

"Kicking the can down the road and brinkmanship"

Corbyn and labour movement must mobilise to bring down Tories and force election

Tories imploding over Brexit: general election now! For a Corbyn government with socialist policies

One in ten British adults says they trust MPs to do the right thing by the country over Brexit. Why so many? Most of us don't trust them to do the right thing about anything!

We need mass working-class action to push for a general election and not one day more of Tory austerity.

Ten thousand children woke up this morning in a B&B - not because they've been taken on holiday but because their family does not have a secure home.

Meanwhile, housebuilder Persimmon made profits of over £1 billion this year - the equivalent of over £66,000 profit on every home they sold. The profit on each house has nearly tripled since 2013. Almost half those homes were part of the government's 'help-to-buy' scheme, backed by public money.

Almost every school, 91%, is hit by funding cuts. Schools have a £5.4 billion shortfall. Teachers and support staff regularly buy food for hungry students as well as sanitary products and stationery.

So there is no basis for trust in this government - and that is before we get on to the Brexit mess in Parliament.

The EU referendum vote in 2016 was undoubtedly, at bottom, [a revolt against the capitalist establishment and its austerity](#). That anger, for the above reasons and more, has not gone away but rages on.

But unfortunately, apart from the 2017 general election when we saw the enthusiasm for Jeremy Corbyn's anti-austerity manifesto, this anger has not been given a route for expression and certainly not an organised form.

We call for the trade union leaders and Corbyn to organise and build mass action to push for a general election and an end to Tory austerity. It's only ABC - 'Anything But Corbyn' - that keeps May in place and holds the warring Tory groups in any way together. But that can be shattered by mass action.

April Ashley is an elected member of the national executive of the million-strong public sector union Unison. She spoke to the Socialist in a personal capacity: "Trade Union Congress (TUC) general secretary Frances O'Grady is supposed to represent working people.

"But I saw her sitting cheek-to-cheek with the head of the CBI bosses' union talking about Brexit as if we have common interests! The CBI bosses are responsible for driving down our living conditions in order to maximise their profits!

"The TUC should be calling us onto the streets to demand a general election. Only a left, Jeremy Corbyn-led government - campaigning to end austerity and for a workers' Brexit - is in working people's interests.

"No deal that the CBI or the Tories support will benefit us and end austerity. O'Grady needs to act for us - not get into bed with the bosses!"

As we go to press, the repercussions of the latest May defeat - for MPs to have indicative votes on various options - are reverberating around Westminster. The government spoke and whipped against this proposal, which came from former Tory cabinet member Oliver Letwin and Labour right-winger Hillary Benn, but lost it nonetheless by 27 votes - 302 to 329.

The indicative votes on proposals, that could include revoking Article 50, no deal or a second referendum, are scheduled for 27 March and 1 April.

The indicative votes on proposals, that could include revoking Article 50, no deal or a second referendum, are scheduled for Wednesday and next Monday 1 April. This has been reported as MPs seizing control of Brexit - but a way out of the morass is unlikely to come out of this, and one in the interest of working-class and young people remains ruled out unless a general election takes place, with Jeremy Corbyn fighting and winning it on the basis of a socialist programme.

Does the word 'historic' apply to this latest defeat in a situation where government defeats, cabinet resignations (three this time), rebellions (29 on the Tory side) and paper-thin denials of leadership challenges (two so far) are the new normal? Does it apply when the chancellor refuses to rule out a second referendum in defiance of what the prime minister has said? As Guardian journalist Rafael Behr moaned: "In Brexitland, the unprecedented no longer feels extraordinary."

29 March was Brexit Day - but now it isn't. The government has been given two new dates - 22 May if it can get May's deal agreed, and 12 April if it can't.

Kicking the can down the road is combined with constant brinkmanship as May tries to corral MPs into backing her deal by threatening ever worse scenarios if she is not supported - with the ultimate threat always being a Corbyn-led government.

General election

But a general election is posed inherently in this situation. Every parliamentary vote reveals the [utter lack of confidence in May and the government](#). The Tories are splintering, unable to share a view of the way forward. May is asked to commit to stepping down in return for support.

No confidence in May is clear - and a vote of no confidence in her government could confirm that at any moment, triggering steps towards a general election.

A Downing Street spokesman told the Guardian: "We really, really don't want a general election" but cabinet members are reported to have 'war-gamed' scenarios for a general election should MPs impose a Brexit outcome that May cannot accept.

"I've seen better cabinets at Ikea". This slogan can be found on protests on many different issues. It was there on the huge 'put it to the people' demo on 23 March.

The joke reflects something very serious - there is an enormous crisis of legitimacy in parliament now as well as in all the institutions of capitalism.

This ultimately reflects [the 2007-08 world economic crisis](#), from which capitalism has not fully recovered. They have no solutions to the problems faced by workers and youth because they act in the interests of the bosses.

In austerity Britain it takes less than three days for [the average FTSE 100 chief executive to earn the average worker's annual salary](#). The top bosses average £4 million a year, while the average salary is less than £30,000. Millions live on half that or less with zero-hour contracts and precarious conditions making life a nightmare.

In an expression of the lack of trust in parliament to overcome this impasse, a million marched on the 'Put it to the People' demo, and five million signed an online petition to stop a no-deal Brexit.

Millions fear the uncertainty of Brexit and the impact it will have - reducing already falling living standards further as we pay for the crisis. While there undoubtedly is scaremongering involved, a no-deal scenario would create further chaos. And [as Honda has shown](#), the bosses will use the cover of Brexit to push through job losses, closures and other attacks on workers' conditions.

That is why [the approach of the Honda workers](#) needs to be emulated - organising resistance and building solidarity and support. Ukip and Nigel Farage's 'Brexit Betrayal' march has so far not picked up widespread support. But its plans for further protests are a warning that the right will attempt to offer a lead to those who voted Leave and feel ignored by parliament and who are suffering austerity.

When Corbyn met May on 25 March he was accompanied by Keir Starmer the shadow Brexit secretary. Instead, he should have brought representatives of the six-million-strong trade unions. They should have threatened mass action - demonstrations and strikes.

Determined mass action would be very effective in showing workers and young people that there are solutions and alternatives to the mess of the capitalist establishment. A bold socialist programme for a [Brexit in the interest of workers](#), and based on internationalism, could win a majority and cut through the confusion.

Council cuts

Corbyn was in Morecombe on 23 March campaigning against local government cuts. The council's funding has been slashed from £15 million to £6 million. But the 125 Labour-led councils in England, Scotland and Wales hold around £14 billion in useable general fund, housing and capital receipts reserves.

If they were to reject the Tory cuts and [set budgets based on need, using their reserves and borrowing powers to fund it](#), mobilising a mass movement of working-class people behind them, it could finish off the Tories and their austerity agenda.

A clear pledge from Corbyn and Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell that an incoming Labour government would replenish any reserves a Labour council used to avoid cuts would give confidence to those Labour councillors.

Many workers feel frustrated that this has not been the clear line from Corbyn. But if he put forward a manifesto along these lines and approached it boldly it is possible that we could see a Corbyn-led government in the near future.

When Tom Watson spoke at the 23 March demo he echoed David Cameron and George Osborne when he said "the way to solve this crisis is to recognise we're all in it together." What they meant was that workers should pay for the bosses' crisis.

Watson's speech was a warning of the role he is playing now and will play under a Corbyn government - of fighting on behalf of the bosses.

So the other vital preparation that is needed for a general election is the deselection of him and all the Blairites as a step towards [the transformation of Labour](#) into the mass workers' party we need to fight austerity and for socialism.

