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Determined UCU strikers: We're out to win!

Sam Morecroft, Sheffield UCU Anticasualisation Officer reports:

With a storm of protest on social media overnight and remarkable scenes on angry picket lines and massive protests, University and College Union (UCU) members around the country have ensured no backtracking in their struggle to defend their pensions.

UCU members were enraged at a proposed agreement reached at conciliation service Acas and the joint statement from Universities UK and UCU released on 12 March.

The deal, which was a significant concession on UUK's previous decision, was still a massive cut to the value of our pensions. Strike action has forced concessions, but this was not the deal members have been striking for.

Even worse, the joint statement - issued the night before branches were consulted - suggested we will call off strikes and action short-of-strike, and that members will reschedule teaching.

That was an insult to the fantastic struggle our members have waged - we cannot demobilise the strike now when all the momentum is on our side and pickets have remained so strong.

There is no point in an interim deal which is just used as a stepping stone to Collective Defined Contribution pensions, as the joint statement suggested.

But now (in the afternoon of 13 March), all but two of the 64 branches on strike have organised emergency meetings and voted to reject the deal, and so has the UCU higher education committee which has met today.

The big, angry and lively protests around the country pressured the national leadership to rethink. It is clear UCU members are not willing to cease their action for a shoddy deal and nor should they. We have made history, waging an incredible struggle despite the Trade Union Act, and we are the first union to do so. Keep up the strikes, keep up the action!

The above report was updated during the course of the day on Tuesday 13 March.

Keishia Taylor, UCU striker and UCL PhD student, reported from the lobby of the UCU reps' meeting in London early on 13 March:

After publishing a UCU/UUK joint statement about their 'agreement' without talking to UCU members, UCU general secretary Sally Hunt had the audacity to talk to the angry crowd about democracy. But this is the opposite - members were not consulted, it is not our agreement and we want to reject this insulting deal.

Hundreds of university workers and students have mobilised in only 12 hours to protest outside the UCU talks and say no to the deal and Sally Hunt's version of democracy. Around the country, emergency meetings on picket lines are unanimously voting against this offer and for continuing our strike action.

So far, the dispute has united our universities and shown us the power of standing together. With university workers making huge sacrifices and incredible solidarity from students, we've forced the bosses to retreat and the latest offer retains some Defined Benefits.

Huge numbers have flooded into the union, particularly younger people and those who have never been on strike before. The significance of how much we have achieved so far should not be underestimated!

Regardless of the outcome, there is a victory in forcing the bosses back and more importantly, proving to workers we can unite and fight. United we are strong and we are ready to strike until we win.

Below is the text of a leaflet by Socialist Party members in the UCU given out on the morning of 13 March:

UCU strike forces concession from employers - But not enough!

- Demand the right to vote to reject the offer
- Keep the action on

Questions we need answering

- Why did the union leadership issue a joint statement with the employers before today's meeting and before the members have had a chance to consider the proposals?
- Why has the union instructed members to re-timetable lectures?
- Why haven't we been given the detail of how much per month will an extra 0.7% contribution rate cost us per month?
- Why haven't we been told how much we will lose by the decrease in accrual rate?
- Why is the union agreeing to a review that accepts the outcome must include the CDC scheme being used instead of defined benefit?

The employers offering to take their initial proposal off the table for three years is a significant climb-down and is as a direct result of the strike action.

But before we decide if it is enough to call off the action we need the full details as to what it exactly means for members.

NO agreement without members' say so

Given that there was a planned national representatives meeting taking place today, why did our leadership issue a joint statement with employers effectively supporting the proposals before any discussion with the members? Why have we been issued with an instruction to re-timetable lectures?

This was a mistake and it risks demobilising members and losing the momentum we have built up with the strike so far.

There is talk that the leadership will put the offer to an online vote. This must be rejected and instead there must be local meetings where the offer can be fully debated and voted on.

The three-year review should be with no pre-conditions and with union oversight

Whilst UCU members might agree to an independent review as long as the union has equal oversight, this should be done with no pre-set conditions or outcome.

Unfortunately, the employers are proposing in advance of the review that we must end up having to accept the CDC scheme; **this is not acceptable.**

How much will the increase in contribution rate by 0.7% cost us?

Before deciding why and if any concession should be given to the employer, members have a right to know how much it will cost them.

We need the employer to give a breakdown on each pay point of how much more they would have to pay. Given that members have had little or no pay rises for years, any further pay cut will hit members hard.

What will the change in accrual really mean in lost pension?

Part of the proposed "transitional offer" is to reduce the accrual rate to 1/85th, what does that mean in real money for members; how much pension will members lose with this change on each pay point? We need this information before we can decide that any proposal is acceptable.

This offer should be rejected. UUK are raising the issue of the deficit but we should demand that the government underwrites the scheme.

The planned strike action should be continued and escalated - linking up with fellow university unions and students and our UCU members in FE who are taking action on pay.

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 13 March 2018 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

UCU strike continues: set dates for next national action

University and College Union (UCU) strikers [have determinedly fought](#) to keep the pensions strike going.

This will be a huge blow to the university bosses who were already on the back foot - and it is an indication of a union being transformed, rapidly growing and emboldened by action, with a membership that expects their union to be democratic and combative.

The offer by Universities UK (UUK) has been rejected by branches and the union's higher education committee. Dates need to be set for the next wave of national action and until then support should be built for the strike. Here are some reports of the struggle so far.

St Andrews

UCU's industrial action to defend the pensions of university staff, including lecturers, researchers and administrative staff, enters its fourth day. Thousands of workers at universities across the UK have gone on strike, many for the first time. Membership of the UCU has rocketed since the start of strike action.

The response of university bosses, whose huge pay packets have made headlines recently, and UUK, the body responsible for administering the 'USS' pension scheme, has been appalling and dismissive, driving many new workers into the union and onto the picket lines.

A massive victory was gained at the University of St Andrews where bosses threatened their staff with docking 100% pay for action short of a strike. A letter from the vice-chancellor to staff threatened the cancellation of initiatives aimed at improving the representation of women and minorities in the university should the pension scheme remain intact. The outrage among staff was palpable.

The letter drove more staff onto the picket lines and a large-scale campaign among university students and alumni, along with a refusal of the staff to be bullied, pushed management back. They now state that they will not dock pay in response to action short of a strike and have backpedalled on their threats to diversity initiatives.

Laurel Fogarty, UCU striker

Liverpool

Around 200 striking UCU members, students and other strike supporters assembled at the University of Liverpool Guild of Students building on 8 March before marching through the city in a tremendous display of strength, solidarity and determination in their struggle against vicious cuts to university staff pensions.

The marchers were greeted by a chorus of car horns as they made their way through the town centre from taxi drivers, bus drivers and even one man driving a Bentley!

Socialist Students and Socialist Party members attended the march, dishing out leaflets and selling copies of the Socialist.

The strike is enjoying massive support from students, the Liverpool community and the wider trade union movement, as shown by how Communication Workers' Union postal workers have refused to cross picket lines by delivering mail to the university, forcing staff to collect the mail themselves from the post office depot!

Jack Yarlett, Liverpool Socialist Students

Leicester

From 5 to 7 March, students occupied part of the administrative floor of the Fielding Johnson building at the University of Leicester. It was one of many student occupations across the country in solidarity with striking lecturers and academic staff united in the UCU, fighting cuts to their pensions.

Alongside this, students at the University of Leicester were fighting back against the appointment of David Willetts as the new chancellor of the university. Willetts is the Tory ex-minister for universities, who oversaw the tripling of tuition fees from £3,000 to £9,000 a year.

Despite initial difficulties with security and administrative staff, students managed to secure the occupation and clear the offices, with great support outside from striking UCU staff and other students. After several hours of protest the management was forced to meet with students.

The meeting was held, attended by democratically chosen delegates from the occupiers. However the concessions offered were unsatisfactory to the students and UCU alike. The vice-chancellor refused to change his position on the appointment of Willetts, and attempted to defend his despicable voting record on LGBT+ rights and his atrocious actions over tuition fees. Students wouldn't take no for an answer and voted to extend the occupation.

Under pressure a meeting was agreed with David Willetts present where all staff and students were welcome to question him and openly discuss his appointment as chancellor. Alongside this, management agreed that the process by which the next chancellor is chosen needs to be changed to a democratic one, and to take steps towards this goal.

But management failed to address the concerns that students raised regarding David Willetts, maintaining support for his appointment. They also completely failed to come out in support of striking UCU lecturers.

Therefore we are continuing the fight against Willetts, against cuts and against the marketisation of education.

Taran Spivey, Leicester Socialist Students

Socialist Party congress 2018

The Socialist Party's national congress 2018 took place in London on 10 and 11 March, attended by delegates and visitors from Socialist Party branches all over England and Wales, as well as from Socialist Party Scotland.

