

Historic all-out junior doctors' strike action

Zoë Brunswick, Medical student

Junior doctors staged their first full walkout in NHS history from 8am to 5pm on 26 and 27 April.

Emergency care was provided instead by consultants and other health professionals. This momentous escalation was in response to Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt's continued refusal to negotiate.

The strike went ahead despite ongoing pressure on Hunt to back down - including a continuous grassroots protest outside the Department of Health, begun in early April.

Labour's right wing has again undermined Jeremy Corbyn's support for the strike. Scandalously, Shadow Health Secretary Heidi Alexander suggested a trial of the new contract. In effect, no different to the Tory plan of staged imposition from September.

It is not the timeframe for contract change that doctors are protesting, but its actual terms. These discriminate against women doctors, will force staff to work more unsociable hours for less pay, and will worsen patient care.

Concern

Some had expressed concern about a full withdrawal of labour. But the belligerent government has forced this action through its refusal to back down. Public support for the strike remains high, despite media attempts to unnerve doctors.

Teachers' union NUT has already discussed the idea of coordinating strikes with doctors' union BMA. This would massively boost morale, and put further pressure on the government.

On the evening of 26 April, the BMA and NUT in London held a joint protest. Socialist Party members in the unions and National Shop Stewards Network have worked to help this happen. Teachers and doctors marched in solidarity against vicious attacks on the NHS and schools.

Following this, we must push for unions to mount more decisive, coordinated action - at local and national levels - against this government's heavy-handed barrage of cuts and privatisation.

Tata steel crisis: 100% nationalisation now!

Alec Thraves, Socialist Party Wales

With the government's announcement that it is prepared to take a 25% stake in a Tata Steel buyout there has inevitably been a flurry of reaction with hopes understandably raised that such a deal could offer a lifeline to steel workers and their communities.

Even the partial nationalisation offered by this Tory government, a complete anathema to its ideological stance of privatising anything that moves, shows the enormous political pressure Cameron is facing in trying to retain the UK's power and prestige in this critical area of manufacturing.

When Tata announced plans to cut 1,050 jobs in the UK last January, including 750 at its Port Talbot plant, Socialist Party members, alongside the National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN), launched a campaign for the democratic nationalisation of Tata Steel as the only guarantee of keeping the plants open.

Unlike some of the Welsh steel trade union leaders and Aberavon MP, Stephen Kinnock, we had no confidence that the Tata board of directors in Mumbai would protect the jobs of steel workers and unfortunately we were proven correct.

At the start of our campaign for full nationalisation the Welsh government's First Minister, Carwyn Jones, dismissed outright the call for nationalisation, calling it a 'red herring' and a 'non-starter', as did the so-called leaders of the steel workers' union Community, when one of their Welsh representatives told BBC Wales news that they were actually opposing nationalisation!

These very same people are now ecstatic at the government's announcement of 25% nationalisation, which of course is a big step forward. But because it still comes with reliance on private sector intervention from investment companies and vulture capitalists there remains great uncertainty over the future of the plants.

A united struggle involving Tata Steel workers from across the company to demand full nationalisation remains the best way to save jobs and defend steel communities. This is what the steel unions should be urgently organising instead of going cap in hand, begging the ruthless private sector to invest!

Welsh billionaire Sir Terry Matthews, the self-proclaimed Knight in Shining Armour, is in the process of pulling together a consortium of interested business partners, steel managers and even the chief executive of Neath Port Talbot council, who himself has had a great deal of experience in implementing massive cuts over the past few years.

Little wonder then that as well as a desperate hope of success there is also a big dose of cynicism towards this proposed consortium buyout.

Many older steel workers remember the Phoenix Consortium which bought out the Longbridge car plant in Birmingham in 2000 for £10 and was effectively given £500 million by the then owner, BMW, plus £16 million from the New Labour government. Five years later, the five executives put the company into administration, sacking 6,000 workers on statutory redundancy terms and walked away with £42 million in pay and pensions!

It's reported that this proposed management buyout would also involve steel workers putting up to £10,000 each into the pot. This has been met with amazement by steelworkers who not only blame the present management for part of the problems in the plant but say they have absolutely no chance of finding £10,000 to invest in a project that was rejected as too risky by Tata itself. As one steel worker commented: "It would be like me withdrawing £10,000 from my bank account, driving down to the plant and throwing it into the blast furnace! Why should we risk money we haven't got when bankers took no risks and were 100% bailed out by the government?"

There is even a suggestion that the 130,000 workers in the pension scheme should also 'invest' their money into the project. Even the jovial, uncle-type figure of Sir Terry Matthews, head of the consortium, is reluctant to invest any of his own money into the management buyout and neither will the trade union leaders and politicians advocating such a position do so.

Full nationalisation under democratic workers' control and management, financed by the Westminster and the Welsh governments, would avoid any financial risk to workers and would ensure the funds are available to reinvest in and then develop a plan of production to save jobs and communities.

The steel industry is a multi-billion pound organisation that can only be financially secured by

government funds and full nationalisation. It bears no comparison to those who misguidedly point to the management and workers' buyout of Tower colliery, a few miles up the valleys, as a way forward. Tower colliery was a tiny project in comparison to Tata, which had a short term profitable future but inevitably as a small island cooperative, working in a sea of capitalism, has now closed.

The fight for the future of Port Talbot and the other Tata plants lies not in the hands of the investment bankers or vulture capitalists but in a united struggle of the steel unions to demand 100% nationalisation now!

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 22 April 2016 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

Hillsborough inquest victory: 96 victims unlawfully killed by cops

The inquest into the 1989 Hillsborough disaster has found that police unlawfully killed 96 fans. This decision vindicates the families and supporters of victims who have campaigned for years against an establishment cover-up.

- More on this important victory to follow on this website and in a later issue of the Socialist
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Nationalise BHS to save 11,000 jobs

Iain Dalton, Shop workers' union Usdaw conference delegate (personal capacity)

Department store BHS is going into administration. The news on 24 April will have shocked many, not least the 11,000 staff.

Speaking to the Socialist Party's Isai Priya, one worker was "scared and uncertain on the future," saying "I feel like I am not in control."

Retail mogul Philip Green, who owned BHS as part of his Arcadia group, sold it last year - for £1.

Bosses blame the company's large debts - £1.3 billion, including a £571 million pension fund deficit. But when Green bought the company in 2000, it had a £5 million surplus, rising to £12 million the following year.

Green has taken what the Financial Times calls "substantial dividends" over a number of years. He avoided tax on these by paying them to his wife, who lives in Monaco.

Superyacht

Additionally, he used BHS assets to back loans for other businesses within his group. Green recently bought a third superyacht.

And BHS paid over £25 million to its subsequent owners, Retail Acquisitions, ahead of going into administration.

Even under previous recovery plans, management was discussing closing up to 50 stores and attacking staff pensions. Now retail workers are once again expected to pay the costs of the bosses' mistakes.

If administrators, or a new buyer, attempt to shut stores down, workers should take a leaf from the book of workers in Ireland. Staff at Game and La Senza occupied their stores.

Multiple owners have proved incapable of running BHS as a going concern, using it to feather their nests instead.

The company should be nationalised, and run democratically by workers and consumers. That would save 11,000 jobs, and allow stores to respond to communities' household product needs.

Rich List betrays lies of austerity

Sam Gleaden

The annual publication of the Sunday Times Rich List is a chance to bask in the magnificent work of our 'wealth creators'. And the past year has seen many increase their well-earned domination of British and global society.

Epitomising this spectacular enterprising growth of the capitalist elite is one of this year's biggest climbers: Major-General His Grace the Duke of Westminster, Gerald Cavendish Grosvenor.

His company, Grosvenor Group, makes him worth an eye-watering £9.4 billion. This 'creates' wealth by heroically speculating on large swathes of property, and inflating London's monstrous housing bubble.

The massive increase in the wealth of property investors in this year's Rich List - including the number-one spot, newly taken by David and Simon Reuben - shows the massive hypocrisy at the heart of the capitalist economic system.

The housing crisis is reaching preposterous levels. 53% of private tenants struggle to pay rent, according to Shelter.

The money is there to build genuinely affordable housing for all the real wealth creators - the workers, who make the goods and run the services that create the bosses' profits. But establishment politicians encourage a super-wealthy clique to exploit the basic human needs of ordinary people.

Housing is just one example of the parasitism of the 6th Duke of Westminster and pals. Cuts and privatisation are affecting every area of our lives.

That's why we should take the wealth off the 1%. Nationalise land, banking and the big corporations under the democratic control of workers and the community. Then a socialist plan of production could not only return the services we have lost, but guarantee security and prosperity for all - not just the super-rich.

Queen reaches 90: abolish the monarchy

Paul Callanan

Many people will have watched with extreme indifference Queen Elizabeth's 90th birthday celebrations.

Some may even have felt slightly nauseous as they watched left-wing politicians, such as Jeremy Corbyn and 'Red Ken' Livingstone, send their most insincere best wishes.

The reason for the apathy is because many see the monarchy as, at best, a huge waste of money. We are told she has no real power and is just a figurehead. And on the face of it, this is right.

But in truth, the continuation of the monarchy is a danger to the workers' movement in the future. The queen still holds powers such as the right to dissolve governments, call elections - and declare martial law.

The capitalist class - the real power behind the throne - has resorted to some of these powers within living memory.

In 1975, the bosses used them to dismiss Gough Whitlam's democratically elected 'radical' Labour government in Australia. This was in spite of its relatively modest programme.

The anti-democratic reserve powers of the monarchy, alongside the police and the army, are among the last lines of defence against movements that threaten capitalist rule.