Haringey 'Corbyn council' finance chief resigns

Mass struggle needed to defeat council cuts

North London Socialist Party

With only days to go before the setting of its first budget, Councillor Pat Berryman, the finance chief of Haringey's so-called 'Corbyn council', has resigned from the cabinet. Coming after the sacking of two cabinet

members at the start of the year, this resignation [deepens the crisis in Haringey's Momentum-led council](#).

In his resignation letter, Pat Berryman criticises the lack of democracy in the council's Labour group, the watering down and ignoring of manifesto pledges, as well as decisions being made without proper consultation and process.

The Labour Party membership has no control or oversight of decisions made by the council Labour group. The group's confidentiality rules mean that there is not even proper reporting of decisions to the rank and file, with rival Labour councillors accusing one another of advocating cuts.

Berryman had been a prominent opponent of the [Haringey Development Vehicle \(HDV\) 'regeneration' plan](#) proposed by the council's previous right-wing Claire Kober regime.

This social cleansing scheme was defeated by a movement both inside and outside of the Labour Party, which saw the deselection of most of the right-wing Labour councillors who supported the HDV.

In May, [a Corbyn-supporting council was elected](#). It cancelled the HDV and instituted a 100% council tax rebate for residents on the lowest tax band. But the council is faced with a massive budget deficit due to cuts in central government funding amounting to over £140 million per year.

The Socialist Party advocates the council [use its reserves and borrowing powers in order to avoid making further cuts](#). This would allow time to build a mass campaign based on the workforce, local labour movement and wider community, fighting to force the government to return these funds and provide the resources that the borough needs.

After the initially proposed cuts in social welfare provoked massive opposition in the local Labour Party's ranks, the council leadership has agreed to use some reserves this year.

But there has been no hint of building a local campaign for increased government funding. And without such a campaign the council will eventually either run out of money, or become a transmission belt for Tory cuts.

Neither the council nor the local Labour Party have produced a single leaflet or called a single public meeting on fighting the cuts. And the line put forward by the official council publications - of managing the cuts as well as possibly using "creative solutions" has not changed since the Blairites ran the council.

In order to defend jobs and services, it is not sufficient to have well-meaning councillors appointed to the key posts. They need to be armed with a programme to mobilise the community in the struggle for the needed resources.

Haringey is seen as a laboratory for Corbynism in power. A future Corbyn government will need to overcome much bigger pressures if it is to end austerity, and deliver pro-working-class, socialist policies.

The labour movement in Haringey needs to urgently assert its authority on the 'Corbyn council', demanding an end to the secrecy of Labour group and council deliberations, and building a campaign to mobilise the community to demand the resources the borough needs.

Oil firms spend \$1bn fighting climate laws: 'Green New Deal' needs socialist policies

Tessa Warrington, Socialist Party national committee

The world's top five oil and gas companies have spent \$1 billion since the 2015 Paris climate agreement on lobbying and PR to obstruct policies addressing climate change. Meanwhile, youth climate strikes continue to spread.

Climate NGO InfluenceMap revealed that ExxonMobil, Shell, Chevron, BP and Total spend a total of \$195 million a year on these media and political campaigns.

Despite superficially lauding the Paris agreement, behind the scenes the fossil fuel giants have used lobby groups to attack the details of regulations, and invested in social media, to push their profit agenda. BP sunk \$13 million alone into a campaign that successfully stopped a carbon tax in Washington state, USA.

Since the Paris agreement, emissions have continued to rise. The International Energy Agency, which advises the richest economies on fuel markets, reported a 1.4% increase to 32.5 gigatons of carbon in 2017 - the equivalent of adding 170 million cars to the road.

Meanwhile, the five biggest firms racked up total profits of \$55 billion, with just \$3.6 billion invested in low-carbon schemes.

The UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has called for a [45% drop in fossil fuel use in order to limit warming by 2030](#) to the 1.5°C target laid out in the Paris accords. It also estimates that it would cost \$900 billion a year to implement the programme it says is needed.

Nevertheless, two studies by science journal Nature in 2017 concluded that not one of the major industrialised countries was meeting the Paris targets or implementing policies to reach them.

President [Trump even tried to withdraw from the Paris accords](#) in 2017. He was unable to as the earliest leaving date is 2020. However, the agreement is non-binding, with no sanctions for not meeting the agreed targets, and no way of enforcing them even if there were.

It is absolutely clear that big corporations and their representatives in capitalist governments cannot and will not solve this crisis. At the same time, the world watched on Friday 15 March as [students across the planet participated in a one-day school strike](#) as part of the developing youth movement against climate change.

There is clearly a huge mood among young people to fight on this issue. They see no real future for themselves on a planet ravaged by environmental catastrophe - but also no future in terms of huge student debt, zero-hour contracts and poverty wages.

Green New Deal

Following the radicalising consciousness around climate change, the Guardian has reported the appearance of 'Labour for a Green New Deal' - no doubt inspired by the US 'Green New Deal' proposal accepted by Democratic Party congresswoman and self-described socialist Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez.

Its director calls for a ban on fossil fuel subsidies, mass investment in public transport, and "green industrialisation" to replace the jobs capitalism destroyed in the deindustrialised regions. The article also points to Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell's 'Alternative Models of Ownership' report, which argues for expanding democratic public ownership.

All these policies would be a welcome step in the right direction. However, [as the Socialist remarked last year on the 'Alternative Models' report](#), "it assumes the capitalist elite in Britain will acquiesce to its proposals and therefore has no plans to counter their sabotage."

To prevent the bosses undermining such policies, we need to take all the banks and big corporations out of their hands. Nationalising Britain's top 150 firms under democratic workers' control and management would allow socialist planning of the economy to meet the needs of all.

The Guardian quotes a comment that "climate change is fundamentally about class, because it means chaos for the many while the few profit." This is true. But the Socialist Party says it is also about class because only working-class action can implement the programme needed to overcome it.

Workers' power

The multinationals and super-rich elites have shown time and again they will ignore laws and circumvent policies that harm their profits. The working class has enormous power - we can cut off the flow of profits in an instant, by organising, striking and occupying.

And winning Labour to such policies cannot be separated from the need to [boot out the pro-capitalist Blairites and democratise the party](#). This should include mandatory reselection for MPs, a democratic collective voice for the trade unions, and MPs to only take an average worker's wage.

Trade union leaders should be coordinating action and campaigning among their members to build a mass movement to improve the living standards of working-class people, boot out the capitalist governments of the super-rich like Trump and the Tories, and link up with the brilliant school student strikes.

This could be the first step towards a movement to reorganise society on socialist lines, to win liberation from the oppression of the capitalist system and threat of environmental destruction for the whole planet and its inhabitants.

Universal Credit forces women into 'survival sex': scrap it now!

Isai Priya, Waltham Forest Socialist Party

Growing numbers of welfare claimants impoverished by Universal Credit, benefit sanctions or cuts to single parents allowance, are forced into selling their bodies to pay for rent or feed their families.

[Universal Credit is a brutal benefits system that's not fit for purpose](#). Instead of helping people out of poverty, it is pushing them further into desperate and dangerous situations. It needs to be scrapped immediately.

Younger people in particular are exploited by sexist, greedy landlords, using the situation of high rents and low pay to encourage them to take rooms at low or zero rent in exchange for sex.

MPs have now been forced to launch an inquiry to investigate. How much more evidence does the government need to see? How many more reports are required to make them face up to reality?

