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Editorial of the Socialist issue 980

NHS: use the 3 February protests as a launch pad for a mass movement

"If we have made history, so be it. Someone had to make a stand." These were the words of shop steward Joan Foster to our predecessor paper, Militant, in January 1988. Joan was one of 40 nurses who walked out at North Manchester General hospital in response to an attempt to take away their unsocial hours payment.

Our article about the unofficial strike reported the massive local support that rushed to the impromptu picket line, including firefighters and workers from nearby factories. But the effect went much wider. The walkout detonated a national mass movement against Thatcher's NHS cuts, which culminated in a TUC demonstration in London that March of in excess of 100,000.

Now, virtually 30 years later to the day, thousands will be marching and protesting in London and across the UK in response to the crisis that has escalated in hospitals over the winter. Of course, the Tories are attempting to blame the increased pressures on the cold weather and Australian Flu. But actually these pretty normal factors have only brought the issues of cuts, understaffing and bed shortages to the surface - or rather to hospital corridors, or even the inside of parked ambulances outside A&Es, waiting for a vacant bed.

Potential

The demonstration on 3 February could be very big and Socialist Party members around the country have been working to build the turnout. But given the outrage of ordinary people at the state of the NHS, it could have been gigantic.

The London demonstration was organised at short notice by Health Campaigns Together (HCT) and the People's Assembly. Activists, including ourselves, have spread the word. But the leaders of the unions and also the Labour leadership of Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell should have put themselves at the head of the march from the start. We called on them to organise for Labour and the unions to pay for trains and buses from every area and to take out paid adverts in daily newspapers. Unfortunately, even when addressing a Labour Party rally on the NHS in Westminster nine days before, Corbyn didn't mention the demonstration. There is a real danger that the leaders of Labour and the unions leave the struggle against this weak and divided Tory government to merely waiting for it to implode.

Last March, on the proposal of Socialist Party members in HCT, a demonstration was organised against the planned £22 million Tory health cuts contained in their sustainability and transformation plans (STPs) and well over 100,000 were mobilised.

The capitalist establishment is extremely wary of a Jeremy Corbyn-led Labour government because of the expectation it can arouse among working class people. This fear was reflected in the capitalist media's response to the Carillion scandal. In its editorial 'Carillion's failure does not vindicate Corbyn,' the Financial Times voiced the venom of big business against any threat to the neoliberal privatisation agenda of the last three decades or more that was started by Thatcher and then continued under New Labour's Blair and Brown.

This is a harbinger of the relentless pressure the capitalist class and its media will attempt to exert on a Corbyn administration. But the working class will be in the strongest position to resist such attacks on a left programme if the Tories are pushed out of office as a result of a mass movement.

Such a movement can be built now. 3 February must be the beginning, not the end. It can tap into the huge anger that has built up after a lost decade of workers' living standards and seven years of Tory austerity. The Corbyn surge in the general election as a result of radical policies such as public ownership, abolition of tuition fees and a £10 an hour minimum wage, is itself a reflection of the mood that exists. The fall of

Carillion has further exposed and discredited the parasitic privatisation that is rife in the NHS and across the public services and ratcheted up the anger even more.

Unite the struggles

After 3 February, the TUC, unions and the Labour leadership have to meet urgently. They should set the date for a Saturday London demonstration. The planned TUC one in May should be brought forward. It must bring together the defence of the NHS with the fight for a decent pay rise.

The civil servants' union PCS has the mandate for a strike ballot on pay after its consultation ballot last autumn. Both Unite and Unison are now recommending rejection of the Tory pay offer in local government. Lecturers' union UCU is starting strike action next month to defend the pensions of university lecturers. The waves of strike action at local and sector level over the last six to nine months show the preparedness of workers to act if a lead is given.

Over the last few years, we have already seen different groups of health workers take action, from midwives to radiographers, to junior doctors - some for the first time in decades, others for the first time in their history. Last summer, even the traditionally non-strike union the Royal College of Nurses organised protests and a consultative ballot over pay.

Back in 1988, on the front page of our paper for the 4 March TUC demo, we carried an article by the late John Macreadie, Militant supporter and CPSA (now PCS) deputy general secretary. He was also on the TUC general council and unapologetically used that position as a platform to put pressure on the other union leaders and to appeal for action. He wrote: "At the last TUC general council meeting, I asked 'what next?' The Tories could ride out one demonstration... I urged that it [the demo] should be used to launch a one-day general strike."

The demonstration on 3 February in London and national day of action has to be the platform for a mass movement that can inflict a terminal defeat on the Tories.

NHS we're ready to fight

Heroic health workers and valiant community campaigns have already proven that when we fight, we can win. The ideas and work of the Socialist Party have been a key component in this struggle.

But it's not just about ideas. Socialist Party members have been on the front line of the fightback, turning ideas into action. Help us beat the Tory and Blairite NHS wreckers. Join the Socialists.

Kids' heart surgery saved by mass campaign

Steve Score, chair, Save Glenfield Children's Heart Centre campaign and Leicester East Socialist Party

Campaigners in Leicester have decisively proved we can win battles in the war to save the NHS. In December, NHS England announced a dramatic climbdown from its plan to end congenital heart surgery at two of its three threatened regional centres - Glenfield Hospital and the Royal Brompton in London.

Just one week after the closure announcement was meant to happen, Glenfield hit the headlines when staff spectacularly saved the life of a baby born with her heart outside her chest. But outside the headlines these hospitals save children's lives every day, including that of my own son.

Without building a mass campaign, this u-turn would not have happened. Save Glenfield Children's Heart Centre had persuasive arguments and massive support from across the East Midlands, but mobilising that support was crucial.

We built an active campaign that united patients and families, NHS staff, trade unions and the community.

We held demonstrations of up to 2,000 people a time, mass meetings and lobbies. 130,000 signed a petition (online and paper) and 7,500 engaged in NHS England's complex online consultation. We organised a series of public meetings across the region to go through these arguments in detail.

We even held a day of action in 25 schools. Pupils turned up wearing red, held assemblies, sent their support and made placards for a demonstration.

From the start campaigners were focussed on the issue of saving the heart centre. But they also understood it was part of the overall struggle to save the NHS.

We affiliated to Health Campaigns Together and sent two busfulls of people to the mass NHS demo last year. Many of us will be taking part in protests on 3 February and beyond. United we can win!

Staff work overtime to prevent collapse

Zoë Brunswick, BMA doctors' union activist and Manchester Socialist Party

The last few years have seen multiple attacks against medical students and junior doctors.

There was the forced implementation of an unsafe and unfair new contract. The threat of forced "conscription" into the NHS for doctors who train in the UK. And the opening up of more medical school places with no extra funding where placements are already overstretched.

All of these political moves have contributed to low morale among medical students. This year saw over 2,000 fewer applicants to medicine than in 2014, according to Ucas figures. More students than ever are considering alternate career pathways.

Moreover, the current NHS crisis is impacting our learning. Doctors often have no time to teach us, as they are busy trying to support a system that is understaffed and underfunded.

In fact, medical students in some parts of the country have been drafted in - on an unpaid basis - to help hospitals that are struggling. While some may argue this is a good learning opportunity, there is potential for students to be asked to do things outside their competency, thus putting patients in danger.

The NHS is being propped up through the goodwill of staff and students, who are working overtime to ensure it doesn't collapse. We need to build a mass movement to end the government's attacks and save our NHS.

Strike beats back bully privatisers

Len Hockey, secretary, Unite Barts Health Trust union branch and Waltham Forest Socialist Party

In 2016, mainly female migrant workers, including agency workers, providing services like portering and cleaning, were about to be transferred to privatiser Serco. They had for years subsisted on minimum rates of pay and with the threat of joblessness hanging over them daily.

Members of Unite the Union in Bart's NHS Health Trust in east London staged a protest at the trust AGM in Stratford. This was the culmination of a summer of activity in the four hospitals, including the Royal London, which saw big increases in members and representatives of the union.

A joined-up approach between the branch and the national union, influenced by the previous successful industrial action by Whipps Cross Hospital workers, had yielded 700 new members.

It put the issue of the long-happening abuse of ancillary workers firmly on the agenda. The trust was now being called to account. With confidence, consciousness and combativity up, we achieved the London Living Wage as a minimum for all staff.

And following 24 days of strike action across four big east London hospitals in the summer of 2017, we won a 1% basic pay increase, a one-off payment - and, crucially, permanent contracts for many of the former precarious workers.

The vitality and vigour of this historic strike movement inspired all who attended picket lines and demonstrations. It fundamentally gave the lie to fainthearts at the summits of the trade union movement that workers won't fight when a determined lead is given.

