

# NHS crisis: we're fighting back!

Jackie Grunsell, GP

Health workers up and down the country are bracing themselves for a winter crisis.

Even prior to the increased demand that winter places on the NHS, [the situation has reached a tipping point](#) in recent years. The cumulative effect of cuts and staff shortages year after year has left services blatantly incapable of meeting needs.

I hear regular reports from GP surgeries of 999 calls made and ambulances being unable to respond. Patients have been left waiting for as much as four hours before the paramedics reach them.

A ripple effect of slashing of social care funding means fit patients can't be discharged, wards are full, A&Es can't admit people, ambulances have to wait outside hospitals with critically ill patients inside and can't get back out to attend to those who need them in the community.

It is against this background that we are being told [another £22 billion of cuts](#) are to be made in the NHS England budget. More A&E departments must close and cash starved GP surgeries will be left to wither on the vine. And the government's misnamed 'sustainability and transformation plans' will cut NHS funding even more brutally.

Is it any wonder that around the country a mood of anger and rebellion is rapidly developing?

In Huddersfield the [campaign to save the A&E and hospital](#) rages on. Chorley campaigners are unrelenting in their weekly protest outside the Chorley and South Ribble A&E. [Leicester is fighting](#) to keep Glenfield children's heart surgery unit. Thousands have been on the streets in Exeter, Barnstaple, Grantham, Banbury and many more areas where services are under threat.

These campaigns are uniting and calling a national demonstration on 4 March against NHS cuts and closures. It has the backing of Unite and the PCS unions. We are calling on Unison, which organises many health workers, to give its support also.

This is set to be an outpouring of the anger against the Tories' deliberate underfunding and destruction of our treasured NHS. It needs to be a step towards a national united campaign - including industrial action - to save our health service.

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## End the Tories' war on the working poor

Dave Murray, Socialist Party Eastern region

In the 19th century, Walter Bagehot, a constitutional scholar, said: "Poverty is an anomaly to rich people; it is very difficult to make out why people who want dinner do not ring the bell."

For working people in the UK today poverty is becoming a normality, just as it was in Bagehot's time.

According to a recent report from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) [55% of poor people now live in working households](#) - for the first time on record.

While wages haven't risen since 2005 for most people, [housing costs have rocketed](#) as private landlords have muscled into the housing market, and the welfare safety net has had great holes cut in it.

Women and young people make up a majority of workers who are in poverty, and almost half of poor households include a disabled adult. Poverty has no commitment to equal opportunities.

The report warns that the coming reduction in the benefits cap will pitch 90,000 families into extreme poverty.

In a previous report JRF noted that while the incomes of the bottom 10% in society have reduced, the incomes of the top 10% have gone up.

JRF is a charity, however, and it would be uncharitable of them to embarrass the government, or indeed the obscenely rich 0.1% who stand behind that government

That's why, in this report, they do no more than mildly request a benefits system that works to prevent poverty. But this ignores the fact that every government since 1979 has worked in the opposite direction.

For socialists the report's findings show that we need to issue a less gentle warning to the government, employers and housing profiteers: we are coming for you!

We want a minimum wage of £10 an hour without exemptions, we want rent controls and rent reductions, we want an end to zero-hour contracts and full rights at work, and we want to be able to live like human beings when we can't work. We are campaigning for these basic demands and more besides.

More importantly, we want a democratically planned economy and an end to the poverty and inequality generated by capitalism - we want a socialist future!

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## **Amazon workers living in tents**

### **Fight for a £10 an hour minimum wage**

**Tessa Warrington, Leicester Socialist Party**

In the latest shocking revelations about online retail giant Amazon, accused of "intolerable working conditions," [workers were apparently found sleeping in tents](#) near its Glasgow depot.

Commuting has been made impossible by eleven-hour shifts and low pay. Afraid of losing their jobs, camping in the dead of winter was the last option.

[An undercover Times journalist](#) also exposed horrific practices inside the warehouse, including punishing staff for ill health. Workers are given points for 'poor behaviour' - taking sick leave and missing superhuman performance targets.

After six points they are sacked. This is irrespective of doctors' notes or medical emergencies. One staff member was hospitalised for three days with a kidney infection but still received a point!

Staff can walk over ten miles a day, and water dispensers are apparently often empty. They suffer myriad injuries from unsafely stored stock, and impossible targets causing rushing.

Given Amazon's cosy relationship with the Tories, we can expect nothing less. The president of Amazon China was [appointed to the Department for Work and Pensions board of directors](#) earlier this year. And in 2013, Amazon [received more in government grants than it paid in tax!](#)

We cannot rely on the bosses and their Tory allies to do anything for workers. There is a clear need for trade union organisation in Amazon, and a serious fight to improve terms and conditions.

Last year, general union GMB rightly claimed the company's regime was responsible for physical and mental illness.

Amazon has since hired 20,000 agency staff to cover the peak Christmas season, more than doubling its workforce. Where there is a profit to be made, the tax-dodgers can find money to hire more staff - but not to pay decent wages or ensure health and safety.

Key demands should include permanent contracts for all year-round workers, and direct employment for all agency staff. Hire enough permanent workers to do the job safely, shorten shifts with no loss of take-home pay, and end the draconian points system.

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## **Pfizer drug extortion - nationalise big pharma!**

**Lisa Bainbridge, health charity worker**

Drugs company [Pfizer has been fined a record £84.2 million](#), and Flynn Pharma £5.2 million for [excessive and unfair prices](#). The Competition Market Authority ordered the fine for hikes to anti-epilepsy drug phenytoin sodium, branded 'Epanutin'.

Pfizer sold distribution rights to Flynn Pharma in September 2012. Flynn then debranded the drug, releasing it from price regulation. 100mg of phenytoin sodium capsules, previously sold to the NHS for £2.83, rose to £67.50 - a hike of 2,600%.

There was a slight reduction in May 2014, to a mere £54. But the result had been an increase in NHS spending from £2 million to around £50 million a year in 2013.

The regulator found both companies abused their market position. Pfizer continued to manufacture the drug - at a price 780-1,600% higher than its previous sale price.

The NHS was locked into buying it. Changing medication even slightly risks loss of seizure control for the estimated 48,000 NHS epilepsy patients who rely on it.

Prescriptions dispensed in the community [cost the NHS £9.3 billion in 2015](#), up 4.8% on the previous year, against an increase of just 1.8% on the number of items dispensed to patients.

In my own role in a health charity, we have been working for a year to save a prescribing budget of just £23 million in support of 150,000 NHS patients. That's less than half the annual profit raid Pfizer and Flynn Pharma conspired to achieve.

The National Audit Office has also recently warned that the NHS needs to find a further £14.9 billion in savings to close the gap between patient needs and available resources.

The NHS is at a crossroads. The choice is simple: a fully funded, publicly owned NHS with cheap, high-quality, nationalised drug manufacturing - or a system that continues to allow [corporate raiding of the NHS](#) at our expense.

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## **Trust in politicians reaches all-time low**

**Stephanie Hammond, Camden Socialist Party**

It could hardly be more timely that when the British establishment has decided to rail on about 'post-truth' politics, it is the politicians themselves who have reached an all-time low in the eyes of public trust.

According to [this year's 'veracity' survey from polling agency Ipsos Mori](#), faith in British politicians to tell the truth is lower than ever before. Polling beneath business leaders, estate agents and journalists, just 15% of those surveyed had any faith in politicians to tell the truth. "Voters' levels of trust" are "approaching rock bottom," Ipsos Mori said.

This is in stark contrast to those the Conservative government has attempted to demonise. The public overwhelmingly trusts nurses, doctors and teachers, despite the smear campaigns against them following industrial action.

## Cover-ups

The findings are not surprising when the ruling class says black is white and white is black, that workers enjoy austerity, and amidst exposure of cover-ups of the [shameful role of the state at Hillsborough](#) and [Orgreave](#).

They also expose the right wing of Labour for its careerism, drifting increasingly towards the racist and draconian policies of the Tories. And both the establishment Remain and Leave EU campaigns were equally castigated - neither were trusted to be speaking with honesty.

