

No more concessions to Labour right!

Fight for an anti-austerity, socialist party - readmit expelled socialists

In recent weeks the strategy of the pro-capitalist Blairites - to surround Jeremy Corbyn and gradually strangle him - has clearly been stepped up. Unfortunately, the response of Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell to this has been to retreat in the face of the onslaught. There is now a real danger that the possibility of creating a democratic, socialist Labour Party is squandered by conciliation with the right. It is vitally urgent that no more concessions are made and that a clear campaign is launched to consolidate the landslide victory that Jeremy won back in September.

One of the terms that has been banned as 'abusive' by the Labour Party NEC is 'Blairite'. Yet surely this is a fair description of the overwhelming majority of the Parliamentary Labour Party who voted en masse against the motion demanding Blair be held to account for 'misleading' parliament in the run up to the Iraq war.

It was a mistake for Jeremy Corbyn, a leading figure in the mass movement that opposed the [Iraq war](#), to bow to the pressure of right-wing Labour MPs by not taking part in the vote. Only five Labour MPs dared to vote for Blair to be held to account. Jeremy Corbyn was elected by hundreds of thousands of people who want to see Labour transformed into an anti-austerity, anti-war party. Yet the pro-austerity warmongers are still running the show!

This is also true at local level. Labour councils are currently discussing implementing further huge austerity. Most recently [Newham Labour council has announced plans to tear up its workers' contracts](#), sacking them and then re-employing them on worse terms and conditions. Doing so would take £1.8 million out of the pockets of Newham's workforce. Yet the council has £161 million in its general reserves! Correctly Unite is organising a campaign to stop these savage cuts, but Jeremy and John need to make clear that they support Unite's campaign.

Savage cuts

If this isn't done the right will claim that there is unanimous support for these kinds of savage cuts. For example, one of the Labour National Executive Committee's (NEC) councillors' representatives, Alice Perry, claimed that at the November NEC Corbyn supporter Rebecca Long-Bailey MP praised Labour councils and rejected calls for councils to set 'illegal budgets'. This is a red herring - the issue is not 'illegal' budgets but the setting of no-cuts budgets that refuse to implement any more misery on council workers or destroy any more vital services. It is urgent that the left leadership of Labour make clear that they do not support the further savaging of council jobs and services by Labour councils.

An essential part of transforming Labour into an anti-austerity party is [the campaign for the party to be democratised](#); including fighting for mandatory re-selection of MPs, restoration of trade union rights, and re-admitting expelled socialists.

Printed here is the correspondence that has so far taken place between Ian McNicol, general secretary of the Labour Party, and Hannah Sell, deputy general secretary of the Socialist Party. Hannah is writing on behalf of [75 people demanding readmission to the Labour Party having previously been expelled or excluded because of their socialist ideas](#).

Unsurprisingly, Iain McNicol has not responded positively to the application. As Labour's general secretary, he has presided over the exclusions of many tens of thousands of Labour Party members during the attempted coup against Corbyn, in a vain attempt to try and stop his re-election. However, the decision is not McNicol's to take. We urge all socialists and trade unionists who want to see Labour transformed into an anti-austerity

party to support the campaign for the next meeting of Labour's NEC to agree to readmit these and other expelled socialists (see socialistparty.org.uk/main/readmit_expelled_socialists).

The 75's application also asks the Labour Party NEC to look favourably on requests for affiliation from socialist organisations. This could form a vital part of the transformation of Labour into a democratic, socialist party that brings together all those forces that want to fight austerity. The affiliation of the Co-operative Party demonstrates that, even under the current undemocratic Labour Party constitution, there is no impediment to socialist organisations affiliating; other than the desperation of Labour's right wing to prevent it taking place.

Tom Watson, deputy leader of the Labour Party, was reported as making that absolutely clear at the recent Labour First conference, by declaring: "Trotskyist entryists tried to ruin Labour 30 years ago, I won't let 75 back in to ruin Labour again." If the ideas of Tom Watson - who said at Labour's conference that "capitalism is not the problem!" - dominate Labour, it will be ruined.

Even Mark Carney, governor of the Bank of England, has warned that 'people are becoming disillusioned with capitalism' and will seek alternatives. No wonder! For the majority it means falling living standards and increasing insecurity. A democratic socialist Labour Party would be able to win mass popular support for a clear anti-austerity programme. However, achieving this means standing up to the pro-capitalist wing of the Labour Party, who are determined to crush the movement around Corbyn.

Correspondence below.

Dear Iain,

Enclosed you will find a joint application to the Labour Party NEC for membership of the Labour Party. It is from 75 people, all of whom have previously been expelled or excluded from the Labour Party because of our socialist ideas. Among the 75 are members of the Militant Editorial Board, including Peter Taaffe, now general secretary of the Socialist Party; Tony Mulhearn, one of the leaders of the struggle of Liverpool City Council in the 1980s; and Dave Nellist, previously Labour MP for Coventry South East. We are socialists, trade unionists, community activists and young people. Between us we have over 1,000 years of Labour Party membership.

Because many of us who found ourselves outside the Labour Party rightly continued the struggle for socialism through membership of other organisations, we know that our applications for re-admittance will be denounced by the establishment media as 'left wing infiltration'. However, we have no wish to hide our background, hence this collective application for membership.

As our application explains, in our view the election of Jeremy Corbyn as Labour leader represents an opportunity for the Labour Party to be rebuilt as a clearly anti-austerity socialist party, with an open and democratic structure. We want to play our part in that struggle and urge the NEC to aid this process by admitting us, and others who have been similarly expelled or excluded, into membership and also by deciding favourably on requests for affiliation from any socialist organisation that so applies.

Yours comradely,

Hannah Sell, Socialist Party deputy general secretary and Labour Party member 1985 -1991, Labour Party NEC 1988-89.

Dear Ms Sell,

Thank you for your letter.

If individuals wish to join the Labour Party they can do so by using the 'join' function on the Labour Party website. In the case of individuals who have previously been expelled from the Labour Party, they must write individually to the NEC requesting that their membership application be considered. They can do so by writing by post to me at the address above and the NEC will consider those membership applications in due course and in the normal manner for all of those who have previously been expelled.

I should add that the Labour Party's rules do not allow members of other political parties to join the Labour Party. Specifically, "Political organisations not affiliated or associated under a national agreement with the Party, having their own programme, principles and policy, or distinctive and separate propaganda, or possessing branches in the constituencies, or engaged in the promotion of Parliamentary or local government candidates, or having allegiance to any political organisation situated abroad, shall be ineligible for affiliation to the party."

Yours sincerely,

Iain McNicol

Dear Mr McNicol,

Thank you for your reply. We understand that it is not appropriate for individuals who have previously been expelled to apply via the 'join' function on the Labour Party website and that instead we should apply to the NEC. That is what we have done. Can you please assure us that our application will be passed onto the NEC for their consideration?

You also refer to the Labour Party rule which states that "political organisations not affiliated or associated under a national agreement with the Party, having their own programme, principles and policy, or distinctive and separate propaganda, or possessing branches in the constituencies, or engaged in the promotion of Parliamentary or local government candidates, or having allegiance to any political organisation situated abroad, shall be ineligible for affiliation to the Party."

