

May's government facing endgame

Corbyn must demand general election and fight for the socialist alternative to the bosses' EU

With just ten days until the date of departure from the EU at the time of writing, there is unprecedented daily turmoil in parliament on what will happen. The government's position has become so intractable that a complete government collapse is possible in the coming days or weeks, with a general election becoming the only solution.

Alternatively, prime minister Theresa May is now so discredited and ineffectual for the Tories that a no-confidence vote in her government might again be moved, with enough Tory MPs voting for it this time to bring about success. Then parliament would have 14 days to come up with another government, or a general election would be called.

Either way, a trade union-headed workers' movement - with a plan of action - needs to be launched to help sweep the Tories out of power. It's also needed to prepare a massive campaign to get Jeremy Corbyn in as prime minister, with socialist policies.

This outcome is greatly feared by the capitalist class. "The top 0.1% in Britain are doing very well", wrote the economics editor of the Sunday Times. They want no obstacles to their hoarding of vast wealth, which could be created by the election of a government proposing to take measures in workers' interests.

But the capitalists' political representatives in Westminster are mired in such an acute and protracted civil war over Brexit that now is the time to turn the tables on them. Now is the time to take full advantage of their weakness, kick out the Tories, and inside Labour turn seriously to the task of deselection of the Blairites.

From crisis to crisis

On 12 March, Theresa May had her withdrawal plan decisively defeated in parliament for the second time. The week included Brexit minister, Stephen Barclay, summing up a debate in parliament in which he called - on behalf of the government - for a short extension to the withdrawal deadline.

He straightaway bare-facedly defied May by voting against the extension himself. Seven other cabinet ministers also voted against it and Tory chief whip Julian Smith abstained.

They had allowed their MPs a 'free vote' on that motion, but on one which ruled out a no-deal Brexit, the government whipped Tories to reject it after it was amended to apply indefinitely. The government lost that vote, with 13 ministers abstaining and one voting against. Cabinet members were among them, but the government is so powerless and fragile that May felt unable to take any action against them.

These votes were not binding, but no plan has yet been passed and May's government has been sinking more and more deeply into crisis. When Attorney General Geoffrey Cox didn't assist May's deal by giving a legal assurance against the UK becoming stuck in the EU Customs Union, there were frantic attempts to get his 'opinion' altered.

Faced with threats that Brexit might not otherwise happen - or could be softened further or long delayed - there is a small possibility that May could end up getting a variant of her deal voted through.

But the parliamentary arithmetic doesn't yet add up for that and many different scenarios are possible over the coming weeks. A new factor is a ruling by the Speaker of the Commons John Bercow that May can't have a

third vote on her deal if it remains the same.

Pressure is escalating in Tory and establishment circles for May to be removed. Although she won a confidence vote in December, an attempt to force her to resign could come.

Who would replace her? Numerous Tory ministers and MPs are flaunting themselves as leadership candidates and canvassing for support, but none have a position or strategy that could bridge the chasm over Europe in their party.

Extent of division

Certainly, there's sharp division on the EU among MPs, in many cases reflecting their careerist ambitions. But the Socialist Party strongly counters the idea - repeated ad nauseam in the capitalist media - that working people are fundamentally divided on this issue.

A dangerous and inciting example of this was shown in Will Hutton's 17 March column in the Observer. He argued that on the one side in society are pro-EU Remainers who recognise the "interdependencies" between European countries, realise the need for EU institutions that can tackle climate change, want a strong public sector, effective trade unions, and are not hostile to other cultures, languages and people. On the other side, are those who support Brexit, who want "a world of closure, intolerance and suspicion of the other", according to Hutton.

The idea that useful and desirable cooperation between people across Europe is only possible by supporting membership of the EU is complete fiction and pro-capitalist propaganda. The EU is, in essence, an alliance of the ruling classes across Europe, to serve the interests of big business, not those of working-class and middle-class people across the continent.

A socialist confederation of European states would be able to achieve levels of cooperation and mutual benefit for ordinary people way beyond what is possible on a capitalist basis.

Public ownership of the top companies that dominate the economies, together with democratic socialist planning, would mean the raising of living standards for all working people. This, and the removal of profit-making and market competition as over-riding forces, would also lay the basis for resources and cooperation to stop environmental disaster and enable rapid progress in useful technology and medicines.

It would be the very opposite of a Europe of 'intolerance and suspicion'. Rather, it would be one where the removal of poverty and austerity would cut the ground from beneath distrust and racism.

Working-class people, whether they presently identify with the Remain or Leave side, have the same class interests. Corbyn recognises this. For instance, he said in Wakefield in January: "The real divide in our country is not between those who voted to Remain in the EU and those who voted to Leave. It is between the many - who do the work, who create the wealth and pay their taxes, and the few - who set the rules, who reap the rewards and so often dodge taxes".

He must cut across the confusion and scepticism arising from the manoeuvrings in parliament and get out this message loud and clear, along with a promise of pro-working-class measures both regarding Brexit and irrespective of it.

This also means standing firm against the Labour Blairites who want to reverse the EU referendum result. Corbyn needs to stick to the demand for a general election, and help to mobilise the labour and trade union movement to urgently bring it about.

Utility bill and council tax hikes... benefit cuts...

End austerity. Fight for a living wage!

Dave Carr

Despite a £30 billion windfall in the government's coffers, Tory chancellor Philip Hammond's spring statement signals a continued squeeze on low-income families.

Because of a freeze on benefits the poorest households will lose on average £400 this year. Also, the government's austerity measures will mean cuts to Universal Credit and increases in council tax. Shockingly, it's reported that cuts and delays to Universal Credit payments are forcing some women into sex work.

But the cost of living crisis doesn't stop there. Gas and electricity bills are set to rise from 1 April, as are water charges, the TV licence fee, and NHS prescriptions in England.

In the next fortnight, working-class people will also be adversely impacted by higher car tax, increases in mobile phone network charges, the higher cost of postage stamps, and a hike in 'class three' national insurance contributions which count towards a state pension.

Wages

But an average worker's annual real wage remains hundreds of pounds below what it was over a decade ago when the capitalist financial crisis erupted. And since then successive governments, while bailing out the super-rich elite and the capitalist system to the tune of trillions of pounds, have imposed pay freezes, ie pay cuts, on millions of public sector workers.

But organised workers are fighting back. Low-paid civil servants, many of who actually qualify for the benefits they administer, are balloting for strike action over the next month to demand better pay. Their union, the PCS, is demanding a modest 10% rise.

Katrine Williams, PCS national executive and Socialist Party member, says: "There's huge discontent over low pay but yet again the Treasury wants to restrict our pay rise to 1%. An imposed increase in contributions to our pension scheme has wiped out the miserable 1% pay 'rises', so pay has literally gone down before you even take into account cost of living rises.

"However, with the government in complete disarray we recognise now is a good time to fight back on pay and win."

Working-class people have had enough of austerity. We've had enough of the tax-dodging super-rich. And we've had enough of this zombie government. Let's get organised and fight back.

New Zealand mosque terror atrocity: workers' struggle can cut off far right

Rob Williams, Socialist Party executive committee

Millions woke up on the morning of 15 March in shock to learn of the mass shooting at two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand.

It soon became clear this was a brutal far-right terrorist act, which left 50 Muslim worshippers at Friday prayers dead, and many others injured. Many of those affected were refugees from warzones such as Syria, who saw New Zealand as a safe haven.

Horribly, the attack was streamed live. It took hours to remove videos from social media platforms.

The attacker, Brenton Harrison Tarrant, was born in Australia. He was active on extreme right-wing forums, and declared in an online manifesto: "For once, the person that will be called a fascist, is an actual fascist."

This is another warning to the labour and trade union movement and working-class communities worldwide of the need to build a united movement to defeat the far right.

Far-right killings

Last year, killings by the far right were at the highest level for over 20 years in the United States, according to the Anti-Defamation League. This included the white supremacist attack on a Pittsburgh synagogue that killed eleven people.

In 2011, Anders Breivik murdered 77 people, mostly at a summer camp of the youth wing of the Norwegian Labour Party.

In Britain, we have seen the murder of Jo Cox MP, and the attack on the Finsbury Park Mosque. Police are reportedly treating a stabbing in west London on 16 March as a terrorist incident inspired by the far right.