The truth is that all sections of the capitalist establishment are in crisis. This presents an opening for a socialist alternative, one that could be led by Jeremy Corbyn. [But he must end the concessions to the Blairites](#), or risk squandering a vital opportunity to lead a serious working class struggle.

The Socialist Party stands for workers' representatives on workers' wages, more frequent elections, and the right to recall representatives at any time. Ultimately, the only way the public can place its trust in politics is by creating a democratic, socialist society - based on providing for all, not enriching the bosses and their politicians.

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## No to home seizures for care bills

**James Ivens**

Councils may start [seizing the homes of elderly people](#) after death to pay care bills.

'Deferred payment agreements' have councils pay extortionate care bills in exchange for ownership of the service user's house. The number of such arrangements is likely to rise because the Tories have reneged on a pledge to cap care costs.

More council-owned homes would be good, but not on the basis of economic blackmail of vulnerable people. And will they become council homes? More likely they will be sold to profiteering developers.

Ministers are also considering letting [local authorities charge more council tax](#) to cover ballooning private care bills. This would only punish working class residents for the greed of the care companies.

Councils should instead [fight for more funding from central government](#), and for care to be nationalised under democratic workers' control and management.

Meanwhile, private care companies try anything to maximise profit. The Socialist spoke to care worker and Socialist Party member Katie Simpson.

"Working in the care sector, you see [the impact of private companies' cost-cutting](#) practices.

"Community carers are given as little as 15-minute time slots to see a patient who may need more support, but local authorities won't foot the extra cost.

"Some staff are staying overtime without pay, while others use their own money to buy essentials for their service users. Meanwhile carers are often making minimum wage themselves, and are unpaid between calls despite guidelines.

"Yet the managing directors are always very well-paid. Six-figure salaries and five-figure bonuses while many frontline staff who work over the Christmas period might get a shopping voucher as a 'thank you.'

"It seems obvious to many carers I have worked with over the years that care was never safe in private hands. That [profiting from the sick, elderly and disabled](#) is not going to benefit the people in the service."

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## Them & Us

### Billions for them...

What might the [super-rich pick up as stocking fillers](#) this Christmas?

It's been a good year. According to poverty charity Oxfam, [the wealth of the wealthiest 62](#) billionaires equalled the bottom half of humanity this January. Six years ago, [it would have taken 388](#) of them.

You can buy a plate from Tokyo Design Studio for £13,200. For the equivalent of a year's gross salary on the minimum wage, it must be a really good plate. The Socialist assumes it makes the food itself and washes itself up afterwards.

Or if you're more the festive clothing type, how about a fox fur and Swarovski crystal woolly hat? The 'Jennifer Behr Narcissus Pom Pom' cashmere beanie is just £677. You can pick that up for three weeks' net pay on the minimum wage.

Of course, for the buyer on a budget, there's the perennial favourite: socks. A cashmere pair hand-cranked to order in Devon from a 19th century 'Harrison Sun' sock machine goes for £60.

That's just a shade more than a week's under-25 jobseekers' allowance. Useful for walking to the dole office [when you can't afford the bus](#).

### ... beans for us

Meanwhile, [120,000 children will be homeless at Christmas](#) this year. That's a rise of 15% on last year, according to poverty charity Shelter's figures.

One in eight UK workers now lives in poverty, [according to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation](#). That's 3.8 million people.

That means that of all those in poverty, 55% are in working households. The charity says that's a record high. In fact, since 2010-11, when the establishment claims the economic 'recovery' began, it has risen by 1.1 million.

A total of 7.4 million people in the UK, over a third of them children, are in poverty. This is despite their families working.

It's clear the wealth is out there, it's just concentrated at the top. It goes on £13,200 plates, or more often lies idle awaiting more profitable times for investment. Take the wealth off the 1% - end austerity - £10 an hour minimum wage now.

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## Editorial of the Socialist, issue 929

# Establishment EU crisis deepens - fight for a socialist Brexit

It doesn't take a political genius to spot that the Tories are at war with each other. In the aftermath of the Brexit vote Theresa May, the most Leave-friendly of the Remainers, [was appointed prime minister](#) in an attempt to bring the belligerent sides of the debate within the Tory party together. But this is impossible. The enmity between Remainers and Brexiters is revealed on a daily basis.

When Chancellor Philip Hammond called for a 'transition arrangement' for leaving the EU - in reality a 'soft Brexit' - many commentators identified within his statement an attack on David Davis, Tory minister for Brexit.

The [FT reports](#) Hammond telling the Treasury select committee that there was an "emerging view among businesses, among regulators and among thoughtful politicians" on the need for a transitional arrangement for the exit from the EU in order to provide businesses certainty about their investment prospects. It's implied that Davis, who told the City of London Corporation in a private meeting that he was "not really interested" in such a deal to smooth Britain's departure from the EU, is therefore not thoughtful.

The 'trouser-gate' spat between May and sacked education minister Nicky Morgan is not merely about the obscenity of a PM who wears £995 leather trousers while foodbank usage soars. The Brexit battles are a proxy - and sometimes poxy - war over how best the Tories can represent the super-rich 1%, the bankers and the bosses, when their system is in crisis, when they are hated and when they have no solutions to the problems we face.

In May's Tory conference speech [she claimed to be breaking with Cameron's austerity](#) and to be standing for everyone including the 'just about managing' millions of victims of Tory austerity. She mentioned the working class half a dozen times, aiming to tell working class people not to worry and definitely not to organise. But the cuts to the NHS, to social care, the [10% drop in wages since 2008](#), the housing catastrophe and the slashing of local government services means there is no choice but to do so. The divisions in the Tory party create an advantage - but it requires strong working class organisations to exploit that.

## **Class warfare**

"There's class warfare, all right, but it's my class, the rich class, that's making war, and we're winning." That's how billionaire Warren Buffett saw things in 2006. In the years since, that war has been stepped up as working class people are made to pay, pay and pay again for the world economic crisis. And in that time an enormous accumulation of anger and distrust in the establishment and institutions of capitalism - from the government to the media - has been amassed.

[This was expressed in the Brexit vote](#) - against the establishment and the Tory austerity-mongers. They are still reeling from this unexpected strike back by the austerity-weary and angry.

In the referendum campaign, the absence of a major working class voice in the debates was a key factor and meant a rotten choice faced voters, where both official campaigns were dominated by capitalist politicians with nothing to offer working class people. But, as the Socialist Party predicted, the vote came to be seen as an opportunity to strike a blow against the establishment. As Aditya Chakraborty summed it up: "A multitude of frustrations, pushed through a binary vote."

It meant that this was a blow with a blunt instrument - but a blow nonetheless. It also meant that millions who would like to see the back of austerity governments voted Remain primarily through revulsion at the racism of the official Leave campaign - Tories Johnson and Gove, as well as Ukip.

The Socialist Party called for a Leave vote in the referendum and fought for an independent, working class political voice to oppose austerity from Westminster and from Brussels. This came up against both the establishment media silence and the failure of the leaders of the labour movement in the trade unions and the Labour Party to fight for a socialist, internationalist and working class voice.

## **Vehicle for austerity**

Ultimately the EU is a capitalist institution, a vehicle of austerity. The majority of big business wants a 'soft Brexit' - that is, barely Brexit at all, keeping access to the single market, which means free movement of

goods, services, capital and labour. 44% of British exports go to the single market. Big business generally prefers to trade and move around capital freely, and to be able to [super-exploit cheap labour](#).

However, in this post-crisis world, there is no reliable political party for the capitalist class. The majority of the super-rich 1% want to maintain the EU for their own interests and the interests of the capitalist system, but many backbench MPs in the Tory party - the traditional vehicle the capitalists would prefer to rule through - backed Leave. Neither side can solve the problems of the ongoing economic crisis because the solutions lie in a break with crisis-ridden capitalism: taking the wealth off the 1% and introducing democratic socialist planning of the economy.

Everything is weaponised by the pro-capitalist Remainers in the campaign to water down the Brexit result - from the challenge in the High Court, to the daily association of Brexit voters with racism and nationalism. Tory Chancellor Philip Hammond used his Autumn Statement to blame Britain's economic woes on Brexit rather than the years of pro-capitalist governments who pursued austerity, privatisation and lack of investment with vim.