I assume you are raising this because some of us are members of the Socialist Party, which we have not sought to hide. Clearly, it is possible for members of other political parties to join the Labour Party. That is the case with the Co-operative Party, for example. The Co-operative Party has an electoral agreement with Labour but clearly has its own "programme, principles and policy" and possesses "branches in the constituencies". On their website they state: "The Co-operative Party is an independent party. It maintains its own membership, staff, national executive committee (NEC) and policy platform, all of which are independent of Labour's." However, members of the Co-operative Party can also be members of the Labour Party. Again, on their website they state: "Our electoral agreement means that an exception is made for those who wish to be a member of both the Co-operative Party and the Labour Party. This is by no means required though, and many of our members choose solely to be Co-operative Party members." In order to strengthen the anti-austerity movement we would like to enter a discussion with the NEC about how other socialist organisations, including the Socialist Party, could come to a similar arrangement. It is in this spirit that our joint application has been submitted and we hope it will be considered accordingly.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Hannah Sell

Dear Hannah

Thank you for your letter.

As we explained before, we cannot accept joint applications for membership. Any application must be individual and fulfil the requirements for membership set out in the rule book.

We will not entertain membership applications from members of another political party. If members of the Socialist Party apply to join the Labour Party these applications will be rejected in line with the normal procedures and rules of the Labour Party.

Our agreement with the Co-operative Party is a historic link with a sister party agreed and endorsed by our Annual Conference.

Yours sincerely

Iain McNicol

Fight for a socialist Brexit

Steve Score, East Midlands Socialist Party secretary

"A tsunami of opposition to the establishment has travelled the world." This description was used by a BBC presenter after the [referendum result in Italy](#) on 4 December that forced out their prime minister, Renzi. It was part of a process of revolt that included [Trump's vote](#) in the US and the EU referendum in Britain.

The anger felt by millions of working class people at the decimation of their living standards, jobs and services has searched for an outlet, and over many years there hasn't been a mass socialist alternative to channel it.

The Socialist Party predicted that the EU referendum would be used by many as a weapon against the Tory government. No wonder many of those people are suspicious of the motives of politicians who may seek to undermine or delay the enactment of the referendum result. This is not just restricted to the rabid right-wing press.

Supreme Court

The [Supreme Court deliberations](#) (with a judgement expected in January) on whether the government alone can trigger article 50 and negotiate on national treaties, or whether it has to go before parliament, are viewed in that light by many people.

On the other hand, the decisions shouldn't be left to the Tories! They fear splits in their own party and defeat in parliament, creating a crisis that could even force an early general election.

Corbyn's Labour has to go on the attack and push for a working class alternative in the move towards Brexit. The EU represents the interests of big business. It has imposed rules that undermine wages and conditions of workers, block socialist measures of nationalisation and enforce austerity, privatisation and cuts in services.

Corbyn should put forward a positive plan for a solution to the problems working class people face, replacing the EU's rules with an increase in public spending on health, housing and education, an end to privatisation and protection of workers' rights, pay and conditions. This has to be backed up by action from the trade unions.

On that basis the workers' movement in Britain can link up with workers in Italy, Greece and across Europe who want to fight back and build a real opposition to capitalism internationally.

Conservatives humiliated in Richmond - but socialist voice needed

Chris Newby, Socialist Party London

Zac Goldsmith's humiliating defeat in the Richmond Park byelection was equally a defeat for Theresa May and the Tories. Her already weak government has seen its majority cut to 13.

Goldsmith stood down as a Tory MP following the government's decision to back a third runway at Heathrow. Although Goldsmith was nominally standing as an independent, the Tories didn't stand a candidate against him.

He was clearly still seen as a Tory, and specifically an anti-EU Tory. The Lib Dem Sarah Olney, seen as the main Remain candidate, managed to overturn a 23,015-vote majority to win the seat.

Much as Goldsmith tried to make this a referendum on the third runway at Heathrow, it was clearly largely a vote against Brexit.

Richmond upon Thames, the borough which covers most of the constituency, has the [second-highest average income in London](#). Part of Kingston upon Thames, in the top third, makes up the rest. 69% of Richmond Park voters backed Remain.

Goldsmith will also have had a certain amount of payback for his [extremely racist campaign in this year's London mayoral election](#).

The Green Party did not contest the seat in favour of the Lib Dems. The Greens claim to be anti-austerity, yet are prepared to back a party that spent five years in coalition with Tories carrying through brutal cuts.

Worse still, some Labour MPs called for the Labour Party not to stand. [This included Clive Lewis](#), a leading figure in pro-Corbyn campaign group Momentum.

Jeremy Corbyn's critics will use the fact Labour lost its deposit due to low votes as another chance to attack his anti-austerity leadership. But this is home ground for the Tories and Liberals.

And for working class voters and new Labour members in the area, the Labour candidate, railway columnist Christian Wolmar, was hardly inspiring. Although previously a Corbyn supporter, he backed Owen Smith in 2016.

What was lacking in this byelection was a candidate who could use the platform to put forward a socialist alternative to EU, Tory and Liberal austerity.

Such a candidate still might not have won in Richmond Park, but could have helped galvanise anti-austerity voters to join the fight against the cuts.

Newham council to sack up to 1,300

Helen Pattison, East London Socialist Party

The all-Labour council in Newham, east London, is threatening to sack up to 1,300 of its workers.

Following years of pay freeze, the council plans to have the entire workforce sign a new contract with reductions to maternity pay, overtime rates and night pay.

This year the council passed a £50 million cuts budget. Afterwards, the mayor, [Sir Robin Wales](#), said: "Londoners would all say that's an absolutely excellent budget!" It seems not all Londoners would.

[General union Unite has launched a campaign against the attack](#), planning protests and demonstrations. The Socialist Party supports this and will campaign to build the widest possible movement against these and all cuts in the borough.

Earlier in the year, Unite members joined a [lobby of Newham council's budget-setting meeting called by the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition \(TUSC\)](#). TUSC includes the Socialist Party, transport union RMT and leading trade unionists.

The lobby called on Newham council to set a no-cuts budget, using its reserves and borrowing powers to stop austerity while building a campaign for the much-needed funding from central government. In 2015-16, Newham had £161 million in general reserves.

But instead, as Unite's press release points out, the Labour council would rather attack employees' pay while maintaining Sir Robin's £81,000 salary.

Newham's 60 Labour councillors could vote against austerity, like Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn has pledged to - and propose a strategy to fight back, like TUSC. Newham residents and workers deserve councillors willing to oppose austerity. If those currently in are not willing, they should step aside for others who are.

If the council refuses to listen, a serious campaign including strikes from Unite and the other council unions could defeat the onslaught. Teaching assistants in Durham have shown a fighting strategy can defeat austerity.

Slump in unfair dismissal cases - scrap tribunal fees!

Ned Hancock, Young member of Unite the Union, Birmingham

Workers took 73% less unfair dismissal cases to employment tribunal last year than before the government introduced fees.

[The Tory-Lib Dem coalition government introduced fees](#) of up to £1,200 for workers to bring cases to employment tribunal from 2013 - higher for appeals and multiple claimants.

Trade unionists warned it would lead to thousands of workers being priced out of justice.

Unfortunately, [new research by the Trade Union Congress](#) has shown this prediction was correct. The 73% drop is compared to the 12 months before fees came in.

With fees that can be more than a month's take-home pay for workers on the minimum wage, it's no surprise some bosses have felt emboldened to fire at will. In my previous job in a call centre, sackings took place regularly.

The criteria for unacceptable performance and attendance were never properly defined, creating a culture of fear and cynicism. People were hauled off the floor for disciplinaries, often at just a few hours' notice, effectively taking away their legal right to have a union representative in the hearing.

And the coalition also doubled the time it takes to qualify for unfair dismissal from one to two years. Thanks to this, only two of the 30 workers in my section would have been entitled to bring a case to tribunal, fees or none.

