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Tunisia: Explosion of protests against government austerity

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CUTS CAUSE NHS CRISIS

- Investment not austerity
- Reverse privatisation
- Back 3 February demos

London protest 12pm at Gower Street, WC1E

photo Rob Allday/CC

Caroline Vincent
Leicester Socialist Party

The NHS is in a perfect storm this winter. Decades of cuts and sell-offs have brought it to breaking point while it faces pressure from all directions.

68 A&E consultants have written to Theresa May. The letter warns of the consequences of chronic underfunding amid a gathering flu epidemic, and the increased strain on already overstretched hospitals with too few staff and beds to cope.

NHS Providers, representing most NHS trusts in England, has demanded an NHS budget increase of £20 billion to avoid catastrophe.

So, what is the Tories' strategy for dealing with the crisis? According to May, the 55,000 operations cancelled this winter were all part of the plan!

Jeremy Hunt is still clinging to his health secretary job - now including social care - to the dismay of

patients and doctors alike. Even he has admitted that significantly more money is needed.

Hunt and May both insist, however, that the NHS is better prepared this winter than ever before. Given the images of ambulances queuing outside hospitals, and patients sleeping on the floors of crowded A&E departments, this simply doesn't ring true.

But the current and all-too-visible crisis facing emergency services is just the tip of the iceberg. Staff shortages at the Churchill Hospital in Oxford mean delayed chemotherapy treatment for cancer patients.

Inadequate funding to social care

creates further pressure too. Shockingly, under the Tories, the number of elderly people rushed to hospital from care homes has risen 62% since 2010.

Chemists are meant to play a role in reducing pressure on NHS resources. But Lloyds Pharmacy has closed 190 branches, meaning hundreds of job losses and limited access for patients - blaming government cuts.

Absurdly, cuts to NHS services don't even reduce costs in many cases. Quite the opposite.

For instance, lack of beds at the Royal Free and University College hospitals in London have resulted

in millions spent on hotel accommodation for patients in specialist care. At the Royal Free this expenditure has increased tenfold since 2010, rocketing to £400,000 in 2016.

'Out-of-area placements' in mental health too. The additional cost of all this mayhem in the 12 months to October was £83 million.

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Also on pages 4-5:

- The crisis nurse: "staff are desperate for change" - unions must call strikes

- The A&E patient: "they were literally overrun" - but campaigns can win

Left NEC victories, Williamson resignation, council tax debate...

CORBYN'S LABOUR NEEDS 100% ANTI-CUTS STRATEGY AND FIGHT FOR DEMOCRACY



What we think

How can we save our local leisure centre? What can be done to halt gentrification and meet housing need? How can the deepening crisis in social care be addressed? What must be done to protect local jobs and halt attacks on pay and conditions?

These are just a few of the questions which working class people are asking, especially as we approach council budget setting and May's local elections. They are questions which demand concrete answers in the here and now. Rhetoric, handwringing, and semi-pious exhortations to 'hold on for a general election' are all utterly insufficient.

Yet at present, it is this that is on offer, not just from Labour's Blairite right (many who are actually brazen with their anti-working class policies and sentiments) but even from the leadership of Momentum.

Chris Williamson, the Labour MP for Derby North and former shadow fire minister, appears to have been pushed to resign from the front bench after making comments about an alternative to local government cuts.

Acknowledging that the austerity which has been dutifully doled out by councils over the last seven years is in fact intolerable, he argued that Labour-run local authorities could consider increasing council tax for those living in properties which fall within the highest tax bands. This, he said, could be used to help raise the funds needed to stop cuts and protect services.

Fighting austerity

Socialists must always oppose any increases in taxation which have the potential to fall on people with low or middle incomes. Council tax, which is calculated based on the estimated value of properties in which people live (whether as tenants or owners) and which does not properly take account of people's ability to pay, could certainly not be described as progressive.

Chris Williamson's proposals did acknowledge this, and included ideas for ways for those on lower incomes to 'claw back' increases in the tax on higher bands - to protect cash-poor pensioners, for example. This complex schema, to be approved in each council area in a local referendum, would be open to ferocious attacks and distortions by the Tory media.

Nonetheless, he was grappling with vital questions: how can Labour councils act to protect working class people from the ravages of austerity? How can they play their part in fighting to ensure that the burden of paying for capitalist crisis does not fall on workers, pensioners and youth?

For Labour's right, this is a crime which cannot be tolerated. Since the beginning of Corbyn's leadership the Blairites have sought to use their base in local government - where they have the vast majority of Labour councillors - in order to undermine him. In particular, they have ferociously opposed any suggestion that Labour councils might have options other than those of cuts, privatisation and redundancies.

In one indicator revealing the extent to which many Labour councillors have accepted the 'logic' of neoliberal-



photo SP London

ism, it has been revealed that Leeds City Council was on the verge of offering a £100 million contract to the parasitic company Carillion just before its collapse.

But councillors do have a choice. Around Britain, Labour councils currently hold over £9.2 billion in general fund reserves. They administer combined budgets of almost £75 billion. They have substantial borrowing powers, as well as the ability to work together to 'pool' funds and collaborate with other local authorities.

In other words, far from being powerless 'technocrats', bound by the logic of austerity or the chaos of the market, Labour councils are in fact a potential alternative power in Britain. Indeed, even if just one Labour council

was to take a stand, using reserves and borrowing powers and refusing to lay more hardship on working class people, it could mobilise behind it a mass campaign and have a profound effect on the political situation. It could hasten the demise of May's weak, divided government and bring about an early general election.

Any hint that councillors could take such a road is anathema to the Blairites. That is why it was disappointing that Corbyn and McDonnell appear to have bowed to their pressure by encouraging Williamson's resignation. Unfortunately, this has not been their first retreat on the issue. As part of their mistaken strategy of attempting to 'keep on board' the Blairite rump that remains dominant



photo Paul Mattsson

chance to democratically decide candidates and kick out the Blairites? To help take on cuts-making Labour councillors and support any and all who are prepared to resist austerity and refuse to implement cuts?

In recent weeks, Momentum's leadership has begun to push an alternative strategy for 'fighting' local government cuts, which is based on a model put forward by Bristol's Labour mayor, Marvyn Rees.

The essence of it is to support and call for protests against cuts, and to use these as a platform to ask the government to provide more funding - hoping that the pressure of large demonstrations will bear down on May's government.

Borrowing from the strategy put forward by the Socialist Party, they even suggest drawing up 'needs-based' budgets. But unlike us, they see this as merely an exercise in propaganda, not as something to be acted upon and implemented. It is here that the strategy ends.



Socialist and left-wing politics means little if it is unable to provide a way forward in the real struggles faced by working class people in the here and now

Should the Tories refuse to provide funding, councils should, according to Momentum's leaders, make the cuts as required. Those who have joined protests to demand an alternative should be asked to simply accept that the council 'has no other option'. They should be asked to continue to cast their votes for Labour councillors, even while they make themselves busy destroying local jobs and services.

Demonstrations are not a bad place to start. But they must be linked to a strategy which includes councils refusing to implement cuts. So far, the 'Rees model' has singularly failed to extract further funds from the Tories. Indeed, when the Bristol mayor came to London to meet the communities' secretary he was snubbed - not even offered a meeting!

Socialist and left-wing politics means little if it is unable to provide a way forward in the real struggles faced by working class people in the here and now. In the June election, Corbyn's anti-austerity manifesto generated a surge of enthusiasm because it began to offer answers to the needs and aspirations of ordinary people. But this manifesto provides a sharp contrast with the programme on which the majority of Labour's right-wing councillors will be standing at this year's local elections.

As Unite assistant general secretary Howard Beckett put it at this year's TUC congress "if Labour councillors act like Tories we should treat them like Tories". In the view of the Socialist Party, this should include being prepared to provide an electoral challenge to cuts-making councillors - whatever colour rosette they wear.

■ See "We must fight all council cuts" campaign reports feature on pages 8-9

Stop repression in Hong Kong and China



Socialist Action forum protest 2017

Theo Sharieff

revenge for its defeat in 2003.

Despite these outrageous attacks, across the globe, 'pro-democracy' capitalist governments turn a blind eye to the trampling over Hong Kong's hard won democratic rights.

Here in Britain, the Tories seem more concerned with keeping on the Chinese dictatorship's good side to court even more Chinese trade and financial deals.

Campaign

In 2018, these political trials will only continue, and dozens, possibly hundreds, of democracy activists will face jail.

