

## **Alienation and austerity behind London deaths - fight for socialism**

Grief, anger and fear. These have been the dominant feelings in many working class communities, especially in London, at a recent spate of violent crime, including the deaths of a number of young people.

More than 50 people have been violently killed in the capital alone so far this year. The victims have mainly been young, working class and disproportionately from ethnic minorities.

This is a tragedy and people are rightly demanding action to keep our communities safe. But it is also an indictment both of the capitalist system which offers no meaningful future to young people, and of the politicians who defend that system and have cut to the bone the services which play a role in avoiding these devastations.

The response from the Tories is as we might predict. In their final proposals they were pressured to back off from increasing stop and search powers - proven time and again to be ineffective and racist.

But they pledge to attempt 'hot spot' policing - redistributing existing police numbers to have a heavier presence in areas with high crime rates.

This is an attempt to brush over the fact that they have carried out significant cuts to police budgets since 2010, with 20,000 less officers now on the street.

And a leaked document proved that they were told by their own officials that police cuts "may have encouraged offenders" and "may be an underlying factor that has allowed the rise" in violent crime.

Some working class people will no doubt welcome the extra officers in target areas, hoping it may have at least a temporary immediate effect in discouraging the gang violence. But, apart from the fact that without an overall increase in numbers it means less provision elsewhere, this tactic could also actually increase tension and add to a feeling of poorer areas being under siege and whole communities being criminalised for the actions of a few.

We demand that control of the police be placed under the auspices of democratically elected local committees involving representatives from trade unions, councils, tenants associations, and community organisations.

### **Crime and poverty**

But, more fundamentally, this isn't just a crime and punishment issue. Any serious analysis of the situation and attempt to solve it has to look deeper at why people turn to crime and violence. Which is clearly linked to why the highest crime rates tend to be in the poorest areas.

Firstly there is the obvious financial issue. Some poor people can, in desperation, turn to crime and drugs to make a living. Decent jobs, housing and benefits can combat that. Young people who, when they think about the future, feel confidence that they will have a good home, job, pay and security for themselves and their family, don't tend to risk throwing such a future away by embarking on a life of crime.

Instead it tends to be a small minority of those who feel they have nothing to lose. And that's the feeling of a growing number.

If things continue as they are, they will never own a home, or even be able to afford to rent one of their own. They will never have a permanent, full time job with pay that's enough to live on. They watch their local areas transformed, with shiny new apartments and trendy shops appearing everywhere - but know that these are not for the likes of them.

Austerity is destroying lives now, and the prospects for lives in the future. We are seeing the potential talents, skills and interests of thousands of young people go to waste - seen at the extreme end in the list of those who have died on London's streets in the recent period, as well as those who carried out the killings.

## **Alienation and insecurity**

More broadly, there is an increasing sense of powerlessness and alienation among working class young people. It starts young, with growing numbers excluded from schools that have been turned into 'exam results' factories.

Insecurity in their own lives is mirrored by the insecurity they see in the world around them. They fear war, terror, environmental destruction, the far-right and racism - created by older generations of the capitalist bosses, with young people feeling they have no say over their own future or that of the world in general.

The politics of neoliberalism, accepted by the majority of politicians for decades, has taught that being out for yourself and willing to trample on others is the way to success, and that if you are not 'succeeding' only you are to blame.

And unfortunately the trade unions have failed to provide an alternative vision or to lead a fight against austerity and all the other attacks on the working class. A mass coordinated struggle could draw in big numbers of young people and channel their rightful anger in a direction that could achieve change in their conditions.

The Corbyn surge, which included many working class young people attending rallies and turning out to vote for Corbyn, showed that when a serious battle is engaged in, youth will get involved.

But there has been no sustained call to action from Corbyn either. And his failure to launch a full-on fight against the right wing within Labour has undermined the appeal he could have among some youth. Cuts by local councils, many of them led by Blairite Labour, have decimated services to assist young people and families (see quotes below).

But we shouldn't be pessimistic. The majority of young people are just waiting for a signal to fight back. We should be confident that mass movements are coming, and that youth will be the best fighters in those movements.

Because we are not powerless - working class and young people, organised together and linked internationally, have the potential power to change the world and build a socialist future based on solidarity, cooperation and peace.

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## **Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition candidates respond**

We have to say enough is enough. Stop all cuts and privatisation now. If you don't come from a rich family or a family with big assets, you need public services. EMA payments for college students, a functioning careers service, somewhere to go with other young people. The possibility of getting a job and a home must be on offer. Councils must provide services that offer alternative routes out of a life of crime or drugs. When our young people are dying it's time to act.

**Nancy Taaffe, candidate for High Street, Waltham Forest**

Unfortunately, the threat of violence is a constant fear for many parents with teenagers, like myself, who want their children to be confident and independent but also safe on the streets. In a borough with a high youth population, with high levels of overcrowding and poverty, the mayor's cuts, including £700,000 from youth services, have worsened the situation.

We know schools are cutting courses because of central government cuts and careers services are being cut back, again pushing some young people to the margins.

**Hugo Pierre, candidate for mayor in Tower Hamlets**

While every incident has its own specific circumstances, the increase in violent crime on our streets, we believe, is a reflection of deteriorating youth provision. Young people have had their services destroyed - our careers services, social work teams vital to helping children and families, and local Connexions teams have all sustained vicious cuts. This is not to mention the deep cuts to our youth offending team's budget.

**Theo Sharieff, candidate for Leytonstone, Waltham Forest**

Before the riots in Tottenham in 2011, eight of 13 youth centres were callously closed in Haringey. Socialist Party members campaigned for them to be reopened. Instead, the now-discredited and deselected Labour council leadership of Claire Kober proposed to cut the youth services budget by 75%. A poignant video has been circulated of young people speaking and protesting against these cuts - tragically including one of the local victims. Haringey is now set to become the first 'Corbyn council' in London. The new council must re-open these closed centres, expand youth services and restore EMA.

**Candidates in Haringey**

45% of children in Hounslow are living with out-of-work parents or in low-income households. The least we're asking for is youth services that can provide for them, give them somewhere to go, help them socially integrate and gain some skills. We're asking for things that can help them be motivated young people who can really make a difference in the future.

**Sukh Sethi, candidate for Hounslow South (see a video of Sukh's full speech on the 'London Socialist Party' Facebook page)**

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Socialist Party members have set up a petition to demand that London's Labour councils re-instate all cut youth services and youth service jobs. [See and sign it on change.org.](#)

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This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 10 April 2018 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

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# No to bombing Syria

## Build the movement against Trump and May

**Hannah Sell**

"Hell on earth" was how one UN chief described Eastern Ghouta earlier this year. Now the appalling misery of buildings bombed to rubble, hospitals with no supplies, and food at critically low levels, has been added to by the horror of a chemical weapons attack.

In response Donald Trump has vowed to 'take action' against those responsible, adding there was 'not much doubt' about who was to blame - meaning it seems the Assad regime, or even Russia directly.

Over the last seven years more than half a million Syrians have been killed and millions more have fled as their country has been torn apart by civil war and competing global and regional powers. Dropping more bombs on this devastated country will only add to the nightmare.

It is the role of imperialism in the Middle East which is central to the horror that has developed in the region. Its legacy, with decades of military intervention, divide-and-rule policies, support for brutal dictatorships and flirtations with jihadist forces left Iraq, Libya and Afghanistan in ruins.

In Syria their interventions contribute to what is in reality several wars taking place now in that country.

The events in Syria confirm the analysis the Socialist made at the start of the conflict. At the time there were widespread predictions, including from the Tory-led government in Britain, that President Assad would rapidly be defeated.

We argued that, unlike in Libya, this would not be the case. Assad had greater reserves of support from ethnic and religious minorities within the country; with the increasingly sectarian character of the rebels driving them towards the regime.

At the start the uprising was part of the Arab Spring - and was a genuine popular revolt against the Assad dictatorship. But this changed with Assad's war to hold onto power and the outside intervention of reactionary forces supporting different sides in Syria - including the brutal dictatorial regimes of Saudi Arabia and Iran - backed up by imperialist forces.

Today US imperialism - while still the most powerful military force on the planet - is increasingly a bit player in Syria.

The Assad regime, backed by Russia, now controls most of the populated areas of the country. At the end of March it seems to have largely taken control of Eastern Ghouta.

It is not obvious why the Syrian regime or Russia would have launched a chemical weapons attack after their brutal siege had succeeded. It is possible of course, but so could it possibly have been carried out by remnants of Isis or others.

Inevitably, Jeremy Corbyn is already under attack from the right-wing press for correctly refusing to apportion blame without evidence, and for failing to beat the Trumpian drums of war.

This when, as Patrick Cockburn rightly says in the Independent, there is a real danger that the Middle East could face the catastrophe of a regional war, and that Trump, backed by May, could fan the flames.

The workers' movement needs to clearly oppose all the warmongering of the imperialist powers and capitalist politicians (including Blairites), and instead support the rebuilding of the workers' movements across the region on a multi-ethnic, non-sectarian basis.