The Socialist Party fights to scrap tribunal fees, and ensure full employment rights from your first day on the job. But it's not just a case of having protections in law - workers need to be able to insist on them.

That's why it's vital trade unions step up efforts to organise non-union workforces, particularly younger and precarious workers, to fight to improve their conditions.

Workers can fight Uber-style care

Siobhán Friel, Birmingham South East Socialist Party

A new, Uber-style care service has been launched in Britain.

'Cera', the company behind the idea, already has several hundred carers registered. As it sounds, service users will be able to request a carer through an app. This enables them to 'cut the queue' for home care.

Cera boasts of using modern technology for the benefit of society. In fact, it's using the growing crisis in health and social care to exploit vulnerable people and workers, while advancing the backdoor privatisation of public services.

I have witnessed first-hand the hugely disproportionate [effect of cuts on care](#) patients, from the closure of care homes, to the complete removal of day care and mobility allowance from vulnerable adults. This has frequently left care patients housebound.

Care in the community is almost entirely self-funded by patients already, with a massive 26% drop in those receiving government funded care from 2010-15. Cera is simply the latest company to look to exploit the crises which have arisen from austerity measures in that time.

Companies like Uber and [Deliveroo](#) have lead the pack on profiting from precarious working conditions and casualised labour. Workers in the 'gig economy' usually get no sick pay or holiday entitlement, due to bogus 'self-employed' classification. In 2015 a study by Tax Research UK found that 80% of self-employed workers are living in poverty.

But bosses may end up with a fight on their hands yet. [Uber and Deliveroo workers have both won recent gains through organising.](#)

Community campaigns against health and care cuts are growing and linking up. Workers can, and must, fight back.

Compensation disabled

An admin error robbed thousands of families with disabled kids of up to £4,400 a year.

The Tories revealed the tax credit foul-up in [their Autumn Statement](#). They were worth £60 to £84 a week. They have pledged funds to guarantee payments for the next six years.

But these are only backdated to April. They could be cheating some families of up to £20,000 in unpaid tax credits.

The Socialist condemns this miserly and contemptuous approach to compensation. Pay backdated credits to everyone who was entitled.

Reverse the benefit cuts and invest in a decent standard of living for all disabled people, carers and families.

Them & Us

Bank warns bosses

The head of the Bank of England [says "globalisation is associated with low wages, insecure employment" and "staggering wealth inequalities."](#)

Mark Carney made the warning in a speech at Liverpool John Moores University. Carney is highly qualified to comment, as the recipient of an [£879,000 annual pay package](#). He also travels the world in luxury on public money.

Meanwhile, [six million workers earn less than a living wage](#), and seven million are in precarious employment.

Carney went on to warn that "turning our backs on open markets would be a tragedy, but it is a possibility." His solution? Well, it includes making multinational corporations "pay tax somewhere."

How about nationalising them - so society, instead of the super-rich, can control what their workers produce? No?

Well, never mind. The Socialist has no doubt corporations have every intention of allowing the politicians they fund to tax them.

Tesco toffs

A Tesco in Edinburgh [allegedly makes state school students queue](#) while private students can walk straight in.

The father of a state school student accused the Bruntsfield branch of Tesco Metro of the weird discriminatory practice.

Boroughmuir High School students apparently have to wait outside. Meanwhile, the red-blazered students of £11,577-a-year George Watson's College can jump the queue.

The Socialist wonders if local managers are trying to turn their store into some heavy-handed allegory for capitalist society in general. Either way, they should just stop.

Food banks and the real Daniel Blakes - fight for rights so we don't need charity

Hundreds of thousands of people are surviving and feeding themselves by using foodbanks in Britain today.

The recent [film 'I, Daniel Blake'](#) graphically showed the reality of life for those trying to get by after losing their job or their benefits, or those who are paid so little they have to use food banks despite having a job.

In the articles below, [Nancy Taaffe from Waltham Forest Socialist Party](#) describes what lies behind food bank misery and what the Socialist Party demands to end it, followed by eyewitness accounts from food bank volunteers and users.

In 2012, I was sitting in the local pub after a Socialist Party meeting when our [Blairite Labour MP for Walthamstow](#) came round with a bucket and a smile: "donate to the local food bank folks?" she chirped.

This food bank collection was taking place at a time when huge spending cuts were being imposed on workers. 2012-14 were the years of the greatest carnage. Job losses and cuts to welfare provision and local government spending just seemed relentless. An onslaught of cuts and general austerity reigned down upon us with one million public sector jobs lost.

Later that evening my response to this MP's request was condemned as "uncharitable" on social media.

The human misery this bucket wielding MP claimed she wanted to alleviate didn't stop her from being absent for the vote on the hated welfare reform package of 2014 - the effects of which were portrayed so heartbreakingly in the film, 'I Daniel Blake'. She was also absent for the vote on welfare cuts in 2015.

Not content in creating impoverishment and destitution in this country, she later went on to sanction the bombing of Syria - creating more desperate and destitute people elsewhere.

It is precisely this hypocrisy that all socialists should call out. We should have no shame in pushing the begging bowl of double standards firmly away.

Food banks are no longer catching those that fall through the gaps of welfare provision. Food banks are now woven into actual welfare provision - they have become a factor in the sanctioning and organisation of welfare provision. At many food banks you now have to be referred, you can't just turn up.

It is not the existence of food banks that have created this situation, it is pro-austerity politicians who have championed them as an equal part of state provision. Quite deliberately.

Food bank provider Trussell Trust reported last year that they distributed more than 500,000 three-day emergency food parcels. Of the 500,000 given out, over 188,500 were for children. They say issues with benefits account for 44% of all referrals.

Working poor

The working poor are also on the increase at food banks, driven there by problems such as low pay, insecure work or rising transport and energy bills.

Low pay is the second largest cause of a crisis, accounting for nearly one in four of all referrals.

Volunteers now run libraries, young graduates work for nothing as 'interns' and unemployed workers are expected to queue for food when they fall foul of the government's benefit rules.

Part of the great rebellion that took place across Europe and in this country after the end of World War Two was an uprising against the humiliation of poverty.

It was a deep seated feeling that they were never going back to the misery of the 1930s. We should similarly reject the normalising of begging bowl provision by charities. This normalisation only gives cover to tax-avoiding billionaires.

We demand:

- Trade union struggle to increase the minimum wage to £10 an hour without exemptions as an immediate step towards a real living wage
- An immediate 50% increase in the state retirement pension, as a step towards a living pension
- No to all cuts in jobs, public services and benefits. Defend our pensions
- Affordable housing and rent caps
- Reversal of all welfare and benefit cuts
- Scrap the Tories' welfare counter-reforms and abolish work capability assessments
- For a mass workers' party to drawing together workers, young people, the unemployed and others into a fighting alternative to the cuts

Eyewitness: the volunteer

Karen Seymour, Mansfield Socialist Party

There is a scene in the excellent Ken Loach film 'I, Daniel Blake' where a young lone parent is forced to use a food bank, due to problems accessing her benefits.

At the unemployed workers' centre where I volunteer, we have a small food bank for Monday mornings, when the two local ones are closed, and for emergencies such as when a young couple couldn't afford baby milk to feed their son because their [Employment and Support Allowance \(ESA\)](#) hadn't been paid.

Benefit delays and sanctions are by far the main reasons people seek out food banks. People do not, as some politicians claim, use them when they've spent all their money on booze and fags.

They are used as a last resort, and people are often embarrassed and ashamed that they have become so desperate. You can only use food banks about three times a year anyway, and then you have to be referred by an agency such as social services or the job centre.