We have also seen terror attacks by right-wing political Islamists. The Socialist Party completely condemns these, just as we do the far right.

The Christchurch attack has shown the hypocrisy of the establishment political parties in New Zealand and elsewhere, whose polices have helped legitimise the policies of the far right.

The Labour-led New Zealand government blames the lack of gun control. But New Zealand Labour is in coalition with the right-wing populist New Zealand First party, which has an anti-immigrant agenda. It only dropped its election promise to hold referendums on reducing the political rights of the indigenous Maori population in exchange for becoming part of the government coalition.

The Indonesian government has now called in the Australian ambassador after right-wing Queensland senator Fraser Anning tweeted: "Does anyone still dispute the link between Muslim immigration and violence?"

In a statement shared by an Australian journalist on Twitter, Anning also wrote: "As always, left-wing politicians and the media will rush to claim that the causes of today's shootings lie with gun laws or those who hold nationalist views, but this is all clichéd nonsense.

"The real cause of bloodshed on New Zealand streets today is the immigration programme which allowed Muslim fanatics to migrate to New Zealand in the first place."

This outrageous racism is in stark contrast to the magnificent support and solidarity of ordinary working-class people from all communities, both in New Zealand and globally.

This attack is in the context of rising instability in a period of global capitalist crisis in the decade since the financial crisis and the Great Recession. The working class has shown great fighting capacity around the world in defence of living standards and the gains made in the post-war period, now threatened by rapacious capitalism.

This has included New Zealand. In the last year, nurses, teachers, public servants, railway workers, cleaners, bus drivers, fast food workers, airport workers, dockers, and even junior doctors have taken strike action in pursuit of improved wages and conditions.

This has come after a decade when workers' action has been at a low ebb. Workers have been forced to fight as the Labour-led coalition has continued with the austerity policies very similar to the previous conservative National Party administration.

Political vacuum

The role of so-called Labour governments like this has helped create a political vacuum which the far right can try to fill. Both in New Zealand and elsewhere, the labour and trade union movement, if it is prepared to fight, is the key force to combat the far right, which seeks to divide the working class in defence of big business.

In Britain, a composite motion originally written by Socialist Party members in general union Unite at last year's union policy conference means that Unite's policy is to launch a 'Jobs, homes not racism' campaign. This in turn has now become official Trade Union Congress policy.

This would link the fight against austerity and for socialist policies to the need for united workers' action to isolate the far right, which is trying to exploit the establishment crisis over Brexit for its own ends.

A key necessity is for the unions and Jeremy Corbyn to mobilise workers to fight for a general election to get rid of the Tories, and for a left Labour government on a socialist programme.

The horrendous events in Christchurch have shocked the world. Many will be asking: what is the way forward? The response must be mass workers' action. Individual terrorism only plays into the hands of the capitalists and the far right.

Top unis threaten cuts if tuition fees fall: scrap all fees and debt now

Bea Gardner, national chair, Socialist Students

The elitist club of top universities known as the Russell Group has recently threatened that any reduction of student tuition fees will result in cuts to course numbers, as well as the arts and social mobility programmes.

The statement comes ahead of the government's delayed publication of a review of post-18 education and funding. This is widely expected to recommend a reduction in tuition fees from the current level of £9,250 per year.

The current funding system, initiated with the Tory-Lib Dem trebling of fees in 2012, cut government spending on universities and lumped the cost onto students as enormous debts. By doing this the university sector was spared from some of the austerity measures seen in the rest of the public sector.

But it was always a short-term solution. Student debt is currently at £118 billion, and rising with interest. Three-quarters of students will not pay back their loan in full by the time it is wiped after 30 years, and the state will be footing the bill.

The government is now hoping to mitigate this cost by reducing fees, which would bring down the unpaid debt. But with the cost of most degrees substantially higher than current fees, the question is: who will pay for it?

If the government offers no further funding, we are likely to see massive cuts, redundancies and even closures at universities in Britain. This would come on top of already very high rates of dissatisfaction among staff and students who have suffered a decade of marketisation.

Higher education is one of the most casualised workforces in Britain, and the University and College Union pensions strike last year showed there is already a mood for a fightback. Meanwhile, students are finding universities more concerned with getting them through the door than investing in quality education.

Socialist Students campaigns for free education at all levels, fully funded by the government. Jeremy Corbyn was right to put forward the abolition of tuition fees in his 2017 manifesto. We say he should also come out for the cancellation of all current student debt. And universities must be put under the democratic control of staff and students.

If the government is committed to reducing fees without funding the difference, then the trade unions and student activists will need to launch a campaign to defend education from further austerity, including demonstrations and strikes if necessary.

Such a stand would have the potential to begin the radical transformation of education we desperately need, and even start a movement that could push the Tories out of power.

Cash-strapped schools now 'fourth emergency service': strike to fight the cuts

Jamie Elliot, school teacher and National Education Union rep

Increasing numbers of schools are having to provide clothing, laundry facilities and food parcels to their students due to a decade of austerity leaving many vulnerable children in poverty.

This damning indictment of Tory Britain comes from a recent survey of headteachers carried out by the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL). School finances are already at breaking point, with ASCL conference warning of a £5.7 billion funding shortfall and further cuts to already-threadbare budgets.

The fact that schools now act as a 'fourth emergency service', at the same time as struggling to find the resources to educate our students, lays bare the cruelty of capitalist austerity and the desperate need for a socialist alternative.

Hungry

I have seen the impact of austerity first-hand at my academy, where I have been both a teacher and a pastoral leader. My school is in a highly deprived area of Bradford, and it is all too common to see students come into school hungry, wearing ripped and unwashed uniforms.

We provide a free breakfast to all students, and a free hot meal at lunch to those classed as 'disadvantaged'. I worry about our students during the school holidays - are they able to get a decent meal?

Bradford Labour's local cuts have also left council services in a desperate state. It is nearly impossible to get access to mental health support for our students, and I know of many who are going back to unstable and possibly dangerous households because the cuts-making council does not deem their situation 'serious' enough to get support.

This story is not unique to Bradford. With child poverty predicted to reach a historic high of 37% by 2022 according to the Resolution Foundation, this will become the new normal for the working class in Britain.

Strike action by school unions is essential if we want to reverse these cuts and win proper funding for our schools. The recent strike at Valentine Primary School in Southampton is an inspiration for teachers and students nationally.

But individual schools should not be left to fight alone. We need a national strategy, linked with trade union action against austerity in every sector. This could also force the general election we badly need.

And unions should demand that Labour councillors pass no-cuts budgets using reserves and borrowing, while mobilising workers and communities to fight for full funding from the government.

To secure a decent future for young people, we need to fight for the socialist transformation of society. Where wealth is no longer in the hands of the 1%, and workers and students can democratically plan resources to guarantee the wellbeing and education of young people, rather than profits for the super-rich.

Youth strikes show the way - mass action can oust Tories

Tom Baldwin, Socialist Party national committee

On 15 March, young people marched out of their schools and colleges and took to the streets for the second youth strike against climate change. The inspirational protests brought out tens of thousands of people across the country in a mass action repeated at over 2,000 sites around the world.

In Bristol, the strikers chanted "system change not climate change". The system change needed is socialist change. With just 100 companies responsible for over 70% of climate emissions, it is clear that big business is killing our planet. Capitalism's incessant drive for profit has been put ahead of even the future of life on earth.

Climate change is not the only threat to the future of the young protesters. Capitalism has left a wasteland of prospects. Low-paid, insecure jobs are becoming the norm, as is over-priced, privately rented housing. Those seeking a university education are being saddled with enormous debts.

The Tories' and Blairites' austerity programme has made this situation worse. They've deliberately picked the pockets of ordinary people, young and old, in order to give even more to their super-rich mates.

People are growing increasingly frustrated with the spectacle of parliament. Out-of-touch politicians are scraping over the details of Brexit while the main issues facing people's lives go unanswered.

Theresa May could be forced into seeking a delay to Brexit, underlining her complete lack of authority. However, this government by the rich and for the rich has little prospect of bringing forward anything significantly different. While they remain in office, a delay will only prolong the arguments without answering any questions.

That's why we need mass action to force the Tories out. The youth strike is a great example and an inspiration to follow. Strikes of workers are even more effective, as they hit the bosses' profits. We're strongest when we stand together.