That is why socialists say the monarchy, along with the House of Lords, must be abolished.

We congratulate Mrs Windsor on reaching 90 - after travelling the world, and being waited on hand and foot, at the expense of Britain's workers. There will be no place for the feudal institution of the monarchy in a socialist society.

Most diesels emit illegal levels of poison

97% of modern diesel cars break European Union rules on poisonous nitrogen oxide emissions. Testing firm Emissions Analytics found a quarter producing six times the limit or more.

This comes after last year's emissions test cheating scandal, centring on car maker Volkswagen. It now seems pretty much every diesel out there is killing us.

The Socialist says: the car bosses can't be trusted. Nationalise their factories and assets as part of a democratic, socialist plan of production. For mass investment in green technology and cheap, publicly owned mass transport.

Them & Us

The Sunday Times published its annual Rich List on 24 April.

£137.8 billion

Total net worth of Britain's wealthiest 1,000 residents - the top 0.002%.

£56.9 billion

Total net wealth of Britain's poorest 12.6 million residents - the bottom 20%. (2010 to 2012, Office for National Statistics)

£103 million

Minimum you need to be admitted to the 2016 Rich List.

£1.325 million

Gross lifetime earnings of a worker on the average UK salary of £26,500 over a 50-year career. It would take 77 lifetimes for a worker on average pay to earn the equivalent needed for Rich List entry. Of course, you'd have lost most of it in rent and necessities to people already on the Rich List anyway.

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Property billionaire brothers David and Simon Reuben, top of the 2016 Rich List. They also have investments in tech, metal and banking. The pair owns Millbank Tower, Oxford Airport, shops on London's ultra-posh Sloane Street, and more. Net worth: £13.1 billion.

5 million

Homelessness charity Shelter's estimate of the numbers caught in the UK's 'rent trap' in 2014. These renters - 66% - permanently subsidise private landlords, never able to afford a deposit on their own homes.

£9.78 billion

Ernesto Bertarelli's net worth, with wife Kirsty. Ernesto mainly races yachts these days. But he earned his money the hard way: by cleverly and industriously inheriting a pharmaceutical firm. When that sold, he took home a well-deserved \$8.6 billion.

£8.9 billion

Total net cost of ingredients in NHS prescriptions in 2014 (Health and Social Care Information Centre). Private drugs companies, like Ernesto's former plaything Serono, demand obscene mark-ups. 'Dasatinib', for example, is a leukaemia treatment. Its manufacturer, Bristol-Myers Squibb, sells it to the NHS at 100 times what it costs to make.

Spare a thought

Steel magnate Lakshi Mittal has suffered, now only worth £7.12 billion after his stake in steel crashed due to overcapacity in China. Oil barons and retail bosses have also lost out. The Socialist will be dropping round the UK's 1.68 million unemployed workers to see if they can spare a quid.

Top tweets: TUSC

[@TUSCoalition](#)

The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) is fielding candidates against cutters and privatisers of every stripe. Tory and Blairite council cuts, academies and the jobs economy are some key issues.

- We all know public services run by our local councils are facing crisis after years of austerity - vote for councillors who will resist! #TUSC
 - Tories wriggling on academies but 'local authorities could form their own academy chains'? What?! How about just running the schools!! #TUSC
 - #BHS 11,000 jobs could go - following steel, who can believe Tory lies about economy? #CapitalismFail #TUSC
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Editorial of the Socialist, issue 899

Defeats and u-turns show Tories are weak

Together we can defeat them!

We are in a war against this Tory austerity government. Ranged behind it are the bosses, Rich Listers, privateers, banksters, exploiters and hedge funds. On our side are the majority of people, the working class, young people, junior doctors, teachers, steel workers, disabled people and all suffering under this pro-1% government.

The first task in a war is to assess the strength on both sides. On any account the Tories are weak. Elected with the support of less than one in four eligible voters with a small majority of 12, since last June they have suffered a whole number of defeats.

The government has had to backtrack on its refusal to act on the steel industry, under pressure committing to a public stake. We demand 100% nationalisation.

On its budget announcement to make all schools into academies, it is considering offering councils some control. We say no education privatisation.

Trade unions

The Tories retreated on changes to union dues payments amid the attacks in the vicious anti-Trade Union Bill - let's now fight to defend trade unions. The Tories were forced to retreat on tax credits - we want an end to austerity. And 16 defeats have been inflicted on the Housing Bill - but we need investment in council housing and rent control.

As well as being weak the Tories are also divided. Their divisions do not arise from any deep-running differences on austerity - on that they agree whole-heartedly.

The immediate reason is the European Union referendum which Cameron was initially forced to call in

an attempt to cut across the magnetic pull exerted on his backbenches by Ukip. The party is split down the middle.

As Ken Clarke pointed out, Cameron would not last 30 seconds if the government is defeated. A defeat for Cameron and Remain would see him forced to resign and a general election could be called.

Ultimately the Tory party is being torn apart because the system it defends, capitalism, is in crisis and capitalist parties cannot rule in the old way. Across the world, the capitalist parties' inability to provide any solutions to the problems facing the majority of people - including unaffordable housing, low pay, environmental destruction and war - makes them enormously unpopular and therefore unstable.

While the government has not yet faced a mass movement on these issues it has glimpsed the opposition. In the Times, a Tory "rebel" described the forced academisation of schools "as a 'f***** poison' that could see parents camped outside popular council-run schools in protest while Tory councils have described the policy as wrong and bonkers." It's estimated that the rebellion could rise to 40 as MPs feel the heat in their constituencies.

Organised

A weak and divided enemy is an advantage but not a guarantee of victory. To drive home that advantage requires organisation and leadership on our side.

Without doubt there is support for the idea of getting the Tories out. It stems from the mostly subterranean mass opposition to austerity, the disgust at the Panama revelations, anger at inequality and no trust in the Tories to solve any of our problems.

The 18-million strong anti-Poll Tax movement toppled Thatcher. Without doubt an organised movement today could not only push Cameron out but also force a general election.

There are many indications of the mood for action - from the strikes of the junior doctors to the support of the steel workers for the demand for nationalisation, from the Kent school students striking against the closure of their school to library campaigners, to the unanimous vote at NUS conference for a national campaign and demonstration against fees, and so on with campaigns and protests on local, regional and national scales.

The first step should be coordinating strike action of all those workers with ongoing disputes. Among them there is support for the idea of a 24-hour general strike which would reveal clearly how isolated the Tories are and the mass nature of the opposition to austerity.

Anti-austerity party

The election of Jeremy Corbyn as Labour leader also reflected the rejection of the representatives of the 1%. But Labour still contains a majority of MPs and councillors who do not oppose Tory austerity. While Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell have been upfront in their support for the junior doctors' strike, Shadow Foreign Secretary Hillary Benn has been one of the voices from the Labour front bench saying Labour would not and should not be on the picket lines.

We need a party that stands on the side of working class people. If Labour is to play that role it means Corbyn leading a fight to remove Benn and all those who take the side of the Tories and the bosses against working class people. An unapologetically no-cuts and pro-working class party would win the support of millions and strengthen the movement to get the Tories out.

The Socialist Party is standing candidates as part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition against

cuts-making councillors in May's local elections. See www.tusc.org.uk

Trade unions: myths of EU 'Remain' campaign

Dave Semple, PCS union rep

When Jeremy Corbyn, flanked by Blairite minders like Alan Johnson, made his first serious intervention in the EU referendum debate, he declared that if we voted Leave, the Tories would dump equal pay, annual leave and maternity rights.

This follows months of the Trades Union Congress cranking up the left wing of Project Fear. General Secretary Frances O'Grady famously and disgracefully declared in February: "Most of the rights we depend on derive from Europe".

Socialists must be absolutely clear that, in or out of Europe, our rights are under threat. We can choose, like O'Grady, to hide behind the skirts of the European Union or we can choose to organise and campaign for our rights.

The European Union has not prevented Tesco attacking the pensions of staff, or the premiums they enjoyed for working anti-social hours.

It has not prevented the government's quest to break up national pay bargaining for council workers and teachers, or their attack on public sector pensions, or the strike ban they imposed against Prison Officers.

All of these have been imposed without a peep from the EU, the institutions of which are fully behind the Tory plan to make City spivs ever richer and workers ever poorer.

Maternity rights were not a gift from the European Commission; they were first wrested out of the hands of employers by strong unions.

This is why strongly unionised jobs often come with more than the statutory minimum entitlement to maternity leave.

Managers routinely ignore these rights - and un-unionised workers have no redress, for fear of angering the boss.

Union leaders associated with the establishment-led Remain campaign are allergic to the kind of industrial struggles that can secure rights like these.

A huge section of the working class will not be convinced by this scaremongering.

They will be repulsed by Labour activists standing beside Tories on high streets, handing out leaflets promising that the EU will secure jobs - the same Tories who have slashed more than a million public sector jobs.

Workers will be instinctively repelled by a blood-spattered establishment promising jam tomorrow while hospitals go bankrupt, libraries close and school places evaporate.

They are right to be repelled - and someone has to speak for them. This is why the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition is organising a working class, socialist Leave campaign.

We must fight on two fronts - to push these union leaders into fighting austerity and to build a socialist

How the bosses' EU acts against workers and trade unions

Kevin Parlson

The 'Remain' campaign, including unfortunately most trade union and Labour Party leaders, says that workers' rights would be more adversely affected by a vote to 'Leave' the European Union (EU). This is not true! Workers and trade unions are already under attack from the EU. Although 'accepting' the right to organise in trade unions of a workers' choice (part of International Labour Organisation - ILO - principles, not an EU right), when this comes into conflict with the bosses' objectives of the single market and the rights of businesses to exploit their workers, the capitalist EU invariably comes down on the side of the bosses.