'Stop Repression in Hong Kong and China' is an international campaign initiated by socialist and left organisations, including Socialist Action, to defeat this crackdown on democratic rights. It has launched an online petition and open letter, calling for the release of the 16 jailed pro-democracy activists and the reinstatement of the six disqualified opposition legislators.

There is no hope of any 'pro-democracy' Western government speaking up on behalf of the workers and youth in Hong Kong. Only by mobilising mass support internationally from the labour movement, trade unions and the working class can these attacks be exposed before worldwide opinion.

Sign the petition, take it to your union local union branch and build the campaign of international solidarity to push back the repressive measures of the Chinese and Hong Kong regimes.

■ Visit stophkrepression.net to find the petition and other campaigning materials

Have you got news for us? DEADLINE: Friday before publication date, urgent news: Monday

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“Over 120 patients a day managed in corridors, some dying prematurely”

Experience reported by A&E consultants in a letter to the prime minister

2,016,000 patients

Attended hospital emergency departments in England last month, 3.7% more than December 2016 (all data from the NHS unless otherwise stated)

62% more

Elderly patients rushed to A&E from care homes between 2010 and 2016

Every five minutes

Met Police receive a mental health call - 115,000 last year, a growth of a third since 2011 (Labour)

15% of patients

Waiting longer than four hours in A&E - 23% in full-service 'type one' A&Es

77% increase

Flu deaths, from 48 in the first week of January to 93 in the second week (Public Health England)

“There are seats available in most hospitals when beds are not”

Response of junior health minister Philip Dunne - now sacked - to patients sleeping on floors

90,000 patients

Stuck on ambulances waiting for A&E over a six-week period

16,690 patients

Stuck on ambulances in the first week of January alone - 5,082 for over an hour

July 2015

Last time NHS England hit its target for A&E patients seen in under four hours

55,000 operations

Cancelled to deal with the winter crisis

3rd lowest

Number of doctors and hospital beds per person in the EU - that's Britain (European Commission)

100,000 posts

Unfilled in the NHS (Labour)

6,479 nurses

Off sick for four weeks or more from stress or mental health - up over a third in 2016-17 compared to 2012-13

573,002 days

Lost to sick leave for stress or mental health in 2016-17 - up from 432,695 in 2012-13

£1 billion

NHS contracts taken by Richard Branson's parasitic Virgin Care (NHS Support Federation)

£20 billion

Minimum amount needed over next five years to prevent catastrophe (NHS Providers, Office for Budget Responsibility)

4 in 5 nurses

Can't even afford homes developed on sold-off NHS land (New Economics Foundation)

Saturday 3 February

Health Campaigns Together national day of action on the NHS, including a march in central London - put it in your diary

NHS crisis: under pressure from all angles - end cuts and sell-offs!

> Continued from page 1

And the mental health crisis is escalating as demand for services rises while provision shrinks.

Consequently, the Metropolitan Police alone fielded a record 115,000 mental health-related calls in 2016. Calls they are unequipped to deal

with, and at a time when they are facing cuts in numbers themselves.

Blame for this disastrous situation doesn't lie solely with the Tories. Sell-offs accelerated under New Labour too. The result is a health service on the brink.

The NHS can survive, but not without halting the privatisation agenda



The NHS can survive, but not without halting the privatisation agenda

agenda, including US-style 'Acmos' - 'accountable care management organisations' which entrench outsourcing. All cuts must be reversed, and so-called STPs - 'sustainability and transformation plans' which demand 'savings' - scrapped.

And the fat-cat profiteers like Richard Branson have to be shown the door. The health of ordinary people should not be a source of private wealth.

The Socialist Party fights for a fully publicly owned NHS from family doctors to pharmaceutical firms, fully funded, free at the point of use for all.



THE CRISIS NURSE

“Staff are desperate for change” - unions must build for strikes

Andy Bromhall
NHS mental health nurse and Unison rep (personal capacity)

I work as a crisis nurse and unscheduled care practitioner, with the aim of giving patients a choice - if safe - between hospital admission and home treatment. This choice, unfortunately, is sometimes made for them.

With the shortage of mental health in-patient beds, people are often offered care hundreds of miles away from their homes. I work in Wales and have known patients placed as far as way as Southampton - a distance of over 200 miles.

This leads to increased stress on mental health workers. We have to arrange transfers, have increased paperwork, offer support and care to distressed and anxious families - and at times very unwell patients.

The NHS needs to value and nurture its staff. Last year 6,479 nurses were off sick for four weeks or more due to stress or mental health problems. The total number of sick days has risen a third between 2012-13 and 2016-17.

This exacerbates staffing shortages in vital areas such as A&E, wards and mental health care. They are all rammed.

Hospitals are struggling to fill

hundreds of vacancies - with possibly 100,000 posts unfilled across the NHS, according to Labour analysis.

This is a disgrace. It is a result of years of Tory austerity - and the actions of the Blairite Labour MPs in parliament and AMs in the Welsh Assembly.

Desperate

NHS staff are desperate for change! The government gives us no recognition for the difficult, stressful work we face day in, day out in an understaffed and overstretched service.

We demand an above-inflation pay rise to start to make up for years of real-terms pay cuts. And bring

back the bursary for student nurses now so more can afford to train.

Fund the NHS fully - reverse the cuts and the sale of services to the lowest bidder - so we have plenty of staff and beds and can focus on doing our jobs.

Health union leaders - in particular in Unison and the RCN - need to build for industrial action to win these demands, for our patients as well as for us. Coordinating strikes - with the civil servants, for example, who got a big majority for action in their recent indicative ballot - could prevent further privatisation of our NHS. What's more, it could end this disastrous Tory government.

THE A&E PATIENT

“They were literally overrun” - but mass campaigns can win

Steve Nally
Lambeth Socialist Party

I ended up in London's St Thomas' Hospital after an accident at work on 10 January. From the moment I arrived, the NHS staff, from all walks of life and all nations, treated me with care, consideration and human kindness despite the obvious fact that they were literally overrun with patients and up against it.

People were in every available space and wheelchairs and trolley beds lined the corridors. The A&E department resembled nearby Waterloo station at rush hour, and this in what is one of Britain's top teaching hospitals just across the river from parliament.

In fact, it is in such full-service 'type one' A&Es that waiting times are the worst, with 23% of patients waiting more than four hours to be seen in December.

Even gaining admission to A&E is also at crisis point, with over 5,000 patients stuck in ambulances outside A&Es for more than an hour during the first week of January. Over six weeks, the total queued up in ambulances reached over 90,000.

Doctors are now publicly reporting that people are dying in corridors. I did not see that at St Thomas, thank goodness.

Chaos

But with chaos and overcrowding in A&Es combined with a lack of beds it is inevitable that some patients will spend their last minutes in a hospital corridor. That is degrading and inhuman.

The Tories' and Blairites' cuts and sell-offs are fully responsible for this situation. It is clear the NHS needs more money, resources and staff. The government has deliberately starved the NHS of what it needs to provoke a debate on privatising it further.

The bosses they represent look fondly at the US, where people's health is big business and where millions have no health cover. That is what the Tories and their friends in big business want for the NHS.



Join the fightback!
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Victory!

Trump's UK visit cancelled by fear of protests

Jack Maxey
Goldsmiths Socialist Students

A victory for the left! President Trump has cancelled his visit for the opening of the new US embassy in London, scheduled for this February.

Both Trump and Theresa May feared the visit would spark mass demonstrations against his racist and bigoted views and policy agenda.

Last month Socialist Party members joined a protest outside the US embassy to protest against Trump's retweeting of the far-right group Britain First. He broadcast their racist lies to his over 46 million Twitter followers.

Trump has more recently made headlines by reportedly describing a number of African countries, as well as Haiti and El Salvador, as "shitholes." In a lot of cases, of course, US imperialism bears a big responsibility for any problems that do exist in these countries, including by overthrowing their governments.

True to form, Trump denies the remarks himself. But Dick Durbin, a Democratic senator who was at the meeting, stated "he said these hate-filled things and he said them repeatedly." But it's OK - Trump then told the press "I am the least racist person you will ever interview."

Movements

The implications of this are big for the students' and workers' movements. The Conservative Party is fragmented. The majority they hoped to increase with a snap election disappeared, leading to a hung government.

Meanwhile, Trump is the least popular first-year president in history, and his Republicans aren't happy with him either.

Both Trump and May are wary of the power that movements of workers and young people have, particularly in their vulnerable situations. A state visit to Britain would give momentum to the opposition.

