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NHS - build the fightback

Trade unions and Corbyn's Labour must throw their weight into building a mass movement

Sarah Wrack

We must make 3 February a turning point. Tens of thousands in London and dozens or hundreds on each of [more than 50 other events around the country](#) boldly protested in defence of our NHS.

They called for "more staff, more beds and more funds" to deal with the horrific crisis. It's highlighted this winter by queues to get into hospitals, and reports of deaths caused by understaffing and lack of space and resources. This emergency needs emergency action - these emergency protests were a good start.

The streets of central London were packed with marchers of all ages, from all over the country, many attending their first demonstration. There was an enthusiasm about being able to collectively show the frustration that has been bubbling up for many over the last few months.

Marchers expressed huge solidarity with the health workers struggling to cope with this crisis on the front line. Speakers from the trade unions that represent such workers - Unison, the Royal College of Nurses and Unite - gave sometimes rousing speeches reflecting the anger on the demonstration.

They recounted the devastation caused by this crisis, and asserted the general idea that it's possible to fight for better. But there was a lack of clear strategy and commitment to action.

Only Jacqui Berry, an intensive care nurse and Socialist Party member, spoke clearly about what can be done immediately - and the vital role of health workers and their trade unions in the fight to defend the NHS.

Jacqui said: "In a few months' time when NHS workers are served up another insulting pay offer, we will have no choice but to reject it. And we will need to say to our trade union leaders that they will need to prepare and organise and build coordinated industrial action across the NHS.

"And after eight long years of pay restraint, I don't think that this weak minority government will be able to withstand the pressure of picket lines made up of nurses and porters and cleaners with the public behind them."

With the [Capita crisis](#) following hot on the heels of the Carillion collapse, there were correctly many references to the rip-off of privatisation.

Labour's shadow health secretary Jon Ashworth was loudly cheered when he said: "Let me tell you the next Labour government - no more PFI hospitals, no more Carillion outsourcing leaving hospitals unclean affecting patient health and safety.

"And we're putting Virgin Care and organisations like that on notice today - no more privatisation, privatisation comes to an end with a Labour government."

He also repeated Labour's manifesto pledges that a Labour government would scrap the pay cap and bring back the training bursary.

Every reference to Jeremy Corbyn got a similarly enthusiastic response, showing the mass support that can be won by Labour on a bold anti-austerity programme.

But the tone of some speakers leaned too much towards "wait for a Labour government". That could be as far away as 2022 - too long to wait for patients and staff. We need action now.

While many unions, the Trade Union Congress (TUC) and individuals in the leadership of Labour backed the protests, more could have been done by these mass organisations to mobilise their members and use their resources to publicise the events.

If the full power of all workers' organisations was thrown into this movement, we could see millions on the streets - backing up and giving confidence to a programme of industrial action by health workers.

The protests on 3 February showed the potential. To build on this, the Socialist Party calls for:

Build the movement

- An urgent meeting of the TUC, trade unions and Labour Party to set a date for a next national Saturday demonstration bringing together the issues of the NHS crisis, austerity and pay - bring forward the march planned for 12 May
- Coordinate strike ballots and action over pay across different unions
- Get the Tories out! For a programme of mass action to force a general election
- Kick out the Blairites!
- For Corbyn and his supporters to fight for democratisation of the Labour Party to get rid of pro-privatisation, pro-austerity politicians

Save the health service

- Scrap PFI, 'accountable care organisations' and all privatisation schemes, with compensation only on the basis of proven need
- No cuts, closures or job losses in the NHS. Decent pay for all staff.
- No attacks on NHS pensions or working conditions
- Reverse council cuts to social care to relieve the beds crisis
- Nationalise the profiteering drugs companies
- For a comprehensive, high-quality NHS, under democratic control, with care free at the point of use

Jacqui Berry's full speech

I am a nurse. And if you were hoping for stories about what it's like working on the frontline, I'm sorry I can't tell you. I can't tell you because they're not my stories to tell and I can't tell you because there are just far too many stories to tell. But we know that patients are dying on corridors, in trollies. We know that our doctors, our nurses, our midwives, our physios, are working in a system that has set us up to fail.

The crisis in the NHS is the new normal, and it's a crisis that is politically manufactured. Over the last six years we've lost 15,000 beds. While claiming that there's no 'magic money tree,' successive governments have thrown billions and billions at the likes of G4S, at the likes of Carillion, at the likes of Virgin Care - who do nothing more than act as a middle man to transfer funds away from our patients, away from the public, and into the pockets of already-very-rich people, private shareholders.

And all the while we are 100,000 members of staff short in the NHS. After eight years of pay cuts to the value of 14%, it is no surprise that many of us have voted with our feet. Today we have marched more staff, more beds and more funds - these aren't pie in the sky demands, these are the immediate things that we need in order to keep our service functioning and keep our patients safe.

But I don't think these things are compatible with the Tory government. There's no easy way to say this but if we want an NHS, we have to bring them down. So in a few months' time when NHS workers are served up another insulting pay offer, we will have no choice but to reject it.

And we will need to say to our trade union leaders that they will need to prepare and organise and build coordinated industrial action across the NHS. And after eight long years of pay restraint, I don't think that this weak minority government will be able to withstand the pressure of picket lines made up of nurses and porters and cleaners with the public behind them.

We will bring down this government. And we will replace them with a government that we demand ends cuts, reverses the scourge of privatisation, pays NHS staff what we are owed and builds a fully funded publicly owned and provided national health and social care service.

Today we have marched together, tomorrow we will probably have to strike together. This government is at war with public services - go home go back to your communities, your workplaces, your trade union branches and prepare for battle.

- Watch the speech [here](#).
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NHS day of action: all around the country

Exeter

The rally attracted a crowd of over 300 from all areas - Torbay, Barnstaple, Okehampton and Honiton. The Socialist Party sold 40 copies of the Socialist and over 100 badges - at times queues formed to sign our petition.

The Blairite local MP, Ben Bradshaw, did not turn up - to no one's surprise, given his recent support for 'accountable care organisation' - the next step in privatisation.

Sean Brogan, Exeter Socialist Party

Warrington

Despite cold and wet conditions, over 200 people made the effort outside Warrington Hospital.

Protest organiser Angela Walsh of the local Momentum group said: "We want a properly funded, publicly owned health service, free at the point of use for all. It was fantastic to see so many people, from young kids to nans and grandads, come down here and show their support for the NHS."

We had queues of people waiting to sign the Socialist Party petition and vent their anger over the crisis. No one believes Tory lies about investment or staffing levels.

Ste Armstrong, Warrington and St Helens Socialist Party

Southampton

About 200 people came to the rally in Southampton despite the very wet conditions. Queues formed to sign our petition. We sold 25 copies of the Socialist.

There was a mood for action. People we spoke to could clearly see the dire state of the health service was a precursor to the Tories handing over more services to the private sector so their friends could line their pockets at our expense.

One of the speakers at the event was the Labour councillor Sarah Bogle. It was difficult to equate her call to save the NHS with her inability to do anything but implement Tory cuts in the council chamber. We need a mass movement to end all cuts and there can be no exceptions.

Jane Ward, Southampton Socialist Party

Leicester

Around 150 people from across Leicestershire gathered, defying the chilling wind and icy rain.

Outside the Leicester Royal Infirmary, jubilant speakers from the successful Save Glenfield Children's Heart Centre campaign made it clear it is only through the collective action of the working class that we can save the NHS.

Mike Barker, Leicester East Socialist Party

Leeds

Despite yet another dismal winter drizzle, around 150 people joined the protest outside the Leeds General Infirmary.

Socialist Party and Socialist Students members had run stalls over the last few weeks to build for the demo, and some local branches of the Labour Party had mobilised their membership, as well as contingents from the RCN and GMB unions.

The Socialist Party ran a petition against plans to establish 'special purpose vehicles' in local trusts, privatising non-medical staff. Many people commented they agreed with the slogan "kick out the privatisers" on the front page of the Socialist, with 23 copies sold on the demo.

Iain Dalton, Leeds Socialist Party

Huddersfield

Over 100 residents of Huddersfield attended a demonstration outside Huddersfield Royal Infirmary as part of the coordinated day of action called by Health Campaigns Together and the People's Assembly. We sold 14 copies of the Socialist on the "kick out the privatisers" front page.

Despite the wintry weather spirits were high. A Conservative councillor sent his apologies - and a message saying there is no crisis in the NHS and it isn't at threat of privatisation! The laughs of the protesters showed how much they believed him.