At the same time socialists internationally need to spearhead movements against imperialist intervention in the Middle East.

- No to imperialist intervention! The withdrawal of all foreign forces from Syria and from other occupied countries.
- For the building of united, non-sectarian defence committees to defend workers, the poor and others against sectarian attacks from all sides.
- Independent trade unions and the building of mass workers' parties with a programme of land to the masses and the factories to the workers, implemented through a programme for a socialist democratic planned economy.
- A democratic socialist confederation of the Middle East and North Africa.

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## **Gender pay gap figures show need for trade union action**

**Becci Heagney, Socialist Party national committee**

Figures released by 10,000 large companies reveal what most of us already knew: there is a huge gender pay gap in Britain. The median across the firms is 9.8% - but some had gaps of over 70%.

Since the Equal Pay Act 1970, it has been illegal to pay men and women different amounts for the same job. However, that doesn't mean it doesn't happen. High-profile examples include presenters at the BBC, but it is likely to happen in many workplaces across the country.

But the main explanation for the gap in pay is that women are still overwhelmingly concentrated in lower-paid jobs or working part-time. Employers are still punishing women for taking - or even just having the potential to take - 'career breaks' to have children and care for families.

The average company is 52% men, but 30% of male employees are in the highest-paid quartile, compared to just 20% of women. Even companies that have a majority-women workforce are more likely to have more higher-paid men.

Unsurprisingly, the biggest gaps are in male-dominated workforces like construction and finance. Ryanair has the worst pay gap in the airline industry at 71.8%. Pilots are mainly men and most women employees are low-paid cabin crew.

The smallest pay gaps are where women workers are concentrated, such as the public sector, health and social care. No sector overall pays women more than men.

### **'Women's work'**

But the main issue is that vital jobs traditionally seen as 'women's work' are more likely to be low-paid and on poor terms and conditions. Most workers in the public sector have not had a pay rise in the last decade. The care industry, dominated by private companies, pays minimum wage or less.

Workers organising and taking strike action for higher pay and decent conditions - like the Ford Dagenham women sewing machinists did 50 years ago this June - is vital if we are to seriously address the pay gap.

So the trade unions should use these figures as a launch pad to fight for genuine pay equality, reversing privatisation and cuts to fund decent wages and conditions. We can take confidence from the incredible mass feminist strike in the Spanish state on 8 March.

Under capitalism, bosses will use every means at their disposal to boost profits by paying workers as little as they can get away with, including discriminating against a section of us because of our gender.

So it's no surprise the gender pay gap is also biggest in companies with the biggest disparity between executives and workers. While socialists would oppose any woman being paid less because of her gender, the majority of women's lives will not be improved by a tiny minority of executive women being paid bigger bonuses in the banks, for example.

We stand for pay equality - but we want more than just equality with low-paid, downtrodden men. The Socialist Party fights for decent pay and jobs for all, taking big business out of the hands of the super-rich exploiters.

United workers' action can tackle the growing inequality between the owners and top executives who are getting richer, and the rest of us struggling because of wage restraint for their profits.

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## **Child poverty to hit 5m by 2021 - strikes can stop the cuts**

**Tessa Warrington, East Midlands Socialist Party**

"My children have grey skin, poor teeth, poor hair, poor nails. They are thinner... when you see them with children of the same age who are from an affluent area, they just look tiny."

Horrifying research published by the National Education Union (NEU) together with the Child Poverty Action Group has again highlighted worsening child poverty in Britain.

Delegates at the NEU's recent annual conference commented that schools are increasingly forced to fill the gaps left by cuts to local government and social services.

"We are expected to be social workers, carers, doctors. We are expected to deal with every issue at the same time as doing all the other things that the government wants us to do," said one.

## **Shoes**

Others described keeping their school open during the snow to ensure children could get a hot meal, and delivering shoes to homes so pupils could get to school.

The NEU survey revealed that 4.1 million children currently live in poverty, predicted to rise to five million by 2021. As reported on the front page of the Socialist in March, around a million children are also expected to lose access to free school meals due to Tory means-testing of universal credit.

By kicking people off benefits the Tories twist the figures to claim poverty is decreasing. First-hand experience screams that the opposite is true.

We need councils that will stand up and refuse to pass cuts that harm our children. We need unions like the NEU to be prepared to take decisive action in defence of education and pay. Coordinated strikes have the power to push the Tories back - and out power altogether.

Striking school teachers in Virginia, USA demonstrated what workers can achieve when we fight together. They also organised food on the picket lines for their students who face the same conditions of poverty as ours.

This is not a coincidence. It is a product of the profit-driven capitalist system. Let's fight for a socialist future for all.

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## **Non-fiction: Trotsky in 1917**

# **Striking analysis in heat of 1917 will deepen any reader's understanding**

**Iain Dalton, Leeds Socialist Party**

'Trotsky in 1917' is the most complete collection in English of some of the contributions of Leon Trotsky, one of the Russian revolution's key leaders alongside Vladimir Lenin, in that crucial year.

It provides another window on the revolutionary processes at work and the way the Bolsheviks successfully took part in them, offering a lead to workers, soldiers and peasants.

While copious notes, a timeline and other aids will assist those whose knowledge of the revolution is limited, the book is best seen as a companion volume to Trotsky's majestic 'History of the Russian Revolution'.

It is broken down into chapters, the first three corresponding to the three volumes of Trotsky's work. A fourth deals with the immediate period after the Soviet government came to power in October 1917.

It is easy to be struck by the sharpness of some of Trotsky's analysis at the time, which in reading 'The History' written over a decade later, you might assume were conclusions drawn after the event, not in the heat of the moment.

Niall Mulholland's introduction helps draw out some of Trotsky's key contributions to the ideas that took the revolution forward to victory.

The book also strikes you in other ways. A speech entitled 'An appeal to the majority in the Soviet' gives an indication of Trotsky's skill as a speaker as he deftly takes up the ideas raised in speeches by government ministers and draws out the key issues, in this case the need to strike against the interests of profit.

'Shame! The work of republican justice' describes the character of those arrested by the supposedly revolutionary government under Alexander Kerensky following the 'July Days' mobilisation, held in the same part of Kresty prison as Trotsky.

Mostly soldiers, one was detained for the 'crime' of distributing leaflets for local government elections!

'Pogrom agitation', written on 18 October, demonstrates how revolutions do not progress in straight lines. Unless revolutionary opportunities are taken forward, reactionary movements can grow out of the disillusionment of the masses.

As Trotsky comments "What is pogrom agitation based on? On backwardness, in the main on the poverty, hunger and despair of the bottom layers of the working masses..."

"The revolution has still not given them anything. On the contrary, in many respects life is worse now than it was before."

The final section deals with some of the challenges facing the new Soviet power after October. Of particular interest are newly translated pieces such as 'What do the secret treaties reveal?' discussing the capitalists' plans to carve up the Middle East, and also the discussion of 'The freedom of the press'.

This collection will help deepen the understanding of the process of 1917 for any who read it. As well as reading it themselves, every socialist should try to get it into the hands of those interested in learning the lessons of the greatest event in human history so far.

## **Trotsky in 1917**

- £12.50 paperback - £9.99 ebook - £15 deal - Trotsky in 1917 plus Lessons of October - All available from [socialistbooks.co.uk](http://socialistbooks.co.uk)
  - Trotsky in 1917 is the latest publication of Socialist Books, the Socialist Party's publishing house
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## **Fiction: The Nowhere Girls**

# **Moving look at school students' many perspectives on sexism**

**Helen Pattison, East London Socialist Party**

'The Nowhere Girls' is written from the perspective of a variety of young women school students at Prescott High School in the US, although it mainly chronicles the three founding members of the Nowhere Girls, Rosina, Erin and Grace.

Their group is set up to fight sexism on campus following the hounding out of town of a gang rape victim the year before.

It's an extremely moving book. The main characters vary in confidence at the beginning and are unsure at first of how their action can combat the sexism they face.

But incensed by the treatment of a former student, they grow in confidence, and their differing ideas about how to challenge misogyny in society become rounded out as they battle to support rape and assault victims in their community.

They draw wider conclusions about sexism as they discuss together their different attitudes towards sex and relationships, and realise it's impossible to avoid sexism by simply changing their own behaviour.

They call a 'sex strike' in protest against young women feeling pressurised into sex, the lack of understanding of consent from young men at the school, and in solidarity with victims who have previously been ignored. They expose the local police, right-wing religious leaders, and school management for their roles in the misogyny students face.

While Amy Reed's novel ends with a kind of victory, it's not a guide to action on fighting sexism. It is fiction, after all. But it is a chance to consider all the different perspectives young women and men can have on sexism and feminism - and their willingness to change the world.

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## **The Socialist inbox**

**Do you have something to say?**

Send your news, views and criticism in not more than 150 words to Socialist Postbox, PO Box 24697, London E11 1YD, phone 020 8988 8771 or email [editors@socialistparty.org.uk](mailto:editors@socialistparty.org.uk).