A coordinated series of strikes and protests could rapidly finish the Tories off. Corbyn should be using his position to make the call for such action and mobilise working-class people to fight back.

And we must fight not just the Tories, but also to end the profits-at-all-costs capitalist system that they support. We need a socialist alternative, where the wealth of society is owned collectively by the working class which creates it. Only then can the future of our planet and the people living on it be properly prioritised, as part of a democratic, socialist plan of the economy.

Massive protests over catastrophic climate change

- Build the movement for the next walkout on 12 April
- Fight for a socialist alternative to capitalism

On 15 March, in 1,000 cities and 100 countries, millions went on strike and demonstrated against the huge threat to the environment and human populations posed by rapid climate change. These protests, against the failure of capitalist governments to agree meaningful environmental policies, were led by young people, in particular school students. This is the generation which will bear the brunt of catastrophic global warming due to greenhouse gas emissions from profit-driven capitalist industry, transport and agriculture.

The Socialist Party and youth groups Socialist Students and Young Socialists - along with our socialist counterparts internationally in the Committee for a Workers' International (see reports on socialistworld.net) played an important role in building the 15 March protests and will continue this effort in the next round of protests.

Below, the Socialist carries 15 March reports from around Britain, and Socialist Students national organiser Theo Sharieff presents a socialist strategy for developing the youth strike protest movement. (see also socialiststudents.org.uk)

Theo Sharieff, Socialist Students national organiser

Socialist Students is calling for the creation of school and college student unions to help students coordinate their next walkouts on 12 April and, importantly, to defend the right to protest. Hundreds of students signed up to Socialist Students for help with setting up such unions in the run up to 12 April.

Socialist Students also wants to take the movement forward by linking it in struggle with the working-class majority in society. Students pointed out on our open mic in London that it will overwhelmingly be working and middle-class people who pay the heaviest price if climate change continues unabated - through food and water shortages and climate-related poverty.

The super-rich - including last year the Kardashian-Wests in California - have the resources to protect their property, hiring private fire services to keep their mansions safe from wildfires. Working-class and young people are not so fortunate under similar circumstances.

That's why Socialist Students is calling for the trade unions to help organise and steward local protests on the next round of school strikes.

In London, well over 200 students left their details with Socialist Students to be put in touch with local trade unions and trade union councils for assistance with organising joint students' and workers' demonstrations against climate change in their local areas and towns.

Socialist Students is now setting out to officially establish local student unions to help organise students who want to build this movement, and will be looking to hold founding meetings of student unions over the coming weeks.

But we now must extend our movement by appealing to the trade unions, through new student unions or as Socialist Students, to weigh in on this battle.

We want to put central to this movement our demand that the Tory government is kicked out and replaced with a Corbyn-led government - a government which nationalises, under democratic workers' control and management, the big polluters, the energy companies, and the commanding heights of the economy as a matter of urgency, to introduce a socialist economic plan to halt and reverse climate change.

Brighton

Defying threats of school fines and detentions, a huge turnout of around 3,000 students and young people marched in Brighton against climate change - more than double the attendance of last month's demonstrations.

Many students recognised the need for system change, and our specific slogan - 'socialist change, not climate change' - was well received. They were also enthusiastic about our call to form school and college student unions to organise the fight back, especially with the example of the recent strikes of our sister organisation in the Spanish state (see pages 14-15).

Young people across the country are realising that the Tories and the current capitalist system provide no solutions to the pressing problems we face, and in fact are the problem! Some of the biggest chants were "Tories out" and "oh Jeremy Corbyn".

Glasgow

From across the west of Scotland the second #youthstrike4climate drew 1,800 people to George's Square in Glasgow.

Many of the demonstrators were primary or secondary school students, as well as those in third-level education. Young workers were also present, with Unite the Union, the RMT and Glasgow Unison representatives all in attendance.

The protest was lively and colourful with many banners. The joint Socialist Party and Socialist Students stall was busy all morning, with many young people signing our petitions demanding nationalisation of the energy industry and taking up other climate issues.

Socialist Students and Socialist Youth will be assisting school students organising for the next strike on 12 April. It is important to stress the potentially huge role that the trade unions could play in this developing environmental movement.

To start with, we suggest calling on the teachers' unions to assist in the organisation of demonstrations and strikes at their schools and fight against any attempt to victimise striking school students.

Oisín Duncan, Glasgow Socialist Students

London

Students and young people in London once again filled Parliament Square - this time much bigger and even more vibrant.

Throughout the day, students and young people marched back and forth to Trafalgar Square and Buckingham Palace. Holding their homemade placards as they marched, they called for immediate action to address climate change.

Trade unions, such as the RMT, were also present during the protest, giving support.

Socialist Students, aware of the importance of democratic debate to build this movement, set up an open mic to engage with young people about how we can go further. This proved to be very popular and a massive crowd formed around the 'red' sound system.

Although there was a wide spectrum of ideas, there was one argument that almost all agreed on: only mass action from below, linking up with trade unions and disrupting not only the traffic but the whole economy, has the potential to halt climate change.

Many agreed that profit-oriented big businesses would do nothing to halt climate change - and some students chanted "socialist change - not climate change".

More than 200 people signed up to Socialist Students to hear more from us. Many young people said they want to campaign in their schools and colleges to build for the next climate strike. We told them that we would be more than happy to provide materials and any other support they need.

Berkay Kartov

Birmingham

Around 1,000 young people gathered outside Birmingham Council House for the climate strike demonstration. Socialist Students provided a socialist approach to combating climate change.

The march itself was short and sweet, plenty of noise, chants, whistles and handcrafted signs, all with an air of cheerful resistance.

Many bystanders were enthused that young people were taking action and an older man who'd asked for a leaflet proudly told me that he was a lifelong socialist and expressed his solidarity to the school strikers.

Many marchers talked about how the reaction by their schools wasn't too positive and they'd been threatened with detention - but it was quickly pointed out, if my school is underwater, detentions aren't as feasible anymore!

More than 60 people signed-up for more information. School students bought copies of the Socialist with their lunch money and every single leaflet handed out, the day was a resounding success.

Corinthia Ward, Birmingham Socialist Party

Swansea

Around 200 young people braved the wet weather, taking to the streets to demand climate justice. In the main square, university and school students stepped up to our megaphone to share their thoughts.

Socialist Students had a strong, visible presence, and our placards were popular among the crowd. We marched through the city centre to the Guildhall behind a Young Socialists banner and led various chants which were enthusiastically picked up.

We also distributed leaflets promoting our meeting on 20 March to discuss socialist solutions to climate change.

At the Guildhall, the local climate strike movement demanded the council declare a climate emergency and disinvest from fossil fuels.

Ellen Rosier, Swansea Socialist Students

Liverpool

500 young people assembled outside St George's Hall. While, as before, there were calls not to 'politicise' the event, the baleful role of capitalism in causing climate change cannot and did not escape people's notice. Many of the young people carried homemade signs naming capitalism as the culprit of the world's pollution and carbon emissions.

Socialist Party members had a stall and distributed leaflets. Liverpool Socialist Students campaigned for the demonstration, as well as holding a meeting where some of the organisers of the protest spoke. Party members have also been involved in Wirral Extinction Rebellion meetings.

After listening to speakers the march set off making plenty of noise and grabbing the undivided attention of shoppers before holding a second rally at Derby Square.

Entering the square we were greeted by members of PCS civil service union, including assistant general secretary Chris Baugh, who were protesting in support of cleaning workers to coincide with the climate strike. Their message of solidarity was well received.

Among the speakers who addressed the demo in Derby Square was former Liverpool 47 socialist councillor Tony Mulhearn, who was loudly cheered and applauded.

With these combined interventions of Socialist Party members, Socialist Students and trade unionists, we sought to raise the need for the movement to link up with trade unions and the need for socialist change in order to fight climate change.

Jack Yarlett

Newcastle

Chants of "Hey, hey, ho, ho, climate change has got to go" and "when May tells us climate lies - we fight back and organise," echoed around Newcastle city centre.

School students marched from the Monument towards the civic centre, where they met students from Northumbria University. Then back to the Monument for speeches and chanting, followed by a march around the block, then more speeches and chanting at the Monument!

Our Socialist Party and Socialist Students open mic was greatly appreciated. Our message - that to end climate change, you need socialist change - gained an echo.