Michaela Bower, Huddersfield Socialist Party

Middlesbrough

Over 100 people assembled outside James Cook Hospital in Middlesbrough, organised in just a couple of weeks by new Labour Party activists.

The rally was addressed by the local Labour MP Andy McDonald and Unite union full-time officials. One of the officials was shouted down with cries of "tax the rich" when he said his solution to the NHS crisis is increasing National Insurance contributions!

The Socialist Party leaflet was warmly received and we sold 15 copies of the Socialist.

Alan Docherty, Teesside Socialist Party

Sheffield

Around 50 attended Sheffield's NHS protest outside the Hallamshire Hospital, to oppose the proposed closure of the minor injuries unit there, and the nearby walk-in centre.

Campaigners from Sheffield Save Our NHS, the Socialist Party and Labour agreed to build for a further demo on 3 March.

Alistair Tice, Yorkshire Socialist Party

York

There were 40 people at the hospital demonstrating against secret plans by the local NHS Trust to establish a private company at York Hospital (see page 11). This was in spite of the driving rain.

The Socialist Party was there too, with our petition, and garnered another 158 signatures. The manager of the hospital cafe invited us in to get even more.

Nigel Smith, York Socialist Party

Cardiff

We braved the rain and held an energetic NHS campaign stall in Canton. The working class of Cardiff responded enthusiastically: we sold out of copies of the Socialist and filled pages of petitions!

The mood is here to organise a mass movement to kick out the privatisers, and to fight for an NHS for the millions, not the millionaires.

João Félix, Cardiff West Socialist Party

Peterborough

Five of us travelled together to London from Peterborough, including two Labour Party members we met in the ticket queue.

Almost everyone we spoke to on the demo commented on the limited publicity and organisation from the trade union tops, and said that the demo could easily have been many times larger.

Quite a few thought the limited union input was because many national officials were looking forward to a Corbyn government, which ironically would be more likely if the unions gave extra priority to protests such as this!

Steve Cawley, Peterborough Socialist Party

Salford

All Virgin trains were cancelled around 6pm. One comment was: "Does Branson know it's all people on them coming back from protesting about him taking money from the NHS?"

Sally Griffiths, Salford Socialist Party

Tragic death exposes criminal understaffing of NHS

By a doctor

After the tragic death of a six-year-old child, Jack Adcock, a doctor and nurse have been removed from their professional registers and given two-year suspended prison sentences for manslaughter.

Fear and fury have engulfed health workers following the court's decision. 'It could have been me,' is the feeling of over-stretched staff everywhere, caring for patients with inadequate resources.

Jack's grieving family suffered a terrible loss. They have rightly demanded explanations and justice. But the criminals - successive government ministers starving the NHS of resources - have walked away from the scene. They are the ones who should be held responsible for the predictable consequences of their policies.

Jack's death exposed many failings at Leicester Royal Infirmary in 2011. Born with a heart condition, he had had successful surgery when younger. The Children's Congenital Heart Centre at nearby Glenfield Hospital was already under threat of closure that year. He was brought to hospital with a chest infection. Several mistakes, including drug administration later that day, resulted in a catastrophic blood pressure fall.

The most senior children's doctor on duty, Hadiza Bawa-Garba, had a previously unblemished record. She had just re-started work after 13 months maternity leave, in a new hospital but with no induction in the hospital procedures. That day was her first back in an acute setting. She was looking after six wards, spanning four floors, undertaking paediatric input to two surgical wards, giving advice to midwives and taking GP calls.

She was covering the Children's Assessment Unit as well as her wards. The colleague normally doing this was on a training day. The senior consultant was teaching in Warwick. Two other junior doctors had started paediatrics less than three weeks earlier.

The hospital's IT system failed so one junior spent the afternoon constantly phoning for test results. Dr Bawa-Garba was effectively doing the work of three doctors throughout the day - and four that afternoon. She had been working non-stop for over 12 hours when Jack died.

There was a shortage of nurses too. Jack's nurse, Isabel Amaro, was qualified in adult nursing, brought to the Children's Assessment Unit through an agency.

An investigation team concluded a single cause for Jack's death could not be identified. 79 actions were undertaken by the hospital as a result of their report.

Dr. Bawa-Garba and nurse Amaro have taken the blame for system failures.

Among many shocking aspects of this tragedy was the use of Dr Bawa-Garba's reflective learning journal as evidence against her. All health workers are expected to learn from mistakes and incidents. If health workers are to be criminalised for honestly trying to learn from these, they will think hard about concealing them, making patient care less safe.

Any health worker who feels staffing levels are unsafe should have the right to demand managers bring in extra staff within an hour. But it mustn't be left to individuals.

And many know of the case of Dr Chris Day, a junior doctor who blew the whistle on unsafe staffing levels of his intensive care unit in 2014 and had his training stopped by Health Education England, effectively blacklisting him since then.

The choice between working understaffed leading to criminal charges and the end of a professional career if someone dies - or blowing the whistle and being unable to find further work - is no choice at all.

All health trade unions should now organise workplace meetings, linking safe working to the need for decent pay to help retain staff and student bursaries to help recruitment. These meetings should build to an urgent national trade union-led demonstration, followed by national industrial action, both within the NHS and by the whole trade union movement, if the NHS remains under-funded to meet patient and staff safety.

York socialists head resistance to NHS outsourcing

Nigel Smith

There has been a consistent campaign in York to resist secret plans by the local NHS trust to establish a limited liability company at York Hospital.

This company intends to manage the cooks, cleaners, porters and maintenance staff. Hospital security has already been outsourced. The Socialist Party in York has led the way in the campaign against it.

We initially met with York Defend Our NHS, to discuss strategy, but moved much more quickly into action than they were able to. We also briefed the trades council, who agreed to release a press release expressing their opposition to any such proposal.

One of our members is a shop steward at the hospital and has been leading the campaign inside it. The mood of the staff is solidly opposed to privatisation and the unions have seen significant recruitment since the campaign started.

Without this campaign the hospital staff would still be largely unaware of these proposals. By working together the three main unions - Unison, Unite and GMB - have been able to prepare a joint statement, which they presented to the hospital board, outlining determined resistance to the proposals and referencing disastrous attempts at privatisation at other trusts.

An online petition organised by York Defend Our NHS has so far received 1,700 signatures. The York Socialist Party branch also has a petition of over 1,000 signatures so far.

We are frequently thanked for our work and feel fully supported by people in York. We have also had to double our order of the Socialist and have sold out each edition. This is a tripling of our usual sales.

We have also sought to enable the local Defend Our NHS group to make a fighting plan with us, and we presented our petition along with theirs at the latest hospital board meeting.

Since then the trust has met with representatives from the unions for the first time to 'own up' to their previously clouded intentions.

We will continue to work with any group that shares our objective. No compromise; no limited liability company or outsourcing at York NHS Trust.

Trump v NHS

Donald Trump has claimed the 3 February march to save the NHS shows public healthcare doesn't work.

The tweeter-in-chief [told Twitter](#): "The Democrats are pushing for Universal HealthCare while thousands of people are marching in the UK because their U system is going broke and not working. Dems want to greatly raise taxes for really bad and non-personal medical care. No thanks!"

But it's the invasion of the US-style private system which is responsible for this mess! The crowds of marchers who picked up the Socialist Party's "kick out the privatisers" placards will attest to this. Profiteers out!

Capita in crisis: bring all outsourcers back in-house

Leo Marsden, Lambeth and South West London Socialist Party

Shares in outsourcing giant Capita have collapsed following the company's profit warning to shareholders. This follows shortly after its competitor Carillion sank into liquidation, and underlines further the fragile state of British capitalism.

Shares fell by more than 47%, resulting in enormous profits for hedge funds who had sold them 'short' - essentially betting on misery for Capita's workers and small business suppliers. Shares in Serco and other outsourcers also fell significantly, reflecting a wider malaise.

Despite the collapse, the company appears to have avoided bankruptcy, with emergency measures to halt dividend payments and issue £700 million in additional shares. Management is also drawing up plans to 'cut costs' - no doubt meaning attacking workers' jobs, pay and conditions.

This may provide bosses temporary respite - at the cost of the workers who make them their money. But it will not solve the problems of a company with over £1 billion of net debt suffering from decades of underinvestment.

Like Carillion, part of Capita's problems stems from austerity - cuts in public budgets mean outsourcing vultures are competing to do more with less. Although the main impact of this corner-cutting is on workers and service users, it shows the short-sightedness of austerity even from the bosses' blinkered point of view.