Diplomatic norms require the visit to happen at some point, but neither leader wants to provoke the inevitable uproar that will come with it. In January 2017 May formally invited Trump for a state visit, resulting in thousands of people taking to the streets of London in protest.

If they're afraid of protests - let's give them protests! The National Union of Students should call a national demo for free education - and build to get students out on the NHS demonstration on 3 March too.



Manchester mini-strike wave intensifies

■ Mears ■ First bus ■ Fujitsu

Becci Heagney
North West Socialist Party organiser

The new year hasn't put an end to the disputes taking place across Manchester, in fact it has intensified them.

Mears housing maintenance workers are in their ninth week of action and still striking four days a week.

Their trade union Unite has put forward a proposal to Mears and Manchester council on how they can fund parity in pay across the workforce and bring it closer to the levels of pay received by maintenance workers elsewhere in the city.

While waiting for their response, strikers will be escalating the number of protests outside Northwards Housing Association offices (who they do the maintenance work for).

First bus drivers, who have been out at least one day a week since the beginning of October, are striking three days every other week for the foreseeable future.

This is after First offered a measly 4p an hour increase just before Christmas. Drivers at the Rusholme depot that serves south Manchester are currently paid £3 an hour less than drivers in the north of the city. After Unite rejected this 'offer', First is now refusing to go into talks at conciliation service Acas.

Supporters of the strike helped block buses driven by scabs from

leaving the depot on 10 January and faced heavy policing, including being shoved around and two arrests.

In the same week, Manchester-based trade unionist Ian Allinson received news that he had lost his job at Fujitsu (while on compassionate leave for a family funeral).

He was told that he could not work his notice period and that his last working day would be 12 January.

Union activists have reported a clear strategy by Fujitsu management to target them for redundancy in response to strike action in Manchester during 2016-17.

But in a defiant display of solidarity there was a big protest outside Fujitsu on Ian's last day of work. Fujitsu workers came out in their lunch breaks and striking Mears workers went from their protest outside Northwards to Fujitsu to bring support.

Striking bus drivers also came down. The Fujitsu branch announced they would be taking strike action at the end of this month too.

Despite all of these workers being in dispute with different companies and doing completely different jobs, there is a huge sense of solidarity building between them.

There will be a joint social and fundraiser taking place and potentially more joint protests and events.

■ Petition to stop the victimisation of the union reps at Fujitsu: ipetitions.com/petition/fujitsu-victimisations

CARILLION CRISIS - BRING ALL CONTRACTS BACK IN HOUSE!

■ Continued from back page
Carillion has been part of the 'race to the bottom', including in construction, where it was forced to admit its role in blacklisting after the heroic campaign by victimised workers.

In 2012-13, 200 outsourced workers employed by Carillion at the Great Western Hospital in Swindon took strike action against job losses and pay cuts.

The Financial Times reports that the opening of the Royal Liverpool Hospital has been delayed because of construction faults such as cracks in the concrete beams.

These parasitic companies can't regulate themselves. This scandal must be the signal for this policy to be reversed. There must be no bail-outs or compensation for the fat cats.

We support the call of Mick Cash, the general secretary of the transport union RMT: "The infrastructure and support works must be immediately taken in house with the workforce protected."

In London the RMT has called on London mayor Sadiq Khan "to take immediate measures to bring Carillion's London rail contract work into direct public ownership through Transport for London with guaranteed protection for the workforce, their jobs, pay, conditions and their pensions."

■ Carillion - a multinational based in Wolverhampton - employs around 50,000 workers worldwide, nearly 20,000 of them in the UK

■ The Tory government paid Carillion £1.7 billion in 2016 - a third of the company's income

■ When Carillion went into financial loss last year, its chief executive Richard Howson resigned - with his £688,000 a year pay and benefits package being paid to him for a year after he left. The present interim CEO, Keith Cochrane, has been on a salary of £750,000

This must be applied to all outsourced workers in the public sector.

Labour's shadow business secretary Rebecca Long-Bailey is quoted as also calling for Carillion's workers to be taken back in house. This is to be welcomed, as is Jeremy Corbyn's call for an end to privatisation. And this is the perfect opportunity for him to reiterate his general election commitment to renationalise the railways, which would include bringing cleaners and other outsourced workers back in house.

Public ownership

Corbyn should also call for Carillion's accounts to be opened and scrutinised by the workforce and the unions. The company should be taken into public ownership with compensation paid only on the basis of proven need.

He should also use this scandal to put himself and the trade unions at the head of the 3 February demonstration against the winter crisis in the NHS, called by Health Campaigns Together and the People's Assembly.

Labour and the unions should immediately pledge to finance trains and buses from every area to come to London for a mass mobilisation to force out the Tories who, along with their big business friends, are destroying the NHS and our public services.

Hackney school cleaners strike



photo Free Photos/CC

Unite the Union members working in six schools in Hackney will be taking strike action on 30, 31 January and 1, 2 and 5 February as part of a campaign to win fair pay and decent contracts.

The employers, OCS, are subcontracted by Kier, which has a contract with the council to clean schools. OCS have stated that they want to force all staff who remain on year-round contracts onto term-time-only contracts. They argue that staff should not be paid for when schools are closed.

Unite previously won a fight to get the workers' pay raised from the minimum wage to the London Living Wage. Now OCS are refusing to pay the new uprated amount that was announced last November.

The union response - to call for five days of strike action - has got the attention of the subcontractor, contractor, council, mayor and the Labour Party!

Up until the point of issuing the strike notice, nobody was talking to the union. Collective action certainly gets you noticed! The

union is sticking to its position - the strikes are on until the members accept any offer.

Unite regional officer Onay Kasab said: "We have been approached by the employers and asked to call off the action - yet no offer has been made. Unions now have to jump through hurdles to secure a legal ballot so having made all that effort, why would we call off action when no offer is on the table? Our members voted, with a majority of 100%, for strike action. If the employers do not make an acceptable offer we will strike."

photo Paul Mattsson



PCS 2018 ELECTIONS - NOMINATE THE LEFT SLATE FOR A CONTINUED FIGHTING LEADERSHIP

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

PCS members can nominate candidates for the national executive committee (NEC) at their branch annual general meeting. These meetings will take place during February and early March.

The Socialist Party supports the Democracy Alliance, which is standing a full slate in this election.

The alliance, which is comprised of PCS Left Unity and PCS Democrats, has won the NEC elections for the last 14 years. During this time PCS has been seen as a union which stands up for its members, providing a democratically accountable and fighting leadership.

It has fought against austerity and the pay cap and put forward an alternative tax justice and welfare programme.

The Democracy Alliance slate (right) includes eight Socialist Party candidates.

NEC democracy alliance slate 2018

President (1)
Janice Godrich - DWP Clydeside & Argyle

Vice Presidents (4)
Jackie Green - MOJ Bradford
Fran Heathcote - DWP Northumbria & Tyneside
Zita Holbourne - BIS London North
Kevin McHugh - HMRC Benton Park View

NEC (30)
Mark Baker - DCLG Bristol & South West
Paula Brown - HSE National Branch
Clive Bryant - HMRC Worthing
Martin Cavanagh - DWP Wirral
Harvey Crane - HMRC Anglia
Alan Dennis - MOD DSG South Central
Felicity Flynn - MOJ
Angela Grant - DWP Wirral
Sam Hall - DWP Highlands & Islands
Austin Harney - MOJ Associated Offices
John Jamieson - Registers of Scotland
Tahir Latif - NATS CTC
Neil License - HMRC Yorks & North Lincs
Marion Lloyd - BIS Yorks & Humber
Dominic McFadden - HMRC Intelligence & Invest
John McInally - DWP HQ London
Kenny McKay - Comm Sec IT Services Glasgow
John Maguire - MOJ Greater Manchester
Lorna Merry - HMRC London HQ
Marianne Owens - HMRC South Wales
Ian Pope - DWP Glasgow
Annette Rochester - DWP Birmingham North
Alison Roder - MOJ HQ Branch
Dave Semple - DWP Greater Glasgow
Steve Thorley - CPS East Midlands
Candy Udwin - CMSOA National Gallery
Karen Watts - MOJ Wessex
Hector Wesley - HMRC Euston Tower
Katrine Williams - DWP SE Wales
Paul Williams - Dft Nottingham

■ See leftunity.org.uk for full slate including trade union conference candidates



[News in brief]

■ Brum care strike

On 20 February, Birmingham home care staff will be taking strike action against their employer Birmingham council - a Labour council!