Within the Labour Party [the right wing see the EU as a weapon against Corbyn](#), and the threat that Labour's future could be in the service of the working class and impoverished middle class, and not as a second eleven for the capitalist class. Defeated coup candidate Owen Smith championed the call for a second referendum and Corbyn was repeatedly attacked for his lacklustre support for Remain.

Unfortunately since [Corbyn's decisive victory over Smith](#) and the Blairite plotters, it has been the likes of Keir Starmer, shadow Brexit secretary, who has been in the limelight putting a case for the single market in the interests of the 1%.

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's proposal to organise a European conference in February to discuss a left-wing perspective on the Brexit negotiations is an important opportunity to put forward a clear and positive plan for a solution to the problems working class people face, both here and across Europe.

The EU is fundamentally an agreement between the different national capitalist classes of Europe with the aim of creating the best terrain for the big European multinationals to conduct their drive for profits with the least possible hindrance.

This has been made painfully clear in Greece where, since 2010, unemployment has risen to over half the youth. The EU has again been attacking the Greek government - [which has already capitulated on opposing austerity](#) - for wanting to make one-off payments to horrendously impoverished pensioners.

## **Movement of disobedience**

In Ireland an incredible movement of mass civil disobedience has [forced the government to retreat on its austerity water charges](#). But on 27 June it was reported that the European Commission said to withdraw the charges was illegal under EU law. Environment Commissioner Karmenu Vella said: "Ireland adopted its river basin management plans in July 2010... and the Commission considers that the Directive does not provide for a situation whereby it can revert to any previous practice."

Corbyn's conference, if it can reach out to those resisting EU austerity such as the [Anti Austerity Alliance in Ireland](#) (involving the Socialist Party's sister organisation there), could be the launch pad for a positive plan for a solution to the problems working class people face. This would mean 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.

But if Labour under Corbyn is to be of use in resistance against the bosses making the working class pay for the capitalist crisis, the fight to kick out the Blairites must be pursued vigorously. At the moment this is not the case. The same goes for a real fight for a workers' Brexit, which could inspire the hundreds of thousands

who have joined Labour to become active, and the millions watching to participate. This means a programme that opposes all the anti-worker directives and privatisation rules that oppose nationalisation of companies and industries, demanding a minimum wage of £10 an hour with no age exemptions and enshrining trade union rights, including collective bargaining. As part of a socialist, internationalist approach this could cut across the fears and divisions that the pro-capitalist Remainers play on.

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## What kind of education?

**What kind of education should we be fighting for? Teacher and Socialist Party member James Kerr asks how we might change schooling from a chore to a truly vibrant, nurturing part of life.**

Teacher trade unionists have been engaged in a bitter struggle to defend education. The next few years will see further [battles over school funding and teacher workload](#), among other things.

As socialists, though, we don't simply see our role as a defensive one, but to offer a way out of the chaos: a socialist education programme. "Education for the masses," as the popular demonstration slogan goes. This requires examining the current education system under capitalism.

"Why are we doing this?" A familiar question we hear as teachers when students embark on a task in school. Sometimes there is no easy answer, or we know that the reply is probably "because the exam board demands we do."

Teachers use every trick in their repertoire to make the subject matter engaging and meaningful, but the reality is that what is demanded of students can often be viewed as abstract and irrelevant.

### Counter-reforms

This has been exacerbated by recent education counter-reforms. For example, [under Michael Gove](#), the teaching of history in primary schools moved to a linear model.

Previously, students had started their learning of history 'closest to them', studying World War Two. This enabled some to discuss with grandparents and other adults who had lived through it, understanding their family history and placing their own lives in the context of world history.

They developed an understanding of the 'concept' of history as well as the content. It wasn't without flaws, but was more meaningful than beginning with the Neolithic period and working forward like they do now.

Is it a surprise that this is one of the characteristics of the school system under capitalism?

[Karl Marx](#) explained that workers can experience a feeling of estrangement from their own humanity, 'alienation', as a result of their mechanical role in production. This alienation is of course present within the school system too, as students complete abstract tasks, preparing them for a life in work.

The class system in capitalism is reflected in the education system. The vast majority of judges, politicians, military officers, journalists, executives and so on come from the tiny number of elite private schools and universities.

This suits capitalism well. The bosses benefit from an education system which can produce an able next generation of workers, but also avoids encouraging challenges to the inequality of class-based society.

However, this is a fine balance for them to strike. It prompted [Friedrich Engels, Marx's collaborator, to state](#) that "the capitalist class has little to hope, and much to fear, from the education of the working class."

In fighting for socialism we cannot simply see our role as tinkering with the capitalists' system. We should fight to revolutionise the education system, to meet the needs of the 21st century.

Despite many 'innovations' over the years, has the education system really been transformed? The blackboards may be gone, but is the PowerPoint projector not just a jazzed-up version? Opportunities to create more active learning opportunities have often not been developed, and will be further sidelined with the impact of school funding cuts.

We are left in many cases with what pioneering educator Paulo Freire described as 'banking education'. Knowledge from an all-knowing 'expert' is deposited into the student, rather than learning coming from dialogue, debate and criticism.

The freedom for teachers and students to explore their interests and follow tangents is [restricted by a rigid curriculum](#). In some schools now there is an expectation that teachers should be at the same stage of the same lesson simultaneously, regardless of the class in the room or what discussion might throw up.

In 2017 we celebrate the hundredth [anniversary of the Russian revolution](#), where many of these same questions confronted the Bolsheviks as they fought to build a new society. The old 'book school' of the Tsar was to be replaced; innovation and experimentation was to be encouraged.

## **Polytechnical**

One area where much attention was directed was around the introduction of 'polytechnical education', an approach long-discussed within the Marxist movement. Put simply, polytechnical education foregrounded the importance of human labour and production in the learning process.

Vladimir Lenin, one of the leaders of the Russian revolution, gives the example of the study of electricity involving regular visits and lessons within a power station. This enables students to see electricity not as an abstract concept, but an integral part of the modern society they live in.

There are numerous opportunities in society for learning to be approached in this way and not confined to a set time period within the school building. The school could become the organiser of a student's learning, rather than its only provider.

Finland plans to replace rigidly defined subjects in the next few years with more thematic learning. This will provide interesting opportunities for study and discussion. Finnish students will take courses like 'Working in an English café' in order to learn a range of skills and concepts within a 'real life' situation.

It is important here to not confuse the arguments for a rich and varied learning experience with those for a purely 'vocational education'.

There can be a tendency for often well-meaning arguments to be made for alternative provision for students who are deemed not to be 'academic'. This effectively means preparing young people for a set employment path as a specialist in a particular area.

We should argue for young people to be introduced to a variety of practical skills and to experience real work situations, but not be deprived of learning in other areas. People should have the opportunity to develop as rounded human beings and the education system should support that. This is an important facet of [the fight against the Tories' proposed expansion of grammar schools](#), and also campaigns to defend and extend adult education.

Learning should be open to all, throughout life, and not just as a crash course prior to employment.

## **Play**

These debates rage around the education of some of our youngest students too. Any good early-years teacher will tell you that much of students' early learning comes through play - through playing roles and experimenting with ideas as part of a social interaction with others.

Even in early years, that approach is [under threat from standardised testing](#) - a similar theme running through education - but it should form the basis of all learning. Students' creativity and curiosity should be given a

forum to be explored throughout life.

Some of these ideas are present within the independent sector, like the Montessori Schools. They should be trialled and introduced within state education, under democratic working class control and management.

For these ideas to bear fruit, a fundamental change in the running of education would be required.

Schools would need greater autonomy to experiment and embed teaching methods which worked, and this would require genuine democracy. The day-to-day running of schools would need the input of elected teachers, students and representatives from the local community to ensure schools served the whole community.

A massive injection of funding would be required to [train the number of teachers necessary to bring down class sizes](#), and allow for the teaching approaches previously discussed. With proper funding, schools could become hubs of their community; open to all, to provide wide-ranging, high-quality education, plus clubs, trips and other community functions.

While fighting to defend past gains, we will continue to look ahead to a future where no one's left counting the days until the school holidays.

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## Education for all - not exam factories

**Jane Nellist, National Union of Teachers executive member (personal capacity)**

It is without doubt that our children are the most tested in the world.