Ten years of austerity, and 14 million people - including 4.5 million children - live in poverty, according to the Social Metrics Commission. In-work poverty is soaring due to low wages and zero-hour contracts. And wherever Universal Credit is rolled out, the Trussell Trust reports food bank use goes up by an average 52% within 12 months.

Austerity and cuts to the welfare state have disproportionately affected women workers. We face double oppression in capitalist society: oppressed and exploited both as workers, and as women.

The oppression faced by working-class women has only increased since the implementation of austerity. Self-described feminist MPs who have backed austerity - such as the Blairites Stella Creasy and Jess Phillips - should be ashamed of themselves.

Socialist feminism

Tory and Blairite women MPs have spoken to the media about their supposed joint efforts for women's equality, while at the same time voting for or abstaining on cuts! We don't want the feminism of the bosses, where wealthy individual women rise to preside over continuing misery for the rest of us. [We need socialist feminism](#): fighting for working-class women and all workers in deed as well as word.

The Socialist Party argues that the fight for women's liberation is linked to the fight against austerity and capitalism. We stand for a programme that can unite the whole working class - women and men - to fight the cause of our misery.

Only socialist policies - such as fully funding jobs, homes and public services for all, a real living wage, reversing all cuts and sell-offs, scrapping Universal Credit, building council homes - can liberate women from this desperate situation. And only working-class action to take the wealth and power off the super-rich 1% can overcome the barrier of the profit motive.

Part of the immediate action we need, to fight for women's liberation, is mass action for a general election now to kick out the Tories. Corbyn and the union leaders must urgently build for that action.

NHS staff shortage now permanent: reverse health cuts!

Fred Ray, Leicester East Socialist Party

Our NHS is in crisis. Unless there is a major change, there's no end in sight for the serious shortage of GPs.

A new report by The Kings Fund, Nuffield Trust and Health Foundation think tanks finds that we need at least 3,000 more GPs by 2024 just to keep up with population growth. But at the rate GPs are being trained, that won't happen.

In fact, the report states that unless "decisive action" is taken, we could see the shortage of GPs almost triple from 2,500 to 7,000 nationwide.

Across the health service there is a shortage of 100,000 staff, with one in every eleven posts sitting empty, according to NHS Improvement. The Kings Fund predicts this could hit 250,000 by 2030.

It's no mystery why the NHS is understaffed. Pay freezes and cuts have ruined working and living conditions, and pushed exhausted workers away from the health service. NHS staff are underpaid and overworked.

The latest report calls for a number of changes to address the shortages. These include raises for NHS staff and grants for student nurses. Both are necessary to reverse the damage done by [real-terms pay cuts](#) and the [abolition of the nursing bursary](#).

Staff numbers are falling, but our need isn't! These shortages are symptoms of years of cuts and privatisation from governments that put the profits of big business before our health.

The decisive action necessary to save our NHS won't happen on its own. If we want to end permanent staff shortages, we need the health unions to build for mass demonstrations and strikes. Such action could bring down this paralysed Tory government, and help keep a Corbyn government firm against the bosses.

The Socialist Party fights to reverse all cuts and privatisation in the health service, as well as nationalising pharmaceuticals and the big corporations. For a fully funded, socialist NHS, run democratically by workers and service users!

Algeria uprising: 'We stay here until the whole system goes'

Sue Powell and Dave Carr

Every Friday, since 22 February, hundreds of thousands of Algerians have been protesting against their infirm president - the figurehead of a decades'-long ruling clique - who is standing for a fifth term of office.

These outpourings of anger against 82 year-old President Abdelaziz Bouteflika are the biggest since the 2011 mass uprisings across the Middle East and North Africa.

One protester in the capital Algiers, a 37 year-old teacher, said: "We stay here until the whole system goes".

A five-day general strike, involving transport workers, dockers, car workers, shop workers, teachers and workers in many other sectors, began on 10 March. Another three-day general strike to remove Bouteflika began on 26 March.

In order to prevent revolution 'from below', the regime has introduced reforms 'from above'. It announced that Bouteflika will not now seek a fifth term and installed a new prime minister, Badawi, with talk of an 'inclusive government'.

But the planned 18 April presidential election has been postponed indefinitely, leaving Bouteflika in office. Needless to say, these 'reforms' have failed to halt the protests.

"They are just trying to delay things until they have a candidate who suits them. We want him gone. We want them all gone", said one protester.

Bouteflika had a stroke in 2013 and has seldom been seen in public since. Algerians call him their 'invisible president'. His last public speech was seven years ago.

But he remains in office as a puppet figure fronting a corrupt and autocratic elite made up of the top military, party cronies and wealthy businessmen and widely known as 'le pouvoir' ('the power').

Opposition

Most opposition parties do not want the movement to overthrow the system. Instead they want a reshuffle of the regime which is more favourable to them in terms of positions and privileges.

The opposition's call for Friday demonstrations steadily escalated, but on the evening of 3 March the protests exploded onto the streets after a spokesperson had announced the president's intention to stand again and vacate the presidency after one year.

Opposition party leaders are reportedly engaged in talks with the regime for concessions and have attempted to hold back the movement by warning of 'chaos' and 'bloodshed' if the protesters try to overthrow the ruling class.

Youth to fore

Over half of the population is under 30. Most young people have known only one ruler and did not experience the "dark years" of civil war, in which around 200,000 Algerians lost their lives.

The universities have emptied as countless thousands of students have thronged the streets.

The education ministry, in order to cut across the developing student movement, brought forward the spring holiday originally scheduled for 21 March and extended it until 4 April.

Bouteflika was initially seen as the 'mediator' who ended the horrors of civil war, but even among the older generations there is no longer any loyalty and patience.

Unemployment officially stands at 10% and youth unemployment is 29%. In 2015 it was estimated that 35% of the population somehow survive on a poverty wage.

Most households have seen their incomes decline substantially during the last five years.

This fall in living standards corresponds to the sharp fall in wholesale oil and gas prices, the mainstay of the economy.

Bouteflika had previously used burgeoning oil and gas export revenues to subsidise consumer commodity prices and invest in social programmes. But these subsidies and social spending have gone into reverse.

However, sections of the elite have become filthy rich. Many Algerians have long been saying: 'We are a rich country, we have oil and industry - why are we not rich?'

Apart from the Friday protests, all election candidates have threatened to withdraw and now the ranks of the protesters have been swelled by members of the official trade unions.

Traditionally loyal to the FLN (the National Liberation Front - Bouteflika's party - that led [the 1954-62 struggle against French colonialism](#)) union leaders belatedly withdrew their support for Bouteflika and backed the 10 March general strike.

The strike was widely supported, including by workers in the crucial oil and gas industry (which accounts for 30% of the country's total economic output).

Wanting to distance themselves from Bouteflika's rule, even some large private companies publicly supported the strike.

And in a desperate attempt to stop its haemorrhaging support the FLN's interim leader Moab Bouchareb announced support for the "popular movement", while also backing Bouteflika's non-existent political reforms.

In a new twist a FLN spokesperson has now rejected Bouteflika's call for a 'national conference' to prepare for new elections. Clearly the ruling class is split on how to proceed.

Women have already played a prominent role in the protests and marked International Women's Day (8 March) by leading mass demonstrations.

Existential threat

The regime, while so far limiting its use of force against the protests, is likely at some stage, if existentially threatened, to use the full weight of the state against protesters.

However, as we have seen during periods of struggle in [the 'Arab Spring'](#) and in [the 1979 Iranian revolution](#), the state forces can crack under enormous pressure.

In order to achieve this movement's aims and prevent counter-revolution at a later stage, a working-class mass movement must forge strong, independent organisations which not only challenge the rule of the regime but also the capitalist system which underpins it.