Meanwhile, the Tories have had to bring forward the end of Stagecoach and Virgin's contract to run the East Coast railway - again. After cutting it from 2023 to 2020 in November, it will now end in months. The government may end up running it directly.

And more problems are looming for the outsourcers. After years of pumping in cheap credit to try to restart the economy, central banks are now increasing borrowing costs. This will only cause more bankruptcies.

Panicked traders have already responded to interest rate hikes and fears of asset bubbles bursting by wiping \$4 trillion off global stocks in a week.

Britain's ruling class is desperately trying to avoid these tremors becoming a generalised economic crisis. Banks and the state scrambled to put together £325 million of support for Carillion's small suppliers. It's a fraction of the firm's liabilities, but reflects the banks' own precarious position and fear of further insolvencies.

The government in turn is trying to reprivatise services rescued from Carillion - but offers no guarantees for workers and most small business creditors.

The Tories may have only temporary relief regarding Capita. If bankruptcies come to spread throughout the outsourcing and construction sectors, they would be facing another deep recession.

Carillion employed 20,000 workers in the UK and Capita employs 50,000. Hundreds of thousands of working and middle class people would be directly affected by Capita going under. We demand bailouts for workers - the bosses have had plenty already.

The Socialist Party says:

- Defend every job - no redundancies, pay cuts or attacks on conditions to pay for corporate greed
- Full payment to all freelancers and small suppliers left out of pocket
- Bring all outsourced services back in-house now
- Nationalise the banks and big construction firms to protect public services and start a mass programme of council house building

90 feared dead after migrant boat capsizes

- For safe and legal passage for refugees
- Fight for jobs, homes and services for all

Sathya Rajan, Refugee Rights Campaign and Tamil Solidarity

I, being a refugee from Sri Lanka, a victim of civil war, find it disheartening when I read the news about 90 migrants thought dead after a boat capsized off the coast of Libya.

It has become regular and common news in the areas of the Mediterranean. When dozens or sometimes hundreds of lives drown on the EU's doorstep, while the Nato countries are just having a watch.

This is the period of greatest refugee crisis since World War Two. People leave their country of origin because of war, persecution or natural calamities. They leave only to save their lives.

However, these people are treated as criminals and denied basic rights. The governments of the big capitalist countries which have pledged to take in refugees are failing.

These countries are among the world's most powerful and rank at the top of the list for military spending. But they do not let the migrants in or help in resettling them. Rather their governments start building fences, apply cuts to rescue services, and tighten their border security to control the influx of migrants.

The super-rich in these countries get even richer while all the rest suffer, migrants or not.

I relate with the hopes and aspirations of the young men and women in that boat. Like everyone, they would have had goals and love for their life and family. Nobody wants that to be ended so soon.

I imagine what they would have thought as they were drowning. They might have lived a little longer if only they didn't make this voyage; some would have thought of their family and their lost life in the homeland.

The memories would have been a slideshow in their minds. And what about the children who couldn't even understand the happenings and the reason for their voyage?

Right-wing governments which share responsibility for the conflicts causing the refugee crisis are refusing any further funding for rescue boats. It is their action - and inaction - that is ending these people's lives. Well done them!

I worry about what the end of this will be. We need an end to capitalist military intervention, making conflicts worse in the name of power and profit. We need safe and legal passage for refugees.

The Refugee Rights Campaign also demands the right to work, closure of the detention centres, a £10-an-hour minimum wage without exemptions, and jobs, homes and services for all.

- Read more at: refugeerightscampaign.org and tamilsolidarity.org

Editorial of the Socialist issue 981

Limited readmittances, tenants' ballots, "municipal socialism"

Corbyn's left must seize the advantage in Labour's civil war

Headlines scream about a hard-left takeover of the Labour Party. No wonder. Under Tony Blair, big business found a safe political alternative to the Tory Party. How they must now long for the return of pro-capitalist, pro-austerity Labour as they watch the divisions in the Tory party and fear they have no stable political expression for their interests in Brexit.

The billionaire press hopes to whip up a storm to assist the right-wing Blairites in the party in curtailing Corbyn's progress. Many people who have been enthused by Corbyn's policies, however, will look at recent events in the Labour Party and hope that this means change is under way - that Labour is becoming an anti-austerity, even socialist, party that will speak for them and improve their lives.

The latest developments that raise these hopes are that Corbyn supporters have now won a small majority on the Labour Party national executive committee (NEC) and chair the disputes committee. Subsequently, some left-wing activists who were excluded from the Labour Party have now been readmitted.

The NEC intervened in Haringey, albeit in the mildest of tones, calling for the Haringey Development Vehicle (HDV) to be "paused" for "mediation" between anti-privatisation councillors feeling the pressure of a big local campaign and arch-Blairite privatisers.

At the same time, Jeremy Corbyn has made a speech about ending privatisation in public services and the return of "municipal socialism". In a speech to councillors, he said it is crucial for local authorities to reverse the privatisation of public services. The pledges include ballots of residents prior to redevelopment of council estates, replacement of lost social housing, and more realistically-affordable housing costs.

Corbyn proposed giving councils the power to seize empty properties to house the homeless. Shadow housing minister John Healey has said a Labour government would legislate to buy land at its nominal price. This "municipal socialism" also includes taking privatised services back in-house and employing council workers directly.

Succumbing to the pressure of multiple housing campaigns in London against gentrification, the capital's mayor Sadiq Khan has now announced that he will insist on residents' ballots, having previously opposed them. This should give confidence to all those campaigns battling for a ballot, such as the Save Our Square campaign in Walthamstow, which is currently being blocked by unelected highly-paid council officials from the right to even petition for a referendum!

Corbyn went so far as to imply that these measures should happen straightaway, pointing to cases where councils are already "taking measures to bring services back in-house and reject costly PFI-style models". These announcements don't come a day too soon. Labour councils have continued, despite Corbyn's leadership of the national party, to socially cleanse their boroughs, privatise, close and cut services, jobs and pay. The spectre of the end of the central government grant to local authorities in 2020 means that Labour councils are more and more looking to sell-offs, luxury developments and deals with private developers to increase income.

If the huge support for Corbyn is not to be undermined, it is imperative that a clear instruction is issued from the top that councils must stop. The plans must also go further. We need mass council house building. We need rent control in the private sector. And we need to stop and reverse the cuts.

But Corbyn hampers himself from putting out a clear instruction because of the insistence from those around him in the leadership of Momentum on trying to achieve 'unity' with the right wing of the party. As Corbyn himself was quoted as saying in relation to Haringey, the intervention was a "one-off" and "we want to bring people together".

Biding their time

Yet while the left continues to hold out an olive branch, the right mount a ferocious fight every time they think they have a foothold to do so. After the surge for Corbyn's policies in the general election, the right wing felt at that stage they would have no support, and they reined in open attacks.

But the moment they see a chance, they seize it. Tony Blair started 2018 campaigning to re-run the EU referendum, with Chuka Umunna and others in tow; the right wing in Unite are attempting to re-run the leadership election against Corbyn-supporting Len McCluskey. These are all ways to undermine Corbyn.

Corbyn-supporting MP Chris Williamson was moved to the back benches after he made his proposals on council tax. And Labour councillors, the vast majority who are part of the bulwark of the opposition to Corbyn, undermine him every day with their policies of cuts and privatisations. The condemnation of the NEC's mild intervention in Haringey by over 70 council leaders, describing it as "dangerous and alarming" and "an affront to the basic principles of democracy", makes it clearer than ever: the Labour Party is still two parties in one.

Momentum is occasionally the centre of press furore. They now claim 35,000 members, and in the general election ran a wide-reaching social media campaign and mobilised people to canvass in Labour marginals. But when it comes to the crucial question of standing up to the Blairites, Momentum's leadership fails. The vast majority of council candidates that will be up for election in May are opponents of Corbyn.

Momentum leader Jon Lansman continues to rule out mandatory reselection of MPs. In an interview with the Independent he said "we have made it clear that we are not going to campaign to reselect anyone at all, anywhere". He added that local areas might decide to do so. But posing the question like this has practical consequences.

It completely disarmed Corbyn supporters in the councillor-reselection process and has resulted in few Corbynistas replacing right-wingers (outside of Haringey, where local left Labour Party members consciously rejected this approach). So now Momentum members are expected to try to mobilise voters to support cutters and privatisers once more - the very people communities are raging against.

