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Communities and health workers unite to resist cruel NHS cuts

Brent Kennedy, Cumbria Health Campaigns Together

The Tories have already cut doctors, nurses, student nurses and 15,000 beds. Now the government intends a further £22 billion of cuts through its ['sustainability and transformation plans' \(STPs\)](#).

Underlining these cuts, NHS England chief [Simon Stevens wants to abandon waiting time targets for surgery](#). The British Medical Association said this shows the NHS is at "breaking point".

In my area, North Cumbria NHS Trust and ten others have just come out of special measures, yet this result of the staff's hard work is threatened again by STPs and locally through the misnamed 'Success Regime'.

All the trust's chief executive could offer the staff was years more blood, sweat and tears. But how much longer will these workers' nerves stand this extra strain? They need more resources and more staff now. But after seven years of wage freezes and caps, how can we recruit and retain doctors and nurses?

Meanwhile, more so-called 'bed blocking' will inevitably worsen as the [Success Regime](#) closes three 'cottage hospitals' and cuts up to 200 beds, and the Labour/Lib Dem-run county council closes 137 out of 257 care home beds. They are already blaming each other but working hand in glove.

Recently, our [council health scrutiny committee met](#) and voted to refer back to Jeremy Hunt, the government health secretary, proposals to close three hospitals, the Whitehaven paediatric unit and probably the Whitehaven consultant-led maternity unit after a year.

But after pressure from the 'clinical commissioning group' they rushed through a second vote and reversed their decision on hospitals and paediatrics.

[Four councillors \(three Labour\) had gone home early](#) (!) and enough others turned coat to betray the people they claim to represent. One of these was Gill Troughton, the Blairite opponent of Jeremy Corbyn, who unsurprisingly [lost Labour the Copeland byelection](#).

We need more protests locally and nationally by health worker unions, NHS campaigners and the wider public to fight the cuts.

All the health and other public sector unions must organise and coordinate strike action to restore living standards, jobs and services.

Demonstrations, strikes and other forms of protest action would give organised expression to the deep mood of discontent against austerity and stop this weak, divided government in its tracks.

Save our NHS march and rally

- Saturday 8 April, 12 noon
- Carlisle city centre.
- Called by Cumbria Health Campaigns Together

NHS SOS round-up

- The number of NHS patients waiting more than the target 18 weeks for an operation [has gone up by 100,000 since January](#). Luckily, the government has a solution: scrap the 18-week target.
- GPs' surgeries face fresh budget crises after NHS Property Services has threatened massive hikes to maintenance charges. [Some could have to pay up to £100,000 more a year to the government-owned property group](#) - headed by a former exec at privatised telecom firm BT.
- Welsh Labour has insisted hospitals make more cuts. Four health boards have a total shortfall of £146 million this year. [The Welsh government has refused to bail them out](#), preferring to wield the Tory axe rather than stand up to Westminster.

Editorial of the Socialist, issue 943

Gibraltar, EU guidelines, Ukip in crisis

Fight for a socialist Brexit

Talk of Britain ['going to war' with Spain](#), European politicians telling each other [not to 'lose their cool'](#) - it could all seem rather surreal. But the Gibraltar tensions that have developed in the latest stage of the Brexit process show the truth of what [the Socialist Party has argued](#). The chaos shows that there is no cohesive approach to Brexit within the British or European ruling classes - there is only division and instability within a context where the rights and interests of working class people (in Britain, Gibraltar or anywhere else) are of no concern to the ruling elites. This division should be an opportunity for the workers' movement - but as yet has not been seized.

The [EU's draft negotiating guidelines](#) poured cold water on any idea that May and the British government would have their way. There will, the council of the EU says, be no parallel talks on a future trade deal until 'significant progress' has been made on the details of Britain's 'exit payments' and other issues. May had suggested that Britain would keep access to the single market in industries where it would be most beneficial - the EU says there will be no sector-by-sector agreements.

It is possible that some splits on these issues could emerge as the different capitalist classes of Europe promote their own national interests, but for now they are presenting a united face. A big factor in this initial stance is the precarious footing of the whole EU and the risk of the idea of leaving becoming even more popular among the working class of other member states. The Greek debt crisis is coming to a head again, [with payments of €7 billion due in July](#). Far-right (and anti-EU) French presidential candidate Marine Le Pen is neck-and-neck with millionaire 'independent' Emmanuel Macron going into the [first round elections in two weeks' time](#).

