

[Socialist Party](#) | [Print](#)

Editorial of the Socialist, issue 988

Antisemitism slurs: latest attempt to derail Corbynism

The Blairite majority of Labour MPs will never be reconciled to Jeremy Corbyn's leadership. Corbyn resoundingly won the second leadership contest they forced on him in 2016 but they go on looking for every opportunity to undermine, damage and remove him.

Their slandering him as 'antisemitic', dredging up a two-line Facebook comment he made in 2012, is a continuation of this goal.

Right-wing Labour MP Luciana Berger led the attack, suggesting that Corbyn had opposed the removal of an antisemitic mural in east London.

Blairite MPs lined up to condemn the mural - which a 2015 Jewish Chronicle report described as under criticism for "antisemitic undertones" - and Corbyn by association. These included Chuka Umunna, Wes Streeting, Stella Creasy; and Liz Kendall of 4.5% fame - her vote when she stood against Corbyn for the Labour leadership in 2015.

They do anything to try to hold onto their seats - including Luciana Berger who is threatened with deselection in Liverpool Wavertree - not stopping short of exploiting genuine fears of antisemitism.

Corbyn responded that he "wholeheartedly" supports the mural's removal. This didn't stop the baying for blood by the Labour right, together with the Board of Deputies of British Jews and the Jewish Leadership Council, all intent on milking the slur as far as they could.

Another was John Mann MP, who when questioned on the BBC's Victoria Derbyshire show refused to say that Corbyn is not antisemitic. Derbyshire resorted to reading out a number of statements from Corbyn outrightly condemning racism and antisemitism and then said to Mann: "It seems to some that it doesn't matter what he says, it's never enough for people like yourself".

In his student days Mann didn't even support the right of Israelis to their own state, countering our predecessor Militant's support for a socialist Israel and a socialist Palestine with an insistence that there should be one capitalist state of both nationalities together.

Adding to the right's outrage was Corbyn sacking from the shadow cabinet another failed leadership contender, Owen Smith, for defying agreed policy by voicing support for a second EU referendum.

The fact that Derbyshire said she couldn't find a Labour MP to appear on her programme in defence of Corbyn, speaks volumes about the make-up of the parliamentary Labour Party. Those mainly right-wing MPs and the capitalist media don't mind the facts when they can whip up hysteria against Corbyn and throw enough mud in the hope that some of it sticks. He is even blamed for Facebook posts he had nothing to do with.

This onslaught must not be responded to in an apologetically defensive way, rather it should be energetically counter-offensive.

Israel

Those who attack the Labour left as being 'antisemitic' sometimes concede that criticising the deeds of the Israeli regime is not antisemitic, but they also deliberately confuse the two issues by arguing that criticism of Israeli policy is used as a 'cover' for antisemitic views.

This is an attempt to denigrate the Labour left and socialists, who oppose the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories while also opposing all forms of racism and antisemitism.

Some on the left, in giving support to the Palestinians' cause, have taken mistaken political positions regarding Israel (see article below), but no evidence has indicated that antisemitism is particularly commonplace in the labour movement.

A recent study published by the Institute for Jewish Policy Research found a higher percentage of people with "at least one antisemitic attitude" among those who identify as 'right of centre' than among people identifying as left wing.

During the Israeli military's brutal wars on Gaza, Jewish groups were welcomed on the large anti-war demonstrations as participants and platform speakers, including by the overwhelming majority of British Muslims who turned out in large numbers.

This unity in action strengthens solidarity with war victims and oppressed people abroad, and developing it will also strengthen working class struggles in Britain.

Those using accusations of antisemitism to attack Corbyn and the left are seeking to divide and weaken the workers' movement as well as to try once more to remove Corbyn.

Blairite hypocrisy

Antisemitism is certainly prevalent on the far right, and it is socialists and trade unionists who are at the forefront of countering neo-Nazi racism and antisemitism, not the Labour right.

In Labour, the Corbyn wing and Momentum have supported disciplinary action in cases where behaviour is considered to be antisemitic, sometimes to an unwarranted extent even. In 2016 Momentum removed Jackie Walker - herself Jewish - from its vice chair position after a rabid media campaign was conducted against her for remarks she had made, despite Momentum recognising they were not in substance antisemitic. She was also suspended from Labour membership.

The Labour right and Tories' attitude on antisemitism is completely different when it comes from elsewhere. How much do they criticise Saudi Arabia, "whose mosques and education system have, for decades, spewed antisemitic venom of the kind the world has not been subjected to since the Nazis," as the Spectator right-wing magazine described that country?

When shadow foreign secretary Emily Thornberry moved a motion in parliament calling on the government to suspend its support for Saudi Arabia's bombardment of Yemen pending a UN inquiry, over 100 Labour MPs wouldn't even vote for it, including John Woodcock, John Mann, Liz Kendall, Wes Streeting and Luciana Berger.

And while throwing accusations of antisemitism at the Labour left, they are silent on the laws going through the Israeli parliament which are blatantly racist against Palestinians who live in Israel, not to mention the forced West Bank displacement of Palestinians and other racist discriminations that are no less abhorrent than antisemitism.

At last year's Labour Party conference a new network, Jewish Voice for Labour (JVL), was launched at a fringe meeting of over 300 delegates and visitors to counter the attacks on the Corbyn wing being made by the 'Jewish Labour Movement' and other right wing-led organisations.

Barely covered by the capitalist media (while the recent anti-Corbyn protest was covered copiously), JVL declared itself in favour of an "open, democratic and inclusive" Labour Party, and for the "rights and justice for Jewish people everywhere and against wrongs and injustice to Palestinians and other oppressed people anywhere."

This propaganda fightback is welcome, but needs to be accompanied by demands and pressure for concrete measures to democratise the Labour Party, including reintroducing mandatory reselection - ie local selection contests for the party's parliamentary candidates.

The latest 'antisemitism' attacks by the right on Corbyn and the hysteria whipped up against him over 'Russian nerve agents' are not likely to succeed, but they are a further warning of the urgency of these measures.

Opposition to Zionism is not antisemitism

Bob Labi

Significantly neither of the organisers of the "open letter", the Board of Deputies (BDBJ) or the Jewish Leadership Council (JLC), specifically claim to represent all people of Jewish origin or faith in Britain, but they do like to give that appearance. Both bodies are, in effect, federations of representatives of Jewish organisations like synagogues, charities and political groupings.

But these do not include people of Jewish origin who are not members of such organisations or those who are members of the rapidly growing Charedi (ultra-orthodox) Jewish community that currently number around 16% of Jews in Britain.

Politically both the BDBJ and the JLC support Zionism and, effectively, seek to falsely equate opposition to Zionism with antisemitism. As the current JLC chair, Jonathan Goldstein, put it last year, "we showcase and take great pride in our historical connection and unbreakable commitment to our ancestral homeland, the state of Israel".

However, historically many Jews, people of Jewish origin and Jewish organisations were anti-Zionist. In 1917 the then BDBJ president wrote to the Times opposing Zionism because it regarded "all the Jewish communities of the world as constituting one homeless nationality".

Far from condemning these views as somehow antisemitic, today's BDBJ leaders argue carefully that "with the benefit of a century of hindsight, we are certain our predecessors" would now agree with that Israel is "the ultimate refuge for Jewish people and a place where Jews can determine their own future."

There is no doubt at all that the Nazi mass slaughter of millions of European Jews in the Holocaust, the fact that many Jews trying to flee the Nazis were denied entry visas to other countries, plus the legacy of anti-Jewish riots and pogroms in European and Arab countries has meant that for many Jews, including some non-religious ones, Israel is seen precisely as the "ultimate refuge". But this is not the case.

The Socialist Party's forerunners agreed with Trotsky's warnings in the 1930s that the setting up of a specifically Jewish state on territory already lived in by non-Jews would produce a trap for the Jews who moved there.

In Israel the Jewish fear of losing a war and being "driven into the sea" is constant. It reflects the fact that Israel's creation has not been the solution to the threats facing Jews, something that our forerunners argued when opposing creation of Israel.

Subsequently, however we recognised that, over decades since 1948, an Israeli nation and an Israeli working class had developed. This meant that, while constantly fighting for the full rights of Palestinians, the social and national questions facing the Israeli working class have to be addressed by socialists.

Among the JLC founders were a number of Jewish capitalists who naturally, given their class position, opposed socialism. Until recently the JLC was chaired by Sir Mick Davies who in June 2017 was appointed chief executive of the Conservative Party.

People of Jewish origin, like all peoples, contain within them all classes - capitalist, middle and working - and political positions. Internationally people of Jewish origin have been prominent in the workers' movement. Indeed the Nazis attacked Marxism as part of a Jewish conspiracy, but at the same time in fascist Italy there were Jewish members of Mussolini's Blackshirts until anti-Jewish laws were introduced there in 1938.

Today it is capitalist and pro-capitalist elements who predominate within the BDBJ and JLC leaderships. This is why their "open letter" is not simply a criticism of Corbyn, it also aimed at socialists in general by

condemning what they call "the far left's obsessive hatred of Zionism, Zionists and Israel".

In carrying out this propaganda attack the pro-capitalist BDBJ and JLC leaders ignore the position of the Socialist Party, today the strongest Marxist force in the trade unions, and of our co-thinkers in the Socialist Struggle Movement, the CWI in Israel/Palestine.

Instead they utilise the mistakes and stupidities of some individuals and tiny groupings to attack what they call the "far left".

We oppose the attempt to equate opposition to Zionism with antisemitism. Opposition to Zionism does not mean antisemitic opposition to Jews, those of Jewish origin or the Israeli working class.