It is urgent that Labour is democratised. Getting a Corbyn-supporting majority on the NEC does not end the matter. Readmittance of expelled socialists must go much further than the odd few. In November 2016, 75 expelled and excluded socialists - including former Labour MP Dave Nellist and former Liverpool Labour councillors such as Tony Mulhearn - applied for readmittance, backed by hundreds of signatures of trade unionists and community campaigners. The application was rejected by Labour general secretary Iain McNicol.

The Socialist Party wrote to McNicol to ask the NEC to consider affiliation of socialist and campaigning organisations, including the Socialist Party, in the same way that the Co-op party is currently affiliated. This too was rejected.

We argue that there must also be restoration of trade union rights and the adoption of a democratic federal structure. On this basis, the Labour Party could really become a mass anti-austerity socialist party that draws together all those forces opposing the Tories, austerity and the super-rich.

Go over the Blairites' heads

Just as he did with the general election manifesto, Corbyn should go over the heads of the Blairites to appeal to the members with a new democratic constitution. Reselection of MPs cannot wait. With the Tories so divided and openly discussing replacing Theresa May, Corbyn supporters need to prepare for a general election.

The millions who voted for Corbyn's manifesto did so because they want to see something fundamentally different. There will be big hopes in a Corbyn government. Corbyn will come under ferocious attack from the capitalist class for any measures that restrict their ability to make profits. He must not allow himself to be trapped from day one by the capitalists' representatives in his own party.

In the Socialist Party we will continue to do all we can to help mobilise a mass movement in support of Corbyn's policies, and link those to the need to take the major banks and corporations into democratic public ownership - for a socialist society.

Haringey: now's our chance for a no-cuts council

Paula Mitchell, London Socialist Party

Right-wing pro-mega-privatisation Labour councillors deselected. Arch-Blairite council leader resigned. Major privatisation and gentrification project derailed.

Haringey is in the eye of the storm for all the right reasons. Now is our chance - let's fight for a no-cuts council!

An extremely unpopular privatisation project that would have involved socially cleansing thousands out of their council homes has been the catalyst for change inside Haringey Labour Party.

The 'Haringey Development Vehicle' (HDV) is opposed by all local Labour Party branches, both MPs and 21 Labour councillors. Yet the ideologically driven Blairites ploughed on regardless.

Rather than follow the national Momentum line of preaching unity with opposing class interests, Corbyn supporters in Haringey got organised to deselect pro-HDV Labour councillors.

In May, Haringey will be seen as the first Corbyn council. It will be under scrutiny from the press, the Tories, the Blairites - and, most importantly, the working class in Haringey.

It is vital that under this Corbyn council, residents of Haringey stop paying the price for Tory austerity. The cuts must stop.

As well as stopping the HDV, the council should set a no-cuts budget, plan to build council houses and bring in rent control.

They should use their considerable reserves and borrowing powers to balance the books and build up a mass campaign to demand the funding necessary from the government.

Their fight should base itself on the anti-HDV campaign and expand to include the wider working class of the borough, trade unions and other community campaigns.

Any other road means not only inflicting further misery on the working class of Haringey, but also risks undermining the huge support for Jeremy Corbyn.

If Haringey council acted in this way and appealed to other councils around the country - especially to those councillors who say they are Corbyn supporters - it could spearhead a national campaign.

It could link up with members of the big national trade unions that already have a position of support for no-cuts budgets: the GMB, and the local government committees of Unison and Unite.

This would hasten the fall of the weak Tories and help bring about a Corbyn government. If Jeremy Corbyn made that call now, local government austerity would be over.

The crucial question of what a Corbyn council should do was debated at Haringey Labour Party's manifesto conference on 4 February.

Motions passed committing the council to stopping the Haringey Development Vehicle (HDV). The conference agreed the council should use its borrowing powers to build 1,000 council houses on secure tenancies - and hold residents' ballots before any regeneration.

Conference agreed to reinstate 100% council tax support for poorer residents and commit to the public provision of social care. Motions passed to reintroduce an Education Maintenance Allowance for 16 to 18-year-olds and free school meals.

These policies, if they make it into the manifesto and are boldly shouted from the roof tops, will be very popular. However, the process is overshadowed by undemocratic rules that state the outgoing councillors have to agree the manifesto - leaving control in the hands of the deselected, discredited right wing.

Already election material has been produced in that vein, with no mention of Corbyn or of fighting the cuts and privatisation. It is vital this undemocratic approach is rejected.

However, the conference also sidestepped the key issue: cuts or no cuts? There was a general commitment to campaign for the government to reverse cuts. But what about the meantime?

One ward had agreed a no-cuts motion, and while it wasn't one of the main conference motions, it was added in to the delegates' pack for consideration. The argument to use reserves and borrowing powers to balance the books, while building a mass campaign, was made on the conference floor, and argued for in a Socialist Party leaflet distributed outside.

Some of the anti-HDV candidates have argued that there is limited money available and that the council just needs to be creative. Others argue for a council tax increase, with lower earners rebated.

We say no. There is money in the bank, and there is a mass campaign in the community - use it, to defend the jobs and services in the borough and to fight for the funding necessary. There should be no more cuts, and working class people should not be asked to pay more council tax to compensate for cuts.

No fudge on this question with the right wing is possible. They should not be allowed to hold the rest of the party to ransom.

If the few remaining right-wing Labour candidates insist on standing on a cuts platform, then anti-cuts, anti-HDV campaigners from the community could stand against them, in support of the majority of the anti-austerity, pro-Corbyn Labour candidates.

Haringey is already under the microscope, but this is nothing compared to what the council is likely to face after May. They have to take a stand - no other choice will satisfy the anger and suffering of working class communities.

Walthamstow: occupy to save the town square

Stop the private monster block - for a local referendum

Nancy Taaffe, Waltham Forest Socialist Party

Residents and workers in Walthamstow, east London, are preparing to occupy their town square against a 'monster block' phoney regeneration scheme.

So Walthamstow's 'Save Our Square' (SOS) campaign has got off to a roaring start after coming back in the new year. The organising committee has agreed to meet every week in the run-up to our planned occupation on Saturday 24 February.

The Labour council plans to tear down 81 trees and move the kids' playground, cutting open space by a third, to throw up private towers full of expensive homes.

We've got a programme of activity that includes leafleting tube stations, asking local businesses to display window posters, leafleting sixth form colleges - and leafleting McDonald's. As virtually all our youth clubs have closed, McDonald's is one of the few places where lots of young people now socialise after school.

We hope to make the occupation of the square the property of every young person in our borough, encouraging them to get involved in the struggle for a place of their own.

Over 10,000 leaflets have been dropped off at various pick-up points across the borough - at our last audit they were going fast. A silent army of volunteers has quietly picked them up and delivered them to thousands of homes across the borough. So much so we'll probably have to print more.

There's a million suggestions as to what we should do on the actual day itself, from encouraging a mass play-about with children skipping in the square, to musicians playing and community choirs singing.

Campaigners connected to homeless charities are discussing ways to get housing workers and those in housing need to come along on the day, and raise their voices in opposition to privatising public space and treating the homeless like an eyesore like in Windsor.

We decided to appeal to those displaced from our borough, to places like Luton and Welwyn Garden City, to come back for the day. We will appeal to working class Londoners forced out by this social cleansing model to come and rage against what has happened to them.

They should demand the right of return. Not just for the day, but forever if they wish.

Many young women with children have been forced away from their networks by councils like Waltham Forest, to live in overcrowded and inadequate housing. We intend to make a generalised appeal to these people to return on 24 February and protest against social cleansing.

It's good that Blairite London mayor Sadiq Khan has made a u-turn over residents' ballots. After feeling the pressure, he's reversed his opposition to Jeremy Corbyn's call at Labour conference last year for residents to have a vote on 'regeneration' schemes.

But long before this, Walthamstow SOS had decided to submit a petition for a community ballot on the proposed 'regeneration' of the town square. There is a deep-seated suspicion that local 'consultations' are skewed to suit the developers and are not democratic at all.

We've produced a petition which calls on the Labour council to honour Corbyn's pledge and run a local referendum on this issue. We would have to collect 4,000 signatures just to force the council to debate holding a referendum - and that's only if they decide to recognise the petition.

On 26 January, after submitting our petition, we found out an unelected senior officer, the head of governance and law, had arbitrarily decided the council won't accept it. Not the referendum, not the debate on holding a referendum - just the petition calling for a referendum!