The strike is over changes to the home carers' working patterns where they will have to work three split shifts during the day: from 7am-10am, 12pm-2pm and 4pm-10pm. Home care workers are lone workers traveling from their homes to the service users' houses, many by public transport, to provide six weeks care for people who have just left hospital. These unrealistic and exhausting working patterns will become a barrier to many of the workers who will no doubt be forced to leave their jobs.

These new patterns are just one of ways the Labour council is unravelling its social care. In 2010 there was a social care workforce of over 7,000 compared to less than 2,000 today, with the council looking to make a further 40% of the home care staff redundant. Birmingham home carers will be striking from 11am to 2.30pm on Saturday 20 January with a strike rally being held outside Birmingham council house at 12pm. The strike will be seen as more than just about their working patterns but also a fight to defend public services and the service users they care for.

■ Read full report at socialistparty.org.uk

■ Woolwich walkout

Unite members employed by Briggs Marine to run the Woolwich ferry in London have voted for strike action. The vote comes in response to proposals from the employer to cut jobs and pay with the

introduction of new boats. The new vessels will use the latest technology and bring a ready excuse for the employers to make cuts. Where employers attempt to use automation and the latest technology to make cuts to pay and jobs, the response from the trade unions must be a militant one based on collective action.

Unite members have voted both for strike action and action short of strike action. The intention is to issue notice to the employer for both types of action to run together. In response, the employers have asked for talks through conciliation service Acas. Unite has agreed to the talks. However, Unite is equally clear that the employers will not be allowed to use talks to cause a long delay before any strike action. Unless progress is made then notice will be issued for strike action.

Unite regional officer Onay Kasab stated: "The response from members is superb. The union has launched a campaign which takes the position of all of our members into account - which in turn has led to a strike vote on the basis that we win for all of our members, not do a deal with winners and losers."

■ Ushaw election

Ballot papers started hitting doorsteps on 15 January to vote for a new president of the shop workers' union Ushaw. Socialist Party members have been out campaigning for Amy Murphy to be elected, distributing some of the 11,300 leaflets sent out. Amy is running on a programme of changing the union into a more fighting, democratic one which campaigns for a £10 an hour minimum wage and supports members taking action against job losses and attacks on terms and conditions. There have been lots of support for these ideas and all agree the union needs change.

■ See 'Vote Amy Murphy for Ushaw President' on Facebook for updates, Amy's leaflet and to get in touch with the campaign

the late Bob Crow: "If we all spit together we can drown the bastards!"
Elaine Brunskill

Bournemouth

RMT members on the picket line at Bournemouth were keeping warm and expressing their determined mood with the song 'Never cross a picket line.' They said they were getting support from people who were concerned about the safety of rail travel.

One picket said they wanted the assurance of a safety-critical guard which would guarantee accessibility for disabled and vulnerable people.

The guards are performing a function only a guard can do almost on a daily basis. Particularly on the

late shift, many passengers on the Bournemouth line would have to alight at unmanned stations and some of them need the help of the guard.

Jane Ward

Hull

The strike was well supported throughout the week. A particular feature of the strikes was the support from the passing public. Many of them linked the cuts to the guards on trains to other cuts, in particular in the NHS.

Socialist Party members supported the strike on all of the days and sold 17 copies of the Socialist to striking RMT members and members of the public.

Mick Whale

RMT strikes against driver-only operation continue



A particular feature of the strikes was the support from the passing public

Newcastle

"Everyone passing understands that this strike is about rail safety" said one of the striking guards on 12 January.

The mood on the Northern Rail picket line after three days of strikes was rock solid. Also, the strikers were clearly buoyed up by the refusal of train drivers to cross picket lines in Manchester and Wigan.

Having seen first-hand the impact of privatisation on the rail networks the strikers also expressed concerns about ongoing privatisation of the NHS.

The view was expressed that although the Tory government has all the anti-trade union laws at its disposal, it is weak and divided. One of the strikers repeated the quote from



photo Derby Socialist Party

Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) conference
TUSC AGAINST CUTS
Saturday 10 February
See tusc.org.uk/events

Waltham Forest: Outrage against 'monster block' plan

Waltham Forest Socialist Party members

140 people crammed into a meeting on 11 January called in opposition to plans to tear up our town square, build a monster tower block 29 stories high, build four more blocks on public land and reduce open space by a third.

The meeting was organised by Waltham Forest Trade Union Council's Housing Action Network in east London. The proposal also includes chopping down 81 trees and moving a children's playground to the most polluted part of the square, just in front of the bus station.

And after all that, this development will make not a dent in the 20,000 people who are deemed as in 'housing need' in the borough. The community is in uproar.

Trade union council secretary and Socialist Party member Linda Taaffe chaired the meeting. She made it clear that even though the decision had been made by the Labour-controlled planning committee, we in no way see it as the end of the campaign.

The Save Walthamstow's Town Centre campaign has been active for over two years and Socialist Party

members have been involved since then. At the meeting leading campaigner David and others outlined a strategy to help force either the majority-Labour council or the property company to withdraw. We believe that we should use every tool available to us to get this monster block stopped - and this was endorsed at the meeting.

Some will investigate launching a judicial review. Some will attempt to use their influence inside the Labour Party to get London mayor Sadiq Khan to enforce his proposal that all developments should be 50% affordable. The meeting also agreed to target the developers, Capital and Regional, so some people are researching opportunities to do this.

Many in the room were chomping at the bit to move to the agenda item to discuss mass activity, which will be a key tactic of the campaign. We agreed to hold a community demonstration on 24 February to occupy the square for the day in a show of strength and to proclaim that 'this land is our land!'

Finally we discussed May's local elections. There were Tories and Liberal Democrats in the room. Socialist Party members made it clear that we have no truck with them using

this campaign to opportunistically feather their own nests - the blame lies at their door.

But these decisions are being driven through by Waltham Forest council - a Labour council. A motion has been passed in at least one Labour Party branch opposing the plans.

The Socialist Party welcomes this. But right-wing pro-gentrification councillors have been reselected almost without exception for the local elections.

This means that one of the Labour candidates for High Street ward, which will be worst affected by the development, is right-wing council leader Clare Coghill. Socialist Party members argued that working class people, and all those being mobilised by this campaign, deserve better than a choice between the Tories, Liberal Democrats or right-wing Labour.

We need real anti-austerity, anti-gentrification candidates. Nancy Taaffe from the Socialist Party invited anyone interested in this type of a challenge to meet in the Red Room of the Rose and Crown pub on 20 February at 7.30pm.

■ **Read the full report at socialistparty.org.uk**



Residents queue out the door at monster block meeting photo Ben Robinson

WE MUST FIGHT ALL COUNCIL CUTS!

During January and February many council budget-setting meetings are taking place across the country, slashing millions more pounds off vital services. At the same time many councils are forging ahead with plans to build new developments at the expense of communities. But despite Jeremy Corbyn's anti-austerity leadership of Labour many of these councils are run by his party. Ahead of council budget announcements and local elections in May we look at examples of the actions of Blairite Labour councils and why we need to oppose them.

Derby: Stop cuts to domestic violence services and save women's lives

Annette Oliver

Derby Women's Centre service user and fundraiser and Unite the Union rep

This year Derby Women's Centre enters its 40th year after being set up by a group of women in 1978. Sadly it may be its last as it is likely to close at the end of March unless Derby council reverses its decision and agrees to fund this vital service.

Derby Women's Centre provides a range of activities and help to women who are suffering from the effects of domestic violence, offering advice on matters such as legal services, benefits, debt advice and employment and volunteering opportunities. They also help restore self-confidence and empower women to take their lives back with a counselling service, coffee mornings, alternative therapies, drama and music workshops, relaxation and confidence-building courses.

Their funding ran out at the end of May and by August they were unable to pay staff, building insurance or their phone bill. This meant that vulnerable women of Derby and the surrounding area were without the support and help that they need to escape a violent partner.

The leader of Derby council was visited by service users of the

centre and members of Derby Socialist Party. Although he admitted that the council had millions of pounds in reserves he said that they were keeping the money for a rainy day and reiterated that the centre would have to continue to self-fund.

Through the immense generosity of people, unions, businesses and organisations, the centre fought off closure with donations. The BBC news exposure since autumn has highlighted the battle the centre has faced and raised awareness of their plight.

This is a vital service, current statistics show that more than two women a week are killed by current or ex-partners and figures are sadly on the increase. Currently one in four women in the UK will experience domestic violence sometime in their lives. All research indicates that in an economic recession domestic violence and abuse increases but meanwhile the cuts are adversely affecting women's support services and refuges.