Nurses cannot 'watch and wait' - build for strikes

Beth Webster, nurse, Cardiff West Socialist Party

Chronic underfunding and staff shortages have brought the NHS to its knees this winter.

40,000 nurse posts are unfilled. Coupled with the 1% pay cap and harshening Tory-imposed austerity, increasing numbers of nurses are using food banks; are even faced with homelessness.

On the wards, nurses bear the brunt of the crisis and are unable to give safe care, frequently working 13-hour shifts without breaks.

Pressured by nurses' growing anger, the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) issued an indicative ballot for industrial action last year. 78% of respondents were prepared to take strike action.

Following a 'Summer of Protest' headed by RCN members, Chancellor Philip Hammond alluded in the November budget to lifting the pay cap.

It was hinted that any pay increases would be linked to productivity, increasing anger among a profession keeping the NHS afloat with unpaid overtime and suffering deteriorating working conditions.

As with the police officers and prison guards, pay increases would likely come out of the existing NHS budget and be below inflation - pay cuts in real terms.

The RCN has adopted a 'watch and wait' approach until the NHS Pay Review Body reports in the spring. But the members don't have the luxury of watching and waiting. And the public cannot watch and wait while their NHS is privatised and dismantled.

Public sector workers can defeat the pay cap. We must pressurise our unions to unite behind a serious strategy for coordinated industrial action. The working class must again lay claim to our health service and fight for it!

Doctors ready to fight - unions must lead

Jackie Grunsell, GP, Lancashire Socialist Party

As a GP for 16 years I've felt privileged to be working in general practice.

I see patients during the highs and lows of their lives. The trust patients have in GPs develops through a relationship built over years and a unique continuity of care.

However, things have dramatically changed since I started the job and I now see more and more GPs demoralised and leaving the profession.

The shortage of GPs and underfunding is making the workload for those left almost intolerable. The ability to provide safe care for patients is now questionable.

Many of the services GPs traditionally provided have been contracted out to private providers. Simultaneously, GPs are dealing with the fallout of cuts to secondary care, being told we have to do more to keep people out of hospital.

People are waiting longer for appointments while wait times for the services we refer them to are through the roof.

In recent union indicative ballots GPs have shown a willingness to take action over issues like pension cuts and lack of resources. The crisis facing the NHS means doctors' unions urgently have to join with other health unions to build for action to safeguard our health service.

A&E cutters tied up by community pressure

Mike Forster, chair, Hands Off HRI campaign (personal capacity) and Huddersfield Socialist Party

We are now entering the third year of our vibrant and increasingly militant campaign, launched in 2016 to stop the closure of our A&E and the downgrading of our hospital.

These insane plans would result in unnecessary illness and deaths. Ordinary people remain incensed and bewildered that so-called health professionals in senior management can try and pass this off as somehow improving healthcare for our area.

However, it has galvanised the most effective community campaign the town has ever seen, sustained by people who have never been active before.

The campaign has a high profile in every local area, attending fetes, galas and festivals with our stalls, merchandise, leaflets and collection buckets. We hold weekly campaign stalls in Huddersfield and maintain a sophisticated structure of committees and area groups which have kept up our momentum.

Marches to save the A&E have attracted thousands. As well as a legal challenge which will shortly go to judicial review, the whole case has been referred to the secretary of state for an independent review.

This year we are supporting the day of action on the NHS on 3 February with a huge protest at Huddersfield Royal Infirmary. Later in February we take our petitions to the Department of Health and will be meeting Jeremy Corbyn to discuss the campaign.

The campaign is pressing all parties, but especially Labour, to commit to a plan which can provide proper public funding for the NHS. We are already mobilising for the 70th anniversary of the NHS demonstration in London on 7 July, and will be holding our own birthday party in the town square on 5 July.

We have resolved that there will be no let-up or going back until we have saved the NHS from the privateers, spivs and Tory and Blairite cutters who are trying to take away the jewel of our welfare state.

Northern health campaigns conference discusses the fightback

Mike Forster, Health Campaigns Together vice chair (personal capacity)

Around 150 delegates crowded into the first and very successful Health Campaigns Together northern conference held in Leeds on 20 January.

Almost 30 active campaign groups were represented from Leicester to Liverpool and Newcastle.

Instead of numerous platform speakers, we invited each region to share their campaign stories. Around 15 people spoke including Socialist Party members from Cumbria, Newcastle, Leicester and Mansfield. The conference was especially inspired by reports of victories at Glenfield Children's Heart Centre and Chatsworth.

The afternoon was given over to workshops but was first addressed by our guest speaker from Northern Ireland, Pat Lawlor, speaking on behalf of public sector trade union Nipsa.

Pat lifted the conference with his report of highly successful community and union pressure to stave off Belfast health cuts.

Workshops reflected the huge scope of health campaigners' work from the workplace, legal challenges to building campaigns.

The conference was rounded off with a call to support the 3 February day of protest with local actions outside hospitals in at least 20 areas, as well as the London demo. Plans are now underway to support the 12 May TUC demo and the 70th anniversary NHS rally in July.

We plan to hold annual conferences in the north to broaden and organise campaign groups across all our regions.

8,000 strong petition opposes closure of Sheffield health services

Alistair Tice, Yorkshire Socialist Party

Socialist Party members took part as over 8,000 signatures on petitions were presented by Sheffield Save Our NHS, Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition and Labour Party members against the proposed closure of the minor injuries unit at Hallamshire hospital and the walk-in centre in Sheffield to a meeting of the clinical commissioning group (CCG).

The CCG argues that these proposals aren't about making cuts, but to improve access to GP appointments. It says that the money 'saved' would be 'moved around' to fund GPs surgeries grouping together to offer patients a same- day appointment.

They also say: "There's lots of places that provide urgent care... we've heard it's quite confusing. Patients don't know where to go or when to go in many cases."

So the CCG is proposing closures so that patients aren't confused!

People use these services precisely because they can't get GP appointments.

If the CCG really wants to make GP same-day appointments possible, then they should invest in that first and prove that it will actually work.

These proposals must be stopped. But the consultation exercise is a sham. It's a tick box exercise where all the options are variants of what the CCG wants with no option of keeping the walk-in centre and minor injuries unit open.

Our campaigning has forced an extension of the consultation period and put back the date of the final decision to September. We must use that time to build as big a campaign of opposition as possible to stop these closures.

Labour NHS rally reveals horrors but offers no way forward

Clare Doyle, Hackney Socialist Party

A rally in Central Hall, Westminster, on 25 January brought home the horrors of what is happening to the NHS, after 70 years of its treasured existence.

They were graphically illustrated by a screening of the Labour Party's recent TV broadcast and by first-hand accounts from health workers around the country, about how they, as well as their patients, are struggling for survival.

Organised by the Labour Party, it was chaired by Jon Ashworth, shadow health secretary, who confirmed the startling statistics about how rundown the service has become and also how poverty literally kills.

He said, to cheers, that "outsourcing must end" and both health and community services must be "publicly provided and publicly administered".

Earlier, Jeremy Corbyn had roundly attacked the Tory government over the crisis in the hospitals. It is no exaggeration to say that on this one issue alone, the government could be brought down and a Labour government assured of victory.

Like all the other speakers at the rally, when his turn eventually came, the Labour leader presented a depressing tale of woe and condemned the private companies who are bleeding the NHS to death.

But where was the demand for the nationalisation of these companies with no compensation for the wealthy bosses and shareholders who have made billions at the NHS' expense, including the huge profit-driven pharmaceutical companies?

Where was the call for the unions in the health service to demand, and fight for, decent wages and salaries for the hard-pressed nurses, doctors, paramedics and ancillary staff? Why was there no call from the platform to support the 3 February NHS protests?

And why did people who had bought papers like the Socialist and taken bundles of NHS campaign leaflets have them confiscated by self-proclaimed Blairites at the entrance to the hall? Security? Whose security? The shortcomings of Labour's programme on the NHS must be overcome or victory over the Tories cannot be assured.

Leicester NHS protest

Leicester Socialist Party hosted a determined public meeting on 27 January to discuss how to build a fightback against the escalating attacks on our NHS.

Addressing the gathering of around 40 people, the chair of the Save Glenfield Heart Unit campaign, Steve Score, emphasised the importance of "taking the momentum from the successful Glenfield campaign into the ongoing battle to save the NHS."

Local health expert Dr Sally Ruane outlined the dire problems facing local health services. Tom Hunt, a nurse and Socialist Party member from the inspiring Save Chatsworth health campaign, explained how he and his fellow workers had built a successful campaign to keep their neurological rehabilitation ward open in Mansfield.