As in all capitalist countries, class struggles take place in Israel and we fully support the battles of both Israeli and Palestinian workers against capitalists and oppression.

The Socialist Party and the Socialist Struggle Movement advocate that a "combined call for both nationalities to have the right to their own states on a socialist basis, with full rights for any minorities within them, is central.

"On the one hand, it is a clear rejection of the coercion of either Palestinians or Israelis. At the same time, it argues for the overthrowing of capitalism that would open up the road to raising the living standards of all.

"Moreover, while it cannot be ruled out that a common struggle of Palestinians and Israelis could lead to the creation of one state carrying through a socialist transformation, to get there it would be first necessary to recognise the rights of the two peoples." ("Anti-Semitism, Labour and Momentum", Socialism Today, Issue 203, November 2016).

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 27 March 2018 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

NEU conference 2018: Strike to take on the Tories

James Kerr, Lewisham NEU

The National Education Union (NEU) conference (NUT section) will see the union at a crossroads.

We must judge the success on the conditions of our members in the classroom. I'm sure if you ask any serving teacher if their working life has seen improvement you'll get a curt response.

Teachers are leaving in droves, funding cuts are exacerbating the crisis and the testing regime is causing extreme anxiety for the children we teach. Our leadership's lack of a serious strategy and a willingness to follow it through has led us to this point - weakness invites aggression. Let's not forget that two years ago we voted for a programme of discontinuous strike action and ended up with a one-day strike.

The recent advice on workload shows the government feels under pressure to respond but we've heard this before. Unless there is legislative change and new money to back it up, workload will continue to drive people out of the profession. That kind of change will only be achieved if we're willing to fight for it.

There are opportunities on the conference agenda to instruct the executive to launch the kind of action necessary. Many will argue that national strike action is not possible now under the Trade Union Act. But the Communication Workers Union and University and College Union have already shown that it's possible to defeat these undemocratic voting thresholds, providing there is a serious, well-prepared campaign with fighting demands.

This is all connected to the need to fight for a healthy democratic culture in the new union. The Socialist Party warned at the special conference in 2016, that there were potential dangers contained within the new

structures of the NEU. Some of these warnings have proved correct and members will need to stay vigilant to ensure the union serves us.

The current wave of local strikes by our members, particularly in London, shows what can be done when members organise and a lead is given.

This is a critical time for our schools and our movement. We can't just wait for a Labour government and see more people driven out of teaching. We need a bold, fighting and democratic union to take it to the Tories.

UCU: Strike action forces bosses to retreat but keep the pressure on

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

The University and College Union (UCU) received an offer on 23 March that showed how completely we have forced employers Universities UK (UUK) on to the back foot. They have offered to maintain the existing pension structure for a year, and crucially have agreed to a joint UUK/UCU working group to re-evaluate the pension fund.

It took a gargantuan effort by members to get us here - around 45,000 of us have taken more days of strike action collectively than were taken in the whole of 2015 or 2016 across all sectors! And when our union leadership announced an 'agreement' before branches could be consulted, members mobilised to seize control of the dispute and to reject the shoddy deal.

We are on the cusp of victory - but we're not quite there yet. The strike action and determination of our members has forced the employers into a retreat.

But at this stage this is a ceasefire not yet a surrender. That's why, at a meeting of 260 members, my branch has mandated me to demand that the threat of further strikes must not be withdrawn until we are certain that there are no preconditions placed on this joint working group.

In particular the reference to 'affordability' in this latest proposal is unacceptable - we can't allow the union to tie itself in to the employer's notion of affordability.

My branch is also demanding that we push for a three-year interim period, so there will be no changes until April 2021. That's crucial, because we can't allow this working group to be forced into a rush job - we need a genuinely transparent process from which members can hear regular reports from the UCU representatives involved.

It also gives us time to build a campaign to nationalise the USS pension scheme. That would secure our pensions not just for a couple of years but well into the future.

UCU members have waged an incredible struggle and we've very nearly won a famous victory - but the pressure must stay on. The employers will undoubtedly want to come at us again in the future, so it's crucial we continue to build a fighting and democratic UCU.

But provided we do that then let them come - they'll be taking on a union with a win under our belts, hardened by this struggle and confident we can fight them back again.

NHS pay: Reject the Tories' divide and rule offer

Health unions take action together to fight for more

By Socialist Party members in Unison

One of the issues that nearly lost the Tories the general election was the ongoing crisis in the NHS: growing waiting lists, staff shortages and growing unrest among health workers against the ongoing pay cap.

This led to a wave of pay protests over the summer, when even the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) was threatening to take strike action if the pay cap wasn't scrapped.

Under enormous pressure to retreat, in his Autumn statement the Chancellor announced that the government would review and fund NHS pay.

The unions, having been denied the right to negotiate pay and conditions for members, instead having to rely on pleading to the pay review body for the last decade or more, correctly ignored the pay review body and submitted a claim directly to the government on behalf of 13 unions, for a modest 3.9% and £800.

However instead of upping the campaign and preparing the members for a fight to strengthen their hand in the talks, the unions' leaders went into months of secret talks and dropped any campaigning.

Members were not kept informed of developments during the talks. In fact, Unison health service group executive members were sworn to secrecy - not to share anything - at the pain of threat of disciplinary action against them.

Yesterday, the unions put out a deluge of facts and figures to members as to why they should accept the offer.

The offer wasn't even put to the Unison health executive to discuss and vote on, and now Unison intends to simply have an email survey to accept or reject instead of a series of full workplace debates, discussions and votes.

This is totally unacceptable. Particularly for such a complex offer there must be a full and democratic consultation and voting by members in workplace meetings.

So what is in the deal and what does it really mean for workers?

While Jeremy Hunt proudly endorsed this latest pay offer for NHS staff, the headline figure of 6.5% is not all it seems.

In reality the pay award will be stretched out over three years, with staff receiving a 3% increase this year followed by 1.7% in the two years after.

Clearly the first year has broken the pay cap and is the biggest offer to any group of public sector workers to date.

However, why a three-year deal? Why not even a guarantee that years two and three would at least match the rate of inflation if it's higher than the offer? Currently inflation is predicted to be 9.6% over the next three years - as such, 6.5% would mean another round of falling pay.

It has been reported, including by some union leaders, that some staff will receive increases of up to 29%. However, as ever, the devil is in the detail.

On top of the pay offer, the government is offering to accelerate workers through their pay grades by paying increments early.

While this will clearly benefit a significant number and they will welcome getting what they are entitled to early, 52% of NHS workers won't see a penny out of this part of the award as they are already at the top of their pay band.

It's one thing for a Tory government to try a divide and rule tactic but it's entirely another for a trade union to recommend accepting a deal that pays for one member's pay increase at the expense of others who are forced to take a pay cut.

Even the new pay progression scheme has more than one sting in its tail. At the moment workers generally get automatic pay progression through their grade each year.

Under the new proposals it could take workers two, three or more years to get a single incremental increase - so what the employers give today, they will claw back tomorrow.

In addition, rather than being automatic, progression will be subject to performance. In the context of massive cuts to training budgets, with staff having to fund their own professional development in many cases, what is being packaged as a good deal for new starters may end up being the opposite.

It is highly likely that staff will be held back down on the pay spine because their employers are not investing in training.

This is little more than a further drift to performance related pay. On top of this the government is making a move on unsocial hours' payments and sick pay by reducing what a worker can claim when off sick. Again this is a case of giving with one hand and taking with another.

Beyond the positive spin, the offer does nowhere near enough to claw back the 14% real terms losses NHS workers have endured since 2010.

Clearly the government is on the back foot, having to break the pay cap and find £4.2 billion to fund this deal.

However we cannot accept a divide and rule deal that accepts continued falling pay. This is a deal that has been secured by secret talks; imagine what could be won if the unions were to mobilise the anger of members and lead a real fight.

Reject the offer and prepare a real fight across the health unions.

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 22 March 2018 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

British Museum: Carillion workers demand to be brought back in-house

Chris Baugh, PCS assistant general secretary

I had the pleasure of supporting PCS members working for Carillion outside the British Museum at their protest on 20 March calling for the cleaning and facilities management contract to be brought back in-house.

This lively and well attended demonstration was supported by the Trade Union Congress, Unite the Union, PCS general secretary Mark Serwotka and many other campaign groups, as well as a message of support from the shadow chancellor John McDonnell.

Around 100 workers from across the museum working in retail, security and visitor services as well as the Carillion workers themselves, came out in support.

Carillion workers at the museum have suffered years of cuts and attacks on their conditions since being outsourced in 2004. Before the collapse of the company, the PCS Carillion branch was pressing the museum to take the contract back in-house given ongoing problems with the delivery of it.

The PCS culture group estimates that since outsourcing the contract, cleaning staff numbers have been cut by a quarter, which has affected air quality at the museum and limited the time off workers can take.

Before PCS won staff the London Living Wage in 2016, workers had to endure 1% pay cuts on a poverty wage.

The British Museum should meet urgently with the unions to discuss this situation and stop paying consultants PricewaterhouseCoopers to run this contract. Bring the workers back in-house and allow workers at the museum to have their proper trade union rights respected.

Victimised recycling strikers uncowed as Hull strike wave builds

Mick Whale, president, Hull trade union council

Bosses' suspension of two Hull recycling workers after they returned to work following a successful first week on strike is a clear attempt to intimidate the workforce into cancelling future action. It has failed.