Below are reports of some of the sessions on developments in the world and in Britain. We also discussed building the Socialist Party, had [an update on the building fund](#) and heard a report of the work of the Committee for a Workers' International. A fighting fund appeal raised £6,231.

World in crisis: volatility prepares the way for revolutionary upheavals

Kevin Parslow

The Financial Times, mouthpiece of British capitalism, had published on the morning of the first day of congress, [a piece on how relevant the Communist Manifesto is today](#). "We live," according to an Oxford University academic, "in the wake of a calamitous financial crisis and in the midst of whirlwind social change, a popular distaste of financial capitalists, and widespread revolutionary activity."

The conclusion? That if Marx and Engels were writing today, they would rename their work the 'Activist Manifesto' and tone down its explicit pro-working class and anti-capitalist message!

In leading off on 'world perspectives,' Socialist Party general secretary Peter Taaffe referred to this article but applied the real method of Marxism to analyse the world situation and show a way forward to building socialism internationally.

A wide-ranging discussion followed in which comrades elaborated on developments in South Africa, the Spanish state and Catalonia, Italy, Eastern Europe, Japan, China, Israel/Palestine and the US. Judy Beishon, from the Socialist Party's executive committee, replied to the discussion.

Peter explained that the most striking feature of the current period is the rapid and convulsive changes in the world today. They denote ultimately revolutionary upheavals at a certain stage, for which socialists should be prepared.

This is typified by the results of the elections in Italy, where populist parties gained the most votes, and forming a government will be difficult.

[The Italian result](#) could also be a blow to the 'EU project' of greater integration. Italy could even follow Britain out of the EU door.

The eventual formation of a coalition government in Germany between the right-wing Christian Democrats of Merkel and the Social Democrats took almost six months from the general election in which both these 'traditional' parties achieved their worst results since 1949.

What these outcomes show is that the capitalist class internationally cannot rule in the same way as it did in more stable times in the past, partly due to them not having reliable parties to do their bidding.

Most of Europe is similarly convulsed. The events of the last year in Catalonia have shown the volatile situation within the Spanish state. President Macron in France is conducting an offensive against the working class, which could lead to big battles there in the 50th anniversary of the revolutionary events of 1968 in that country.

Mass upheavals in the neocolonial world in the past few months are further indications of the speed of events today. The catastrophic war in Syria is terrible for ordinary people as the regional and world powers battle for 'supremacy'.

But Peter also referenced the recent mass movements in Iran and Tunisia as examples where the working class has lost their fear of the ruling class and their political representatives. Similar volatility shakes Africa and Latin America.

The biggest factor in the world situation today is undoubtedly Trump and US imperialism. The instability of his presidency is reflected in the standoff with North Korea, with no guarantee of success for the planned talks; the imposition of tariffs on steel, threatening retaliatory measures worldwide and affecting the international economy; and possible clashes with China, the world's second biggest economy.

In China itself, economic growth is fuelled by debt. This situation is unsustainable and will come to a head at a certain stage.

The country's leadership under President Xi Jinping have consolidated their powers, including scrapping term limits, to stifle the coming mass explosions.

Some of the capitalist class have talked about a new 'Gilded Age', similar to that at the turn of the 20th century dominated by so-called 'robber barons' like the

Rothschilds, Vanderbilts and Rockefellers. Today's billionaires - numbering just over 1,500 worldwide - are a new plutocracy and, in the words of the Financial Times' Martin Wolf, Trump represents 'Plutocracy populism'.

But Trump is mobilising the opposition against him, like the youth uprising against school massacres and a wave of teachers' strikes in West Virginia and other states.

The task of the Socialist Party and our sections in the Committee for a Workers' International is to prepare for big developments and build support for socialist forces worldwide. Realising socialism in Britain and worldwide, Peter concluded, is a goal worth fighting for!

Britain: Corbyn surges and Tories' weakness mean favourable terrain for socialists

Sarah Wrack

The era we are living through - following the surges in support for Jeremy Corbyn, and with many young people talking about socialist ideas and consciously considering themselves on the left - is more favourable terrain for socialists to be organising on than we've had for many years.

As Socialist Party deputy general secretary Hannah Sell described in her introduction to the 'British perspectives' discussion: "After 30 years of nothing but establishment politicians supporting neoliberal ideas, we've now got John McDonnell putting the case for nationalisation of at least some utilities, and being attacked again in the Financial Times as 'singing a Marxist tune'."

The support for Corbyn and McDonnell's ideas has come from "a profound, deep-rooted anger at what capitalism means for the majority."

Hannah pointed out that the return to formal growth in the economy has meant nothing for ordinary people. Instead we see huge personal debt levels, life expectancy for girls falling for the first time since the 1920s and public services like the NHS facing catastrophe.

While the majority of national trade union leaderships are holding back national and coordinated action, the same anger as is behind support for Corbyn has driven a number of important sectional and local industrial disputes, as well as community campaigns.

For example, in the discussion we heard from Socialist Party members who are playing leading roles in the University and College Union strikes, RMT strikes against driver-only operated trains, and local campaigns to save NHS services and on housing and other local council cuts.

These struggles show the potential, but unfortunately both the majority of trade union leaderships and the Labour leadership have not acted to maximise this. Instead, both give too much the impression that it is

enough for working and middle class people to get behind Corbyn and hold on until a Labour government is elected.

It is a mistake to not use their positions to mobilise workers in mass campaigns for jobs and services now - that would be the strongest basis on which a Corbyn government could come to power. For example, as executive committee member Rob Williams said in replying to the discussion, the emergency NHS demonstration at the start of February could have been much bigger than it was had Corbyn and the trade union leaderships thrown their full weight behind it.

It is similarly a mistake - by Corbyn and those who claim to lead the support for him, like Momentum - to continue to talk of 'unity' within the Labour Party. "The reality," Hannah said, "is that the pro-capitalist wing of the Labour Party has been forced to appear reconciled to Corbyn's leadership, while continuing to work to undermine him."

And they would continue this undermining in the case of a Corbyn-led government coming to power, trying to prevent Corbyn's anti-austerity manifesto from being implemented.

Many workers understand that the Labour Party remains "two parties in one". That is why in many areas we see the best campaigners, including those who have joined Labour, correctly willing to prioritise fighting in the interests of the working class over fear of criticising Labour's right wing.

For example, those Labour Party members in Bristol who have signed a letter to Corbyn demanding that Bristol's Labour (and supposedly Corbyn-supporting) mayor Marvin Rees stops implementing Tory cuts.

Similarly, many workers who back Corbyn, including some who have joined Labour, are supportive of the Socialist Party standing candidates against the Blairites in May's local elections as part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC).

Hannah said that "unlike any Labour leader in the last epoch" Corbyn and McDonnell can be pushed to take a more radical anti-cuts stance by pressure from below. This can be built through campaigns and strikes, but also through an electoral challenge which backs them, but boldly stands against the saboteurs within their own party.

These battles are made all the more important and urgent by the fact that the opportunities facing the working class are huge and there is "disarray on the other side". The capitalist class is in an extremely weak position, with no reliable political representatives to carry out a programme in their best interests - "the Tories are at each other's' throats."

Nowhere is this more clear than over the issue of Brexit. As we pointed out in the editorial of the last issue of the Socialist (see ['May's EU speech kicks can down the road'](#)) the pro-EU wing of the Tories has been temporarily pacified by May's latest position, which stressed having high level access to EU markets.

But the divisions will soon come to the surface again - it is clear that this wing hopes to push May towards accepting Single Market and/or Customs Union membership, which will be intolerable to the other side.

The bosses are attempting to use Labour as a stick to push May into a Brexit position they could accept, while hoping the undemocratic Fixed Term Parliament Act will maintain her in power. But as Hannah said, "this is a very high risk tactic... events are not under the control of the capitalist class."

The fudged positions to maintain unity in the Tories will become more and more difficult as Brexit deadlines approach, and the DUP could pull out of the 'supply and confidence' agreement at any time. So while it is possible that the Tory government could "stagger on", we could also see a general election within the next year.

Such an election would present a huge opportunity for the working class and for socialists. The work we are doing now, including mobilising people through campaigns and industrial battles as well as winning workers and young people to join the Socialist Party, is preparation for the battles that would be faced in such a situation.

Italian elections create huge political shake-up

Build a mass left, anti-capitalist alternative

The 4 March general election has caused the biggest shake-up of the Italian political landscape in over 20 years. Not since the 'clean hands' corruption scandal of the early 1990s have the establishment parties been so severely wounded, writes Christine Thomas of Resistenze Internazionali (CWI Italy).

The Democratic Party (PD) of former prime minister Matteo Renzi suffered a humiliating defeat, coming a poor second to the populist Five Star Movement (M5S), while billionaire Berlusconi's Forza Italia (FI) was outpolled by the right-wing populist Lega led by Matteo Salvini.

On a turnout of 73%, over 50% of votes went to perceived anti-establishment parties, reflecting a clear rejection of traditional politics and a desperate desire for change after years of corruption, austerity and economic devastation for ordinary people.