Here is how the bosses' EU acts against workers and trade unions and facilitates the 'race to the bottom':

- Viking case: The Viking shipping line wanted to reflag its Finland to Estonia route to Estonia to take advantage of cheaper wage rates. The European Court of Justice (ECJ) ruling accepted the right to strike against this but limited its scope and said it was possible that 'collective action' taken by workers to protect their interests could be unlawful because it infringed the 'employer's interests'. Employers have the right to extend their business and pay the wages and implement conditions of a cheaper jurisdiction, ie they can avoid collective agreements and conditions.
- The Laval case was similar; this Latvian company won a contract to renovate Swedish schools and refused to sign a collective agreement with the building workers' union in Sweden, because it wanted to employ workers at Latvian wage rates. The union organised a blockade of Laval sites and the company could not do business in Sweden. Laval claimed the blockade infringed its corporate rights. The ECJ said industrial action must be limited if it obstructed the right to carry out business in services. It forced the union to pay Laval damages! This judgement and fine were condemned by the ILO!
- Posted Workers' Directive: The Directive has come under criticism for reducing rights of posted workers (workers sent to employment abroad by their employers) and undermining the rights of workers in the nation where the work is carried out. Employers need only adhere to a minimum number of basic rights in that country.
- The Lindsey Oil Refinery strike in 2009 overcame the use of lower-paid agency labour from Italy and Portugal, and thereby the Posted Workers Directive, by determined industrial action to defend the National Agreement for the Engineering Construction Industry (NAECI), a collectively negotiated agreement. Appeals were made to the agency workers in their own languages and the strike defeated the EU's regulations.
- The ECJ ruled in the Rüffert case that collectively negotiated agreements in Germany did not apply to certain contracts. The Posted Workers Directive limits the employment protection which can be provided in public building and works contracts, and rides roughshod over workers' rights. Thompsons Solicitors, a major trade union law firm, said the Rüffert decision was 'absurd'.
- The Temporary Agency Work Directive (TAWD) established a minimum common standard of employment rights for agency workers but they may be below standards already in force in many countries! The directive was criticised for facilitating the 'race to the bottom'.
- Work Agencies have been criticised for using the 'Swedish derogation' of the TAWD, where they offer an agency worker a permanent contract of employment and pay the worker between assignments. A worker entering into such a contract gives up the entitlement to equal pay (with

permanently employed workers) in any post taken. Workers on 'zero hours' contracts are not considered to be on a 'derogation' contract and are not entitled to a regular wage.

- In the Parkwood Leisure case, EU courts ruled that trade union collective agreements incorporated into the contracts of employees should not be protected during a Transfer of Undertakings and Protection of Employment (TUPE). These workers had originally been employed by Lewisham council but their work had been outsourced. Their nationally negotiated local government contracts stated that their wages should rise 'from time to time' according to collective bargaining agreements, but both British courts and the ECJ ruled that such 'dynamic' agreements do not need to be adhered to after a transfer has taken place! The collectively-agreed pay rate of workers at the time of their transfer continues to be protected under TUPE regulations but the decision means the ECJ has shifted the traditional interpretation of TUPE, as a set of legislation to protect workers, to concentrate on the 'Rights of Establishment' (ie employers) instead.
- The Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) is a proposal for 'harmonisation' of EU and US trade and business laws at the lowest level, usually US legislation. It will allow US companies, particularly the 'Big Pharma' drugs corporations, to buy up en bloc NHS services, for example. The Health and Social Care Act 2012 enshrines this principle.
- The EU single market mechanism forces 'open public procurement', competitive tendering, within the EU. This was also enshrined in the EU's Lisbon Treaty, which promoted privatisation in public services. The First Railway Directive puts forward 'liberalisation' and competition for railway and freight services in the EU, code for privatisation.

The truth is, in or out of the EU, the only defence against the bosses' attacks is to build independent, strong and fighting unions with a class-conscious membership, which links this to the idea of changing society in a socialist direction.

This second of the above articles was posted on the Socialist Party website on 25 April 2016 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition

An anti-austerity alternative on the ballot paper

The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) is standing candidates for elections to the Scottish Parliament, the Welsh Assembly, and sixty English local councils on 5 May.

TUSC has been fielding candidates on a 100% anti-austerity platform since its formation in 2010, co-founded by the late general secretary of the RMT transport workers' union, Bob Crow.

Obviously the political situation has changed since then, with Jeremy Corbyn's election last autumn as Labour leader. TUSC has been clear that it would not stand candidates against Labour politicians who have resisted austerity.

But the big majority of Labour members of the Scottish Parliament, Welsh Assembly and local councillors did not support Jeremy Corbyn for leader and still continue to implement cuts to jobs and services. They cannot be surprised if they now face a challenge from a trade unionist and socialist anti-austerity candidate at the ballot box.

Candidates

There are six Scottish TUSC candidates standing for constituency seats in the Scottish parliament. One is the branch secretary of Glasgow Unison, Brian Smith, who is standing in Glasgow Cathcart. For the Welsh Assembly elections TUSC is standing in three of the five regional list seats. In South West Wales the list is headed by former RMT national executive member Owen Herbert.

In the English council elections there will be 302 TUSC candidates contesting seats in 52 of the 124 local authorities with scheduled elections in May. In addition there are five TUSC candidates standing in by-elections in councils without full elections this year and three TUSC candidates contesting parish council seats.

Lastly, TUSC is standing in two of the three Mayoral contests outside London taking place on 5 May, with Unison national executive member Roger Bannister standing in Liverpool and Socialist Party member Tom Baldwin in Bristol.

- See www.tusc.org.uk for more
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Welsh Assembly elections: A working class voice to say 'save our steel!'

Dave Reid, Socialist Party Wales

The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition's (TUSC) challenge in the Welsh Assembly elections on 5 May has centred on the campaign to save Welsh steel. Standing in the three south Wales lists out of the five regional lists, TUSC has campaigned for the immediate nationalisation of the industry, which is supported by a large majority.

The Port Talbot steel plant is located at the very centre of the South Wales West regional seat. Tata's announcement that it will sell off its UK operations raised the prospect of losing 4,500 direct jobs at Port Talbot and around another 15,000 jobs that rely on the steelworks.

TUSC is demanding that if the UK government refuses to step in and nationalise then the Welsh government should use its borrowing powers to do the same.

Our campaigns have concentrated on being out on the streets and putting our case in hustings. Overwhelmingly working people support our campaign. Understandably some people want to support Corbyn's changes in the Labour Party but, as we explain, Corbyn's Labour is not on offer in these elections. For First Minister Carwyn Jones's Welsh Labour it is business as usual - which means more cuts.

The TUSC launch in nearby Swansea saw a dozen or more supporters take over the main shopping centre with a lively 'TUSC Team' engaging with the passing public on issues such as council cuts, zero-hour contracts, £10 an hour minimum wage, as well as the nationalisation of steel.

Even with Ukip and the Greens also campaigning in the city centre our 'TUSC Team' totally took over the pedestrianised area both politically - by leafleting and petitioning - and physically, with twice as many members participating as our competitors!

Despite the expected minimal media coverage, the TUSC banner and supporters have managed to be photographed in the local press on the steel protests in Port Talbot and on council cuts protests in Swansea.

Candidates

Our lead candidate is Owen Herbert, branch secretary of the Swansea RMT transport workers union. All our candidates are well-known local trade union and socialist activists.

Ukip has tried to pose as a quasi-left party in the elections with expensive leaflets demanding Save Our Steel, Save Our NHS - even taking up the demand for a 24-hour A&E at Ysbyty Ystrad Fawr, a campaign led by Socialist Party members.

Combined with the disenchantment with establishment politicians and the high profile for Ukip afforded them by the media, the proportional representation element of the elections will give Ukip some seats in the Assembly. So part of TUSC's campaign has been to minimise Ukip's seats by exposing their Tory links.

Scottish elections: strong mood for anti-cuts strategy continues

Philip Stott, Socialist Party Scotland (sister party of the Socialist Party in England and Wales)

The result of the elections to the Scottish Parliament on 5 May is not in doubt. According to all opinion polls the Scottish National Party (SNP) looks certain to win another overall majority at Holyrood.

Labour is set to suffer another body blow in Scotland, following the loss of all but one of their seats in the 2015 Westminster election. Only the partial proportional representation system in Scotland will allow Labour to avoid a catastrophe.

No doubt the SNP leadership will claim the result as a confirmation of their policies. But that would not paint even half a picture of the real situation.

The mood in working-class communities has changed significantly in the past year. The hope that was engendered through the independence referendum of September 2014, of an escape route from austerity, has not been delivered.

Indeed, for increasing numbers of people there is growing mood of disappointment at the actions of the SNP leadership - in some cases anger and a sense of betrayal. Despite 100,000 new members in the 'surge' that followed the 'indyref' and the election of 56 SNP MPs to Westminster, the SNP has continued to implement Tory cuts.

In the first instance this mood in many working-class areas is going to lead to a dramatic fall in turnout for the election. The independence referendum saw an unprecedented mobilisation and an 85% turnout. 70% voted in the Westminster elections in a tidal wave that swept the "red Tories" to near extinction.

But this election is likely to see a turnout of less than 60%, reflecting this mood of disappointment and the lack of a national fighting anti-austerity alternative.

SNP first minister Nicola Sturgeon described as "reckless" calls for the new powers coming to Holyrood to be used to increase the top rate of tax. Protecting the elite 1% from tax rises while inflicting Tory austerity on the 99% is not what the 1.6 million who voted for independence expected.