Workers are more determined than ever to defeat multinational FCC, which despite making millions in profits last year is not prepared to fund sick pay. Staff at the Wilmington plant in Hull plan a further two weeks' strike from 29 March.

At the same time, the planned 231 full-time equivalent redundancies at Hull College - which will probably affect more than 400 actual workers - is a devastating attack. Workers face an uncertain future and students face courses being cut or under-resourced.

The sheer scale of redundancies, with plans to drive down wages and conditions through privatising some jobs, feels like an attack on the city itself.

College unions UCU, Unison and the NEU are organising ballots for industrial action. Socialist Party activists demand the college be taken back into public hands and run democratically by its workers and students.

Construction, school and local authority workers in Hull all face potential struggles against cuts to jobs, pay or conditions. And workers here are also part of national disputes against driver-only operation on trains and pension cuts in universities.

In 2017, Hull was UK 'City of Culture'. Now we are becoming a city of struggle!

Hull trade union council is attempting to pull these different disputes together. Under the banner of 'Defend our City', we will be organising a series of activities and demonstrations during the next two months.

- Union branches should send messages of solidarity and financial support to the Wilmington strikers c/o Adrian Kennett, Hull City Unison, 39 Alfred Gelder Street, Hull HU1 2AG - cheques payable to Unison Hull City branch
-

Liverpool Uni staff set to fight 220 job losses

Hugh Caffrey, North West Socialist Party

The University of Liverpool has announced 220 redundancies. Vice-Chancellor Janet Beer is also head of Universities UK, the body trying to carry out colossal cuts to university workers' pensions.

Jo McNeill, president of the University of Liverpool branch of the University and College Union (UCU), told us: "We are very concerned about the impact the loss of over 200 of our academic staff will have on our students.

"And we are extremely unhappy with the management's declaration that they will move to compulsory redundancies if the numbers they cite do not leave voluntarily.

"Our branch will not stand for such a vicious attack - and it has not gone unnoticed that this announcement was made days after we returned to work from the most sustained period of strike action to ever take place in the UK's higher education system."

Students at the University of Liverpool value the time staff spend supporting and educating them. They will react with dismay to the redundancies.

Certainly the financial priorities of senior management are open to question. The Liverpool Echo recently reported thousands spent on five-star hotels and chauffeur-driven airport transfers.

The paper also says "Liverpool University fat cats could have saved £113,000 if they'd instead travelled standard class on planes and trains - in a period of just under three years."

Liverpool Socialist Students and Socialist Party both give total support to the UCU branch in whatever actions it may take to resist the job losses. We will seek to build support as widely as possible among students and in the city more widely.

- Send messages of solidarity to lucu@liverpool.ac.uk

Aberdeen bus drivers strike against pay cuts

Socialist Party Scotland

Aberdeen bus drivers are striking against draconian cuts to their wages and conditions by employer First Bus.

Mike Flinn, Unite union convenor, explained: "First are cutting into drivers' wages to achieve more profit. Drivers who are earning £25,000 are going to jump down as low as £19,000." Management also wants to scrap paid breaks, reduce holidays, and keep drivers on the road for up to ten hours.

After a huge 97% rejection of the proposed changes, a ballot gave around 95% support for strikes. Following four one-day strikes, a seven-day strike began on 25 March in the run-up to the day drivers are supposed to sign new contracts.

Strikers spoke to Socialist Party Scotland on their 90-strong picket line on 19 March. "The strike is having a big impact and is massively supported. First Group has brought up staff from other parts of the UK to scab during our strike.

"Managers, including the managing director, are also driving buses. But it's clear that they don't know the routes. Bus timetables have been hugely affected with buses reduced to an hourly service."

The dispute highlights the need for public ownership of bus services. Running lifelines for the profits of corporate shareholders is not acceptable. A publicly owned and democratically run transport system is essential to prevent profit-hungry companies abusing workers.

Migrant cleaners win living wage at Mail

United Voices of the World

A group of migrant cleaners - members of the United Voices of the World union - have won a historic victory at the Daily Mail.

After the threat of an all-out cleaners' strike at the Mail's offices in Kensington, and the prospects of large and lively protests and pickets, our demands have been met. As of 1 April cleaners will all receive the London Living Wage of £10.20 an hour.

Some cleaners have been scrubbing and polishing the Mail's offices for nearly 20 years. They were previously paid only the minimum wage of £7.50 an hour.

It's not migrant workers who suppress wages, it's miserly and unscrupulous employers who take advantage and keep them on the breadline. Perhaps the millionaire editor of the Daily Mail, Paul Dacre, will reflect on this before he sits down to sign off on another anti-migrant headline.

For Whom the School Bell Tolls: Our kids or the Tories?

Nick Chaffey, Socialist Party Southern secretary

Like the NHS and council services, public state education in primary, secondary, special schools and colleges is facing a dire crisis, with serious consequences for children whose 'one chance' in preparation for life is under threat.

Funding cuts and rising costs are hammering schools. Local budgets are drained by exorbitant Private Finance Initiative payments.

A sustained pay freeze and intense workloads have caused a teacher recruitment and retention crisis. Curriculums under a 'high stakes' testing and league table regime are seeing PE, music and computing scrapped for a narrow focus on reading, writing and maths.

Stalking the towns and cities of Britain are the academy chains, gobbling up the state sector and building private empires of overpaid management at the expense of children's education. Like other public services, great gains for the working class that ensured greater equality in society, education is now just one more source of profits in an increasingly marketised and privatised system.

The figures are alarming. Education spending as part of GDP is at the same level as the 1960s. £2.8 billion has been cut in education since 2015. Teachers and teaching assistants are being cut to balance budgets.

With pupil numbers rising, so are class sizes. The National Education Union (NEU) highlighted: "The latest School Cuts research - drawn solely from government figures - shows that staff numbers in secondary schools have fallen by 15,000 between 2014-15 and 2016-17 despite having 4,500 more pupils to teach."

Schools are going bust, with over 25% of secondary schools in deficit according to the Education Policy Institute, up by a third since 2015. Last year the government's figures showed there were more than 9,400 primary schools which had been in deficit in 2015-16, more than a third of the total.

And 80% of academies, the golden balls of Tory and Blairite education policy, are in deficit with their accountants saying they will go bust within two years. Was Carillion just the first brick to fall?

The 'choice' now facing local councils, schools, teaching unions, parents and students is accept the cuts or fightback. Rumblings of opposition were felt in last year's general election where education cuts dominated the debate and forced a £1.3 billion 'retreat' from the Tory government.

A lobby of parliament saw hundreds of MPs challenged to reverse cuts. Shadow chancellor John McDonnell committed an incoming Labour government to reverse the cuts and restore education funding.

With the May local council elections now in sight, what can Labour councils do to ensure school budgets are protected, cuts are halted and a mass movement is built to ensure schools get the required funding? Firstly they should make clear their full support to all education unions and parent campaigns, and show their solidarity with the NEU day of action on 21 April.

But most importantly they should turn their words of support into deeds by utilising council powers to stop school cuts. Under legislation from the Department for Education - 'Schemes for Financing Schools' guidance - local councils have the powers to issue 'licensed deficits' for up to three years.

These can be used to allow schools to resist making cuts, while Labour councils, education unions, parents and students build a mass campaign to demand the Tory government restores education funding.

In the meantime councils can use reserves and borrowing powers to ensure schools are fully funded, with the clear commitment of an incoming Labour government to restore funding and eradicate the deficits and borrowing used to protect schools. What possible reason could there be for Labour councils not to use these measures?

Such a campaign could lay the basis for a national education strike if the Tory government refuses to budge. In the face of a 60-hour working week and a pay freeze, NEU members are calling for a 5% pay rise, fully funded by the government and fought for with a campaign of strike action.

Already in London and other areas, school strikes have challenged academisation and the effects of cuts. As calls from nurses to reject their pay offer grow, there is the renewed possibility of cross-union strike action coordinated by the Trade Union Congress (TUC).

Under the banner of the demand for an immediate general election, such action could sweep the Tory austerity government from office. Surely the best way to make the urgent change schools and children need.

These are the demands that the TUC should march under on its 12 May anti-austerity national demo. As voters arrive at the ballot box in May, they should be given a real choice to vote for candidates prepared to fight education cuts and who will refuse to carry out austerity.

Despite the enthusiasm for Jeremy Corbyn's anti-austerity manifesto, his Blairite opponents, many of them councillors, continue to vote through Tory cuts. Those Labour councillors who fail to fight and force schools to carry out damaging cuts should be challenged at the ballot box by Trade Unionist and Socialist Union (TUSC) candidates who are prepared to fight back.

Southampton asks "What will you do to stop education cuts?"

Sue Atkins, Southampton grandparent and TUSC candidate for Woolston

Last year's general election saw a historic surge for Jeremy Corbyn's anti-austerity manifesto. A large part of that wave was the 800,000 voters who switched their vote on the question of education. That crisis and that wave has not gone away.

On 23 March hundreds of parents, teachers, students, education trade unions and anti-cuts campaigners across Southampton joined end-of-school protests at 13 schools to say "stop school cuts!" The schools crisis is reaching breaking point and a fight has to be waged to ensure jobs and children's education are protected.

The protests were followed up by a successful campaign meeting in Southampton. Hosted by Southampton Fair Funding for All Schools and the local NEU, it attracted new teachers and parents to the fight.

NEU activists Penny Burnett and Pete Baddams outlined the crisis facing schools and the pressure heads are under to make cuts. A local headteacher, Liz Filer, talked of the disastrous consequences cuts would have and explained schools are in deficit because they are underfunded.