Some students said they faced sanctions from their school for joining the strike. We said they need to learn the lessons from the 2003 anti-war movement, where students also faced sanctions. Our suggestion that any school, college or university which threatens to punish students should have protests outside. This got a huge response.

Elaine Brunskill

Plymouth

Over 300 students, parents and activists gathered in Plymouth city centre, more than treble the size of the February climate strikes. The crowd was buzzing with energy and determination. After initially gathering outside the council offices the youth quickly turned the assembly into a marching demonstration.

The students were defiant when asked by council security to move off council property back onto the public walkway, responding with: "We are the public and this is our property"!

Shortly after moving off, the students stopped traffic in Plymouth city centre for a short time and then marched through the shopping mall, braving the mall security who quickly conceded defeat!

After once again stopping to assemble, a number of students and parents gave heartfelt speeches as to why they were protesting. Socialist Party organiser Ryan Aldred was met with cheers when he emphasised that the current system was unsustainable - with politicians and corporations needing to be held to account.

The demonstration was finally led to the office of Labour MP Luke Pollard who was greeted with boos when it was revealed that he had failed to attend a recent climate change debate in parliament.

The energy of the demonstration quickly dampened when addressed by Pollard, and many students voted with their feet and left. They were however, much more enthusiastic about the Socialist Party's idea of forming strike committees to prepare for the 12 April strikes.

Plymouth Socialist Party

Leeds

Outside Leeds Town Hall, Victoria Square was packed with around 1,500 protesters, where students of all ages walked out of their classrooms, carrying signs and placards, to make their voices heard.

Spirits were high, and the crowd was determined. Both the Socialist Party and Socialist Students had a good showing, with a stall, leaflets and badges.

Passers-by were stopped by the chanting of the assembly and took pictures of the placards. Some took on a humorous tone, "Spill tea not oil", "Clean up planet Earth, it's not Uranus"! Others were more serious: "System change not climate change", and "There is no Planet B".

Around midday the assembly marched through Leeds, chanting and cheering, while onlookers voiced their support. We marched behind our banner and lead the chants.

Kai Trinder and Lilli Green, Leeds Trinity Socialist Students

Notts and Derbyshire

300 hundred school and college students walked out of classes throughout Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire, braving heavy winds to march from Trinity Square through Nottingham to outside the city council offices in Market Square.

A sixth-former from Derby, who described himself as a socialist, spoke of how "we need a complete change in how the economy works".

The loose youth strike movement, ignited on 15 February, has produced a manifesto which includes some good points, such as lowering the voting age to 16.

However, it doesn't link real action on the environment to the need of all sections of the working class to mobilise together and sweep aside the large corporations, which continue to squander resources and pollute, and the governments which represent them.

We proposed that every school and college set up Young Socialist groups as part of their climate meetings - which could coordinate nationally, ultimately internationally and give greater democratic accountability.

Additionally, we demand the trade union council call a lunchtime walkout on 12 April that could connect the labour movement with a new generation eager to fight.

Nathan Sharpe

Leicester

Over 100 students protested at the Clock Tower, then marched to Jubilee Square. When we got there a student steward shouted at me and told me off for handing out leaflets for Leicester Young Socialists as they said the event wasn't meant to be political.

But everyone took our leaflet and they agreed with our slogan 'Socialist Change Not Climate Change'. Some of them were interested in coming to our next meeting

Climate change is a political issue. Capitalism always prioritises profit over the planet. This is why the only solution to global warming is a socialist fightback.

Bethany Morgan-Smith

Stoke

More than 200 protested. Most were young and included school students. Keele and Staffs University students along with workers from Unite, PCS, National Education Union, and other unions also marched.

Some local schools reportedly had assemblies on climate change and the youth strike with teachers endorsing students to attend the protest.

Socialist Party and Socialist Students members also helped build the protest with clear socialist demands.

Our leaflets also had suggestions on how to make April's demonstrations even bigger, including how to link up with the trade unions.

Andy Bentley

Victory for Birmingham bin workers

Meeting discusses fight to win other disputes and save services in the city

Birmingham Socialist Party

The long-running Birmingham bins dispute, concerning "secret payments" and the "blacklisting" of workers, has ended after Birmingham city council today approved the agreement on 15 March that has ended the dispute.

The bin workers accepted a pay deal of £3,500 to each member over blacklisting payments made to non-strikers in the 2017 dispute.

They reported on their victory at the Birmingham National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) rally 'Defend workers from council attacks' on 12 March where they were also joined by striking home carers in the city.

In all, 100 trade unionists and activists met to listen and discuss current local disputes as well as put forward demands, tactics and ideas on how to build a trade union movement against cuts to jobs, terms and conditions as well as saving public services.

The floor heard inspirational fighting speeches from Unite union convenor and bin striker Dean Smith, Unison local government union senior shop steward and home care striker Mandy Buckley, Unite assistant general secretary Howard Beckett and NSSN chair Rob Williams, to name a few.

Home carers dispute

While the bin workers have won, Birmingham's Labour council has yet to settle the 18-month-old home carers dispute over changes to working hours.

Activists at the meeting highlighted how the home care strike is relatively hidden compared to the very public bin strike. They explained it shows the council's complete lack of regard for a service which assists vulnerable people.

Suggestions were made that, in order to ensure the home care strike is victorious, Unison and Unite need to lead an all-out council strike against the deplorable Labour council attacks - and to defend jobs and public services.

If the home carers get more muscle on their side and link their struggle with others this will give them a much better chance at saving their jobs completely, without any compromises with the bosses.

Additionally, putting forward demands on councillors to set a no-cuts budget and to only take an average worker's wage will be steps forward to a genuine council fightback against the Tory austerity agenda.

Council cuts

Furthermore, Birmingham Council has voted to cut another 1,000-plus jobs! Cuts which could potentially be made to the bin and home care services and elsewhere.

What was agreed by the meeting is that, while the bin workers have won their battle and the home carers are still in theirs, Birmingham Council is set on waging a war on its workers and residents - making them face the brutal reality of the effects of these cuts.

With people literally dying on Birmingham's streets, council workers and their trade unions need to go on the offensive now more than ever. Bin and home care workers can lead the way forward with this fight and inspire their co-workers within the council to join them on the picket line!

This regional NSSN meeting provided the ideas and tools to develop further coordination between the unions and workers to defend their jobs - and hopefully can be the first meeting of many in bringing about action to save Birmingham services!

PCS civil servants' union: Vote Yes to strike for better pay

Marion Lloyd, PCS national executive committee (personal capacity)

125,000 PCS union members across the civil service and related public bodies are being asked to vote Yes in the national ballot on pay. The ballot, which began on 18 March, will conclude on 29 April.

It is vital that the 50% turnout threshold is crossed to enable members to pressure government into scrapping the 1% cap which has caused pay misery and poverty for thousands of hard-working public sector workers.

Pay demands include an immediate rise of 10% (with a £2,400 underpin) and a return to national bargaining for pay and employment conditions.

Currently, there are hundreds of separate pay systems across the civil service which cause major problems for staff - notwithstanding the absolute inefficiency of hundreds of pay talks when one would do.

Chris Baugh

PCS Left Unity candidate for assistant general secretary, Chris Baugh, says: "It is vital that members support our pay claim with a massive Yes vote.

"It is time we ended the hardship and misery caused by current and previous governments on their employees. The government should be leading the way on pay, not using its own workforce as political scapegoats."

Last year, 58,000 members voted to take strike action if the government tried yet again to impose a below-inflation pay cap.

Despite this overwhelming support, we were prevented from taking action by the Tories' anti-union laws that require a turnout of more than 50%. Our ballot had secured a 42% turnout.

The chancellor's spring statement gave no grounds for believing that pay restrictions will be removed. So again this year we are faced with the same question. Are we prepared to accept yet another year of pay cap

misery? Our answer must be no. MPs have just voted themselves an over £2,000 pay rise. Why them but not us?

This year we need not only a massive Yes vote for action. We need to clear the 50% turnout threshold. The union has put huge effort into preparations for the ballot.

This is vital. But turning all this activity into votes will be down to the lay reps in the workplace. I believe we can and will deliver the votes we need.

After a decade of austerity and pay caps, household budgets are already stretched to breaking point. Families will be put under further stress, as the Guardian reports: "A raft of price hikes over the coming weeks that in some cases will add hundreds of pounds to gas, electricity, phone, broad band, council tax and water bills."