The latest round of austerity cuts are devastating council services. SNP and Labour councils are playing pass-the-parcel and blame-shifting. Not a single SNP or Labour councillor or MSP has been

prepared to call for no-cuts budgets.

As a result there are growing demands for elected politicians to fight austerity rather than meekly implementing it. This has been reflected in the stand taken by the Glasgow and Dundee council trade unions, representing more than 20,000 workers, who demanded no-cuts budgets from their respective Labour and SNP councils.

The Scottish Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) is standing to offer that fighting 100% anti-austerity and socialist alternative.

We are contesting six constituency seats in all, in Dundee, Glasgow and Renfrewshire. Our candidates include leaders of local government trade unions at the forefront of leading struggles against Labour and SNP cuts. All are members of Socialist Party Scotland.

No cuts

Scottish TUSC's campaign has centred on demanding that MSPs should refuse to implement cuts at Holyrood. By using the powers that the parliament has it would be possible to defy austerity and build a mass campaign to win back the billions stolen since 2010.

There is an overwhelming mandate for the SNP to fight following their sweeping election victory last year on an anti-austerity platform. But it's clear that the pro-capitalist leadership of the party has no intention of launching a real struggle.

TUSC candidates are also standing for a £10 an hour minimum wage with no exemptions and an end to zero-hour and insecure contracts. We call for a doubling of the top rate of tax on those earning more than £150,000 a year.

TUSC campaigns for an independent socialist Scotland with democratic public ownership of the banks and big business in order to plan the economy for the millions, not to line the pockets of the billionaires.

We've had a very positive response to these policies in the areas where we have been campaigning. The mood of disappointment at the role in power of the SNP will soon turn to outright anger, and to searching for a genuine 100% austerity and socialist alternative.

While our votes will be modest in this election, Scottish TUSC is helping to prepare the ground for the upheavals and mass struggles that are around the corner.

- For updates and reports see www.socialistpartyscotland.org.uk

Scottish TUSC candidates are:

Brian Smith (Glasgow Cathcart); Ian Leech (Glasgow Pollok); Jamie Coccozza (Glasgow Shettleston); Jim Halfpenny (Renfrewshire North & West); Leah Ganley (Dundee East) and Jim McFarlane (Dundee West)

London elections: fight for an anti-austerity GLA

Paula Mitchell, London Socialist Party

This is a longer version of the edited article printed in the Socialist.

Two weeks before the London mayoral election, David Cameron launched a desperate, racist, anti-Muslim attack on Labour candidate Sadiq Khan in parliament. Why the desperation? Because so shortly before election day, Khan was 20 points ahead of Tory Zac Goldsmith.

While there are no council elections in London this year, on 5 May Londoners will vote for the Greater London Authority (GLA): a directly-elected mayor, and 25 assembly members. There is the possibility that Labour could win an outright majority on the assembly for the first time.

The Tories are in a massive crisis. Riven by the EU referendum, they could split and fall from power within weeks. Failure in the London elections would be another blow.

Were the Corbynistas in London to fight for a bold anti-austerity approach, they could be a lightning rod to harness all the anger at austerity and at the Tories, to drive them out.

Unfortunately, Jeremy Corbyn, in another retreat in the face of the right-wing Blairites that infest the Labour Party, has not insisted on the London elections being fought on the policies that swept him to the leadership.

And rather than fight for those policies, Momentum in London has descended into cheerleading the #JezWeKhan election "Khanpaign".

Sadiq Khan

The Socialist Party understands that big numbers of Londoners want to drive the Tories out of City Hall and will vote for Sadiq Khan to do that. But unfortunately, Sadiq Khan has made it clear, with such statements as: "I like the fact that London is home to 140 billionaires. I like the fact that there are 400,000 millionaires", that he is not intending to be an anti-austerity mayor who challenges the interests of the super-rich.

But Corbyn-supporters inside and outside the Labour Party could still fight for an anti-austerity, socialist programme for London. An anti-austerity GLA would be a powerful counter-force to the Tory government.

Sadiq Khan was elected Labour candidate for London mayor at the same time as Jeremy Corbyn was elected Labour's leader. His win against Blairite Tessa Jowell was part of the 'Corbyn-surge'. Labour's membership in London grew faster than elsewhere after Corbyn's leadership victory, doubling to over 80,000.

General satisfaction polls for Corbyn are higher in London. Polls in December showed more people in London opposed the bombing of Syria than nationally. London was the eye of the storm of protests against pro-bombing Labour MPs like Stella Creasy in Walthamstow. Sadiq Khan voted against the bombing.

In the 2015 general election London bucked the national trend of Labour's defeat, with a swing to Labour of 3.4%. This trend has continued in council byelections, with Labour's vote share increasing by an average of 1.9% up to September and 2.3% since Corbyn became leader.

London population

One of the factors in Labour's support in London is the ethnic diversity of London's population, with black and Asian communities still tending to vote Labour as less racist than the Tories. Another factor is that there is a layer of better-off workers and a 'liberal' middle class in London, including young

working and middle class people moving to London for work, who despite being reasonably well-paid, struggle to get by.

Tory support in London has been hit by increasingly low paid, insecure employment and crippling living and housing costs. Many working class, middle class and young Londoners see the obscenity of vast wealth on their doorsteps every day, while they struggle to pay for a roof over their heads.

The price of homes on the route of the recent London marathon has more than tripled since 2000. The Observer on Sunday revealed that one 38 square-metre single bed studio apartment (the smallest size possible according to government standards) is up for sale for £562,000.

The average rent for a two-bed home is now over £2,200 a month. Half of the evictions of private renters in the country happen in London - and they have doubled in the last five years.

'Social cleansing' and gentrification means that tens of thousands of families have been forced out of inner London in the last five years - over 63,000 have been placed outside of their borough by Labour councils. In consequence the outer boroughs, once middle class strongholds, are now more ethnically diverse and poorer.

In this context, the Tories' attempts to smear Khan by linking him with Corbyn appear to be backfiring.

Vote Khan to support Corbyn?

But Sadiq Khan is no Corbynista, explicitly repeating: "I'm not Jeremy Corbyn's representative in London". He says he will be the capital's champion "often against my own party, rather than the patsy of the leadership of my party."

In March he appeared in the "hostile" section of a leaked list of Labour MPs compiled by Corbyn supporters.

Despite this, very many Corbyn supporters, anti-austerity and anti-war campaigners will vote for Khan in order to support Corbyn.

The reality is that win or lose, the result will be used by the right wing to attack Corbyn: if Khan wins it is despite Corbyn, if he loses it is because of Corbyn.

As Dave Hill said in the Guardian in February, if Sadiq Khan wins while Labour loses in Scotland and in councils, "that message would say that a Labour politician who is savvy, practical and paints a persuasive picture of beneficial change can win power from a left-of-centre platform no matter what muck Conservatives throw at him. Corbyn would not find comparisons flattering."

Sadiq Khan says: "I'm running for mayor because I want all Londoners to get the opportunities that our city gave to me and my family when I was growing up. A secure home you can afford, good jobs with decent pay, a modern and affordable transport system, an NHS that puts patients first, fantastic state schools and real action to reduce crime. I'll be a mayor for all Londoners."

Echoing an idea put forward by the Socialist party and TUSC (Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition), he says he would be "dare I say it, London's shop steward".

But really it depends what kind of Londoner you are. Because in a letter to voters he also says: "I'll be the most pro-business mayor London has ever had... Business will always have a seat at the table when I'm mayor".

It is not possible to actually represent all those interests at the same time. Unless a clear programme is put forward that challenges big business and the super-rich, and a campaign mobilised in its defence,

theirs will be the interests that win out.

Housing proposals

For example, Khan's proposals to increase house-building to 80,000 a year (from the current 23,000), to give 'first dibs' to Londoners, and to prioritise key workers, will be popular.

But in reality he aims to do this by attracting big business investment, and has a target of only 50% being 'affordable'. He has refused to clarify what he sees as the role of council estates - thereby still allowing for demolition of estates with little chance of return for existing residents.

The promise of a London living rent will also be welcomed, but again, this is very limited. Khan proposes that rent will be based on a third of average local income, determined on a borough-by-borough basis.

Not only does this still price working class people out of boroughs where the rich also live, or where 'gentrification' has taken place, but a third of average income is still way too high. Nationally the average spent on housing costs is 21%, itself an increase from 17% in the last ten years.

The mayor controls a budget of £17 billion, plus an additional regional housing fund, and can use the same prudential borrowing system as councils.

The GLA could play a critical role in coordinating resistance to council cuts by the London boroughs, and could mount mass campaigns of trade unions and communities against schools cuts and forced academies, in defence of the NHS, and against the cuts to Transport for London.

An anti-austerity mayor and assembly could:

- Set £10 an hour as the London living wage for all ages
- Call an immediate halt to 'social cleansing' schemes and call on London councils to refuse to implement the Housing Bill
- Build houses and take over empty speculative property to provide 800,000 genuinely affordable homes, including council homes with secure lifetime tenancies
- Set a London rent cap and require councils to register private landlords and establish council-run borough letting agencies
- Re-open the ten closed fire stations and stop the proposed extra cuts of 13 engines
- Enforce a moratorium on NHS and adult social care cuts, closures and privatisations. Call on London's health trusts to refuse to implement Hunt's junior doctor contract
- Call an immediate halt to academies and free schools in London. Call on councils to refuse to pass on cuts to schools funding
- Re-open tube ticket offices and reinstate lost jobs. Instruct bus companies to immediately establish pay parity. Bring privatised London transport back in-house
- Tackle air pollution by investing in non-diesel public transport, establishing a grant for people to convert polluting cars, and bringing in a levy on businesses that drive freight through London. Cut fares. No fracking in London
- Establish a grant for London's young people in further and higher education
- Campaign against racism, 'Prevent' and the scapegoating of migrants and refugees
- Establish a London fund in place of the Independent Living Fund
- Defend the democratic right to peaceful protest in London, including Parliament Square

Other candidates:

At the end of 2015 George Galloway was running third in the polls for London mayor. He is hoping to

pick up an anti-austerity, anti-establishment vote among those who have no illusions in Sadiq Khan.