Our campaign has met secondary students who are furious that their schools don't teach music or IT! The meeting had support from Southampton Labour council cabinet member for education, Darren Paffey, and other councillors who joined the meeting, all outlining their opposition to Tory funding cuts.

The first contribution from the floor came from a Unison teaching assistant and parent. They asked the Labour councillors, "what will you do to stop the cuts?"

To this decisive question Labour councillors retreated to warm words of solidarity and apologies they couldn't do more. It is clear this did not satisfy anyone in the meeting.

Socialist Party member and Trade Unionist and Socialist Candidate candidate Nick Chaffey outlined what powers councils have to use 'licensed deficits'. He pointed out that these could be funded from the £120 million reserves Southampton council has, which could be paid off by an incoming Jeremy Corbyn-led government. Nick said, "if councillors were prepared to fight, they would be heroes and get huge support."

Councillor Keith Morrell has consistently voted against cuts, and was scandalously expelled from the Labour Party for doing so. He challenged Labour councillors to tell the truth to voters and fight like Labour's pioneering councillors who fought for state education.

Our local campaign has drawn a clear line in the sand - this far and no further. We will continue to campaign at school gates in coming weeks and make the local elections a clear choice about what our council needs to do to stop Tory school cuts.

- Regional demo: Saturday 21 April, 1pm, The Bargate

Campaign against Newham academies boosted by victories

Juliette Fogelman, East London Socialist Party

Teaching staff at three schools in Newham, east London, have been taking strike action due to the schools' governing bodies forcing through academisation. Striking staff have been actively backed up by parents, students, the local community, their union the NEU and the Socialist Party.

Newham NEU members have just elected a new branch secretary. Louise Cuffaro is the rep at one of the striking schools (Avenue) and a Socialist Party member. In February people from the three striking schools rallied outside the town hall. Feeling the pressure councillors voted in support of an anti-academy motion.

Avenue school's transfer to an academy chain is "on hold" after a legal challenge by the parents. The governors were days away from voting to become an academy. The success means that vote and the process of academisation has been temporarily halted.

The legal case challenges the lack of meaningful consultation about the transfer. Many parents believe the refusal by the school to organise a parents' ballot is because it would be a resounding no to academies. An insufficient survey of parents last year found 132 against academisation, with only four in favour.

Keir Hardie school (named after the Labour Party's first socialist leader) has reversed its academisation decision. The NEU had escalated strike action there.

It's clear that the governing bodies of others schools in the area have taken note of the strikes and the campaign. It's likely to have influenced Brampton school governors to make the decision to remain in local authority control rather than transfer to academy status.

However, all the recent victories do not mean that the fight for these striking schools to remain in local authority control has been won. Strikes are key to ending academisation. We need to do everything possible to support those on strike and to ensure a permanent victory.

Although the council did vote through the anti-academies motion, some councillors disgracefully abstained or voted against it. Socialist Party members in Newham will be challenging these councillors in the local May

elections by standing as part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) candidates.

Local people can choose to vote for genuinely anti-academy and no-cuts candidates. TUSC has chosen not to field candidates against genuine anti-academy Labour candidates that have been showing their support in both words and deeds by attending picket lines and supporting the demand for a parental ballot.

The Socialist Party also demands that the current council executive accepts the council vote and the outgoing mayor Robin Wales confirms that council policy has changed and it now rejects academisation.

Governors make the decision to transfer to academy status but there is still lots anti-academy councillors can do to help striking teachers and the parents that object to academies. Just a vote for an anti-academy motions is not enough.

Council propaganda already plasters the borough. Why not push for funding for anti-academy banners to be displayed? It would make it very clear where the council stands on the issue.

They should also contact governors in partnership with the NEU and organise meetings between governors and the staff and parents who oppose academisation to ensure the governors properly listen and act on parents and teachers wishes.

The council can call local referendums. Anti-academy councillors should demand this on the issue of academies so that the community has a democratic say in how their schools are run.

Finally they can call on the Newham Partnership Working (NPW), which runs outsourced education support services, to follow the new council policy on academisation. The NPW's board contains three staff appointed by Newham Council so they should follow the direction of the council and aim to stop academisation in Newham.

50th anniversary of the assassination of MLK jnr in Memphis

The life and legacy of Martin Luther King

April Ashley, Unison national executive council, black members rep (female) (personal capacity)

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the assassination of Martin Luther King junior, who was shot and killed on 4 April 1968 in Memphis, Tennessee, while supporting striking sanitation workers.

He is now portrayed as a safe, noble and worthy figure in order to blunt his quite radical message but at the time of the civil rights movement he was hated and feared by the Democratic Party in government.

The Democratic Party attempts to perpetuate the myth that they are the party of civil rights and there is a straight historical line from Martin Luther King to Barack Obama. But King's radical vision and legacy is a world away from the capitalist establishment of the Democratic Party.

King, a Baptist minister, was the most important leader of the civil rights movement.

One-third of the southern protest leaders were preachers. The churches were the only places where the Black community could freely congregate and where all the issues facing black workers and youth were discussed. That is why non-violence was the main strategy adopted in the early period of the civil rights movement.

But King's advocacy of mass non-violent civil disobedience was radical and courageous at that time in contrast to the more moderate leadership of the traditional black organisation NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) which focused on legal action.

King and his organisation - the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) - organised mass demonstrations and boycotts against racial segregation, for voting rights and equality of employment. Black

people faced down police attack dogs, fire hoses, police beatings, mass jailing of students, death threats and bombings.

The mass movement caught fire across the whole of the southern states. The struggle in Birmingham, Alabama, in 1963 was a key battle with up to 3,000 students jailed as they continued the battle on the streets, as well as the march across the bridge from Montgomery in 1965 as portrayed in the film, Selma.

Peaceful protesters being savagely attacked was seen live by millions of viewers on the TV. It shocked the nation and inspired the black freedom struggle in the northern cities.

It was pressure from the mass movement below that prompted the Democratic governments under John F Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson to pass civil rights legislation banning racial discrimination in voting and public facilities.

This was a triumph for King and the whole civil rights movement after years of struggle. As King said in his letter from Birmingham jail: "We know through painful experience that freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed."

King had many discussions with John F Kennedy on civil rights for black workers and tried working within the confines of the Democratic Party to affect change. But this was ineffectual. It was the mass demonstrations like the march on Washington for jobs and freedom where King delivered his iconic 'I have a dream' speech at the Lincoln memorial in 1963, which forced change.

But the civil rights movement didn't just stop in the Southern states and King's ideas were evolving.

King travelled to northern cities where the generation of black workers who migrated to the north in the 1920s and 1940s, especially after World War Two, to escape the rural poverty, white supremacy violence and Jim Crow (discriminatory laws), still faced segregation, police violence, poor housing, mass unemployment and poverty.

There were huge uprisings in Watts (Los Angeles), New York, Detroit and every major city with black workers struggling for freedom against racial discrimination and poverty. The movement raged across cities from the mid 1960s to early 1970s and evolved into the 'Black Power' movement.

King's tactic of non-violent civil disobedience was questioned by the many black workers and particularly black youth facing horrific police brutality. The Black Power movement was also inspired by the movements against colonial oppression and imperialism in Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean.

The slogan, 'Black Power', fulfilled an important psychological need to black people at that time whose history had been denied them and who had suffered hundreds of years of humiliation and indignity. It was a time to raise confidence, time to be Black and proud.

The Black Power movement with people like Malcolm X, the Black Panther Party and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) provoked intense debate in the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) on the questions of integration, consumerism, capitalism, imperialism, militarism and war.

Vietnam War

The time spent in northern cities among radicalised workers and young people and their anti-war mood had a profound effect on King.

King eventually came out against the Vietnam War, which put him in conflict with the Democratic Party which had started the war and continued it under the Kennedy and Johnson administrations.

King was deeply disturbed by the increasing death toll of US soldiers and recognised that black soldiers were disproportionately placed in combat units. Between January and November 1966 almost 25% of army casualties were black. In addition, half a billion dollars was diverted from community action programmes to war spending in Vietnam.

"Over the past two years, as I have moved to break the betrayal of my own silences and to speak from the burnings of my own heart, as I have called for radical departures from the destruction of Vietnam" (Beyond Vietnam: A Time to Break Silence Speech delivered by King, on 4 April at Riverside Church in New York City).

This was a huge break with the Democratic Party. The mass media, which now lauds him, denigrated and hounded him for demanding the withdrawal of American troops. President Johnson referred to him as "that goddam nigger preacher," and told him that his statements against the war had the same effect on him as if he had discovered that King had raped his daughter.

It is no surprise that King was also under constant surveillance and harassed by J. Edgar Hoover's FBI Cointelpro (Counter Intelligence Programme) including numerous death threats. He was called "the most dangerous and effective Negro leader in the country."

Questioning capitalism

King's anti-war activism deepened his radicalism and he began to question capitalism.

He said in August 1967: "And I say to you today, that if our nation can spend \$35 billion a year to fight an unjust, evil war in Vietnam, and \$20 billion to put a man on the moon, it can spend billions of dollars to put God's children on their own two feet right here on earth..."

"There are 40 million poor people here, and one day we must ask the question, 'Why are there 40 million poor people in America?' And when you begin to ask that question, you are raising a question about the economic system, about a broader distribution of wealth. When you ask that question, you begin to question the capitalistic economy."

He increasingly began to turn his attention to problems of economic justice and inequality - as although there was no longer formal segregation the condition of black workers was still abject poverty. He believed a serious battle against poverty and oppression was necessary.