'Rise of the right'

Some on the left continue to lament a 'rise of the right' in Britain and elsewhere. This is wrong - and is becoming more and more clearly so. We must of course remain vigilant, and some racists have been given confidence by the reactionary rhetoric from both sides during and since the referendum. But as a whole, the right is in crisis.

Just look at the current state of Ukip. [Arron Banks, the party's main funder, resigned his membership and is setting out to build a new 'movement'](#) targeting unseating Remain MPs. Then just 12 days later the party's only MP, [Douglas Carswell, followed suit](#). This, just two years on from their hopes of [winning up to 30 seats in the general election](#).

Meanwhile, the Tories, although having presented a relatively united veneer in recent weeks, constantly teeter on the edge of civil war. Their sheen of stability cannot last, especially given the EU's guidelines undermining every promise May had made to unite them. A glimpse of this was seen when [six of the ten Tory MPs who sit on the Brexit committee walked out of a meeting and refused to back the committee's own report](#) on the impact of Brexit happening without a trade deal in place. As we have previously outlined, it was always

utopian to pretend, as May did, that both wings of the Tory party could be satisfied by the terms and outcome of Brexit negotiations.

The only reason that the right feels any confidence is because of a lack of organised opposition from the trade union and Labour leaders. Jeremy Corbyn has been almost silent in his response to the triggering of Article 50. With some similarities to May's predicament, Corbyn is under pressure from all sides within the Labour Party. But his response should be to come out with a [clear, fighting programme](#), not to go quiet.

Highlighting the vacuum left by Corbyn's evasion of the key issues, ex-Labour leader Ed Miliband [wrote an article in the Observer](#) jointly with Blairite-in-chief Hilary Benn. They set out their case: "The right approach is to accept the result, fight hard Brexit and, crucially, set out a progressive settlement for Brexit Britain... All of us who care about a progressive future for Britain must not let the future be decided between the right and extreme right."

They talk about investing in infrastructure, breaking with casualised exploitative labour practices, funding the NHS, making Britain an 'internationalist' country, helping refugees and tackling climate change. But these politicians fully accept the logic of austerity that means exploitation of workers and cuts to our NHS. They do not challenge, for example, the 'red line' in the EU negotiation guidelines to preserve the EU state aid and competition rules prohibiting nationalisation. The Labour right cannot be allowed to present themselves as the voice of 'progressive' Brexit.

Instead the workers' movement and socialists, with Corbyn in the lead if he shows himself willing, must be clear on a programme for the 99% throughout negotiations and after Brexit. Our movement stands against all austerity. It stands for the scrapping of all anti-union laws and for full rights for workers to organise. It stands in defence of migrants and refugees and against all racism. These things by their very nature mean standing against the neoliberal EU.

The discussions taking place about what kind of Brexit we need - not just in Westminster but around dinner tables and in workplaces in working class communities - can be an opportunity. The left needs to fight to put centre stage that hand-in-hand with 'what kind of Brexit' comes 'what kind of society'. We need to bring into the mainstream a conversation about an internationalist, socialist Brexit - as a step towards a voluntary, democratic, socialist federation of European states - and to convince the majority of working class people that fighting for that is the only way we can secure jobs, decent wages, homes and services for all.

- See ['Brexit and the left' in this month's Socialism Today magazine or online at socialismtoday.org](#) for more on the Socialist Party's approach to Brexit
- See ['What is behind new tensions over Gibraltar?' \(from 2013\) at socialistworld.net](#) for more on the CWI's approach to these issues

Fight Tories' callous cuts pushing 200,000 more kids into poverty

Sue Powell, Gloucestershire Socialist Party

Do you know what "I've had mine already" means?

Last year, up to half of mums under 25 skipped meals to feed their kids; two-thirds struggled financially; one in four resorted to food banks - [says a Young Women's Trust survey](#).

Now, a raft of callous Tory measures starting on 6 April will [push another 200,000 kids below the breadline](#), according to the Child Poverty Action Group.

20% of households are already deprived, with the Department for Work and Pensions counting [3.9 million children living in poverty in 2015](#). This was itself an increase of 200,000 on the previous year.

Even [bereaved families face a benefits cap](#), reducing payment to a maximum 18 months. Imagine you're terminally ill and discover that if you don't die this week, your loved ones will receive substantially less support.

New rules mean parents on the '[Universal Credit' benefit system](#) are expected to work when their youngest child turns three, and one million families will have their benefits limited to two children. A family with a child born on 5 April could be £50,000 better off than if their baby was delivered a day later.

New parents will be excluded from tax credit. New disabled claimants will receive only £73 a week 'employment supplement allowance' - down from £102.