The meeting resolved to back the national day of action on 3 February. In Leicester, campaigners will be gathering outside the Leicester Royal Infirmary between 11am and 12.30pm to protest together in opposition

to the Tory attacks on our health service.

Mike Barker

Film: The Post

Trump as Nixon: urgent questions about press freedom and the state

Paul Gerrard, Salford Socialist Party

In 1971 US casualties in Vietnam were running at 500 a week, and opposition to the war was reaching boiling point.

Daniel Ellsberg stole a 7,000-page document, later known as the Pentagon Papers, detailing the failures of US policy in Vietnam, information which had been deliberately concealed from the American people by a succession of presidents. Stephen Spielberg's latest film 'The Post' is the story of what happened next.

Ellsberg leaks the documents to the prestigious New York Times, which prints extracts. Ben Bradlee (Tom Hanks), editor of a smaller rival newspaper, the Washington Post, is furious the competition has the scoop.

By the time the Post has the documents too, the Times faces a court order from President Richard Nixon to cease publication of "treasonous" material. The Times complies.

A dilemma confronts Bradlee, and the paper's owner, wealthy socialite Katherine Graham (Meryl Streep): do they publish anyway, to defend press freedom, but also to steal a march on the Times?

Bradlee wants to publish and be damned while the naturally cautious Graham is pressurised by directors to back off since a legal case could jeopardise a vital share offer on the stock exchange. In the end both papers appear together before the Supreme Court which rules 6:3 in favour of the right to publish.

The record-breaking nine-month gestation of this film suggests it is Spielberg's response to a Trump presidency. The two rival papers in the film - almost its central characters - are daily abused by Trump as purveyors of 'fake news'.

But there are no simple answers in Spielberg's film. It makes clear that both Bradlee and Graham are part of the same wealthy establishment, socialising with presidents and secretaries of state. In addition to legal and commercial risks, are they prepared to betray their friends and associates by publishing?

Hanks gives a strong performance as the brash, utterly driven newspaperman Bradlee.

But Streep's performance is altogether more layered. Handed the ownership of the paper by the untimely death of her husband she is initially nervous, even deferential, as she attends board meetings, surrounded by grey-haired men in dark blue suits.

There is no mistaking the pressures on her, the slights and humiliations facing this lone woman in the newspaper world. Gradually she finds her voice, asserts herself, and summons up the courage needed, even as the tough-talking Bradlee gets cold feet.

This film asks urgent moral questions about press freedom and the capitalist state. It portrays a time, not unlike today, when the American capitalist class feared that a president was out of control and needed reining in, hence the Supreme Court verdict allowing publication.

Press freedom in the US is already more constrained than in the 1970s, and the secret services have more power than then. Trump even has his Supreme Court stacked too.

This is a great film. But as socialists, we won't be relying on the rich and powerful - even their most courageous representatives - to right their own system's wrongs and bring this president down.

Capitalism v cricket

Dan Crowter, Coventry West Socialist Party

For a series that cricket fans look forward to for months, this year's Ashes was something of a disappointment - on the English side, at least. We lost 4-0, and were only saved from a 5-0 whitewash by a lifeless pitch ensuring a draw.

It's very easy to blame the players or the coach, and they're not without fault. But in reality the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) deserves far more criticism than the team or the coaching staff.

Over the last ten years the ECB has neglected the four-day 'first-class' domestic tournaments, concentrating instead on the more immediately lucrative 'Twenty20' format.

T20 is the shortest form of cricket that is widely played, and has engaged millions around the world who wouldn't normally be interested in the sport. Clearly their interest is very welcome. But the obsession with it from the ECB and other cricket boards is unhealthy.

From its inception T20 has been pushed by big businessmen - the now jailed Allen Stanford is a prime example. The recent cancellation of the South African 'T20 Global' league, and the failure of the Afro T20 and a Caribbean Premier League franchise to pay players, should give some pause for thought.

T20 and other limited-overs matches are given priority and played in the middle of summer. First-class matches are primarily played in late spring and early autumn. This damages the development of spin bowlers in particular, and also means batsmen have less experience of playing spin.

This can be seen at all levels. Aussie spin bowler Nathan Lyon left England's batsmen clueless in the Ashes, while England spinner Moeen Ali was ineffective. And there's the recent 7-0 home whitewash the India under-19s' spin-heavy bowling attack inflicted on us.

Poor performance can't just be pinned on the marginalisation of first-class cricket, however. Cricket features marginally - if at all - in the majority of state schools.

I went to junior school with a lad who now plays for Warwickshire - but we never played cricket together, because our school didn't do it! At senior school there was a gulf in class between us and the private schools - this was particularly noticeable in one match against them where we were eleven all out.

Around a quarter of England players come through the Marylebone Cricket Club Universities system, restricted to the students of six elite universities.

Despite England's recent lacklustre away results, the ECB has recently signed a "game-changing" £1.1 billion TV deal. All parties have been at pains to emphasise the BBC will have the rights to ten county T20 matches.

But the deal will still mean all England international matches will show on Sky Sports - pricing many working class people out. England cricket matches were shown on terrestrial TV for almost 70 years prior to 2006 - the return of some domestic cricket does nothing to resolve the lack of international coverage.

The 2005 Ashes series, one of the most thrilling Test series of all time, engaged people across the country and the world. This includes people the ECB is so keen to target with T20, those who "don't like cricket." This wasn't just because it was an incredible series - but because it was free on everyone's TV!

The same story goes for the tickets. As of now, an adult ticket for the first day of the Test against India at Edgbaston is £56. Back in 2013, even the right-wing Daily Telegraph lamented the £83 cost of tickets to a test match at Durham, and rightly said "With tickets so expensive and no cricket on free-to-air TV, it is no wonder England are so reliant on private school talent."

The Australian system isn't perfect, but it's certainly better by comparison. 'Sheffield Shield' domestic games are often free to attend, or around \$10 (£5.80) for a day. Women's Big Bash League (WBBL) matches are all free!

All National Cricket League (NCL) and Shield games are streamed online for free by Cricket Australia, along with some Women's NCL games. The popular T20 Big Bash League and WBBL are shown on terrestrial TV - in England, both are confined to BT Sport.

Unfortunately, the ECB seems to see embarrassing defeats and the decline of first-class and Test cricket as a price worth paying for big-money TV deals. Ordinary people who want to see their counties and the England teams doing well in all forms of the game are a long way down the list of priorities.

Under capitalism sport is a business, and as such advertising and sponsorship takes over, with huge sums of money involved. In the recent 'Ram Slam T20' even the ball boys and girls were sponsored! A socialist programme for sport should involve free broadcasting, cheap tickets and investing money into developing players at the grassroots level, giving everyone a chance to participate.

For workplace trade union organisation against sexual harassment

Tessa Warrington, East Midlands Socialist Party

Despite the ongoing slew of allegations revealing the endemic nature of sexual harassment in Hollywood and Westminster and despite the formal denunciation of this culture by the establishment, the scandal over the Presidents Club charity dinner shows that behind closed doors the rich and powerful feel as entitled to women's bodies as ever.

Undercover journalists for the Financial Times described the groping, propositioning and harassment experienced by hostesses, the only women at the men-only charity auction.

The women were required to wear revealing outfits with matching underwear and to sign a non-disclosure agreement, which they were not provided with a copy of, or given a chance to read.

The attendees of the event were from the select elite of British business, politics, finance and entertainment.

Being auctioned were the chance to have dinner with Boris Johnson and Bank of England governor Mark Carney as well as plastic surgery to "add spice to your wife".

The revelations have led to charities returning donations, the closure of the Presidents Club itself and the resignation of event organiser David Meller from the Department for Education board.

Even the Tory Minister for Women, MP Anne Milton, was forced to admit in parliament: "There is an association between rich, wealthy people and this sort of behaviour".

While it is clear that the imbalance of power which can lead to a sense of entitlement and objectification is pervasive among the super-rich, it is also endemic in workplaces across the whole of society.

Women workers in bars, restaurants and hotels especially face daily sexual harassment but don't speak out for fear of losing their jobs.

Many of the hostesses at the Presidents Club were students or part time actors, struggling to advance their careers and make ends meet.

If not for the exposé, it is possible the women would never have come forward, not wanting to risk future employment, or due to feeling reliant on their harassers for job opportunities.

It cannot be left up to brave individuals to speak out, possibly putting their livelihoods at risk. The scale of the #MeToo phenomenon demonstrates the potential for a united women's movement, but this unity must be built in the workplace and community not just on social media.