Almost from the time a child starts school, they are subjected to a never-ending regime of examinations. This not only impacts on the child, but on the school and the individual teacher, and [most importantly on the quality of education](#).

The costs of these formal tests and exams are a drain on school budgets, with private companies, like Pearson, making huge profits from our education system. Constant switching between exam boards creates huge workloads for teachers, rewriting schemes of work.

The pressure of testing on pupils causes unnecessary stress, resulting in increasing levels of mental health issues. Schools are now more like 'exam factories'.

Even the Institute of Directors uses this term. [Their report in April stated](#) that "this study raises serious concerns that UK education policy is turning our schools into exam factories, squeezing out creativity and the joy of learning at a time when these very attributes are becoming increasingly important."

With teachers subjected to performance-related pay, it is obvious that 'teaching to the test' impacts on the curriculum young people experience. Music, art and drama are being marginalised.

Teachers have always used testing as part of the assessment of their pupils, but it is only one of the tools we use. The increase in the use of publicly reported testing and exams from children as young as seven is more to do with control than good education.

So does it have to be like this?

Well, the simple answer is no. Teachers want to ensure all their pupils can achieve their full potential, whatever their ability. High-stakes testing inevitably means some pupils are more 'important' than others. Children with special educational needs, and those more able, can often be sidelined.

'Pisa', which looks at the quality of education worldwide, has consistently shown that Finnish children perform well. This is in a country where there are no school inspectors, no league tables, and no exams until the age of 16.

In Germany, while they have introduced national tests, there are no performance league tables and schools are not penalised for poor results.

Of course, parents want to ensure there is accountability. But a recent Ipsos Mori poll on who people trust put teachers on 88%, second only to doctors and nurses - while [politicians, who make the decisions about our education system, came in at 15%](#).

## Sats

[Parents are becoming increasingly uneasy](#) about the level of testing. Campaigns such as 'Children are More than a Score' are gaining wider support for ending Sats.

We need a huge overhaul of education, led by education professionals. We need to rid our system of the present national curriculum, along with Ofsted inspections, Sats and league tables.

Our immediate demands should include a flexible curriculum with more practical learning. It must be [a broad and balanced curriculum](#), with time for the arts, music and more pupil-led innovation, as well as a wide pastoral curriculum including health and sex education for all.

Diagnostic testing and moderated teacher assessment should be at the discretion of the teachers. But a socialist education system would be based on individual and group learning and attainment rather than exams.

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# CWI: opportunities for substantial growth

**Judy Beishon, Socialist Party executive committee**

An excellent and inspiring six-day meeting of the International Executive Committee (IEC) of the [Committee for a Workers' International \(CWI\)](#) ended on 3 December.

Attending were 90 CWI members and co-thinkers from over 35 countries, encompassing Europe, Latin America, Africa, Asia, Australia, Canada and the United States. The meeting discussed, amended and agreed documents on the world situation, Europe, the Middle East and Latin America. These are [available on the CWI website](#).

The IEC fully endorsed the political analysis of the Socialist Party in England and Wales on the major events in Britain of the last year - the developments in the Labour Party around Jeremy Corbyn, and the Brexit vote - and our positions and orientations throughout those fast moving changes.

Co-thinkers of the CWI from Socialist Alternative in the US have also faced major events in 2016, having participated in the massive movement that arose in support of Bernie Sanders in the US presidential election.

They elaborated to the IEC on their activity since achieving the tremendous [reelection of Kshama Sawant](#) in 2015 to Seattle city council, and on how this year they launched Movement for Bernie (now 'Movement for the 99%') and organised some very successful 'Marches for Bernie'.

After Donald Trump's victory, they acted extremely quickly in calling for [immediate protests across the US, to which 40,000 people responded](#) - a great start to building the necessary opposition to Trump's racist, divisive, anti-worker agenda.

Socialist Alternative has had its strongest year of growth yet, reaching nearly 1,000 members in over 30 branches covering 20 cities across the length and breadth of the US - fast becoming the most influential Trotskyist organisation in that vast country. They are planning a launch as a fully-fledged party in 2017 or early 2018, taking their work onto a strengthened, higher level.

## Spain

Particularly welcomed and applauded at the meeting were excellent contributions from two participating visitors from the Spanish organisation Revolutionary Left (Izquierda Revolucionaria - IR), Juan Ignacio Ramos and Victor Taibo.

Victor reported on how young IR members, who lead the student union Sindicato de Estudiantes (SE), have recently been at the forefront of the magnificent mass student movement across Spain that has achieved a [significant victory over the Spanish government](#).

Juan Ignacio explained the history of IR, which was launched in April of this year. Until then it was known throughout the workers' and youth movement by the name of its paper, El Militante.

Originally, El Militante members were organised as a section of the CWI, but in 1992 the majority of them split to become a section of the International Marxist Tendency (IMT), led by Ted Grant.

In 2010, El Militante, together with the majority of the IMT's Mexican and Venezuelan sections, broke with the IMT due to political differences on a series of strategic political questions.

These included the building of a revolutionary party and work in the mass organisations, the national question, the characterisation of the new period opened up by the economic crisis, the cult of personality in the leadership, and in defence of a proletarian and democratic internal regime in the party, as well as the programme and tactics of Marxists in the Venezuelan revolution.

In recent months IR comrades initiated a process of discussion, debate and practical collaboration with the CWI, which has revealed great political agreement, as well as agreement on methods and tactics.

This rapprochement is heading towards a hugely important qualitative advance for the genuine forces of Trotskyism internationally. IR is a growing revolutionary socialist organisation, producing a monthly newspaper, El Militante, plus a bimonthly in the Basque country, and a 'Marxism Today' theoretical journal.

As well as young students, its membership includes many trade unionists who are building up significant influence in workplaces and among the left in the unions. It has numerous premises across the country and runs the biggest Marxist publishing company in the Spanish speaking world - the Frederick Engels Foundation.

Discussions between IR (and its sister organisations in Mexico and Venezuela) and the CWI in Spain and internationally are ongoing, with a view to a historic unification during the course of 2017.

Already, prior to the IEC, a number of [IR representatives visited London in September](#) to discuss with members of the CWI international secretariat and England and Wales executive committee; and then spoke at the England and Wales [Socialism 2016 event in November](#).

Later in November Peter Taaffe and Danny Byrne visited IR comrades and participated in a [conference of the SE in Madrid](#), on behalf of the CWI, and plan a further visit to attend IR meetings in February.

During the IEC discussion on these uplifting developments, CWI leaders from a number of countries commented on what a great impact a fusion would have internationally.

For instance, Andreas Payiatsos from Greece spoke of the solidarity felt between working peoples across southern Europe, which means that cross links in their struggles and organisations are hugely important and they are boosted by each others' successes.

Andre Ferrari from Brazil spoke of how socialists in Brazil and across Latin America have closely followed material of the Marxist left in Spain. He praised the honesty of IR members in analysing the past, which - together with reciprocal openness and integrity in the CWI - has set an excellent example for discussions that the CWI in Brazil is currently having with groups from other left traditions.

This process towards unification with IR can certainly act as a magnet to other revolutionary workers' groups and organisations across the globe to enter into similar discussion, which the CWI will be appealing for, as part of the vital and urgent development of the forces of Trotskyism internationally.

## Building in 45 countries

While not every section of the CWI has faced a highly favourable situation for growth over the last year, many important steps forward were referred to during the IEC.

In the Irish republic [three Socialist Party members were elected](#) as TDs (members of parliament) for the Anti-Austerity Alliance in February. In Germany a member of Socialist Alternative - Lucy Redler - was in May elected onto the national committee of Die Linke - the Left Party.

[The 'Outsourcing Must Fall' campaign](#) initiated by CWI members in South Africa developed into a rolling campaign of mass action in several cities. In November CWI members in Taiwan, following successful student campaigning and other activity, launched themselves as the group 'International Socialist Forward'.

New branches were reported by many sections - from the new Chennai branch in India (adding to branches in Pune and Bangalore), to an Aberdeen branch in Scotland (adding to those in Dundee, Glasgow, Lothian and Renfrewshire).

