

The masses are their own liberators, the Zimbabwean experience of the last two decades confirms this.

As previously emphasised by the Workers and Socialist Party, the masses of Zimbabwe can only rely on their own programme, their own power and their own organisation to overthrow the capitalistic dictatorship and achieve the socialist transformation of Zimbabwean society.

Zimbabwe's workers, young people, and the diaspora must now congregate towards building a mass workers' party.

Such a party must learn from the lessons of the failed attempt in the late 1990s to build one. It is vital to ensure a new workers' party strives to lay the foundations of a government of workers and poor on a socialist programme so as to inflict a decisive defeat of the post-Mugabe regime currently emerging.

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Australia: massive yes vote for marriage equality

Socialist Party (CWI Australia)

Thousands of people gathered around the country on 15 November to await the announcement of the Australian marriage law postal survey result.

There was a huge turnout with 79.5% of eligible participants returning their surveys. Of those, [61.6% voted 'yes'](#), in favour of marriage equality. That is 7.8 million people in support of equal rights!

All eight states and territories returned a majority 'yes' vote. Even in former prime minister Tony Abbott's seat of Warringah, 75% voted 'yes'. Abbott - the former prime minister of the right-wing ruling Liberal party prior to Malcolm Turnbull - had been a [leading opponent of same sex marriage](#) equality.

This is a truly impressive result and a major setback to all those who stood in the way of this basic reform. The result also shows that the more conservative elements within the pro-equality campaign were mistaken to suggest that a public vote would unleash a 'festival of reaction'.

The opposite was true, with millions of people actively supporting the fight for LGBT+ rights, many for the first time. Undeniably it has been the politicians from both the major parties (Liberal and Labor) who have held back this reform.

While people did previously have questions about marriage rights for LGBT+ people, homophobic views have been steadily decreasing over the past 13 years.

In 2004 when John Howard (Liberal Party) [changed the Marriage Act](#) to specifically deny same sex marriage rights, over 60% supported that change. Since then that number has been flipped on its head. This shift in attitudes is in large part because of the tireless efforts of LGBT+ rights activists, both here and overseas.

This positive result will act as a huge boost to the LGBT+ rights movement and it represents a major step towards securing equal marriage rights, but the fight is far from over. The legislation currently supported by Malcolm Turnbull, Bill Shorten and the Greens (the Smith bill) is [riddled with extra discriminatory clauses](#), supposedly to protect 'religious freedoms'.

The right wing of the Liberal Party has proposed an even worse bill that extends discrimination against LGBT+ people significantly. Neither of these bills should be accepted by the LGBT+ rights movement.

We need to keep up the fight to ensure we win marriage equality with no strings attached. We should also attempt to harness the positivity that has been created to take the fight beyond marriage equality and win equal rights for LGBT+ people across the board.

For socialists, equal rights is but the first step. We will continue to struggle until LGBT+ people win liberation and a world free from all oppression and discrimination.

Trump's tax attacks

Billionaire president Donald Trump is desperate to get his tax plans through the US Senate.

No wonder. Trump wants to abolish the estate tax paid when you die. It is currently paid only on estates worth at least \$5.5 million - or \$11 million in the case of a couple.

It is charged at just 40% on net worth above that. And because of a multimillion-dollar exemption, the average paid is only [about 17%](#).

Steven Mnuchin is Trump's treasury secretary. Commenting on Trump's efforts to repeal it, [he bluntly admitted last month](#): "Obviously, the estate tax, I will concede, disproportionately helps rich people."

Too right.

Paul Gerrard, Salford Socialist Party

Scotland: BiFab workers' occupation and march secures jobs and pay guarantee

Philip Stott, Socialist Party Scotland

Workers at the three threatened Burntisland Fabrications - BiFab - yards in Fife have won a guarantee that their jobs and wages will be secured, at least until April 2018. Action by workers and the GMB and Unite trade unions has delivered this important breakthrough.

On 12 November, the company said it had no money to pay wages and was giving notice that it intended to enter administration. The jobs of 1,400 workers who either work for BiFab or who rely on the company for work via contractors were hanging by a thread.

At mass meetings on 13 November [workers agreed a 'work-in' in order to complete the contract - without being paid - but also to ensure they occupied the sites to prevent any attempts at asset-stripping](#).

As Gary Smith, Scottish secretary of the GMB, told a rally outside the Scottish parliament: "If you had not occupied those yards then your jobs would have gone and the yards shut."

The occupying of the yards, beginning a 'work-in' and a mass march on 16 November to the Scottish parliament to demand government action has paid off.

The major companies involved in the project have agreed to provide BiFab with money that will allow the work to continue and workers to be paid.

The threat of BiFab entering into administration, management claimed, was due to money going unpaid to them by the Dutch company Seeway Heavy Lifting (SHL). SHL is contracted by the Scottish power giant SSE whose Beatrice Windfarm Project the BiFab workers are employed in.

As a result of the action of the workforce, the Scottish government and the main companies involved agreed an arrangement that would ensure wages were paid and the jobs guaranteed until the end of the project. The fact that the completed wind turbine platforms would not be released by the workers would have been an important factor in SHL and SSE agreeing to a deal.

However, as Socialist Party Scotland has called for, only an opening of the books of all parties involved in this project for inspection by the trade unions would get to the bottom of what was really going on. The unions should demand full access to this information to get a real picture of what is happening to BiFab.