In 1968 King launched the Poor People's Campaign. He hoped to go around the country assembling a "multiracial army of the poor" to march on Washington to abolish poverty in the US and internationally and demand that the money being spent on the Vietnam War be redirected to provide jobs and income for the poor.

He aimed for more than just a symbolic march, planning a campaign of mass civil disobedience, including blocking traffic and staging sit-ins in Congress, to shut down Washington, DC.

The aim was to have a permanent tent encampment in Washington called "Ressurrection City" until their demands were met. The demands included:

- \$30 billion annual appropriation to fight poverty (\$213 billion today)
- Congressional passage of full employment
- Guaranteed annual wage;
- Construction of 500,000 low-cost housing units to eliminate slums
- Petition the government to pass an Economic Bill of Rights

King expected violent confrontations with the federal government and its troops in Washington, DC.

King travelled throughout the country organising for the Poor People's Campaign march.

Memphis strike

The Memphis sanitation workers' strike of 1968 epitomised the struggle for economic justice - to end the poverty wages earned by working people. As King said: "What does it profit a man to be able to eat at an integrated lunch counter if he doesn't have enough money to buy a hamburger?"

King's participation in the campaign is not an accident; it is rooted in the political, economic, and social aims of the black freedom movement. The strike slogan 'I am a man' defined the struggle and the fighting spirit for justice, equality, and freedom.

King politically and organisationally understood the link between the labour and civil rights movements. The "captains of industry" and big business opposed both labour and civil rights, holding down wages and violently attacking strikes for union representation and better working conditions.

The US capitalist class and their political representatives have always used racism and sexism to divide the working class and deny human rights, economic justice, and social mobility to the black masses, immigrants, and women.

It was during the sanitation workers' strike after a demonstration through the city that King was shot dead on the balcony of the Lorraine Motel.

As his death was announced uprisings broke out in major cities throughout the US. The movement had lost one of its finest leaders.

It was a severe blow and the mass movement was not sustained either by the official reformist civil rights organisations nor by the Black Panther party, which as well as being subject to brutal oppression and assassinations by the FBI's Cointelpro, made strategic mistakes.

Today, black young people in the US have continued the black freedom movement through the Black Lives Matter (BLM) demonstrations.

From the protests in Ferguson, Missouri, after the police killing of Michael Brown in 2014, demonstrations erupted across the US against police killings, unrelenting police brutality, racist oppression, mass incarceration of black youth, and very poor conditions.

Black workers still suffer high levels of unemployment, poverty and low-wage jobs, and poor housing. 50 years after the assassination of Martin Luther King and after a black US president, little has changed for the overwhelming majority of black youth and workers.

The BLM movement has emulated the mass civil disobedience of the civil rights movement of 1950s and 1960s and the movement has been echoed internationally. But its programme is limited.

It needs to go further and draw some of the same conclusions of Martin Luther King that in order to seriously challenge structural racism and racist attitudes we need to build a mass movement of all those exploited and oppressed by capitalism. We need to create a new society that can end poverty and discrimination, a socialist society.

Review - MLK: The Assassination Tapes

Dave Carr

MLK: The Assassination Tapes uses rare archive newsreel footage and radio reports surrounding MLK's assassination in Memphis in April 1968 - a period of heightened class struggle and social upheaval in racially divided America. The documentary, in a simple chronological narrative-less style, is a powerful account of the period.

The backdrop was the bloody Vietnam War and the hated draft, the dying days of the failed Johnson presidency, and the tinderbox social conditions in US cities especially affecting the oppressed black population.

MLK had gone to Memphis heading the moderate, reformist black civil rights movement to give political and financial support to 1,000, mostly black, striking refuse workers who demanded recognition of their Afsome union branch and better pay from the municipal authority.

Baton-wielding cops sent by the city's reactionary mayor brutally attacked a march by strikers and their supporters

A further support demonstration, led by MLK's non-violent Southern Christian Leadership Conference and the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People, began peacefully but more radicalised groups of black youth clashed with police.

The mayor then drafted in over 4,000 armed national guardsmen, who acted like an occupying army. But this only tightened the lid further on the pressure cooker situation developing in the city's black community.

MLK's gunning down at the Lorraine motel by white supremacist James Earl Ray was an incendiary act that provoked widespread rioting and an uprising of black people in cities across the USA.

The assassination terrified the Democrat leadership who feared that radical black forces would fill the political vacuum.

13,000 troops surrounded the White House as president Johnson dithered, bereft of political solutions. The civil rights leaders and the trade union leaders, while urging political reform, lacked a clear strategy and programme to bring about lasting and fundamental change. Only a mass revolutionary socialist party overthrowing capitalism could have achieved that.

However Johnson, under pressure from the uprising and widespread social discontent, signed into law anti-racist and positive discrimination legislation that year. In Memphis, the mayor conceded union recognition and better pay to end the sanitation workers' strike.

When the rioting subsided, the Democrats would regain political control of the civil rights struggle and shunt it into a safe siding. But the documentary graphically shows how the workers' class struggle merged with the struggle for black liberation.

- A version of this review first appeared in the Socialist on 4 September 2013

Grenfell: survivors not rehoused, inquiry not independent, blocks not safe

Paul Kershaw, chair, Unite union housing workers branch

The government has admitted that 82 households are still in temporary accommodation following the Grenfell Tower fire and not all will be in permanent accommodation by June, the first anniversary. So much for Theresa May's promise they would be rehoused within three weeks of the fire.

Sajid Javid, the minister responsible, said "this is totally unacceptable. The suffering that these families have already endured is unimaginable. Living for this long in hotels can only make the process of grieving and recovery even harder."

Quite true - he condemns both the government and himself!

There are around 1,400 empty homes in Kensington and Chelsea. In the immediate aftermath of the fire Jeremy Corbyn rightly called for requisitioning of empty homes to rehouse survivors swiftly. It is time to put that idea in to action.

As the Grenfell inquiry headed by retired judge Sir Martin Moore-Bick proceeds, it faces increasing questions that undermine its credibility. The problem is not only that its remit is too narrow, but also its links with business interests and the establishment.

Inside Housing magazine has now revealed that Sir Ken Knight, the inquiry's safety expert, signed a certificate claiming Grenfell-style cladding is allowed under official guidance. And the provider of the cladding material, Arconic, insists its product was not in breach of building regulations.

But the government has repeatedly claimed regulations did not allow the material used on Grenfell on buildings over 18 metres tall.

Lawyers representing survivors and the bereaved at the inquiry have pressed the issue - arguing the materials did not meet regulations and that Moore-Bick should resolve this by making a ruling. Will Sir Ken be advising that his own certification was wrong?

Knight was also responsible for advice that sprinkler fitting was not economically viable, despite a judge recommending sprinklers be retrofitted to tower blocks after the 2009 Lakanal House fire in south London. Will he be advising that he was wrong here too?

The London Assembly now calls for mandatory sprinklers in buildings taller than 18 metres - six storeys. But the government remains silent and has refused funding for sprinklers.

To really get to the bottom of the issues will need an inquiry based on the community and labour movement.

The police have recently announced that an undamaged 'Masterdor' fire door recovered from Grenfell protected against fire for just 15 minutes instead of the 30 minutes' resistance it was designed to give.

Government ministers responded irresponsibly by jumping to say there was "no evidence that this was a systemic issue" and that no further action was needed from social landlords.

But quite rightly many landlords have started checks where Masterdor FD30 doors are used. Shouldn't the government have insisted on this minimum action?

Investigations continue to reveal a maze of private companies which must not be allowed to obscure responsibility. Manufacturer Manse Masterdor has gone into liquidation; its assets have been acquired by a company called Synseal which then established a new, separate company that trades as Masterdor.

Tenants and residents nationally are right to demand to see updated fire risk assessments and to monitor progress. Residents on the Lancaster West estate living in homes facing Grenfell tell the Socialist they have waited six months for promised replacement fire doors with no information as to when they will be fitted.

After the fire the government pledged that lack of money would not stop safety work, but since then has not put a penny in place. The estimated bill to re clad at least 288 towers in England which failed combustibility tests is now on course to reach £1 billion.

The Socialist Party continues to support residents organising to explore methods of withholding rent if action is not taken - no safety, no rent!

- Requisition empty homes!
- Launch a labour movement inquiry!
- Cladding off, new fire doors and sprinklers in now - no safety, no rent!

Walkout from undercover policing inquiry

A Socialist Party press release

On 21st March Socialist Party activists were among around 200 core participants who walked out of the undercover policing inquiry.

Speaking on behalf of the 200, Philippa Kaufman said:

"Our clients are not prepared to participate in a process where their presence is mere window dressing, lacking all substance and meaning, which would achieve nothing other than to lend the process a legitimacy it does not have."

She explained that we had collectively "expressed a view therefore that you should recuse yourself from the inquiry or that you ensure that you sit as a true panel, bringing on board others who well understand the critical issues that shape and frame this inquiry."

Dave Nellist, Socialist Party member and previously a Labour MP (1983 - 1992), explained why he took part in the walkout:

"The government was forced to establish this inquiry as a result of public pressure following growing exposures of police spying - including against an elected socialist MP like myself, trade unionists, women activists, anti-racist activists and many more.

"We welcomed its establishment but warned there was a danger it would be a cover up. To be effective it would have to give the cover name of every police spy, but also look at who gave the orders and the role of government itself.

"Instead we have faced a situation that there has been virtually no information revealed about the cover names of police spies, and no real explanation given why not."

Lois Austin, Socialist Party member and a core participant from Youth Against Racism in Europe, added:

"Mitting seems to be behaving as if we were the guilty parties. Yet we were guilty of nothing other than leading a mass, democratic anti-racist youth movement.