CWI members in Northern Ireland stood the youngest candidate in the Northern Ireland elections in May, and the Italian section this year held its first national youth camp.

Advances were also reported in fundraising, publications and social media reach; for example, despite a difficult objective situation, visits to the website of CWI members in Greece have more than doubled.

Above all, every section of the CWI will be going into 2017 with a determination to build its membership and influence, no matter what the starting point.

As stated in the IEC document on the world, the crisis of world capitalism grows ever deeper and its strategists are full of foreboding about the prospects for their system. "A constant theme is the lack of 'legitimacy' of capitalism: in the economic sphere, in world relations, on the issue of the environment, climate change and the reflection of this socially and politically.

"Above all, there is a real fear, although largely unspoken, that the obvious failures of capitalism mean that we are living 'on the edge of the volcano'; bourgeois speak for mass upheaval and even revolutionary change."

The document concludes that the CWI "will have every opportunity of growing substantially in most parts of the world given the chronic crisis of world capitalism... This could be a crucial period for us to lay the foundations for the CWI to become the most important Trotskyist force worldwide and to lay the basis for mass formations."

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## Glasgow Labour leaders deluged with protests in support of workers' strike

**Matt Dobson, Socialist Party Scotland**

The [attempted scabbing operation by Glasgow Labour council](#) in an effort to undermine Unison's strike action against privatisation of ICT services has been pushed back. Thousands of emails from across the trade union and labour movement were sent to the council administration and Labour politicians in protest.

The recruitment adverts for scab labour have not yet been acted on and are currently dormant. Management are now talking to the union.

ICT workers and the union will need to remain vigilant as the council may try and use other avenues to recruit workers to break the strike.

Protests should still be made to the Labour council and Labour politicians over the ICT privatisation and their anti-union tactics. Solidarity should also be sent to the ICT workers and Glasgow Unison.

Outrageously however all ten Labour councillors on the council executive voted the privatisation proposal through again.

[Socialist Party Scotland](#) and Socialist Party members have been mobilising across the trade union and labour movement to protest and build. Our members raised the issue at the Unison NEC and the Unison Scotland council who both gave full support for the strike action.

The two month-long planned strike by 39 Glasgow Unison ICT workers against the privatisation of their and their colleagues' jobs by the Labour council has concluded its first week with daily lively pickets and protests. Strikers braved minus temperatures to picket from 2 December.

The 39 determined strikers were joined by over 200 colleagues in a mass protest outside a Labour group meeting on 7 December. Workers sang Wham's Last Christmas to the Glasgow council Labour group changing the lyrics to: "Last Christmas you gave us your word, but the very next day, you took it away. This year to save us from tears, we're taking industrial action."

ICT worker Lorna told the Socialist: "It's important we all came out today to support our strikers, the pressure the council are trying to force on them and the union is disgusting".

One striker told protesters through the megaphone he had been a Labour voter all his life and an active election campaign supporter but this dispute had led him to break from the party.

It's a message that should be addressed by Jeremy Corbyn who has not spoken up against the actions of the Labour council, despite calls to do so by Glasgow Unison. One of the 'Corbyn-supporting' councillors who is involved with Momentum, Matt Kerr, voted for the privatisation at the council executive.

- Send urgent messages of protest to the chief executive of Glasgow City Council [annemarie.odonnell@glasgow.gov.uk](mailto:annemarie.odonnell@glasgow.gov.uk) and Labour leader Frank McAveety [frank.mcaveety@glasgow.gov.uk](mailto:frank.mcaveety@glasgow.gov.uk)
- Labour affiliated trade unions should send motions to constituency Labour parties condemning the actions of Glasgow City Council
- Email Jeremy Corbyn at [leader@labour.org.uk](mailto:leader@labour.org.uk) to ask him to intervene to stop the privatisation
- Send messages of support to the Unison strikers to Glasgow City Unison at [enquiries@glasgowcityunison.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@glasgowcityunison.co.uk)

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## Victory for UPS parcel workers

Unite the Union members employed by [UPS parcels in Camden](#), London, have won a tremendous victory in a long running battle against bullying and racism.

The company has a business model which forces drivers to work overtime using bullying tactics such as sending messages out to drivers who are out on route, demanding that they finish delivering all packages before returning to the depot - and threatening disciplinary action if this condition is not met.

The workers who load the vans work under Victorian conditions, with tremendous pressure to load vans as quickly as possible - reporting that they have even been fed high sugar energy drinks to keep them going through the night shift.

These workers have complained in particular of racism and [bullying over a long period](#), but have felt too intimidated and afraid of victimisation to follow complaints through.

Negotiations have taken place since February at Acas which followed a consultation ballot where members expressed a clear desire for a strike ballot. Progress was slow and stalled and the reps finally had enough and

called for an official strike ballot, which returned a 85% yes vote, but on a small turnout.

Once news of the ballot got out around the country, reps in other depots expressed concern about action taking place, because of the low turnout. They also expressed fear that the company would withdraw from the recognition agreement.

However, the courageous reps at Camden took the view that a recognition agreement is only as good as the results it delivers. They therefore pressed for notice of strike action to be issued without delay, which the union did, setting the 7th and 9th December as strike days.

Once again reps outside of Camden expressed concern, this time in strong and sometimes insulting terms - again expressing more concern for the recognition agreement than for day-to-day conditions. However, events proved the Camden reps right.

Following the issue of notice for strike action, which would have coincided with the December peak season, the employer started serious talks. Within the space of four days more was achieved by local reps than had been achieved by national negotiations for nearly a year.

An agreement was signed that led to the strike being called off only after the local reps were satisfied that issues had been addressed.

The multi-issue agreement includes measures to start dealing with racism but also includes a proposal that will mean drivers no longer being bullied to work forced overtime. This is a huge step - the UPS business model relies on forced overtime.

Unsurprisingly, those reps who were critical of Camden now wish to see this rolled out across other depots. The Unite response must be to support depots outside of Camden who now have the confidence to fight too.

But there are also clear lessons. This campaign was won despite a very low turnout in a ballot, emphasising again how important it is for the trade union movement to fight measures aimed at restricting the ability of workers to take strike action following a yes vote.

It is of course vital that work is done to maximise turnouts in ballots. But equally, there are plenty of campaigns that grow from low turnouts and win important victories.

**Socialist Party reporters**

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This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 8 December 2016 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

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## **Nationalise Tata Steel to save jobs and pensions**

**Alec Thraves**

The announcement that Tata Steel and the leaders of the steel unions have potentially reached an agreement to stop the closure of the Port Talbot works and the other Welsh and UK plants has understandably been greeted with enormous relief by the local community. It has been [politically impossible for governments in Westminster and Cardiff](#) to stand idly by and let these works close, particularly emphasising the weakness of the crisis-ridden Tories.

However, Tata's decision to reverse its planned closure by committing to keep the two blast furnaces operating for five years, 'seeking' to avoid compulsory redundancies for the same period and also investing £1 billion over the next 10 years, comes with a poisonous sting in the tail. The company also wants to make a further £10 million saving as part of this deal. This will come from downgrading terms and conditions which hasn't been discussed yet.

Tata wants to [close down the final salary British Steel Pension Scheme](#) (BSPS) and replace it with an inferior Defined Contribution Scheme. 130,000 present and past employees are members of the BSPS and could face a huge cut to their pension entitlement. Understandably, workers are torn but angry. Reflecting this, the unions will now put the 'rescue package' of proposals to the workforce, without a recommendation.

One steelworker told the Socialist:

*"I'm not sure of the potential losses that will be felt due to the scheme closing but part of last year's pension settlement was that it was 'agreed' that the ability of workers to take early retirement at 60 and not suffer any financial penalties was given up. It was replaced with: workers who wished to and were financially able, could retire at 60 but lose 25% of their pension - despite the unions all saying no steel worker should ever have to do that.*

*"When the scheme closes we will all become deferred pensioners of the BSPS and will have to wait until 65 to claim our pension. There will not be the option of taking it early with the financial hit. Some have already taken their 'pot' out of the BSPS and I think more will follow before the scheme is closed, as my understanding is once the scheme is closed your 'pot' is locked in till 65.*

*"The mood in the plant I work in is very negative, disheartened etc. Most people have only just come round to accepting working five years longer in this tough industry or losing 25% of their hard-earned money and despite agreeing to this the company once again wants the scheme closed.*

*"Most people I have spoken to feel that with the BSPS closed Tata will probably sell us off pretty quickly. We are all too well aware that a guarantee from the company is no guarantee at all! The media has been really positive about this offer and there are worries that steel workers will look very ungrateful if they don't accept the offer that is on the table."*

18 months ago, steelworkers voted for strike action when Tata threatened the closure of the BSPS. Now Tata has come back again, only this time the implied threat is accept pension cuts or face potential closure of the plant!