Use of a food bank is never an individual's fault. It could happen to any of us and the government is happy for them to be seen as an extension of the welfare state.

Tory and Labour governments have also been keen to perpetuate the myth that welfare claimants are feckless and are incapable of managing their finances.

In my experience benefit recipients are some of the best budgeters you will meet. They have to be - every penny must count!

The vast majority of benefits staff hate the system as much as the claimants do. What is needed is a mass campaign made up of these staff, claimants, trade unions and others that will restore some dignity to the welfare system.

And a £10 an hour minimum wage, without exemptions, would tackle companies who boost their profits through 'corporate welfare' - tax credits for example - so that people do not have to claim in the first place
#WeAreAllDanielBlake

Eyewitness: the former food bank user turned volunteer

Glenn Parker, Mansfield Socialist Party

I have experience of working in and being a client of a food bank.

A couple of years ago, due to a mental breakdown, I ended up out of work, and, due to benefit delays, using a food bank. Out of gratitude, I now volunteer at the food bank that helped me.

The horrors of zero-hour contracts mean quite a lot of our clients are in work. At one stage, this affected 60% of our clients!

The biggest cause of use now is benefit delays. I can see food banks getting busier since the benefit cap has been lowered and living costs have risen, especially housing.

On the subject of housing, the most heartbreaking cases we see are homeless people.

We had a client who was living in a tent. This is bad enough in the summer, but in winter time it's even worse.

Our food bank is grateful to schools and the general public for donations of food and financial contributions.

There is a scene in the film 'I, Daniel Blake' where someone who hasn't eaten for days opens a tin of beans at a food bank and eats it there and then.

We in the Socialist Party demand an end to benefit delays and sanctions. We need a [£10 an hour minimum wage](#) and benefits that people can live on, not just exist on.

NHS: Stop the Tory vandals

Elaine Brunskill, Socialist Party Northern secretary

The Tory plan to privatise the NHS via the back door has given way to smashing in via the main entrance.

Their next attack is NHS England's shadowy 'sustainability and trans-formation plans' (STPs). Under these ruthless schemes, the government aims to make a further £22 billion of NHS cuts by 2020, with dire consequences for patient care.

If you haven't heard of these proposals - don't be too hard on yourself. Despite their huge impact, a survey of 310 members of doctors' union BMA revealed a third had never heard of STPs.

Meanwhile, the NHS is still suffering from the hammer blows inflicted over 30 years by successive Tory and Labour governments.

[The Guardian recently reported that seriously ill children were having to be transported](#) long distances in order to receive intensive care. This included London where all the beds for paediatric intensive care across seven hospitals were full to capacity.

The number of [patients waiting for over an hour for an ambulance to arrive has almost tripled](#) over the last two years. And the nightmare isn't necessarily over once the ambulance turns up, as many patients have to wait for hours in the ambulance for beds to become available.

Undoubtedly this callous Tory government hopes the severity of the cuts will turn people against the NHS, making handing it to their big business friends seem the only option available. However, even with all its current problems, the NHS remains incredibly popular.

People understand that every local attack needs to be fought. Campaigns to save local services are springing up in towns and cities across Britain.

[In Leicester, tens of thousands have signed a petition to save the Glenfield heart unit.](#) Huddersfield's campaign to save its A&E organised [a huge demo earlier this year](#). A campaign in North Tyneside against proposals to close walk-in centres is about to mushroom.

These local campaigns will be a springboard for the national 'It's Our NHS' demo on 4 March 2017 in London. Now is the time to fight and fight again!

Hundreds protest the decimation of Devon NHS

Sean Brogan, Exeter Socialist Party

Hundreds protested in the centre of Exeter on 3 December against the [decimation and degrading of Devon's NHS](#). Coming from all points of the compass and forming 'red lines' of marchers from different parts of the city, they cheered and clapped speakers from the community and the labour and trade union movement.

Many came from communities that have organised themselves in the more rural areas and small towns. Loss of community hospitals will mean long journeys to city 'hubs' and the loss of the maternity services in north Devon district hospital will mean long journeys for pregnant mothers.

So-called 'social care' has been shown to be totally inadequate and calls were made for a halt to the plans by local commissioning groups. The stalls set up by both Exeter and Torbay & South Devon Socialist Party branches were almost overwhelmed as protesters mixed with Christmas shoppers rushing to sign petitions.

Hundreds of Socialist Party leaflets were handed out and there was a great sale of the Socialist and generous contributions to our fighting fund.

The protest was reminded of the next step - building for a [national demonstration on 4 March](#).

- Exeter Socialist Party has a meeting about what is needed to defend the NHS at Exeter Community Centre, St David's Hill, Thursday 8 December
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Massive support in Stoke for action to save the NHS

Andy Bentley, Stoke Socialist Party

We sold 100 copies of the Socialist on our campaign stall in Hanley in just three hours on 26 November. We were building [support for the 4 March 2017 national march](#) to defend our NHS from privatisation.

We also raised £52 fighting fund to pay for more leaflets to advertise the march.

An 86 year old woman told us: "The Tories are killing our NHS, a big march is long overdue."

"A crime"

A nurse said: "It's a crime that, despite twenty odd years of gradual NHS privatisation, none of the unions representing us have organised a national march. Well done to the community campaigns for organising this march, have you booked a bus yet?"

We sold another 88 copies of the Socialist on two other campaign stalls in the same week and have already sold over 100 this week as well.

What does all this mean? There is a massive mood for real action to defend our NHS from being dismantled and privatised.

Health campaigners in Yorkshire protest "slash and trash plans"

"Slash and trash plans" is how campaigners from Health Campaigns Together renamed the government's [Sustainability and Transformation Partnerships](#) (STPs), the latest vehicle for cuts to the NHS. STPs, spread over 44 footprint areas, are expected to deliver £22 billion worth of cuts by 2020-21, including £1.07 billion for the West Yorkshire and Harrogate footprint.

Leeds played host to a conference of NHS organisations discussing how to implement STPs on 1 December, with around 25 people from local NHS campaigns able to make a lunchtime protest.

Given these attacks, plus the closures of accident and emergency units in nearby areas such as Huddersfield, campaigners locally will be involved in organising several demonstrations. This will include building for the [4 March Health Campaigns Together national demonstration](#) which was recently supported by Leeds TUC.

Iain Dalton, Leeds Socialist Party

Victory at Standing Rock: US authorities agree to re-route oil pipeline

US authorities (subject to possible appeal) have agreed to abandon the planned oil pipeline through Standing Rock, North Dakota, after a months-long standoff between protesters and armed police. This represents a significant victory over corporate interests in favour of the environment and native people's land rights. In this article, written before the decision, Tony Wilsdon of Socialist Alternative

(US co-thinkers of the Socialist Party) explained the background issues and why protecting the environment is linked to the struggle for socialism.

[Socialist Alternative has built solidarity meetings in a number of cities, raised money and sent representatives to Standing Rock.](#)

This struggle highlights the need to escalate our fight against climate change and link it to a struggle against a system that not only destroys our environment, but also rests on the oppression of native people, people of colour, and the exploitation of workers.

Central to this struggle is the decision to route the 1,134-mile pipeline upstream of the Missouri River, the major water supply for the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe. With over 2,000 pipeline ruptures and spills in the last ten years, there is very real fear of major pollution.

The issue of preserving land and water is central to indigenous peoples, having been brutally driven off their original tribal lands by US authorities in the past.

Republicans are funded to the hilt by oil money. But so are the Democrats, and it was the Obama administration which oversaw the largest increase in oil extraction in a generation and whose state department pushed fracking globally.