[1,000 workers, their families and trade union supporters marched to the Holyrood parliament building to demand action.](#) More than 600 workers walked off the job to travel to Edinburgh for the demonstration. However, dozens of workers stayed behind to blockade the gates of the yards to ensure none of the completed work could be moved.

The GMB convener for BiFab, Mike Sullivan, called on the Scottish government to take the plants under their control and to ensure wages were paid.

Socialist Party Scotland members distributed hundreds of leaflets to workers in support of the struggle and calling for the books of BiFab, SHL and SSE to be opened to trade union inspection.

As is normal in these big projects, a labyrinth of contractors and sub-contractors are used by big business to lower costs and increase profit.

That's why Socialist Party Scotland calls for the nationalisation of the major energy and construction firms to guarantee full rights and the rate for the job across the industry.

With renewables, oil decommissioning and waste to energy projects increasingly important for jobs, public ownership and democratic control by workers and the government is essential.

While this victory for the workers at BiFab is welcome, the future of the company is still uncertain after April 2018. The jobs and the yards could be secured with a programme of massive investment into the renewable industry and public sector control of the energy and fabrication industry. BiFab should be brought into public ownership by the Scottish government to secure the skills and jobs there.

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

Usdaw general secretary coronation

Socialist presidential candidate receives 45 nominations - vote Amy Murphy

Usdaw Activist (Socialist Party members in Usdaw)

Most active members of Usdaw will be unsurprised to [see the announcement](#) that Paddy Lillis will be Usdaw's next general secretary. With a high nominations threshold of 25 - raised after [a grassroots challenger, the late Socialist Party member Robbie Segal, won 40% of the vote in the last election in 2008](#) - it was unlikely anyone would be able to challenge Lillis, who is the current deputy general secretary.

This election highlights a democratic deficit in the union - as ordinary members have been denied a debate since 2008 around the policies put forward by the person in the most powerful position in Usdaw. Not only that, but as Lillis was elected by a branch vote for deputy general secretary, he has never faced a national vote by the full membership.

High nomination thresholds are a tool of the right wing to subvert members' democratic rights. The right wing in Usdaw opposed the recent rule change moved by an Usdaw Activist supporter at this year's conference, which attracted the support of around 20% of delegates. It would have opened up the possibility of a contested election instead of a coronation. This was similar to [Blairite MPs trying](#) to keep Jeremy Corbyn off the ballot paper via such a threshold in the 2016 Labour leadership election.

The Activist believes that the nominations threshold for general secretary should be reduced to five, which would allow Usdaw members to debate the direction they want the leading figures of the union to take us in.

Many members will be glad to see the impending retirement of John Hannett, whose leadership was closely linked with support for the Blairite wing of the Labour Party against those around Jeremy Corbyn. For

example he spoke on the platforms of right-wing Labour organisations [such as Progress](#) and Labour Friends of Israel. Industrially, members have seen pay decline in real terms, increasingly insecure hours of work and terms and conditions surrendered without a real fight.

It is welcome that at speeches at Usdaw divisional conferences Paddy Lillis has been much more positive towards Jeremy Corbyn and the radical policies that were in the most recent Labour election manifesto - many of which have been passed as policy at Usdaw conferences.

However, Lillis was also chair of the Labour national executive committee during the 2016 leadership election that went to court to [deny many Labour Party members a vote](#) in that election. Therefore many Usdaw members will be waiting to see how much he distances himself from Hannett's legacy once this election period is over.

The best way to advance the union in a new direction is to elect a fighting executive council in the coming elections to work alongside Paddy Lillis.

There are a number of Broad Left candidates standing in the election around the country, as well as Broad Left supporter and Socialist Party member Amy Murphy standing for president. [In 2015 with ten nominations, Amy won 45% of the vote](#), and with 45 nominations for the forthcoming elections, many Usdaw members will be working for a victory for Amy.

Leeds college workers protest poor pay rises

Nabil Ali, Leeds City College Unison (personal capacity)

Staff members in Unison and UCU trade unions at Leeds City College, the largest provider of further education in the Leeds city region, organised a joint protest outside the college's Park Lane and Printworks campus' on 15 November to demonstrate their dissatisfaction with senior managers' refusal to implement a 1% pay-rise for the previous academic year.

This guidance was issued by the Association of Colleges for implementation on a national level, but continually ignored when raised with the senior leadership team. Managers have invested over £36 million in building a new state of the art campus at Quarry Hill but have no faith in their staff.

One member of staff said: "We held two very successful protests against years of real-terms pay cuts. Many staff took part and received a good response from the public. Leeds City College still owes staff a pay rise they failed to pay last year. We hope that the college will pay what is owed and we also need fair pay across further education and public services generally."

Leeds City College staff have been continually undervalued, [with a dire record on pay increases in the past five years](#) of either 1% rises or none at all.

Workers on the ground have had enough of their rising workloads, forced redundancies and managers refusing to listen to their concerns. The joint protest organised across two of the college's sites allowed workers the opportunity to express their dissatisfaction with this system, and to provide a voice for those staff who have been ignored. The protest was enthusiastic and well attended, with speeches from union representatives inspiring hope and encouraging momentum for future workers' victories.

Virgin train workers vote for strike action over pay

RMT members at Virgin Trains West Coast have voted by 91% for strike action in response to a divisive pay offer.

Following years of highly profitable activity, Virgin bosses offered drivers £500 on top of their percentage pay rise to drop their claim for a one hour reduction in the working week without loss of pay.

However everyone else has been asked to 'self-finance' any reduction by giving up other hard-won terms and conditions.