With no clear victor, weeks and possibly months of uncertainty are likely as parties struggle to form a viable government.

The collapse in the vote for the PD, the main party in the outgoing coalition and favourite of the Italian capitalist class, was even greater than the polls had predicted.

In the Camera (lower house) the PD on 19% was only just ahead of the Lega, a far cry from the 40% polled in the European elections less than four years ago. Even its dominance of the 'red regions' (former Communist Party strongholds) in the centre has been shattered, with the PD losing the Emilia Romagna region to the 'centre'-right for the first time since World War Two and holding on in just a few cities like Bologna and Imola.

Following such a crushing defeat nationally, Renzi has been forced to announce his resignation as leader (although it will happen only after a new government is in place).

Economy and politics

Even though there has been a slight upturn in the economy, after nearly a decade of recession, the PD was never going to benefit from an economic electoral bounce. Growth is still lower and unemployment higher than before the crisis and most working class people and many middle class people have felt no improvement in their daily lives. For many there is no end to the crisis.

During the election campaign, Embraco (part of Whirlpool) announced the transfer of production from Turin to Slovakia with the loss of 500 jobs.

The split-off from the PD, Liberi e Uguali (LeU), which was supposed to offer a new "left" alternative, only just reached the 3% threshold for having candidates elected.

This is not surprising when its leaders are associated with all the PD's anti-working class attacks - such as the labour law 'reform' which made it easier to sack workers and the pension 'reform' which has forced workers to work longer.

On the eve of the election, Pietro Grasso, leader of LeU, showed his party's true colours by announcing LeU's willingness to form a post-electoral coalition with the PD.

With over 32% of the vote nationally, the M5S is by far the biggest party. It swept the board in the south, which has been hardest hit by the economic crisis, getting 40% of the vote in Puglia and Sicily and over 50% in some parts of Campania, such as Naples. M5S did particularly well among young people (35% of the under 35s who voted).

'Something different'

The support for M5S has come from both former left-leaning and right-leaning voters who, thoroughly sick of traditional politics, have been prepared to overlook the party's internal problems and chaotic governance of Rome in order to 'try something different'.

However, despite its success the M5S will not be able to form a majority government on its own. Terrified of the possibility of a M5S government, the Italian ruling class had pushed for a change in the electoral law aimed precisely at denying the movement a majority. Now that same electoral law has resulted in the ruling class having no stable political reference point.

Luigi Di Maio, leader of the M5S, has spent the past few months courting big business and trying to present himself as a viable future prime minister and the M5S as a reliable capitalist party, including backing away from the movement's former anti-euro/EU stance and opposing a wealth tax.

He has also declared that he is open to the idea of alliances with other parties. How far he will be able to go along that road is an open question as it flies in the face of the original *raison d'être* of the M5S - a movement forged in complete opposition to the rotten political 'caste' and traditional parties.

If the M5S should decide to go into a coalition with any of the other parties it would most likely result in the movement shattering, with one part attempting to move back to its anti-establishment origins.

The 'centre'-right has emerged as the biggest coalition but, with 37% of the vote, it is also short of a majority. The significant change is that the virulently anti-immigrant Lega is now the biggest party on the right, overturning the balance of forces within the coalition away from Berlusconi's Forza Italia.

Immigration

In the media, the question of immigration dominated the electoral campaign with all the major parties adopting a hardline position. But in the north, and increasingly in parts of the centre, it has been the Lega which has reaped the electoral benefits.

Its vote increased nationally from 4% at the last election to 18% this time (a third of those voters having previously abstained and a quarter switching from Berlusconi's party). Also, Fratelli d'Italia, which is part of the coalition and has its roots in the fascist party MSI, tripled its vote to 4.35%.

The 'centre'-right will undoubtedly attempt to win over MPs from other parties in order to form a majority. But it will be extremely difficult to find the necessary numbers (over 50 seats), especially with Salvini as the candidate for prime minister.

Despite the anti-immigration political discourse and unprecedented media publicity for the fascist Casapound, it only managed to get 0.9% of the vote. However, the shooting of six immigrants by a right-wing terrorist in the course of the election campaign showed the dangers that anti-immigrant politics are fuelling. The question of anti-racism and anti-fascism will continue to be a central one, whichever government emerges.

'Power to the People'

The newly established left-wing Potere al Popolo (Power to the People) failed to reach the 3% threshold for parliamentary representation. It got 370,000 votes, just over 1% nationally (compared with 3% in 2013 for the 'radical' left forces). This was in part as a consequence of the 'useful vote' mood which prevailed, affecting all the smaller lists.

For a movement formed only a few weeks before the election and without the media coverage given to the other parties (including Casapound), getting candidates elected was never the main aim.

Potere al Popolo was formed from below as a fighting, campaigning organisation of and for ordinary people, uniting the main left parties and social movements in the country. Hundreds of meetings held in over 100 cities up and down the country attracted thousands of people, especially youth.

It was because of the potential that Potere al Popolo represents for building a fighting anti-capitalist force that Resistenze Internazionali (CWI Italy) affiliated to it, participated in its electoral campaign and stood a candidate on its list in Genova. Whether this organisation will realise its potential is not certain but we will continue in the next period to play a role at a local and national level.

At this early stage it is impossible to say what kind of government (if any) will result from this election - a 'centre'-right coalition dominated by the Lega, a M5S/PD coalition, an alliance between the M5S and the Lega, an extended 'grand coalition', a technocratic government, a government of the president with the sole aim of changing (yet again) the electoral law, or maybe new elections.

All are possible outcomes, but what is certain is that none will be able to solve any of the problems facing working and middle class people.

Italian capitalism's economic, political and social crisis will continue and the building of an anti-capitalist alternative through struggle is now more vital than ever.

- [See socialistworld.net](http://socialistworld.net) for pre-election analysis of Italy

Spain: millions on streets against sexism and capitalist oppression

Izquierda Revolucionaria (IR - CWI in the Spanish state)

The 8 March feminist strike in the Spanish state was unprecedented. Never has there been such a deep and massive mobilisation against the oppression of working class women, against inequality and violence against women.

Hundreds of marches took place and became a tsunami of millions in the streets. It reflected the anger of working class women and young people against the capitalist crisis and reactionary Partido Popular (PP - 'People's Party') government.

This movement was built from below, on the initiative of hundreds of women's collectives, social movements and left organisations, which worked for months to make this a success.

The leaders of right-wing parties PP and Ciudadanos viciously opposed the strike and marches, showing their political agenda is a declaration of war in favour of institutionalised sexism and inequality.

In Madrid, the demonstration could barely move, with an avalanche of hundreds of thousands of women, young people and tens of thousands of male workers. More than one million took part, covering more than five kilometres.

And Madrid was not an exception. The same happened in Barcelona, Vigo, Ferrol, Gijon, Bilbao, Gasteiz, Valencia, Malaga, Sevilla, Zaragoza, Tarragona, Cadiz, Toledo and dozens of other cities.

The participation of millions of young women and men in this battle reflects the enormous revolutionary potential of the new feminist movement which is developing.

In this earthquake of the youth opposing violence against women and sexist capitalism, the Sindicato de Estudiantes (SE - Students' Union), Libres y Combativas (socialist feminist platform launched by SE and IR), and Izquierda Revolucionaria have played a key role.

Our call for a 24-hour student strike was massively supported. 90% of students in secondary schools and 80% of university students joined the strike. Thousands filled the streets on our student demonstrations in the morning with more than 150,000 taking part across the state.

We need a movement which denounces capitalist patriarchy, but also the PP government, Ciudadanos, and all those who accept the logic of this system of cuts to rights, wages, health and education, of precariousness and sexist "justice" which protects those who abuse women.

Despite the two main union federations only calling for a pathetic two-hour strike per shift - which they didn't even organise in most workplaces, only organising symbolic gatherings - millions of women overcame fear and threats to go on strike. Working class women made 8 March a historic day.

Beneath the surface there is bubbling discontent and building pressure, in the homes and workplaces of the poorest and most oppressed in society.

IR and Libres y Combativas call on all workers and youth to continue the struggle for our present and our future, building a feminist movement which cannot be assimilated by the capitalist class. For a working class, revolutionary, anticapitalist feminism!

- [Read the full report at socialistworld.net](http://socialistworld.net)

Spring Statement 2018: Tory austerity staggers on despite economic and political weakness

Ross Saunders, Socialist Party national committee

No wonder people are pulling away, disgusted, from establishment politics. Chancellor Philip Hammond betrayed no sign that the agony wracking austerity Britain even crossed his mind when he drew up the government's Spring Statement.

Usually the chancellor's economic update - previously held in November and called the 'Autumn Statement' - is a kind of mini-budget, making some additions to the main plans announced on Budget Day.

But Hammond managed to spend his whole 20 minutes almost without announcing a single penny of new money for any purpose.