In the light of this anti-democratic rejection, the campaign will discuss how we pressurise councillors to ensure a petition for a local referendum is allowed. A disproportionate amount of power is wielded by unaccountable bureaucrats independently of what is going on outside.

Of course, on 7 February we also went across to Haringey to celebrate their victory in defeating the 'HDV' housing privatisation scheme, hoping some of their fairy dust rubs off on us in Waltham Forest.

But we know the real fairy dust is a combination of mass campaigning, welded to a political intransigence that defends the very idea of council housing being provided by democratically elected councils - it just has to be fought for.

- Occupy Walthamstow Town Square, 1pm, 24 February

TUSC survey sets scene for conference debate on May elections

Last autumn the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) launched a survey of Labour councillors to see if they would back Jeremy Corbyn's anti-austerity stand when setting 2018-19 council budgets and, in those councils going to the polls this year, in the 2018 local elections.

Now, as TUSC prepares for a conference debate on 10 February on what it should do in May's elections, the survey results are in.

Not unexpectedly the survey confirms that Labour-controlled councils, still under the domination of the Blairite right wing, are continuing to make drastic cuts to local services, jobs and conditions - even under Jeremy Corbyn's leadership of the national party.

In the 21 councils where detailed budget information is collected in the survey, Labour councils are planning a further half a billion pounds of cuts this year.

TUSC has a well-established policy of arguing for no-cuts 'people's budgets' - of councils using their reserves and borrowing powers to set budgets that don't pass on Tory cuts, and using the breathing space provided to demand central government makes up future shortfalls.

There are 124 Labour-led councils and their combined spending power is greater than the state budgets of 16 EU countries! If they set no-cuts budgets this year - in the expectation they would be reimbursed by an incoming Labour government - what could May's feeble administration do?

Councillors could play their part in forcing the Tories out of office. But instead the Blairites are acting to prop them up.

And the survey also shows that there will not be a new influx of Corbynista councillors who could change the situation. Right-wing Labour councillors have by and large been reselected to stand again as candidates in May.

There have been red scare stories in the establishment media, typified by a Times front-page splash in December claiming that "Corbyn supporters are ousting local councillors" in an "orchestrated purge" across Britain.

This was based on events in the London borough of Haringey where supporters of a notorious social cleansing 'redevelopment' scheme have indeed been replaced as candidates for this year's council elections.

The "across Britain" evidence cited by the Times, however, was slim. In the one case mentioned in Leeds, for example, involving the Labour group leader, the TUSC survey report shows that she was reaffirmed as a candidate the following day. This was something that didn't make the Times's columns.

Overall the survey suggests that at most one in eight Labour candidates in May's elections could - sometimes very generously - be described as being 'on the left'.

In the vast majority of cases, the Blairites have not been unseated, and are poised to take positions of public authority for the next four years, which they will then use to do everything they can to undermine Jeremy Corbyn and socialist policies.

Whether the battle against them must move to the ballot box in May is the question that is now posed. Come to the TUSC conference and join the debate!

- The full report of the TUSC survey replies is available at tusc.org.uk/txt/409.pdf

TUSC conference 2018

- 11am-4pm (registration opens 10am), Saturday 10 February, Student Central, Malet Street, London WC1E 7HY
- Two sessions: 'Building support for Jeremy Corbyn's anti-cuts policies in the 2018 local elections', and 'TUSC and the Brexit negotiations'
- All TUSC supporters welcome
- See tusc.org.uk

Royal Mail forced back under threat of action but keep the pressure on

Gary Clark, Secretary CWU Scotland No.2 branch

The CWU executive committee has agreed a national agreement with Royal Mail Group (RMG) which will now go to members to vote on. Overall, it represents a major climb-down by management and should be viewed as a victory against them. But we must hold management to it, as past agreements have seen them ignore agreed principles and instead attack our members.

This agreement was won because we pushed management and they knew that we were prepared for a battle with them. Clearly they were surprised by the way we engaged with our members and the tremendous 89% yes vote for strike action - the first national strike ballot by any union under the Tories' Trade Union Act and its undemocratic voting thresholds.

A wave of unofficial walkouts at over 20 delivery offices over the last six months or so to defend individual union reps and members also sent a clear message to Royal Mail that our members were up for the fight.

Some major gains have been won from Royal Mail since the start of the dispute. On pay a victory has been achieved with a lump sum of £250 raised to £350 and a 5% pay increase backdated to October 2017, plus a further 2% rise next year.

At the same time, we have also seen a move towards a 35-hour working week, with a one-hour reduction this October, followed by another hour linked to the 2019 pay review and with a path to achieve the 35-hour week by 2022.

There was a clear attack on our pensions where Royal Mail had given notice to renege on the agreement at privatisation by closing down our final salary/defined benefits (DB) pension scheme, which not all members are in.

While the proposed new defined contribution (DC) scheme, which will now cover all members, doesn't maintain the existing DB terms, Royal Mail has been forced to agree to a number of important concessions which, if implemented, will be a marked improvement on that originally proposed.

Royal Mail has had to increase its employee pension contribution from the 10% it originally proposed to 13.6%. The agreement says that the new scheme has a 'similar design' to previous RMG DB schemes but because it will be DC, these are 'targets not hard promises'. Therefore there are clearly outstanding questions on pensions that members will want clarified.

But this single scheme is a great step forward for our newer members in particular who have been stuck in a poorer scheme since 2008. If management try to stall or block the path to the new pension we must be prepared to take action.

What now needs tackling is the culture of bullying by Royal Mail against our members which has led to unofficial action over the past few years.

Reps and members will now debate this agreement. Overall, we believe it should be supported. We would support members if they decide to fight for more but the gains that have been secured can raise members' confidence and we have now got to make sure that we keep our members prepared to tackle Royal Mail management.

This offer can also give other workers confidence to fight - especially those fighting for pay and pensions in the public sector.

This dispute shows clearly the need for the CWU, alongside the current struggle, to continue the fight to re-nationalise Royal Mail to secure jobs, pay and pensions for postal workers. This is the expectation that CWU

members will have of a Jeremy Corbyn-led Labour government.

Unison national women's conference - dirty tricks fail to stop successful Socialist Party participation

Vicky Perrin, Unison member (personal capacity)

This year's Unison national women's conference (NWC) in Liverpool last week saw Socialist Party members playing a key role in initiating and organising the first 'Unison Action' fringe meeting to be held at a self-organised group conference.

For many years the union bureaucracy has felt in safe territory at NWC with a comfortable agenda of women's issues and largely free from political debate. This year though, they feel under attack.

Terrified for the upcoming service group executive elections and a further loosening of their stranglehold on the union after Unison Action's success in last year's national executive council elections, they have driven through new election rules to limit members' campaigning and 'interference from outside organisations', with new threats of disciplinary action.

Socialist Party industrial organiser and NUJ member Glenn Kelly had requested a press pass in advance as usual but been told that Unison was not issuing them for the NWC.

Glenn was one of four Socialist Party activists illegally disciplined by the union bureaucracy back in 2007 in a failed witch-hunt. Unable to come into the conference hall he was outside helping women members leaflet for the fringe and sell the Socialist.

Meanwhile, anonymously produced leaflets appeared inside the conference hall showing a 'no entry' sign over a picture of Glenn. This contravened the union's own rules of material distribution in a despicable personal attack on an individual and the Socialist Party.

They show that far from cleaning up its act following a certification officer judgement which found Unison's officials to have broken the union's own rules in the 2015 general secretary elections, a weak and threatened bureaucracy will go to any lengths to attack any opposition and cling on to power.

Ironically, for a union that prides itself on being 'for women, led by women' they allege that the work of woman delegates at the conference was in some way being 'interfered with' by a man - which is a new level of patronising insult.

Far from raising hostility, delegates were appalled at the use of such dirty tricks and the Unison Action meeting attracted around 100 delegates who came to discuss the fight to overthrow this rotten right-wing bureaucracy.

Striking back against academies in Newham

Helen Pattison, East London Socialist Party

It's been months since teachers at Avenue School in Newham, east London, uncovered plans for the school to become an academy.

A lot has happened since then. Days of strike action have already been taken. A new fighting National Education Union branch secretary has been elected, Louise Cuffaro, who is also a Socialist Party member.

And parents have organised themselves into a campaign alongside teachers to fight for schools to remain under local authority control.

Other schools in the borough have also found out they are being threatened with academy status and have taken action. Cumberland and Royal Docks have all taken strike action. There was a large community meeting to build a campaign at Shaftesbury Primary School.