This is a disgusting way to treat staff and exposes Virgin management's 'first and second class' attitude to different grades of staff.

[RMT balloted its members at Virgin](#) and this resulted in the impressive result on a 82% turnout, easily surpassing the scandalous minimum thresholds required by law.

A Socialist Party member in the RMT

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 16 November 2017 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

Sheffield Eastern Ave Job Centre strike ends

Alistair Tice

Applauded by supporters, PCS members marched back to work this morning at Sheffield's Eastern Avenue Job Centre. After taking [44 days of strike action since June](#), it was quite an emotional and inspiring moment.

Although the job centre closes tomorrow, the solidarity shown by the around 50 PCS civil service union members who took this strike action, and the example they have set in fighting to keep open a public service in the local community, will long be remembered.

The callousness of this Tory government is highlighted by its attitude towards benefit claimants and disabled people.

Local DWP management's vindictiveness was exposed today by its attempt to unnecessarily disperse the returning staff to their new workplaces ahead of Monday's official transfer date.

However, the union's campaign to keep some sort of outreach service in the local area will continue, and the fighting spirit and solidarity of the strikers will now be taken into their re-deployed DWP offices.

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 16 November 2017 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

Posh estate agent's housing crisis solution: make your own sandwiches

Cap private sector rents

Build council homes now

Tanis Belsham-Wray, Leeds Socialist Party

So according to an upmarket estate agent, the solution to the housing crisis is... not buying sandwiches.

[Strutt & Parker says](#) that just by giving up six "luxuries" - including nights out, holidays and supermarket sandwiches - Millennial couples can save up a substantial part of a home deposit.

They calculate £94,000 is the average deposit for a house in London, and that we could save that in just five years. To achieve the whole deposit would mean saving £18,800 a year!

They suggest your parents would make up some of it - they assume your parents can afford it. But leaving this aside - and assuming you had, by some miracle, managed to raise enough just by having no life for five years - you still need to get a mortgage.

The average house price in London is [£481,556](#). Mortgage providers will typically lend you around four times your basic salary.

A £481,556 home minus a £94,000 deposit leaves you £387,556 to pay. So you would need to be on a minimum of £96,889 a year. Even earning that as a couple would put you in the [top 4 or 5%](#) of incomes.

Working full-time on the [London Living Wage](#) will earn you just under £20,000 a year before tax - with many workers, especially young workers, not even getting that.

How about building council homes, and capping private sector rents, and raising the minimum wage? For some reason I don't think making your sandwiches at home or [giving up avocado toast](#) will sort it out.

Them & us

Property empires v avocados

The suggestion that the [solution to the housing crisis lies in foregoing sandwiches](#) isn't new.

Back in May, Australian property developer [Tim Gurner said](#) young people can't afford a home because of our depraved and profligate smashed avocado and coffee habit.

That's right. Wanton consumption of avocado toast is to blame for the gap between flatlining incomes and supernova-scale housing costs.

Gurner is worth [\\$473 million](#) according to Australia's Financial Review. He said "the expectations of younger people are very, very high."

Are they? Is expecting to be allowed to sometimes eat avocados as well as have a house as high an expectation as, say, expecting to be allowed to own a multimillion-dollar property empire?

Is it? Is it really? But really though, is it?

The Socialist says: it isn't.

Anyway, here's our favourite response from Twitter...

[@SFtheWolf](#): You know your generation's had it rough when its image of decadence is a vegetable on a slice of bread.

Seats for landlords...

One in seven councillors in the 40 areas with the highest proportion of private rental homes are landlords.

There's over 300 landlord-councillors just in these parts of the country, according to [Guardian analysis](#). They make up over a third of the seats in some chambers.

Local authorities have spent years carving up council housing stock like so much roast beef. Is it any surprise the people in charge turn out to be cowboys?

Kick out the cutters and rent-seekers. Build council homes. Implement compulsory licensing of landlords, and cap rents.

... eviction notes for us

Meanwhile, a letting agent in Grimsby sent mass eviction warnings to its tenants ahead of the Universal Credit roll-out.

The [letter from GAP Property](#) explains the government's hooligan attack on benefit levels and waiting times could put tenants in arrears. And if that happens, they can expect no quarter.

And quite right too. Who do renters think they are? Why should the massive piles of free money they give to property owners earn them any forbearance?

We should count ourselves lucky that letting agents and landlords let us into the homes we pay them for at all.

Councils' £1bn on commercial property amid housing crisis

Councils in England and Wales are set to gamble £1 billion on commercial property ventures. That's enough to build over 8,000 new council homes.

The figures come from estate agent Savills, [which found](#) councils had spent £758 million this way in the first two-thirds of 2017.

Perhaps councillors plan to move the [1.2 million](#) households on council waiting lists into the hotels they're buying? Maybe office and shopping centre workers can just kip over after closing time now their local authorities own them?

Never mind encouraging property speculators - councils have become them. Send these town halls eviction notices, down to the last Tory and Blairite. Build council homes now.

James Ivens

Tories refuse extra cash to health service

NHS cuts kill!

Caroline Vincent, Leicester Socialist Party

The Tories' mission to wreck our NHS continues, as funding looks set to fall to a historic low for our already horrifically overstretched health service.

Chancellor Phillip Hammond has delivered a further kick in the teeth, [refusing to provide](#) a desperately needed emergency injection of £4 billion that has been demanded by NHS chief Simon Stevens. Hammond's

response? That heads of public services always predict 'Armageddon' in the run-up to a budget!