He was full of lame jokes about Winnie the Pooh characters, but empty of the funds our starving public services need to end the permanent crisis they are in.

He had nothing for public sector workers who have endured a decade of pay restraint, nothing for the legions of us struggling on zero-hour contracts, a pitiful response to the ever-growing housing crisis, and no answer to the dire warnings that austerity in our NHS is killing us.

Labour's shadow chancellor John McDonnell was correct to ask parliament: "How many more people have to die waiting in an ambulance before he acts?"

Economy

Much of the big business press has colluded with the Tories to try and talk up the economy and the government's effect on it.

Frankly it was embarrassing to see analysts earnestly attempting to convince us that the small increase in projected GDP growth for this year - from 1.4% to 1.5% - represented what Hammond called "the light at the end of the tunnel." This anaemic recovery is only for the super-rich.

Hammond trumpets that the government is finally spending less than it receives. But while his excuse for continuing austerity is the public debt - due to hit 85% of GDP this year, the highest level since 1965 - its real aim is to erode any sense that the working class is entitled to public services and living wages.

Meanwhile, austerity has also compounded British capitalism's underlying problems. The same tired lies about record employment were rehearsed, with no mention of the epidemic of underemployment, insecure work, enslavement to the gig economy and flight from the sanctions regime in social security that are hidden in the figures.

These processes, coupled with failure to invest record profits, have shipwrecked productivity - the value created per hour of work - which is 16% behind the average across the leading 'G7' economies.

The Office for National Statistics also found in February that since the 2008 crash the trend is for workers to be forced into less productive jobs, in the service sector for example.

All this puts British capitalism in a very precarious situation when the next downturn comes.

The truth is that Britain's economy is still mired in the swamp the capitalist road has plunged it into. There will be no emerging from the filth without socialist policies.

The Tories are fragile and divided and only get away with austerity as usual because of the lack of a lead from the trade union leaders. The UCU strikers show the way: the unions must build for a coordinated fightback.

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 14 March 2018 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

Profits up Wages down

Link up the fightbacks - join the Socialists

Beth Webster, Cardiff West Socialist Party

After congratulating themselves on nominally bringing the British state's finances out of the red - by plundering working class purses - the Tories sat down to vote on cutting provision of school meals and childcare.

They are due to slash benefits by £2.5 billion in April. The latest report by the Institute for Fiscal Studies has again confirmed what the working class knows through experience: the profits of the richest 1% continue to rise while working households fall in to poverty.

Falling living standards have been caused by rising inflation and costs of living, while the bosses and their politicians hold wages down. The Tories continue to impose a 1% pay cap on public sector workers - having awarded MPs a 1.8% pay rise this month.

They answer attacks on their appalling austerity programme with claims of record levels of employment, conveniently not explaining that this 'employment' is frequently precarious and on zero or low-hour contracts.

Bosses of the top 'FTSE 100' firms earn on average 120 times as much as the average worker according to the High Pay Centre. The Tories continue to cut corporation tax, choosing to shunt millions of working class people into poverty to balance the books.

Brutal austerity

The Tories' and Blairites' programme of brutal austerity has not gone unchallenged. Strikes against wage and pension attacks are rumbling around the country. Campaigns around the closure of services such as NHS and women's crisis centres are growing.

Councils continue to implement cuts, telling us they have no choice - this is a lie. Councils, particularly Labour ones, could use reserves and borrowing powers to implement no-cuts budgets now and build mass campaigns to win the money back, saving services that would protect working class families.

We also need unions to coordinate their action to improve pay and conditions. And those unable to work should not be abandoned to destitution and homelessness - benefit cuts must be reversed. A Corbyn-led government with a bold, socialist programme could reverse austerity.

We need a mass movement to kick out the Tories. But ultimately, we need to completely change society from a system driven by profit to one that is run by the working class, for the working class - a socialist society. If you agree, join the Socialists!

- [Spring Statement - Tories press on with austerity despite economic and political weakness](#)
- Join the Socialists: see socialistparty.org.uk/join, or call 020 8988 8777

Sainsbury's raise really a cut: fight for £10 with no strings!

Isai Priya, Usdaw union rep (personal capacity)

Supermarket Sainsbury's announced on 6 March that it will increase the wages of its 130,000 store workers.

Management's headline was that this will make Sainsbury's the highest-paying supermarket and the first to go over £9 an hour.

Sounds good? Well - not quite.

Members lose pay in other areas. The offer includes not just a £1.20 increase to the basic rate - but removal of premium pay for Sundays, paid breaks, and annual bonuses.

There will also be changes to the attendance policy. And the 'deal' says there will be no further increase in the salary until 2020.

The overall package is not at all a wage increase - but rather a pay cut in the long run. Removal of payment for breaks will mean workers lose on average £20 a week, and with added loss of premium pay workers will be worse off.

As general union Unite said, this is a classic "robbing Peter to pay Paul" pay offer. But in this deal there are far more Peters than Pauls.

Unite represents more than 12,000 members working in Sainsbury's. The Socialist Party welcomes the announcement that it will be holding a consultative ballot of members across Britain from the end of March, with a recommendation to reject the 'deal'.

Reject

Retail and distribution union Usdaw, the main union in Sainsbury's and with 430,000 members across the sector, should follow Unite and ballot its members with a recommendation to reject.

Udaw members have shown, through the election of Socialist Party member Amy Murphy as their new president, that they want change. They elected her based on her programme of fighting low pay and zero-hour contracts, and for a £10 an hour minimum wage.

The mood is there among retail workers to fight - but from the right-dominated Usdaw bureaucracy, no clear lead is shown.

Both unions should mobilise their members and call for a no-strings package including a pay rise that reflects the increased cost of living. In London this pay rise should at least match the London Living Wage of £10.20.

We want a real pay rise - and we want it now!

Zero out of 15,000 new homes 'affordable' in Blairite Manchester

Invest in council homes - use reserves and 'Section 106' cash

Becci Heagney, North West Socialist Party

A damning, yet unsurprising, February housing report reveals that zero affordable housing has been built in Manchester city centre in two years.

Anyone who has recently walked around the city will see on the one hand luxury flats being built everywhere - 14,667 plans approved in that time - and on the other, outrageous numbers of people sleeping rough. It doesn't take a genius to work out something is wrong here.

The report commissioned for Greater Manchester Housing Action shows developers are not building the required 20% of affordable housing in new projects. But also, the 'Section 106' money that developers should pay to the council in lieu of this is not being collected.

Construction companies working on big developments are supposed to pay money to councils to help fund affordable housing elsewhere - or new schools, services, infrastructure and so on that might be required because of the increase in residents.

However, if the reported profit margins of developers are too small, they don't have to pay. And the best part is they can keep their figures secret and just say they can't afford it!

In Greater Manchester this is part of devolution. The 'deal' between former Tory chancellor George Osborne and the council leaders of the ten boroughs involved - nine of which are Labour - means the £300 million additional devolution housing money cannot be used to build social housing.

Over one-third of the money has been loaned to a private company to build just one skyscraper in Manchester city centre!

Theresa May recently lambasted the lack of affordable housing available and put the blame on councils and developers. But the Tory government is responsible too. They have given the green light to companies like Carillion to take on contracts without being able to deliver while paying executives big bonuses.

However, her answer - that councils should work still more closely with private developers to build more quickly - is ludicrous.

She also said at least 10% of developments need to be allocated to affordable housing. Without even considering that their definition of 'affordable' is still out of reach for most working class people, the examples of Manchester and nearby Salford show companies can just ignore that!

Local government is not only allowing developers to throw up overpriced housing, pushing out the working class - but passing up millions from them at a time of massive cutbacks to services and rising homelessness.

Councils must demand all the money they're owed - and stop facilitating developers' gentrification projects. Instead they should use the money, with their reserves and borrowing powers, to invest in services and building genuinely affordable council housing.

But it also shows the chaos of the capitalist system and its inability to provide for people's most basic needs. We need the nationalisation of the construction companies and a mass council house building programme to provide for the many not the few.

What we saw

The Mexican communist and artist Frida Kahlo is to be immortalised as... a Barbie doll. This farcical, tone-deaf plan is part of US multinational Mattel's 'celebration' of International Women's Day.

Kahlo spent her adult life railing against capitalism. She also hosted exiled Russian revolutionary leader Leon Trotsky during his later years campaigning against Stalinism. To transform her into a commodity for corporate profit is preposterous.

To add insult to injury, Kahlo's art is known for its honest appraisal of the human body, in particular her own. Barbie, by contrast, is the grotesque epitome of misogynist body imagery.

Mattel says the Kahlo Barbie "celebrates the ideological contributions of Frida Kahlo." No it doesn't. Both Kahlo and the origins of International Women's Day are about militant struggle against capitalism and sexism.

The Russian revolutionary leader Vladimir Lenin is closer to the mark: "During the lifetime of great revolutionaries, the oppressing classes constantly hounded them, received their theories with the most savage malice... After their death, attempts are made to convert them into harmless icons."