The Green Party would also hope to do well, standing more council candidates outside London than before and expecting to win seats. In 2012 Jenny Jones came third on 4.5%, in the context of a tightly fought race between Boris Johnson and Ken Livingstone, and the Greens won two assembly seats.

However, Galloway is currently polling at less than half a percent, way behind Ukip (on 7% first preference votes), Greens (6%) and the Lib Dems (5%).

Things can change at the ballot box of course, including some people perhaps feeling less worried about a Tory win given the huge lead Khan now has. But at the moment it would seem that the 'Corbyn surge' is still primarily benefiting Khan.

The racist attacks on him, as a Muslim, will probably mean some London Muslims who might have turned to Galloway will now vote for Khan. Galloway has probably also been tainted by sharing a platform with Nigel Farage in Grassroots Out.

Warrington: Socialist councillor fighting cuts and hitting doorsteps

A Warrington TUSC supporter

Councillor Kevin Bennett and the TUSC team have been out every day in Warrington discussing with Fairfield and Howley residents about the upcoming elections. We have been getting a tremendous response on the doors for Kevin and our other five candidates in the town.

Local people have been able to see the impact of a TUSC councillor over the last few days as fly tipping, a rising problem in the area, has been dealt with.

A growing town, Warrington residents are concerned that big developers are happy to build houses but pay no attention to the infrastructure people will need. Kevin calls for council house building and private developers to be held to account.

In reality, the Labour and Tory councillors have been complicit in letting developers run riot through the town while voting for huge cuts in the council chamber. Every 'lollipop' school crossing patrol has been cut.

Fracking is also a big local issue with ten fracking permits already a worry. Most of the other candidates said fracking was ok if it "could be proved safe". Kevin thinks Warrington should be a frack-free town. Labour has refused to sign up to this demand.

Rather than fracking, Kevin is a supporter of investing in green energy.

Gravy train

The local elections hustings saw the Labour Party outed for increasing expenses to senior councillors by £34,000 while also cutting the YMCA funding by £38,000. Our campaign has been clear - no to the gravy train and for action not words.

Three times in the hustings the Labour representative said there was "nothing they could do" because of the vicious Tory cuts to local government funding. How different our campaign has been!

In his closing remarks Kevin said it was time to take the fight to the Tories, not do their bidding in the council chambers.

Why I'm standing: TUSC can make a real difference

Jac Green, TUSC candidate, Abbey ward, Lincoln

I decided to stand as one of four TUSC candidates in this year's City of Lincoln council elections for a number of reasons. I had the fantastic experience of campaigning in Dublin alongside the Anti-Austerity Alliance during the Irish general election at the end of February.

Labour councillors in Lincoln have been very reluctant to state that they will stand up to Tory cuts. We are seeing a significant number of public services in the city viciously cut, including one of our fire stations in the south of the city. If these cuts go ahead, lives will be put in immediate danger. Lincoln TUSC and our supporters find this completely unacceptable. We are putting forward a no-cuts alternative.

We have been tirelessly campaigning alongside the firefighters union FBU in order to halt these plans. We have received a huge number of signatures for our petitions.

So far, the response to the campaign has been really positive, which has motivated me even more. Teams of supporters have been more than willing to help with leafleting, canvassing and spreading our message.

Our presence in the city centre has piqued interest and it's been fantastic to openly discuss local issues with a broad range of people. It is abundantly clear that the public are seeking real change and they no longer have faith in the mainstream parties.

Lincoln TUSC will fight on behalf of working class people who feel deflated and defeated, disillusioned by the continuation of cuts to vital public services.

I am so proud to have the opportunity to stand under the TUSC banner and present myself as a candidate to the people of Abbey ward. I feel that we can make a real difference in Lincoln and continue to struggle for a fairer city, where people can access the services they need without fear of them being cut.

Southampton Labour council faces crisis as cuts hit city

Nick Chaffey

Despite growing anger at further cuts and continued austerity, Southampton Labour council's failure to mount any resistance to the cuts has put its majority in jeopardy.

No wonder - over £60 million cuts have been carried out by Labour since its election in 2012. Youth services have been closed entirely and a youth centre handed to charity for nothing.

Funding has been stopped to five libraries and the library bus service axed. Sure Start and adult social care have been cut, care homes Woodside Lodge and Brownhill House closed, hundreds of council workers sacked. When thousands opposed the closure of a local NHS walk-in service in Bitterne, Labour councillors voted in support of the closure.

Against this capitulation, the battle in the Coxford ward by anti-cuts councillors Keith Morrell and Don Thomas has been a beacon of hope to those looking for an alternative. On the back of the victory in saving Oaklands Pool from the bulldozers Keith and Don were re-elected by huge majorities.

In 2013 they moved a legal, balanced, no-cuts budget outlining how jobs and services could be protected and on that basis a campaign waged to mobilise the community and trade unions in a fight to restore government funding to meet the needs of the city.

Corbyn

Unfortunately this fell on deaf ears. Even after the election of Jeremy Corbyn and the influx of hundreds of new members to the Labour Party, the council remains on a course of further massive cuts to jobs and services.

Incredibly the latest ruse of the council has been to borrow £65 million to carry out a programme of property speculation as a way of securing extra revenue. With a new super-casino coming to Southampton it seems our future will be a speculative gamble.

The only way to maintain a Labour council is to ensure the council changes course and fights to oppose further cuts. That will not be possible with the current local Labour council leadership. Nationally, members of the trade unions Unite and Unison have decisively called for Labour councils to refuse to vote for further cuts. Such a stand would receive enormous support.

Those in the Labour Party who support such an anti-cuts position need to mobilise that support and demand a change of course by the council. Sadly the local Momentum group has provided no resistance to the right wing. Rather they have uncritically campaigned for Labour cuts councillors, including in the Coxford ward for Labour councillor Sally Spicer. Spicer has appeared in the local paper outside Oaklands Pool claiming to have saved the pool she voted to close.

TUSC is standing candidates across Southampton with a long record of actively opposing cuts. We have given our full support to anti-cuts candidate Tammy Thomas standing in Coxford and other independent anti-cuts candidates.

Anti-cuts stand wins support from students in Leeds

Maddy Steeds, Leeds Socialist Party

On 20 April, Leeds University student union held a hustings for Hyde Park and Woodhouse candidates in the local council elections. The idea was to get more students interested in local politics. TUSC candidate Ben Mayor made a strong case for why students should vote for anti-cuts councillors.

On a panel with the Green Party, Liberal Democrats, Ukip and the Conservatives, TUSC was the only anti-cuts party. While the Green Party often try to put themselves forward as being anti-austerity, their candidate stated that councillors' "hands are tied" over cuts.

Solidarity

Ben made it clear that TUSC fights for ordinary working class people and stand shoulder to shoulder with them during struggles. TUSC's programme of capping rents and setting up an ethical letting agency was popular.

Another topic discussed was sexual assault and safety. Ben was clear that sexual assault survivors need support and concrete measures to improve safety around the ward.

The Lib-Dem candidate instead gave the impression that sexual assault is a result of victims being irresponsible - showing how out of touch politicians are with the consent campaigns making up an important part of today's student politics.

Students in the audience were nodding along to Ben's points. The positive reception shows that students are ready for political change and are very open to socialist ideas.

Countering the growth of Ukip in south Wales

Jaime Davies, TUSC candidate, South Wales East

TUSC is standing widely across Wales in these elections to present working class people with a real alternative to austerity politics and in an attempt to stop Ukip from gaining in Wales with their false anti-establishment rhetoric.

We have been taking to the streets campaigning against NHS cuts, for the democratic nationalisation and public ownership of steel and rail, for a real living wage of £10 an hour for all workers and against the huge cuts to public services imposed by Westminster.

On the doors, campaign stalls in town and city centres and at hustings events, we have received a great response to our strategy and programme.

It has been quite easy to expose Ukip. They are not in favour of nationalising steel. They are also parachuting in failed ex-Tory MPs like Mark Reckless who leads their list in South Wales East.

The majority of people we have spoken to agree with us and some of those taken in by Ukip have decided to switch their support over to us. We were so successful at one hustings that a lot of the Labour Party members there said they would vote for TUSC in the regional list!

I exposed the record of Mark Reckless as a Thatcherite Tory MP who voted to privatise the English NHS and abolish EMA in England. We have been able to explain how Ukip's failure to clearly call for the democratic public ownership of steel is typical of their true ideology.

We produced a leaflet about Ukip with Margaret Thatcher's face on it, asking if people really want people who share her politics representing them in the assembly. Let's not forget how Nigel Farage once proudly proclaimed that had Thatcher been getting into politics now, she would join Ukip.

Whatever our vote in this election, we hope to accomplish our objective - to use the campaign as a platform for our ideas and tactics, to present a real anti-establishment working-class alternative and to stop the advancement of Ukip as much as possible.

Junior doctors withdraw all labour to step up pressure

In the face of the government's refusal to negotiate, junior doctors are again on strike today and tomorrow, 26th and 27th April, 8am-5pm each day. This time the doctors are withdrawing all their labour, i.e. not doing any type of shift.