"For that we suffered being spied on by the police. For an inquiry to do its job it would have to demand the police reveal who spied on us, when and why.

"Nor should it remain in the past. We do not accept that infiltration, as the Metropolitan Police have implied, no longer occurs.

"Surveillance of peaceful protesters has increased dramatically in the recent period. We demand to know what today's spies are doing."

Hannah Sell, Socialist Party deputy general secretary and a core participant from Youth Against Racism in Europe (YRE), added:

"We hope today's walkout will force a change in the character of the inquiry. Even if this is the case, it is clear that the capitalist establishment will continue to work to prevent us getting the real story.

"That is why the labour and trade union movement should organise its own independent inquiry, made up of representatives from the trade union movement and the anti-racist and environmental protest groups that have suffered infiltration."

The following article was written before the above walkout

Demand police spies out of women's lives!**Lois Austin, Campaign Opposing Police Surveillance and Socialist Party**

On International Women's Day, Unite the Union hosted a meeting of the Campaign Opposing Police Surveillance (Cops) at the Trade Union Congress women's conference.

Women members of Police Spies Out of Lives (PSOOL) gave reports of the relationship they had with undercover police officers. Alison (a pseudonym), a social justice and anti-racist campaigner, was deceived by Mark Kennedy. He infiltrated Alison's life and had an intimate sexual relationship with her.

Alison showed a video of their life together from the years when he posed as her boyfriend in the 1990s. He infiltrated every aspect of her life. He met with all of her extended family including nieces and nephews, children, who were also duped into thinking of him as an uncle.

Helen Steel - veteran campaigner who took on McDonald's in the 'McLibel case' - told a similar story of how undercover police officer John Barker (real name John Dines) infiltrated her political and private life.

Alison and Helen explained how these undercover officers - and those giving them their orders higher up in Special Branch, an institutionally sexist organisation - abused these women in the most outrageous way imaginable. They were used as vehicles to infiltrate and subvert radical progressive movements and campaigns.

There is an imbalance in justice at the Mitting (previously Pitchford) public inquiry into undercover policing. Since retired High Court judge Sir John Mitting took over there have been very worrying developments.

The police and Home Office have a large legal team and resources - in contrast to the non-state core participants, the political activists who were spied on, who have just two barristers. The police are doing all they can to undermine and delay the inquiry by submitting continuous applications for restriction orders and demanding anonymity for officers and for them to give evidence in secret courts.

They say these undercover officers are worried about reprisals if they are identified. But activists already know the identity of two undercover officers and nothing has happened to them. Our only interest is finding out the truth, uncovering the extent of political policing, and putting an end to it.

Undercover political policing is a trade union issue because one of the main targets of infiltration was trade unions such as the miners' union NUM and civil service union CPSA. We know undercover officers like Peter Francis gave the names of anti-racist activists to the Consultancy Association and Economic League which then blacklisted these campaigners from working on building sites for many years.

In response to Mitting clamping down on the openness of the inquiry, Cops, PSOOL and other campaigners organised a protest outside the inquiry hearing at the High Court on 21 March. Our demands are:

- No cover up
- Spies out of lives
- No to political policing
- End blacklisting
- Release the cover names
- Release the names of the organisations which were and are now being spied on
- Expand the inquiry to cover the activity of British spy cops in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Europe

We are also demanding that a panel preside over the inquiry made up of individuals who have experience of working with anti-racist and women's organisations and understand the campaigning and trade union movement, rather than just one judge.

Please support the campaign and affiliate your union branch to Cops and PSOOL - detail at our websites:

- policespiesoutoflives.org.uk
- campaignopposingpolicessurveillance.com

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 21 March 2018 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

Facebook data protection scandal and algorithm changes show...

Social media - the potential and the limits

Sarah Wrack, editor of the Socialist

Cambridge Analytica, a data company owned by Trump-supporting billionaires, bought user information that had been harvested from Facebook and allegedly used it to build a huge program that predicted and attempted to influence voting in the 2016 US election. Facebook knew that the data had been harvested and didn't report it.

Executives from Cambridge Analytica also claimed to undercover Channel 4 reporters to have swung a number of elections around the world based on manufacturing fake bribery allegations, sending prostitutes to rival candidates and working with former state spies.

While we should be extremely sceptical of any suggestion that Trump or Brexit won the polls because of advertising - no matter how targeted - the security breaches highlighted in these revelations are outrageous.

Fundamentally what lies behind these votes is a rejection of the capitalist establishment which offers nothing to the working class and young people apart from continuing destruction of their living standards and hopes for the future.

The absence of a mass socialist alternative that can channel the anger and offer both explanation of why life is so hard for the 99% and a programme of how to organise to fight back is a major factor.

In this situation big business money will always be a defining factor - almost every election in the US has been won by the highest spender using the capitalist media and everything they can. This scandal is no exception.

Facebook founder and CEO Mark Zuckerberg has been summoned to give evidence to a parliamentary committee. And a warrant is being sought by the UK information commissioner to enter and search Cambridge Analytica's headquarters in London.

But Facebook had already sent investigators of its own into the building, who were ordered to stop by the information commissioner.

The Tory chair of the culture select committee wasn't wrong when he said: "The concern would have been, were they removing information or evidence which could have been vital to the investigation? It's right they stood down but it's astonishing they were there in the first place."

This disregard of data protection has rightly made a splash on the front pages. We should be angry about any big company attempting to use for its own ends (and profits) private information inputted in good faith, without clear permission.

But some have been particularly shocked by this failure from Facebook, clearly having had a mistaken idea of what the organisation is and how much trust we should have in it.

This latest scandal is a chance to look at some of the trends in how Facebook and social media operate, and their broader implications particularly for the labour movement.

Algorithm changes

Facebook is notoriously secretive about how its algorithm (the computer process which determines who sees what posts from where) functions.

But it is clear that there have been recent changes, which Facebook justifies as responding to people wanting "more meaningful" interactions, particularly with friends and family.

Mark Zuckerberg's 2018 mission statement was to "make sure time spent on Facebook is time well spent". This sounds nice. And of course most of us do enjoy keeping in touch with those close to us on social media.

One of the advantages of it is it allows people to feel involved in each other's lives in an increasingly alienating, busy and stressed world.

But by meaningful, Facebook tends to mean 'apolitical'. The new algorithm penalises all pages unless they pay huge amounts of money to 'boost' (advertise) posts.

The company is pitching this as an attempt to tackle 'fake news'. But - apart from the fact it's clearly about making more money - the idea that all organisations are inherently less truthful and meaningful than individuals is incorrect.

It is the nature of those organisations that matter. In fact, people coming together collectively to say something, rather than just as individuals, is democratic and ensures more fail safes for reliability.

And it's clear that Facebook is misjudging what people want. It tried to take its impression of encouraging meaningful interactions to an extreme and trialled an entirely separate timeline for posts from pages, where the user had to click on another tab to see anything not from individuals.

But this was quickly dropped as Facebookers in the six countries where it was trialled unsurprisingly reported feeling that they were actually seeing less interesting and varied content.

These developments all highlight the fact that Facebook - like all social media platforms (ie companies) - is not a liberal force for good.

It's not a panacea of balanced, unbiased relaying of information. Facebook is a huge multibillion dollar corporation whose bosses make decisions on how information is collected and displayed.

And their class interests (Zuckerberg is the fifth richest person in the world) clearly have an impact on those decisions.

The Silicon Valley top bosses are part of the capitalist class - albeit tending towards an anti-Trump, liberal wing. Workers' rights, including the fight for a \$15 minimum wage and trade union rights are very definitely not on their agenda.

Shut down

The recent campaign by Tamil Solidarity against censorship by Facebook highlighted that the platform is far from radical or open.

Tamil Solidarity is a vibrant, young Tamil refugee-led organisation fighting for the rights of Tamil-speaking people around the world.

On 9 February, its very active and growing Facebook page was shut down arbitrarily, without warning and without any way for the campaign to appeal or have the page reinstated.

As Tamil Solidarity wrote in its statement: "It would appear Facebook's action follows a malicious campaign by Sinhala nationalists, supporters of Sri Lankan state oppression. But surely there must be some process whereby Facebook tests any allegations of inappropriate content - completely false in this case - before such drastic action is taken?"

But what is that process? Who carries it out? Who are they accountable to? What are their political and class affiliations? Some of these answers we simply don't know at all - others we can probably predict.

If the page of a relatively small campaign is shut down when it makes a splash on an issue, imagine what action may be taken against a mass movement, especially one fighting for socialist and revolutionary change. This can be either by the social media companies or by state forces.

During the revolutionary movement in Egypt in 2011, social media sites, including Facebook, were blocked.

In the recent mass movement in Iran several websites, as well as photo sharing social network Instagram, were periodically blocked and constantly monitored. Facebook and Twitter have been banned in Iran since 2009.

These examples highlight why we cannot rely solely on social media to organise, and must be active in real life campaigns, organise face-to-face meetings, and produce physical publications.

Potential

But social media does offer huge potential for socialists and activists to organise and spread the news that the establishment press won't cover.

For free, we can set up Facebook pages and create posts about strikes, protests, working class history and a socialist analysis of events.

Those posts can reach tens of thousands of people. Social media has played a major role in a whole number of struggles around the world.

Indeed, this is certainly part of why the establishment is now so keen to seize on this current scandal to push for some sort of regulation.

In these discussions the role of socialists should be to demand democratic workers' control over any such regulation.