In contrast, Kshama Sawant, Socialist Alternative city councillor, recently stated: "I brought forward a resolution in the Seattle City Council calling for solidarity with Standing Rock.

"The statement, which condemned past violence and called on North Dakota authorities to drop all charges against protesters and journalists, was passed unanimously. But our demands and the voices of so many others in the US and internationally have gone unheeded."

Labour movement

Imagine how much more powerful our movements would be if we had more [representatives like Kshama Sawant who unapologetically stood on the side of the 99% and used their positions](#) to build and strengthen our movements.

Labour should also be spearheading this struggle. Some more progressive unions have taken clear positions against global climate change, having come out strongly in support of the struggle against the pipeline.

However, the main national labour federation, the AFL-CIO, is scandalously supporting the pipeline project. It is taking a narrow view of support for pipeline jobs over the broader issues of this struggle.

We need to link the legitimate concern of workers about the need for good jobs with urgent action on climate change.

We also need policies that address the power of the fossil fuel industry and the major banks that fund them. This would mean taking the energy sector out the hands of the ruling elite who control these resources and exploit them for profit.

They should be run under the democratic control and management of the 99%. This should be part of an emergency plan to tackle global warming, organise climate justice, and fight for a socialist society.

- [Full article can be read on socialistalternative.org](#)

Spain: Government forced back by Student Union mobilisations

Statement by Sindicato de Estudiantes (Students Union), Spain

Just days after the last general strike that was called by the [Sindicato de Estudiantes](#) against the "Revalidas Franquistas" (introduction of matriculation), we have been proved correct in what we always said - struggle works.

Following a meeting between the Ministry of Education and the representatives of the autonomous regions, the revalidas - proposed by Wert, the former education minister - have been abandoned. These reactionary matriculation exams were weighted to exclude working class students progressing to university.

The new agreement assures that simple completion of the Bachillerato (equivalent to 'A' Levels) will be treated in the same way as the PAU (university entrance exam).

Exams

The revalidas exams, which were to be sat at the end of the final year of secondary school as well as primary school, will no longer be obligatory and not have any academic bearing. The tests will merely be indicative. In other words they will only be introduced in some schools and as indicative tests.

This agreement means we have succeeded in defeating the Revalidas Franquistas and in so doing have prevented hundreds of thousands of youth from being thrown out of the classroom.

[This victory](#) is the fruit of a struggle conducted by millions of students over the last few years and is due in particular to the [historic mass strikes of 24 October](#) and 25 November called by the Sindicato de Estudiantes.

These strikes emptied the classrooms and filled the streets in protest against these unjust and reactionary exams. The victory was also achieved by the battle fought by parents and teachers alongside us - although some might be tempted to claim victory themselves - such as those from PSOE (the social democratic party) who supported the formation of the new government of Mariano Rajoy.

In reality the only reason the right-wing PP government gave in on this issue of strategic importance to them was due to the mobilisations and struggles on the streets.

This is the first victory. Now the battle continues with the aim of finishing off the LOMCE (education reform) and ensuring that not one comma of this Francoist counter-reform remains.

We told the government and their cronies - Ciudadanos (right-wing Citizens party) and leaders of PSOE - that we are aware of the significance of this victory. We will not allow them to continue down the road of cuts and attacks on state education with their latest manoeuvres in the form of the 'Education Pact'.

We told them that they would not cheat us and that there would be no pact should they refuse to recognise and implement the demands of those millions who have tirelessly struggled as part of the 'Green Surge' (Marea Verde, a campaign involving education workers against cuts).

Their demands are: the return of 7,000 million euros stolen from the state education budget; the re-employment of 32,000 sacked teachers; the repeal of the LOMCE and the 3+2 exams; no more state funds to support religious and private education.

Furthermore if they decide to follow the road that they have taken in the last few years, they should be aware: We will again take to the streets.

Italy: Establishment routed - workers alternative needed

From the editorial of *Resistenza* by *Contro Corrente*, CWI Italy

[In January 2014](#), on the day that Matteo Renzi took office, we wrote that this was the beginning of the end for the leader of the Democratic Party (PD), who at that time seemed to be on an unstoppable path to glory.

[The result of the constitutional referendum, in which Renzi was defeated by almost 60% to 40%](#), shows not so much our foresight but the lack of foresight of the Italian ruling class, which relied on a leader who turned out to be a car without brakes.

No

In fact, on 4 December Italians sent a clear and strong message not only to the government and the prime minister but also to the entire political class, including those who were on the 'No' side.

As the Sole24Ore (newspaper of the industrialists and financiers) wrote on the day after the vote, those who voted 'Yes' were mainly pensioners and in the upper and middle layers of society. While those low-paid workers and youth, precisely those who the government had addressed its rhetoric to for three years, dealt them a solemn blow.

81% of those aged 18 to 35 voted 'No'. The idea that it would be possible to ride the wave of social anger by promising a few euros to the poorer sections of society, proved to be a complete illusion.

As was predicting an 'apocalypse' if 'No' won, while trying to chase after [Grillo](#) (leader of the Five Star Movement) and Salvini (leader of the Lega Nord) on their anti-'political caste' and anti-Europe terrain. The same is true for those who pose as defenders of the constitution, including Grillo.

Workers, youth and impoverished middle-class people didn't vote 'No' to defend 'the best constitution in the world', but to reject those who, instead of 'demolishing the old politics' (as everyone says they want to do), continued to demolish working people.

Laughably the establishment talked about a country that doesn't exist - where the economy is improving, companies are taking on hundreds of thousands of young people on permanent contracts, and taxes are decreasing.

Renzi's massive defeat, his resignation, and the deepening crisis of the PD (the real pro-big business wing of recent years) represent a positive development and an opportunity for workers and youth who want to fight for a better future.

But for an opportunity to become a step forward it must be grasped with a realistic analysis of the political and social situation. There isn't a single political force in the 'No' camp which could be a reference point for those who really want to change Italian society.

Fill the streets

The enthusiasm for the 'No' vote could be used to begin a serious discussion about a political alternative capable of filling the streets rather than the voting stations.

Alternatively, it could be used to sow the illusion that now that Renzi has been kicked out our problems are solved, that a new 'centre-left' can be reborn or that a victory for the Five Star Movement at the next general election could produce what hasn't been so far produced in any of the municipalities controlled by Grillo's movement.

Obviously we are for the first option.

Portugal: No to witch-hunts - fight the capitalists not socialists

[Socialismo Revolucionário \(SR - CWI in Portugal\)](#) is being targeted by the leadership of the Left Bloc, with threats of expulsions and exclusions. An Inquiry Committee has been opened against our members.

This is as a result of our political positions and differences with the current leadership, as well as our role in building the party from below. This includes our opposition to the policy of uncritical support to the 'Socialist Party' minority government, and our role building the Left Bloc youth.

Democracy

We are completely committed to the construction of the Left Bloc as a mass party that defends and represents the interests of workers and youth, and we fully endorse the words and spirit of its founding documents - that the Left Bloc should be a "popular, plural, combative left with influence".

SR officially applied to be recognised as a tendency inside the Left Bloc, a formal organisational procedure allowed and regulated in the statutory documents.

As the name implies, the Left Bloc is supposed to be a coalition of left-wing people and organisations to which SR, as a Marxist organisation, belongs.

Accusations of "infiltration" by the leadership against a group which was always open about its objectives are baseless and pernicious. They are akin to bureaucratic methods to stifle debate and restrict internal democracy that Left Bloc members value so highly.