The campaign to re-elect Chris Baugh as PCS assistant general secretary and the Democracy Alliance national executive committee goes hand in hand with the campaign for a Yes vote in the strike ballot.

Success in both ballots will send a powerful message to this weak and divided Tory government.

Midlands machine bearing makers launch all-out strike

Jon Dale, Mansfield Socialist Party

"There's only so much meat on the bone. NSK has taken so much off us it's now passed the bone and is into the marrow!"

Pickets outside the Newark factory on 15 March, which makes super-precision machine bearings, members of Unite the Union, told me why they are on all-out strike.

Workers are determined to get back some work/life balance: "People have been off with stress and illnesses. If they can't get a proper rest the immune system hits rock bottom."

In 2016, management foisted new shift patterns onto the G2 department: "We can work up to 200 extra hours a year, but not get paid until 13 months later. A maximum of 74 hours can be banked, but when nearly at 74 we're sent home mid-week - partners are at work and children at school. We then have to work the weekend."

Instead of voluntary overtime, banked hours became compulsory - with disciplinary threats for not working weekends.

Tippling point came last Christmas. Managers broke usual practice and workers got ten days' notice they were expected to work the weekend before 24 December.

Everyone stuck together and no-one went to work. Disciplinary letters were sent out seven weeks later.

Changes to shift times mean Monday to Thursday afternoon shifts finishing at 2am. Some workers, women and men, then walk home across town. Saturday and Sunday shifts have been split up so management gain an extra four hours' work on Friday nights, with the afternoon shift not finishing until 11.40pm.

Unite members in the G1 section wanted to be part of this dispute. Although on different shift patterns they see the threat. A company making huge profits with no consideration for its workers won't treat other sections any better in the future if it gets away with this.

- Send solidarity messages to andy.shaw@unitetheunion.org
-

Hackney school bus workers walk out

Unite the Union members in passenger services at Hackney Council walked out on 19 March in their fight for a payment in recognition of the fact that they undertake split shifts. The 33 members, who drive and assist the children to and from school on a daily basis, will stage further 24-hour strikes on 26 March and then on 2 and 4 April. The dispute centres on a £50-a-week claim for compensation for the split shifts, backdated to July last year when the issue was first raised.

Coxford by-election

Socialist Party's Sue Atkins wins big support for anti-cuts, socialist policies

Nick Chaffey, Southampton Socialist Party

Increased council tax bills, along with another round of cuts, fuelled voters' anger in the Coxford ward council by-election in Southampton on 14 March.

Socialist Party candidate Sue Atkins, standing as Socialist Alternative, won an excellent 368 votes and 14% of the vote. The short six-week campaign followed the retirement of anti-cuts councillor Keith Morrell.

It is disappointing that we weren't able to hold Keith's seat. But the campaign has ensured a strong basis of support for clear anti-cuts, socialist policies - with May's local elections looming - which will continue to pressure the new Labour councillor for Coxford to fight cuts.

Schools' funding campaign

It has been a turbulent few weeks locally as yet another round of cutbacks, implemented by Labour's right-wing Blairites, had its effect. Election Day campaigning began on the picket lines at Valentine Primary school, where National Education Union (NEU) members were striking to stop school cuts.

After a 100% vote in favour of strike action, 100% of NEU members stood on the picket lines with parents and children. Socialist Party candidate Sue Atkins, an active member of the Southampton 'Fair Funding for All Schools' campaign, and Socialist Students members from the university were also out in force. The NEU called on Southampton Labour council to give schools financial support to avert further cuts.

But the right-wing Blairite councillors are playing a rotten role. At first Councillor Paffey, the chair for education, refused to meet with the union. But under pressure from the strike and its support, he then agreed to meet for talks which rapidly broke down. NEU members are now preparing for further strike action next month.

It came as no surprise to us that the only councillor prepared to give full backing to Valentine Primary was Coxford's anti-cuts councillor Tammy Thomas.

The council leader also failed to respond to the NEU's very moderate request to allow schools to hang banners outside to highlight the cuts each school in the city is facing.

Television and radio coverage of the strike carried on over the weekend, featuring in the Sunday BBC Politics Show.

Elsewhere, the threatened closure of care homes in the city led to a campaign among public sector union Unison and Unite the Union care workers to oppose the cuts. While the campaign forced the council to retreat and keep one home open, another - Glen Lee - has been targeted for closure.

These two battles show how the anger at austerity can push struggles to develop and a campaign to grow locally and nationally to fight council cuts. It shows the potential that exists.

No-cuts budget needed

If Corbyn were to give a lead, mobilise his supporters to select fighting anti-cuts candidates in May, call on Labour councils to use reserves and borrowing powers to set no-cuts budgets, and unite with council unions to mount a decisive battle to end council cuts, it would transform the political landscape in his favour.

Across Coxford, we met hundreds of angry residents and their families. We had many conversations outlining our proposals, to build a campaign to restore the £136 million government funding stolen since 2010, which could begin to repair the damage.

As the election approached, more and more people came over to discuss with us at our campaign stalls, enthused by our socialist policies, with many describing themselves as socialists too.

One of our active supporters was a fourteen-year-old school student, a Corbyn supporter. He soon became a regular presence on our stalls and came out canvassing. He attends the local secondary school, Oasis Academy, where the effects of school cuts have been felt.

Active support

In a short few weeks, we got Sue Atkins' name into the minds of hundreds of voters as someone who had backed anti-cuts councillors Keith, Don and Tammy and was prepared to continue that fight. We held two public meetings to promote the campaign, which will now continue in the lead up to the May elections.

None of the other candidates put forward any policies to address the issue of austerity. From the impact of Universal Credit, the Bedroom Tax, and the housing crisis, to social care cuts, the lack of youth facilities, problems around parking and rubbish collection, it is clear people are looking for a way out of this crisis.

Everyone who helped canvass in Coxford will have felt the impact Keith, Don and Tammy have made with their stand to oppose cuts. Their refusal to vote for cuts on the council, their victorious campaign with the community and council unions to save Oaklands Pool, is rooted in the memory of Coxford.

We fought hard to keep that memory alive and will continue that fight in Coxford and across Southampton to offer voters an alternative to austerity in every seat in the May elections.

The election is over, the cuts continue and so does our campaign. We were the only ones out in Coxford on the Saturday following the election building support for the schools campaign and strike at Valentine school.

- Please send messages of support and solidarity to the strikers at soto.fffas@gmail.com

Union fightback key to movement against racism and austerity

Hugo Pierre, Socialist Party black and Asian group

The annual anti-racism demonstration marched through central London on 16 March. The demonstration is called to mark the United Nations day against racism.

This year the march was a day after the horrific attack in Christchurch, New Zealand, where 50 Muslim worshippers were murdered by a far-right extremist inside two mosques in the city. The demonstration in part was an act of solidarity with those victims and their families. But it did not draw in the huge numbers who could be mobilised to march.

This is because, while many of the invited speakers drew reference to the rise in Islamophobia and hate crime to condemn this attack and there was a widespread call to stand firm against the rise of support for far-right populist politicians, how the potential power of the organised working class in the trade unions could defeat racism was not posed.

Such a movement, linking workers up with energy of the young people who have taken to the streets in recent weeks, must be built around demands and slogans that unite working-class people in a fight for a decent life for all.

The threat of the growth of the far right is a warning to everyone, not just to black or other minority populations, but to the organised working class as a whole. If opposition is not mobilised, then horrific attacks like Christchurch could become more commonplace.

The role of the trade unions in organising this opposition is key. However, at the moment, they appear to have delegated this task to Stand Up To Racism, the main organiser of the 16 March event.

London United has been formed by unions to mobilise for anti-racist actions. Some unions did have blocks on the march - the Communications Workers' Union and civil service union PCS - while several branches of public sector union Unison brought banners.

General calls for unity and challenging the far right will not be enough to build a movement to defeat the far right and racism. None of the speakers said why this is happening or how to defeat it.

Some Labour politicians, who are currently administering cuts, spoke. The cuts only contribute to the difficulty in building unity to fight racism.

The conditions of economic crisis, austerity and the lack of trust in the political establishment have prepared the grounds where far-right ideas could get an echo.