Later this month, Avenue teachers will walk out again, this time for three consecutive days. They will be joined on the final day by other schools in a joint day of action against academies, backed up by many parents across the borough.

As well as the strike action, on 26 February campaigners, parents and teachers from all the threatened schools in Newham will take their anger to the steps of the town hall during the full council meeting.

While a small number of Corbyn-supporting councillors have either visited picket lines or met with campaigners, other Labour councillors are pushing for academies. These councillors don't deserve an easy ride; parents and teachers should lobby councillor's surgeries and call on them to oppose academies.

Reports from local Labour Party meetings show that it has been Labour councillors voting down motions in support of the strikes and the anti-academies campaign.

If councillors aren't going to fight in the interests of local people, they should stand down now or campaigners may be forced to stand against them.

A strong anti-academies voice in the council chamber could help stop save our schools but whatever happens, local teachers will continue to fight alongside parents for local authority schools in Newham.

May's silence is a green light for Chinese repression

British PM's visit to China puts business rights before human rights

Vincent Kolo, chinaworker.info

During her three-day visit to China, Britain's prime minister Theresa May avoided irking her hosts with talk of human rights or the recent attacks on democratic rights in Hong Kong.

In so doing May was following in Donald Trump's footsteps, when he visited China last November, and Emmanuel Macron during his visit earlier this year, although the French president threw in a horse for China's leader Xi Jinping.

Rather than allowing May's diplomatic sheepishness to pass unnoticed, the Chinese state-controlled media revelled in it. Beijing's Global Times hailed her "pragmatism" and said she was right to resist "radical" pressure to engage in "mudslinging" over human rights.

In the days prior to May's visit, Beijing's local government in Hong Kong launched new attacks on the city's partial democratic rights. Three opposition candidates were banned from standing in upcoming byelections to the Hong Kong legislature. The byelections are to fill vacancies created by a purge of pro-democracy legislators last year.

One of those banned was 21-year-old Agnes Chow Ting of the youth party Demosisto. She was banned on the grounds that the party's manifesto stands for "self-determination". This means it's the party that's banned rather than one individual. Demosisto won one seat in the 2016 elections only to have its legislator Nathan Law Kwun-chung disqualified along with five others in the 'Oathgate' affair.

Golden era

Demosisto's secretary general Joshua Wong Chi-fung wrote an open letter to Theresa May in the Guardian newspaper. He urged her to "use her time with 'Emperor Xi' this week to stand up for Hong Kong's rights, before it is too late."

But this evidently went unheeded. May stressed a "golden era" of British-Chinese relations, using the slogan of her predecessor David Cameron, whose government signed mega-deals for Chinese investment in nuclear power, railways and London's financial sector. After May's low-key visit, however, China expert Kerry Brown said relations were in more of a "bronze era".

The British government's loss of worldwide authority is more striking, given that technically it is one of the international guarantors of Hong Kong's partial autonomy under the Sino-British Joint Declaration of 1984.

On his visit to Hong Kong last year for the 20th anniversary of the handover, Xi bluntly stated that the Joint Declaration "no longer has any practical significance".

May's office in London denied accusations she had failed to raise Hong Kong during her talks with Xi Jinping. It said both leaders had restated their commitment to the "one country, two systems" arrangement under which Hong Kong has a degree of autonomy.

This is diplomatic waffle! Every attack on democratic rights in Hong Kong is carried out in the name of defending "one country two systems", so such glib statements from Xi are meaningless and May's team have knowingly played along.

During a succession of moves to restrict democratic rights in Hong Kong, screen-out election candidates, introduce new repressive laws and jail opposition activists, many have called on Britain to speak up.

When Benedict Rogers, a senior member of May's Tory party with an interest in Hong Kong politics, was refused entry to Hong Kong on Beijing's orders last October, this prompted only a perfunctory protest by the British government.

Similarly, and more importantly, when Hong Kong bookseller Lee Bo, a British citizen, was abducted by Chinese security agents in 2015 and weeks later resurfaced on Chinese television making a forced 'confession', the British government's response was minimal.

The abduction of five Hong Kong booksellers, including Lee, was used to spread fear in Hong Kong and step up media censorship against critics of the dictatorship.

The Chinese regime feels confident it can step up repression - already the most severe in 25 years - without encountering significant pressure from foreign governments.

May returned from China boasting of \$13 billion in new business deals. Cash comes before human rights, evidently, but even these sums are not impressive by past comparisons.

Britain's attractiveness as a destination for Chinese capital took a knock after the Brexit referendum and so steadying its relationship with the Chinese dictatorship was the main aim of May's visit.

Some democracy activists in Hong Kong, China and elsewhere have yet to fully grasp the fact that right-wing politicians and governments are not on the same side, they will not and never have fought for democratic rights.

Real and effective international solidarity comes from below, from workers, youth, anti-cuts and anti-austerity campaigners, a new generation of left-wing feminists, anti-racists and migrant rights advocates.

In other words, it comes from the very sections of the population that are battling against the big business policies of Theresa May and Donald Trump. These are the layers the Stop Repression in Hong Kong campaign is turning to.

International pressure is needed to protest the repression in Hong Kong and China. But our appeals need to be addressed to the right people.

- Full article on chinaworker.info
-

Sudan: Mohamed Satti released - global solidarity campaign gets results!

Committee for a Workers' International (CWI) Sudanese comrade Mohammed Satti (Hamudi) was released from jail on 2 February. He had been detained by the state for over two weeks for his participation in an anti-regime demonstration in the capital, Khartoum. Hamudi was brought home by a police car at around 9.30pm local time.

There is no doubt that Hamudi's release is the fruit of the relentless pressure put on the Sudanese authorities by the international campaign of solidarity organised by the CWI and its sections around the world. The growing public outrage over Hamudi's imprisonment meant that keeping him detained became a liability for the Sudanese government.

The CWI salutes this victory over the Sudanese state, and wishes to thank all those who have campaigned to get Hamudi out of prison.

However, dozens of opposition activists are still detained in terrible conditions by the regime, and need to be released too. As protests against price hikes broke out again on 31 January, in Khartoum, Wad Medani, Zalingei and other cities, more protesters were arrested.

This highlights the need for a sustained movement that can not only resist state repression in Sudan, but that can uproot the capitalist dictatorship of Omar al Bashir.

The CWI demands freedom for all political prisoners fighting the Sudanese regime, and will continue to campaign and help build the struggle of the Sudanese people for a free, democratic and socialist Sudan.

- More on socialistworld.net
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Protesters denounce oppressive Sri Lankan regime

Isai Priya, Tamil Solidarity

On 4 February hundreds of Tamil youth attended a protest on Sri Lanka's 70th 'Independence Day' outside the Sri Lankan High Commission in London.

It was a lively, energetic and inspiring protest of young people chanting that Independence Day does not represent the independence of ordinary people, especially Tamil-speaking people.

Tamil-speaking people in Sri Lanka have faced continued state repression and discrimination since the military slaughtered up to 100,000 people, including bombing Red Cross marked buildings, in the brutal end to a 30-year civil war in 2009.

The protesters chanted slogans demanding information on the disappeared, to stop land grabs, and the right to self-determination of the Tamil people.

However, we were mocked, laughed at and given a death threat by Sri Lankan authorities. A military officer - Brigadier Priyankara Fernando - wearing the much hated military gear and uniform, ran a finger across his neck as if to say: 'I will slit your throat'. This outrageous action was filmed and is being widely shared on social media.

However, his gesture is not so shocking when we see the actions of President Sirisena to protect the warmongers who carried out the genocidal slaughter from war crimes investigation.

This incident shows that the establishment is unrepentant for those well-documented war crimes and that the struggle for justice must go on.

Tamil Solidarity wrote an official complaint to the high commission and submitted the evidence, demanding the brigadier's removal.

Tamil Solidarity played a key role in organising this protest and appealed for other organisations to take part as well.

The protest was one of anger and determination - against the oppression, to fight for justice and the rights of the Tamil-speaking people.

- More info on tamilsolidarity.org and socialistparty.org
-

Stop press - success

Brigadier Priyankara Fernando has since been suspended following Tamil Solidarity's campaign and circulation of the video showing his behaviour towards the protest, which received a lot of attention on social media

GCSE grading game stresses out students - even more than before!

Adam Abdullah, school student

The government has implemented new GCSE rules and with them stress, and with them fear, and with them anxiety.