[Click here to read a Socialist Party leaflet on the dispute.](#)

Gateshead

On television, viewers were told that the presenter was going to confront junior doctors with members of the public who were "vehemently opposed" to their strike. However, outside Gateshead's Queen Elizabeth hospital they would have struggled to find anyone opposed to the strike.

People passing by the picket line were stopping to give words of encouragement. Cars, vans, taxis and buses were all tooting. Consultants were out on their break, and Unison members arrived with hot drinks, all in a show of solidarity.

It's clear the junior doctors are now becoming seasoned strikers. One of them commented that initially he had expected media coverage to be unbiased, showing views from both sides of the strike. Others were having very serious discussions on how best to take the strike forward. The mood on the picket line despite the sleet and biting cold wind was upbeat. The junior doctors are determined they will not be brow-beaten by Jeremy Hunt.

Elaine Brunskill

St Thomas', London

The picket lines are just as big and just as determined as ever at St Thomas' this morning. Strikers were still getting great public support from traffic, bus drivers and passers-by.

The joint teachers and BMA demo due to take place later in the day was particularly popular - junior doctors are keen to link up with teachers who are preparing for strike action themselves and were looking forward to the demo, which will start at their hospital.

Some took extra supplies of the National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) leaflet advertising the demo to give out.

Paula Mitchell

Newham

The picket line at Newham hospital was more than double the size of previous strikes. Junior doctors who had provided emergency cover in previous strikes now joined the picket line, as did doctors coming bleary eyed off a long night shift.

A stream of staff and patients going into the hospital stopped to support the strike including the consultants who were providing cover for the strike. The mood of the strikers was determined. The Socialist Party's call for solidarity action was enthusiastically received.

More than in previous strikes there was a widespread feeling that the public support needs to be turned into concrete solidarity action because a victory for junior doctors would be a victory for all workers, especially public sector workers. Everyone on the picket line (except those coming off night shift!) was planning to travel to central London later in the day to join the joint demonstration with the NUT as a first step to building solidarity.

Hannah Sell

Royal Free, London

Royal London

Around 50 people joined the picket line this morning. Mainly junior doctors but also supporters. What a response to Hunt's bullying! "They want a health system like the US or Australia. It would still be called the NHS but it would be a two tier system where only those who can pay get proper treatment", said one picket.

Lots of NHS staff, including many consultants who are providing cover, came up to get badges and stickers to wear at work today and tomorrow. Junior doctors really appreciated the public support, from specially wrapped 'heart NHS' homemade biscuits, to the toots and bells from passing traffic, to the people queuing up to sign the petition to support their claim.

Naomi Byron

Whipps Cross

More junior doctors than in previous strikes joined the very start of the sunny picket line at Whipps Cross hospital, East London. One doctor told me it was even more important to be on the picket line as they take their first day of all-out strike action. Every doctor we spoke to said they were going to the central London march later today. During this round of action junior doctors are going to schools to speak to teachers in the NUT union about the strike.

Ian Pattison

King George, London

Video: junior doctors explain why they are striking.

Salford

Warrington

Warrington hospital picket line was supported by Socialist Party members, TUSC supporters and members of the trades council.

One doctor said he was striking because the contracts were being imposed. "We are being blamed for the lack of a seven-day NHS". Hunt isn't going to put forward extra resources or staff. He emphasised: "This is not about Saturday pay".

Debbie from the local TUSC group was supporting the strike. She said it was about protecting the NHS for the future. "Doctors work hard and should be treated with more respect" by Hunt and the government.

Helen Pattison

Bristol

Junior doctors were out in force in Bristol today, forming easily the largest picket lines of the dispute so far. Public support seemed unwavering as did the desire of the doctors to fight the imposition of a dangerous new contract.

Discussing the contract one doctor said they may have been targeted because the BMA hadn't been very active in the recent past but that the strike had changed this. Others agreed that an unintended consequence for the government was that more health workers and young people are getting politically active and challenging them. This politicisation and activism can only be a good thing. The more people that join the doctors on strike the stronger they will all be.

Tom Baldwin

Sutton-in-Ashfield

Junior doctors were again on strike at King's Mill hospital, Sutton-in-Ashfield. Countless horns sounded from passing traffic. Supporters brought sandwiches and crisps to sustain the growing crowd. Mansfield Socialist Party members were thanked for our continued support.

Junior doctors are showing the trade unions a thing or two about protest, and giving workers confidence to struggle.

These doctors are not striking over pay; they know Hunt and the Tories want to destroy the NHS as we know it and sell it to their profiteering mates. The trade unions must show solidarity with all health workers and build for a 24-hour general strike in support of the NHS.

Karen Seymour

Taunton

At their picket lines and protests up and down the country, junior doctors have consistently deployed the use of an empty chair with Tory health minister Jeremy Hunt's name on it. This empty chair is used to symbolise Hunt's consistent absence and continual refusal to even sit down and begin to negotiate a settlement with them.

Today was no different here at Taunton's Musgrove Park hospital in Somerset, with the hospital providing the backdrop to two very large and extremely lively junior doctors' picket lines on Tuesday 26th April.

Pointing to the 'Hunt chair', Tom Johnston said: "As you can see, Hunt has once again failed to turn up today so we have loaded up 'his' chair with a pile of doughnuts donated to the picket line by supporters

of our strike ... as you can also see, the pile of doughnuts are clearly far more useful to society than Jeremy Hunt could ever be!"

Harvey Johnson, a foundation first year doctor said: "Of course we would prefer not to have to strike, however as Hunt has given us no other choice it would make far more strategic sense to coordinate our strike action with other public sector workers such as teachers, firefighters and local government workers currently engaged in a monumental struggle to defend jobs and services".

Patric Hart agreed, before adding: "There should be absolutely no place for any outsourcing or privatisation within the NHS."

Steve German

Torbay

There were more doctors than ever on the picket line. Turning up with their children they were determined to send Jeremy Hunt a message of No to imposed contracts. "They have taken on the wrong people", said one. The noise of honking cars was almost continuous at times.

Sean Brogan

Sheffield

There were more than double the usual number of junior doctors on their picket lines at both Sheffield's major hospitals.

They were boosted by a letter signed by 260 Sheffield consultants saying that they supported the strike. In fact they had said that they had the wards covered so the juniors had to go on the picket lines.

At the Northern General Hospital, over 50 pickets stood behind two empty chairs, one with HUNT on, the other with CASH.

These vacant chairs represented Hunt's refusal to negotiate and the failure of Andrew Cash, Sheffield Teaching Hospital's chief executive, to meet with junior doctors locally.

Alistair Tice

Blackpool

Around 40 delegates from Usdaw conference visited the junior doctors' picket line in Blackpool during the lunchtime of the Usdaw conference, including three Usdaw EC members.

Scott Jones

Huddersfield

On a picket line of 20 junior doctors at the Huddersfield Royal Infirmary I spoke to Dr Katie Hames who was angry at Hunt's claim that their action was an attempt to topple the government. Katie was not impressed with the claim that junior doctors have been 'brainwashed' by their union the BMA. She explained that all this was designed to try to destroy doctors' morale. What it is all about is the safety of patients and the future of the NHS.

27 April - second of the two strike days

Maudsley and King's College, London

Pickets at King's College Hospital and the Maudsley in south London brimmed with confidence on 27 April. Spreading the action to junior doctors in emergency and intensive care brought out fresh strikers who have been waiting for the chance to protest.

Denmark Hill, which separates the two hospitals, was deafening. Nearly every other driver leant on the horn in support. Backing for the strike seemed visibly higher as a result of the escalation.

Many pickets had marched on the thousands-strong joint demonstration between doctors' union BMA and teachers' union NUT the previous evening. Socialist Party members in the unions and National Shop Stewards Network worked hard to help this happen. The combined protest - and obvious appetite from members of both unions for combined strikes - boosted morale.

One picket at King's had attended a fringe meeting at the recent conference of public sector union Unison. He reported that Unison members were urging their union to join the doctors' struggle, but the leadership seemed to be holding this back.

James Ivens

Coventry and Warwickshire

Ipswich

NUT members joined junior doctors on the picket line outside the hospital along with local trade unionists from the Ipswich and District TUC at 5pm, to coincide with the march and rally in London.

I spoke to Sadia from the BMA along with her colleagues about conditions in the hospital. She said things are on the brink. Last Friday-Sunday her consultant was on duty for 72 hours and because Sadia as the anaesthetist working the 12-hour night shift over the weekend - and the registrar did the same on the day shift - were so busy, the consultant had just six hours of sleep the whole weekend.

She also said the consultants had been fantastic in their support during the juniors' strikes and the support within the hospital in general had been brilliant. As we stood on the picket line the hooting from the cars never stopped.

Teresa MacKay

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 26 April 2016 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

Trade Union Bill concessions made - now fight

to scrap the lot!

Scott Jones interviewed John McNally, PCS national vice-president (personal capacity)

A change has been made to the government's Trade Union Bill. The government is not now going to include in the bill the removal of check-off* in the public sector. This is a big concession and shouldn't be treated lightly. It would have had a deeply damaging effect if implemented.

But we need an honest assessment of how the concession came about and how the TUC is fighting the Trade Union Bill.

It seems likely that in effect a deal was done between the Tories and some of the trade union leaders regarding the EU referendum. The Financial Times reported last week that the U-turn on check-off was a concession made by the Tories after some of the trade union leaders argued they couldn't help to boost the EU Remain campaign because they had to prioritise fighting the worst aspects of the Trade Union Bill.