Strikes and protests on different issues, including opposition to the official trade union and the right to elect new workers' representatives, are developing.

Recently 13 independent trade unions have declared their opposition to Bad-awi's attempt to form a government.

This opposition needs to be broadened into a movement to replace the present regime with a government led by representatives of workers and the poor. One that breaks with capitalism and begins the socialist reorganisation of society.

Lessons of the heroic 1984-85 miners' strike

Thirty five years ago, on 5 March 1984, Yorkshire miners walked out on strike against Tory government plans to impose a massive programme of pit closures. They saw this attack as the first step to a complete rundown of the mining industry.

But there was even more to the miners' strike. Former Tory chancellor Nigel Lawson admitted that Tory preparation for the strike was "just like rearming to face the threat of Hitler in the 1930s".

They prepared meticulously and ruthlessly by stockpiling coal, beefing up the police's powers and introducing anti-union laws. The Tories saw defeating the miners in 1984 as a means to destroy the working class's collective strength.

As former political commentator Brian Walden described it, the miners' strike was "a civil war without guns" - an all-out battle between workers and the ruling class.

Its effects still reverberate. Here we publish an edited extract of an article by Ken Smith. It was first published on the 20th anniversary of the miners' strike, in 2004.

Along the road of discovery, the new generation will have to cross some huge dungheaps of disinformation put there by critics of the miners' stand from the right and left alike.

The ruling class and their apologists portray the strike as a doomed, futile attempt to preserve a dying industry led by a tactically inept Arthur Scargill.

Michael Ignatieff, seen as a cultural guru by the ruling class in 1984, wrote towards the end of the strike that "the miners' strike is not the vindication of class politics but its death throes."

Other critics, like New Labour minister Kim Howells - a former Communist and South Wales National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) research officer - converted to Blairism and disowned their role in the strike.

Even before the strike ended, Howells had hauled up the white flag saying: "The state is much better organised for taking on mass pickets than it was in the early 1970s... It is the hardest lesson any workforce has had to learn since 1926. The whole of the organised labour movement has to take a fresh look in future disputes."

But for Howells, and many like him, taking a fresh look means drawing only negative conclusions, and abandoning the trade union ideals of struggle and solidarity - ideals the miners fought for so valiantly.

Even those on the left who solidly backed the miners are to this day intimidated by the miners' defeat. They lack confidence to launch the kind of all-out struggles the miners did - to successfully turn the tables on 20 years of mostly uncontested attacks.

The miners' strike was not only justified - the miners came closer to defeating Thatcher than they knew - but it also holds many vital lessons for trade unionists.

It was the longest lasting and most bitter industrial dispute of the second half of the 20th century in Britain. It had a huge impact on virtually every subsequent industrial and political development.

Police a political weapon

Over 27 million working days were lost in strike action in 1984 (mainly among miners). Over 11,300 miners and their supporters were arrested during the dispute. Over 5,600 stood trial and more than 100 were jailed, although 1,504 were released without charge. Over £60 million was raised for the miners, according to the Guardian newspaper. Warehouses full of food and toys were donated to the strikers and their families.

Seafarers were sacked and rail workers were victimised for taking solidarity action with the miners. Over 700 miners were sacked and not reinstated.

The Tories later admitted it cost nearly £6 billion to win the dispute, or £26,000 for every striking miner. This was a political attempt to break the power of the NUM. And, from 1985-95, the Tories' continued war against the miners cost over £26 billion in redundancy and benefit payments, keeping pits mothballed and lost revenue from coal.

Thatcher and her cabinet were desperate for victory and prepared to go to great lengths to try and weaken or destroy the power of effective trade unionism, which they saw as an obstacle to their free-market policies.

For the first time in a post-war national strike the police were openly used as a political weapon. Provocateurs and spies were deployed - and the state benefits system used to try and starve the miners back.

Despite the extraordinary lengths the Tories went to, by October 1984, six months into the strike, the future of Thatcher's government hung in the balance - when there were less than six weeks' coal stocks.

The proposed strike by the pit supervisors' union, Nacods, threatened to close down all working pits in the Midlands at this time. Later, Nacods shamefully called off the strike for a shoddy deal which the Tories later reneged on.

So, the NUM had to battle on alone. Despite the odds, they came within a whisker of winning. Ten years after the strike, Frank Ledger, the Central Electricity Generating Board director of operations, recounted how they had only planned for a six-month strike and that the situation at this time was verging on the "catastrophic".

Former electricity board chairman Sir Walter Marshall spelt out what this meant: "Our predictions showed on paper that Scargill would win certainly before Christmas. Margaret Thatcher got very worried about that... I felt she was wobbling".

Thatcher confirmed this herself nine years later: "We had got so far and we were in danger of losing everything because of a silly mistake. We had to make it quite clear that if it was not cured immediately then the actual management of the Coal Board could indeed have brought down the government. The future of the government at that moment was in their hands and they had to remedy their terrible mistake."

Ultimately, the key factor that defeated the miners was not their lack of militant spirit in facing the most sustained vicious state onslaught on them and their families, nor was it lack of support from the wider ranks of the working class or even the mistakes that some NUM leaders made at national and area level - although some were of fundamental importance at later stages of the strike.

The crucial factor in the strike's ultimate defeat was the treacherous, cowardly role of the trade union and Labour Party leaders, who consciously sabotaged the possibility of miners' victory.

After Labour's 1983 election defeat, right-wing trade union leaders were pursuing a policy they called 'new realism' - code for retreating in the face of the class enemy without firing a shot in retaliation. Labour leader Neil Kinnock was also afraid of a rising tide of militancy in the event of a miners' victory, and he didn't want to see militancy pay, particularly not if he was prime minister.

They used the absence of a national miners' ballot and the fact that a section of miners were still working to turn their back on the 130,000 miners who were striking.

They refused to deliver the effective solidarity action that could have brought the miners victory, a victory which would have benefited the whole working class against the detested Thatcher.

Bitter blow

The miners' defeat, along with the economic upswing of the late 1980s, set in motion a complex and difficult period in Britain, consolidating a massive shift to the right at the top of the labour movement.

Labour and trade union leaders meekly accepted anti-union legislation and generally abandoned any pretence of struggle against industrial run-down and privatisation.

It was a bitter blow for those miners and their families who struggled. Their jobs are gone for ever and their communities turned into industrial wastelands with social devastation following for many.

Had they won, the whole course of history would have changed. Thatcher and her government would have resigned and most likely a Labour government would have come to power.

The pit-closure plan would have been dropped and, under pressure from a confident working class, even a Kinnock Labour government would have had to carry through some measures in favour of the working class, perhaps being compelled to abolish the Tory anti-union laws.

The miners' strike politicised a generation of young socialists. Over a quarter of a million school students went on strike just a month after the strike, inspired by the example of the miners and led by supporters of Militant, the Socialist Party's forerunner. It also temporarily produced a massive shift to the left on many issues in society.

Immediately after the strike, Tory ministers privately fumed at how little goodwill their victory had brought them.

Had the miners not struggled as they did, many other anti-working-class measures would have been introduced earlier than they were.

But, eventually, dizzy with her own success, Thatcher began a policy of deindustrialisation of British industry and further impoverishment of working class and middle-class people.

Lessons of strike

Crucial questions arise from the strike: the role of mass picketing; democracy and leadership within the trade unions; the state; how to organise solidarity action; the role of left trade union leadership; what economic alternative should trade unionists and socialists put when an industry is claimed to be declining and, crucially, what programme and strategy for the trade unions is applicable today.