Since the regular GCSE grading system of A*-G was replaced with the 9-1 grades, levels of stress, anxiety and mental disorders have increased among young people in schools.

What is the issue of replacing the letters with numbers? The GCSE 'specs' - the exam rules, the amount we have to 'learn' and level of homework - that come with it.

Coursework has entirely been removed from GCSEs. And with the exception of one or two speaking and listening tests it's mostly written examinations now.

Even drama, a subject about getting on your feet and expressing your creative freedom, is now 40% written examination with exam board Edexcel.

This is so with all the subjects, written examination has taken over. For example, for triple science - physics, biology, chemistry - you have to take nine exams where three are for each of the sciences. They teach the different modules in the order of the exams and it seems more and more like it's meant to test our memory functions rather than intelligence.

What are we to the examiners, goldfish?

Under the old GCSE spec teachers used to be able to allow students to sit the exams at different points (for example, if you had three exams for one subject you could do one in Year 10). So I've calculated I have 20 or more exams to do in one academic year...

Even if you'd count yourself as 'strict' you can see how this is going to impact us. As the exam boards only have one set of results to compare us to, one horrible thing that has happened is that on the OCR board maths exams only 27% earned a 'standard' passing grade (grade 4) or higher. The best percentage - AQA exam board - was only 32%.

In English literature you're expected to have a memory good enough to remember quotes from 15 poems, novels, contextual information for all those poems, and not go blank under that pressure...

Across all the exam boards last year only 33% to 50% achieved a grade 4 or above in English language. This is a recurring theme now.

It has gone so far a student created a petition to parliament that has over 160,000 signatures. This is 60,000 above the required number for parliament to discuss having a debate and they will now announce the date soon.

The recurring theme of pass rates going down, the 'worst' schools being shown in league tables, rising mental health issues, austerity cuts to schools and academisation all show that we are indeed in crisis.

However, we can escape. Freedom from pressure, elimination of memory tests and a wholesome education not revolving around examination is not only what we want, but what we need.

Featured letter

Fighting sexism: Positive discrimination - yea or neigh?

It's 100 years since women in Britain won, through militant struggle, limited adult suffrage.

Yet, today, the media is replete with examples of sexual harassment and abuse of women, and a stubbornly persistent gender pay gap.

Sport is no exception, with the recent trial of notorious serial abuser Larry Nasser, the disgraced former US sports doctor, and widespread examples of the continuing gender pay gap in prize money, opportunities and media coverage afforded to sportswomen.

Such discrimination has recently surfaced in horse racing. A recent number-crunching study by the racing industry showed no difference in performance between female and male jockeys.

Yet male jockeys monopolise the top-graded rides. It's clear that sexual discrimination accounts for the huge gender gap in winning rides.

Interestingly, Galop, the French horse racing authority, has given a weight allowance - an advantage in handicap events - to rides of female jockeys. Unsurprisingly trainers have prioritised female jockeys to take advantage, and the number of successful female riders has soared by 165%.

It raises the question: is 'positive discrimination' the way forward to level the playing field?

Leading female jockeys Josephine Gordon and Hayley Turner say the French allowance belittles their efforts to compete with male riders, whereas French jockey Maryline Eon says the allowance has helped her progress in a notoriously chauvinistic industry.

Positive discrimination is not new and has been repeatedly debated in the labour movement. But has widespread gender discrimination in today's society resurrected its efficacy?

Simon Carter, Forest Gate, east London

Non-fiction: Our Revolution

Bernie's book shows need for workers' party

Derek McMillan, Brighton Socialist Party

This book 'Our Revolution' by Bernie Sanders is a bestseller which charts his campaign for the Democratic nomination. He is scrupulous in making it clear it was grassroots activists that made this possible.

The book is very useful as an indictment of American capitalism. Just one example: the press is full of stories of welfare recipients as a "burden" on society, but does not mention the Walton family, owners of Wal-Mart. Bernie Sanders does.

"Wal-Mart makes huge profits by paying its workers wages that are so low that the workers not only qualify for, but need, public assistance just to get by... When you add it up, it turns out that US taxpayers are subsidising Wal-Mart's low wages to the tune of at least \$6.2 billion each and every year."

His proposal is that Wal-Mart should pay its workers \$15 an hour. This is a proposal socialists support.

However, Bernie intends only to 'civilise' and 'tame' the corporations. He has not gone so far as to suggest expropriating them. I can assure you they would be as tame as anything under those circumstances.

A turning point for many was when it became clear Hillary Clinton would get the nomination. Bernie gained some concessions from the Clinton campaign before offering his endorsement.

The only trouble is that no worker could possibly trust the "candidate of Wall Street," to use Bernie's own expression, to carry out any of these concessions on policy.

Unwittingly, the book makes the case for building a workers' party in the United States. A party which would not be in thrall to Wall Street, and could take power away from the corporations.

And that is when the real "revolution" starts!

Film review

Darkest Hour: not the usual flattery of brutal Tory Churchill

Tim Wall

Watching Gary Oldman as Churchill in 'Darkest Hour' at the Tyneside Cinema, I felt quite emotional. I was angry - if it was left to the Tories in 1940 they would have surrendered to Hitler.

The truth is that it was the working class and poor of each side that did the fighting, including the oppressed peoples of the soon-to-be-former British Empire. In numerical terms, nothing even comes close to the indescribable sacrifices of millions upon millions of Soviet workers.

What part did Churchill, one of the most brutal anti-working class Tories, play in this?

It is clear in Joe Wright's film that Churchill wavers, considering a peace deal with Hitler, and the real heroes were the working class characters: the stenographer, the passengers on the London Underground who

Churchill had ignored for most of his political career.

Churchill thought these people were fighting for Empire. But they weren't - they were fighting for a better world where ordinary people could live with dignity, a welfare state and decent living conditions - not a return to Churchill's throwback vision of empire, and the hunger, poverty and lockouts of the 1920s and '30s.

It falls to Gary Oldman, one of the most brilliant working class actors of his generation, to portray Churchill. Beneath Oldman's fantastically crafted piggy Churchill makeup, by the amazing artist Kazuhiro Tsuji, you could still see some of the punk anger of 'Sid and Nancy' and his early films. Robert effing Hardy it ain't.

I was heartened that Darkest Hour was at least not the usual flattering biopic of Churchill. It goes some way to show it was working class pressure that influenced the decision to fight on in 1940 - and just how close the spineless British ruling class was to following its European counterparts in capitulating to fascism.

The Socialist inbox

Do you have something to say?

Send your news, views and criticism in no more than 150 words to editors@socialistparty.org.uk - or if you're not online,

Socialist Inbox, PO Box 24697, London E11 1YD

NHS: no beds in Brum

The Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Birmingham is the largest single-site hospital in the country, has over 1,200 beds plus 100 critical care beds, and has 9,000 staff.

When I was there last week there were no spare beds available.

Pete McNally, Welland, Worcestershire

Kurdish liberation

Under the flimsy guise of 'fighting extremism' the increasingly dictatorial Turkish regime of President Erdogan has embarked on another brutal invasion of northern Syria. Its real purpose is to smash the aspirations of the Kurdish people for self-determination.

Cynically, Erdogan's offensive has the blessing of Vladimir Putin who hopes to secure strategic military bases after Turkey's military forces drive out the Kurdish YPG militia from the area.

Should anyone forget, it was only just over two years ago that Putin's regime threatened the Turkish state with military retaliation following the downing of a Russian jet fighter. Yet within weeks of the incident Erdogan and Putin had a public rapprochement.

Equally cynical has been US imperialism's support for the YPG as a proxy militia to fight Isis. Faced with a choice of supporting the YPG or Turkey in this latest conflict, Trump's administration has made it clear it will side with its Nato ally Turkey, reportedly turning down YPG requests for new arms supplies.

As the Socialist Party has repeatedly warned, US imperialism has a history of betraying Kurdish groups. It was George Bush senior who, in 1991, encouraged Iraqi Kurds to rise up against Saddam Hussein - only to later abandon them in order to preserve US geopolitical ambitions.

The overarching conclusion is that the Kurdish people cannot rely on the world powers and their regional allies to achieve national self-determination.

Only by forging genuine alliances and unity between all the workers and oppressed peoples of the region, and fighting for a programme of democratic rights and fundamental social change, can such a desire be achieved.