A Socialist Party motion has led to general union Unite and the Trade Union Congress agreeing to a 'jobs, homes and services' campaign.

The urgent task for the trade unions is to combine a vigorous campaign against all the worsening conditions workers face with the fight against the far right. This can unite all sections of the working class against racism and austerity.

"Thatcherism on a continental scale" - trade unionists debate the EU

An 'EU - Should We Stay or Should We Go?' debate was organised by Nottingham and Mansfield trade union council. Over 70 people attended the 26 February meeting.

Socialist Party member and former Labour MP Dave Nellist introduced the socialist Leave case, a Brexit in the interests of the working class. He said that the referendum result was a revolt against decades of suffering by working-class people and the effects of the 2007-2008 economic crash.

He explained that transport union RMT, Northern Ireland public sector union Nipsa and the Trade Union and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) had presented a socialist, pro-worker, internationalist Leave position during the 2016 referendum. Unfortunately this was drowned out by pro-austerity, capitalist and racist Remain and Leave campaigns.

The European Union is Thatcherism on a continental scale.

It is run by 28 heads of government. 18 or 19 are Tories or worse. And the 28 commissioners are appointed by them.

The single market has pursued the fragmentation of public services and privatisation. The EU defines healthcare as an 'economic activity', so it can be privatised.

EU rules present barriers to nationalisation. Although a determined socialist government and workers' movement could overcome these obstacles, they could become an unnecessary distraction.

Factories are relocated around Europe pursuing lower wage bills for workers. And it would pose serious hurdles to Jeremy Corbyn's 2017 anti-austerity manifesto.

This is why the capitalist class do not want to leave the EU. May's deal leaves the UK signed up to these anti-worker agreements and is in many ways a Brexit-in-name-only.

Dave Nellist said the priority for socialists was to fight for a general election. The Tory party is splintering. We need Corbyn and the unions to organise demonstrations and strikes to bring down the government.

But these proposals to fight for a general election were missing when Ed Maltby, from Another Europe is Possible, introduced the argument to Remain in the EU. He argued that we don't get a showdown with the EU by leaving.

Socialist Party members made the point that whether working-class people voted Leave or Remain, they are suffering exactly the same under austerity and the Tories' 'hostile environment'. They can be united by a movement with socialist policies - taking the rich resources in society and using them in the interests of working people.

Clare Wilkins, Nottingham Socialist Party

Socialist Party Northern conference: Workers are sick of cuts and have the power to fight back

Brent Kennedy, Carlisle Socialist Party

The stand-out contributions at the Socialist Party Northern regional conference came from trade union activists reporting their recent experiences in their workplaces. This made both the discussions - British economic and political perspectives and the one on building the Socialist Party - very real and practical.

A Tyneside social care worker graphically showed the destructive effects of cuts on the morale of her colleagues. She's frustrated at not being allowed to give the service which vulnerable people need.

This was echoed by a member of public sector union Unison about his hospital in Teesside. The daily experience of a disabled member from Newcastle meant they felt the same.

Socialist Party members from workplaces on Gateshead's Team Valley industrial estate reported how they had won some small, but significant, victories for their workmates. One workforce had stopped the arbitrary imposition of drug and alcohol rules and rewrote them in the interests of the workers as a whole.

Another had gone into negotiations armed with the figures showing exactly how much the directors take out of the factory. Just letting the bosses pointedly know that general union Unite now has a strike fund of £32 million and will pay out £50 a day to members on strike was enough to get what the workers wanted, without a strike.

Meanwhile, Socialist Party members in North Shields are waging a neighbourhood battle to keep a vital footbridge link. Blairite councillors are prepared to get rid of it as part of a land grab by private developers. Therefore, Socialist Party members will be standing as Socialist Alternative council candidates in May's local elections.

The Socialist Party has actively backed the transport union RMT strike to keep the guards on trains. And now we're supporting the student strikes and protests against climate change.

The £300 collection for the fighting fund reflected our excellent target-busting fundraising in every quarter over the last year.

Stop cuts to women's services in Leicester

Women's Lives Matter meeting

23 people attended Leicester Socialist Party's public meeting on 'Women's Lives Matter' on 16 March.

Socialist Party member Heather Rawling spoke about the impact of austerity on women's services and the double oppression that working-class women face under capitalism. Steve Score, Leicester mayoral candidate for the Socialist Party, raised how we can fight back against cuts, and the importance of councils setting no-cuts budgets.

Over a dozen people spoke in the discussion. A woman who works at a women's refuge gave extra context on how cuts affect services. The council is doing nothing to support them, so different services in Leicester have had to group together to campaign for the vital funds they need.

Others explained the way Universal Credit is making it even harder for women to leave abusive partners and the even greater difficulty immigrants find accessing vital services.

People in the meeting were definitely angry about the state of services. There was also a clear desire to fight to win back the vital funds for women's and other services that have been cut in Leicester. And to fight for the socialist transformation of our economy to ensure these services will always be available when needed in the future.

Jade Ritchie, Leicester East Socialist Party

International Women's Day action

Two women a week are killed by a current or ex-partner, according to Women's Aid. And on an average day 94 women and 90 children are turned away from refuges because there isn't room.

Leicester Socialist Party marked International Women's Day with a campaigning stall to defend domestic violence services. We handed out leaflets for our public meeting (see above) and had a petition calling on Labour shadow chancellor John McDonnell to pledge that an incoming Corbyn government will replenish any reserves used to avoid cutting these services.

Women who had been victims of domestic violence and employees of women's services, who see first-hand the devastating effect of cuts, stopped to sign.

One said: "I was in an abusive relationship for seven years. When I finally got help, I was told that me and my kids could go into a refuge but that we'd have to move away from Leicester. How is that fair? Why should we be the ones who have to move?"

We say councils have a choice. They don't have to carry out vicious cuts to vital women's services, or in fact to any services at all. Needs-based, legal, no-cuts budgets can be set using reserves and borrowing powers, while fighting to win the funding back.

This May, Leicester Socialist Party will be standing candidates in the local elections who will fight all cuts.

Help build the workers' press: send May Day greetings to the Socialist!

- 20% discount deadline: 29 March

James Ivens, Socialist May Day greetings organiser

The early-bird deadline for May Day greetings is fast approaching! We want full payment for as many greetings as possible by 5pm on Friday 29 March, the cut-off for the 20% advance discount.

Every year, groups of workers, trade unionists and community campaigners send paid greetings to the Socialist on International Workers' Day. These vital expressions of working-class solidarity help spread socialist ideas and fund the Socialist newspaper.

Make sure you're visiting workplaces and picket lines with our May Day sign-up sheet to collect contributions towards a greeting. Send motions for a greeting to trade union bodies now. And don't forget the student societies and community campaigns!

The final deadline for May Day greeting pledges is 11 April. Getting greetings agreed can take time, so don't miss out - get those greetings in now!

- For more information, and to pay and send greetings, visit socialistparty.org.uk/mayday, call 020 8988 8781, or email jamesivens@socialistparty.org.uk
-

Spanish state: Historic 8 March action

Izquierda Revolucionaria (CWI in Spanish State) and 'Libres y Combativas'

We've made history again! Millions were on the streets against sexist violence and capitalist oppression.

[Click here to see the photo gallery](#)

[Click here to watch the videos](#)

It seemed difficult to surpass the scale of action achieved last 8th of March, International Women's Day.

But we have done it again! Millions of working class women have taken another firm step forward, supported by hundreds of thousands of our colleagues, and we've organised another day of strike that will undoubtedly be written in the history of the social and political struggles of the Spanish State in capital letters.

In the morning, the mobilisations organised by 'Sindicato de Estudiantes' (Students' Union) and 'Libres y Combativas' (Free and Combative) were overwhelming: 2.5 million students on strike, and more than 400,000 in the dozens of demonstrations that we organised around the whole state.

In the afternoon, in the unitary feminist mobilisations, participation went way over the most optimistic forecasts: close to 5 million workers, with hundreds of thousands of supporters at our side, provoked a tsunami that has unleashed a deep concern in the ruling class.

There were many signs that preceded the explosion we have experienced, beginning with the reality of oppression, exploitation and violence against working-class women that has not been solved despite the "feminist" rhetoric of the PSOE government, which has become a real rage against patriarchal justice and the declarations and provocations of the reactionary and Francoist political block - the Popular Party (PP), Ciudadanos (Cs) and Vox.