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

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

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## Understanding economics

For anyone finding it a bit difficult to understand why all is not well with capitalism, I highly recommend the article in Socialism today issue 216 by Judy Beishon, titled 'World economy: ten years after the crash'.

Low investment , rising inequality, US tax cuts, protectionism, can the crash be repeated, stagnation and crisis - all answered in a way that helps to make sense of why the world economy is in such a mess. The article is also available on the Committee for a Workers' International website, [socialistworld.net](http://socialistworld.net).

**Trevor Grewar, Unite Hull EMSI branch**

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## Iranian refugee writes

It has been few years that a Socialist Party member brings the Socialist newspaper for us every week. At first, I was not able to understand the news, just something from the headlines and photos, but the comrade explained about the concept of the articles.

The Socialist has reported about the people's daily life and their struggles over education, nurseries, zero-hour contracts, the NHS, accommodation and many more. The articles describe why these kinds of issues happen for people - and what is the solution of them.

The comrades believe they have to do something to change the situation, and they run campaigns, have petitioned, organised marches to say no to cuts, no to poverty, no to war. The valuable fact is they have hope for change, and are trying for that.

**An Iranian refugee**

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## Criticism isn't antisemitism

On 28 March, thousands of people turned up in Paris to demonstrate against antisemitism. This demonstration follows the murder of an 80-year-old woman who was apparently killed because she was Jewish.

During this demonstration, the 'Conseil Représentatif des Institutions Juives de France' (CRIF - Representative Council of French Jewish Institutions) objected, not surprisingly, to the presence of the far-right Front National, represented by Marine Le Pen and some of her entourage.

But they also objected to the presence of Jean-Luc Mélenchon, with the accusation that he is part of an 'extreme' left which spreads hatred and racism.

This is in the same way that accusations of antisemitism are launched against Jeremy Corbyn and the left who criticise the activities of the Israeli state. Israeli governments have repeatedly broken international laws with occupations, systematically destroyed homes, and created impossible conditions for Palestinians, including imprisonment and brutality against children.

The establishment tries to silence criticism of the activities of the Israeli state by conflating it with hatred of Jewish people. So if you argue that Israel should stop its illegal activities, stop dismantling the lives and homes of Palestinians, and stop brutalising children, you are accused of being antisemitic.

For the CRIF there is no room for any criticism. You either side with the Nazis, who hated, tortured and sought to kill all Jewish people - whether they were babies or elderly, practising or atheist, women or men, socialist or pro-capitalist - or you give wholehearted support to all the actions of the Israeli state. There is apparently nothing in between.

This attempt to silence criticism will never reduce antisemitism. Repression only increases anger and resentment.

**Debbie Adams, France**

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## **North Korean sanctions**

In March, a panel of experts reported to the United Nations Security Council on the impact of sanctions on North Korea.

The report states that North Korea and the international community have found many ways to work around fuel, weapons and financial sanctions. Meanwhile, sanctions, says the report, "had an unintended negative impact on the humanitarian operations of the United Nations and other actors... leading to delays in the delivery of humanitarian assistance."

All of this confirms what the UN already knows. Contrary to common belief and contrary to the rules of standard warfare, economic sanctions are deliberately designed to target civilians in order to bring about the desired change.

In effect it's warfare on the cheap - for which, as always, the working class pays the price while the capitalists reap the rewards.

**Nicki Waugh, Bracknell**

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## Tory roubles

Lo and behold, Tories and toffs love to profit from Russian affairs. Jacob Rees-Mogg's Somerset Capital Management Fund has £57 million invested in the blacklisted Russian Sberbank - a company which is subject to EU and US economic sanctions.

Then there is Sir Roderic Lyne - a recent board member of Petropavlovsk PLC - one of the largest producers of gold in Russia - who in earlier years served as the private secretary to John Major for foreign affairs, defence and Northern Ireland. Presently Sir Roderick serves on the advisory board of the Front Row Group, which boasts of being "a leading high-end and luxury holding company, specialising in emerging markets".

Front Row's chief executive is Russian investment specialist Richard Wallace, who is a former managing director for Renaissance Capital Investment Bank - a bank whose former chief financial officer is current Sberbank board member, Alexander Morozov.

Finally, another Front Row advisor is Viacheslav Kopiev, who is the deputy chairman of Russia's largest publicly listed holding company, Sistema - whose lucre-loving boardroom is host to none other than Peter Mandelson, another well-known Tory of Blairite stock.

**Mike Barker, Leicester**

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## Halton Hospital cuts

The news that the government has not secured the funding for the proposed redevelopment of Halton General Hospital should come as no surprise to anyone.

When the plans were announced, many people were rightly sceptical, considering this government's appalling record on NHS funding and investment in the North West. Halton Labour Party's Twitter feed bemoaned people circulating "unfounded rumours" when a protest against the plans sprang up among local people, staff and patients' groups.

The fact that these rumours were not unfounded needs to be acknowledged by Labour. They should be standing by these campaigners to save a valuable local resource and employer in a town with a growing population where unemployment is rising.

The alternative could very well be a privately run 'accountable care organisation', built with public money through another PFI scheme, saddling future taxpayers with more debt, and taking the NHS further down the road of privatisation.

We need a fully funded, well-resourced local hospital, where staff are properly paid and patients are treated on the basis of need, free at the point of access to all. Profit or loss should never be a consideration in healthcare provision, nor should someone's financial circumstances prevent them from receiving treatment.

How many lives have been saved or improved since the creation of universal healthcare? It has also helped our economy, with fewer days lost to production due to illness. No Tory policy has benefitted our country or its people anywhere as much as old Labour's NHS.

I ask everyone who loves the NHS to remember the words of the father of the NHS, Nye Bevan, on the day it was created, and to stand up for its proud history, protest against its current destruction by the Tories, and protect its legacy for future generations:

"The eyes of the world are turning to Great Britain," he said. "We now have the moral leadership of the world."

**Stephen Armstrong, Halton TUSC**

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## **Universal credit delays**

When you apply for universal credit, you fill it out online, then it says "complete."

So you wait for a response, as well as going to the job centre to make sure you have done it properly - only to find out two weeks later it is not "complete." There is another page.

That cost me two weeks' money. I am on the third appeal from mid-November.

The six-week wait then becomes the least of your worries. This is the devil's work!

**Mike, Southampton**

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## **Homelessness curse**

Homelessness in this country is a curse; some places it's even worse. They sit all day in the cold and rain, alone with their hunger and pain. These people need help and kindness, not attacked by bigoted blindness.

Compulsory purchase orders around empty properties in town would soon bring homelessness down. Councils have millions in reserve, they should build the affordable homes that people deserve. To hell with property developers and their mantra of greed, let's build homes for people in need.

**Bill Buchanan, Nottingham**

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## **Feeling motivated**

Universal credit, removing free school meals, the running down of the NHS, the decline of social care, austerity, cuts, closures...

I found a way to stop being just angry and I started feeling passionate. And that passion, like for many others, became the alarm clock to my thoughts and my days.

I started to talk and listen and question and search, for ordinary people who want justice and fairness. I've met them and they are many and diverse and passionate and connected - inspiringly busy people.

I'm no longer just angry. I'm motivated to be inspiringly busy too.

**Denise Tooley-Okonkwo, Mansfield**

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## **NEU conference: Teachers vote to ballot over pay and workload**

**James Kerr, Lewisham NEU (personal capacity)**

The National Education Union (NEU) conference (NUT section - the last ever before fully merged conference next year) took place in Brighton against the backdrop of a perfect storm building in our schools.

A teacher recruitment and retention crisis as a result of unsustainable workload is being compounded by massive cuts to school budgets. Major concerns about students' mental health, due in large part to the exam factory nature of our schools, have hit the headlines. There are serious questions about the strategy of our union leadership in beating back Tory attacks on education.

### **Where are we going?**

The Socialist Party bulletin was aptly headlined 'Where are we going?' and the major test on this question was going to be over national strike action. Socialist Party members co-wrote and moved the key amendment to the motion on pay, which would commit the union to a ballot for national action in the new academic year on three key demands: 5% pay rise, a limit on teacher working hours and an end to performance-related pay.

The amendment was passed overwhelmingly with no-one speaking against. The hard work begins now to ensure the leadership follow through on this and we methodically build to meet the new ballot thresholds. The upcoming executive elections will be an important opportunity to thrash out a strategy to win and commit national executive committee members to it.

While there was a unified conference hall on the pay amendment, many fiery debates erupted during the weekend, showing the anger many delegates harbour, including over the representation of supply teachers on the new executive and the arrangements for conference next year.

It was on primary school testing that one of the other major debates was fought. The admission in the discussion that the executive had failed to carry out last year's policy to conduct a consultative ballot of primary members to boycott Sats, tests for seven and eleven-year-olds, set the scene.

Anger at a Groundhog Day-type scenario bubbled up to the surface. A motion to boycott a new pilot scheme of baseline tests for four-year-olds meant a proposal to boycott all primary tests was ruled out of order by the chair. The close vote on the original motion, only narrowly won, suggested an appetite to go much further and advance a bold programme of action.