Hot on the heels of the news that [120,000 deaths](#) have now been linked to Tory austerity, this glib dismissal from Hammond is offensive in the extreme. The urgency has not been overstated, far from it! Cuts are literally killing people.

This summer, hospitals [faced the sort of strain](#) that they normally only encounter in winter months. Hence the fear that this year will see a winter crisis of catastrophic proportions. The situation is exacerbated by the lack of services for patients leaving hospital.

I have recently experienced how brilliant, and yet frighteningly stretched, the health service is. Earlier this month my brother was admitted to intensive care at the Bristol Royal Infirmary, having suffered a cardiac arrest and brain injury. He received excellent, life-saving care.

However, despite the doctors explaining that he was extremely vulnerable and unable to look after himself, I discovered that there were no longer any services available in the community to provide any help once he left hospital. The only option was to care for him myself.

Cruel cuts to health and social care are devastating to patients and family members. And what happens to patients who don't have the support of a family to take up the slack?

We need a fully funded health service, alongside social services that can relieve the strain. Up and down the country people have shown their willingness to fight to save the NHS with local protests and marches.

What's needed now is for Jeremy Corbyn and the trade unions to call for a mass demonstration and coordinated strike action to bring this weak Tory government to their knees, and put an end to cuts that wreck lives.

Gentrification on the terraces: fans say twenty's plenty

Laurence Maples, Portsmouth FC fan, Lambeth Socialist Party

Football ticket prices still remain prohibitive, especially for young fans, according to the BBC's annual [Price of Football report](#).

The majority of football ticket prices have not increased this year. But [82% of young fans](#) say the cost of tickets is an obstacle to them going to more games. And 56% of young fans correctly identify that football is not run in their interests.

Ticket prices are particularly expensive in the Premier League, with 13 of the 20 clubs advertising some tickets for over £50.

This is even more pronounced in London, with all four top-tier clubs selling season tickets for £1,000 or more. Even Fulham, a second-tier Championship team, sells season tickets for £929!

Contrast this with German club Borussia Dortmund, which is selling individual tickets for €17, and Catalonia's FC Barcelona which sells season tickets for less than €100. Both operate some kind of fan-ownership model.

What do fans of Chelsea and co get for their astronomically higher prices? It's certainly not quality of football.

This is neoliberalism in sport, and the money men are killing the game in pursuit of private profit, prestige and political influence. The latest proposal from Sky is increasing the number of matches held on evenings

and midweek - making them harder for supporters to get to.

But fans and their organisations are fighting back. Last year's campaign to cap ticket prices has had some success, with away tickets now [capped at £30](#) in the Premier League. And fans of Blackpool, just promoted to third-tier League One, have [led boycotts](#) against their dodgy owner.

The Socialist Party says: take football off the robber barons - for club ownership by fans and communities. Cap ticket prices - the Football Supporters' Federation is right to say "twenty's plenty" for away games. In my view you could say the same for home games.

Nationalise Sky and the big broadcasters under democratic working class control and management - to guarantee access for all and end top-down control of match times. For massive investment in women's, youth and community football.

- 'Reclaim the Game' - a socialist programme for football by John Reid - [available from leftbooks.co.uk](#)
-

Carbon dioxide hits 800,000-year high: end profit-driven pollution

Pete Mason, East London Socialist Party

The feared surge in global warming gases in 2016 [was confirmed](#) by the World Meteorological Organization on 30 October. Its researchers found the highest atmospheric carbon dioxide levels in [800,000 years](#).

Then the "[world scientists' warning to humanity: a second notice](#)" - a letter from over 15,000 scientists across 184 nations - was published on 13 November.

It's hard hitting: "by failing to adequately limit population growth, reassess the role of an economy rooted in growth, reduce greenhouse gases, incentivise renewable energy, protect habitat, restore ecosystems, curb pollution... humanity is not taking the urgent steps needed to safeguard our imperilled biosphere."

With the US under [Trump withdrawing from the Paris agreement on climate change - which is a toothless arrangement anyway](#) - you might have thought the letter would target the main culprit. But mistakenly, it primarily seems to target population growth.

Yet after the post-war 'baby boom', the growing population of pollution-heavy Europe [began to level off](#) - and even fell in some cases. Working people's struggles won rising living standards and social security. They also won greater rights for women, which contributed to lowering indigenous birth rates.

And as welcome as the letter is, putting demands on "humanity" as a whole is misplaced. The majority of humanity is not in control of the levers of power, any more than you or I. That's the capitalist class.

To give the letter its due, it does recommend various practical measures, such as reducing "wealth inequality" and phasing out subsidies to fossil fuel companies.

The scientists recommend humanity ensures that "prices" and "taxation" benefit the environment. But, with the capitalist class in power across the world, this would simply mean higher prices for an already impoverished majority, not higher taxation for the biggest companies overflowing with unspent cash.

And there's no chance of ending the growing wealth inequality around the world while the people haunting the corridors of power are the capitalist class, who defend their own. And with them, the very fossil fuel companies responsible for global warming.