In April, at a protest [march and rally in Port Talbot organised by the National Shop Stewards Network](#), the main demand put forward by the protesters was to 'Nationalise Tata to Save Steel'. This demand gained a big echo amongst steelworkers and their community who had no confidence in the Tata board to save their jobs.

It could and should have been the platform for a serious struggle led by the steel unions to win this outcome. Partial nationalisation was even accepted by the Tory government as well as Labour MPs and Welsh Assembly Members who recognised the political and social explosion that would occur if the plant was left to go under. But while the leaders of the steel unions passively went along with this idea, they refused to really campaign by mobilising their members and the community to force the government to take the plants over.

Instead in reality, they have been reduced to trying to come to an agreement acceptable to Tata or failing that, to find a private buyer.

If Tata can renege on its long standing pension scheme agreement then what are the chances of Tata standing by its 'commitment' to keep the furnaces firing, promising no compulsory redundancies or continuing the investment plans?

In an economically and socially depressed town like Port Talbot, the wage rates of full time employees in Tata, which are at least double the minimum wage, are an extremely rare exception. No doubt the Tata executives have taken this into account when deciding to close the BSPS. Many workers will be torn at the prospect of seeing their pension agreement ripped up or alternatively possibly losing their jobs.

Many steelworkers have no confidence or trust in Tata to honour its long term commitments in Port Talbot and elsewhere.

Instead of standing to one side and cowardly offering no recommendation to their members, the leaders of the steel unions should be demanding the nationalisation of steel under democratic workers' control and

management as the only real chance of securing the hard won British steel pension scheme and guaranteeing the long term future of the UK steel industry.

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This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 9 December 2016 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

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## **Doncaster bin workers strike against draconian management style**

**Alistair Tice**

130 members of the Unite trade union working at the Doncaster waste transfer depot are on strike today, Monday 12 December, over a 'draconian' management style and the victimisation and sacking of two colleagues.

The one-day stoppage by the refuse and recycling workers, who are employed by Sita UK Limited which now trades as Suez Environment, followed a massive 98% vote in favour of strike action on a turnout of 94%.

Workers have grown angry over management's increasingly hardline attitude resulting in workers not being allowed to take any holidays since August and they report that there have been a number of 'trumped up' unfair dismissals, which they fear is a prelude to potential redundancies.

One sacked worker, a Unite member, who previously won a company health and safety award, has been sacked for a supposed health and safety breach. His appeal is on Wednesday this week and if he's not reinstated then more industrial action will follow.

At least 100 strikers were on the picket line from 6am and nothing went in or came out. The strike is solid and a union steward said: "Job done for today but if he doesn't win his appeal we'll be back out".

Workers said that managers had got so ridiculous that they were hiding in hedges to take photographs of workers doing their bin rounds! They are being pushed to work longer hours to the point where one worker had to pee in a bottle at the back of the bin wagon.

Commenting, Unite regional officer Shane Sweeting said:

"We had hoped that we could have avoided a strike and the inevitable disruption it will bring, through recent talks at the conciliation service Acas.

"Sadly management was not willing to listen and instead seems hell bent on continuing with its bullying 'draconian' management style and denying people taking time off to go on holiday with their family.

"The bullying mentality of management cannot be allowed to fester. We urge the company to get around the negotiating table to meaningfully negotiate a solution which meets our members' concerns and restores dignity and respect to the workplace."

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This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 12 December 2016 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

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## **Derby TAs to strike against pay cut**

**Charlie Taylor, Derby Socialist Party**

Derby teaching assistants (TAs) are to take a further six days of strike action in their dispute with the Labour-led city council. The strike dates are 14, 15, 19 and 20 December 2016 and then again in the new year on 19 and 20 January.

The TAs have already taken several days of strike action over massive cuts to pay.

The cuts came about originally in the name of 'single status' and a review on equal pay. This review saw some workers gain but around 1,200 Unison members will see their pay slashed.

## **Contracts**

These new contracts were imposed on the teaching assistants in June this year. Many will see pay cuts of up to 25%, averaging £300-400 a month; some are losing as much as £6,000 a year.

In October planned strikes were suspended to allow talks to end the dispute. The council offered to make a one-off payment of £2,000 to staff that meet certain criteria. Unison says this equates to just 10% of the 2,700 who have been left out-of-pocket by the contract changes.

Staff voted to reject this offer and are now preparing for more strike action.

[As in the Durham dispute](#) it is a Labour council that is forcing through massive cuts to its workers' pay. The leader of Derby City Council, Rangit Banwait, stood on the same platform as Jeremy Corbyn in front of 1,000 people and declared himself a democratic socialist and a supporter of Jeremy.

As with thousands of other Labour councillors, those in Derby should face re-selection if they are not prepared to stand up and fight.

Derby TAs will be encouraged by the struggle of the Durham TAs who have [shown that action can force councils back](#).

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## **Southern Rail: back the strikes, nationalise the railways!**

Members of train drivers' unions Aslef and RMT are taking three days of strike action on Southern Rail on 13, 14 and 16 December in the [long-running dispute over the removal of guards](#). A High Court ruling refused an injunction to prevent the strike by Aslef - a ruling which Southern's owners have lodged an appeal against. A week-long walkout is also planned in January.

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## **Birmingham Labour: Corbyn supporters need not apply**

**Dave Griffiths, West Midlands Socialist Party secretary**

The Midlands Metro mayoral elections take place in 2017 and in 2018 every Birmingham council seat is up for election. So 2017 will see Labour go through the process of selecting candidates.

BBC's Sunday Politics has referred to "a tight knit group of MPs in the Midlands" (the right-wing 'party within a party') who previously sought to expel Militant supporters, and now want to defeat 'the left' in Labour.

So much so that the Birmingham board of the Labour Party is reported to have voted to exclude all members who joined on or after July 2015 from selecting Labour candidates for the 2018 local elections. In a further attack on accountability, council elections have moved from every year to every four years as well.

'After July 2015' joiners, of course, would be people who joined overwhelmingly to support Jeremy Corbyn in his first leadership challenge.

Given the next elections will be in 2022, this means that around 70% of Labour Party members will be excluded for six to seven years! The qualifying date for participating in selection meetings is normally six months.

Being diplomatic, Birmingham Momentum says it "smacks of cynical gerrymandering". They correctly say "it is also self-defeating. How do we expect to have a motivated membership knocking doors, delivering leaflets and taking the case for Labour candidates into our communities if we won't even let that membership select those candidates?"

A Momentum member told us: "I just read a Momentum report that Birmingham Labour has excluded all members who joined after July 2015 from voting in the selection of council candidate elections. This, and the shenanigans going on in Momentum over a democratic and open Momentum conference, makes you fear for the battle for democracy in Labour."

Momentum South Birmingham has called on the board to overturn the decision and instead have the usual six month freeze date. This needs to be part of a campaign to overturn the decision and to seek the selection of anti-cuts candidates for the 2018 elections.

## **Conference to debate TUSC's role and the 2017 elections**

Saturday 28 January from 11am to 4-30pm at Student Central, Malet Street, London WC1E 7HY

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# **The Socialist Party and fighting women's oppression**

**Heather Rawling, Leicester Socialist Party**

Following the recent [Leicester Reclaim the Night march](#), the local Socialist Party invited the University of Leicester Feminist Society to speak at a Socialist Party meeting on rape and sexual violence.

The society declined via Facebook and said that some "FemSoc committee and members... felt that the [Socialist Party] group were trying to take over women's issues with socialism, and some felt uncomfortable with the tone of the blog post and that leaflets were being handed out at Reclaim the Night.