Conference and fringe meetings also heard from strikers and parents at Avenue Primary, Newham. The NEU group there is engaged in a fight against academisation with Socialist Party member and Newham NEU secretary Louise Cuffaro leading the action.

Conference also discussed many international issues, organising young teachers, pedagogy and the curriculum, sexism in schools, Ofsted, the hijab and many other issues.

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## **PCS elections: Vote for Democracy Alliance candidates!**

**Marion Lloyd, PCS national executive committee member (personal capacity) and PCS Left Unity chair**

Ballot papers for the PCS civil service union national executive committee and group elections will start arriving on 20 April.

The past month or so has been annual general meeting time for PCS branches. Feedback indicates solid support for Left Unity motions to the annual delegate conference in May on the major issues facing PCS members.

Nominations for the 2018-19 national executive committee indicate continued support for the current Left Unity (Democracy Alliance) PCS leadership.

### **Vital period**

There are seven Socialist Party members on the Democracy Alliance slate, (a joint PCS Democrat-Left Unity slate). This includes Janice Godrich for president and Fran Heathcote for vice-president. This period is vital for preparations.

Branch committees should meet to agree recommendations to members for the Democracy Alliance slate.

Branches should prepare plans for leafletting their own members and adjacent branches where there is no Left Unity presence.

Branch membership records should be prepared and arrangements made for reps to contact members when the ballot starts to encourage them to use their vote and to vote for the Democracy Alliance slate.

The Easter holiday break will have eaten away at the time available to prepare for the ballot. Preparations should start now if they haven't already.

[The Left Unity website](#) will carry full information on the ballot and materials issued by the Democracy Alliance.

Left Unity (Democracy Alliance) is standing for re-election on its record - making PCS a fighting, democratic union. But it's also a question of electing a leadership which will stand up to the many challenges we face.

Immediate among these is the campaign for the union's pay demands of 5% a year increase with a return to central bargaining.

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# **Surrey Unison takes the anti-austerity message to the chancellor's backyard**

**Paul Couchman, Surrey Unison branch secretary (personal capacity) and Socialist Party member**

In one of the best local demos for many years, Surrey County Unison members turned out, alongside their sisters and brothers from across the South East region, to protest in the constituency of Philip Hammond MP.

The rally was symbolically held at the site of the signing of the Magna Carta over 800 years ago on the banks of the River Thames at Runnymede. Unison members were joined by Fire Brigades Union, RMT transport union and Unite the Union banners as well as several local Labour Party activists. The Socialist Party in Unison was well represented with dozens of activists, banners and placards and around half of the day's speakers.

## **Poverty**

I outlined why our Unison branch called the demo - with 30% of children in some parts of Surrey living below the poverty line and foodbank use among working parents up fourfold in the last four years. It is impossible for the average worker to get somewhere decent to live.

One recent report showed that you would need to earn £85 an hour to afford to buy the average Surrey home. The protest's call for a £10-an-hour minimum wage is a modest step towards fair wages for Surrey council staff and other public sector workers.

Surrey council has imposed an effective pay freeze for nearly a decade and one of the knock-on effects of government austerity is that less and less money is available to pay those community sector companies who have picked up all the outsourced work like home care.

One charity in Surrey has had its local authority funding slashed to the point where it has made pay cuts of £2,000 to £3,000 a year in its care workers' salaries. Two Unison reps from this sector proudly carried the branch banner at the front of the demo.

## **Buoyant mood**

The mood was buoyant but frustrated. Speaker after speaker called for serious coordinated national action on pay.

This protest could not have come at a better time with all the capitulations over pay going on at the moment. A clear majority of the best activists from right across the region were there and the day was a huge success.

I said: "We will use the mood here and the photos from the day to build our local campaigns on public sector pay. We can and will achieve a £10-an-hour minimum wage rate in Surrey and beyond. We will continue to fight for a fair local pay increase this year - even if the unions at national level don't appear to be fighting back."

Around £70 was collected towards a May Day greeting in the Socialist from all those attending.

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## **McStrike: ballot for strike action at six McDonald's stores**

The bakers' union BFAWU has notified McDonald's that it is balloting workers at six stores with a view to authorising a strike later this year.

Tristan Bentley, a McDonald's worker in Crayford said: "Workers across the country came together to decide to ballot for industrial action. We want a better deal. We are the McStrikers, and we will not be silent, we will not be scared. We will do whatever it takes to win a better life for all McDonald's workers."

Ian Hodson, BFAWU president said: "BFAWU is balloting its members at six McDonald's stores. Representatives from six stores attended a meeting and took a decision that they wished to be balloted on industrial action on issues of pay, unequal pay for young workers, and for a choice of fixed hours.

"The union is committed to supporting its members in their fight and campaigning for £10 an hour, an end to zero-hour contracts, and to give McDonald's workers a voice."

The stores balloted are Cambridge and Crayford, where workers took strike action in September 2017, Manchester, central London, and two stores in Watford, which is the hometown of McDonald's global CEO Steve Easterbrook.

The ballot will close on 16 April and BFAWU will release the results of the ballot once the company has been informed of the result.

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## **FCC Wilmington refuse workers' strike in hull stands firm**

### **International solidarity from Spanish school students**

**Paul Spooner, Hull Socialist Party**

The refuse workers at FCC Wilmington waste processing in Hull continue to stand firm in their demand for equal sick pay. The strike is actually getting stronger as workers from other sites in the Hull and east Yorkshire area are walking out in support. The strikers have been buoyed by the support from local council bin workers who have refused to cross the picket line.

Solidarity messages and finance have also increased. The National Education Union (NUT section) conference bucket collection raised £700 and local construction workers on a neighbouring site have raised £300. Other trade union branches are also sending donations.

Perhaps the biggest morale booster was the news that the Spanish student union would be organising a solidarity protest at the FCC headquarters in Madrid and Barcelona. They have also pledged to raise the issue in the Spanish labour movement.

On 7 April, pickets and supporters gathered for a musical rally in support. We were treated to great sets from Joe Solo and the Hillbilly Troupe. Labour MP Emma Hardy pledged her support to rousing applause and promised to raise the issue in parliament.

Mick Whale, who together with Damian Walenta had been instrumental in organising the NEU bucket collection, got a good response when he linked Joe Solo's song 'No Pasaran' about Hull International Brigader Jack Atkinson to the current struggle against Spanish-based FCC.

Tony Smith, speaking on behalf of the pickets, thanked a number of people for their support, including Socialist Party members Keith and Janet Gibson. "The best thing about the strike", he said, "was the friendship of the pickets themselves".

There is a growing confidence that the strikers will win this dispute. Messages of support and donations are still needed. Please send to Adrian Kennett, secretary Unison Hull, 39 Alfred Gelder Street, Hull HU12 2AG. Make cheques payable to Unison Hull City branch.

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## **Aberdeen workers step up strike action against profiteering First Bus**

### **Socialist Party Scotland**

The Aberdeen bus workers' strike is an inspiration to the entire trade union movement in Scotland and beyond.

The eleven days of action have sent a clear message to First and managing director Andrew Jarvis that workers will not be kicked around by profiteering bosses and their attempts to slash wages and working conditions in Aberdeen.

An indefinite strike began on 6 April. In effect First is demanding drivers work longer shifts for less pay. The removal of paid breaks alone would mean huge pay cuts for drivers.

Drivers could also be on the road for up to ten hours each day, while holiday entitlement would be reduced. In all, some drivers face pay cuts of up to £5,000 a year.

Unite members have rightly rejected the latest 'offer' from First which would still have meant severe reductions in pay and conditions.

However, First Bus bosses have been forced back by the strength, resolve and determination of the workers' action. The overwhelming vote in favour of an escalation of the strike has rattled the employer.

Mike Flinn from Unite told Socialist Party Scotland: "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. They have rent and mortgages to pay and this cuts into it. How are they going to afford to pay their bills, or feed and clothe their kids?"

- E-mail messages of support to [aberdeenstaff@unitetheunion.org](mailto:aberdeenstaff@unitetheunion.org)
  - Pay online donations to sort code: 608301, account number: 20174026, please quote 'First Aberdeen dispute'
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## A socialist approach to Corbyn and a customs union

Pete Watson, from Nottingham Socialist Party branch, takes up below some of the issues raised in the [editorials of issues 984](#) and [985 of the Socialist](#), which commented on Jeremy Corbyn's February speech on Brexit. Pete's points are followed by a reply from Socialist Party executive committee member Judy Beishon.

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As I understand it, our position is that we would support Britain being in the Customs Union (CU) as long as it had the powers to implement a socialist programme. This is an important issue, as being in the CU may be a reality soon. But does this demand raise the sights of workers towards a socialist future, which should be its intention?

The vote in favour of Brexit has changed the political landscape in Britain. Most people did not see Corbyn's detailed speech on his attitude to the Customs Union; Labour's right wing got the lion's share of publicity following it. Corbyn's conditions won't generally be known, and therefore most would think that Labour is in favour of being in the CU with few conditions.