Climate change is an intractable problem for capitalism. The letter again exposes its failed rule of the planet. Ending the rule of the market and the super-rich through public ownership and [socialist planning would free](#)

[up the resources needed to tackle environmental catastrophe.](#)

Lively student demonstration for free education could have been much bigger

Theo Sharieff, Socialist Students national chair

Around 1,000 students took to the streets of London in demand of free education on 15 November. Students gathered at Malet Street and marched to Parliament Square to demand the [scrapping of tuition fees, the reintroduction of student grants and a cancellation of all outstanding student debt.](#)

At the Socialist Students stage, students and young workers repeatedly made the point that after the general election, not only is it possible for us to win free education but furthermore to get rid of the Tories altogether and to pave the way for a radical left led Corbyn government to enter power.

A lively atmosphere could be felt that afternoon, contributed significantly to by a loud and bold Socialist Students contingent.

Yet inevitably, some students will raise questions concerning the [relatively smaller turnout as compared to previous student demonstrations in the past.](#)

However, we think it would be a mistake to argue that the modest turnout in London on 15 November is an accurate reflection of the mood which exists amongst students to fight.

Much of the blame must fall to the leadership of the National Union of Students (NUS) who not only refused to publicly support the demonstration, but who actually blocked a motion in support of the demonstration being heard by the NUS national executive council earlier this year.

Another factor that must be appraised is the role of the Labour Party leadership. Despite Jeremy Corbyn publicly coming out in support of the demonstration, this support was of an extremely limited fashion and [only announced](#) a week ahead of 15 November.

After the massive enthusiasm which was generated at the general election for the policies of free education around Corbyn's manifesto, the opportunity for the Labour leadership to translate an electoral revolt at the ballot box into a wider reaching movement by calling and leading a campaign for free education was missed.

Socialist Students [previously wrote an open letter to both Angela Rayner and John McDonnell](#), the shadow education secretary and the shadow chancellor respectively, requesting that the Labour leadership table amendments in parliament to the chancellor's budget calling for the scrapping of tuition fees and cancellation of student debt, as well as publicly supporting direct action being taken by students on budget day.

Unfortunately it appears that at this stage, the Labour leadership have no plans to table such amendments.

NCAFC

Unfortunately, responsibility also lies with the organisation which organised the demonstration, the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts (NCAFC).

Socialist Students [called a day of action on Budget Day](#), 22 November. Subsequent to this, [NCAFC called a national student demonstration for the week before](#), 15 November.

So in the run-up to the 15 November demo, on 6 September, [Socialist Students wrote an open letter to the NCAFC national committee](#) requesting that the two organisations meet in order to discuss the possibility of democratically opening up the planning of the demonstration to other groups and student forces on the left in order to make 15 November as successful as possible.

In the context of the criminal moves by the NUS, we wrote: "Without NUS, a national demonstration on 15 November - if it goes ahead - will need to be organised democratically by all capable forces within the student movement."

"Organising a successful national demonstration, especially in the absence of the leadership of the NUS, will take the involvement of Socialist Students and other organisations which have a national presence on university campuses."

Socialist Students believes that such an approach could have at least somewhat counteracted the negative role played by the NUS leadership.

Unfortunately, despite being informally told that a reply was being prepared by the NCAFC national committee, Socialist Students never received a response to this letter.

We believe this was a serious error, and that the modest turnout on the day could have been much higher had a more open, and ultimately less sectarian approach to the planning and execution of the demonstration been taken by the leadership of NCAFC.

Simultaneously to this, in multiple areas of the country (including Leeds and Birmingham), leading members of NCAFC locally requested that Socialist Students groups and societies host their speaking tour in promotion of the demonstration on 15 November. They were apparently unaware that they had previously ignored the open letter and our request for our organisations to cooperate, following the elevated political mood which has developed since the general election, which opened up fresh possibilities for the student movement.

This contradictory approach to our organisation, we believe, is ultimately a reflection of what has so far been a sectarian approach to Socialist Students by the NCAFC leadership, and at the same time the lack of forces the NCAFC organisation has on the ground at many campuses.

Despite having a national profile, 15 November demonstrated the vital importance for serious political organisations to carefully and attentively build their forces on the local level, something which NCAFC has clearly failed to do.

Problems

The unwillingness to allow other organisations to participate in the planning of 15 November also presented easily avoidable problems on the day itself.

For example, NCAFC organisers raised unnecessary logistical disagreements with Socialist Students during the set-up for the demonstration.

This counterproductive approach by NCAFC was taken to an absurd degree when, later in the day, NCAFC's sound system at the main stage failed.

NCAFC organisers requested the use of the Socialist Students sound system. When we said we would be happy for our sound system to be borrowed, provided Socialist Students be allowed a speaker on the platform, our reasonable request was called "petty factionalism."

Socialist Students took a completely different approach to our stage. We had a list of speakers prepared, but simultaneously ran an open microphone and invited anyone from the crowd up to speak, even welcoming speakers to put across differing perspectives to those offered by Socialist Students.

We believe our approach speaks of the confidence Socialist Students holds in its political programme, and our eagerness to debate the ideas needed to take forward the student movement in a positive manner with other groups.

NCAFC, by contrast, seems to think the only way to maintain the prominence of its ideas within the student movement is to keep a tight and undemocratic grip on the formal leadership, preventing fellow organisations from challenging its politics - and thereby cutting across this chance to build a mass, democratic student movement.

Despite NCAFC's unhelpful approach, Socialist Students decided to suspend use of our louder system for a time in order to allow speakers on the NCAFC stage to be heard by the crowd.

Remarkably, a threat towards our comrades of a court injunction was made with regards to the setting up of a gazebo. After attempting to prevent Socialist Students from setting up a gazebo, when it was raised with the NCAFC organisers that we had previously written to them and that such a disagreement could have been avoided had they involved Socialist Students in the planning process, we were told that the matter of the open letter was irrelevant and we needed to do what we were told!