The social pressure has been of such magnitude that the leaders of the workers' unions - CCOO and UGT - have not been able to enforce the policy of social peace that they have been practising in these past years.

The class struggle and the massive movement of working-class women for their rights forced them to extend their call for a two-hour strike to 24 hours in different sectors, as other workers' unions had already done (CGT, Cobas, CNT, CIG, LAB, ELA...).

From early morning on 8 March, the media had no choice but to highlight the swelling response of the labour strike in which nearly seven million workers participated.

Youth on the front line of battle

The role of the youth on this day became crucial again, as was obvious in the massive student mobilisations that filled streets and squares at 12am throughout the whole Spanish State.

More than two and a half million people emptied the classrooms in support of the 24 hour general strike organised by the Students Union and Free and Combative. More than 400,000 young people filled the demonstrations in the morning!

In Barcelona more than 130,000 students began our march in Plaça Universitat to fill the city centre and more than 6,000 demonstrated in Tarragona.

In Madrid more than 120,000 students took to the Puerta del Sol and blocked the Gran Vía to the Ministry of Justice.

In Bilbao, Gasteis, Donosti and Iruña -in the Basque Country- the mobilisation was huge - tens and tens of thousands, as in Valencia, where 30,000 young people filled the main arteries of the city.

The student demonstrations flooded all corners: tens of thousands in Seville, Malaga, Cádiz, Córdoba, Granada, Almería...; in Vigo and in Ferrol, with massive marches of thousands of young people.

In Oviedo, Gijón and other towns in Asturias there were more than 7,000. Thousands and thousands in Saragosa, Illes Balears, more than 3,000 in Guadalajara, thousands more in Castilla-La Mancha and the same trend in Salamanca and the rest of the cities of Castilla León, in Extremadura, Murcia and in dozens of other cities.

The young students, together with our comrades, merged with millions of workers in this massive mobilisation against sexist violence, patriarchal justice and capitalist oppression.

In all the demonstrations, the slogans were loud and clear: 'Enough of sexist justice!', 'We want to be alive, free and combative!', 'The 'Wolf Pack' is the system!' or 'Long live working class women's struggle!'.

The demonstrations organised by the Sindicato de Estudiantes and Libres y Combativas were so massive, that the bourgeois newspaper El País had the headline on its main article of the morning: "Students lead the March 8th women's protest in the streets".

A human tide in the afternoon demonstrations

The mobilisation of the youth in the morning was only the prelude to what would be the unitary feminist demonstrations held in the afternoon.

And indeed, from the early afternoon, buses, subways, trains and streets of all neighborhoods in dozens of cities were all purple, filled with posters and home-made banners, painted faces, a desire to fight and show strength and determination.

More than five million working class women and young people, along with comrades in the struggle, packed every corner of the Spanish State in the afternoon.

The images speak for themselves. In Madrid, more than a million took to the streets; the same in Barcelona.

Hundreds of thousands in Valencia, Bilbao, Seville, Granada, Malaga, Gasteis, A Coruña, Gijon, Valladolid and in dozens of cities... A human tide filled the demonstrations that was so massive that it was not even possible to walk.

This historic day of struggle has also made clear who the real protagonists of this struggle are. We are the women and girls of the working class who have filled the streets and made the strike a success.

And we are the ones who suffer in a continuous way the oppression of this system, precariousness, low wages, mass unemployment and evictions.

Poor women are the victims of the most extreme forms of sexist violence including prostitution, and the other forms of commodification of our own bodies like surrogate pregnancy.

And it is mostly women and young girls from working families who are killed, raped and mistreated, and whom class and patriarchal justice humiliates with their despicably lenient sentences.

Revolutionary, anticapitalist and class feminism

The class composition of the movement once again made the mobilisations stand out, but to an even greater extent than last 8th March.

Once again it was evident what is really the beating at the heart of this uprising. As explained by Libres y Combativas, the Sindicato de Estudiantes and Izquierda Revolucionaria repeatedly, in this great battle for our liberation, not all women are our allies.

Neither Inés Arrimadas from Ciudadanos nor her "liberal feminism" (advocating legalising the most disgusting forms of exploitation and sexist violence against women), nor the female PP deputies, represent us.

It's quite the opposite. They, along with Albert Rivera (Cs) or Pablo Casado (PP), are responsible for the cuts and austerity that hit us, and have not had any qualms about allying themselves with an ultra-rightist formation like Vox.

They share the same Francoist DNA, and they are declared enemies of women who suffer capitalist oppression! The same thing we say about Ana Patricia Botín, that banker who now joins in on feminism but amasses an obscene fortune as a result of the exploitation of both male and female workers.

They are defenders of the capitalist system, of their patriarchal and class justice, and responsible for our oppression as much as their male partners are.

The feminism that we defend has nothing to do with wearing a purple bow on 8th March. The current government of PSOE, which calls itself the most feminist one in history, in practice, has done nothing to end the state of things that has led millions of women to start this rebellion.

They have looked the other way over despicable sentences of patriarchal justice like the 'Wolf Pack' one, they have maintained the social cuts, the labour reform and the wage gap and have bowed before the Catholic church, guaranteeing its privileged position in the education system from which they spread their sexist and homophobic messages.

We know that only putting forward a revolutionary and anti-capitalist feminism, countering the great economic powers and institutions that sustain this system, can we end our oppression.

Clamour against the reactionary block of PP, Cs and Vox. NO PASARÁN!

That's why on 8th March we pointed out very clearly the people responsible for our oppression. We, the women and also the men who blocked the streets across the Spanish State, are very clear about one thing:- this struggle is not only a matter of gender; it is also a matter of class.

That's why the rich - female and male - are allied against us and plan to attack the rights of women and of the working class and youth as a whole, with the clear objective of continuing to enrich themselves at the cost of our exploitation and suffering.

If there was any message that came across in a special way on the 8M mobilisation it was the one we sent to the PP, Cs and Vox. We are very aware of the threat that these elements pose and their aim to return us to the past and end our most basic rights.

That's why this 8th March has been the best possible answer we could give them: a deafening scream against their Francoist offensive, an example of how to fight and defeat the right and the far right. That is by organising and mobilising in the streets.

This year's mobilisation for International Women's Day reflects not only our enormous strength; it is also a thermometer of the process of radicalisation and turning to the left that is deepening among millions of workers and youth.

This massive form of uprising, which is a historic milestone in the class struggle of the Spanish state and internationally, is also a decisive step to defeat the reactionary bloc of the PP, Cs and Vox in the general election on April 28th.

But it's not just about voting; it's about transforming society, ending the way the system works, achieving genuine liberation and equality, something that we can only achieve with socialism.

From Libres y Combativas, Izquierda Revolucionaria and Sindicato de Estudiantes we call on all students and all workers to continue the battle for our present and our future.

What we did on 8th March was impressive but the fight must continue 365 days a year. That is why we must build a feminism that is separate from the shows of the system, that they cannot assimilate or domesticate: a revolutionary, anticapitalist and class feminism. We call on students and workers to build it with us and join Libres y Combativas!

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 13 March 2019 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

Exhibition: Don McCullin - a life in pictures

Paul Heron

Being a legal aid lawyer, you are subjected to audits by all kinds of people. As it is, working a weekend allows you a day off mid-week and I took the opportunity to pop down to Tate Britain in south London. The reason for the trip was to see the retrospective on the photographer Don McCullin. It did not disappoint.

Don McCullin was born in 1935 into a poor working-class family in north London. He was forced to leave school at 15 in order to take a job to help the extended family. His father had died a few years earlier. He completed his national service as a photographer's assistant in the Royal Air Force.

However, his fortunes were to change when he visited the Observer newspaper with a picture of a gang called the 'Gov'nors'. They were lads he knew - he had gone to school with them, and he had asked them to pose for a photograph that was snapped up as that week the gang was allegedly involved in a murder.

Fortune had clearly favoured Don McCullin, but there is no doubt that fortune was seized by him - and he was then commissioned by the Observer to provide more pictures for the news bureau. Following that feature, he then travelled to Berlin to cover the beginning of the construction of the wall that secured him a long-term contract with the paper.

His commissions then took him around the world. It is that breadth and international scope that this retrospective covers. That good fortune marks the beginning as a war photographer and someone who is thrown into covering other human disasters.