Many will view this as a retreat by Corbyn. Labour's final position may be one of being in the Customs Union with few conditions anyway. Those workers who voted for Brexit therefore will see it as a betrayal by Labour. There is a danger then that we would be associated with that too by taking what is seen as a favourable view of the CU.

Our policies also have to cater for workers in manufacturing who are fearful for their jobs after Brexit and want easy movement of half-finished and finished products from the UK to continental Europe. We can answer their fears by supporting trading agreements with the EU and with individual countries to keep trade rolling until Europe and other countries go socialist. These would be bilateral trading agreements, not membership of the CU.

On a capitalist basis neither free trade nor tariff barriers provide any solution for working people. But a socialist Britain would need to control its trade. The problem with supporting being in 'the' or 'a' customs union with the EU (and Turkey) is that it would mean there would be no tariff barriers around a socialist Britain. This is the current meaning of a customs union.

The point was raised at the Socialist Party conference in March that revolutionary Russia signed a trading agreement with Britain in the 1920s. This was in support of the view that a customs union could be agreed by a socialist government. In 1924 the British government opened negotiations with Russia by insisting on abolition of the Soviet government's monopoly of foreign trade, among other demands. This was rejected by Soviet negotiator Rakovsky, who said "our answer to such an attempt is a categorical 'never'".

A socialist Britain in capitalist encirclement would need trading relations, but could not concede monopoly of foreign trade and control of industry, as it could lead to capitalist restoration. A deal was signed in 1924 with Britain without breaking the Soviet government's monopoly of foreign trade.

The CU is used to oppress the ex-colonial world such as Africa and the Caribbean. The collective strength of EU imperialism forces unfavourable trade deals on many countries by lowering governmental control over tariffs and other protections for the home economies. This would make it more difficult for a socialist Britain to appeal to the peoples of Africa and elsewhere.

There is also the prospect of a new TTIP. This trading agreement was to be signed between the US and the EU and would have penalised governments who take measures against capitalist monopolies. This could come as a consequence of continued membership of a customs union.

Being in or out of the CU does not affect our calls for international solidarity with workers across Europe and elsewhere. Being out of the CU could however be the platform for a greater and more principled appeal to workers.

A better demand therefore would be for a socialist Labour government to negotiate trading agreements with the EU and elsewhere without any restriction on its ability to nationalise and enhance workers' conditions etc. But not as part of the Customs Union.

**Pete Watson, Nottingham Socialist Party**

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Pete Watson's letter is welcome, as [debates](#) and [queries](#) on our editorials can help with the clarification and development of political ideas for all readers of our paper.

In this case it's necessary to try to remove any misunderstandings on the position we put forward, in order to then be able to explore whether there is a difference of opinion or not.

Pete suggests that we supported "Britain being in the Customs Union as long as it had the powers to implement a socialist programme" and later says that by taking what could be seen as "a favourable view of the CU" we could be associated with a Labour retreat.

In the EU referendum we disagreed with Jeremy Corbyn's Remain position and called for an anti-austerity, anti-racist, pro-working class Brexit. We have a socialist and internationalist standpoint, for a voluntary, socialist confederation of European states.

While maintaining this position since the Leave vote, we also have to confront issues as they are posed, including what the position should be of a Corbyn-led government on trade relations with the EU. And we include in our programme the best way of defending and advancing workers' jobs, pay and overall living standards during the Brexit process as it unfolds.

Nowhere, however, in our editorials did we support staying in the present EU Customs Union.

Instead, we welcomed Jeremy Corbyn's altered position which, while maintaining his post-referendum support for leaving both the Single Market and Customs Union, was seeking, in his words: "to negotiate a new comprehensive UK-EU customs union to ensure that there are no tariffs with Europe and to help avoid any need for a hard border in Northern Ireland." He also sought to negotiate "protections, clarifications or exemptions where necessary in relation to privatisation and public service competition directives, state aid and procurement rules and the posted workers' directive."

## **Retreat?**

We commented in our issue 984 editorial that Corbyn's call for a new deal "could be used to challenge the EU leaders in Brussels on their anti-working class policies and expose their motives if they reject it."

But we also recognised that a layer of workers feared that Corbyn might be retreating from Brexit. We ourselves warned that the eventual outcome might not be one that socialists could support: "Whether Corbyn's new position turns out to be unfavourable to the working class will depend on his subsequent positions and actions - in particular how firmly he and those around him take a stand in workers' interests and mobilise mass support behind that, and counter the pro-capitalist positions of the Blairites." So we acknowledged that Brexit voters could end up with a "betrayal by Labour", as Pete puts it.

We agree that many people wouldn't have seen the detail of Corbyn's speech. The capitalist media distorts, hides or denigrates Corbyn's positions, which makes it all the more important that we use the influence in the workers' movement of our own publications to get across a Marxist appraisal of those positions.

Pete recognises that our policies must address workers "who are fearful for their jobs after Brexit and want easy movement of half-finished and finished products" and he concludes we should support "trading agreements with the EU and with individual countries to keep trade rolling... These would be bilateral trading agreements, not membership of the CU."

However, a bilateral trading agreement with the EU would most likely take the form of a type of customs union, because, for instance, tariff-free or low-tariff trade would mean the EU and UK together having some degree of customs separation from the rest of the world. Without that, customs controls between the UK and the EU (including in Ireland) would be brought in to establish the 'country of origin' of products, an outcome Corbyn was trying to avoid.

It's true though that neither protectionism nor 'freer' trade will defend the interests of the working class and poor, nor are either a solution to the economic problems of the capitalist ruling classes. Many trade and customs variants are possible, but the central issue for socialists is: how will they impact on workers' interests?

## **Socialist measures**

Pete ends his letter by saying that "a better demand" would be for "a socialist Labour government to negotiate trading agreements with the EU and elsewhere without any restriction on its ability to nationalise and enhance workers conditions etc. But not as part of the Customs Union".

We, in fact, do strongly argue that a Corbyn-led Labour government needs to adopt socialist measures and act in workers' interests regarding trade, nationalisations, and so forth. Corbyn has leant slightly more in this direction but unfortunately is still trying to compromise with the Labour right and work

within the confines of capitalism.

So we do, as Pete stresses we should, "raise the sights of workers towards a socialist future". We have always pointed out that no form of capitalist relations - trading or otherwise - will solve the problems faced by the overwhelming majority in society. Only a socialist alternative can do this.

Our editorial (issue 984) called for Labour's manifesto to include "public ownership of the banks and largest companies, under democratic workers' control and management" and for the need to "link up with the workers' movement across Europe for a common anti-capitalist strategy and socialist road."

Pete argues that "a socialist Britain would need to control its trade" and that a customs union "would mean that there would be no tariff barriers around a socialist Britain".

He goes on to mention the 1924 trade treaty signed by the Soviet Union and writes: "A socialist Britain in capitalist encirclement would need trading relations, but could not concede monopoly of foreign trade and control of industry".

This conflates two issues. Yes, a socialist Britain would need to adopt a democratically run state monopoly of foreign trade. This would be essential to control imports and exports and movements of capital, as part of establishing a socialist planned economy.

However the trade agreements entered into with capitalist powers: tariffs, quotas, standards, and so forth, would depend on the outcome of hard-fought negotiations in which some concessions would be inevitable, as indeed there were in the 1924 Soviet deal with Britain.

Incidentally, a customs union with the EU would not necessarily mean "no tariff barriers around a socialist Britain", because - leaving aside the many such barriers the EU has with the rest of the world - the type of customs union would be a subject of negotiation, with many possible variants, including selective arrangements.

Pete argues that being out of "the CU" could be "the platform for a greater and more principled appeal to workers". It's certainly the case that the EU's trade policy internationally is decided by the interests of Europe's top multinationals which have ensured aggressive profit-seeking deals at the expense of the livelihoods of millions of people in the developing economies.

Negotiations like TTIP and Ceta have shown in which class's interests EU trade policy lies and we oppose such deals - as should a future Corbyn-led government.

Many workers outside the EU no doubt view the possibility of Britain leaving the EU Customs Union as an opportunity for Britain's terms of trade to be made 'fairer' to the industries they work in, while Britain's capitalists have no such aims.

On the other hand, in EU sectors of industry with significant exports to Britain - the EU had a £95 billion goods surplus with Britain in 2017 - many workers fear Britain leaving the Customs Union, because of the prospect of their bosses' UK market being undercut by cheaper non-EU products.

Ultimately, only public ownership and socialist planning on an international scale can end the capitalist classes' chasing of markets and production around the globe and guarantee decent jobs, homes and services for all. Any trade agreement between a socialist government and capitalist interests would have to be a stopgap while movements for socialist change are built and spread in all countries.

Meanwhile, socialists, while calling for the best possible trading deals in the interests of workers at home and abroad, must demand that no worker in Britain, the EU or anywhere else should be made to pay the price of the chaos of the global capitalist markets and any hits on their bosses' profits.

We lay the blame firmly at the door of the capitalist governments and their rotten, decaying system and call for international workers' solidarity in the task of removing it.