15 years since the invasion of Iraq: what we said

Here we reproduce word-for-word the editorial from the issue of the Socialist printed on 28 March 2003, the issue of our weekly paper that came out directly after US and UK troops were sent into Iraq. Obviously the Socialist Party could not peer into the future but as you can see we sought to arm our readers with both a perspective of how the processes might develop and with a programme for action to fight to end war.

On 20 March 2018 it will be 15 years since we woke up to footage of the invasion of Iraq by US and UK forces. The Iraq War was an enormous charge detonated deep in the earth which has shaken and continues to contribute to the instability of millions of lives but also of all capitalist institutions and politics - on the left and right.

Capitalism is illegitimate

The distrust of the capitalist media was cemented by the lies about weapons of mass destruction and has been strengthened since. The Iraq invasion and its aftermath is a major factor in the crisis of legitimacy of capitalism across the world.

World relations have been transformed. Bush's 'New American Century' foundered on the disaster of Iraq. Today the US is still the greatest military power but 2003's unipolar world is no more and tensions between the different imperialist powers reverberate throughout the world - including trade wars and actual wars.

A quick war, 'shock and awe' was promised to deliver a new world and a flowering of democracy in the Middle East. Instead that war (and the world capitalist crisis of 2007-8 that it helped prepare) opened the way to multiple wars since and still today. Iraq itself knows no peace. A million died during the invasion.

From Sri Lanka in 2009 to Libya, to Yemen, Sudan to Afrin, and more - brutal regimes have taken Bush's approach to the so-called 'axis of evil' as a licence to massacre. There are over 65 million refugees in the world. What a monstrous quantity of human suffering that figure represents.

What did bloom were the profits of the contractors who went in to Iraq. By 2013 the US had spent \$138 billion on private security, logistics and reconstruction. By then the invasion was already estimated to have cost \$2 trillion.

The US working class is paying that price - and for the bankers' crisis of 2007-8. Trump's 2019 budget proposes to cut food stamps by more than \$213 billion over the next ten years.

An estimated 30 million marched in over 600 cities on the historic date of 15 February 2003. Two million had marched in Britain.

"No blood for oil" was the slogan adopted in particular by young people there and on the incredible school student strikes. That slogan reflected the understanding that the world's capitalist powers prioritised profits over people.

But in the absence of a political voice, the movement fought with one hand tied behind its back.

Corbyn's anti-war record was definitely a factor in his stunning 2015 victory in the Labour leadership election. Unfortunately the parliamentary Labour Party remains dominated by warmongers like Hilary Benn and Stella Creasy.

Today we need a movement to remove them as part of the fight for the mass socialist workers' political voice we need to fight war, austerity and capitalism.

As we go to press, the battle for Baghdad seems about to begin. It is still too early to get an exact picture, but if the first phase of the war is anything to go by the next stage could be far from the 'cakewalk' that some military analysts predicted.

The US/British war plans have not kept to the script. Superior military airpower was meant to create such 'shock and awe' that the regime would crumble, troops surrender and Iraqis in the towns rise up and welcome US and British forces as 'liberators' from the tyrant Saddam Hussein.

Instead, up until now US and British troops have met with determined resistance, far fewer Iraqi soldiers have defected than was expected, while US and British casualties have been unexpectedly high.

Supply lines have come under attack and, according to Unicef, in Basra - a city of two million people - there has been no water or electricity and a humanitarian disaster is developing. At least 100,000 children under five are at risk from disease.

Fierce fighting was waged over Umm Qasr, a town of just 5,000 compared to a population of seven million in Baghdad.

Of course, the US has overwhelming military superiority. The US administration believes its vital interests are at stake and is determined to fight to the bitter end to overthrow the Iraqi regime. The battle for Baghdad could still result in the collapse of the regime and this phase of the war could be over relatively quickly.

However, US and British troops could also become bogged down in a drawn out, guerrilla style, hand-to-hand fighting, which could drag on for weeks and months. No one can be sure how much resistance US and British forces will face.

Although there is hatred for Saddam's vicious regime, there appears also to be a willingness by significant sections of the population to fight what is perceived not as a liberating army but as a force of domination and conquest.

As one Iraqi returning from Jordan to Baghdad explained: "I'm not fighting for Saddam, I'm fighting for Iraq." Iraqi 'returnees' have paid up to £1,000 for taxi rides back to Iraq to fight the 'imperialist invaders'. Iraqi nationalism could prove to be a much greater force than US and British imperialism expected.

The situation could also be complicated by the 'war within a war' that could potentially break out between Turkish and Kurdish troops in the north.

Deaths

A US opinion poll taken just after the war started found that 41% expected US casualties to be no more than 100. General McCaffney, a retired US general, said on Newsnight that with heavy fighting they could reach 2,000 to 3,000.

A lengthy, bloody war would have an effect on public opinion in the US and in Britain.

In both countries, as expected, the outbreak of war resulted in an initial decrease in opposition. There is a feeling among some people, encouraged by some 'anti-war' politicians like the Liberal Democrats, church leaders etc, that now that the war has begun they should 'get behind' the troops whose lives are being put at risk.

Nevertheless, two days after war broke out, an anti-war demonstration of between a quarter and half a million took place in New York, and a similar number protested in London - the biggest wartime demonstration in Britain.

Media commentators are speculating on how high the 'pain threshold' is in the US. If casualties mount in a prolonged conflict, the mood could swing rapidly back against war.

The 'Vietnam syndrome' has not been completely buried. After the Vietnam war, when 57,000 US troops were killed, US administrations had to be careful to avoid any military engagements that might result in significant US casualties.

If the war goes very badly and mass opposition grows, Bush and Blair could come under increased pressure to negotiate a ceasefire with the Iraqi regime. To do so would fatally damage both political leaders but cannot be completely ruled out if the war turns out to be much more brutal and protracted than originally anticipated.

It is vital then that we continue to build the anti-war movement. The mass protests that have so far taken place have not prevented or stopped the war. But they have affected the conduct of the war. Neither Bush nor Blair can afford to completely ignore public opinion.

The bombing of Baghdad has been a horrific experience for ordinary Iraqis and caused deaths and terrible injuries. But the bombing has not yet been completely indiscriminate.

As Major-General Peter Currie bluntly stated in the Daily Mirror: "We don't want to reduce to rubble a country that we shall have to rebuild.

"That is not the only reason. In a war so politically highly charged, which has divided the nation straight down the middle, collateral damage could be more than just costly - it could be catastrophic."

In other words, there are political limitations on the use of US military might. However, now that they have met resistance in towns such as Basra, bombing affecting civilians is taking place and this could grow in the battle for Baghdad.

It is wrong to assume that nothing can be done now that the war has begun. However, the anti-war movement has to do more than "shout a bit louder," as some leaders of the Stop the War Coalition have suggested.

Strike action

We have to continue and extend the walkouts, protests and civil disobedience. But we also have to campaign now for decisive industrial action against the war.

The school students have shown the way by their fantastic strike action on Day X. Workplace action was much more limited but there is much that can be done now to organise for future action.

Left union leaders like Bob Crow of the RMT are opposed to war with Iraq and have pledged to support any workers who take action against it. They now have to be more proactive.

They should immediately organise an anti-war conference of rank-and-file union members, union reps, executive committee members and general secretaries who support the Stop the War Coalition.

Such a conference could discuss taking action against the war, including naming the date for a one-day strike.

This would take the movement onto a new level that could challenge Blair and his support for this brutal imperialist war.

Woolwich ferry workers win automation campaign

A Unite member

The news has been filled with reports about the robot future and while it gets the odd mention, there has been relatively little detail reported about the impact on workers - save for the occasional sensational headline warning of a robot take over.

Unite the Union has correctly given the matter priority attention and produced informative reports. More importantly, Unite members working on the Woolwich Ferry in London have shown how to take the matter on in the workplace. This October will see the delivery of new, hybrid boats. The technology involved will make a number of jobs on the ferry no longer necessary - mainly in the onsite workshop. The employer put forward a reorganisation plan, which involved compulsory job losses and pay cuts.

The union responded by uniting workers in order to deal with a challenge that will be increasingly common as automation advances. This challenge, where older groups of workers may wish to take the opportunity of a retirement or redundancy package but where equally there are workers who cannot afford to leave and want to fight for their conditions, requires a campaign that takes up the demand of both groups.

To the immense credit of union members on the ferry, this is what was agreed and on this basis, a ballot for strike action took place with 98% of members voting for strike action on a turnout that also beat the threshold set by the latest anti-trade union legislation. This forced the employers into serious negotiations where the union held the line that both sets of workers' demands must be met.

The leverage from the strike ballot forced the employers to agree a no-compulsory-redundancy process, a three-year pay protection arrangement for those moved jobs where nearly all workers will receive 100% pay protection, enhanced redundancy terms for those who do volunteer to leave now, a pay increase this April and the option of enhanced redundancy terms for workers who do not accept voluntary redundancy at this stage but who are unsuccessful when applying for a job later on in the process.