And all this is without going into the detail of other instances of NCAFC organisers and stewards attempting to throw young Socialist Party members off the demonstration - one just because he wasn't a student!

Budget day

The contrast is stark with the approach Socialist Students has taken to planning our national day of action on Budget Day, 22 November, which we have sought to build democratically alongside other local student groups.

In our open letter to NCAFC, we wrote that combined action "could potentially be received very enthusiastically and pull new layers of students into struggle, especially if built cooperatively and democratically alongside other groups"

We note, however, that instead of seeking to work with us on building for Budget Day, [NCAFC has instead decided to call a very similar day of action on campuses on the Wednesday following](#) Budget Day, 29 November.

Given our previous attempted correspondence with NCAFC, and the modest results of its approach on 15 November, we believe its decision to ignore actions already planned by students by calling a separate day of action is yet another mistake by the NCAFC leadership, who at this stage risk cutting their nose off to spite their face.

It is a shame the NCAFC leadership has - so far - acted this way. However, Socialist Students remains positive about the opportunities which exist for the future of the student movement.

Although NCAFC's approach on the matter has again been unhelpful, we do believe further action is necessary after 22 November. This should include follow-up meetings on every campus about what to after the budget to win free education - and to plan further, escalated protest actions into the new year.

As part of this, Socialist Students would like to take the opportunity to once again invite the leadership of NCAFC to meet with us to democratically build for a successful student movement beyond Budget Day and into the future.

Socialism 2017 Socialist Students meet-up

Amid the busy atmosphere of Saturday afternoon [at Socialism 2017 on 11 November](#), 30 or so Socialist Students activists found the time to get together to discuss the upcoming budget day protests.

Students reported that this academic year has seen a new determined crop of students coming into the Socialist Students societies who are committed to campaigning for Jeremy Corbyn's promise of free education and an end to austerity.

Socialist Students is prepared to respond to potentially volatile events in the lead up to [Theresa May's attempt to pass a budget with a crumbling government](#).

Plans have already been made for a series of protests in places such as Cardiff, Leeds and London. Members are being flexible in their strategy and organising not just around free education but also key local demands.

For example, the University of Southampton has just announced plans to cut 75 academic jobs. As a result Socialist Students has adopted the slogan 'no job cuts, save all jobs' for [our protest on 22 November](#), as well as inviting the university's trade unions to join us.

Pressure over the budget will exacerbate the existing splits in the Tory government. Socialist Students knows that the government is likely to need a shove for it to fall.

We are doing our bit to build a vibrant student movement to be the force that topples the Tories and makes Corbyn's manifesto a reality.

Josh Asker, Southampton Socialist Party

Nottingham 'Reclaim the Night' march highlights cuts to women's centres

Heather Rawling, Leicester Socialist Party

A spirited and determined 'Reclaim the Night' march, organised by and for women, wound its way through the Saturday night revelry of Nottingham city centre on 18 November. The crowds were mostly supportive and even the buses and other traffic didn't seem too bothered by their unexpected delay.

The struggle against misogyny and violence against women has become even more intense, [post-Donald Trump's election](#) combined with [the onslaught of austerity on women's lives](#).

Val Lunn from Women's Aid Nottingham spoke about the potentially catastrophic plans of this Tory government, led by a female prime minister, to change the funding for Women's Aid nationally. Rather than the money going to Women's Aid directly, they plan to give it to local councils with apparently no ring fencing. When [councils, including Labour ones, have played fast and loose with vital services](#), closing many regardless of their impact on staff and local users, Women's Aid is right to want to plan a campaign to defend their refuges across the country.

The rally stood for a minute's silence for all those women who have been killed by partners or ex-partners and a patchwork wall hanging in the women's centre, with a named patch for each of the [598 women](#) killed between 2009 and 2015, was a poignant reminder of how important women's refuges are. Yet many are closing and others frequently turn away women and their children fleeing domestic abuse because of lack of space.

A programme to defeat misogyny and violence against women is vital. As one placard said: "I can't believe I still have to put up with this shit". We need a campaign against austerity and misogyny that takes up the causes of women's oppression and unites with the labour movement.

Members of the Socialist Party are already prominent in campaigns to [save women's centres in Derby and Doncaster](#). Linking up campaigns nationally could strengthen each one. Taking the campaigns into the labour movement, in the way the brilliant [Socialist Party-led Campaign Against Domestic Violence](#) did, can increase support and help build the fight back.

Southampton: Corbynista success but cuts continue

Southampton Labour Party member

On the same day that shadow chancellor John McDonnell outlined [his alternative](#) to the budget, which included among other things the reinstatement of local authority funding, Southampton Labour Party held its

annual general meeting (AGM) on 16 November.

The question was asked of the council leader Simon Letts: "Will you therefore [use some of your £80 million in reserves to save schools from cutbacks?](#)" Simon said he would spend money only when McDonnell's 'cheque has cleared'. While Letts is waiting for the cheque to clear, teaching assistants are losing their jobs, parents are being asked to subsidise their children's education and subjects are being stripped from the curriculum!

In his report the council leader gave an overview of his time in office and recounted the £120 million worth of cuts that Labour has made on behalf of the Tories in Southampton.

He then proceeded to appeal to the meeting to "trust me" on the planned closure of Kentish Road respite centre. I prefer to trust the service users and their families who have been heroically campaigning to save their vital service from closure.