"Additionally, FemSoc have a policy of remaining neutral in regards to supporting any political affiliations, we don't endorse any political parties or groups. Thank you for letting us know about the event, and we hope the event is a success."

Leicester Socialist Party replied saying the following:

Dear UOL Feminist Society,

Thanks for your reply.

Our leaflet was intended as a contribution towards the debate on the causes and solutions to women's oppression, particularly in response to the unfair burden women are suffering due to austerity.

Reclaim the Night events have been taking place around the country and the Socialist Party has been involved in these events over many years and in many towns and cities. Socialists have been working with feminists and others who oppose oppression for over a century. Indeed [many suffragettes were socialists](#).

Socialists, including the Socialist Party, have [a proud record of campaigning on women's issues](#), with some success.

In Ireland our sister Socialist Party is playing a leading role in [the fight for abortion rights](#). Members who sit in parliament with the Anti-Austerity Alliance have been to the fore in pushing for a referendum to repeal the eighth amendment which bans women's right to choose. Support for this demand is growing.

We welcome debate about the causes and solutions to women's oppression. We hope that many on the protest received our leaflets in that democratic spirit.

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## **Socialist women national meeting**

Saturday 7 January, 10am-5pm, London. Venue: tbc

### Agenda

10-10.30am Tea and coffee

10.30am-12.30pm Women and the Russian Revolution

12.30pm-1.30pm Lunch

1.30pm-3.30pm Commissions on women and the fightback in the work places and trade unions; on campus, and in the community. These will help with the preparation of a socialist programme for women's rights

3.30pm-5pm Abortion rights under attack and the fightback around the world

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## **Doncaster: cuts give rise to 'tent city'**

Homelessness in the UK has reached epidemic proportions, [120,000 children will be homeless this Christmas](#), two million people are waiting for social housing and a cap on benefits has added to the 60,000 evictions a year. There has been no response from government except inane ramblings such as 'difficult decisions must be made' and 'we're all in this together'.

Homelessness in Doncaster is no worse than other towns but a few enterprising folk have set up a tent city to protect the town's homeless.

An appeal went out through social media and the community has responded magnificently. Tents, camp-beds, blankets, clothes, food and toiletries have all been donated. Someone even paid for a couple of toilets to be hired.

Within a very short time people volunteered themselves to staff the 'city' which has been set up on a piece of public land in between the council's prestigious offices and the town centre.

It's a huge embarrassment to the Labour councillors who have cut £100 million from services in the past three years and are planning a further £68 million for the next three years. This is a council that has increased its useable reserves from £97 million to £104 million while making these vicious cuts to essential services for the most vulnerable.

It's time Labour councils started [fighting back and demanding the resources they need](#) to look after the people who voted them in instead of appeasing this weak Tory government.

It's time Jeremy Corbyn [stood by his opposition to cuts and organised a real fightback](#).

**Mary Jackson, Doncaster Socialist Party**

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## Scrooge Tory council confronted over treatment of homeless

**Chas Berry, North Kent Socialist Party**

Medway Tory council in Kent loves to celebrate Charles Dickens. Twice a year the picturesque streets of Rochester are filled with characters in period dress reenacting scenes from his most famous novels.

At the same time, 21st century poverty and homelessness go unnoticed with an estimated 200 people sleeping rough and [many more 'sofa surfing'](#) between insecure and sometimes dangerous arrangements.

Reality dawned at this years 'Dickensian Christmas' on 3 December, however, when Mayor Stuart Tranter was confronted by around 40 protesters from Medway Justice for Homeless People. The group, which was set up following the death of Samson Paine earlier this year, lined the streets of the main parade with a lively demonstration.

The protest made a huge impact, sited directly outside the historic 'Six Poor Travellers House' featured in one of Dickens's novels and campaigners were overwhelmed with people wanting to sign our petition.

A public meeting, held fittingly at the Huguenot Museum which records the refuge given to those fleeing religious persecution, called for immediate [action to address the housing crisis](#). We are calling on Medway council to provide emergency shelter and an end to the eviction of those forced to sleep in tents on public land.

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## It's the bumper Socialist 2016 quiz!

Here's the editors' test of our readers' knowledge. All the questions are themed from articles which appeared in the Socialist this year. You don't have to resort to using a search engine - the answers are below!

Season's greetings and a happy New Year.

### Questions

#### Numbers and percentages

- 1) In June, how many Labour MPs supported a 'no confidence' motion on Jeremy Corbyn?
- 2) What percentage of leave voters want EU migrants to stay after Brexit?
- 3) According to Oxfam, what percentage of the world's wealth is owned by 62 super-rich people?
- 4) How long did the Chilcot report into the Iraq war take to be published?
- 5) How many young Americans preferred a meteor to destroy Earth than see either Hillary Clinton or Donald Trump in the White House?
- 6) What's the average household debt for every adult in the UK?

7) How many England matches did [disgraced Sam Allardyce](#) manage before being dismissed?

#### **Places**

- 1) Where were zero-hour contracts banned?
- 2) Where did the 'fishball revolution' break out?
- 3) Where was an attempted coup on 15 July?
- 4) Where did workers successfully strike against migrant worker exploitation?

#### **Named**

- 1) Who took strike action in January for the first time in 40 years?
- 2) Who replaced Brazil's president Dilma Rousseff following her impeachment?
- 3) Name the anti-labour law which led to mass strike action in France?
- 4) Name Britain's "worst railway company" which wants to axe all its conductors?
- 5) Who was told to pay back £11 billion?
- 6) Who proposed a referendum to repeal the Irish republic constitution's eighth amendment banning abortion?
- 7) Who said: "I didn't think they hated me so much"?
- 8) What was the name given to the leaked 11.5 million files on the secretive financial affairs of the world's rich?
- 9) Who were "unlawfully killed"?
- 10) Whose mass strikes in October and November forced Spain's government to withdraw the 'revalidas'?
- 11) Who resigned over cuts to disability benefits?
- 12) Who said: "I'm not sure I fully understand politics right now"?
- 13) Who called US president Obama a "son of a whore"?
- 14) Who banned Burkinis saying they were a terrorist-related public order threat?
- 15) Who was found guilty of false imprisonment of Ireland's deputy prime minister?
- 16) Which group of bikers defeated attacks on pay and conditions?
- 17) Whose denunciation 60 years ago caused a big political stir?

#### **Miscellanea**

- 1) What gaffe did low-paying Sport's Direct boss Mike Ashley make at his Shirebrook warehouse open day?
- 2) What did Home Secretary Amber Rudd rule out?
- 3) What event 100 years ago shook the British Empire?
- 4) Why did 15,000 Liverpool FC fans walk out during the team's game with Sunderland?

- 5) Why did 30,000 children stay away from school on 3 May?
  - 6) What health crisis erupted on the eve of the Olympic games?
  - 7) Which group of tenants successfully resisted eviction?
  - 8) What will cost at least £18 billion to build?
- 

## Answers

### Numbers and percentages

- 1) [172 to 40 against](#).
- 2) 77% [according to an opinion poll](#).
- 3) 50% - [as much wealth as the poorest 3.6 billion people combined](#).
- 4) Over seven years. Gordon Brown [announced the inquiry in 2009](#).
- 5) 25% according to a [University of Massachusetts opinion poll](#).
- 6) £30,000 - [113% of the average annual income](#).
- 7) One.

### Places

- 1) [New Zealand](#) on 11 March.
- 2) Hong Kong, after [street traders were forcibly evicted by police](#) at the start of the Chinese new year.
- 3) Turkey. Middle ranking officers [attempted to overthrow president Erdogan](#).
- 4) The Fawley oil refinery, near Southampton. [Unite members succeeded in getting the same pay rate](#) for contracted workers from Italy and Bulgaria.

### Named

- 1) Junior doctors [over Tory government attacks on their contract](#).
- 2) [Michel Temer of the right-wing PMDB](#).
- 3) [The El Khomri law](#) (named after the labour minister).
- 4) [Southern Railway owned by Govia Thameslink](#).
- 5) Apple. [The EU ruled that it had avoided this amount in tax](#) due to a sweetheart deal with the Irish government.
- 6) [Socialist Party member and AAA TD \(MP\) Ruth Coppinger](#)
- 7) Several candidates - we're going with [ex-PM Matteo Renzi following his defeat](#) in Italy's constitutional referendum.
- 8) [The Panama Papers](#).