New generations will return to the lessons of the strike to ensure they are better equipped to win their own industrial battles and succeed in the socialist struggle to change society.

But, the most important lesson the miners' strike taught the generation who lived through it is the willingness of working-class people to struggle and try to change society. It is still relevant today.

Timeline of the strike

November 1983

National Coal Board confirms 49 pits will close due to 'exhausted reserves'.

March 1984

5 - Yorkshire miners stop work over proposed accelerated closure of Cortonwood and Bulcliffe Wood. Yorkshire NUM calls total stoppage from 12 March.

6 - Scottish area NUM calls strike from 9 March.

8 - NUM national executive declares strikes in Yorkshire and Scotland official, and any other area "which takes similar action".

April 1984

19 - NUM special delegate conference supports action in all British coalfields. Resolutions for a ballot overwhelmingly rejected.

May 1984

29 - 5,000 pickets at Orgreave. Riot police deployed for the first time.

30 - Arthur Scargill arrested at Orgreave.

June 1984

6 - 10,000 pickets at Orgreave: 93 arrests; 73 police and hundreds of pickets injured.

18 - 7,000 pickets take on 4,000 police in the Battle of Orgreave.

July 1984

South Wales NUM fined £50,000 for contempt of court, refuse to pay.

August 1984

1 - Mass demonstration outside South Wales NUM in Pontypridd against threat of sequestration.

16 - £707,000 seized by sequestrators from South Wales NUM accounts.

October 1984

1-5 - Labour Party conference backs the miners.

4 - NUM fined £200,000 for contempt.

25 - Proposed Nacods strike over colliery closure review procedure called off.

25 - Sequestrators appointed to seize NUM funds.

November 1984

13 - TUC general secretary, Norman Willis, confronted by hangman's noose at miners' rally in South Wales.

December 1984

14 - Energy minister, Peter Walker, rejects further talks.

February 1985

20 - NUM accepts review procedure, as agreed by Nacods, and asks for talks with no preconditions.

March 1985

3 - NUM special delegate conference votes 98-91 to return to work without an agreement or amnesty.

5 - Miners return to work behind brass bands, with their supporters.

Visteon struggle tenth anniversary

When factory occupations stayed the hands of the bosses

Ten years ago, in response to Visteon UK (a US-owned car components company that had been spun-off from Ford) pulling the plug on its operations with the loss of nearly 600 jobs, workers fought back by occupying plants at Enfield, Basildon and Belfast.

Socialist Party members participated in the occupations and other solidarity actions, as well as the ensuing pensions' battle.

This struggle was at the start of the Great Recession - following the capitalist financial crash triggered by the Lehman Brothers banking collapse.

Below we reprint a shortened article from the Socialist (5 May 2009), which draws a balance sheet of this workplace struggle and why it was a success.

The hard-nosed Visteon bosses thought that they could just summarily close 'their' factories, throwing workers out onto the streets, with measly compensation.

But they have been prevented from doing this by the marvellous action of the Visteon workers, backed up by widespread solidarity from the rest of the working class.

There is no doubt that, compared to what was offered at the beginning, the settlement is a considerable achievement on the part of these workers.

Mass pressure has compelled the bosses to offer more reasonable redundancy terms than they originally intended.

Unfortunately the factories have not been saved. If the workers' suggestion that they be nationalised (by the then Labour government) and kept open through alternative production had been adopted, they could have been.

Instead many of these workers will now add to the remorseless rise in unemployment in Britain. It is against this background that the opposition to closure of the factories, felt by all Visteon workers, is particularly keenly felt in Belfast. Northern Ireland already has the outlines of a desperate rise in unemployment.

Some of those who were made redundant may get jobs later - although this is a remote prospect for many. It is also likely that these jobs will be much lower paid.

And there is the loss of skills, which will go with the redundancies. Following the collapse of MG Rover in 2005, the Work Foundation reported that two-thirds of those who found jobs suffered swingeing cuts in pay, with the average loss being £5,640. That was before the recession which will worsen the situation.

There is also the unresolved issue of the workers' pension rights. It is not ruled out that the bosses could try to renege on the pensions. This must be met with firm opposition from the trade unions.

(In 2014, after a five-year campaign, Unite and the ex-Visteon workers won a £28 million victory, securing their pensions from previous owner Ford after their pensions had been slashed when Visteon went into administration).

But the lesson of this dispute is that the Visteon workers would have received next to nothing without determined class action, including occupations of their factories, for a time in the case of Enfield and Basildon, and throughout the dispute in the case of Belfast.

Benchmark for struggles

Moreover, the initiative to occupy did not come from the trade union full-time officials, but from the workers themselves.

These workers have now set a benchmark for all similar struggles in Britain. They have 'learned to speak French' - ie adopting the militancy of the French workers.

This lesson will not be lost on other workers who will face similar attacks in the next period.

This victory must be built on in the struggle against the mass redundancies that loom. The starting point must be opposition to all redundancies and defence of every job.

But, fundamentally, the defensive and offensive struggles of the coming period must be linked to the fight for socialist change in society to replace the rule of the dictatorial bosses with a socialist planned economy.

Support the Honda workers: nationalise to save jobs

Tom Baldwin , South West Socialist Party organiser

Honda's announcement that it will close its Swindon car plant in 2021 has been met with anger and dismay by workers. 3,500 jobs could go in the factory itself and as many as 15,000 are at risk including the supply chain.

Massive job losses and the knock-on effect to the local economy will be devastating for the town.

Honda's factory in Turkey is also threatened with its European manufacturing being centralised back to Japan.

It's outrageous that such decisions about the livelihoods of workers and their wider communities are taken by unelected bosses, based only on what makes them the most profit.

The Honda shop stewards have a proud record of defending their members. They have built up trade union organisation at the plant and been big supporters of the rank-and-file trade union organisation, the National Shop Stewards Network.

In 2011, Unite the Union convenor Paddy Brennan won reinstatement after being suspended by management.

This will be the fight of their lives, with higher stakes than previous struggles. Negotiations with management are being backed with action which will be vital if jobs are to be saved.

Next Steps

The next step of the campaign is the mass demonstration on 30 March in Swindon, called by Unite. This will mobilise not just Honda staff but workers from across the town, as well as supporters up and down the country.

Solidarity is one of the most powerful weapons our class possesses and it is important to link up the campaign with other workers, particularly those also facing closures or large-scale redundancies.

The plant should be taken in to public ownership to save jobs. The Socialist Party calls for nationalisation under democratic workers' control and management.

Decision making should be taken out of the hands of greedy bosses and the working class must be able to decide its own future.

Nationalisation is possible, if it is fought for. In 1971 even the Tory government was forced to nationalise Rolls Royce to save it.

Later that year the shop stewards' committee at Upper Clyde Shipbuilders in Glasgow organised a 'work in' occupation of the shipyards.

Again, the Tory government was forced to step in against their wishes. It may prove necessary to follow this heroic example in defence of Honda jobs.

This demonstration comes on the tenth anniversary of the heroic occupations by Visteon (ex-Ford) workers in Belfast, Enfield and Basildon when the company went into administration.

The action won tens of millions in redundancy payments, when the workers were facing statutory terms.

Jeremy Corbyn should promise that, under his leadership, an incoming Labour government would nationalise the plant, along with other threatened industries.

This would add to the pressure and, alongside the actions of workers, their union and the wider working class, could help prevent closure.