Jeremy Corbyn's manifesto needs to be made a material reality to save us from the onslaught of austerity. Every service closure and every job loss delivered by Labour councils makes that less likely to happen.

The Corbynistas won an overwhelming majority at the AGM. But it will all be for nothing unless they can force the council to be [anti-austerity in actions and not just words](#). That is the only way to give working class people trust in Labour.

Disability cuts outrage: my story

A Derby Socialist Party member

I am a 49-year-old woman who has been managing the progressive disease multiple sclerosis for 19 years. I am unable to work and receive disability benefits.

In the year 2000, following an appeal process with the support of a welfare rights officer, I was granted Disability Living Allowance, high-rate care, high-rate mobility, indefinitely.

It was a relief knowing that I had this benefit, enabling me to enjoy a better quality of life.

In 2016 I received a letter from the Department for Work and Pensions informing me of [the government's change from Disability Living Allowance to 'Personal Independence Payment' benefits](#). The letter outlined that I would have to reapply and be assessed - again.

Filling out the assessment booklet was tiring and very stressful and took three sittings with the help of a friend to complete. I also felt great anger and frustration at having to go through all of this again.

[Capita, the outsourcing giant running the assessments](#), informed me one would be carried out at my home a few months later at 6.30 in the evening. My care worker came to support me for this assessment.

I was feeling anxious about the visit, so you can imagine my dismay when the assessor did not turn up. On calling to enquire why the assessor's appointment had not been kept, I was informed it was because there was not enough travel time available for the assessor!

I made a formal complaint and £50 was reimbursed into my account, along with an apology.

The following week I was given a new appointment, this time for 9am. My care worker was present again.

I was questioned for 70 minutes, with the humiliating question "can you stand on one leg" thrown into the mix. The assessment left me exhausted.

Five weeks later I received my award letter. I was informed that I will continue to receive the high-rate mobility allowance - but that the 'daily living needs' rate would only be 'standard', thus cutting my benefits by

£144 a month!

Shortly I will be going through the appeals process again, with the assistance of a welfare rights officer. Shame on Capita! Shame on the Tory government!

Humour - Jonathan Pie: Off the Record

Left comic's take on politics will have you in tears

Julian Moore-Cook, actor and comedian

Jonathan Pie is [the fictitious journalist created by comedian Tom Walker](#). Here he and Pie cowriter Andrew Doyle give us a book as written by the unhinged TV reporter.

Pie takes us on a cathartic, anger-releasing journey, character assassinating ten "awful" public figures. Simon Cowell, Henry VIII and Donald Trump are just some of the people on Pie's chopping block.

But first up is Tony Blair. This chapter is extremely relieving for those of us on the left who saw Blair for what he was: the end of Labour. In fact, Pie says as much.

He hates Blair most of all not for the Iraq war, but for "destroying the Labour Party and all that it stood for... the equivalent of taking the Sistine Chapel and giving it the once-over with a Dulux roller."

It's enjoyable reading Pie attack politicians because he takes your anger and channels it into the kind of language you may use had you met any of these characters down the pub.

He says he never trusted Blair - "even when Diana died, he looked like a robot testing a new grief algorithm."

The book is funny. An added dimension is Pie's use of footnotes to insult the reader. It's all in good measure.

The footnote on the Third Reich reads "are you seriously telling me you need a footnote to explain the Third Reich... You're a fucking idiot." There is - and if you know the Pie videos you won't be surprised - lots of swearing on the way.

What Jonathan Pie does best is make basic left-wing political analysis entertaining. This would be a great book to give to someone who says they don't know much about politics. It gives you a left perspective on figures throughout history, and makes you laugh.

Pie invites disagreement and debate, which is refreshing as some leading figures on the left seem to want to shut it down.

He is most admirable because his analysis always seems to have the working class at its core. He doesn't offer many solutions - but never said he would.

The chapter discussing his vote in the EU referendum is particularly funny. It involves too much alcohol and Captain Kirk's ghostly visit to him in the polling booth. You'll have to read the book to see which way he voted.

Some of his comments are tenuous. The chapter on Simon Cowell's connection to Trump taking office I didn't buy, but it still made me laugh.

All in all, a worthwhile read. And the chapter ripping Margaret Thatcher will have you in tears.

The Socialist inbox

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We reserve the right to shorten and edit letters. Don't forget to give your name, address and phone number. Confidentiality will be respected if requested.

Views of letter writers do not necessarily match those of the Socialist Party.

Scab safety

The RMT union has [written to the alleged safety regulator](#), the Office of Road and Rail (ORR), cataloguing a list of serious breaches of statutory duty that occurred during industrial action on South Western Railway.

Among the list of occurrences reported were: 'contingency guards' giving the ready-to-start command on stop signals; opening carriage doors early; reporting incidents belatedly; failing to log those instances; and even, in one instance, dispatching a train on a red light.

Alarmingly, the ORR is once again failing to respond adequately to this series of blunders pre-emptive of a much larger accident waiting to happen.

After all, it was only in 2015 that a passenger was dragged along a platform and injured after their luggage was trapped in door of a driver-only-operated train.

Instead, the ORR continues to stand firm, refusing to acknowledge that contingency guards - scab labour - are no substitute whatsoever for fully trained and qualified professionals with passenger safety, not profit, at the heart of their duty.