This is yet another indication of the divisions and weakness of the government over the EU and on many other issues.

Another reason is the disagreement amongst the ruling class over strategy with regards to the trade union movement. Lord Kerslake, former head of the civil service and no friend of PCS or civil servants, has hinted at the stance of some in the ruling class, which is: why risk destabilising those compliant union leaders who are blocking any fightback against austerity? They pose no real threat so why provoke a situation that risks left-wingers coming to power?

Dropping this provision from the Trade Union Bill demonstrates that all the arguments for the removal of check-off for PCS members by the government were lies and that it was nothing more than a vindictive, purely political act against a union that has led the fight against austerity.

PCS campaigned hard to sign up members to direct debit and did so at a rate unprecedented either nationally or internationally - PCS has emerged stronger from that attack. Before the check-off provision was dropped from the bill, PCS was not only offering solidarity to other unions facing the threat but material assistance and expertise as well.

There is a profound crisis in the leadership of the trade union movement. Some leaders have entirely accommodated themselves to capitalism, have no faith in the capacity of their members to struggle and can see no alternative to cuts, privatisation and austerity.

They refuse to organise joint coordinated action despite the fact that it is TUC agreed policy. Organising coordinated action would be the best way to break the pay freeze which is in place until 2020, but these leaders strongly resist it.

Such union leaders provide a barely hidden foundation of support for the ruling class, especially in times of crisis when it is attacking the working class with austerity policies.

Recent examples include when right-wing trade union leaders collaborated with the government to end the 2011 pensions dispute despite the enormous potential to win concessions or even defeat that attack through joint coordinated action across the public sector.

This collaboration plumbed new depths when some union leaders collaborated with the Tories in their attempt to break PCS through attacks on check-off and facility time.

Lack of determined campaign

The overall TUC campaign against the Trade Union Bill has been an utter disgrace. Rather than campaigning by exposing the real purpose of the attack - to prevent the unions from organising effective action to challenge austerity - it was rejected that there was even a link with austerity. They preferred to highlight the "human rights" aspect rather than opposing the bill on an industrial basis, demonstrating an absolute failure to recognise what is going on in the lives of their members.

The check-off concession is an important one and lobbying politicians and even peers is an important and legitimate aspect of campaigning. But there has been no talk from the TUC about mobilising the strength of trade union members and the wider working class to defeat the bill.

Instead the TUC has praised 'principled conservative peers' for the concession and Unison general secretary Dave Prentis, with no trace of irony, tells his members that bishops in the House of Lords have 'prayed for us'.

The campaign should go on and be stepped up to get rid of the rest of the bill, including the increased voting thresholds for industrial action. But the reality is that for the TUC leaders this check-off 'victory' will mark the end of a campaign that never got off the ground in the first place.

The law is not the decisive factor when it comes to thresholds and taking action. Struggle will continue whatever laws are implemented to stop it. But many union leaders are not exercised about thresholds and will readily argue that such measures make industrial action "impossible" - and they will be used as another excuse to avoid calling industrial action.

It is worth recalling that these same people never lifted a finger to demand that the Labour government scrap the anti-trade union laws.

All this reveals again that the TUC leadership does not effectively represent the working class. They see themselves as diplomats elevated above those they are supposed to represent, shuttling off to the ruling class to beg for crumbs from its table.

The real campaign against the Trade Union Bill has been carried out by the Trade Union Coordinating Group (TUCG), a group of left-wing trade unions which has organised demonstrations.

Demonstrations like that organised by the People's Assembly on 16 April show the enormous potential for struggle but also highlight the failure of the TUC to galvanise that potential. Rather than subcontracting its campaign work, the TUC - the official voice of the British organised working class - should be calling for and leading such demonstrations.

The Tory government is weak and making retreats - including recently by conceding to take a stake in a buyout of Tata Steel. The TUC should be leading from the front and must now build a serious campaign against the Trade Union Bill by - as a first step - calling a mass demonstration, linking it the fight to defend the NHS and support the junior doctors, and against austerity.

**Footnote: Check-off is the collection of union dues by the employer through deducting the dues from workers' salaries and then passing the money to the union.*

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 25 April 2016 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

Housing: Catalyst needs converting

Paul Kershaw, Chair, Unite the Union LE/1111 housing workers branch

Neighbourhood managers at Catalyst Housing have started a work-to-rule in response to restructuring proposals that include halving the number of people doing their job.

Staff say workloads are already unmanageable and the changes could result in a drastic decline in service as well as doubling the workload.

Publicly, Catalyst bosses claim they are willing to discuss staff concerns but they have so far been unwilling to engage with Unite officers, or even with the state conciliation service Acas. The housing association refuses to recognise Unite.

At corporate events Catalyst likes to boast that last year's surplus of £53 million was larger than big high street names such as Greggs the bakers and Foxtons estate agents.

Presumably the size of the surplus is thought to justify last year's 8% pay rise for Rod Cahill, chief executive of Catalyst, who is now on £201,920 a year.

Belt-tightening in the social housing sector has not extended to its bosses who have taken inflation-busting increases year after year. These figures are forgotten when justifying cuts to staff, tenants and leaseholders.

Management claims its re-structure will result in an organisation that is "palpably different".

Unite members believe that the intention is to take further steps towards being a palpably different neoliberal landlord.

Events at Catalyst are a particularly crude example of a process that has been happening more widely in the social housing sector.

Landlords blame government policies for cuts but the sector's surplus of £3 billion last year represented a 25% increase on the previous year, which was also a record.

The operating margin also increased from 26% to 28% last year as costs increased by less than revenues (figures from the Homes and Community Agency global accounts). Some housing associations are experiencing problems but that clearly is not the picture for the sector as a whole.

If the Tory Housing Bill is passed housing associations will be further deregulated, reducing their accountability and making it easier for them to dispose of stock or change tenure.

Workplace news in brief

Justice for jannies

Labour-run Glasgow council, through its arm's length external organisation (Aleo) Cordia, is refusing to talk with school janitors in an increasingly bitter industrial dispute.

Janitors took three days strike action in March and again last week. There have also been protests at the council and Cordia headquarters.

Industrial action began on 19 January by boycotting a number of duties. Cordia is refusing to pay a Working Context and Demands payment (WCD) - ranging from just over £500 to over £1,000 - to school janitors, and is using spurious arguments.

Socialist Party Scotland and TUSC fully support the janitors' action and the #justiceforjannies campaign. We call on the Labour council to meet the janitors' demands immediately.

Matt Dobson Socialist Party Scotland

Glasgow pay cuts

1,500 GMB union members in Glasgow City council will be balloting for industrial action over changes to working time contracts that will leave many low paid workers up to £500 a year worse off.

The council wants to convert six public holidays into annual leave, removing the ability of staff to work hours on overtime rates of pay which workers depend upon to boost their modest pay packets.

The background to this effective pay cut is the Labour-run council implementing £130 million of cuts as part of the SNP's austerity agenda.

Keep the guards

As we go to press, 400 Southern railway on-board conductors (guards) - members of the RMT union - are taking 24-hour strike action over passenger safety concerns.

Southern wants to remove the conductors and have them replaced by inadequately trained On-board supervisors - who won't always be present. This regressive step is part of a plan for driver only operated trains - putting company profits ahead of passenger safety.

Museums all out

PCS members at all six sites of the National Museum of Wales will be taking indefinite all-out strike action from Thursday 28 April.

This is in response to management's threat to sack the workforce and impose new contracts that cut weekend payments.

Management is looking for cuts in response to the Welsh government cuts to museum funding. The Welsh government must step in to prevent the cuts in pay and settle this dispute.

- For background to the dispute see <http://bit.ly/1MViiOL>
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North Sea strike

Workers employed by the Wood Group contractor, which operates Shell oil platforms in the North Sea, staged unofficial strike action last week over plans to savage pay and conditions. The company is accused of cutting pay and conditions to protect profits. Unite and RMT union officials have hinted at possible official action ahead of talks with the company.

Butterfields: campaign to stay getting results

Waltham Forest Socialist Party members

This is a longer version of the edited article printed in the Socialist.

A happy ending may be in sight for tenants of the Butterfields estate in Walthamstow who have been campaigning since February to keep their homes. A housing association, Dolphin Living, has expressed an interest in buying all the homes and keeping tenants in them on their current rents.

Nicole, one of the leading organisers of the campaign, said: "It's very exciting. It's the very beginning of this process but we're hopeful. And we're so grateful for the work everyone has put into the campaign."

As the Socialist has previously reported, 63 homes on the estate were sold by their previous charity owner, the Glasspool Trust, to private developers Butterfields E17 Ltd. That company then began proceedings to evict all the tenants so they could sell the properties for a quick profit.

The Socialist Party has been campaigning with the tenants, exploring all avenues that may keep them in their homes. We have written to as many housing associations as possible and had interest from several, lobbied the council and issued draft motions calling on the council to act. We encouraged the tenants to set up a tenants association which has organised many of the meetings and protests.

Staying firm

The bottom line of the Butterfields Won't Budge campaign from the start was just that - the tenants would not budge. Socialist Party members strongly encouraged the idea that a strategy must be built around the idea that there would be no compromise on this point - no one was going to be forced out of their home.

The offer from Dolphin is a vindication of this approach. Only by staying well beyond when asked to leave by the landlords (despite intimidation and threats) and getting prepared for potential legal action and physical eviction resistance if that became necessary, have the tenants got this far.

Tenants are determined to keep the tenants association going and prepare for any future attacks. They stress that they have learnt a lot from the campaign - all are now more aware of the issues in the housing crisis and want to stay involved in the movement against it.