From the mid-1960s to the early 1980s McCullin worked for the Sunday Times magazine when it was at the cutting edge of investigative journalism. During this period he covered Northern Ireland, the conflict in Cyprus and the war in Biafra, west Africa. Indeed one of the most haunting pictures is of an emaciated albino boy - when you see it, you'll remember it, and it will break your heart. Other conflicts covered include Lebanon - he was present when the Christian Phalange massacred innocent Palestinian women and children at the Sabra and Shatila refugee camp.

The retrospective has a series of thought provoking and impactful black and white prints from the US war in Vietnam, and its satellite conflict in Cambodia. The sight of a young father cradling his injured daughter is a powerful riposte to the warmongers of today and of yesteryear.

In 1981 Murdoch took over the Sunday Times and his impact was felt. The respected investigative editor Harold Evans resigned and his replacement Andrew Neil soon found an enemy in McCullin who questioned his integrity to independent investigative journalism - the type that McCullin was committed to. Soon after he resigned going onto work with other magazines and newspapers. He became a key member of the Magnum photo agency.

When commenting on his style and his photography, Don McCullin said: "Photography for me is not looking, it's feeling. If you can't feel what you're looking at then you're never going to get others to feel anything when they look at your pictures."

There is no doubt that his poor working-class background had provided Don McCullin with not only a sense of social justice, but also a real empathy with the subjects of his photographs. The walls are full of real sympathetic prose that supplement the humanity of his work. Well worth a visit.

- The exhibition at the Tate Britain, south London, runs until 6 May 2019 - see tate.org.uk

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.

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.

Ineos taking us for a ride

It's expected that professional road cycling Team Sky (the squad of 2018 Tour de France winner Geraint Thomas) will have a new sponsor in 2020 - the chemical conglomerate, Ineos. This is the equivalent of swapping Lucifer for Satan - anti-trade unionism billionaire Rupert Murdoch for anti-trade unionism billionaire James Ratcliffe.

Of course, all big business sponsors of professional sport are odious. But new sponsor Ratcliffe is particularly so, not simply because, like Murdoch, he's a notorious tax-dodger (saving £4 billion a year by clearing off to Monaco) but, again like Murdoch (who sacked hundreds of unionised printworkers at News International in 1986), as head of Ineos, Ratcliffe reportedly victimised trade unionists during a bitter industrial dispute at Grangemouth oil refinery, Scotland, in 2013.

Stevie Deans, Unite the Union convener at Grangemouth, was witch-hunted out of his job by Ineos after Labour's Blairite leader Ed Miliband accused Deans, chair of Falkirk Labour Party, of involvement in rigging the Labour Party's candidate selection procedure prior to a parliamentary by-election in the constituency.

Labour even called in the police to investigate. No rigging was found, but Ineos allegedly used the media furore to suspend Deans and to investigate whether his activities were 'in line with his role as an employee and a convener'.

Unfortunately Unite's leadership retreated by calling off a planned strike to reinstate Deans. Unite's 'concession bargaining' tactics cost unite members their final salary pension scheme, the loss of bonuses, a three-year pay freeze and no-strike deal,

I'll be cheering on Geraint Thomas to retain his Tour de France crown this year but jeering his sponsor.

Simon Carter, East London

Firefighters' union solidarity

A local member of the Fire Brigades Union attended our Socialist Party meeting recently after we sent a message of support to them.

The support is because Hereford and Worcester Fire Authority want to change shift patterns, leading to insufficient numbers of firefighters overnight and to crews potentially not having the right mix of skills to attend incidents.

There would also be reduced night cover with the time taken to get to incidents increased in a largely rural county. The firefighters in our county attend incidents on the river Severn and others on a regular basis, but the changes would mean fewer staff qualified for this work. The update from the Fire Brigades Union member was very helpful to help us understand the real situation firefighters face.

Pete McNally, Worcester

Alice Hawkins

I was interested to read the article on Alice Wheeldon in issue 1033 of the Socialist (see 'History: Alice Wheeldon - an anti-war socialist persecuted by the state' at socialistparty.org.uk).

In Leicester, there has been a year-long celebration of another Alice - Alice Hawkins.

Both Alices were working class, both were members of the Independent Labour Party and both were suffragettes in the Women's Social and Political Union.

But unlike the Derby Alice, Leicester's Alice broke ranks and joined with the Liberal government and its allies in supporting World War One.

She publicly called her Independent Labour Party comrades cowards for following party policy.

She supported the Women's Social and Political Union middle-class line that everything else could wait until women had got the vote.

It did not seem important to her that she was consigning thousands of working-class people to their deaths in the cause.

Hawkins is seen as a suffragette heroine and her contribution as a working-class woman shouldn't be forgotten, but I find her support of World War One a stain on that memory.

Tony Church, Leicester

Did your Labour MEP back Venezuela coup?

The European Union is an undemocratic elite club that cares not a jot for democracy or for the human rights of the global working class. This much was made abundantly clear on 31 January 2019, when members of the European Parliament overwhelmingly backed a motion that urged the EU to accept the Venezuelan right-wing opposition leader, Juan Guaidó as "the only legitimate interim president of the country until new free, transparent and credible presidential elections can be called in order to restore democracy."

Socialists should be forthright in opposing this attempted coup, but must remain critical of Nicolás Maduro, the incumbent leader of Venezuela. This critical position is maintained by the Socialist Party but unfortunately is not reflected in the past actions of Jeremy Corbyn.

Nevertheless Jeremy Corbyn, was opposed to the recent coup, as was his party's shadow foreign secretary Emily Thornberry, who clearly stated that it was wrong to recognise Juan Guaidó as the interim president of Venezuela. But when it came to the vote in the European Parliament, the majority of Labour's Blairite MEPs either voted to support the motion or gave it passive support by abstaining.

The Labour Party has 19 MEPs and only six correctly voted to oppose the anti-democratic motion. Four Labour MEPs voted for the coup motion and a further five abstained.

Finally, it worth highlighting the voting record of the 'Eurogroup' within which many Blairite MEPs reside - the so-called Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats. Of the group's members who were present at the Venezuelan vote, only 16 opposed the motion, with 105 supporting the anti-democratic motion, and 35 giving it passive support by abstaining!

Michael Barker, Leicester

Theatre: Banner Theatre's Nottingham 'Free for All'

Dr Des Powe, Unite the Union Nottinghamshire Health Services branch

An inspiring evening of music, video footage and commentary was sponsored and hosted by Unite Nottinghamshire Health Branch at the Nottingham Arts Theatre 28 February.

Celebrating the NHS and increasing awareness for the need to protect it, Birmingham-based Banner Theatre's production 'Free For All' played to an audience of almost 200.

Recounting how access to medical treatment was governed by ability to pay pre-NHS, audio and video testimonials painfully described the devastation this wreaked on individuals and families. The cast skilfully weaved through NHS history and the increase in assaults threatening its very existence.

A predominantly Tory-led initiative has engineered a legislative blue-print for fragmenting and running down the NHS, to achieve their ideological aim. Internal marketisation, accounting bureaucracy, and Private

Finance Initiatives (PFI) have left an under-resourced NHS. Banner's take-home message is that, despite sustained attack and inflicted damage, the NHS survives because of its dedicated (but demoralised) staff and strong community-based campaigns.

People can make a difference to outcomes. This was well evidenced by the guest speakers, including Rachel Bannister, Jon Dale, Tom Hunt and Richard Buckwell who spoke of their involvement in successful Nottinghamshire campaigns opposing cutbacks and failing NHS services.

The take home message was - get ready for whenever the next assault comes. We'll need to organise together to defeat that too!

- 'If we fight, we can win! Lesson from two NHS campaign victories' by East Midlands Socialist Party members Jon Dale, Tom Hunt, Tom Barker and Steve Score - available from leftbooks.co.uk, £2.50 including postage

Audio version of this document

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

What the Socialist Party stands for

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

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

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

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

Our demands include:

Public services

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

Work and income

- Trade union struggle to increase the minimum wage to £10 an hour without exemptions as an immediate step towards a real living wage. For an annual increase in the minimum wage linked to average earnings.

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

Environment

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

Rights

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

Mass workers' party

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

Socialism and internationalism

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

Audio version of this document

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

<http://www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/28867>