Clearly, there is a bigger picture whereby the unions must nationally be calling for automation to benefit workers, with more leisure time without loss of income and alternative employment. The victory won by the Woolwich Ferry workers, building on the campaign they won last year against sexual harassment and breaches of health and safety, shows that campaigns can be won at a local level - and should be used as examples for a national response.

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 8 March 2018 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

Leaked NHS pay deal: fight for a genuine pay rise

An NHS worker in Unison

NHS workers have reacted angrily to a headline in the Guardian following leaked news: "NHS staff offered 6.5% pay rise over three years if they forfeit day's holiday".

After eight years of pay freezes, in which the value of NHS workers' wages has fallen by 14% in real terms, it is outrageous that the leaked deal, negotiated by the 14 NHS trade unions "in conditions of strict secrecy", not only consists of below inflation pay rises for another three years but is also to be paid for by ministers insisting that staff give up a day's annual leave!

The deal, which has still to be agreed by the treasury, includes some as yet to be published changes to the pay bands which could mean additional pay for staff not currently at the top of their pay bands. For the majority of staff who are at the top of their band it is in effect another pay cut and will do nothing to stop the drift of experienced staff out of the NHS.

Much has been made of bigger pay rises for the lowest paid but the rise is only in line with National Minimum wage rises which employers need to give to meet legal requirements. 6.5% over three years does nothing to erode the entrenched low for tens of thousands of our union members.

The loss of a day's annual leave will be seen as a kick in the teeth for the overworked staff working in crisis conditions due to staff shortages and underfunding. The government is said to have made the removal of the annual leave a "non-negotiable red line" during the negotiations. NHS workers should draw a red line and demand that we keep it.

Last year's health workers' union Unison conference policy could not have been clearer. We demanded joint action across the union and public sector against the pay squeeze. Rather than concession bargaining in which we pay for our own pay rise we should be uniting with other trade unionists across the public sector to smash the pay cap.

As the Guardian article says, the public sector pay cap was politically damaging for the Tories. This was the only reason health secretary Jeremy Hunt suddenly decide to lift the pay cap. Now is the time to hit the Tories and fight for a genuine pay rise that reverses the attacks on NHS workers' pay.

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We feel that we will win - a Merseyrail striker speaks

A striking Merseyrail RMT member

3 March was our sixteenth day of strike action in a year-long dispute over the introduction of driver-only operated trains on the Merseyrail network.

Even in the bitter cold the picket lines remained solid and resilient in the knowledge that we can win this dispute over keeping a second safety-critical person on every train from start to end of service, which the vast majority of the travelling public of Merseyside want.

Drivers in the Aslef union have shown solidarity with us (even though they aren't in official dispute) by not crossing any Merseyrail RMT picket lines and I honestly thank each and every one of them from the bottom of my heart. The feeling from RMT guards at Merseyrail is that we will win with the continued support from the Aslef drivers and from the Merseyside public.

The facts are, this particular dispute could easily be resolved tomorrow if the Liverpool regional transport committee's (the vast majority of which are Labour councillors) decision was reversed under the instructions of metro mayor Steve Rotheram and Liverpool city mayor Joe Anderson, who are both elected Labour

mayors. Unfortunately Rotheram and Anderson have decided not to intervene in the RMT's campaign to keep the guard on the trains, the latter saying he thought the strike action was "unreasonable".

Rotheram and Anderson are the main reasons why this strike has gone on for a year, because they are complicit to sit back and watch, instead of listening and acting on what 89% of the travelling public on Merseyside want - to keep the guards on the train.

Jeremy Corbyn recently commented on Twitter that he fully supported the retention of guards on trains, yet Rotheram and Anderson choose to ignore their own party leader. It's clear to all that Labour is two parties in one. This dispute ultimately shows that.

I just hope that come the local elections in May, people can see that most Labour councillors in Merseyside are fanatical supporters of Tory cuts.

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Workplace news in brief

Hinkley sit-in

A two-day sit-in by 500 workers at the Hinkley Point C nuclear power station in Somerset won the workers' demand for pay. Bosses had threatened to dock pay for not attending work when the site was closed due to heavy snowfall.

When employees returned to the site on 6 March they were told they would not be paid for the days they were off.

The workers' unions GMB, Unite and Prospect have announced the project is back underway after the 'Beast from the East' sit-in protest which halted work for four days.

Newham academies

The battle against academies is continuing in Newham, with a lively picket at Avenue Primary School on 13 March. Avenue will take six days of strikes over the next fortnight, with other schools in the borough coordinating action.

Campaigners recently lobbied a full council meeting, and won a vote for the council to take an anti-academies position. This is welcomed.

But the motion made no provision for schools currently attempting to convert to academies, so the strikes continue.

What we saw

In his diatribe against Len McCluskey and his leadership of Unite the Union, [Nick Cohen in the Observer \(11 March\)](#) contrasts Unite's 'poor' record with Usdaw the shop workers' union.

Cohen claims: "The shop workers' union Usdaw fights equally necessary and difficult struggles to stop cut-price supermarkets cutting pay and conditions."

On the contrary, they don't! Contrast Usdaw's current position on [the Sainsbury's deal](#) with Unite's. That is why members elected Socialist Party (formerly Militant) member Amy Murphy as president last month so that Usdaw does fight those battles.

Continuing the fighting tradition of working class women

Coventry

Tessa Warrington, Socialist Party organiser in the East Midlands, gave a fantastic introduction speech to a meeting room filled with working class women involved in struggles and battles.

The tremendous Socialist Party public meeting to celebrate International Women's Day in Coventry was chaired by National Education Union executive member and Coventry Trade Union Council president Jane Nellist.

Local activists from 'Women Against State Pension Inequality' updated the meeting on their campaign. Local Keep Our NHS Public organisers Julie and Vicky Horbury attended and spoke about the local campaign to defend the NHS - and the crucial role it plays in defending women's rights.

Others spoke about the role working class women and socialists played in winning the right to vote, equal pay and maternity rights, and abortion rights. What was clear throughout was that the ruling class has never granted any rights without the struggle of ordinary people.

Coventry Socialist Party

Birmingham

Birmingham Socialist Party, Socialist Students and Young Socialists held a joint public meeting for International Women's Day on 7 March. 35 people attended, including students and young women in precarious work.

Socialist Students and Socialist Party member Hannah Davies chaired the meeting, with the first speaker being Mandy Buckley, Unison shop steward and striker from the Birmingham home care worker's dispute.

Mandy told the meeting that home carers - low-paid and predominately women - were inspired to strike after the victory of the Birmingham bin workers against the council last year.

Becci Heagney, North West Socialist Party organiser, was another guest speaker. Becci spoke on the history of International Women's Day and the suffragette movement, and how we can learn from the struggles of working class women throughout history.

There was lively discussion and a solidarity picture taken at the end for the care workers. We all took away an understanding of the strength of working class women when we get organised, and how working class women's struggles today are continuing the thread of history.

Corinthia Ward, Birmingham Central Socialist Party

Seeing-off the bigoted, billionaire toff!

Lily Branchett, Birmingham central Socialist Party

On 9 March, Birmingham Socialist Students played a vital role in organising a protest against arch-reactionary Tory MP Jacob Rees-Mogg, at the University of Birmingham (UoB) campus.

On hearing that this figurehead of the bigoted billionaire class was planning to speak at our campus, we sprang into action alongside three other societies - the Women's Association, LGBTQ Society and Black and Ethnic Minority Association - to show that we reject both his backwards views and his disgusting parliamentary voting record.

Our members were joined by around 50 people, including UoB students, Birmingham City Uni students and some UoB staff, to show that if this man can exercise his right to freedom of speech to spread his regressive views, then we too can exercise our right to show that we will not stand for it on our campus and in our city.

Many leaflets were handed out detailing how Mogg has consistently voted against the interests of women, LGBT+ people, immigrants and asylum seekers, disabled people, and the working class, while consistently voting to benefit his own capitalist class and profit minded agenda.

Socialist Students members spoke at the event. One said we were protesting to show that we were "completely and unequivocally" opposed to his views and that we had to stand in solidarity in the face of such blatant homophobia, misogyny and bigotry being sold as 'political debate' on our campus.

Birmingham Socialist Students kept the protest peaceful, well-organised, and politically focused. As one of the main organisers, Sam Witts, put it: "If he is proud of his legacy, then we can be equally as proud of ours."

Derby public meeting: Women's Lives Matter

Kelly Carson, Derby Socialist Party

Derby's Women's Lives Matter meeting was poignant in many respects. Not only did it take place during International Women's Day celebrations and the centenary of certain women getting the vote, but it was also 40 years since Derby Women's Centre was formed by a group of local women.

The centre previously had core funding through the council's community grants programme but that stopped in 2012.