For workers and young people, Facebook allows them a voice, at least on their own profiles, to share their opinions and engage publicly in debate in a way that is usually closed off to the majority.

Facebook can be newspaper, social club, television, photo album, telephone, and diary all at once. And with one in every three minutes online spent on social media, this is a vital area to engage with.

But under capitalism, all good ideas can be exploited and distorted by the pursuit of profit and ultimately used to attempt to exert control over society.

Some commentators pointed out that if the two separate tabs for individuals and pages had been successful, it would have meant double the advertising space to be sold.

It's free to sign up to Facebook, but it now requires an increasing amount of money to get any kind of significant reach with posts from pages.

It's thought that un-boosted videos, which get a higher reach than any other kind of post, reach an average of 12% of those who have 'liked' the page (ie those who have said that they want to see the content it puts out). Text-only posts reach less than 5%.

Build the Socialist Party on Facebook

While publicising these points, we must also strive to overcome the obstacles put in the way of working class and socialist organisations by having the most effective use of Facebook and other social media platforms ourselves.

While we explore every option centrally, there is much that you can do to help. Facebook claims that pushing posts from individuals over organisations encourages groups to build a real life network of advocates that spread their content for them.

The Socialist Party has a huge advantage in this, with our members and supporters who demonstrate time and time again how dedicated they are, and how connected to working class and young people's struggles.

We need everyone to follow, like and select 'see first' on the Socialist Party Facebook page and make sure you invite all potential supporters to do the same.

It also means having a conscious effort to regularly like, share and comment on our posts, and to tag us into posts from you as an individual or from local Socialist Party branches.

All of these things increase how many people will see those individual posts and are likely to improve our general reach too, by showing that people want to see what we're posting and will engage with it.

The Socialist Party has recently produced a social media guide for our members, giving more details on some of these points - you can request this from your local Socialist Party organiser.

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 23 March 2018 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

Tories fear youth revolt - fight for our future

Claire Laker-Mansfield, Socialist Party national youth organiser

What do young people want? A good home, a decent job and an education - that might sum it up.

The security of knowing you can't be sacked at the drop of a hat. Housing that doesn't leave you at constant risk of eviction. Education that won't saddle you with crippling debt.

A bit more maybe: wages that allow you to enjoy life a little. Time off to pursue your interests and see loved ones. Freedom from the anxious struggle to afford bills, rent, and life's necessities.

These are the modest aspirations of our generation. Capitalist politicians can provide no answer to them. These are things their crisis-ridden, profit-driven system will not provide.

This is the "gloom and failure" of capitalism - to coin a phrase used in a rather different context by Tory transport secretary Chris Grayling. Young people are rejecting it. They are searching for alternatives and embracing the idea of socialism.

But this fills some with fear. For big business, bankers, oligarchs and plutocrats, any idea which threatens to turn the world upside down, to put working class people in control, is deeply threatening.

Evidently it has Chris Grayling lying awake at night. He now openly proposes using the school curriculum to disseminate Tory propaganda.

School students must be taught about the "evils" of socialism, about its "gloom and failure," Grayling says. He believes giving young people the opportunity to make up their own minds - perhaps allowing them an introduction to the work of Marx or Engels, for example - would be far too dangerous.

He wants schools to teach caricatured nonsense about governments and regimes which bore no resemblance to the real ideas of democratic socialism. Even more than it is already, he wants a revised history, viewed only through the lens of the ruling class, taught as objective fact.

This blatant attempt to present right-wing propaganda as 'education' must be fought. But even if forced through it would have a limited effect.

Experience is life's greatest teacher. It is experience of life under capitalism which is driving young people to oppose it.

It is experience driving them to the mass action which has just visited the US in the tremendous 'March for Our Lives' movement. It is experience that is behind the gritty determination of those protesting state

repression in Catalonia. It is experience that is fuelling the support for Corbyn's anti-austerity stand.

And it is experience, both of hardship and of resistance, which continues to draw young people towards socialist ideas - ideas that offer the tools needed to change the world.

- Interested in socialist ideas? Want to help the fight? Join the Socialists: socialistparty.org/join

Goldsmiths students occupy and protest in support of UCU strikers

Ellen Kenyon Peers, Goldsmiths Socialist Students

Student activism has been invigorated during the University and College Union (UCU) strike at Goldsmiths, part of the University of London.

Even in the final week of term, when staff were no longer striking but instead 'working to contract' (which means leaving at five when they stop being paid), a group of students decided to enact a flash occupation of the university's Great Hall - which was holding a post-graduate open day for prospective students.

Initially marching onto the stage with banners and Socialist Students placards to prevent a speech by the vice-chancellor, and reading a list of demands which included safe and affordable student housing, more funding for mental health services, democratic governance of the institution and defence of pensions, the protesters moved peacefully and chanted around the hall.

Walked out

UCU members walked out at five to chants of 'the strike goes on'. Some lecturers attempted to stay until the 7pm timetabled finish but most left when they realised the event had been shut down by staff and students.

A rally with speakers including the National Education Union's Martin Powell Davies, Unison's April Ashley, Claire Laker-Mansfield of Socialist Students and 15-year-old Adam Abdullah - who is setting up a student union at his school - went ahead despite the head of Goldsmiths estates team locking the great hall doors with bike locks.

Students were outraged by what was undoubtedly a scare tactic by university management (who had earlier hidden food brought by protesters). But they were thwarted by students who held a side door open to give the speakers access. As was read to university management: 'We are the university, we are united, we will fight, we will resist and we will be back!'

Walthamstow Save Our Square protesters thrown out of city hall for demanding a say

Linda Taaffe, Waltham Forest Socialist Party

London Mayor Sadiq Khan's decision to grant permission to redevelop Walthamstow town square in east London was met with anger and feelings of gross betrayal.

This regeneration plan, including a 29-storey monster block of unaffordable flats, the felling of 81 mature trees, and the loss of a third of our public green space, was drawn up by a cabal of a few Blairite Labour councillors with greedy property developers Capital and Regional Plc specialising in retail, and Mount Anvil specialising in the construction of luxury apartments.

Khan, in a recent visit to our area, had agreed to meet a delegation from the campaign. However, we were met with a wall of silence. But it was the comment in Khan's press release saying "we have listened to the community" that really ratcheted up the mood of the Save our Square meeting. "More like selective deafness", said one long-standing campaigner. "Let's march on city hall", said another.

A raft of figures show how thousands of people had protested one way or another over the last two years. He either didn't listen, or he totally ignored what protesters were saying.

So we attended the 'mayor's question time' on 22 March. We had posters in our bags and were seated in the vast chamber where the question time takes place. A beautiful vista over the Thames, the atmosphere sterile, no feeling of the cut-and-thrust of debate, written questions and written answers, hushed tones, all pre-organised, no room for anything out of the ordinary.

Until, after a question on ballots before regeneration, we jumped up holding up our posters. The chamber was quite full with many students probably studying government, or just on the tourist trail. "This is not good enough." "We want a ballot." "We want affordable homes". A cacophony of voices!

In a nano-second half a dozen heavies appeared. They snatched posters, then moved in to eject us. They got hold of us and we protested, they pushed, even carried one of us by both arms.

We continued giving voice to our complaints: "Khan's in the pockets of the billionaires," "building unaffordable homes is madness". Khan walked away to hide, left his security men, who probably find rents difficult on their wages, to do his dirty work for him.

Our video of the protest has got over 6,000 views - bringing a great response from the people who truly matter. We are now fired up for a march on city hall.

Trees

Following this, on 24 March Save our Square and Socialist Party members gathered in Walthamstow to highlight the threat to our 81 mature lime trees. Loads of people came along specifically with messages to tie around the trees. Shoppers stopped by.

We supplied ribbons, pens and card for people to make their own messages, however they wanted to express themselves, or to appeal to the council leader, the mayor and the private developers not to chop down these trees.

Along the promenade entrance to the square and market, edged on both sides by huge trees, every tree had a message tied with coloured ribbons - all around the square too. People signed petitions to the council and others signed support for the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition standing for council against councillors who don't listen to the working class.

It was a great way to spread the message of protest to stop private profiteers and Blairite councillors destroying our environment.

- [Watch a video of the city hall protest](#)

Conference reflects mood of optimism in Socialist Party Northern region

Elaine Brunskill, Northern Socialist Party secretary

You know a conference has been good when those attending are enthusiastic despite shivering because of the lack of heating in the venue!

Around 30 of us, including trade unionists, youth and community activists, were at our Socialist Party Northern Region conference on 25 March.

Our members listened intently as Socialist Party executive committee member Ken Douglas reported on the depth of the capitalist crisis across Europe. This includes events in Catalonia, where there are elements of revolution and counterrevolution, and how the most combative workers and youth are fighting for independence.

We discussed the ongoing problems facing Angela Merkel, who after six months only just managed to scrape together nine votes more than the legal requirement to become chancellor.

There were excellent contributions from the floor, including a report of the German IG Metall workers who have won significant gains. An NHS worker spoke about the growing mood in Britain to reject the NHS pay deal (see page 6).

Our discussion on building the Socialist Party was inspirational and included reports from our young members on how to build among students and their participation in Corbyn's youthquake.

Members listened raptly to one of our shop stewards who explained how he had used the methods learnt from our organisation to help build his trade union branch, which has been involved in successful strike action.

Our fighting fund appeal raised over £400. This is on top of the £3,800 pledged to our building fund campaign.

All of this reflects the mood of optimism in our region that alongside workers and youth we can build a formidable socialist challenge to this rotten capitalist system.