Political differences with the leadership are not a reason to prevent the fighting left from joining an organisation that aims to be a union of militants and organisations that genuinely look for an alternative for capitalism.

SR comrades are among the most committed to building the Left Bloc from below, not just recruiting other activists but encouraging political discussion necessary to devise the correct analysis and methods of action.

With the potential to be a mass party of and for the 99% in Portugal, these undemocratic methods adopted by a tiny layer will only hurt the cause for which the Left Bloc was created.

This is about defending democracy and pluralism inside the Left Bloc, not just our democratic rights. It's a fight for the construction of the Left Bloc as a mass workers' party in Portugal.

- [A model letter of solidarity can be found on socialistworld.net](#)

Austria: Far right temporarily halted

Austria's far-right Freedom Party presidential candidate Norbert Hofer failed to win [the re-run election](#) against former Green leader Alexander Van der Bellen. The [election result in May](#), which Van der Bellen won by less than one percentage point, had been cancelled due to declared technical irregularities.

This time he comfortably won (53% of the vote) in a polarised election, but the size of Hofer's vote (46%) means that the Freedom Party (currently the third largest party in parliament) looks likely to make substantial gains in the next general election.

This is because of the failure of the establishment parties' "grand coalition" to resolve the major economic and social fears and questions facing many Austrians.

International picture

Like Trump in the US, or Marine Le Pen's far-right National Front in France, or Farage and Ukip in Britain, right-wing populist politicians and parties have been able to exploit an increasingly politically disenfranchised

working class electorate by playing on economic uncertainties and by scapegoating refugees along with religious and ethnic minorities.

Moreover, traditional parties, in particular former workers' parties, have been unable to target society's real parasites - the capitalist class and the profit system.

Instead they have simply gone along with the austerity cuts demanded by the ruling classes while bending the knee to the anti-migrant propaganda of the far right. The situation means the building of an independent working class-based anti-capitalist party as an alternative to right-wing populism is urgent.

One factor widely quoted in Hofer's defeat was his association with other European far-right parties' anti-EU stance. However, it appears that many in Austria, at this stage, do not wish to leave the EU.

However, no sooner had the liberal establishment in Europe breathed a sigh of relief over Austria's presidential result then it was left proverbially holding its head in its hands with the trouncing of pro-EU prime minister Matteo Renzi in Italy's constitutional referendum.

- [Austrian CWI report on socialistworld.net](#)
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Sudan: General strike in defiance of regime

A three-day strike between 27-29 November shook the regime in Sudan. According to reports from activists and supporters of the CWI in Sudan, universities, schools, market places, public transport and many private businesses, cafes, shops and restaurants were closed.

In the face of open threats issued by the autocrat Omar al-Bashir, and the intimidation tactics of his notorious security forces, this nationwide shutdown was a remarkable success.

The proverbial straw that broke the camel's back was the new cuts in state subsidies (a 30% hike in fuel and electricity prices) announced by the government on 3 November, which for many poor Sudanese represented a vital lifeline, and separated them from starvation and disease.

A majority of the Sudanese people are absolutely fed up with the corrupt and brutal 27 year-long rule of al-Bashir. The overthrow of this regime should be the order of the day, which could be greatly assisted by a new, well-prepared mass general strike.

- [See article on socialistworld.net](#)
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Durham TAs force Labour to suspend pay cuts

Alan Docherty, Teesside Socialist Party

Durham teaching assistants (TAs) have won a significant battle in their campaign to prevent [Labour-controlled Durham council from cutting their pay by up to 23%](#). The immediate threat to dismiss all TAs, members of Unison and teaching union ATL, and reemploy them on worse conditions from 1 January 2017 has been suspended.

[Four days of strike action](#) have forced the council back to the negotiating table.

Unison called off the next round of planned strikes, due to commence on 1 December.

Jubilant

The council will now re-enter negotiations with the recognised trade unions to try to find a settlement by a new deadline of 1 September 2017.

Staff are jubilant about their victory, but very cautious too that the threat of pay cuts has not been lifted.

The council has laid down its conditions that it is undertaking "a review of teaching assistants' role, function, job description, and activities within the breadth of school activities to establish whether current job descriptions adequately describe the role being undertaken by TAs in schools. This review will not reopen the single status agreement currently in place."

Such a review is likely to lead to winners and losers. Possibly some new higher graded posts will be introduced and staff will be divided as they compete for these 'promotions'.

Wrong

There is something seriously wrong with Durham council's pay and grading structure for TAs. They earn thousands of pounds less than those in neighbouring authorities, even before the current attack on their pay.

One of the reasons TAs remained employed on full-time contracts was to compensate them for such a low grade delivered through job evaluation for single status.

There must be recognition that job evaluation (single status) must be reopened. Both the unions and management must admit that they got it wrong. All the TAs should be re-graded up to a level commensurate with other authorities and no one should lose any pay.

Durham TAs have to stay vigilant and engage in the running of their union to ensure no sell out.

Protest against Glasgow Labour's scab workforce plan to defeat Unison strike action

Below we reprint an article from Socialist Party Scotland, appealing for solidarity for striking Unison members in Glasgow. There is also a letter of protest from National Shop Stewards Network chair Rob Williams at the end.

Glasgow Labour council have descended into the gutter by attempting to recruit a scab workforce in order to defeat a strike of council workers against privatisation. It is part of an onslaught against the trade unions in the city and in particular the socialist-led Glasgow City Unison branch. In November, the Labour-led council executive voted through a decision to push ahead with the privatisation of the council's ICT (Information Computer Technology) service. This is linked to the huge cuts Labour have implemented in the city with tens of millions more planned for early next year.

In response, Glasgow Unison balloted their 230 members in ICT and a resounding 96% voted in favour of industrial action. Following a successful one-day strike in November, the workers agreed to an all-out action by 39 staff which started on Thursday 1st December.

In an unbelievable act of treachery that a right-wing Thatcherite council would have balked at, the Labour council are now attempting to recruit a scab temporary workforce to cover for the striking Unison members during their action.

This declaration of all-out war and goes against every principle of trade unionism and the traditions of the labour movement. Principles that are now completely alien to the Labour leadership of Glasgow City Council. Frank McAveety, the council leader, has regularly attacked Glasgow City Unison in the press recently. The leaders of Glasgow City Unison and their 10,000 strong membership are being specifically singled out for attack by council officials and the Labour leadership. This is not a surprise as Glasgow Unison have been

intransigent and uncompromising over a number of years in defence of members terms and conditions, pay and in opposition to Labour's implementation of Tory austerity in the city.

Action now

Trade unionists across the country and internationally will be rightly outraged by the attempts of a Labour council to recruit a scab workforce to try and defeat the strike. If the council put scab labour in the workplaces, the union would be quite correct in bringing out all 230 workers on indefinite strike action in response as a first step.

Glasgow Labour's action would set a precedent for all other public sector employers to act in the same way when faced with a strike of workers fighting privatisation and cuts. Every single Labour councillor, MP and MSP must be approached to condemn these strike-breaking methods. All trade union branches across Scotland and the UK must respond urgently and send messages of condemnation to the Glasgow Labour councillors.

Jeremy Corbyn, John McDonnell and all other "anti-austerity" politician must speak out to condemn these actions. There is no hiding place on this issue. It is the consequence of Labour, and for that matter SNP politicians, refusing to take a fighting stand against cuts and instead capitulating again and again to austerity. At stake is the right of workers and militant trade unions to defend jobs and livelihoods. It is a fight for every trade unionist, socialist and anti-cuts campaigner to engage in now!