Derby council sends out a miserable 'happy new year' message to women affected by domestic violence as the centre that has helped so many women over the years comes to a close unless funding is secured.

Stop the cuts austerity - save women's lives!

Swansea council should oppose education cuts

Swansea Socialist Party

Swansea Socialist Party had an enthusiastic response when we took part in a 200-strong meeting in Gowerton to oppose education cuts.

The meeting at Gowerton Comprehensive School on 11 January was organised by the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) to campaign for fair funding for education in Wales.

The Socialist Party leaflet calling on Swansea's Labour council to fight against Tory cuts - instead of proposing £22 million cuts next year - was snapped up by teachers and parents as they went into the meeting, along with a number of copies of the Socialist.

One teacher gave their details to join the Swansea Socialist Party. The first member of the audience called to speak was Carmarthenshire County Unison branch secretary

Mark Evans, speaking in a personal capacity, who brought solidarity to the NAHT and spoke of how the branch fought off planned education cuts through a campaign which included leafletting 40 schools.

He said that all councils must stand up against the cuts: "Are children getting the support they need? No. Are children with special needs getting the support they need? No, they are not."

"Schools have had their budgets squeezed and squeezed and squeezed. It's a choice. Councillors can stand up to cuts and say we are not going to do the Tories' dirty work."

Alec Thraves of Swansea Socialist Party said education would be devastated by the cuts and called for a deficit budget, using reserves and borrowing to 'balance' it, and joining with other councils to oppose Tory cuts.

We call for:

- No more cuts - set a legal 'no-cuts' budget!
- Link up action with other teaching and local government unions!
- Set up a coordinating committee to fight the cuts!
- Lobby the cabinet meeting (8 February) and protest outside the full council meeting (22 February).
- Initiate a Swansea march and rally against the cuts!



photo Southampton Socialist Party

Southampton Labour council votes to close vital respite centre

Nick Chaffey
Southampton Socialist Party

"Let's must go!" was the call of furious parents as Labour council leader Simon Letts and three Labour councillors shamefully voted to close Kentish Road Respite Centre days before Christmas.

This service provides vital support to families caring for loved ones with life-long special needs. Their campaign has fought heroically for three years to ensure there are facilities for the most vulnerable people in the city. They are right.

How can Labour claim to be an anti-austerity party when its councillors act in such a brutal way? "When you vote Labour in Southampton, you're not voting for Corbyn, you're voting for cuts!" was the view of one campaigner.

Others agree. Labour Party members who have actively supported the campaign are horrified at the decision. They were hopeful that after their recent annual general meeting voted in a new executive committee made up of Corbyn supporters to replace the Blairites, things would change.

With the continued impact of Tory government funding cuts to local councils, the crisis deepens, with schools especially affected. A dozen schools are in deficit in Southampton, with budgets being made for the year ahead this term.

How many jobs are at risk if La-

bour doesn't step in to support 'licensed deficits' to stop the cuts? The severe housing crisis has seen homeless people camped out on the high street.

Corbyn's supporters must seize the opportunity to change course and put an end to council cuts. A powerful campaign can be built by uniting all those hit by austerity.

Standing firmly and clearly in support of a no-cuts budget that protects Kentish Road, school budgets, and agrees a housing policy to open the empty properties to house the homeless would bring together the enormous anger and channel that in a campaign to restore the £100 million stolen by Tory governments since 2010.

But there is a serious warning attached to this crisis. As Labour has carried out Tory cuts, the local Tory group leader has launched a campaign to reopen Kentish Road.

Desperate to support their families, some campaigners have backed his call, despite the fact that just a few miles away Tory councillors in Hampshire are closing two respite centres themselves. If Labour continues voting for cuts, they will continue losing support and risk a return of the Tories.

Last time that happened, the Tories implemented cuts to services and pay cuts to the entire council workforce, including those at Kentish Road.

Southampton anti-cuts councillor Keith Morrell, who was expelled by the Blairites from the Labour

Party in 2012 for voting against cuts, has stood consistently with the Kentish Road families and given his full support to their campaign.

In 2013 Keith proposed a legal, balanced no-cuts budget to Southampton council showing what is possible by using reserves that currently stand at £110 million. This policy, advocated by the Trade Unionist & Socialist Coalition, offers a way forward for Labour councils in averting another round of cuts and mobilising a mass campaign to challenge the Tories.

There are no excuses now for Labour councillors, especially since shadow chancellor John McDonnell pledged £17 billion extra to councils, schools and the NHS.

In the weeks ahead running up to the council budget meeting in February Southampton Socialist Party calls on all those opposed to cuts to demand Kentish Road is reopened and the council puts an end to Tory cuts. Implementing Corbyn's manifesto now in Southampton council, and linking up with other councils nationally, would show in practice that change is on its way and add pressure on Theresa May to retreat and fund councils or further deepen their unpopularity in the run up to council elections in May.

■ **Public Meeting - how can we get Corbyn's policies into Southampton council?**
Saturday 17 February at 1pm at Bitterne URC Church, 446 Bitterne Rd, Southampton, SO18 5EF



photo Kleon3/CC

NO TO THE WOOLWICH MONSTER BLOCK

Paul Callanan
Greenwich and Bexley
Socialist Party

If Greenwich council and property developers get their way Woolwich's skyline in south London will soon be unrecognisable. A new development, including a 27-storey tower block, will overshadow General Gordon Square and the Royal Arsenal.

At a time of a huge housing crisis in London more homes will sound good. Unfortunately none of the houses built will be available at a social rent. Just 20.2% will be 'affordable' which amounts to anything up to 80% of market rents.

This comes after Greenwich council approved a 245-home scheme with zero social rented units in Abbey Wood and another in Woolwich with 300-homes and only 6% social rental units. There are currently

16,000 people on council house waiting lists in the borough. Yet the council would prefer to knock down existing council estates and sell them off.

The reality of so-called regeneration is that ordinary working class people who live in an area are forced out. Woolwich, like so many parts of London is becoming a playground for property developers and speculators.

As prices go up people are being forced to the outskirts of the city. From there they will have to use overcrowded, overpriced transport systems to find work.

The Socialist Party welcomes the call made by Jeremy Corbyn at Labour Party conference for all regeneration schemes to be subject to a local ballot. Yet the scheme in Woolwich is being enthusiastically driven through by the Labour council.

We say the council must immedi-

ately halt the development and act on the words of their party leader and carry out a genuine consultation with residents.

Working class people have endured years of Tory austerity and gentrification carried out by the Blairite council locally. We say rather than housing only available to the rich, the council should start a programme of council house building to serve the housing needs of the poor and ordinary workers. The council should also introduce rent controls to stop private renters being ripped off by fat-cat landlords.

The council could help build a mass campaign to demand more money for Greenwich from the government.

Alongside this they could refuse to make cuts and use their reserves and borrowing powers to set a budget based on the needs of ordinary Greenwich residents.



photo Phil Long/CC

Undercover policing legal challenge

Public Law Interest Unit press release

The Public Interest Law Unit (a small project of a south London law centre) has launched judicial review proceedings against both the Home Office and the Scottish government in respect of the failure to inquire into undercover policing operations in Scotland.

On 14 September, Lord Brailsford of Edinburgh's Court of Session agreed to grant permission for a full judicial review hearing to take place. The full hearing is to determine whether the UK government acted unlawfully in refusing to extend the terms of reference of the inquiry to Scotland, and separately but simultaneously, the decision of the Scottish government to refuse to set up an inquiry of its own.

In March 2015, Theresa May, then home secretary, announced her intention to set up an inquiry into undercover policing. This announcement followed revelations that police officers, as early as 1968, had spied on political campaigners and had used the names of dead children to create their identities.

The officers deceived women into forming long-term intimate relationships and had fathered children, befriended grieving families and acted as agents provocateurs. The undercover police operations

under scrutiny by the inquiry are limited to those conducted in England and Wales. However, much evidence has come to light demonstrating that the Metropolitan Police had in fact operated in Scotland, and possibly without the permission of the Scottish authorities.

Tilly Gifford, environmental justice campaigner and member of Plane Stupid, had also been targeted in Scotland, and in 2009, officers attempted to recruit her as an informant. Tilly was asked to betray her friends, beliefs and the communities in Scotland that she had been campaigning to protect.

In the course of three meetings, police officers indicated that they would give Tilly cash payments in exchange for information, and threatened her with prison should she fail to cooperate.