These measures are supposed to 'encourage responsibility' and 'incentivise work' but won't deliver suitable jobs or childcare. In fact, families getting Universal Credit, tax credits or workplace childcare are excluded from a tax-free childcare scheme which could save them up to £2,000 a year per child.

Councils continue to axe vital services and [increase council taxes instead of mobilising coordinated opposition](#). So we face a double whammy of up to 5% more council tax - for fewer services. [And 18 to 21-year-olds are excluded from housing benefit](#).

These vicious attacks simply spell more personal debt, council tax arrears, sanctions, evictions and homelessness.

Working class lives could be transformed with a £10 hourly minimum wage without exemptions, more council housing, a rent cap, fully funded public services and decent jobs for all. Nationalise the banks and top corporations - let's plan that wealth to provide for all.

Labour group to discipline councillors for resisting Haringey gentrification scheme

For a council group which opposes cuts and privatisation

Nick Auvache, Haringey and Enfield Socialist Party

Ten Labour councillors in Haringey, north London, face disciplinary action after voting for further scrutiny of a gentrification scheme.

The '[Haringey development vehicle](#)' (HDV) is a proposed public-private partnership between the council and blacklisting property developer Lend Lease to "regenerate" the borough's housing stock. This means evicting thousands of council tenants and demolishing entire estates.

The HDV was opposed by Labour Party general committee meetings in Tottenham and Hornsey, and Wood Green - the two constituencies which make up Haringey.

Despite this, a majority of the Labour group which runs the council voted to press ahead.

Ten of the 18 councillors who voted to oppose have now been summoned to disciplinary meetings. These are likely to decide to withdraw the Labour whip from them, which will make them ineligible to stand for re-election with Labour in May 2018.

The ten councillors are being punished for the crime of standing up for council tenants, and for voting according to local Labour Party policy, as decided by votes at its two constituency parties.

Having lost the argument, the right-wing clique which controls the council is attempting to use administrative means to silence dissent, to bully and intimidate the local Labour Party into acquiescence. They must not be allowed to succeed.

If the ten are suspended, they should form an anti-cuts and anti-HDV group on Haringey council. With ten councillors, this would become the official opposition to the Labour group. It could spearhead local opposition to privatisation and cuts.

The Socialist Party is keen to discuss with the ten councillors, and with our fellow participants in the [Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition](#), about how we can build the best challenge to the HDV, privatisation and cuts in the run-up to the 2018 elections.

Gagged Jobstown defendants defiantly expose Irish state

Conor Payne, Socialist Party (CWI Ireland)

The 'Assembly for Justice' in Liberty Hall, Dublin on 1 April was an inspiring display of working class solidarity with those [facing trial for 'false imprisonment' of austerity politician Joan Burton while peacefully protesting in Jobstown](#).

In the days running up to the event, the Director of Public Prosecutions [tried to gag the seven defendants up on trial on 24 April](#) - in reality, to shut down the campaign. The assembly was a defiant response to this attack on free speech.

700 attended, filling the main hall and two overflow venues. The atmosphere was electric. The defendants themselves appeared on the stage wearing gags, representing the restrictions imposed on what they could say at the event.

Jobstown protester Kay Keane said: "On that day, I didn't go simply because of the water charges. I went because I had seen my community devastated by the cuts that [Joan Burton] imposed."

National Bus and Rail Union rep Stephen Nugent also spoke. His delegation of striking Bus Éireann workers received a standing ovation as they returned to their picket lines.

In 2005, Turkish workers in Ireland - super-exploited by Gama Construction for only €2.20 an hour - [struck with the support of the Socialist Party](#). They won up to €40 million of wages they were owed.

In a fantastic gesture of solidarity, Gama workers donated the €3,000 remaining from their strike fund to #JobstownNotGuilty. The rally raised over €10,000 for the campaign.

Vincent McGrath of the ['Rossport Five'](#) spoke of the state harassment their community in North Mayo had faced for standing up to Shell and its gas pipeline.

Another highlight was Paddy Hill of the ['Birmingham Six'](#) - who knows about real 'false imprisonment'. Paddy spent 16 years in jail for a crime he didn't commit. He pointed out he had spent longer waiting in line in prison canteens than Joan Burton spent 'kidnapped' in Jobstown!

Jobstown defendant Paul Murphy, a Solidarity TD (MP) and member of the Socialist Party, pointed out that the real nature of the state had been exposed.

The surveillance of anti-water charges protesters, the witch hunt against police whistleblowers, and now the mass fabrication of breathalyser tests show the police are far from a neutral force for good. The Socialist Party calls for democratic control of policing, accountable to working class communities.