- Send urgent messages of protest to Chief Executive of Glasgow City Council annemarie.odonnell@glasgow.gov.uk and Labour leader Frank McAveety frank.mcaveety@glasgow.gov.uk
- Labour affiliated trade unions should send motions to constituency Labour parties condemning the actions of Glasgow City Council and demanding the withdrawal of this attempts to break a trade union strike.
- Email Jeremy Corbyn at leader@labour.org.uk to ask him to intervene
- Come to the protest at Glasgow City chambers on Wednesday 7th December 1pm for Labour group meeting at 2pm <https://www.facebook.com/events/1121915241259579/>
- Send messages of support to the Unison strikers to Glasgow City Unison at enquiries@glasgowcityunison.co.uk

To Chief Executive of Glasgow City Council, and Labour leader Frank McAveety,

I am writing to protest at the news that Glasgow Council is attempting to recruit a 'scab' workforce in order to attempt to break the legal industrial action of Unison members in the ICT service against privatisation.

I find it incredible and outrageous that a Labour council is resorting to these worst Tory methods rather than engage properly with the Unison branch to resolve the dispute.

The NSSN gives its full solidarity to the Unison branch and its members and will spread the word that this outrage is being carried out.

Rob Williams (NSSN National Chair)

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 1 December 2016 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

Crossrail action in defence of victimised union rep

Rob Williams, NSSN national chair

In response to a campaign by Unite to demand a second tier productivity bonus for electricians on Crossrail in London, which included an [unofficial walkout on 25 November](#), notorious blacklisters Laing O'Rourke/Crown House has issued the Unite rep on the site a transfer to another job off the project.

From 5 December, Terry Wilson was set to be off Crossrail, in a blatant attempt to intimidate workers, just as Unite starts a consultative ballot on the bonus payment and other demands.

As a result of this victimisation, on 30 November and 1 December electricians 'cabined up' and refused to start work. Then on 2 December, they picketed the site. Following this, workers were issued with a letter from Laing O'Rourke, 'encouraging' them back to work by threatening disciplinary action!

Sent home

But the electricians were back outside the site straight away, fighting to get Terry back. We overheard workers who had been meant to install the lifts saying they were being sent home because the electricians weren't working!

It is crucial that this dispute is won. And it can be - not just for the Tottenham Court Road site but the whole campaign across Crossrail. A victory here would really build confidence that they could force Crossrail management to concede the bonus.

- Hardship fund for Tottenham Court Road electricians out in support of victimised shop steward Terry Wilson: Account name - Unite London Construction LE/0555 Branch, account number - 20276649, sort code - 60830, Unity trust bank
- Tweet support to London Construction Branch LE/0555 [@unite0555](#)

Unison members barely earning the living wage in some universities

Unison member, Southampton

As terms and conditions throughout the UK are being chipped away, incomes are tightening and security in the workplace is in jeopardy, Unison members voted in September to decide whether or not to strike over the 1.1% pay offer that was made to most members. Workers on the lowest pay scale were offered slightly more but this didn't even bring many to the living wage!

Unison's higher education service group executive called on members to reject the offer and take strike action to get the employers to improve their offer. This followed the results of a consultation in which over two thirds of members who responded voted to reject the offer.

54.9% voted in favour of industrial action. But Unison decided that the vote was too close and there would be no industrial action taken. At the university where I work the 1.1% pay increase was implemented before the ballot had even ended.

I personally feel let down by Unison on this decision. I work with colleagues in their thirties that have had to return to living with parents when relationships have broken down because the cost of rent and living is too great for their own salaries.

Struggling

These are people working full-time but struggling against ever-increasing rents and the cost of living, watching vice chancellors get a 6.1% pay rise while their union accepts a measly 1.1%.

According to recent freedom of information requests sent to all UK universities by Unison, the number of staff paid over £100,000 has increased to over 5,000 - so there is clearly money available for those at the very top in higher education. In contrast, 12,000 staff are currently paid below the living wage of £8.25.

Come on Unison, do something about it! Don't just roll over and take it - we need to organise, fight back and show them we are worth it.

Sacked bakers' union rep Kumaran Bose calls for living wage 'protection'

Ian Hodson, BFAWU president

On 6 December, [Kumaran Bose](#) will be meeting a number of MPs (including shadow ministers) to discuss his recent sacking by Samworth Brothers, a company known for its famous household brands, such as Ginsters and Soreen. He worked for Samworth Brothers for 12 years, with an unblemished work record.

However, everything changed for Kumaran after the [Conservative government introduced its much heralded 'living wage' in April 2016](#). Like many other employers, Samworth Brothers decided to dodge the minor pay increase for those over the age of 25 by making the workforce fund it themselves.

As the company set out its agenda of slashing certain contractual terms that the workforce had, such as paid break-times, overtime rates and shift premiums, many workers at the site felt that the changes being proposed were unfair, especially as it was widely known that the company's profits for the year were set to soar.

As a result, a number of employees approached Kumaran for guidance, so in his role as a team leader he raised the workers' concerns and asked searching questions to CEOs, during company briefings. Unfortunately, the company's response was that due to the introduction of the 'living wage', it had no option.

[The workforce turned to the Bakers', Food and Allied Workers Union \(BFAWU\)](#) and met with representatives, who offered support and assistance. Consequently, hundreds of them joined the union.

However, despite many requests from employees and approaches from BFAWU itself, a collective agreement and recognition of BFAWU has always been resisted by Samworth Brothers. The management decided that Kumaran was responsible for the company being 'named and shamed' and he was suspended from work.

At his first disciplinary hearing, the initial reasons were dropped, as they were based on false allegations. However, the company then changed tack by accusing him of a breach of confidentiality, despite there being no convincing evidence to back-up this claim. He was dismissed.

The meeting with MPs is to discuss how the lack of protection given to workers' terms and conditions has left them vulnerable to unscrupulous employers seeking to avoid paying the living wage.

Workplace news in brief

Paul Reilly elected to RMT EC

[Socialist Party member Paul Reilly](#), a branch secretary of the RMT transport workers' union in Nuneaton, has been elected to the union's national executive committee to represent the Midlands region.

Network Rail worker and former Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) candidate Paul said: "To have received the confidence and support of our members over these past few months and to be elected by them on to the executive is a massive honour!"

"I have no doubt whatsoever that the challenges and Tory attacks on our industry and on the trade union movement as a whole over the next few years will be some of the toughest we will have ever faced

"This won't be easy at all, but I'm ready and willing to take up the challenge head on! I won't let you down!"

Trade Union Act to come into force 1 March - TUC call a special conference

The Tories have confirmed that their anti-union laws, incorporated in the [Trade Union Act](#), including new undemocratic industrial action ballot thresholds, will come into force on 1 March.

The National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) calls on the TUC to implement the policy passed at this year's TUC Congress moved by the RMT, which includes: "Congress believes the General Council needs to convene an urgent conference of affiliates to provide a practical forum, including workshops, as to how to best coordinate our legal and industrial response to the act in line with policy already set by congress."

And an amendment from the FBU: "Congress should discuss all options for challenging the new legislation. This should include stepping up the campaign to scrap the Act and other anti-union legislation as well as the practical steps to be taken to support any unions and groups of workers threatened by this anti-worker legislation."

Bolton council gives £300k to solicitors while making swingeing cuts

Bolton Unison shop steward

Bolton Socialist Party is backing [mounting calls for the leader of the Labour council, Cliff Morris, to resign over the use of emergency powers to hand over £300,000 to an ambulance chasing solicitor, Asons.](#)

The decision was taken in secret, using emergency powers, with only the Tory opposition leader present, who then leaked the decision to the local press.