James Hunter, Jarrow

Prison principles

To hear a union leader say that he was not "consulting his lawyers" before carrying out the wishes of his members was a welcome change from those union leaders whose first recourse has been to legal action. It is many years since the legal profession led a mass movement in favour of the working class!

The [hate campaign of the mass media](#) focussed on Len McCluskey's words at the National Shop Stewards Network rally ahead of TUC congress in Brighton.

Yet he was not calling on Unite members to engage in murder or arson, but to oppose an unjust anti-union law.

When a Conservative government imprisoned five dockers in 1972, that created a mass (illegal) movement which came close to a general strike - before the government produced the "official solicitor" like a rabbit out of a hat to declare that the 'Pentonville Five' had "purged their contempt" and should, therefore, be released.

The trade union movement was not fooled. This was a massive defeat for the Tories.

I doubt if that is the kind of outcome John Humphrys of the Today programme had in mind when he launched his attack on Len McCluskey.

Humphrys has a record of standing up to Tory ministers so it was a falling-off of standards to see him baying with the Tory pack for Len McCluskey's blood.

The phrase "better to break the law than break the poor" exemplifies workers' representatives standing up against unjust laws.

It [originated in Poplar in 1921](#) when, indeed, socialists were imprisoned for standing up for the working class.

It was an inspiration for the [Labour council in Liverpool in the 1980s which took on Thatcher](#) and showed she could be beaten.

What a contrast from today's Labour councils, such as in Birmingham, who have been the cheerleaders of austerity.

Nobody wants to break the law, nobody wants to go to prison. Yet, like Tommy Sheridan, [Terry Fields and others in the fight against the poll tax](#), it is a price people with principles are prepared to pay.

Derek McMillan, Worthing, Sussex

Gentrifying Manchester

I live in Chorlton, Manchester, where I have rented for seven years, and [it is now being slowly gentrified](#).

Pubs and places to shop and eat are becoming much more expensive to pander to the new, wealthy homeowners.

Local businesses have also become victims of gentrification through the cost of renting more expensive premises, and the loss of loyal customers forced to move.

There are four sites in Chorlton on the redevelopment hit list. Chorlton baths, is currently owned by Manchester City Council which is in talks with a 'social housing provider' - no name given - to build 40 homes.

The remainder of the site will be used by the vegan grocer Unicorn for retail expansion.

Chorlton Precinct - owned by Greater Manchester Pension Fund! - faces plans to demolish its existing buildings, shops, offices and accommodation, to build new business premises and 190 homes.

Locals have registered concerns such as added pressure on schooling, doctors' surgeries and road congestion, which is already a problem.

Rye Bank Road is owned by Manchester Metropolitan University, which has been involved in a 50-year-old dispute with residents.

Locals want the land to be given official village green status. The university has made four unsuccessful attempts at permission to develop.

The site was donated by Manchester City Council to the university on the basis it be used for recreation only. A total of 70 executive homes have been earmarked for the site.

Turn Moss playing fields is a site already used for recreation, but has now come on the radar of a property company.

It has joined up with the 'Class of 92', ex-Manchester United players, to launch a new university. As of yet the details of the plans are pretty vague.

As a local resident, seeing so many proposals for developments brings home the real threat of big business profiteers and their pernicious programme of social cleansing. They have no moral qualms whatsoever about the communities they destroy.

Councils should not allow more luxury homes to be built. We need social housing and rents that are capped at affordable rates.

I'd support Corbyn's proposal of local areas needing a referendum on proposals for redevelopments to ensure it is done in the interest of working class people, not the super-rich!

Greg Price, Chorlton, Manchester

Solar suggestion

Three or four years ago I visited my town council planning committee and proposed that permission to build new homes, in fact all new buildings where possible, should not be passed without the stipulation that they are fitted with photovoltaic panels or tiles or ground-source heat pumps, perhaps both where possible.

My proposals went down like a lead balloon. Well, not exactly - one local councillor listened and wrote to a local newspaper the following week with the same suggestion as though it was his own. Still, nobody else was interested in even thinking about it.

I can tell you that I am, and as I am 94 years old I am unlikely to suffer the worst effects of global warming myself, but still consider those that come after me.

If they were designed-in, that would mean far less cost - especially if every new house had them, because of economy of scale. Houses now cost far in excess of the extra amount involved.

I note that some new developments of local houses for which plans have recently been passed intend installing electric car charging points.

No problem there then. Wouldn't it be good if they also had heating from renewable sources?

Is it, perhaps, that the present money-grabbing fuel suppliers would lose out? Well, my heart bleeds for them.

I'm more interested in the ordinary man, woman and child who have to pay through the nose in order to keep themselves warm - not to speak of bathing, laundry, cooking, fuelling their vehicle etc - and at the same time need clean air to breathe.

Why not government-funded and owned laboratories being opened with the task of inventing electrical storage? There are plenty of well-trained people looking for a good job, not to speak of all those untrained people who would be glad of training.

Claude Mickleson, Lydney, Gloucestershire

Umbrella umbrage

I found '[Blacklisted](#)' a revealing book. In construction, agencies are in control, with umbrella companies running a racket. Agencies control the job market and leave you with no choice.

They say you can work for £9.50 under the umbrella, or on PAYE for the minimum wage. Umbrellas take around £20 a week, and you pay both employer's and employee's National Insurance.

These umbrella companies are a scam and should be abolished now.

Mike, Southampton

- 'Blacklisted' by Dave Smith - [available from leftbooks.co.uk](http://leftbooks.co.uk)

<http://www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/26526>