The state functions as defender of the super-rich 1%. The increased repression of protest is linked to the political crisis facing the capitalist establishment.

The Socialist Party fights for a fundamentally different type of society, planned under democratic control of the working class, where wealth and power are in the hands of the majority, not a capitalist elite.

To send messages of support, and for details on affiliating to the solidarity campaign, email jobstownnotguiltygb@gmail.com

- Read more on the campaign at jobstownnotguilty.com
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Help fund your paper!

May Day greetings final push

North West Socialist Party members

We're really pleased we achieved our regional target this year for May Day greetings from trade union bodies, student groups and local campaigns. If you haven't yet, you still can!

We were struck by how seriously the Socialist is taking it, with an early start to the campaign, weekly updates, resources to help get greetings and a dedicated webpage. We felt we should respond in the same way, and demonstrate concretely what a wide influence our paper has.

It may sound obvious, but this requires attention to detail.

Has the relevant member got a collection sheet for getting pledges from colleagues? What's the date of the meeting where we propose a greeting? What message will members want to include about voting intentions or campaigning? And most important: who is going to pay the money in?

The role of the regional paper organiser is very important in working with branch organisers and the centre to assist, chase up, monitor and liaise with the other party structures.

We launched our campaign at the North West regional conference on 4 February and appealed for a member in each branch to take responsibility for a two-month campaign. By and large we achieved that, although not all branches, despite their efforts, were able to attract greetings.

But it's not too late to start getting those greetings in!

We have done well, but we can still do even better before the final deadline - and next year - with a 'hit list' based on successes and failures. We already know of some union branches where the Socialist's fighting ideas are gaining influence. We will invite them to send greetings.

We haven't stopped yet, even though the discount period is over. We would urge other Socialist Party members and supporters to keep trying right up to the wire.

- Deadline for May Day greetings: 5pm on Wednesday 12 April 2017
 - For sizes, prices and to pay: socialistparty.org.uk/mayday
 - Queries and resources: jamesivens@socialistparty.org.uk
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Them & Us

Bosses 'earn' 360x minimum wage

Top bosses get 360 times more than workers on the minimum wage.

Chief executives of elite 'FTSE 100' firms received an average of £5,271,803 a year, [according to the Equality Trust](#).

A full-time worker aged 25 or over on the 2017 national 'living' wage will earn £14,625.

Does one FTSE fat cat really do as much for society as 140 teachers, or 312 care workers?

What would we do without billionaire owners and their millionaire managers slashing all our jobs and pay and services?

Fly into the sun and explode, most likely.

Luxury market...

Global sales of super-swank are up.

Luxury group LVMH - including Dior, Louis Vuitton and Tag Heuer - [reported record revenues last year](#). Its £32.1 billion takings were up 5% on 2015.

In fact, total sales across deluxe brands have risen pretty consistently since the 2007-8 financial crisis. Thank goodness the super-rich were able to save themselves.

... licence fees

Meanwhile, [the poorest pay £16 million extra each year](#) for the 'luxury' of watching telly.

The BBC lets hard-up households pay licence fees in instalments. They get charged an extra fiver for the privilege.

Notorious outsourcing firm Capita is in charge of bullying vulnerable viewers into coughing up. It makes £58 million a year from that.

Horrific attack on Croydon asylum seeker

For workers' unity against racism and austerity

Paula Mitchell, London Socialist Party

Residents and workers in Croydon, south London, are horrified following the [vicious attack on a teenage asylum seeker on 31 March](#).

Local resident and Socialist Party member Helen Ridett said: "This is appalling. These criminals who brutally attacked this young lad do not represent the citizens of Croydon.

"There is more racial integration in this town than in many other places in the UK. Our town is held up upon the shoulders of migrant labour.

"Lunar House [headquarters of UK Visas and Immigration] is situated in Croydon and two years ago working class people, trade unionists and Socialist Party members organised to [drive the BNP off the streets of Croydon!](#)"

17-year-old Iranian Kurd Reker Ahmed was left with spinal injuries, a fractured skull and a brain haemorrhage after the terrible attack by a group of young men and women.

Politicians from all the main parties have condemned the attack, including Tory prime minister Theresa May who called it "abominable," and [local Tory MP Gavin Barwell who called the attackers "cowardly and despicable scum."](#)

But we won't take any lessons from the parties of the super-rich about attacks on asylum seekers. Masses of people have fled the horrors of the Middle East seeking asylum in Europe, while the EU's 'Fortress Europe' has left the majority in squalid camps or to drown in the Mediterranean.