Organised in trade unions, these women, together with their male worker colleagues, can have the power to fight against the threat of both their own harassment and assault as well as against the power imbalance between workers and the bosses created by the exploitative capitalist system.

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 25 January 2018 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

Presidents Club sexism scandal: what you thought

That the statement from events agency 'Artista' questions the sexual harassment of its employees due to the "calibre" of the men present is beyond words. The power imbalances, warped values and inequality at the core of capitalist society led directly to the Presidents Club groping scandal.

Helen O'Connor, Croydon, south London

A Labour peer, a Tory MP, and Bolton University's vice-chancellor... What do they all have in common? They are sexist and disgusting.

Helen Pattison, Leytonstone, east London

Disturbing reading re sexism and sexual harassment at so-called charitable events - men only. By the way, the organisers were willing to spend over 22 grand.

Amalia, Tower Hamlets

The uproar about the sexist nature of the Presidents Club event is totally justified. But there is another important point of principle - why NHS facilities like the two children's hospitals which returned Presidents Club money are dependent on charitable donations.

Roger Bannister, Liverpool

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100 years since women won the vote

Eleanor Donne

It is 100 years since the first women in the UK won the right to vote in parliamentary elections. It took years of struggle and the largest mobilisation of women in Britain's history to achieve this partial victory (see below for limitations).

Today women worldwide are taking to the streets, as well as social media, demanding an end to sexual harassment and domestic abuse, the right to abortion, and an end to austerity and cuts to women's services. We could see new women's movements emerge which draw in women of all classes, initially at least, around their shared gender oppression.

The movement for the vote, the tensions and difference in programme, methods of struggle and ideology which arose out of the different class interests of the women and men involved, hold valuable lessons for socialists today.

The campaign for women's suffrage was one of the biggest movements by women in the history of Britain. Yet thousands of the working class activists and local organisers of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS) who devoted many years of their time to 'the cause,' remain hidden from history.

The NUWSS, set up in 1897, had over 100,000 members at its height. National leaders, including Millicent Fawcett, limited their demand to votes for women on equal terms with male voters. But many of its local activists, especially in the

industrial areas of the North West, demanded nothing less than 'womanhood suffrage' - votes for all women.

Jill Liddington and Jill Norris explain in their book about the rise of the women's suffrage movement, *One Hand Tied Behind Us*: "Several years before 'suffragette' became a household word; the cotton workers of Lancashire were debating the controversial issue of votes for women in meetings at their factory gates, street corners and in town squares.

"The speakers who addressed the crowds were not educated, middle class ladies, but local women who had come to the suffrage movement through their experience of factory work and of organising working women".

These women were known as the radical suffragists, both because their methods differed from the polite parliamentary lobbying of the NUWSS leadership and because of their programme.

Where they were prepared to support demands for limited women's suffrage, they saw this as a step towards full universal suffrage and not an end in itself. They also saw the vote not as an abstract democratic right but a tool which they could use to challenge the terrible social conditions and inequality they faced.

The radical suffragists took the question of women's suffrage into their own organisations, including the trade unions and the Women's Cooperative Guild. Many suffrage activists participated enthusiastically in the growing movement for an independent political voice for the working class through the Independent Labour Party and, later, the Labour Representation Committee (which preceded the Labour Party).

Unfortunately, the labour movement did not always return this enthusiasm. While many in the labour movement were very supportive of women's suffrage, others regarded it (along with other women's issues) with indifference or suspicion, seeing it as a 'middle-class' concern that put gender before class.

There was a genuine fear among some socialists and trade unionists that if better-off women got the vote they would use this to support the Tories and Liberals and undermine the recently formed Labour Party. This led many to put the demand for 'adult suffrage' ie votes for all as opposed to 'women's suffrage' on the same terms as men.

For some, however, this was an excuse to oppose women's suffrage without genuinely campaigning for votes for all. The Labour Party did not back women's suffrage until 1912. Once it did, the NUWSS transferred its support from Liberal to Labour election candidates.

Emmeline Pankhurst had set up the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) in 1903 with her daughters Christabel and Sylvia. Initially, this was based within the Independent Labour Party (ILP) and had close links still with the radical suffragists in and around Manchester.

Shift to right

However, partly out of frustration with the Labour Party's refusal to endorse women's suffrage, and partly a reflection of Emmeline and Christabel's shift to the right politically, the WSPU increasingly moved away from any idea of building a mass movement for the vote as part of a wider labour movement.

In 1905, Christabel Pankhurst and Annie Kenney of the WSPU adopted a campaign of direct action and civil disobedience. The suffragettes got widespread press coverage and almost overnight spread the word about the campaign to thousands of women.

Many of the radical suffragists were enthused by this publicity and admired the courage and determination of the protesters. However, by 1906 the WSPU, according to Teresa Billington, an ex-member, "has gradually edged the working class element out of the ranks", and "cut down its demand from one of sex equality to one of votes on a limited basis".

The radical suffragists broke with the WSPU after 1906 because of their abandonment of the call for universal women's suffrage. Christabel and Emmeline left the ILP in the same year.

By this time they had abandoned any attempts to campaign on wider social issues and had only one aim, 'political equality with men'. Only Sylvia Pankhurst retained her socialist ideas and continued to campaign in the East End of London.

Why did the Liberal-Conservative coalition government grant limited votes for women in 1918 when four years previously the Liberal government under Herbert Asquith had seemed actively hostile? The main fear was always the link between women's suffrage and the labour movement.

Sylvia Pankhurst, in her book, 'the Suffragette Movement', argued that Asquith had been planning to introduce limited women's suffrage in 1914 to attempt to break the link and divide the suffrage movement more decisively along class lines.

The government was facing revolt in parliament over home rule for Ireland and strikes by dockers and miners - the period of 'great unrest' on the industrial front. It had been forced to implement reforms such as pensions, health and unemployment insurance from above in order to prevent revolt from below.

The outbreak of World War One cut across this radical mood temporarily. But during the course of the war, women were drawn into the workforce in ever-larger numbers to replace men who were at the front.

This had a significant effect on women's consciousness and started to break down existing social attitudes about women belonging in the 'domestic sphere'.

The conventional view is that a section of women were 'given' the vote in 1918 in recognition of the sterling efforts they put in for 'king and country' during the war. Certainly, Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst were taken over by patriotic fervour and, in return for the release of suffragette prisoners at the start of the war, agreed to put their campaign on hold.

The NUWSS also 'shut down' during the war. Not all of its grassroots members agreed to this, however, and many suffragists totally opposed the war and were active in campaigns to stop young men from being drafted into the army.

Government fear

However, the 'change of heart' from the government was more likely to have been provoked by fear - of the effect of the Russian Revolution of 1917, which had inspired working class movements all over Europe and radicalised the war-weary troops returning to Britain. The government feared giving working class men a political voice, but feared the consequences of not doing so even more.

Thus, in 1918, all men over 21 (and ex-serving troops over 19) got the vote. The decision to grant the vote to women property owners and tenants over 30 may have been an attempt to 'stabilise' the electorate and tip the balance back in favour of the middle and upper classes.

After the new act, around 40% of voters were women. It was a kick in the teeth for the younger women and working class women who made up the bulk of the munitions workers, but who the government felt were politically more unpredictable.

It was another ten years before the demands of the radical suffragists for 'universal womanhood suffrage' were finally met.

The Representation of the People Act 1918 granted the vote to:

- All men over 21 (over 19 if they had been in active service during WW1)
 - Women tenants and home owners (or wives of tenants/homeowner) of properties with a value over £5 a year, aged over 30
-

Victory for Hackney school cleaners!

A Unite member

Unite members employed by the outsourcing company OCS working in Hackney schools have won a fantastic victory. The cleaners had voted, by 100%, to take strike action which was due to begin with five days across six schools.

The dispute was in response to an attempt by the employer to move the workers from year-round contracts to 39-week contracts. The impact would have been to push the workers further into poverty through the loss of 13-weeks' pay.

The company had also refused to pay the updated London Living Wage (LLW) from November 2017.

The campaign won huge support - new members joined specifically to take part in the strike. Support from the teachers' unions was also key - with at least one head teacher confirming that scabs would not be allowed in the school to cover the work of strikers and that the school may even close during the strike days.

Hackney councillors were approached directly, but none offered direct support.

The industry norm has become to move to term-time-only contracts - as with many teaching assistants. However, Unite repeatedly made the point that these workers are on £9.75 an hour, often working early morning and evening shifts.