National Shop Stewards Network meeting: Save Honda Jobs

7.30pm, Thursday 4 April

Great Western Hotel, 73 Station Road, Swindon SN1 1DH

shopstewards.net

Valentine school strike against budget cuts and redundancies

Southampton Socialist Party

"No ifs, no buts, stop school cuts!" was the sound at Valentine Primary School gates on 14 March, striking at the threat of redundancies due to budget cuts.

100% of National Education Union (NEU) members voted for strike action and 100% turned out on the picket line alongside parents, children and their supporters from Southampton Fair Funding Campaign, Southampton Socialist Party and Southampton Socialist Students.

They followed their picket with a lively protest on the steps of Southampton Civic Centre. Throughout the day this strike was on the local news, highlighting the threat posed. The local newspaper ran an editorial raising the significance of this strike.

The Tories want to bury the truth that funding per child has been cut by 8% under their austerity agenda - and the effects are devastating.

But local authorities also have a role to play. They are ultimately the ones holding the finances delegated to them from central government. This is convenient for the Tories as it means they can point the finger elsewhere. But it also means local councils could play a crucial role in resisting the cuts.

In Southampton, the Labour council has chosen to bury its head in the sand and point the finger back at the Tory government, writing a letter to Damian Hinds, the education minister. There has been no reply.

So despite the crisis in schools that Southampton Fair Funding has raised for over two years - lobbying MPs at Westminster, as well as councillors and MPs in Southampton, building the support of thousands of parents, teachers and schools across the city - the message from the council has been: 'You've got to make the cuts, there's no money.'

Talks break down

Talks between the council and the NEU to resolve this crisis broke down, with the council refusing to support the school, saying if it does this for Valentine, it will have to do so for every school. We agree. It should.

Surely this would build the campaign against school cuts, strengthen the position of the council and build pressure on the government to reverse school funding cuts. It also undermines the argument that the crisis at Valentine is the making of this particular school and not a problem at others.

Not only have they buried their heads in the sand, councillors have also been taking decisions to cap school budgets. The idea is to 'spread the thin jam more evenly'.

In the case of Valentine, this means a cap of £600,000. Valentine is the city's largest primary school and now has a deficit of close to £1 million.

Another 13 schools have deficits totalling over £4 million. 40% of primaries in the city have said they expect to be in deficit this year. This problem is not going away and is getting worse.

Councillor angers NEU

Despite standing on protests and holding the Stop School Cuts banner, councillor Paffey, the chair of education, has attacked the strike saying: "It is regrettable that the NEU representatives are rushing into strike action... I am advised that there are no planned redundancies, so this strike seems unnecessary."

This has hugely angered NEU members, who previously met with councillor Paffey and outlined clearly that the impact of further cuts would mean job losses.

What he could do, if he is serious about fighting Tory education cuts, is allow schools to display NEU banners showing the impact of cuts and back the fight with the cash that the council has, taking from their £100 million useable reserves.

The school deficits amount to just 2% of the council's revenue spending of £192 million: the price of a chocolate bar in every family's weekly shopping.

But the Blairite Labour councillors in Southampton like Paffey and leader Hammond, refuse to fight. They accept their 'responsibility' to carry out Tory cuts.

With the May elections looming and anger at school and council cuts growing, we need Southampton Labour council to join the fight - along with the NEU, Unison and Unite unions - to oppose council cuts, using its reserves and borrowing powers, and mobilising support for the restoration of government funding stolen by the Tories since 2010.

If Blairite Labour councillors and candidates for May's local elections refuse to do this, we will call on anti-cuts candidates to step forward and build the fightback.

Southampton Labour's executive committee is controlled by Jeremy Corbyn supporters. But this position has not been used to clear out the Blairite councillors and adopt a fighting, anti-cuts strategy.

However, three Corbyn supporters have declared they will be council candidates in May and said they will oppose cuts. We will seek to collaborate with them to develop a no-cuts policy on the council.

Newark machine bearings factory workers return to work

Jon Dale, Mansfield Socialist Party

NSK strikers at the company's Newark factory, which makes super-precision machine bearings, returned to work on 26 March after three weeks on strike. Management has not made a new offer but the strike ballot mandate has expired.

This is a disappointment as strikers had heard that production has been hit hard, putting the company under pressure.

Workers in the G2 department, members of Unite the Union, have been demanding an end to the shift pattern imposed two years ago.

One explained: "Due to all the hours being added colleagues have been forced to leave, relationships have broken down, and members of staff have been going off with stress and mental health-related issues.

It shouldn't be a case of if you don't like it leave. The company is bullying and harassing the workers into something that is not only unethical but also borderline illegal.

"We keep being told that the company needs to change with the times. We still work the same way as we did before the recession with the lines, machines and personnel but now have more hours."

Unite should hold meetings in every department to explain the threat all workers face if management feel they can get away with it.

Links should also be made with unions at NSK factories in Peterlee, Germany and elsewhere. They are not on the same hours as G2 workers but could also find themselves threatened in future. A united struggle would quickly show management that flogging the workforce must stop.

Striking teachers march against Enfield schools academisation plans

John Dolan, North London Socialist Party

A lively and noisy demonstration of over 100 striking teachers (members of the National Education Union - NEU), parents and other supporters took place on 24 March. The protesters marched through Edmonton Green Shopping Centre against the planned academisation of five primary schools in Enfield, north London, on 1 April.

Spirits were high, with noisy singing and chanting. Shoppers also applauded as the march passed by.

There were speakers at the end - parent Lucy Howes, Amna Hick from Enfield NEU, Oktay Sahbaz from DayMer, and Louise Cuffaro from Newham NEU.

Louise, a Socialist Party member, was involved in a successful campaign to prevent academisation at her school.

It was good to hear all of the speakers condemn the privatisation that is academisation. This was true even of the Enfield Labour council leader who also spoke - but the New Labour governments of 1997-2010 introduced and promoted academies. Academisation is one of the things that Jeremy Corbyn's Blairite opponents support.

The message from the march and rally was clear - the fight goes on, and we fight to win!

Bradford College strike remains solid over pay and funding

Iain Dalton, Socialist Party West Yorkshire organiser

University and College Union (UCU) members at Bradford College were out in force for the latest round of action over pay in a number of colleges across England.

Over 30 pickets gathered outside the college's flagship David Hockney building, a testament to the money that management has thrown at new buildings while restraining pay for staff.

The college is in crisis, having gone through four different CEOs over the last year, with staff increasingly despairing of the future of the further education sector. But this chaos is also making pickets more determined, as what they see at stake is the existence of such educational provision.

While management at Bradford seem intransigent on the pay issue, increasing numbers of other college managements are being forced to back down to the demands of striking UCU members.

Sheffield UCU branch committee and Socialist Party member Sam Morecroft was one of those who addressed the picket line, bringing solidarity from his UCU branch, along with a donation to the strike fund, and demanding college management open the books so staff can see the full extent of their mismanagement.

This latest three-day action will continue to up the pressure on college managements. But it is vital, given the small numbers of UCU branches in further education that were able to overcome the undemocratic 50% turnout threshold, that other UCU branches and the wider trade union movement mobilise full support.

West London civil service workers strike against office closure

PCS civil servants' union members at the HMRC Ealing Office (International House) in west London had a successful half-day strike on 19 March. Almost all staff walked out at 12 noon in protest at the plan to close the office as part of the misnamed 'Building our Future' programme.

One PCS rep told the Socialist: "It should be called destroying our futures! Many staff in International House have already been redeployed to Ealing after an earlier office closure. They have to commute to get to Ealing, an onward journey to the new office in Stratford will be well outside reasonable daily travel. There is also a significant proportion of staff with disabilities and caring responsibilities - making it impossible for them to travel to Stratford. Ealing is already the last stop for our members. If this office closes our members will be out of a job".