But the Scottish Legal Aid Board refused to fund Tilly's case. The lawyers involved are currently working on a pro bono basis and have raised thousands through Crowdjustice to protect her from any adverse costs.

The right of access to justice is both fundamental and constitutional, and state bodies must be held to account when abusing their powers. Tilly and other activists who have also been spied on are prevented from participating in an inquiry into covert operations which have dramatically affected their lives and the lives of their families.



photo Al Jazeera English/CC

Socialist Party women's meeting brings together members to share experiences

Mia Hollings
Caerphilly Socialist Party

The Socialist Party held its annual national women's meeting on 6 January. This was a great opportunity for women members from all over the country to get together to share views and experiences, to build political confidence and to explore issues of particular relevance to women.

The first discussion was on 'Greece and the lessons for fighting austerity in Britain', introduced by Socialist Party executive member Judy Beishon. Given that it's estimated that women bear 86% of the austerity burden this is an important discussion. The lessons from the Greek workers' experience can help us work out a programme and strategy to fightback.

After lunch we then had a discussion on '#MeToo, austerity and

the fightback against sexism and women's oppression today', introduced by editor of the Socialist Sarah Wrack.

This was a wide ranging discussion which covered, among other things, the #MeToo campaign on social media and how this can be translated into the 'real world', sexual harassment in the workplace and how this can be addressed, domestic violence and the lessons from the Campaign Against Domestic Violence campaign the Socialist Party launched in the 1990s.

We emphasised the need to consider the issues faced by working class women, instead of focusing on only celebrities and their experiences.

We then finished the day by discussing how we can take our work forward among women in the workplace and trade unions, on university campuses and in community campaigns.

Southern Socialist Party conference: discussing the way forward in 2018

Nicholas Doyle
Portsmouth Socialist Party

Socialist Party Southern conference on 14 January was well attended by those eager to discuss the way forward in 2018. The main discussion was what we think will be the major developments of 2018, introduced by Socialist Party executive committee member Rob Williams.

Rob pointed out that since 2015 referendums and elections have gone the wrong way for the Tories and the ruling class. Theresa May has so little authority that she can't even carry out a meaningful cabinet reshuffle.

Rob also pointed out that in 2017 we saw a strike wave which shows the anger at the biggest cut in living standards since the Napoleonic

wars. The recent Communication Workers' Union (CWU) strike ballot at Royal Mail, with turnout higher than the 50% threshold needed, shows what is possible.

Contributions from the floor focused on the NHS and the Labour Party. The main points being the sheer level of the crisis facing the NHS through privatisation and cuts.

In the afternoon the conference split into three workshops on finance and party building, the trade unions, and youth and students work.

The conference was closed with a report of the work of the Committee for a Workers' International and the election of the Southern regional committee. Members go back to their branches ready for the struggles in 2018!



HEATING SCANDAL ON EAST LONDON ESTATE

Pete Mason
East London Socialist Party

The heating and hot water supply to 200 residents on the private Barking Riverside estate in east London was threatened by an asset management company in the middle of winter, after the residents suffered a 40-day loss of heating in the run up to Christmas.

In a letter of protest which got the attention of the local press, the residents' association condemned the asset stripping and the free market capitalism philosophy which is plaguing the estate and playing with the lives of the residents. We have now learned that the threat has been withdrawn in a big victory for the residents' association.

Barking Riverside's planned 11,000 houses are presently being developed by a joint enterprise of the Greater London Authority and

the London and Quadrant housing association and will be one of the biggest housing developments in Europe. But this huge experiment to show that private enterprise, run riot through the estate, can work better than local council control, has failed.

The private company which owned the communal heating to four blocks of flats went bankrupt. The heating equipment languished in administration until it was bought up by an asset management company, with no apparent prior knowledge of heating systems, which then formed a company called Zing Power to bill residents for the heating.

As soon as the severe winter weather hit in November, the heating failed. Zing and the landlord fought over responsibility for fixing the equipment, both refusing to carry out the repairs.

Up to 200 residents suffered through to 21 December, without

heating or hot water. The residents association called an emergency meeting on 9 December for the affected blocks, which brought the threat of legal action against Zing and a temporary fix over Christmas of the remaining block of flats affected.

Then, on 5 January, the director of Zing Power, Jamie Buchanan, wrote to the landlords, their agents Pinnacle, and the local residents' association, declaring his intent to remove this equipment, which he values at £1.2 million, from the estate on 25 January, leaving residents with no heating and hot water.

As chair of the Barking Reach Residents' Association, I expressed the burning anger of the residents in an open letter to Buchanan, gaining the full support of the residents' association committee and collecting the signatures of the residents who spoke out, which has resulted in the threat being withdrawn!

LOBBY PUSHES LIVERPOOL COUNCIL TO OPPOSE PRIVATISATION

Roger Bannister
Liverpool Socialist Party

Around 70 people lobbied Liverpool council's 'Health and Well Being' board on 11 January to protest about 'accountable care' proposals.

Accountable care is the latest Tory plan to move towards privatisation of the NHS, where an accountable care organisation holds a long-term contract to oversee several

health services, on a fixed budget. Hospitals, GPs, district nurses, health visitors, care homes and home care would all be in one budget, and the contract could be run by an NHS trust, but is more likely to be run by companies like Virgin, or a private US based healthcare company.

The majority of the protesters were members of the Merseyside Pensioners' Association, but they were joined by supporters of the Liverpool Against Cuts, pro-NHS

campaigners, and several of the 'Liverpool 47' councillors, who defied Tory cuts in the city during the 1980s, in a lively protest.

50 of the protesters were allowed into the meeting, and Mayor Joe Anderson agreed to submit a resolution to the city council rejecting sustainability and transformation plans, accountable care systems and accountable care organisations. This episode shows that pressure on councillors on NHS related matters can, and does achieve results.

PACKED NEWHAM MEETING AGAINST ACADEMIES

Niall Mulholland
East London Socialist Party

A packed meeting took place on 9 January to oppose attempts to turn Shaftesbury School in Forest Gate, east London, into an academy. Reports of strikes against academies

at other schools in Newham were heard with complete opposition to cuts and privatisation.

But where were the local Labour councillors? What is their position on academisation?

It's been reported that Labour councillors have voted in support of academies at local constituency

Labour Party meetings. Newham is in the middle of selecting councillors for the 3 May council elections.

If a new round of pro-academy Blairite councillors are selected, then campaigners may feel there is no choice but to stand against them in May to stop the tide of academies and austerity in Newham.

FOSTER CARE IS WORK - CARERS DESERVE WORKERS' RIGHTS

Ian Groeber
Plymouth Socialist Party

Sarah Anderson issued a claim to an employment tribunal against Hampshire County Council on 9 October challenging their position that foster carers are not workers. Sarah is a foster carer and chair of the foster workers' branch of the IWGB union.

Reminiscent of the recent battles at Uber and Deliveroo, there is contention over the definition of "worker" - and therefore entitlement to paid leave, sick pay, or even a notice period.

Some foster placements end up not being tenable. Councils can remove a young person from their placement if there are problems, sometimes overnight.

Payment to the foster carer will also stop at this point. Imagine being reliant on that income and then finding yourself without it at such short notice, despite the sacrifices you've made.

Many foster carers cannot maintain a day job if they have a challenging young person to care for, and so rely wholly on that income.

Court of Appeal

The Court of Appeal has stated previously that foster care agreements with councils aren't contracts because they are set out in law, not freely entered into and negotiated by carers and councils.

This is what Sarah is challenging: that she is indeed a worker for the council, and as such should be entitled to the rights of any other employee.

Foster carers have to undertake a 15 to 20-week assessment in which their lifestyle, home and relationships are examined by an independent assessor.

They receive a weekly allowance ranging from £150 to £500 per child to cover care costs. They will usually (but not always) receive a fee alongside this to compensate them for their work.

Over 65,000 children live with



photo USAF/Jared Duhon/CC

almost 55,000 foster families in the UK, according to the Fostering Network. That's a sizeable population seen as not "working" - despite sacrificing their time, finances, accommodation, and emotional energy to support vulnerable children on behalf of councils.

And these fostering households are scrutinised - rightly - on their

time and ability to care for young people under the responsibility of the council's social services.

Tens of thousands of people are paid for this by their council. And yet they are deemed not to be workers for the council!

Socialists support all workers fighting to improve their conditions, striving for a better quality of life.

However, pro-capitalist councillors will try to frame this situation as a dilemma.