Nobody wants dirty schools - the workers do a vital job. So why shouldn't they be paid on an all-year-round basis?

If the hourly wage was higher, maybe all-year contracts would not be necessary - but the cold hard reality is that in this case, the union was fighting pay cuts aimed at workers on £9.75 an hour, in London. It is relevant that average earnings in Hackney are over £16 an hour.

In the lead up to the strike, OCS announced that they were pulling out of the contract and that the workers would transfer to Kier. Kier then began to engage with Unite, requesting that the strike was called off so that talks could take place.

Unite, correctly, refused - making clear that the action would only be called off when an acceptable offer was made.

Finally, days before strike action, the employers offered the new LLW of £10.20 to be paid from February 2018 and all staff on year-round contracts to remain on them.

This is a significant win - unions have found it hard to win preservation of year-round contracts. The pay increase also represents a win for these low-paid staff. Unite will now be taking the campaign beyond the six schools that were involved in the strike - but is also prepared for action should Kier not abide by the agreement.

Unite will also be using this as yet another argument against outsourcing. Kier management claimed that by paying the LLW, their profits would be hit. Their statement alone should sign the death warrant for privatisation.

Local government workers' reps reject 2% pay offer

Glenn Kelly, Socialist Party industrial organiser

The fight for coordinated strike action to win fair pay for public sector workers took a step closer on 23 January when the elected Unison national committee for local government workers voted to recommend rejection of the 2% pay offer to its 600,000 members.

2% represents yet another pay cut with inflation running at 3.9%, and this comes on top of years of little or no pay rises. Local government pay has fallen by 21% in real terms since 2010.

This vote comes on top of the recent Unite the Union national local government committee decision to call for its members to reject the deal as well.

If the leadership were now to campaign vigorously for a rejection of the deal there is the real prospect of local government unions Unison and Unite joining the civil servants union PCS in the fight over pay this year.

However we should be under no illusions that there are those in Unison who will do all they can to undermine the vote. In the weeks leading up to the meeting the unelected national officer for local government toured the country trying to persuade regions to accept the deal.

Even at the meeting the national elected reps had to force a vote on the right to even debate the offer before a vote was taken on whether to accept or reject it. Despite the vote there is even talk now that the recommendation to reject won't even be put on the paperwork going out to members.

The reality is that winning a vote to reject the offer will have to be by a campaign waged locally and regionally by the branches and activists.

That campaign must start now, Unison members and branches should be approached to link up with Unite and the PCS in the pay protests called for 31 January.

University workers' walkout for decent pensions

Sam Morecroft, Sheffield UCU anti-casualisation officer (personal capacity)

University and College Union (UCU) members in 61 universities will be taking up to 14 days of strike action in February and March if plans to completely scrap the defined benefit element of our pensions aren't dropped.

We have a strong mandate for industrial action, with 88% of members voting in the ballot saying yes to strike action, on a turnout of 58%.

That's the largest turnout UCU has ever recorded in a national ballot, and it's a testament to the hard work of branch activists at local level, to secure what we needed to meet the thresholds introduced by the draconian Trade Union Act.

The turnout also represents the anger and disbelief at the scale of the attack on our pensions. Scrapping defined benefit will mean the average lecturer will be around £200,000 worse off in retirement. Most university workers will lose 50% or more of their pension.

Despite the clear rejection of the proposals that our ballot represents, the employers' association Universities UK (UUK) has refused to budge from its hardline position, or even to consider alternative solutions. The pensions regulator has said that our pension fund is in deficit, and UUK says this means there is no other option.

But analysis commissioned by UCU shows the pension fund is in surplus and the employers refuse point blank to consider increasing their contributions!

Because of the need to meet the turnout threshold, we disaggregated our ballot by branch. This was perhaps a mistake as we easily met the turnout nationally but at seven universities we just missed out despite big votes for action - for example at the University of Swansea the branch missed the 50% threshold by just two votes. Those branches are being reballoted however, so that they can join the strikes.

This attack is so huge that we have no other choice but to take sustained action to push back the employers and we are building for this action right now.

The employers are already split on this issue, but so far their representatives UUK have not backed down. If there is no change in their position, we will take 14 days of escalating strike action, with the first two day strike likely to begin on 22 February. This will be the fight of our lives, and we ask for the full support of students and the labour movement.

UCU members in further education are also balloting at some colleges after just a 1% pay offer from employers.

Merseyrail protest

A demonstration called by the transport union RMT took place outside Liverpool Town Hall ahead of a meeting of Merseyrail stakeholders on 25 January to show the incredible public support in favour of keeping the guards on Merseyrail trains.

The meeting was attended by the stakeholders, which include Liverpool councillors and Merseyrail executives, who were greeted by over 50 demonstrators and chants of 'keep the guards on the trains' and 'say no to DOO' (driver-only operation).

Abellio, one of the private companies involved with Merseyrail, recently lost a similar dispute and conceded to having guards on trains on the Scotrail franchise and the Greater Anglia franchise.

Despite a survey conducted by the RMT showing that 78% of passengers, 84% of female passengers and 85% of over 55s feel more comfortable with guards on the train, Merseyrail still hope to remove the guards.

The scheme to get rid of the guards is no more than an attempt to increase profits at the cost of jobs and passenger safety, which the public can easily see through.

The cutting of the guards comes after a year that saw Merseyrail make a profit in excess of £12 million and a quarter of passengers' fares end up in the pockets of privateers Serco and Abellio.

The Socialist Party fully supports keeping the guards on trains to save jobs and increase passenger safety, as well as the nationalisation of the railways to prevent fares being used to line the pockets of bosses instead of improving services.

Mike Long, Liverpool Socialist Party

Supermarket's slash jobs - union fightback needed

Scott Jones, Usdaw East London branch vice-chair (personal capacity)

Two of so-called 'Big Four' supermarkets - Tesco and Sainsbury's - have announced job losses running into the thousands. This comes after job losses in Tesco at head office and call centres and attacks on terms and conditions across retail in recent years.

The response of shop workers' union Usdaw in both cases is "to minimise redundancies". But redundancies should be opposed outright, not accepted without a fight.

Usdaw should demand the supermarkets open the books to prove the financial need for this shake-up. Tesco promises 'new' jobs are being created but there should be a guarantee that nobody loses their job and the new roles should mean no loss of pay or worse terms and conditions.

Usdaw presidential candidate Amy Murphy says: "This a dreadful time for our members in Tesco and Sainsbury's who are facing redundancy and the uncertainty that it brings and I am doing whatever I can to help. Solidarity to Tesco and Sainsbury's workers."

[Vote for Amy Murphy to give Usdaw a socialist, fighting president.](#) Ballot ends 9 February.

Cammell Lairds strikers demand improved pay and conditions

Hugh Caffrey

Hundreds of Birkenhead-based shipbuilding workers employed at Cammell Lairds and organised in the GMB and Unite unions are in dispute over pay.

On the first day of strike action, 26 January, Socialist Party members visited the picket line and we heard some horror stories about this employer which appears determined to recreate the notorious conditions on the Mersey docks from a century ago.

On a site where the employer says 1,200 people work: showers removed and not replaced, no canteen, no hot water in the toilets, 15 of 16 toilets in one block without any seats, holes in shed roofs big enough for not just rain but also hail and snow to come through onto workers, a roof leaking water onto high voltage cables 'fixed' by putting a tarpaulin over the cables - these and more examples of rotten conditions were told to us by strikers.

Workers want minor improvements to pay which would improve terms and conditions such as pensions, sick pay and death-in-service pay.

After seven or eight months of 'negotiation' with no acceptable offer being made, this week some token 'changes' were offered at the start, clearly to undermine strike action.

This has had no effect on today's action, and workers understand why the employer seems so insistent on a five-year deal and is contradicting the unions at every stage.

Chief executive officer John Syvret apparently sees himself as a rags-to-riches success story and a master of public relations. That's not how his statements in the local media have come across. In fact he looked

surprised when his visit to the picket line failed to make a positive impression - pulling up in his Range Rover, he went straight to the front of the queue at the butty van and offered to buy everyone teas and coffees.

The union had already done that, so his offer was politely declined. As I was going, he'd returned, seemingly to repeat the exercise! Bizarre behaviour from the former barrow-boy, who as someone said, "could at least have offered to buy us all a bacon butty!"

Cammell Lairds isn't short of a quid or two. A Unite member told me that according to Companies House records, in round figures there was £20 million in the bank in 2016, when £4.5 million in dividends were paid out to a handful of shareholders, most of whom are company directors. In that year the company made £1.8 million profit, though it had made up to £8 million profit in previous years.