The strike ballot was won with 84% voting in favour of strike action and 95% voting in favour of action short of a strike.

The cuts in HMRC have been relentless. Tens of thousands of years of tax experience has been lost as a direct result of office closure plans. The 'Building Our Future' proposals will see 90% of HMRC offices closed and replaced by fewer than 20 'regional centres and specialist sites'.

As part of these proposals the International House in Ealing could close as early as 2020, putting many of the staff at risk of redundancy. The Ealing campaign needs to be part of a campaign of protests and industrial action across HMRC to stop the office closure programme, defend members' jobs and the service they provide.

- Further strike action is planned for 3 April and 10-12 April

- Send messages of support and donations to RCGroup@pcs.org.uk
-

Climate strike reports

- Link up with trade unions
- Set up a student union
- Defend the right to protest
- Socialist change not climate change!

Millions of students walked out against climate change again on 15 March. See '[Massive protests over catastrophic climate change](#)'. Check out more reports below.

Manchester

Around 500 school, college and university students gathered in central Manchester, demanding action to combat climate change. The atmosphere was one of anger and militancy.

Students as young as eleven attended, urging that our future cannot be jeopardised through another generation of destructive fossil fuel reliance. Some of their parents were protesting too!

There were, however, attempts to 'depoliticise' the strike. Certain environmental groups limited themselves to vague talk about simply 'acting' on climate change.

This didn't stop many students from talking about the need to kick out the Tories and to put the 'planet before profit'! Our socialist ideas were received with keen interest.

A positive mood exists on these strikes for system change. We argued that to take immediate action to halt climate change, we have to take on the profiteers that drive the fossil fuel industry.

This means socialist change, based on public ownership and workers' democracy - not a false 'green' capitalism!

Tom Costello, Manchester Socialist Party

Worcester

From nothing a month ago, there was a gathering of over 200 mainly school students in Worcester city on 15 March.

There were a couple of speeches at the start along with a minute's silence for the victims of the mass shootings in New Zealand.

Students from local schools, some as young as eleven, explained why there were taking part in the walkout. This was followed by more speeches and then we marched off.

Nothing had been organised but it went around the town with many people stopping to watch, taking leaflets and buying the Socialist.

There were hoots in support from passing traffic. Later still, one of Worcester's Socialist Party members spoke to cheers from the audience on the need for socialist change to halt climate change.

One of the main student organisers spoke alongside a Socialist Party member at a Socialist Party public meeting on 18 March.

York

Over 400 school students rallied in the centre of York. They were there to listen, discuss and march.

There were some speakers from the Green and Labour parties but the mood was definitely in advance of the contributions made by those speakers.

Major system change was demanded over and over again by young contributors. I addressed the rally as secretary of York trade union council (TUC) and as a member of the Socialist Party.

My argument that capitalism has no answer to halting catastrophic climate change and that socialism is the way forward was met with loud applause.

The students also applauded the motion passed by the York TUC in support of their action.

The rally lasted for three hours and there was a strong interest in socialist ideas as well as building links with the trade unions.

Over 20 students left their contact details for more information about the Socialist Party, and 20 copies of the Socialist were sold.

Nigel Smith, York Socialist Party

- Read more: '[Oil firms spend £1 billion fighting climate laws - Green New Deal needs socialist policies](#)'
 - Go to socialiststudents.org.uk for more resources and ideas for the next 12 April walkouts
-

United working-class struggle needed to fight for trans and women's rights

Sarah Sachs-Eldridge, Socialist Party national organiser

The Socialist Party was invited to participate in a debate on the Gender Recognition Act hosted by a London Constituency Labour Party.

The forum, on 16 March in Tottenham, was organised as an attempt to get beyond the toxic atmosphere that has surrounded the Tories' proposals to review the 2004 Act.

The Socialist Party defends the right of trans people to self-identify and argued for the trade union and socialist movement to develop an independent working-class approach to fighting for trans rights based on solidarity.

When I spoke, I argued to reject the idea put forward by others there, that the different groups facing special oppression under capitalism must fight each other for rights and resources.

Unfortunately speakers from trade unions and the Labour Party are seeking shortcuts to women's liberation without a struggle. This is a dead end and will not win.

We need to fight for the maximum unity of the working class in struggle against cuts, on all our services, and capitalism, that is based on inequality.

The trade unions, as the largest organisations of the working class, can and have played a key role in the fight for the rights of those who suffer oppression and discrimination under capitalism.

About a dozen Labour Party and trade union members signed the Women's Lives Matter petition. The petition appeals to shadow chancellor John McDonnell to guarantee that an incoming Labour government would replenish any reserves a Labour council used to avoid cuts to domestic violence services and refuges now, and underwrite borrowing made for the same purpose.

- See what we've written on this important issue: '[Gender recognition division](#)'
-

Leeds residents' anger against private 18-story monster block in 'Little London'

Kevin Pattison, Leeds Socialist Party

An angry public meeting in Leeds - called by the Little London Tenants and Residents Association - discussed the proposal to build an 18-story block of private flats on a small green space.

Little London is near the city centre so developers are keen to build. The area already has nine tower blocks, and there are very few open spaces.

The development would require the removal of 51 trees. These absorb carbon dioxide from a nearby busy road.

The land is owned by Leeds City Council. The meeting called for the council to oppose the development and not to sell the land.

To his credit, the local Labour councillor present at the meeting, Javaid Akhtar, said he opposed the scheme.

However, the Labour-controlled council leadership has been selling off plots of land it owns to private developers.

Its strategy in the face of year-on-year cuts from central government has been to prioritise developing the city centre as a 'destination', hoping to plug the finances with increased business rates. But these have largely been illusory.

The working class has borne the brunt of austerity. In its February budget, the council agreed above-inflation rent rises for tenants in Private Finance Initiative (PFI) built properties. Many are in Little London.

The Socialist Party believes that the council should be fighting the cuts instead of implementing them.

The alternative no-cuts budget drawn up by Leeds trade union council this year would be an excellent place to start.

That's why we'll be standing local resident and Socialist Party member Michael Johnson as a Socialist Alternative candidate in this ward in the 2 May local elections.

And Socialist Party members joined activists in the tenants and residents association to door knock on 23-24 March to encourage everyone to make their objections known to the council.

Enthusiastic Southern region Socialists plan for the struggles ahead

Socialist Party Southern region conference was well-attended, lively and confident.

Southampton Socialist Party member Sue Atkins just achieved 14% of the vote [in the Cxford ward by-election](#).

Our campaign of opposing all cuts struck a chord with many voters. The Socialist Party is proud of Sue's achievement and it puts down a marker for the future.

There were members from Aylesbury, Basingstoke, Bracknell, Oxford, Reading and Southampton at the 24 March meeting.

Regional secretary Nick Chaffey explained the volatile political period we are entering.

The mood at the meeting was confident and optimistic. In a number of areas, our members are doing sterling work boldly putting forward the socialist alternative to austerity, cuts and privatisation.

In Reading, our members are campaigning against cuts to services by the Labour council. In Bracknell, our members are prominent in a campaign to end the housing crisis.

Elsewhere, we are fighting to defend the NHS, play a key role in the union fightback and Socialist Students has backed the school student walkout over climate change.

Members responded with a magnificent finance appeal to fund and expand our work in the region. The collection raised £856.

Terry Pearce, Bracknell Socialist Party

Worcester library cuts: staff not even consulted

28 people came to Worcester Socialist Party's second, very successful public meeting over the threats to library services.