During its history the centre has employed many staff and volunteers but due to Labour-run Derby council cuts is now staffed entirely by volunteers who rely on fundraising and public donations to keep going.

The eloquence and passion of the speakers from Doncaster Women's Aid centre, also fighting closure due to council cuts, highlighted the funding crisis faced by many similar centres across the UK.

These centres provide vital services, and having access to the support and advice they provide is a matter of life or death for many women and children facing domestic abuse.

It is essential to have safe spaces that provide the ongoing support needed to aid recovery and assist those fleeing for their lives. Not only do they save lives, they also improve them, and lessen the burden on the NHS and other emergency services.

Investing in women's services and refuges should be seen as an urgent priority. The message from these strong, compassionate women is clear. We won't give up, and we won't give in, we will unite our campaigns and call for action and we are proud to have so many good men standing in solidarity with us, and actively campaigning alongside us to protect the rights and services of women.

Swansea Labour council votes for cuts

Alec Thraves, Socialist Party Wales

Swansea's Labour-controlled council has passed a £28 million cuts budget for 2018-19, as well as voting through projected cuts of a further £70 million over the next three years.

During the ten-minute session allowed for public questions Socialist Party members highlighted that these medium term financial plans included some departments having their budgets cut by 50%!

Colin John, a veteran trade unionist and Socialist Party member, castigated the Labour councillors for being responsible for sacking teachers, bringing in charges for day centres and attacking the elderly of Swansea.

Swansea Socialist Party members, along with the trades council, Swansea Unison, education and other trade union members lobbied the council beforehand, with many Labour councillors sneaking in through the side entrances to avoid the protest.

A Swansea County Unison branch rep at the protest demanded that the council implement Unison, Unite, GMB and Wales TUC policy to refuse to make any cuts and set a legal no-cuts budget.

As in previous years, this demand fell on deaf ears with every Labour councillor voting to implement savage Tory cuts once more.

With the prospect of every part of our council services facing devastating cuts and outsourcing over the next few years this is only the beginning of resistance by unions and residents against the Tory austerity big-butchers in Westminster and their obedient mini-butchers on Swansea Labour council. As Arnie once said: 'We'll be back!'

Campaigners continue to demand Chorley A&E is fully reopened

Steve Ion, PCS Associate and Retired Members

There was a great turnout on Saturday 10 March when over 200 people rallied in support of the community based campaign to demand the full re-opening of Chorley and South Ribble A&E department.

This was the 100th week of protest and community groups, alongside a cavalcade of motorcyclists, and local Labour MP Lindsay Hoyle gave support.

Hands Off Huddersfield Royal Infirmary campaigner and Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition council candidate in the May council elections, Nicola Jackson, also spoke in solidarity.

The protest was also supported by the North West Trade Union Congress, the PCS civil servants' union, Unite, Unison and Usdaw trade unions, and the North West Regional Pensioners Association.

The A&E was closed in April 2016 and downgraded to an urgent care centre. The NHS trust's decision was slammed as "unacceptable" in a Lancashire county council report and there have been protests ever since.

Due to the pressure of the campaign the A&E was reopened in 2017 alongside the care centre but only part-time, from 8am to 8pm.

A night walk-in centre has been opened but the clinical commissioning group awarded the 'preferred bid' to a private company, Go To Doc.

Sales of the Socialist went well and the Socialist Party's campaigning strategy of opposition to cuts and privatisation, and for a trade union-led national demo and campaign to save the NHS, was also well received.

Leicester: Blairites block Labour Party democracy

Mike Barker, Leicester Socialist Party

Like Newham's mayor Sir Robin Wales, Leicester has its very own Blairite mayor - Sir Peter Soulsby. And like Newham council, Leicester is dominated by the Labour Party - with 52 out of 54 councillors.

Since becoming Leicester's mayor in 2011, Soulsby has been busy cutting services and attacking the pay and conditions of workers. This is why last year, Unison city branch submitted a no-cuts budget proposal which called on the council to use their plentiful reserves to prevent making cuts for the next three years. This proposal was backed by all other unions, but rejected by Soulsby and his Labour regime.

But times are changing, and in recent months a group of frustrated Labour councillors and anti-austerity Labour members have campaigned for an open selection process in a 'trigger ballot' to decide who Labour's next mayoral candidate will be.

On 6 March the ballot results were announced, and a majority of the city's Labour branches voted for an open process (eleven to nine). But another 41 affiliate organisations still had a say. This then led to an unexpected victory for the mayor, with a total of 38 branches and affiliates opposing an open selection process.

Block votes cast by CWU, Usdaw, GMB and Unison all opposed an open selection process, with only Unite bucking this trend by casting its nine votes in favour of a democratic process.

In the case of Unison, its eleven-strong block vote was decisive and controversial. This is because Unison's Labour Link regional committee, which made the final decision, backed the mayor despite guidance from the city branch that favoured an open selection process.

Former Labour council leader Ross Willmott, who campaigned for an open process, vowed to challenge the result along with the support of many other disgruntled trade unionists and Labour members.

This, of course, is why fighting for transparency and democracy at all levels of the Labour Party must always be accompanied by efforts to reclaim our trade union from Blairite bureaucrats.

Building Fund appeal

Members dig deep into their pockets to support the party

Caroline Vincent

The Socialist Party is being evicted from the rented offices in London which serve as our national headquarters. We urgently need to raise funds to find new premises.

To date the response to our appeal has been inspiring. Two comrades have donated £10,000 (see below), two have donated £5,000 and one has donated £4,000, from windfalls and savings. But the smaller donations that have been made represent some significant sacrifices too.

A new 12-year-old member, who already pays a weekly sub from her pocket money, has pledged a whole week's pocket money of £5! A young worker pledged £150 just one week after joining the party.

Two members in Leicester, who have already pledged a week's wage, auctioned their record collections on eBay. They were amazed to raise more than £450!

A single parent of two children, who lives on continually squeezed benefits, has pledged £100. He's also selling his car and will donate a proportion of the proceeds on top of that.

There has been a pledge of £500 from a disabled comrade on benefits, who will achieve this by saving pound coins until August.

The self-sacrifice displayed by members is impressive, but there has also been wider support from the labour movement. A member of the Labour Party in Carlisle donated £50 saying "we need people like you in the Socialist Party"!

If you haven't already, make a donation or a pledge and join the fight. We won't let greedy landlords and gentrification force us out of the capital, but we need your help!

'Donating is an honour'

Dear comrades,

I feel very honoured to make a donation (due to some inheritance) of £10,000 towards our new building fund appeal.

I am absolutely convinced that the Socialist Party is the only force in British politics capable of building a mass movement of the working class that will not only topple the Tories but consign them and their sick system to the dustbin of history!

Forward to the socialist transformation of society.

Yours fraternally, A Hull Socialist Party member

International Women's Day

The Socialist Inbox

Refuge crisis

At least one in four women experience domestic abuse at some point in their lives. Two women are murdered by a partner or an ex-partner every week in Britain. Yet there are more animal shelters in this country than refuges for women and children.

Domestic violence is a major cause of homelessness for women, yet due to the housing crisis, alternative safe accommodation is very difficult to come by.

Council homeless departments whose homeless hostels are all full have decided that all women homeless due to fleeing domestic violence should access women's refuges in the first instance. This may sound like a good idea, apart from the shortage of refuge places.

In practice it means that when there are no local refuge spaces, as is often the case, women and children are being forced to leave their home towns to relocate further and further away. This at a time of crisis when they most need to be near their support networks.

Many are unable to cope and end up returning to their abuser or to unsafe accommodation.

But even securing a refuge space is not a final solution. A refuge provides temporary, emergency accommodation. Women and children need to be rehoused in permanent, safe housing suitable to their needs.

Increasingly this is not happening, with people left waiting in refuges for many months - meaning it is even harder to access a refuge space in the first place. People are being encouraged to access privately rented accommodation.

Indeed under the Welsh Housing Act every homeless person has a duty to look for a private tenancy and if they fail to do this they can be deemed 'intentionally homeless' meaning they will no longer receive any help with housing from the council.

Unfortunately private rent is unaffordable for many, housing may be in poor condition, and private landlords may not be understanding when it comes to the safety measures required. Often it is just not an option, leaving people with nowhere to move on to.

Sometimes people have been moved from refuges to other homeless hostels, just delaying the issue of finding permanent accommodation further and further into the future. The reality is that for some, putting up with abuse seems a better option than risking homelessness for their family.

This housing crisis is costing women's lives. We need more council houses now!

Mia Hollsing, Rhondda Cynon Taff

Education escape

My progress as a woman happened through education. I left school with no exams, married at 16 years old and had a large family. It took me years to have the courage to leave an abusive marriage.

I was then a single parent struggling on benefits. I decided to go to adult classes to get the GCSEs I missed out on. From this I gained the confidence to go to college and then uni. This was when full grants were available.