The cost of things like a marginally less-stingy sick pay policy pales by comparison. It seems there's an underlying agenda of undermining the unions, of putting profits before people, and pushing towards the casualisation of the workforce.

Strike action continues on Monday 29th and will resume in February if the dispute isn't resolved. The wider trade union and labour movement should visit the pickets which are all day from 7am, just off New Chester Road roundabout in Birkenhead, opposite the Rock retail park (use the postcode CH41 9BP to navigate).

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Labour civil war re-erupts over Haringey regeneration project

Hannah Sell, Socialist Party deputy general secretary

The abolition of 'Clause IV Part IV' - the socialist clause in the Labour Party's constitution introduced in the aftermath of the Russian revolution - was carried out by Tony Blair in 1995.

It symbolised his successful transformation of Labour into a pro-capitalist party that, as his partner in crime Peter Mandelson put it, was "intensely relaxed about people getting filthy rich".

In last year's general election Labour put forward a programme which was a radical break from the relentless pro-business policies of the Blair era. As a result Labour's vote increased by a massive 3.5 million.

However, when asked on the Andrew Marr show if his next step would be to reinstate the socialist 'Clause IV Part IV', Jeremy Corbyn brushed the question aside, saying it is 'what we do that matters'.

Of course, that is true. If a Corbyn-led government implements socialist policies no-one will care what is written on the back of Labour membership cards.

And in the same interview he repeated and expanded on popular policies from the election manifesto including council house building and housing the homeless.

Nonetheless, Corbyn's hesitation to change the wording of this symbolic clause is worrying, because it is absolutely clear that Labour is not yet a socialist party in constitution or more importantly deeds.

On the contrary, it remains two parties in one: an anti-austerity party in formation around Jeremy Corbyn, and a pro-capitalist Blairite party, which is fighting tooth and nail - with the full backing of the capitalist media - to prevent Labour moving to the left.

Haringey

Every attempt by the Labour Party membership to exert democratic control over MPs and councillors is met with howls of outrage by the capitalist class.

For example, Haringey 'Labour' council has been carrying out a programme of brutal cuts and privatisation. Its latest outrage is the Haringey Development Vehicle (HDV) - a £2 billion privatisation of social housing, which would lead to the demolition and 'regeneration' of housing estates.

This plan has been opposed by the vast majority of Labour Party members, by the local Labour Party general committee meetings, and by a Labour Party conference resolution.

When Haringey Labour members successfully deselected a majority of pro-HDV councillors, instead choosing candidates whose stated views on the issue reflected those of the local Labour Party and community, the Labour council leader was outraged - and pledged to continue with HDV by signing a 20-year contract with the developers.

The Labour Party's national executive committee (NEC) intervened in an excessively moderate way, only 'urging' the council to 'pause' the plans for HDV! In response it seems the council leader has now resigned (see below).

Of course, the likes of the Evening Standard, edited by George Osborne, have shrieked about 'hard left officials' organising a 'radical takeover by the back door'.

What else could be expected from the architect of five years of austerity who praised Labour councils for being 'responsible' implementers of his savage policies 'unlike the Militant in the 1980s'? Now he and his ilk are terrified that Labour councils may rebel against their designated role as privatisers and axe-wielders.

Unfortunately, the majority of them are doing the opposite - vociferously campaigning for their right to continue to do the Tories' bidding! Following the Labour NEC decision on Haringey, 68 of the 123 Labour council leaders signed a joint letter, published in the Sunday Times, refuting the right of the Labour NEC to intervene in Haringey and describing the right-wing council leader as 'inspirational'.

The same arguments were repeated in an article by arch-Blairite Alistair Campbell, in the Financial Times, which demands that no Labour MPs or councillors should face deselection, and fulminates that "never before has the NEC told an elected council what it can and cannot do".

Nonsense! When the right wing was fighting to establish a stranglehold on Labour in the 1980s, councillors from Liverpool and Lambeth were not 'urged' to 'pause' their policies - they were expelled from the Labour Party! And their supposed crime - standing up to the Tories and, in the case of Liverpool, where Militant played a leading role, building over 5,000 council houses, plus council-built and run schools, colleges, nurseries and leisure centres.

More recently the handful of Labour councillors who refused to implement cuts have been summarily expelled from the party.

This is the real issue. In whose interests are councillors acting? Alistair Campbell makes all too clear what role he thinks Labour should play when he criticises Jeremy Corbyn for describing the collapse of Carillion as a "watershed moment" and says it is not honest to suggest that "all private sector outsourcing should be bought back in-house".

Campbell and his ilk want a continuation of the endless privatisation policies implemented by Tories and New Labour over 30 years.

Unfortunately, it is clear that most Labour council candidates in the elections this May will be wholehearted supporters of the pro-austerity Blairites. In those areas the best way to strengthen Corbyn's anti-austerity wing of the Labour Party will be by standing anti-austerity candidates against the Blairite cutters, putting a programme for opposition to all cuts and privatisation of local services.

The hundreds of thousands who joined the Labour Party in support of Jeremy Corbyn did so because they want to see something fundamentally different to Blairism.

Democratise Labour

It is urgent that Labour is democratised - including mandatory reselection of MPs, readmittance of expelled socialists, restoration of trade union rights and the adoption of a democratic federal structure. These measures would allow the members to determine who represents Labour at local and national level.

It is a serious mistake by Momentum's leadership to continue to insist they do not support mandatory reselection, and to repeat endlessly that there is an unprecedented degree of unity in the Labour Party despite all the evidence to the contrary.

These recent events have shown beyond doubt that the pro-capitalist wing of the Labour Party has been humming 'oh Jeremy Corbyn' while biding their time and waiting for an opportunity to sabotage any attempt by Corbyn to implement policies that might threaten the gargantuan profits of big business.

All attempts to pacify them via compromise and flattery need to cease immediately and a campaign to defeat them be launched.

The hysteria in the right-wing press at the Labour Party NEC's mild criticism of a Blairite council leader gives the tiniest glimpse of the avalanche of invective and the blatant sabotage that the capitalist class would attempt against a Jeremy Corbyn-led government trying to implement policies in the interests of the working and middle class.

No number of speeches by John McDonnell to Davos asking the global elite to pay more tax can prevent this.

What is required is mobilising a mass popular movement in support of those policies, linked to the need for the socialist transformation of society - taking the major banks and corporations into democratic public ownership - in order to really be able to build a society for the many not the few.

It is absolutely clear that, if you are preparing for a battle with the capitalist class, it does not make sense to have the majority of your MPs and councillors on their side! A campaign to democratise the Labour Party is essential to oppose local council cuts, but also to prepare for the future bigger battles to come.

Haringey: Housing campaigners celebrate!

Arch-Blairite Haringey council leader Clare Kober says she'll step down at the next election and will leave the final decision on the HDV privatisation project to the next council leader.

A big protest will take place at an emergency council meeting on 7 February where a vote will be taken on the scheme.

All anti-HDV Labour councillors must vote against the HDV at this meeting to kill it off.

- Assemble at 6pm at Duckett's Common (near Turnpike Lane station), Haringey, London, for a 6:30pm start, then march to the civic centre.

See also ['Labour's NEC intervenes in Haringey project - but the battle isn't over'](#)

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Tory infighting escalates - workers' action can oust them

Judy Beishon, Socialist Party executive committee

How much longer will Theresa May be prime minister?

Media reports suggest that around 40 Tory MPs have submitted letters calling for a no-confidence vote in her. If that reaches 48, the vote would be triggered and could lead to a leadership contest.

Tory infighting has escalated publicly at the highest levels. Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson should be sacked, said former Tory minister Anna Soubry, because of "longstanding incompetence and disloyalty." It's the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Philip Hammond, who should be sacked for disloyalty, declared Tory MP Nadine Dorries.

Insults are hurled back and forth across the party's main political divide, between right-wing Brexiters and pro-capitalist Remainers. After Remainers were accused of being "traitors," energy minister Claire Perry on WhatsApp called the accusers the "swivel-eyed few."

Incredibly, in the space of just a week, May felt compelled to counter the "disloyalty" of both Hammond and Johnson - the holders of the second and third so-called Great Offices of State.

Johnson had made public his self-interested intention to demand more funds for the NHS in a cabinet meeting. Hammond, echoing the interests of big business in a speech at Davos, had dared to hope that the changes negotiated in leaving the EU will be only "very modest."

A large part of the venom directed at May comes from the wing of diehard anti-EU Tories who fear she will cave in to a 'soft' Brexit. Others attack her for being "dull" or doing nothing on the crises in the NHS, housing and education, full of foreboding that she won't be able to counter the potential anti-austerity draw of Jeremy Corbyn.