If we support foster carers' claim to workers' rights and entitlements, they will say, councils would struggle to fund it. Austerity pits worker against worker, expecting us to choose between improving working conditions here or funding other services there.

But there is another option: councils can fight to win the funds. By using their reserves and prudential borrowing powers, they can end austerity today while fighting to win the necessary funding from the weak Tory government.

Foster carers, who directly support some of the most struggling and disadvantaged children, should be recognised for their work. Socialists should demand an end to all public service cuts, full recognition of foster carers as workers, and a living wage for all.

Must-see comedy neglects power of Marx's ideas...

We see Marx engage in escapades like attempting to pawn his wife's family heirloom; being constantly on the run from police; long, indulgent drinking sessions; and getting into brawls in the British Library.

This is where the fun ends, however. Beyond being a piece of decent comedy, Young Marx doesn't always do justice to the incredible power of the ideas Marx advanced.

The play is no stranger to historical inaccuracies. In an otherwise excellent scene, Marx engages in a fierce debate with August Willich over Willich's claims that acts of individual terror will lead to successful revolution.

Marx gives a passionate and convincing argument about the uselessness of terrorist tactics. Instead he calls for communists to prepare for a political crisis giving an opportunity to lead the working class to power.

In response, Willich furiously challenges Marx to a pistol duel. Marx accepts out of arrogance and carelessness about the needs of his young family.

There was no such duel. In reality, Marx's ally Konrad Schramm challenged Willich to a duel, against Marx's wishes.

Marx is presented as an underappreciated genius, developing his own radical creed against a backdrop of misery and desperation. The play doesn't at any point misrepresent his ideas.

However, the emphasis the writers place on comedy leads them to neglect the power of those ideas. Not only this, but the clown-like aspect of his personality appears exaggerated.

As a comedic and entertaining effort, this play is a must-see. But as a guide to Marx's life and ideas, don't expect the full story.

Tom Costello
Lancashire Socialist Party

... persuasive on ideas but a caricature of the man...

Well-written, good scenography, decent humour. Marx portrayed rather caricaturally, as this self-indulgent, hectic, larger-than-life character.

But some of his key points - particularly from his early writings - are put across in concise and persuasive ways, without the ironical or condescending overtones I suspected beforehand.

Vladimir Bortun
Greenwich and Bexley Socialist Party

... Marx shows growth in great platform for his ideas

Young Marx isn't a play written by Marxists, but it does entertainingly platform Karl Marx's ideas.

I was almost put off by the two-dimensional jokes and lazy slapstick in



Theatre: Young Marx

the first scene. But after then, Young Marx is much funnier. The physical comedy - and incessant references to his writings - are hilarious.

Rory Kinnear's portrayal of the title character doesn't serve to attack Marx as some critics have suggested. Marx grows from drunken buffoon to the commanding writer of Critique of Political Economy, the basis for his masterpiece Capital, through the course of the play.

The comedy stops at certain intervals when Marx gives sombre political speeches to the other characters and audience. One of these got a round of applause.

One of the main plot drivers is Marx arguing for democratic mass revolutionary action - against advocates of individual terrorism. All this contributes to a production that elevates Marx to his correct stature.

Young Marx has a positive representation of women. Women get an equal say with men in Communist League meetings. Marx's wife Jenny wins political arguments and debates. The final scene is Marx writing his Critique of Political Economy with help and editing from Friedrich Engels, Jenny, and his friend and political confidante Helene Demuth, all on equal footing.

The extreme poverty that drove Marx and Engels to fight to change society, and today calls out for socialism to overthrow capitalism, is not forgotten.

A play called Young Marx couldn't help but provoke a passionate reaction from anyone who calls themselves a socialist. I think if any piece of music, play, book or film has a positive and progressive impact on people's attitudes on the topic, then it's done a good thing. Richard Bean and Clive Coleman's play certainly does that.

Ian Pattison
East London Socialist Party

British imperialism can take no credit in fight against Isis

Ernst Schäfer
Nottingham Socialist Party

No sooner had the Iraqi government officially declared its fight against Isis over on 9 December than Theresa May congratulated the British government for its role in "supporting the Iraqi security forces, including the armed forces and the Peshmerga."

Before we applaud the government though, let's examine its role in Iraq.

The RAF has conducted more than 1,200 airstrikes in Iraq and Syria, second only to the United States. According to the Ministry of Defence (MoD), this cost the UK taxpayer £265 million and killed an estimated 3,000 "extremists," some of which undoubtedly harmed Isis.

But what is the human cost of these airstrikes? Incredibly, the MoD has claimed there is "no evidence that RAF strikes have caused any civilian casualties, this would be "unprecedented in the history of warfare," according to Chris Woods, director of the international air strikes monitor Airwars.

This does not even take into account that it is unclear how it is decided someone is an 'extremist'. Nor that much of the bombing was in densely populated urban areas.

Airwars estimates the minimum number of civilians killed by coalition airstrikes as 5,961. Attributing none of these to the RAF seems like folly.

Even if we ignore the "collateral damage," British imperialism's role in Iraq can hardly be considered positive.

After all, the UK was the USA's major ally in the 2003 invasion of Iraq. That killed thousands of civilians, and predictably created the breeding ground for Isis.

What good, then, has come of this invasion? Saddam Hussein, a brutal dictator, was defeated and hanged. But the situation for most Iraqi civilians has not improved.

There have been over a thousand suicide bombings in Iraq since 2003,

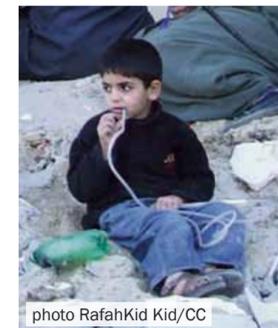


photo RafahKid Kid/CC

most of them targeting civilians. The campaign group Iraq Body Count has recorded over 180,000 documented civilian deaths from violence, mostly in English-language newspapers which makes it likely this is a severe underestimation.

And terrorists have targeted European cities in retaliation for the relentless air strikes, killing hundreds.

Estimates for Iraqis displaced by Isis range from 3.5 to five million. The British state is taking in only a tiny fraction of the refugees for which it bears a substantial responsibility.

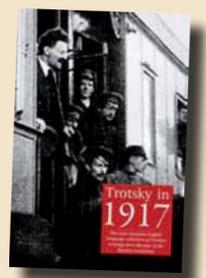
You can't help but wonder if all this suffering would have taken place had Iraq not had any oil reserves. In any case, Jeremy Corbyn was proven right once again in his opposition to the war.

British foreign policy is dictated by the interests of Britain's capitalist class, not the working class and poor of Britain or anywhere else. This is why the atrocious regime in Saudi Arabia is the British state's ally, and why civilian casualties are labelled "collateral damage."

Socialists oppose all imperialist 'interventions' and wars. We oppose the airstrikes, and call for those responsible for the Iraq war to be held accountable. We oppose the supply of arms to 'moderate' rebels and oppressive regimes like Saudi Arabia.

A socialist foreign policy would be based not on interventions, wars and profit interests, but genuine democratic workers' cooperation, international solidarity and peace.

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A demonstration marking the seventh anniversary of the mass uprising in Tunisia which overthrew the Ben Ali dictatorship, and propelled the Arab Spring revolutions, took place in the capital, Tunis, on 14 January. This came after a week of ongoing protests against the government's latest austerity measures. In an attempt to defuse the movement the coalition government has offered some token concessions on living standards. **Serge Jordan**, CWI, and members of **Al-Badil al-Ishtiraki**, Socialist Alternative (CWI in Tunisia) had earlier reported on the fresh outbreak of protests which in a shortened version is reprinted here.

The explosion of protests that broke out on 7 January against the new Finance Act 2018 - a battery of measures against the working and middle classes - has again put into perspective the liberal commentators' fairytale about Tunisia's 'successful democratic transition'. In reality, the country has remained an open battleground between the forces of revolution and counterrevolution ever since the mass uprising in 2010-11 which ousted Tunisia's longtime dictator, President Zine el Abedine Ben Ali. Having initially responded to a campaign launched by social media activists (#Fech_Nestanneu or "What are we waiting for?"), people are venting their long-simmered rage against their worsening living conditions.

Social protests have erupted in numerous parts of the country, along with riots and violent street battles between young people and the police, especially in the marginalised inland regions and in working class suburbs of Tunis and other cities.

Arrests

The state has replied to the movement with force, arresting hundreds of people, including the pre-emptive hunt for activists who issued statements or wrote slogans calling for the protests.