**Judy Beishon, Socialist Party executive committee**

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## **Save our NHS candidate contesting South Yorkshire mayor election**

**Alistair Tice, Yorkshire Socialist Party secretary**

Pointless. The election of a South Yorkshire metro mayor in May, at the cost of £1 million, is set to be one of the most pointless polls ever. The Tory government has insisted on it going ahead as part of ex-chancellor George Osborne's so-called Northern Powerhouse devolution deal, but Labour council leaders have been fighting like rats in a sack about it.

The Sheffield City region originally incorporated nine local authorities, but five in Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire opted out and then Barnsley and Doncaster voted against inclusion favouring an all-Yorkshire deal instead. In 2012 Sheffield voted by 65% against a directly elected mayor.

And because no deal has been agreed yet, the mayor to be elected on 3 May will have no powers and no funding! Even if a deal is struck later, it will only bring £30 million a year to the whole region over the next 30 years, when Sheffield council alone has been cutting £50 million a year since 2010.

To make matters worse, it's almost certain that the new mayor will be Dan Jarvis, the Barnsley Labour MP who is a Blairite opponent of Jeremy Corbyn.

Jarvis won the Labour nomination with 2,584 votes in a poll of South Yorkshire members against Ben Curran, a Sheffield council cabinet member who got 1,903 votes. Jarvis' selection was backed by the old right-wing Labour machine in South Yorkshire.

Curran was backed by the left, trade unions and Momentum in the absence of their own nomination. But as a member of a council cabinet that has passed on over £400 million of Tory cuts in Sheffield, he was hardly an inspiring opponent to Jarvis, reflected in only 37% of party members voting.

However, the inclusion on the mayoral ballot paper of Naveen Judah as candidate for the newly registered 'South Yorkshire Save Our NHS' finally gives a point to this election. NHS campaigners have achieved wonders in raising the £5,000 deposit plus the £3,000 necessary for inclusion in the mayoral booklet. Apart from a £3,000 donation from the National Health Action Party, of which Naveen is a national officer, all the rest has been raised through small donations in a Crowdfunding appeal.

Naveen is standing to "fightback against the rationing, privatisation and service closures being rolled out across South Yorkshire", which includes £571 million cuts in NHS funding. He is campaigning against the 'shadow accountable care system', which will lead to more NHS privatisation, that hasn't been opposed by

any of the four South Yorkshire Labour councils so far.

He says: "I will work with campaigning groups and organisations to stop and reverse cuts and privatisation" and as such Socialist Party members are recommending a vote for Naveen.

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## **Growing Socialist Party branches involved in many campaigns**

**Robin Clapp, South West Socialist Party secretary**

Almost 50 members of the Socialist Party from across the South West attended our highly successful regional conference on 7 April, including members from areas where we've never had representation before.

Socialist Party national organiser Sarah Sachs-Eldridge began the conference with a detailed analysis of the current state of international relations, highlighting capitalism's intractable crises in the Middle East and elsewhere and the paralysis that grips the world's rich rulers.

She moved on to sketch out the political and social events unfolding in Britain. In the lively discussion members commented at length about the sharpened nature of the struggle in workplaces as bosses seek, by increasingly brutal methods, to beat back past gains made by organised workers.

A young member from Devon made the point that despite these assaults, workers are prepared to fight back and become organised across many sectors, as we have seen through the recent UCU strike which has boosted workplace confidence across the public and private sectors.

Much of the discussion revolved around developments in the Labour party, with Domenico Hill and others warning of the potential perils facing a future Corbyn-led government if it doesn't have a programme which fundamentally tackles capitalism. 35 years of brutal neoliberalism will not be unwound by a desire to restore 'fairness', but by the implementation of socialist policies that take into public ownership under workers' control and management, all the major monopolies, including the banks.

In the discussion on building the Socialist Party, I pointed to the many campaigns that our energetic members have been involved in. These include providing the only effective opposition to Labour's local government cuts in Bristol, organising successful protests against the bedroom tax and benefit cuts in Gloucestershire and initiating a campaign against NHS privatisation and cuts in Torbay. There our branch has grown to 16 members in an area more commonly associated as being the English Riviera, but where the scars of poverty are increasingly pronounced.

Successful and lively workshops around selling the Socialist, organising to recruit and integrate more women members and building our forces among young workers and students saw almost everybody join in, a sign that regional teams are beginning to be built that can take our work to the next level.

An army needs first of all a correct strategy and battle plan. But it also marches on its stomach and thanks to the fantastic catering provided by Beverley and the Gloucestershire mobile food crew, we amply fulfilled that requirement too, netting over £100 in profit. This was the 'icing on the cake' after an amazing fighting fund collection of £1,400 and another £3,110 secured for the building fund, taking our pledges to over £18,000.

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# **Socialist Party meeting to discuss fightback against cuts to women's services**

**Sarah Sachs-Eldridge, Socialist Party women's group**

On 8 April around 20 members of the Socialist Party who are involved or want to be involved in fighting the attacks on women's and domestic violence services met up to discuss the next steps for this struggle.

We met in the Derby Women's Centre, a resource kept open by heroic campaigning by working class women and by trade union solidarity.

All the Socialist Party members at the meeting, from sacked Doncaster Women's Aid worker Lou Harrison, to trade union militants, to survivors of domestic violence and the austerity onslaught which falls so heavily on women, were inspiring in their determination to fight.

We were unanimous in our approach - the Tory attack on domestic violence provision, often passed on by right-wing Labour councils must be fought and that requires a socialist programme including demanding no-cuts budgets and building mass struggle against austerity.

We encourage all branches to investigate whether local services are among the third of refuges threatened with closure and if so to call a public meeting on defending the service.

Around the world, from teachers in Oklahoma to students in the Spanish state, from Latin America to India, the mood and confidence to fight and to defend women's rights is growing.

We have every confidence we will encounter that mood and should boldly offer socialist ideas to those who have no choice but to defend the services that can mean women live or die.

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## **To produce the Socialist we need a building - help us keep ours!**

**Scott Jones, the Socialist editorial team**

Computers, phones, desks, meeting table, printers, distribution equipment, archives and a space for editors to work together. Without any of these there would be no Socialist newspaper each week - in print or online. To produce the paper its vital that we have the offices and work space at our national headquarters in London which is under threat.

When we come into work on a Monday morning we meet to discuss the material going in the upcoming issue. We then commission articles written by workers and campaigners themselves before editing and laying out those articles before sending the finished issue to our printers on Tuesday evening.

When the thousands of printed papers are delivered on Wednesday morning they arrive early at our nearby workshop where we package the papers to be delivered to our subscribers and sellers around the country and further afield. At the same time other editors are uploading the content of the paper to our website and processing new subscribers.

Thursday and Friday are then spent having further meetings, discussions and starting the commissioning, editing and layout out of the next issue, beginning the process again.

We wouldn't be able to do any of this without having the space, time and resources the national headquarters gives to produce a newspaper each week, written, read and sold by workers, to workers.

Help us keep it that way. Please donate to the building fund.

- Make a donation online now at [socialistparty.org.uk](http://socialistparty.org.uk) - put "building fund" in the comments
- Or you can pay with a card over the phone on 020 8988 8777
- Or with a cheque or postal order payable to "Socialist Party," sent to Building Fund, PO Box 24697, London E11 1YD

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## Fighting fire cuts in Wirral

**Mark Hazelhurst, Wirral Socialist Party**

On our 31 March campaign stall to prevent the night time closure of Wallasey fire station, a careless passer-by dropped a cigarette into a litter bin. No sooner than the first few puffs of smoke emanated from the bin, a fire engine arrived to extinguish it.

I don't know who was more delighted to see each other, us or them, as we had visited the fire station on three occasions to show them our campaign leaflet and petition and offer our support. Within three minutes we met the Fire Brigades Union shop steward Howard and a further three of his colleagues.

The closure of Wallasey station will put five or ten minutes on response times to the Wallasey area, and sooner or later will inevitably cost lives. The decision to carry out this closure has been taken by Merseyside fire authority made up almost entirely of Labour councillors.

They have been responsible for cutting fire engine provision across the region almost in half while they sit on unallocated reserves in excess of £12 million. Unbelievably one of the Wirral Labour members of the fire authority, Brian Kenny, put a motion before Wirral council condemning the cuts to the fire service recently, the same Brian Kenny that put his hand up to make them not 12 months ago!

The local Labour councillors in Wirral have been responsible for devastating cuts to jobs and services for well over a decade. This is why the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition will be standing three candidates in the May elections, a taxi driver, a striking rail guard and a postal worker.

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# Hull City supporters fight to reclaim their club and the game

Theo Goodison, Hull Socialist Party

Hull City AFC supporters are currently fighting for their club to use their full name and for concessionary prices for the young, elderly and disabled.

In 2014, owners the Allam family applied to the Football Association (FA) to change the name of Hull City AFC to 'Hull Tigers'. This was the result of a long-standing disagreement between the owners and Hull council over the ownership of the council-owned KCom Stadium. The club owners, not being able to acquire the stadium, attempted to rid any reference of the word 'city' from the club's historic name.