Fear of their party turmoil leading to the calling of a general election and a Corbyn victory is clearly a major factor counting against immediate moves to remove May.

Also, while May cannot unite the virulently hostile, opposing wings of her party, there is no contender for her position who could do so either. Worse still for the Tories and Britain's capitalists is that opening up a contest could unleash even greater unrestrained animosity which could tear the party apart. For big business, that scenario would take its present Brexit-related uncertainty to new heights.

But cold calculation might not win out. Reactions to events, criticisms and decisions - including, of course, on Brexit - could at any time spin out of the control of the party's leaders and throw the whole party edifice into a much deeper crisis, with the removal of May and a general election among the consequences.

The Tories' plight - once the most successful capitalist party in Europe - reflects the lack of direction and confidence in the future of the capitalist class which the party represents.

Following May's poorly attended speech at Davos, the New York Times wrote scornfully: "Britain's stature on the world stage has diminished, and its economy has sagged. The former colonial empire has been reduced to a lesser actor."

The millions in the trade union movement won't mourn the ruling class's loss of profits and prestige, but must take confidence from the dire, weak state of the Tories.

Building a mass, active anti-austerity movement and fighting for a socialist Brexit can remove May's whole cabal from power. It would lay the basis for a government in the interests of the majority in Britain and solidarity with the working class in Europe and beyond.

Failing academy chain strips school assets - end academisation!

Adam Abdullah, school student

In businesses when cuts are made, they sell off their facilities and equipment in the interest of maintaining profits. Now that's what's happening with our schools.

In December police confirmed they were looking into "asset stripping" by the Wakefield City Academies Trust which 21 schools are part of.

Wakefield had announced it had to get the Department for Education (DfE) to find new 'sponsors' for the 21 academies, as the "trust does not have the capacity to facilitate the rapid improvement our academies need." Turns out that in October the trust had transferred millions from school accounts to private accounts.

There was, in fact, a leaked DfE document that showed "extreme concern" at how much the trust was paying its chief executive for 15 weeks of work - £82,000. Meanwhile it was paying £440,000 into an IT firm run by the interim chief executive. All while the trust had a £16 million budget deficit!

The real question is: should we be surprised?

It's like the Tories were a classroom teacher and instructed the greediest child to distribute all the ice cream to their classmates equally. Obviously that child is going to take a huge chunk for themselves and get their clothes dirty. They knew that.

Now, since the trust has announced it will begin to divest itself of these schools, it is up to the DfE to find new 'sponsors' to take over.

But how will profit-hungry academy chains make money from schools in such a financial mess? They will lie and lie, say that they care about the students, while attacking teachers and cutting resources.

Even Tory MP Robert Halfon has raised the issue in parliament, showing there is yet another crisis of the Tories' own making which could divide May's weak minority government.

The Socialist Party fights to end academisation, privatisation and 'PFI'. Our schools should be for our children to flourish in. They need to be brought back into public ownership under democratic control.

Young people are not for capitalists to profit from. Nor should the working class be expected to pay off the debts of the bosses like after the 2007-08 financial crash.

Capitalists fear for their system at Davos

Stephanie Hammond

Representatives of the world's ruling class again gathered for the annual meeting of the World Economic Forum at the Davos mountain resort in Switzerland.

Significantly, the official theme was "creating a shared future in a fractured world" - a departure from the shameless openness about capitalist theft usually espoused by the conference.

A coterie of world leaders gave talks at the event including Donald Trump and Theresa May.

Trump, the least popular president in American history, hypocritically called for "peace" - while his reckless actions exacerbate conflict in the Middle East and risk war with North Korea. May was snubbed and prattled blandly about artificial intelligence to a nearly empty room.

The backdrop to the meeting is that in 2017 a billionaire was created every two days on average - the highest growth in the 31 years Forbes magazine has listed it.

Meanwhile, international relations between the great powers are strained. Poverty, hunger, war and want are at the door of practically every country, and inequality is at its highest point in history.

So it was that left-wing professor Guy Standing was able to speak at the conference of the dangers of "rentier capitalism," the obstacles faced by the "precarariat," and the "plunder of the commons."

And Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell was a panellist for a session about the free market. He warned attendees that tax avoidance on an "industrial" scale had alienated ordinary people who feel the system is a "con trick" and "rigged."

This couldn't be more accurate. But many of the academics, chief executives and world leaders in attendance cannot see the wood for the trees.

Short-sighted

Even the less short-sighted capitalists who understand that growing anger about inequality fundamentally threatens their wealth are dumbfounded about how to restore faith in the system. They are completely integrated within it - and the interests of their class are directly opposed to ours.

Socialists welcome any progressive reforms which improve the lives of ordinary people. But with capitalism in crisis and the super-rich unwilling to pay for it, any serious programme of reforms will have to tackle the capitalist system itself.

So the fight for every possible improvement must be linked to the fight to send the entire system to the scrapheap, replacing it with socialism. The Davos meeting should be confined to nothing more than a historical curiosity.

Majority of kids poor in some areas

In parts of London and Greater Manchester you are now more likely to grow up poor than not.

The east London borough of Tower Hamlets has a 53% child poverty rate. In the Coldhurst ward of Oldham it's 62%, according to the End Child Poverty charity coalition.

More than two in five kids live in poverty in 25 parliamentary constituencies. Most are in the three largest urban areas: London, Birmingham and Greater Manchester - but there are patches across Britain.

It's obvious why. Cuts to wages and benefits while living costs rise.

Where does the money from those cuts and price hikes go? Here's a clue: last year Britain contained more billionaires than at any time in history. 134 billionaires, worth over £301 billion, according to the Sunday Times Rich List.

Fat cat vice chancellors schooled by Brum students

Sam Witts, Birmingham Socialist Students

Students at the University of Birmingham lambasted their fat cat vice chancellor (VC) David Eastwood during his 'Question Time' event on 25 January. The room was filled with students rightfully angered by Eastwood's role at the university.

Since Dame Breakwell was shamed into resignation at the University of Bath, Eastwood is now the highest paid VC in the country with an eye-watering salary of £436,000 - almost double the average pay for VC's

nationally, that comes with a university-funded mansion and chauffeur-driven Jaguar.

During his time, Eastwood has made it his personal mission to attack workers' wages, pensions and conditions. Its regime has placed over 70% of teaching staff on casualised zero-hour contracts, and has cut the pay of many support staff by up to £1,800 because he refuses to keep their wages at least in line with inflation, let alone offer the living wage universally.

Not only this, Eastwood also receives £90,000 a year for chairing the universities pension scheme and has attacked the pensions of university staff nationally, which forced UCU lecturer's union to ballot successfully for strike action.

It is no wonder then that students are rightfully disgraced by their VC and bombarded him with criticism. Eastwood was left squirming in a tirade of criticism on an assortment of issues. This included a call from Socialist Students for his resignation after we exposed conflicts with his business interests.

Socialist Students and the campus trade unions have conducted several demonstrations on these matters and distributed material before the event detailing some of the VC's worst offences.

Despite attempts from university security to prevent our completely legitimate and legal activity, almost every student in the room had a copy which ensured there was no let-off for Eastwood.

Confident London Socialist Party conference discusses key issues

Keisha Taylor, North London Socialist Party

The London Socialist Party conference on 28 January was the scene of confident discussion, reports of excellent achievements across the city and focused plans for our next steps.

A key issue is the obscene cost of housing - while working class people live in extortionate, overcrowded and unsafe accommodation (with Grenfell a tragic example of this) and are increasingly pushed out of London, a huge number of luxury apartments sit empty.

The battleground of the local council elections in May will be hugely important to fight for issues such as an end to social cleansing and for needs-based, no-cuts budgets.

Building the Socialist Party and participation of new members is a priority - it is critical to harness the enthusiasm of new members, support their political development and ensure we can engage with as many issues as possible. The Young Socialists and Socialist Students commission, taking place at the same time as one on building in the trade unions, focused on ways to translate the huge enthusiasm for socialist ideas into getting active in party activities.

It was great to meet members from around London and hear about actions going on in other branches. It was really inspiring to be reminded that we can make a concrete difference to struggles being fought. As someone fairly new to the party, I have much to learn, but after this event, I'm even more inspired to do more reading and get even more involved.

£900 was taken between the fighting fund appeal, and sales of food, drink, and books which shows the determination of London members to build the party.

Your newspaper fights with you: help fund it with May Day greetings

James Ivens, May Day greetings campaign organiser

The Socialist is the newspaper that stands with you in your fight. May Day greetings help fund it. Help us get them in.