After my degree I worked in social research before doing a postgraduate in social work. I have now been qualified and working as a social worker for 14 years. I have since joined the Socialist Party and twice stood as a TUSC candidate in local elections.

Without the uni grant or the social work uni bursary, I would not have been able to move on. Education was my way out of being a victim and into becoming an independent woman. It allowed me to make choices to change my life. If only all women had the same opportunities.

Rosa, Gateshead

Tory record

Thursday 8 March 2018: the famed Tory government PR machine - "strong and stable leadership", "the right approach", and countless other rib-ticklers - swings into action. But what is its real record on women's rights?

'Coercive or controlling behaviour' neatly rolls up a number of offences into a 'pattern' presenting as one offence (Serious Crime Act 2015) thus craftily masking the true figures

Two years on, only eight out of 43 police forces in England and Wales have taken part in a new College of Policing national training programme, Domestic Abuse Matters, meant to enable police officers to deal sensitively with domestic incidents

Women's refuges are being closed or seriously underfunded because of council cuts and the bar on using housing benefit - half of income for refuges - for placements

Around half of private letting agencies, according to Shelter, have a 'no DSS' policy, thus further hindering women, even with children, from acquiring accommodation away from an abusive partner

And remember what the blessed Margaret said: "There is no such thing as society. There are individual men and women and there are families" - broken, abused or otherwise.

All the money the Tories have 'saved' could go towards their proposed statue of Thatcher in the name of capitalist women oppressing women. Delivering on promises! True leadership! Onwards to Armageddon!

Ian Hunter, Ilkeston

Collective value

When we demand change we don't ask for the dregs of the coffers after the bigger purchase.

We coins have come to understand that through the collective, we have more value than the jar we were placed in, and we need never be contained again.

Denise Tooley-Okonkwo, Mansfield

Fiction: South Atlantic Requiem

Gripping spy thriller exposes hypocrisy of Falklands/Malvinas war

Tony Saunois

This is socialist author Edward Wilson's seventh novel and does not disappoint. In some respects it is his most gripping from beginning to end.

Once again the hero is William Catesby, the dissident socialist agent for MI6. He races to secure a Peruvian-brokered peace agreement between Britain and Argentina to avert the Falklands/Malvinas war in 1982.

It's a forlorn quest which is defeated by the sinking of the Argentine cruiser Belgrano - which Catesby concludes was a war crime - sunk by Thatcher to shore up support for her hated government.

The theme running through the book is the horror of a war fought by a brutal military dictatorship headed by President Leopoldo Galtieri, and a detested Conservative government headed by the hated Margaret Thatcher.

Dilemma, conflict and confusion swirl up in Catesby as he is faced with the dilemma of hating both sides. Wilson accurately portrays the hatred towards Thatcher which ran throughout Britain, even among sections of the upper-middle class.

The story opens at the funeral of a colonel - a confidant of Catesby. As he departs, the wife of the colonel whispers to Catesby, out of earshot of others who won't approve, "I hope that bitch rots in hell."

At the same time, Wilson brings out the brutal character of the military regime in Argentina and its close links with US imperialism.

One of the most powerful scenes involves the horror of a north American, McCullough, daughter of an arms dealer and member of a guerrilla organisation fighting the junta, being seized and taken to the notorious torture centre in central Buenos Aires, the Escuela de Mecánica de la Armada.

Galtieri, like Thatcher, is portrayed as a whisky-soaked bully, presiding over a government wracked by division, and desperately trying to cling to power. Al Haig, US president Ronald Reagan's secretary of state, complains of the impossibility of getting a conversation with Galtieri when he is sober.

Shady arms deals

In this gripping novel we are taken into the world of shady arms dealers, the clandestine far-right expelled masonic lodge 'P2' in Italy, the Vatican bank, the mysterious death of Pope John Paul I and eventually the apparent suicide of a Vatican banker in London. All these, as usual in Wilson's novels, are based on historic events.

Hesitations and divisions in the Reagan presidency are well portrayed. They reflect accurately the ties between the US generals and a series of brutal military regimes in Latin America in the 1970s and 80s.

Catesby opposes Thatcher's war and at one point concludes the overthrow of the Argentinian junta cannot be made by a foreign power but is the job of the Argentinian people.

He therefore pursues the utopian aim of trying to secure a peace deal when Thatcher and the junta are set on a course for war. She sinks the Belgrano as it steams away from the conflict zone, headed back to port.

In the novel Wilson succeeds in depicting the outlook of the Argentinian ruling class. They play polo, rugby and cricket, and learn English with English accents as opposed to American - confirming the Latin American quip, "a nation of Italians, who speak Spanish and think they are English." A world away from the outlook and conditions of the poor and working class of Argentina.

From the standpoint of the Socialist Party - 'Militant' at the time the story is set - the novel's main political weakness lies in how it deals with what Michael Foot's Labour leadership argued for.

Militant opposed both Thatcher's military intervention and the Argentinian junta. We put forward an independent class position based on action by the working class in Britain and Argentina.

Foot's position, in essence, was to support sending Britain's military task force but not use it. This is skimmed over in the novel.

Other aspects of the conflict - the character of Argentina's populist 'Peronist' movement, and the wrong attitude of some of the Argentinian left during the conflict of working with the military - are touched on, but not developed.

South Atlantic Requiem exposes the hypocrisy and cynicism of all the contending players. None of them were concerned with the interests of either the British or Argentinian people, or the inhabitants of the Falklands/Malvinas.

It's another really enjoyable read from Wilson, again affirming him as a socialist John le Carré. By the end of it Catesby has turned 90 - hopefully not too old to embark on further adventures.

- South Atlantic Requiem by Edward Wilson is published on 18 March, available from leftbooks.co.uk

Audio version of this document

[To hear an audio version of this document click here.](#)

What the Socialist Party stands for

The Socialist Party fights for socialism – a democratic society run for the needs of all and not the profits of a few. We also oppose every cut, fighting in our day-to-day campaigning for every possible improvement for working class people.

The organised working class has the potential power to stop the cuts and transform society.

As capitalism dominates the globe, the struggle for genuine socialism must be international.

The Socialist Party is part of the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI), a socialist international that organises in over 40 countries.

Our demands include:

Public services

- No to ALL cuts in jobs, public services and benefits. Defend our pensions.
- No to privatisation and the Private Finance Initiative (PFI). Renationalise all privatised utilities and services, with compensation paid only on the basis of proven need.
- Fully fund all services and run them under accountable, democratic committees that include representatives of service workers and users.
- Free, publicly run, good quality education, available to all at any age. Abolish university tuition fees now and introduce a living grant. No to academies and 'free schools'!
- A socialist NHS to provide for everyone's health needs - free at the point of use and under democratic control. Kick out private contractors!
- Keep council housing publicly owned. For a massive building programme of publicly owned housing, on an environmentally sustainable basis, to provide good quality homes with low rents.

Work and income

- Trade union struggle to increase the minimum wage to £10 an hour without exemptions as an immediate step towards a real living wage. For an annual increase in the minimum wage linked to average earnings.
- All workers, including part-timers, temps, casual and migrant workers to have trade union rates of pay, employment protection, and sickness and holiday rights from day one of employment.
- An immediate 50% increase in the state retirement pension, as a step towards a living pension.
- Reject 'workfare'. For the right to decent benefits, education, training, or a job, without compulsion.
- Scrap the anti-trade union laws! For fighting trade unions, democratically controlled by their members. Full-time union officials to be regularly elected and receive no more than a worker's wage. Support the National Shop Stewards Network.
- A maximum 35-hour week with no loss of pay.

Environment

- Major research and investment into replacing fossil fuels with renewable energy and into ending the problems of early obsolescence and unrecycled waste.
- Public ownership of the energy generating industries. No to nuclear power. No to Trident.
- A democratically planned, low-fare, publicly-owned transport system, as part of an overall plan against environmental pollution.

Rights

- Oppose discrimination on the grounds of race, gender, disability, sexuality, age, and all other forms of prejudice.

- Repeal all laws that trample over civil liberties. For the right to protest! End police harassment.
- Defend abortion rights. For a woman's right to choose when and whether to have children.
- For the right to asylum. No to racist immigration laws.
- For the right to vote at 16.

Mass workers' party

- For a mass workers' party drawing together workers, young people and activists from workplace, community, environmental, anti-racist and anti-cuts campaigns, to provide a fighting, political alternative to the pro-big business parties.
- Fight for Labour to be transformed into such a party: deselect the Blairites!

Socialism and internationalism

- No to imperialist wars and occupations.
- Tax the super-rich! For a socialist government to take into public ownership the top 150 companies and the banking system that dominate the British economy, and run them under democratic working-class control and management. Compensation to be paid only on the basis of proven need.
- A democratic socialist plan of production based on the interests of the overwhelming majority of people, and in a way that safeguards the environment.
- No to the bosses' neoliberal European Union and single market. For a socialist Europe and a socialist world!

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