The supporters fought to retain their name through the fan group 'City Till We Die'. After various protests at games on 19.04 minutes (the club was formed in 1904) and a submission by the group to the FA, the FA decided that the club's name must stay as Hull City AFC. Upon hearing this news, the Allams stated that the club was up for sale.

Since this time the Allams have not sold the club, in spite of interest, and have proceeded to eradicate the use of the club's name from the crest, around the ground and on social media, which has caused unrest and anger among the supporters.

Among the disunity between the club and supporters the club found itself relegated from the Premier League.

In the wake of the current state of affairs at the club, supporters formed the groups 'Hull City Action For Change' and the 'Hull City Protesters Group'.

Protests and demands followed but the lack of intention to address supporter's concerns was confirmed when chairman Ehab Allam made a last-minute cancellation to a supporters' committee meeting planned for 8 February 2018.

Supporters groups organised another protest for the televised home game against Sheffield United on 23 February.

The next supporters committee meeting was held on 26 February with a senior management team attending instead of the Allams. It was resolved that the club would start to use the name Hull City - but to the dismay of many supporters would not include AFC - and there would be a vote on a concessionary pricing model.

The concessions put forward by the club are limited. Junior prices only apply to the first child of a family, concessions offered to many of the over-65s are the same price as they are paying now, and there are no concessionary prices available for the disabled.

With unsatisfactory resolutions being put forward by the club, the fight of Hull City supporters will continue.

The struggles of Hull City supporters are a symptom of years of the game being taken away from working class communities. Ownership of a top tier football club now resides in the hands of big business, with the billionaire class as a plaything to spend their unused capital on.

Hull City supporters are a victim of this but our supporters' groups have shown how united and organised action between supporters can potentially bring real changes to a football club.

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## **May elections: a chance to fight attacks on health and social care**

### **Here's how councils can stop health cuts**

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

Too often, councils will wring their hands and pass the buck when it comes to standing up to Tory plans for our NHS. But they have real power to halt NHS cuts and sell-offs and help build campaigns to beat them.

All councillors have a statutory duty to scrutinise the work of local health 'trusts', which run hospital services, and local 'clinical commissioning groups' (CCGs), which decide on things like funding and outsourcing for the area.

Some councils have representatives on 'health boards', meant to coordinate NHS services in an area. But even if they don't, councils have powerful statutory 'joint overview and scrutiny committees' which oversee any proposals to 'reconfigure' NHS services.

### **Legal powers**

They can exercise that power forcefully and veto plans for cuts or privatisation by trusts or CCGs, although the final say rests with the government's health secretary to review.

All health boards in England are drawing up plans to cut and merge services, under instruction from the Tories. These are the misnamed 'sustainability and transformation plans' (STPs).

Councils can refuse to endorse STPs - and are the only public body with the statutory power to do so. Some councils will happily refuse to endorse STPs, but so far they are a minority.

Councils can also initiate legal actions like 'judicial reviews', where a judge decides if the way a public body reached a decision was lawful. Councils can do this on their own - or jointly with campaign groups, like in south London a few years ago as part of the successful campaign to save Lewisham Hospital.

Tory health and social care secretary Jeremy Hunt is also encouraging NHS trusts to set up 'accountable care organisations' (ACOs). This is just a fancy title for new bodies which are neither accountable nor caring.

The idea comes from the US healthcare system. ACOs are health service providers, or groups of them, public or private, which take a single contract to provide all health services in a given area. In reality, they are a vehicle for large-scale NHS privatisation.

Once again, councillors have the power to slow down or halt these plans. Disgracefully, too many councils are failing to stand up to them - some are even colluding with them.

Finally, councils are financially responsible for providing adult social care. The Tories have already slashed this budget to the tune of £6 billion since 2010, according to the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services.

This has put intolerable pressure on care services, and has led to what the NHS refers to as 'bed blocking'. More cuts are on the way and must be resisted.

Hunt is now talking about reforming the budget. But without a massive injection of funding, adult social care will collapse.

### **No-cuts budgets**

Councils must refuse to pass on these cuts. By using reserves and borrowing powers, councils can hold cuts off, and build campaigns with unions and local residents to pressure the government for proper funding.

In the 3 May local elections, the pledge to set no-cuts budgets, and use council powers to stop NHS cuts and sell-offs, is shared by all candidates standing for the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) - the anti-austerity electoral alliance including transport union RMT and the Socialist Party.

Any Labour candidates who oppose austerity should pledge the same, and Jeremy Corbyn should call on them to do so.

Health Campaigns Together has produced an excellent briefing for councillors, Into the Red Zone, available at [healthcampaignstogether.com/redzone.php](http://healthcampaignstogether.com/redzone.php). It's thorough and detailed, but it summarises the cuts programme we all now face - and how councils must face up to it.

### **The Socialist Party demands:**

- Reject STPs and ACOs
- Reverse budget cuts and outsourcing in social care
- Use legal powers to stop cuts and sell-offs in NHS and council services
- Fight for a fully funded, publicly owned, socialist NHS, free for all at the point of use

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## **Striking Birmingham carers need pro-worker councillors**

**Birmingham Socialist Party**

Birmingham City Council, led by Labour, is continuing its austerity attacks on workers and the community without putting up an ounce of fight against the Tory government.

After last year's humiliating defeat by striking bin workers, you would expect the council to have retreated with its tail between its legs. Instead it's decided to attack the conditions of the low-paid and predominantly women workforce in home care, as well as reducing the service by at least 40%.

Birmingham home care workers have been on strike over changes to their rotas after the council introduced an unrealistic and chaotic three-split-shift rota, obviously a tactic to push workers out of the profession as a precursor to more cuts or privatisation.

## **Bullying**

They face daily bullying by senior management, telling them to either accept the new rotas or find a job somewhere else.

Strikers demand that the council scrap the three split shifts and instead introduce self-rostering, where the workers themselves collectively decide their schedule.

On 24 March the home carers went on their first full day of strike action, with six picket lines across the city, including campaign stalls to reach the wider public with information on why they were striking. They are gathering signatures to send to local councillors standing again in May.

What was noticeable was strikers' fury at councillors for allowing these attacks in the first place - and additionally that this was done in the name of Labour. They feel betrayed.

The common sentiment was that if Labour councillors aren't going to defend our jobs and the service, they should be replaced with someone who will! This sentiment was also put forward by the bin workers during their dispute last year.

It is clear to these workers that Jeremy Corbyn's anti-austerity message has not filtered down into the right-wing Labour Party machine in Birmingham Council. The home care dispute is one reason of many why TUSC is fielding candidates against pro-austerity Labour candidates in the 3 May elections.

All TUSC candidates wholeheartedly support the demands of the home carers.

We will fight these and any further cuts, as well as management's culture of bullying - but we will also demand more funding from central government to reverse cuts already carried out.

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## **Councillors must oppose NHS cuts in deeds as well as words**

**Matt Hirst, Huddersfield Socialist Party**

Throughout the campaign to save 400 beds and emergency care at Huddersfield Royal Infirmary (HRI), local councillors of all political colours have come out on occasion in support. The Hands Off HRI campaign welcomed them joining the fight.

No party in Kirklees Council has a majority. Labour is the largest party but needs support from the Tories, Lib Dems, Greens or independents to push things through. Every major local party is using the Hands Off HRI logo on their campaigning leaflets - without the campaign steering committee's permission.

This is despite not taking up requests from the campaign for the council to join our legal challenge, which will now progress to a judicial review.

What the right-wing Labour candidates will not put on their election leaflets is how in their February budget they passed through over £200,000 in preventative health cuts. This included smoking cessation, combating obesity and physical activity.

## **Labour cuts**

Kirklees Labour councillors standing alongside us and shouting "no ifs, no buts, no NHS cuts." Yet back inside the town hall, they pass cuts not just to health services, but across the board.

Many campaigners now see these councillors for what they are. They are happy to jump on a campaign bandwagon to further their chances of election on 3 May. However, they are not so willing to put in the hard work that goes into taking that campaign to victory.

TUSC is standing two candidates who are prominent activists for the campaign. But unlike the other candidates, we say fight all cuts to services.

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# **Defend socialist councillor Kshama Sawant against lawsuits**

**Ty Moore, Socialist Alternative (US co-thinkers of the Socialist Party)**

Seattle's socialist city council member Kshama Sawant is facing two defamation lawsuits, the aim of which is to silence an outstanding representative of working people and the oppressed.

The first is from two police officers who shot and killed a black man in 2016. The other is from a landlord notorious for his tenants' complaints about conditions.

A broad-based independent defence campaign is being prepared.

These lawsuits are part of a wider effort from a section of the establishment and the right wing to silence and criminalise dissent. The Trump administration has also made clear its sympathy with these efforts.

## **Che Taylor**

In February 2016, two policemen shot Che Taylor in north eastern Seattle. A widely circulated police dash-cam video of the incident appears to show Taylor's hands in the air and moving to the ground, in compliance with officer commands, when he was shot at point-blank range.