North West Socialist Party conference

47 members from across the North West came to the region's Socialist Party conference on 24 March.

An enthusiastic meeting looked at global perspectives, with an introduction by Socialist Party executive committee member Judy Beishon, reported on likely developments in Britain, discussed selling the Socialist paper, took a report of the work of the party in the region over the last 12 months, and elected our regional officers.

The collection raised £543 for the conference costs and fighting fund, while new promises of payments received at the conference mean we're now over £8,000 pledged for the building fund.

Hugh Caffrey, North West Socialist Party secretary

Building fund appeal: "Each pledge is a triumph for our party"

Nigel Smith, York Socialist Party

Yorkshire region got off to a flying start in its building fund appeal at our regional conference where 36 members made an average pledge of £365. The Yorkshire region has also had a single pledge of £10,000 as well as several of £1,000.

Since then each branch has designated someone to be responsible for contacting members and supporters.

I have been helping coordinate the appeal for the Yorkshire region. I have really enjoyed my discussions with the branch organisers. We have shared ideas and supportive stories about our experiences.

Some members can make a pledge and pay it out of savings. For others it's a matter of putting aside a little each month to make up their pledge. Several members have increased initial pledges following discussions with their families, who may not be members themselves but have grasped the importance of the appeal.

We intend to press ahead with the appeal and hope to increase the number of pledges. We also intend to reach out to supporters, relatives and friends. Whether it be £10 or £1,000, we know that each pledge is a little triumph for our party and for socialism.

Bristol Socialist Students join Yarlswood demonstration

Bristol University Socialist Students recently organised a Sudanese lunch, all cooked by Kaba, someone who has been through the asylum process. The meal was a fundraiser for a coach from Bristol and Bath to the 'Surround Yarlswood' demonstration on 24 March.

With over 100 women protesting within Yarlswood immigration detention centre at the inhumane conditions, it is important to show solidarity with those who are incarcerated indefinitely for simply fleeing their home country for safety.

While the government determines whether they have a right to stay in Britain, detainees are detained and subject to demoralisation, psychological stress of an indefinite sentence.

They have not committed any crimes. A BBC Watchdog report raised concerns as to why these women are even detained with the vast majority granted asylum and released into the communities.

Rob Alexander, Bristol Socialist Students

May Day greetings: Lend your support to the fight against the bosses

William Jarrett, Socialist Party Northern region May Day greetings organiser

Across the north, one of England's most industrially combative regions, shop stewards and rank-and-file trade unionists have relied on the Socialist newspaper to provide support and solidarity in disputes with employers.

At Tyneside Safety Glass, Kone lifts and escalators, Mears housing, Barbour clothing, and in the public sector, the Socialist has been there, helping to link up workers' struggles, and supporting trade unionists' discussions on how to win.

The Socialist also links fighting workers in England and Wales to the struggle for decent working conditions and socialism across the world.

In 2017-18 readers sent solidarity to Serbian postal workers in struggle, where bosses had viciously attacked terms and conditions and sacked the workers' leaders. Our fight with the bosses is global, and the Socialist consistently puts that fight front and centre for readers.

Through its reports of the work of the Committee for a Workers' International - the world socialist organisation the Socialist Party is affiliated to - as well as its coverage of the National Shop Stewards

Network, we count on the Socialist to be a sounding board for the workers' movement.

Why not lend your voice? May Day greetings in the Socialist are a perfect way to reach thousands of readers across our movement, and help support the paper which works for their victory.

Greetings

Your branch, committee or trades council - as well as campaign group or student society - can agree a suitable size and send us the image or ask us to design it for you. Join us in celebrating International Workers' Day 2018 with the socialist newspaper for workers and youth. Place greetings in the pages of the Socialist!

Workplaces - and any union bodies which can't send greetings - can use a sign-up sheet to get donations and book greetings from supporters

- The deadline for greetings is 5pm 11 April, so act now
- You can see prices and send greetings at socialistparty.org.uk/mayday.
- If you have any questions or want resources, email jamesivens@socialistparty.org.uk

Save free school meals!

Hugh Caffrey, Socialist Party North West secretary

"Theresa May, strong and stable, stole the food from the children's table!" chanted 60 or so protesters at the first protest in Liverpool against free school meals being scrapped. Vicious Tory means-testing of universal credit claimants means that free school meals will be withdrawn from around a million school kids across the country, 24,000 on Merseyside alone.

This needless cruelty rankled deeply with many passers-by who expressed their support for the protest with some joining in. Several compared this to the bedroom tax, but aimed at children.

As a start, campaign organisers are looking to protest against local Tory MPs, get people to contact their Labour MP about the debate which Labour secured in parliament on the issue, and spread the word about what's happening. People brought donations to the protest of school uniforms and other things which the poorest parents will find useful.

Others provided free hot meals - what a contrast between working class people helping each other and snide Tory billionaires attacking our children. Socialist Party members gave out a leaflet which was well received by all, and will continue to support this really important campaign.

Labour councils should refuse to implement this cut and maintain free school meals in their schools.

- Find the campaign on Facebook - ['No child will go hungry'](#)

France: Pressure mounts on Macron government

Leila Messaoudi and Cécile Rimboud, Gauche Revolutionnaire, CWI in France

Since the election of Emmanuel Macron - president of the rich - in May 2017, and after the onslaught of the French government against all sectors in society especially the public services - the railways (the SNCF), pensioners, young people, unemployed - we were expecting the day of action on 22 March to go well.

The pensioners' protest on 15 March, the countless strikes, walkouts, and struggles taking place every week around the country, had all built up into a successful mobilisation.

22 March was deliberately chosen by the trade unions because it was the 50th anniversary of the events that culminated in the general strike movement of May 1968.

This time there were up to 500,000 on the streets across the country. More than one in three railway workers were on strike and one out of every four primary school teachers.

If this day of action was not yet as big as the movement against the new anti-labour laws in September-October last year, the atmosphere on the demonstrations and the widespread public support for the strike showed that it is already significantly different.

Many groups of workers went on strike - some for the first time ever, some for the first time in a long time. We saw very diverse groups - much more than the traditional trade union contingents - the presence of young students in the main cities and groups of high school students on the move.

Strategy

The strike was not only organised to fight back against the specific measures of the government but as a way to signal that this is the time to begin the counter-attack and to plan what happens next.

The government and the media in the hands of their friends, the billionaires, have gone to town in doling out tons of propaganda against the SNCF strikers but it did not work! A majority in society supports their fight to keep the railways public.

The presence of contingents of young people on the railway workers' protests in Paris indicates a feeling of the need to fight together. But so does the mixture of many different sectors of workers on the marches and the sizeable demonstrations in medium-sized cities and towns despite the cold early spring weather.

Workers in the private sector are also being hammered by the labour law 'reforms'. Public sector workers are suffering privatisation, massive job cuts and budget cuts. Young people are threatened by the thoroughgoing dismantling of school and higher education. We are all under attack from these policies. We have to mobilise in a united fashion.

The next strike dates of the railway workers are 3 and 4 April. These need to be major days of support and participation in the struggle on the SNCF.

The next date for strike action in both the public and the private sectors has been set by the CGT trade union federation for 19 April. This date should serve as a step towards building a massive, united all-together strike.

USA: Huge 'march for our lives' protests

Mass demonstrations took place in US cities and even internationally on 24 March to demand gun control. This was an uprising by school students demanding gun control following the massacre of 17 pupils in Parkland, Florida the previous month.

These huge demonstrations, following the million-strong student walkouts on 17 March, have forced a shift in public opinion and put the previously untouchable pro-Trump National Rifle Association lobby on the back foot.

Trump, however, showed his contempt of the Parkland student survivors - who last month had an audience with president - by hanging out at his exclusive golf course in Florida during the marches.

Socialist Alternative members (co-thinkers of the Socialist Party) in many US cities played a key role in mobilising turnouts for both 17 and 24 March events.

- See socialistalternative.org for gun control articles and on a strategy to defeat Trump

Russia's predictable presidential election

Unsurprisingly, Vladimir Putin was reelected on 18 March as Russia's president.

Given the lack of any credible opposition, the result was never in doubt - only the turnout was important to the autocrat Putin, who wanted 70%. In the event, after pressuring state employees and offering the public a range of 'incentives', it was 67%.

The western media and liberal opposition cried foul but there was probably less election fraud this time compared to the last election.

The courts having conveniently barred the nationalist Alexei Navalny (who called for a boycott) and with the assassination of Boris Nemtsov outside the Kremlin three years ago, the nearest opposition candidate with 12% was the Communist-backed agrobusinessman Pavel Grudinin.

He lost four million votes compared to last time, having alienated a section of the Communist Party's older soviet nostalgic electorate while doing nothing to inspire - with his racist attitudes and support for Stalin - the younger, increasingly rebellious generation. The CP's complaints about oligarchs and foreign influences were undermined when Grudinin's 13 or so Swiss bank accounts were exposed!

Socialist Alternative (CWI, Russia) has not succumbed to despair, but is determined to continue its campaigning on issues such as 300 rubles an hour for those in work, against the harassment of women and the attacks on LGBT+ people. In this way it is building a vibrant and democratic socialist organisation capable of offering an alternative to the capitalist authoritarianism currently gripping Russia.

- See election article on socialistworld.net

What has brought Russians onto the street in recent days is not the tussle between Putin and the West over the Skripal spy poisoning saga but the fatal shopping mall fire in Kemerovo, Siberia. Hundreds of protesters demanded the sacking of officials for safety negligence.

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!
-

Audio version of this document

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

<http://www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/27114>