- 9) The 96 Liverpool FC fans killed at the Hillsborough stadium disaster in 1989 - [an inquest jury ruled this year](#).
- 10) [Sindicato de Estudiantes \(Students Union\)](#). Revalidas were despised university entrance exams.
- 11) [Tory minister Iain Duncan Smith](#) - despite previously voting for cuts and introducing the hated bedroom tax.
- 12) [Tony Blair, unable to grasp the popularity](#) of Jeremy Corbyn and Bernie Sanders' anti-capitalist messages.
- 13) [Philippines strong-man president Rodrigo Duterte](#).
- 14) [The mayor of Cannes, France, followed by more than 20 other municipalities](#). The ban was declared illegal in the courts.
- 15) [A teenager at Dublin Children's Court](#). The ludicrous charge followed a peaceful sit-down protest in Jobstown over water charges in 2014 which delayed Labour deputy PM Joan Burton. Socialist Party member Paul Murphy TD faces imprisonment on similar charges.
- 16) [Deliveroo couriers in August](#).
- 17) [USSR Communist Party chief Nikita Khrushchev denounced Stalin](#) (but not Stalinism) at its 1956 congress.

#### Miscellanea

- 1) [Taking out of his pocket a thick roll of £50 notes](#), saying: "I've just been to the casino"!
- 2) [An inquiry into police violence against striking miners at Orgreave in 1984](#).
- 3) [The 1916 Easter uprising in Dublin](#) led by revolutionary James Connolly.
- 4) [In protest at home ticket price hikes](#). The club backed down.
- 5) [Parents protesting against Sats tests for seven-year-olds](#).
- 6) [An outbreak of the mosquito-borne Zika virus](#). The lack of preventative health programmes over decades due to funding cuts was blamed.
- 7) [Butterfields housing estate in Walthamstow](#), east London. After a months-long tenants' campaign.
- 8) [EDF's Hinkley Point C nuclear power plant](#). In addition, the public subsidy to EDF's energy bills will be over £30 billion.

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## Deaths and comebacks - 2016 sounds for your stocking

**Dave Gorton, Chesterfield Socialist Party**

The political tremors of 2016 stretched into music with multiple deaths of well-loved figures. Thousands of people singing Starman in Brixton after the death of David Bowie will remain in the memory. Similar scenes were witnessed in the US [on the demise of Prince](#).

Their back catalogues will become Christmas presents for many, as will those of Leonard Cohen, Prince Buster, Fairport Convention's Dave Swarbrick and The Eagles' Glenn Frey.

But there was a wonderful array of new music in 2016.

A Tribe Called Quest heralded a return with the excellent *We Got It From Here...* also tinged with tragedy as band member Phife Dawg died during recording. Standout track is *We The People* whose point is clear:

All you Black folks, you must go

All you Mexicans, you must go

And all you poor folks, you must go

Muslims and gays, boy, we hate your ways

So all you bad folks, you must go

Hip hop and R&B hit a purple patch. Kano deservedly won the Mobo best album for *Made In The Manor* - a modern-day homage to east London. Anderson.Paak, Kendrick Lazaar and Kaytranada also hit the spot.

[Kate Tempest's \*Let Them Eat Chaos\*](#) is part of a new London sound along with Ray BLK - one of my tips for 2017. Her mini album *Durt* is a downloadable steal at a fiver.

PJ Harvey's *The Hope Six Demolition Project* tops my rock choices while jazz is well served with Josef Leimberg's *Astral Progressions*, Shabaka and the Ancestors' *Wisdom of Elders* and BADBADNOTGOOD's *IV*. Applewood Road's eponymous album featuring three-part female harmonies on original folk tunes rightly received reviewer plaudits.

My favourite is *Black Focus* by Yussef Kamaal, another London sound of jazz, grime and broken beat.

Finally, a leftfield offering: *Wreck His Days' Tomorrow The Rain Will Fall Upwards*, a dub/ambient collection, features a reworking of Spanish Civil War song *Ay Carmela*, a track dedicated to revolutionaries Rosa Luxemburg and Alexandra Kollontai and strains of *The Internationale* to close out the album.

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## The Socialist Inbox

### Do you have something to say?

Send your news, views and criticism in not more than 150 words to Socialist Postbox, PO Box 24697, London E11 1YD, phone 020 8988 8771 or email [editors@socialistparty.org.uk](mailto:editors@socialistparty.org.uk).

We reserve the right to shorten and edit letters. Don't forget to give your name, address and phone number. Confidentiality will be respected if requested.

Views of letter writers do not necessarily match those of the Socialist Party.

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### Scrooge bosses

You could be forgiven for thinking that Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* was just a work of fiction. But the characters are in fact alive and well and living in 21st century Britain.

A friend of mine works at a major supermarket chain and applied for 27 Dec off work so that she could visit her family. When the request was refused she explained to her manager that public transport wouldn't be running, so she would have to miss seeing her family completely in order to work. Echoing Scrooge, her manager simply replied "Why do I care?" It's only once a year, sir!

Similarly another friend works for a hospice charity. Her father has been battling cancer this year and she booked time off to be with him at Christmas. However, her 'charity' employer reversed the decision and told her she must be prepared to come in at any time if she gets the call. Humbug!

Capitalism clearly cannot provide a future for the working class, in fact austerity is sending us back to conditions from 100 years ago. We know we can't rely on the benevolence of charity and the Scrooges of the world to have a change of heart - see how they treat their own staff! We have to fight for ourselves this Christmas.

**Tessa Warrington, Leicester**

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## **It's a lottery**

The Tories are gambling with all our futures, but the game is rigged, and the primary beneficiaries of this lottery are the billionaire class. Corporation tax plummets, while our cost of living increases by the day.

Since 2010 the government has cut the grant for local authorities (that is derived from the taxes we pay) by 50%. And every year the super-rich corporate scroungers use legal loop-holes to avoid paying £120 billion of tax.

Vital public services that benefit the most vulnerable in society are being cast by the wayside.

In response, Conservative authorities are now following the regressive American model in setting up local lottery schemes to fund vital local services. In the same way that the council tax is a regressive form of tax, so are lotteries.

As demonstrated in the landmark book *Selling Hope: State Lotteries in America* (1991), regressive tax is a form of taxation that ends up making the poorest in society pay a higher proportion of their income for the provision of public services.

Melton Borough Council is the third Tory-run local authority to back lottery schemes.

Apparently the lotto is meant to "cushion the impact of government cuts".

But the most effective way of reacting to such drastic funding cuts would be for Labour to refuse to put up with such institutionalised theft.

Certainly the leader of the Labour Party opposes austerity, as do the majority of his party's membership. But unfortunately most elected Labour representatives seem intent on blocking any fightback against cuts.

**Mike Barker, Leicester**

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## **Liberal confusion**

Since Brexit, the election of Trump and the rise of the so-called 'populist right' in Europe, many of those who would call themselves 'progressives' or 'left liberals' seem to have been thrown into confusion. They seem unable to find a coherent explanation of what is happening. Many blame the 'white working class' - very wrong in my view.

I think the reason for their bewilderment springs from their failure to comprehend the class nature of capitalist society. It's as if they've accepted Thatcher's claim that there's "no such thing as society, just people and families".

But once you recognise that capitalism divides society into two main classes, you begin to realise that politics is driven overwhelmingly by the struggle between these two classes.

Progressive liberals reluctant to accept this analysis believe instead that progress can be achieved through the force of ideas, reason and logic.

The futility of this approach was brought home to me when I read about Yanis Varoufakis. As finance minister during the Greek financial crisis - prior to the betrayal of the Greek workers by the Syriza leadership - he was negotiating with EU ministers.

The article spoke of the "surreal levels of incomprehension" faced by Varoufakis. He put forward arguments which were "logically coherent", only to be faced with "blank stares". What he didn't seem to realise was that the EU ministers were defending pro-austerity, pro-capitalist policies. Arguments about "fairness" were irrelevant to them.

**Steve Appleton, Sutton**

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<http://www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/24115>