David Simmonds, Leytonstone, east London

The S word

Christmas has been and gone. The Tories and the overlords they serve served up another resplendent yuletide banquet of austerity with all the trimmings: trimmings in pay, working conditions, public services and standards of living. They did this while sneering at us for not knowing which fork to eat it with or how to select the appropriate accompanying wine.

However there has an undeniable wiping of smirks off their faces. For years the powers that be managed through propaganda to ridicule socialism. It was represented only in parody.

It was seen as the flippant students in berets exploring their activist side before settling down into the 'real world' and getting a 'proper job'. It was the maverick, bearded, middle-aged school teacher in the ill-fitted suit and clapped-out car. It was the Oxbridge educated career politician, the quintessential champagne socialist.

But recently people have seen that 'socialism' is not a rude word to be ashamed of, or to be reserved in its usage because 'they' tell us so. It is a communal word, a wholesome concept, absolutely intrinsic to the working class.

Socialism is more pertinent than ever. It can be seen in the popularity of Corbyn's Labour, observed in the numerous protest movements which address austerity, and is attested to by the returning interest in trade unions.

It is not to be defined by the stigma put on it by those who benefit from attacking it. It is being reclaimed. The S word has nothing to apologise for. It has everything to be proud of.

Garrie Grant, Guildford

Blairites fear democracy

Fear of the future is at the forefront of most Blairites' minds. But not fear of the continuation of Tory austerity, nor fear of what dastardly ruses the ruling class has in mind to bring down any incoming Corbyn-led government.

No, what Blairites all fear is the expression of the democratic will of the working class, and most particularly the democratic actions of members of their own party. It is this deep, abiding fear that fuels the ongoing civil war within the Labour Party, a war that is being waged relentlessly in the Tory press by the Blairites.

Fear of democracy is a guiding tenet of the Blairites. Better than most they appreciate that as soon as the Labour Party normalises the type of democratic processes that can allow local members to hold their elected representatives accountable - via reselection - their days in office will be numbered.

Such potential developments, however, should not be presented as some form of hostile takeover by the left, but should be seen for what they really are - a vital way in which democracy can flourish within a potential mass party of the working class.

Mike Barker, Leicester

Sprinklers for safety

A major redevelopment of Nottingham railway station by Network Rail, Nottingham City Council and East Midlands Trains, involving the restoration of the frontage, a brand new glass roof and a new public concourse, went up in flames on 12 January.

The fire lasted 12 hours and was described by the fire chief as "the worst in 20 years." However, it could have been limited to one hour if this redevelopment costing £60 million had included the fitting of... sprinklers (as mentioned in

Helen O'Connor's report '£2m to remove Grenfell-type cladding: residents to get bill' - see socialistparty.org.uk).

Apparently there is no legal requirement to fit sprinklers at railway stations! Yet another example of the total disregard for public safety.

Clearly the renationalisation of the railways must serve not only to get the 'privateers' to 'walk the plank' but also to recommit Network Rail to a public ethos whereby the gold standard of public safety promoted by transport union RMT is adopted.

John Merrell, Leicester

The Socialist Party is being evicted - we need you!

Building fund finance appeal launched

At the beginning of autumn last year the Socialist Party received a notice to quit our national centre by the end of summer 2018. This comes as a huge blow. We have been at our current premises in Leytonstone, east London, for over 17 years - longer than any other in our history.

The landlord intends to redevelop our offices into residential flats, a process that is happening all over London. Following the Tory government's relaxation of the planning laws there is a gold rush taking place as landlords and property developers scramble to make money out of the housing crisis.

We have therefore launched a building finance appeal to raise money to help pay for a move and for a new place.

We may need money towards a deposit if a suitable property comes on the market that we can buy; we may need to spend money refurbishing a building; we may need to pay a higher rent as more parts of London are becoming gentrified and rents are rising in what used to be affordable areas.

The seriousness of this situation for us cannot be overstated. From the first offices we rented in Kings Cross in 1964, the establishment of a national headquarters in London was a historic gain for us.

On the right is a short history of the progress we made in acquiring and rebuilding premises, establishing a press and purchasing our previous national centre in Hepscott Road, Hackney Wick, in 1984, enabled by an appeal for party members to donate a week's income that raised £177,000.

This was only possible based on the huge sacrifices that members, supporters and party workers have made throughout the history of our party, detailed in the books by Peter Taaffe: *Rise of Militant* and *From Militant to the Socialist Party*.

From the first real premises in Bethnal Green in 1971 and the purchase of the first press shortly afterwards, our members and supporters made those sacrifices because they understood the importance of the party's

national headquarters and national leadership to be based in the capital city, at the heart of its national politics.

The capital is where the trade unions have their headquarters and where the majority of government institutions and foreign embassies are based. It is where most national demonstrations take place and it has the necessary transport links for national meetings.

We are where we are today because of those sacrifices and it is incumbent on us to ensure that we carry on that proud tradition. Therefore we are asking every member and supporter to pledge a donation to this building appeal.

Many Socialist Party members will donate the considerable amount of a week's income and in some cases more, as they have done with past appeals, paid over three or four months.

We recognise that this will not be easy for many but the Socialist Party has no rich backers and we can only rely on our own members and supporters.

Your donations, whether it's ten pounds or more from a school student, several hundred from someone who is working or thousands from a windfall, inheritance, property sale, PPI payment etc will make a vital contribution.

The history of our premises

- 1964 Militant launched as a monthly newspaper. £500 fighting fund launched in the first issue.
- 1965 An editor taken on to work on the paper full time. Two rooms taken in Kings Cross, central London, and offered for hire to help pay the rent. The first all-London Militant readers' meeting attended by 50 people and raised £4, 12 shillings and sixpence.
- 1966 Press fund launched with target of £1,000 (raised in three years).
- 1970 Premises acquired in Bethnal Green, east London, which needed rebuilding. Members sold treasured possessions to enable the move. Press bought for £1,050 and a camera for making plates (£800). A fund for a weekly paper was launched with a target of £1,000.
- 1974 New premises rented for use as a printshop. Committee for a Workers' International launched.
- 1975 Fire destroyed the printshop building, severely damaged the press and ruined the typesetting equipment. An emergency appeal raised £27,378 and the press was back in action in one month. By the end of the year we had moved into premises in Mentmore Terrace, Hackney, east London.
- 1976 12-page paper produced. Reached 1,000 regular sellers.
- 1977 Appeal for a new press raised nearly £50,000.
- 1978 Production of 16-page paper on new press without red masthead.
- 1979 Two more units added to press and red masthead restored.
- 1980-82 Additional premises taken on and more printing equipment purchased. Collections over these three years raised £347,000.
- 1983 Building fund launched in October.
- 1984 Building fund reaches £175,000 and Militant moved into new premises in Hackney Wick.
- 2000 Hackney Wick premises were sold and we move into current premises in Leytonstone. Printshop moved to factory in Clapton, Hackney.
- 2007 Old web offset press had to be scrapped. Printshop moved to Leyton, east London. Week's income appeal launched, raising over £51,000 for new digital colour press.

Yorkshire Socialist Party regional conference

Growth in support and big donations to building fund

Mick Whale

The 4 February regional conference of Yorkshire Socialist Party was a tremendous success. Over 50 delegates attended and there was an optimistic mood, which reflected both the growth in support for the party in the region and the number of different campaigns branches have been involved in.

Socialist Party deputy general secretary Hannah Sell introduced the discussion on Britain, focusing on the political situation and how Jeremy Corbyn still faces enormous threats from the Blairite wing of MPs and councillors.

Contributions from the floor added to it by giving examples of the struggles against right-wing Labour council cuts.

Taking place the day after the health demonstrations in London and in most of the cities of Yorkshire, delegates agreed that the campaign to defend the health service would be a dominant one this year.

The conference also heard an inspiring report from Lenny Shail on the work of our socialist international organisation, the Committee for a Workers' International.

West Yorkshire organiser Iain Dalton introduced the discussion on the regional strategy for 2018, prioritising recruitment, youth work and political education.

Again, contributions from the floor showed how most of the branches had made progress.

The conference opened with a video of SP activities across the region, ending in a celebration of the life of Mary Jackson (longstanding Militant and Socialist Party member from Doncaster) who sadly passed away recently.

Maybe it was her inspiration that led to collective commitments to donate more than £13,000 towards the Party's building fund and a very good £330 towards the fighting fund.

Mary Jackson funeral

- Wednesday 14 February, 3.20pm
 - Rosehill Crematorium, Aston Avenue, Cantley, Doncaster DN4 6HE
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<http://www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/26854>