The police claimed Taylor was turning to pull a gun out of a holster as he got out of the car but they have refused to release additional video they have of the "death scene". Taylor was hit by four of the seven bullets fired and died of his wounds.

No weapon was found on the victim. A weapon was later reported to be in the car, though even the official inquest found he was attempting to follow orders, putting his hands in the air, when he was shot.

However, the official inquest jury did not result in a decision to prosecute the police. One of officers, Spaulding, has now killed two people, the other victim being a mentally ill Native American killed during a domestic dispute.

Kshama Sawant, speaking at a protest outside city hall, called the shooting a "brutal murder." In a brazen attempt to intimidate Sawant and all those challenging police violence in the black community, these two policemen then filed a defamation lawsuit against Sawant.

A defamation suit can cost hundreds of thousands in legal fees - clearly beyond the pay of the average Seattle police officer. Many speculate that the officers' lawsuit is being secretly bankrolled by a group or individual looking to silence Kshama and Black Lives Matter.

Kshama has a long record of speaking out against violence by the Seattle Police Department. This lawsuit seeks to silence her - with a potentially tough council re-election battle shaping up next year - and to send a warning shot to other prominent voices who might speak up against police killings of black people.

Meanwhile, Seattle landlord Carl Haglund has also launched a lawsuit accusing Kshama of defamation for calling him a "slumlord".

In 2015, Kshama and tenant activists scored an important victory in forcing Haglund to back down from major rent hikes at one of his apartment buildings, which was infested with mould, roaches, and rats among other code violations.

Council members Sawant and Nick Licata then successfully passed an ordinance to outlaw rent hikes in Seattle for housing units with code violations. Haglund's lawsuit is a clear case of sour grapes.

The attitude of the establishment toward Kshama on this issue is exemplified by the Seattle Times which has failed to expose the racism and abuses by the Seattle police. Yet, they have had four op-ed articles criticising Sawant's objections to the way the police treat black and Latino people.

Not surprisingly, the paper vehemently opposed Kshama's candidacy in 2013 and 2015.

Police violence is not only directed against black people, but also immigrants, social activists, and labour activists. We need a broad defence campaign to bring these injustices to light and to help publicise other cases of police violence.

- See [socialistalternative.org](http://socialistalternative.org) for full article

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## **Poland: huge demos against right wing government's abortion ban**

## **Alternatywa Socjalistyczna (CWI in Poland)**

A bill banning abortion in cases of foetal malformation has been suddenly enacted by the right-wing PiS - Law and Justice Party - dominated Sejm (parliament). This met with an angry demonstration against the right and the Catholic Church hierarchy.

Most estimates are that 55,000 marched in Warsaw - a figure higher than the original 'Women's Strike' in 2016. This turnout shows the existing anger and the prospect of resistance, especially considering that the protest took place on a working day, with very short notice.

While the national demonstration was the priority, thousands of people who were not able to join in the capital protested in other cities and towns. 8,000-10,000 demonstrated in Krakow, a few thousand marched in Katowice, Wrocław, Poznan, Łódź and Gdansk. Small pickets took place in dozens of towns across Poland.

As the demonstration in Warsaw marched from the Sejm to the ruling party's headquarters, slogans were chanted against the ban, against interference of the Catholic Church, for choice and for decent healthcare for women. More radical anti-government slogans could also be heard.

The current government is openly anti-women's rights and reactionary. However, ideas criminalising or totally banning abortion are not predominant in Polish society; not even the electoral base of the ruling party supports the ban.

## **Role of right**

After the movement of 2016, PiS started treading more carefully on the issue, even trying to create an impression that they were open for discussion about liberalisation.

However, PiS quickly stepped back in line once the Catholic Church spoke on the issue. This raised much anger: how could an unelected body of old men, the Episcopacy, have more weight to decide women's reproductive rights than women themselves? That is why in many places demonstrations would target local curiae - administrations - of the Catholic Church.

Faced with these demonstrations, the ruling party initially tried to discredit the protests. State TV went as far as presenting the protests as "feminists demanding the right to kill children".

The authors of the bill are a group of Christian fundamentalists operating under a number of labels - most notably the Ordo Iuris society, a 'legal cultural' organisation.

This group is financed by an anti-socialist Brazilian sect 'Tradition, Family and Property'. The Catholic Church in Brazil disaffiliated from this group as it was involved in financial scams and historically in anti-left campaigns in Latin America, such as fighting against land reform or liberation theology.

The leader of the Polish 'Stop Abortion' initiative, Kaja Godek, was given a lucrative job on the board of directors of a state-owned engine factory after PiS won the election in 2015.

## **What next?**

The leaders of the 'Women's Strike' announced that if the bill passes in the lower chamber of parliament, they will protest at the senate and organise a massive movement.

Alternatywa Socjalistyczna says it is important to build the movement to give the masses hope of a successful struggle. Repeating the same method of demonstrating at every new attack without any preparation or building in between can discourage and exhaust the participants.

The mass movement should try and develop a democratic structure - like action committees based in schools, workplaces and communities - that could discuss and take decisions on next steps, allowing more space for more direct action, civil disobedience, and so forth.

We also think that women's struggle for choice is a class issue that should be taken up with the trade unions, that could help turn the largely symbolic 'Women's Strike' into actual strike action.

Stopping the current attack will not solve the issues facing Poland's women's reproductive rights, especially those of working class women and students.

Underlying problems like restrictive abortion laws - a so-called compromise - an unreliable healthcare system, the lack of sexual education, and insufficient childcare provision remain to be fought for, as part as a socialist programme of full reproductive rights and proper public services.

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## **Workers' protests against state repression in China and Hong Kong**

The 'Stop Repression in Hong Kong' campaign, supported by the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI), is planning a day of worldwide protests on Friday 4 May against increasing political repression in Hong Kong and China.

4 May is a historic day in China, the anniversary of the first major student movement in 1919 for democracy, against imperialism, and rejecting a conservative ruling establishment that had betrayed the hopes of the 1911 anti-dynastic revolution. The 'May Fourth' movement was also the beginning of independent political action by China's working class.

### **Campaign**

Stop Repression in Hong Kong was launched last October with protests in 22 cities around the world. It explicitly targets support from left activists and workers' organisations, explaining that capitalist politicians are too enamoured by economic links with the Chinese regime and conflicted by their own undemocratic policies to offer real support for democratic rights in Hong Kong or China.

The campaign's petition is gaining signatures worldwide. New signatories include writer and social activist Noam Chomsky, human rights activist Peter Dahlin - arrested on trumped up charges and deported from China in 2016 - and Søren Søndergaard, member of parliament and foreign affairs spokesperson for the Red-Green Alliance in the Danish parliament.

MPs in Ireland and Germany have also signed the petition, as have prominent trade unionists in Brazil, Britain and South Africa.

The international protest in May is to oppose election manipulation in Hong Kong, the banning of pro-democracy candidates and parties from contesting elections, disqualification of elected members of Hong Kong's partially elected legislature, and Article 23 - a new draconian security law.

It is also to show solidarity with unexpectedly bold protests inside China, and by overseas Chinese, against Xi Jinping's rule changes, which sees the Chinese regime go from a "one-party" to a "one-man" dictatorship.

Among the so-called Communist Party's National People's Congress 'delegates' who unanimously endorsed Xi were 45 billionaires. The ranks of China's super-rich have more than tripled since Xi took power in 2012 (251 dollar billionaires then, 819 today), while repression against regime critics is now "the worst since the [1989] Tiananmen crackdown" according to Amnesty International.

Donald Trump's response when China's leader Xi Jinping changed the rules, allowing him to rule for life, was to praise Xi and tell a public rally: "Maybe we'll give that a shot someday!"

More information and campaign material - placards and leaflets to organise protest activities on 4 May - can be found on the Stop Repression in Hong Kong website [stophkrepression.net](http://stophkrepression.net)

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## **Ireland: March against misogyny and injustice**

Socialist Party (CWI in Ireland) members were to the fore in organising rallies and marches throughout the country, North and South, against rape culture and misogyny. The protests followed the verdict in a high-profile rape trial which put the court system's failure of women on display. In a video ([see socialistworld.net](#)), Ruth Coppinger, Solidarity TD (member of parliament) and Socialist Party member, speaks to a protest of over 10,000 people in Dublin. Protests also took place in Belfast, Cork, Limerick and Galway.

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## **Audio version of this document**

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## **What the Socialist Party stands for**

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

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

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

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

Our demands include:

## **Public services**

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

## **Work and income**

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

## **Environment**

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

## **Rights**

- Oppose discrimination on the grounds of race, gender, disability, sexuality, age, and all other forms of prejudice.
- Repeal all laws that trample over civil liberties. For the right to protest! End police harassment.
- Defend abortion rights. For a woman's right to choose when and whether to have children.
- For the right to asylum. No to racist immigration laws.
- For the right to vote at 16.

## **Mass workers' party**

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

## **Socialism and internationalism**

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

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