A rep for public sector union Unison in Worcestershire County Council explained that although there has been a 'consultation' over cuts to services, no consultation has been held with staff!

Everyone was keen to help and we made plans for the next steps in the campaign to save our libraries.

Ruthie McNally, Worcester Socialist Party

- See what we've said so far '[Worcestershire: save the libraries, reverse all the cuts](#)'
-

Reader's comment: mental health under capitalism

Max McGee, Nuneaton Socialist Party

The way capitalism manages the collective mental health of workers is a method that eats its own tail.

The casualisation of labour, the Orwellian production quotas, the disdain with which big business greets the alienation of its workforce, combine to produce an increasingly dystopian reality of life and health under this system.

With capitalism offering no realistic solution to a dying planet, this sense of powerlessness is multi-faceted. That is part of how the market makes us sick.

Workers in Britain and across the globe are engaged in a draconian 'race to the bottom', economically coerced into selling our labour for the lowest price in the market.

The mental impact of this burnout culture is often overlooked by the bosses, as it is not in the nature of big corporations to care for any motive other than profit.

According to the most recent National Employee Mental Health Survey, at any one point, one in six of the working-age population is suffering from a mental health condition.

Last year, stress accounted for 43% of all working days lost due to ill health and for 34% of all work-related ill health cases.

Yet, when asked by their employers, 95% of employees cited a reason other than workplace stress for their absence due to stigma and possible blacklisting.

When attempting to explain mental health it is vital to look at the capitalist system. There is often a refusal to recognise the significance of economic conditions in education, health and the workplace. There is often a refusal to look at the underlying causes of mental ill health.

According to the Mental Health Research Charity 75% of mental illnesses begin in childhood. Yet many schools report funding cuts have meant school counsellors and pastoral care specialists are no longer being employed, while 50% of mental health problems in adult life take root before the age of 15.

What needs to be factored in is that capitalist austerity means these problems are not being tackled pre-emptively. It is vital to understand that physical and mental health do not exist in a vacuum.

At surface level, it may seem that these systemic problems of capitalism are all-powerful and all-encompassing, but it is through a socialist alternative and a democratic planned economy, controlled by the working class, that the root cause of these problems can and will be removed.

The Socialist Party says

The Socialist Party fights for full funding for the NHS, including massive expansion of mental health facilities, and an end to bullying and insecure work.

There can be no doubt the mental health crisis in workplaces and communities across the country is due to the draconian policies of the Tories and Blairites.

Increasingly, people have to work multiple jobs to make ends meet. Sometimes even that is not enough to cope with rising living costs.

Claimants of in-work benefits are also on the rise. Benefits are under attack through Universal Credit and cuts.

The Socialist Party campaigns within trade unions for effective action against poor pay and conditions, and for coordinated strikes to bring down this bosses' government.

The Socialist inbox

Letters to the Socialist's editors.

Do you have something to say?

Send your news, views and criticism in not more than 150 words to editors@socialistparty.org.uk, or if you're not online, to Socialist Postbox, PO Box 24697, London E11 1YD.

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.

New Zealand PM's anti-racism hypocrisy

Jacinda Ardern, prime minister of New Zealand, is being lauded round the world for her response to the killing of 50 people at two mosques in Christchurch on 15 March.

She has promised restrictions on automatic weapons and refuses to use the name of the killer. She has also promised an anti-racist programme.

Yet, her Labour Party is in a coalition government with the national populist New Zealand First, which is anti-immigration and has nine MPs. The Labour Party also has a 'confidence and supply' arrangement with the Greens.

Despite the fact that the leader of New Zealand First is part Maori, he has proposed policies that are detrimental to New Zealand's indigenous people.

His proposal to abolish the Maori electorates was dropped when the party joined the coalition.

New Zealand First espouses a mixture of left and right populist policies, but it is deeply conservative on social issues and 'law and order' (which disproportionately affects Maoris who are 15% of the 4.9 million population of New Zealand, but 50% of the prison population).

They want to restrict immigration to between 7,000 and 15,000 "seriously qualified" people a year, who must 'assimilate'.

In 2007 the deputy leader, Peter Brown, said: "If we continue this open door policy, there is a real danger we will be inundated with people who have no intention of integrating into our society...

"They will form their own mini-societies to the detriment of integration and that will lead to division, friction and resentment."

This is the sort of language that has stoked Islamophobia and racism around the world including in New Zealand.

If Ardern is serious about her anti-racism agenda, she needs to start with her coalition partner!

Clare Wilkins, Nottingham

A tale of two Saturdays

On setting out to go sell the Socialist newspaper on the streets of Leyton, east London on 23 March, I happened to cycle through the poshest part of my area - Walthamstow Village.

We now have two galleries and a wine and cheese shop here, but the local butcher had to move out because of the hike in business rates.

There, groups of people were gathering with sashes and homemade placards proclaiming 'Bollocks to Brexit' as they finished their eggs Benedict before heading to the so-called 'People's Vote' march in central London.

I stopped and asked one of them where they'd been all my life, particularly the bit where I lost my pittance of a job in his local library and attempted to stop austerity cuts? In fact, I asked him about all of the anti-austerity protests lately and whether he'd been on any.

His limp cardboard placard fell in his hands. No doubt he was dead cross. I cycled on to try and stop vulnerable kids losing their teaching assistants in his local school because of austerity cuts.

I understand people march for a variety of reasons and many people who marched for a people's vote also try to stop austerity, but it does amuse me that some people cut themselves off from so much suffering caused by austerity... until it affects them!

Nancy Taaffe, Walthamstow, east London

Blairite 'party within a party'

The Blairites in the Labour Party have now formed themselves into a 'party within a party' with the deputy leader Tom Watson leading the pack.

But in fact this is nothing new. They have been plotting and scheming against Jeremy Corbyn from day one and the anti-austerity policies he represents.

The smears and vilification over alleged antisemitism and bullying have reached new depths. This sabotage should be forcefully challenged by Corbyn.

He should have confidence in the mass membership of Labour's ranks to remove those elements and replace them with genuine socialists that will support and implement a programme in the interests of the many.

The only way Corbyn will be accepted by the Blairites is the abandonment of the pro-worker policies that he was elected leader on.

The right wing realise that a general election could happen sometime this year and they are prepared to do as much damage to Corbyn as possible to prevent him coming to power on an anti-austerity anti-austerity programme.

And subsequently removing him as leader at some point if, as they hope, Labour loses the election.

But the failed austerity-lite policies of Blair, Brown and Miliband will not gain mass support any longer.

People want an end to policies that benefit the 1%. They want an end to privatisation of the NHS and the race to the bottom in wages and conditions.

They want decent homes with affordable rents. They would support the nationalisation of rail and the energy and water companies and more.

The Blairites have had their day. Some of them have jumped ship already because they were facing deselection.

The rest are biding their time and hope that they can force Corbyn to retreat on the radical policies he has been advocating.

Frank Bowen, Liverpool

Homes for all

As usual on a Wednesday evening I left home, caught a bus into the city centre and was walking to the local Socialist Party meeting when I approached and passed a couple in conversation. A man asked a woman: "Where do you live?" The woman replied: "Outside Sainsbury's".

I was travelling in the right direction, but what is needed is for the labour and trade union movement to be led by leaders travelling in a socialist direction. End austerity and low pay and fight for homes for all!

Audio version of this document

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What the Socialist Party stands for

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

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

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

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

Our demands include:

Public services

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

Work and income

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

Environment

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

Rights

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

Mass workers' party

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

Socialism and internationalism

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

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