Morris and his Labour cronies have argued that the company needed the £300,000 to keep 400-500 jobs in the town centre.

But Asons workforce is currently at no more than 150 and they have already spent £1.1 million on purchasing and refurbishing new office space in the town centre. The more likely reason for the money, it seems, is to cover Asons' unpaid tax bill!

Meanwhile, the council recently announced further swingeing cuts to jobs and services - £42.5 million over the next two years. They have agreed to use reserves to the tune of £30 million, but why not use an extra £12.5 million and avoid making any cuts this year? Over the past six years, more than £100 million of cuts have been made and hundreds of jobs have been axed.

Attacks

These latest cuts include attacks on school crossing patrols, public health programmes for the most vulnerable in the town, youth and play services and school meals subsidies.

On 30 November, [around 150 people protested outside a full council meeting](#) to demand the resignation of Cliff Morris.

At the meeting, the opposition Tory, Lib Dem and Ukip councillors had attempted to force a split in the Labour group by proposing a motion condemning the money for Asons.

However, in the same way that they dutifully vote for cuts every year, the Labour group unanimously backed Morris and the secret deal!

The Socialist Party in Bolton supported the call made by [Bolton Unison trade union branch](#) to attend the demo and demand "money for jobs and services, not ambulance chasers". It is vital that the trade union movement in the town link the campaign to get rid of Morris and his dirty dealing to the fight against the cuts to jobs and services.

Reading TUSC writes to Labour councillors to demand cuts fight

The following letter was sent to councillors by Neil Adams from Reading [Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition \(TUSC\)](#) to raise questions related to proposed budget cuts to local services:

Whatever Theresa May's pledge to the working class to end austerity, cuts and misery pour down on the heads of us all as inequality continues to widen.

The rich get richer as their taxes are cut, while workers suffer a continued pay freeze and cuts to public services. These cuts hit the most vulnerable hardest.

Cuts to the Reading council budget are hitting hard - over £41 million by 2020. The council says: "Our financial situation has worsened significantly during 2016/17." As a result further cuts are being proposed of over £10 million.

These cuts aim to remove funding to children's services, domestic violence, sexual health, breast feeding support, health visitors, mental health services, grass cutting and street cleaning with cuts to council and agency jobs.

[Reading Labour council proposes to cut and privatise to tackle this crisis](#). But what about fighting these Tory cuts? What about mobilising the anger at austerity to force the Tories to retreat?

Jeremy Corbyn's election and re-election showed we have had enough of endless austerity and want to fight back.

Reading Labour councillors must use their powers to set a legal, balanced, no-cuts budget and build a mass campaign of the local trade unions and community to demand the restoration of central government funding. This means using reserves and prudential borrowing powers to set a budget that meets the needs of Reading.

Such a stand would receive huge support and, if linked up with other Labour councils across the country, could result in the defeat of the Tory cuts agenda.

Obituary: John Sharpe: 1953-2016

Alison Hill

John Sharpe has died of heart disease very suddenly, at a ridiculously early age.

Showing his resolute commitment to the fight for socialism, he gave up his job at Rolls Royce in the early 1990s and came to work on the printing press of Militant, forerunner of the Socialist.

After decades working on precision-built engines, he had to learn a different sort of engineering. He was heard to remark that he'd never seen so much mild steel in his life! And he never quite got used to making modifications to the press without any drawings.

He worked on the press through the move out of Hepscott Road and, with a skilled team of printers, carried on coaxing miracles out of it in Clapton - usually accompanied by very loud rock music.

He was always interested in computers, particularly coding, and relished the new challenge of looking after the growing computer network in our HQ, when the old newspaper press came to the end of its life. He taught himself several new languages and laid the basis for most of the databases used today.

He also did pioneering work on the [website of the Committee for a Workers' International](#), which he was very proud to do, sometimes posting material early in the morning to make sure it was always up to date.

Again, he taught himself various arcane computer languages to be able to manage the servers in the office properly and always had a touching expectation that anyone he talked to would be as fascinated as him about whatever task he was engaged in.

He was dedicated to making sure [the Socialist](#) always came out and enjoyed helping with the proofreading.

Latterly, every Wednesday morning John was at the factory packing the paper and making sure all the branches got the leaflets and posters they had ordered. He organised that with precision and instigated several important improvements to the process. He also made sure most people in the surrounding premises found out what was on 6Music.

John was a kind and generous man, a trade union militant and a committed Marxist who read avidly and always kept on top of current developments.

He has died far too young.

Hannah Sell on behalf of the Socialist Party executive committee

The sudden death of John Sharpe has been a terrible shock to all who knew him. He will be badly missed.

While always happy to discuss ideas, John was never a comrade who sought the limelight. He was very self-sacrificing and, like many others, played a vital role behind the scenes in building the Socialist Party.

He had worked at our national headquarters since 1992, first in the print shop and latterly on many varied tasks including maintaining our computer system and databases, proofreading for the Socialist and packing and sending it out to Socialist Party branches.

Every Socialist Party member and reader of the Socialist, even if they never met John, will have benefited from his work, which ensured among many other things, that their membership card was posted to them and their papers arrived on the doormat ever week.

The best tribute we can pay him is to redouble our efforts to build the party he dedicated his life to.

Memories of John's early years in Militant

In 1977 I addressed the Rolls Royce Joint Shop Stewards Committee in Bristol to ask if they would make a donation to the Labour Party Young Socialists national conference fund.

Every year they did so, but that year they said they had an apprentice who they would like to sponsor to attend. This was John Sharpe, who quickly embraced the ideas of Militant at the conference, and upon returning wholeheartedly threw himself into the many tasks of helping to build support for Marxist ideas.

For John politics was a serious commitment and at work, in his [AUEW](#) (TASS) union branch, and within the Bristol North East Labour Party (then under the iron control of the right wing) he fought tigerishly to promote our programme.

Theory was his guide throughout his political life, whether as a young comrade eagerly participating in discussion groups, or as a mature Marxist seeking to keep abreast of the latest twists and turns in the international political position. His enthusiasm when someone came over to our position knew no bounds.

When John had an opportunity to work in the Militant print shop in London, he answered the call unhesitatingly. Just prior to his move, he attended one of Militant's huge rallies at the Wembley conference centre and donated a five figure sum from his redundancy money. This prompted [journalist Mark Steel](#) to write of his amazement at the self-sacrificing traditions of our supporters.

Many's the time John has told me how gratifying he found the work in the print shop - the camaraderie and the crises!

Few have been more steadfast than John - with an unbreakable and unshakeable belief in the socialist future of humankind and a pride in his being a part of its construction.

Robin Clapp

John had a major impact on me as a young student supporter of Militant in the late 1970s. He was always supportive of any young activist, particularly students. He was able to explain Marxist theory clearly from a worker's point of view but always made sure that any student kept their feet firmly on the ground. Woe betide any who missed their Friday morning paper sale!

John was at the centre of much of the social life in Bristol at the time and was renowned for his generosity. He was the first person to put his hand in his pocket to buy a drink and always made sure that everyone was looked after. I hate to think of how many curries John fully or partially subsidised after a night in the pub.

John was modest and shy, avoiding the spotlight, but one of those activists that you could always depend on. He will be sorely missed.

Mick Whale

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- John's funeral will be held on Friday 16 December at 3.15pm. It will be in the North Chapel of the City of London Crematorium, Manor Park, London E12 5DQ. Please wear something red. No flowers but donations to the Socialist Party in his name will be much appreciated
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