The Tories are lifeless but still standing, like a tree struck by lightning. They could go on standing until pushed down.

And that will be only the start of the struggle with big business and the billionaires. Their tentacles are deep in parts of Labour still.

So to win we need ideas, strategy and solidarity. That's what the Socialist does.

Last year you set a standard: the most money pledged to the paper in over a decade. In fact, financial support for the Socialist on International Workers' Day has more than tripled since 2006. But there is much still to do.

At work, ask your colleagues about sending a group greeting to the Socialist. We have a sign-up sheet you can use.

In your union, propose a motion to send greetings if you can. We have a model motion and special leaflet.

At your school or university, talk to other students about sending a greeting. We will place a student greeting for a whip-round.

In your community campaigns, too, you can move to send greetings or collect names and donations from supporters.

If you're a member of the Socialist Party, your region will have a target to beat. Some trade union groups have targets too. Talk to your organisers about what groups you think might be willing to send greetings, and how you can help.

Fifty years ago, a heroic general strike put the working class in command of events in France in the month of May. Capitalism all but fell.

The Socialist believes coordinated workers' action has that same power today. Help us make it happen.

- Do you want resources? Do you have suggestions? Can we help you get those greetings in? Email jamesivens@socialistparty.org.uk
- You can see prices and send greetings at socialistparty.org.uk/mayday

Bristol anti-cuts campaigners debate alternatives to the cuts

Matthew Carey, Bristol and District Anti-Cuts Alliance organising secretary

Bristol and District Anti-Cuts Alliance (Badaca) hosted a public debate at Unite the Union's Bristol office on 24 January.

The panel was made up of former Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition anti-cuts mayoral candidate Tom Baldwin for Badaca, Esther Giles of Bristol Momentum, leader of the Green Party group on Bristol council Eleanor Combley, Keith Evans from Unite Bristol retired members' branch and single mum and community activist Kerry Bailes.

Also invited was Bristol's elected Labour mayor, Marvin Rees, but he chose not to attend.

The mayor led a protest march of 8,000 against austerity in Bristol last year which was supported by Badaca. He also travelled to Westminster to call for more funding from central government. But Rees was snubbed by Tory ministers who failed to turn up to their presentation.

Instead of standing up to government, Marvin Rees seemed to give up the fight. Huge proposed cuts were announced, which sparked big campaigns in Bristol to save the threatened services.

There have been some major victories including by housing campaign Acorn which stopped cuts to the council tax reduction scheme and others which saved 16 lollipop people, stopped plans to completely defund parks and green spaces and forced a delay in 17 library closures while a review is carried out.

Since September local groups have also been debating ways that we can find alternatives to the council passing on Tory austerity and ways of fighting back.

Badaca has also been collecting signatures on a petition calling for Rees to use reserves and borrowing to set a no-cuts budget and we have also written an open letter to Jeremy Corbyn calling on him to unite Labour councils in a proper fightback against the Tories.

With the weak and wobbly Tories barely clinging to power, it is time for Jeremy Corbyn's Labour Party to take a stand against austerity in local government.

Stop the war on the Kurds

For mass resistance!

Last month the Turkish state began a fresh military assault on Kurdish areas in Syria. Kurds and supporters demonstrated against the war in London on 27 January.

Socialist Party member Paula Mitchell and National Shop Stewards Network chair Rob Williams spoke at the rally. As the Socialist Party leaflet explained:

The territories now under Kurdish control are populated by Arabs and Turkmen as well as Kurds. It is vital to appeal to the mass of the population to organise together.

Self-determination

By championing the rights of self-determination, a movement could be built that would withstand the Turkish onslaught and reach out to workers and the poor across the whole region.

It is also important to make an appeal to working class people in Turkey. In such a terrible situation this might seem remote.

But such an appeal, with a programme to defend democratic rights, for jobs and homes, for the region's vast resources to be publicly owned and controlled democratically for the benefit of all, could break through the fear and the hate.

Workers and the poor in Turkey have nothing to gain from the Kurds' continued oppression, which only strengthens the government and bosses that also exploit and oppress them.

Opinion: solidarity with Kurds, not imperialist support

Adam Abdul

Thousands of Kurdish people marched in London from the BBC in Portland Place all the way to Downing Street. This was to show discontent with coverage by the BBC's Turkey correspondent Mark Lowen of the offensive on Afrin, and to show the atrocities committed by the Turkish state.

Representatives of the 'Solidarity with the People of Turkey' campaign, trade unions such as the PCS, RMT and National Education Union, the Socialist Party, and many more groups showed their solidarity with the Kurdish community.

Turkey's government has been backing the Free Syrian Army and jihadists to attack Kurdish areas in Syria in an attempt to take out its enemies since Kurdish fighters advanced into new areas in the fight against Isis.

The Turkish state wants to see dog eat dog. Sadly, we remember how the Turkish army crossed its own borders and attacked the Kurds in Jarablus while they were attacking Isis.

We show our solidarity with the Kurds. But we disagree with their leaders' acceptance of assistance from imperialism. So many times the Kurds have been betrayed by the imperialist powers. All many Kurdish leaders see is "the enemy of my enemy is my friend."

However, to reiterate, we should show solidarity with the Kurds' struggle, setting up a secular democracy in Syria and Rojava with greater freedoms and equalities for citizens.

Boris Johnson outrageously remarked that "Turkey has the right to protect its borders" on Twitter in reference to the Afrin operation. This is an attempt to protect British arms sales to Turkey, a fellow Nato member.

Demonstrators called on Corbyn, the Labour Party and the "international community" to speak out about this.

Sudan: Free Mohamed Satti

CWI supporter Mohamed Diaeldin Mohamed Satti, 21, known as "Hamudi", is among the protesters who have been arrested by the Sudanese state last week, as part of the brutal response of Al Bashir's regime to the wave of protests against skyrocketing prices and austerity. Hamudi was arrested last Wednesday, as he participated in a peaceful march in central Khartoum.

Reportedly more than 400 political activists and protesters are currently detained, including nine members of the political bureau of the Sudanese Communist Party, leading members of the National Umma Party, and long-standing female activist Ilham Malik Salman Ahmed. This hysterical campaign of mass arrests has extended to include Sudanese and foreign journalists who were reporting about the protests, and highlights the regime's fear that any form of even mild criticism of its policies could be the spark that lights the fuse of a mass revolt.

According to protesters who have been released, the security services are forcing the detainees to sign a document pledging to stop engaging in any demonstrations or political activities in the future. Those who have refused to sign, like Hamudi, have been kept inside.

The prisoners are refused visits by their families, have had their heads shaved and are being physically mistreated.

The CWI demands the immediate release of Mohamed Satti "Hamudi" along with all the other political prisoners.

- Please send solidarity photos and messages of support for Hamudi and the other detainees to cwi@worldsoc.co.uk.
 - There will be a protest in London outside the Sudanese embassy on Thursday 25th January at 2pm. The address is: 3 Cleveland Row, St. James's, London SW1A 1DD.
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This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 22 January 2018 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

Vienna: 50,000 march against racism and austerity

Christian Bunke, Sozialistische Linkspartei (Socialist Left Party - CWI Austria)

The crammed-full U6 tube line in Vienna resembled Saturday shopping a couple of weeks before Christmas. But it was 13 January and shopping was the last thing on most people's minds.

They came in their tens of thousands to protest against the new far-right coalition government formed by the conservative Austrian People's Party (ÖVP) and the far-right Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ).

This government has only been in power for a few weeks but it has already managed to horrify an increasing number of people with its fully fledged austerity combined with state-sponsored racism and authoritarianism.

Attacks

Some of the measures planned by government leaders include introducing a 12-hour working day, attacking abortion rights, cuts to education and the public sector, attacks on unemployment benefits, speeding up privatisation, attacking health and safety laws, sweeping new repressive rights for the police, and measures aimed at making life more difficult for migrants and asylum seekers. The list is seemingly endless.

The main mobilising slogan used for the 13 January demonstration was "against racism and austerity." An estimate of over 50,000 people participating is no exaggeration.

Many voted for this government because they were sick of how society is run for the benefit of the corrupt elite. They were taken in by promises made by ÖVP and FPÖ leaders that they would do things differently to the previous Social Democrat-ÖVP coalition.

In some ways, this also represents both the desire and the potential for a new workers' party. No such alternative was on offer during the elections...

- Read the full story at socialistworld.net: ['Tens of thousands march in Vienna against racism and austerity'](http://socialistworld.net/articles/26827)

<http://www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/26827>