Margaret, another tenant, said that they have all done things they wouldn't have thought they were capable of - being interviewed on television, for example. This group of working class people have been knitted together through this struggle and have found their political voices.

Any victory for the Butterfields Won't Budge campaign must be the start, not the end, of a major fightback against the housing crisis in Walthamstow. We must use the momentum to organise resistance against other local attacks - including the Orwellian sounding 'Walthamstow Development Plan'. This threatens to demolish much of the local market and build yet more expensive, private homes on public land, including on a children's playground.

The Socialist Party calls for:

- End gentrification and social cleansing - We Won't Move!
- Rent control to cap rents in the private sector at genuinely affordable levels

- A mass council house-building programme
-

Women's Lives Matter - Fighting to save aid for women

Louise Harrison, member of Women's Lives Matter (personal capacity)

At the beginning of 2016, I knew two things for certain: austerity would continue to unjustly punish working class women, and the effects of these brutal attacks would damage us, our families and our communities for decades to come.

For me, it mirrors the employment attacks my dad, uncle and their friends faced in the 1970s and 1980s as industries they worked in were battered into unrecognisable, diminished organisations - if they were lucky to survive at all.

We saw our villages and towns plummet into poverty and now we have low wages, zero-hour contracts and a ravished welfare state.

Doncaster, like many other towns, is fighting for its life and with the imminent closure of Doncaster Women's Aid, that's exactly what some women in this town will be left alone to do.

Since 2010, 54% of domestic violence services have disappeared from our towns.

Firstly, the Con-Dem government viciously starved local authorities of financial support and secondly, local authorities then decided to cut domestic violence services.

Both national and local government made economic and political decisions that failed women when they were at their most vulnerable.

Advances threatened

The issues around how domestic violence is understood and dealt with, is as much an indictment on our society now as it was 40 years ago when Women's Aid first began.

In fact, austerity-inflicting politicians at all levels should be more ashamed now, as they are turning the clock back to the 1950s on women's lives, safety, and rights.

Doncaster campaigners have said enough is enough and have organised to say women's lives matter in our town.

Many organisations have supported us, including the Socialist Party, Disabled People Against the Cuts (DPAC), the bakers' trade union and local branches of the NUT teachers' union.

However, we have faced criticism locally, and have been told we are demonising Labour councillors who 'can't do anything other than make cuts'. They hint that the only thing we can do is vote in elections and sometime in the future get a nicer government.

We say to that: dead women can't vote. And while they're making cuts, we bleed.

Fighting back essential

How we effectively campaign to save Doncaster Women's Aid is a question not just for those who support us but also for those who choose not to support us. Because if Women's Aid closes, women's lives will be at risk.

Nationally, two women a week are murdered and three commit suicide as a result of being in an abusive relationship.

I was told it's better to have Labour councils making cuts than have them vote against cuts and then eventually have the Tories bring in auditors to make them.

Tell that to the three women and two children who were murdered within 25 miles of Doncaster this February by a male member of their family.

Tell that to the women of Doncaster who will have no specialised support worker once Women's Aid closes.

Tell that to the 12 women a day who call the police in Doncaster because of domestic abuse.

Tell that to the children living with domestic abuse and will carry the scars for the rest of their lives.

I take my hat off to the DPAC campaigners who fight for their rights, I take my hat off to the Carnegie Lambeth library occupiers who have been fighting for their rights and I thank Sisters Uncut for their action to demand ring-fenced funding for domestic violence services.

I thank those who support the Women's Lives Matter campaign locally and nationally and urge others to set up a similar campaign in their town to defend women's lives.

See clip - that went viral - of Louise Harrison intervening from the audience in the BBC's Question Time:

<http://www.doncasterfreepress.co.uk/news/watch-doncaster-woman-s-rant-over-conservative-government-on-bbc-s-question-time-goes-viral-1-7854837>

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 15 April 2016 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

USA: the un-Democratic primary

Why we need A new party of the 99%

Kshama Sawant, Socialist Alternative (co-thinkers of the Socialist Party in the USA), Seattle

Despite a decisive victory, providing further confirmation of her likely nomination, in many respects Hillary Clinton emerges from the New York primary more damaged, her party more divided, than she entered it.

The 'Battle of New York' has served only to further expose what millions of people in the US are becoming painfully aware of - the Democratic Party primary is rigged in favour of the establishment.

The discussion started with the top-down, super-delegate system and enormous influence of corporate

money in politics. It has gone on to raise awareness about the generally undemocratic nature of the Democratic primary and party itself.

This includes its myriad of anti-democratic voting rules, frontloading of conservative states, heavy tilting of the playing field by the media establishment, and antagonistic role of Democratic Party leaders towards grassroots challengers like Sanders.

Rigged

Working people have seen the pro-corporate character of the Democratic Party leadership itself on full display. To this establishment, Sanders' call for a 'political revolution' against billionaires and wealthy campaign donors is utterly unacceptable.

This Democratic leadership bases itself on the exchange of favours and on a revolving door of influence between elected positions and lucrative corporate and lobbyist careers. Meanwhile they use their weight and influence to whip labour and church leaders into line.

Add to this the combined power of Wall Street Super PACs (fundraising Political Action Committees) and you have a primary and political party which is hostile terrain for a candidate of the 99%.

One simple fact reveals the rigged character of the system: National polls consistently show Bernie Sanders enjoys, by far, the highest favourability rating of all presidential candidates, and beats all Republicans in head-to-head match-ups. Yet he will very likely be eliminated before the general election if he plays by the rules of the two-party system.

We are entering what is possibly the most favourable moment in US history to launch a new left party. Public trust is collapsing in both major parties, the establishment media, and all the key institutions propping up American capitalism.

Eight years since the Great Recession, with most workers still suffering despite the recovery on Wall Street, all the built-up anger and discontent is expressing itself in a bitter revolt against establishment Democratic and Republican leaders.

This is the context for the dramatic rise of Bernie Sanders - with a genuinely left-wing platform, refusing corporate donations, embracing the socialist label, and making the call for "a political revolution against the billionaire class" his central slogan.

The stronger Bernie's "political revolution" has become, the more it has threatened to break out of the straightjacket imposed by the Democratic Party which is completely dominated by big business.

Run through November

That's why Socialist Alternative, and #Movement4Bernie are petitioning Bernie to continue running through to November as an independent or on the Green Party ticket with Jill Stein, if he is blocked in the rigged primary process, and to call a conference to discuss launching a new party of the 99%.

If there are concerns about helping elect a Republican, there is no reason Bernie could not at least run in the 40-plus states where it's absolutely clear the Democratic or Republican candidate will win, while not putting his name on the five to ten closely contested "swing states".

On the other hand, if despite all their dirty tricks against him, Sanders remains loyal to the Democratic Party and backs Clinton in the general election, it would mean the demoralisation and disorganisation of much of our movement.

We need a strategy to push back right-wing Republicans. But collapsing the anti-establishment

movement behind Bernie into the Clinton campaign - a false unity with the candidate of Wall Street and the political establishment - would leave the field wide open for right-populists like Trump or Cruz to expand their base.

If Sanders chooses that path, continuing the political revolution will mean 'Sandernistas' boldly moving beyond Bernie.

An aggressive independent campaign for president by Bernie Sanders, linked to building a new mass party for the 99%, could dramatically transform American politics.

Bernie would not need to win the election to force a decisive leftward shift in US society. Even registering a vote of ten or 15 million for a new party (and the potential exists to win a far larger vote) could strike a crippling blow to the political monopoly of the two parties of American capitalism.

Stakes

The stakes are simply too high to let this moment slip through our fingers. Capitalism is plunging humanity into a social and ecological catastrophe. Bernie's campaign shows a viable fightback is possible.

What's missing is a strategy to sustain and grow our movement. Now is the time for bold action to build a fighting, working class political alternative - a party for the millions, not the millionaires.

This is a shortened version of an article originally published on www.counterpunch.org

Poland: anger at abortion ban plan

Paul Newberry, Alternatywa Socjalistyczna (Socialist Party's sister party in Poland)

A plan by the ruling right-wing Law and Justice party to introduce a total ban on abortion in Poland has angered a significant section of the population. It has sparked a series of large demonstrations in Warsaw and other cities as well as a spontaneous movement fighting for abortion rights involving tens of thousands of women.

Solidarity protests have also taken place outside Polish embassies around Europe, with CWI members participating and often organising the protests.

Not only are protesters opposing the introduction of a total ban, but they are also demanding the liberalisation of Poland's already restrictive law under the slogan "Reclaim Choice". One of the key demands of the movement is for abortion on demand.

The day after the first demonstrations on 3 April the prime minister, Beata Szydło, started to retreat, stating that she had only "expressed a personal opinion". Rather than driving demonstrators home, this raised their confidence in their power to bend the government. A new committee, Reclaim Choice Alliance, organised a demo on 9 April outside parliament.

Movement

But while the Reclaim Choice Alliance is firm about the need to fight for full liberalisation of the law, in the much broader grassroots facebook movement, Dziewuchy Dziewuchom, there are many conflicting views about the way forward.

Alternatywa Socjalistyczna argues that to limit ourselves to only defending the status quo is a strategy that will lead to defeat. It means giving in to the pro-life arguments of the right wing and the Catholic Church without even putting up a fight.

We must explain the desperate situation of thousands and tens of thousands of women whose health and lives are put at risk by the ban. We demand full access to abortions - free abortion on demand. We also demand free and good quality healthcare for women without the possibility of doctors blocking treatment due to their so-called "religious conscience".

Full article at www.socialistworld.net

<http://www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/22679>