The 2018 budget voted through by the governing coalition on 9 December includes a series of bitter pills to swallow for the poor, in particular the increase in VAT, the implementation of a new social security contribution, and new customs duties on imported products. Tunisian households will spend up to 300 dinars (£90) more on average every month as a result of these measures.

This huge assault on working class people has been concocted with tight supervision and applause from the International Monetary Fund, which is

exerting intense pressure to speed-up the pace of so-called "structural reforms", aimed at financing the repayment of the public debt to financial speculators.

Contrary to a widespread myth, this debt has nothing to do with the "high volume of wages" of public sector workers, but is a poisoned gift from the mafia who was in power before the revolution. Tunisian people have never seen a penny of that money.

The state of emergency, constantly renewed since November 2015, is used to clamp down on democratic rights, while last year the militarisation of certain production sites was decreed by the government in reaction to social movements in the south of the country.

Trump and other western imperialist leaders, while hypocritically embracing the recent protests in Iran, have remained absolutely silent on the Tunisian protests.

Wealth gap

The grotesque wealth gap, at the heart of the revolutionary uprising against the Ben Ali regime seven years ago, has only expanded since. Tunisia is pinpointed even by the corporate EU for being a "tax heaven" for the super-rich, while prices of basic staples, especially food, are breaking records, a phenomenon heightened by market speculation and by the organised dismantlement of the subsidy system by successive governments.

The trade deficit has tripled in seven years, driving down the value of the Tunisian dinar, bringing up the cost of debt service payments and crushing the living standards of ordinary people.

The situation in the poorer, inland regions is particularly volatile, as local communities have seen no change or any meaningful public investment. Many young people have the feeling they bartered their blood in 2010-11 for even more misery and unemployment.

Any spark can light the prairie fire, as shown by the example of Sejname, a locality which witnessed two general strikes in less than a month at the end of 2017, in protest at joblessness, poverty and the deterioration of public services.

That movement was triggered by the self-immolation of a mother of five in front of the building of the local authorities, a tragic episode reminiscent of the act which sparked the so-called Arab Spring in December 2010. The last six years have registered



TUNISIA

EXPLOSION OF PROTESTS AGAINST GOVERNMENT AUSTERITY

Hundreds detained in indiscriminate arrests

May Day protests in 2012 photo scossargilbert/CC

an average economic growth of less than 1% - hence the capitalists won't give substantial concessions to workers and the poor, which could provide their remodelled political system with a sustainable social base of support.

Reflecting this, nine governments have succeeded each other in less than seven years. All have teetered, some fallen, on social explosions from below. It will be no different with the current regime.

The so-called national unity government of Youssef Chahed is composed of four parties, with the leading roles played by Nidaa Tounes (essentially a recycled machine derived

from Ben Ali's now dissolved RCD) and Ennahda (the right-wing Islamist party which ruled the country until 2013). Both are facing internal crisis and have suffered splits.

Nidaa Tounes is also the party of the president of the republic Caid Essebsi, and is ruled by his son Hamed. The latter is the most hated figure in Tunisia, while the leader of Ennahda, Rached Ghannouchi, comes second on that list. Projections say around 70% people will abstain in the coming municipal elections.

Last year, the government tried to cut across its growing discredit by starting a vocally promoted 'anti-

corruption campaign'. Corruption is even more widespread than it used to be under Ben Ali.

Once tightly controlled and centralised by the ex-dictator's inner circles, it has now flourished all over the place.

Disgracefully, the central leaders of the General Union of Tunisian Workers (UGTT) have exhibited a very cooperative attitude with the government on its austerity plans - although the recent movement forced them to take some rhetorical distance.

All through 2017, the mainstream press has been full of praise for the general secretary Nouredine

blind alley of desperate actions because these "leaders" have deserted their job, taking no serious initiative whatsoever to lead a determined battle against the intolerable social conditions experienced by the youth.

If these leaders are not ready to take serious action to broaden and strengthen the current movement, they should be replaced by people who are. The need to build a powerful strike movement against the Finance Act has to be firmly put on the agenda in every branch of the UGTT across the country.

After all, it is the organised deployment of the power of the working class that sealed the fate of Ben Ali seven years ago - it is the same power that will defeat all those who try to carry on with the old regime's economic policies.

The leaders of the left coalition 'Popular Front' correctly call for stepping up the mobilisations. But their parallel call for "snap elections" falls short of what is required now.

Of course, we are not in principle against elections that would see an early end to the current administration. But launching such an idea in the height of the struggle betrays the Popular Front leaders' habitual concerns to divert the outcome of grassroots social battles into the safe channels of institutional politics. In 2013, these leaders squandered two marvellous revolutionary opportunities with a similar strategy.

United front

A strong united front of struggle - bringing together Fech Nestanneu campaigners, workers and trade unions, unemployed organisations and local communities, political and social activists - needs to be organised and escalated until the vile Finance Act is scrapped; along with its creator, the Chahed government.

But as amply demonstrated by the experience of the last seven years, unless the movement builds its own independent political voice based on the demands of the revolution, the capitalist ruling classes will continuously put together governmental teams that suit their interests and crush people's aspirations.

To prevent this happening over again, mass action committees should be set up in the workplaces and communities to build the movement from the bottom up, to coordinate a mass political struggle aimed at bringing down the government, and to prepare the modelling of a revolutionary people's government based on democratically elected representatives from workers, poor peasants and young people.

With democratic socialist policies, based on the public ownership of banks, factories, major land holdings and utilities, a radically different future could be built for the majority.

■ **Full article available on socialistworld.net**



What we stand 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.

- 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. Scrap zero-hour contracts.
- 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.

WORK AND INCOME

- Major research and investment into replacing fossil fuels with renewable energy and into ending the problems of early obsolescence and un-recycled 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.

- 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.

- For a mass workers' party drawing together workers, young people and activists from workplace, community, environmental and 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.

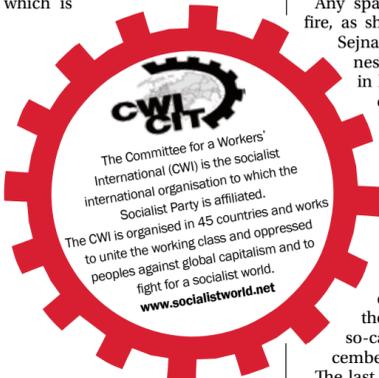
- No to imperialist wars and occupations.
- Tax the super-rich! For a socialist government to take into public ownership the top 150 companies and the banking system that dominate the British economy, and run them under democratic working class control and management. Compensation to be paid only on 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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The Committee for a Workers' International (CWI) is the socialist international organisation to which the Socialist Party is affiliated. The CWI is organised in 45 countries and works to unite the working class and oppressed peoples against global capitalism and to fight for a socialist world. www.socialistworld.net

Carillion

THE CHAOS OF PRIVATISATION



Workers blacklisted by construction companies, including Carillion, demanding justice outside the High Court photo Paul Mattsson

■ Demand action to save jobs and services

Rob Williams
Socialist Party industrial organiser

Tens of thousands of Carillion employees will have gone to work on 15 January wondering what will happen to their jobs and pensions after the company announced that it is going into liquidation.

The future of the workers must be the priority. No worker should lose their job or pension.

No doubt the Tory government will be more interested in trying to avoid being implicated in yet another scandal.

The biggest disgrace is that Carillion, like many others, has profited for so long from privatised and outsourced public service contracts under successive Tory, New Labour and Con-Dem governments.

Carillion has been handed extensive contracts for providing public services in prisons, hospitals, schools, military sites, libraries and major construction projects (including building Royal Liverpool Hospital and Midland Metropolitan Hospital in Sandwell - both presently well behind schedule).

Even the arch Thatcherite newspaper City AM warned that these deals "imperil public faith in business and the very principles of a

market-led economy."

Apparently, Carillion is building the new HQ in Birmingham city centre of PricewaterhouseCoopers, the accountancy firm which is overseeing the administration of Carillion!

Government backing

The Times quotes former New Labour transport secretary Lord Adonis, who resigned last month as the head of the National Infrastructure Commission.

He is now correctly asking why Carillion was seemingly buoyed up by the Tories who awarded the company a further £2 billion worth of contracts (on top of the eye-watering

£16 billion it already had) long after its financial problems emerged.

But the Blairites in office were part and parcel of this neoliberal privatisation offensive which enriched companies like Carillion and put them at the heart of public services such as the NHS.

The effect on those who worked in these services and the public has been devastating, as profits are made at our expense.

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