During and since the EU referendum, the right-wing leaders of both Leave and Remain ramped up their customary anti-migrant rhetoric even further.

But for the majority, rather than being against migrants, Brexit was a vote of rage against a privileged elite, enriching themselves while the rest of us face austerity and worsening living standards.

- The Socialist Party fights to defend the NHS, and make it free for all. We fight for a £10 an hour minimum wage, and for mass council house building and rent controls. Take the wealth off the 1%!
- Fight for the right to asylum. Defend the rights of migrants and refugees. Oppose all racist immigration controls.
- Repeal all EU laws that attack workers' rights. Guarantee the rights of all migrants in the UK, including EU citizens, to remain. For workers' unity against racism and austerity.

"To defeat racism means building a mass movement"

The Socialist Party completely condemns the horrific hate attack on an asylum seeker in Croydon. Reported racist attacks increased by 41% after the Brexit vote last year.

Capitalist politicians condemn the attack, but they provoke anti-migrant feeling as a distraction from their everyday policies that destroy people's lives.

It is not the small number of asylum seekers - just 30,000 in 2016 - that is creating the strain on our public services. It is the austerity attacks of the Tory government, including those disgracefully passed on by Labour councils.

The richest 1,000 people in Britain have doubled their wealth since the 2007-8 economic crisis, while real wages for the working class have fallen 10%, and our public services have been savaged to the bone. These conditions can lead to a rise in racism.

The last thing the rich bosses and bankers want is for us to organise against them - instead they want us to fight each other. When their politicians and media harp on about immigration again and again and again, it can give confidence to a tiny number of people to carry out racist attacks.

It is vital to combat racism. That tiny number of people who carry out racist attacks must be the ones to feel isolated, not black or Asian people or migrants.

To defeat racism means building a mass movement around demands and slogans that unite working class people: against austerity, defend the NHS, defeat school cuts, fight for council housing and a £10 an hour minimum wage.

Labour councils, and London's Labour mayor Sadiq Khan, would go a long way to undermining the conditions in which racism can grow if they refused to carry out the Tories' diktats. Instead of passing on cuts, they could use their positions to help build a movement to defeat Tory austerity.

The Socialist Party fights for a socialist alternative to cuts, privatisation, racism, terror and war.

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 4 April 2017 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

Far right humiliated in London - but trade unions must organise against racism and austerity

London Socialist Party reporters

It was difficult to tell, peering through the massive police protection they require in order to show their faces in public. But it looked like a motley crew of not much more than 100 mustered for the [1 April Britain First/EDL march in central London](#).

Their humiliating tiny size - after boasting that thousands were coming - shows how little toehold these nasty racist thugs have in the population. The main threat of racism and division comes from the mainstream political parties and the right-wing press.

Socialist Party members participated in the much bigger counter-demonstration. But the policing was a disgrace. How much money was spent to herd and shove anti-fascists around central London streets, constantly threatening arrest, occasionally piling in to snatch a protester?

This outrageous policing is clearly designed to intimidate protesters - and sadly it did mean that some refugees who attended felt too unsafe to continue to participate. Counter-demonstrators were separated off from the public and made to look like we were the problem, when actually our anti-racism is shared by the majority in society.

How can this be overcome?

Far-right groups have been in disarray recently, and have been pushed back by community mobilisations against them. But deepening austerity and anti-immigrant rhetoric from the main political parties and press could allow groupings on the right to grow.

So it is important that the far right is countered whenever it raises its head, sometimes at short notice. The Socialist Party argues that the most important force to mobilise is the working class, and in particular the organised working class in the trade unions.

A massive, united campaign of working class people has the power not only to counter protests by groupings like Britain First and the EDL, but to hold out hope in a real future to those small layers of people who might be attracted to them.

This is why it is so important to build a mass fight to defend the NHS, defeat schools cuts, fight for homes for all and end cuts and privatisation - and to fight for a clear socialist alternative to austerity and racism.

The trade unions should be at the heart of any fight against the far right, making it clear that they stand firmly for defending all sections of our communities against austerity attacks and racism. Imagine the effect if transport workers shut down stations, and if bus drivers, bin workers and fire fighters blocked streets!

This is particularly the case when local communities need to defend themselves from invasion by unwelcome far-right rallies, but also applies in central London. Trade unions could also supply stewards.

Such mobilisations and organisation would give confidence to many more people, including school students and refugees, to participate, and would really put the far right in its place!

What would a socialist food industry look like?

Iain Dalton

How to feed the world? That is a question that capitalism has never been able to solve, with [one-third of the world's total population suffering malnutrition](#). Even in the economically advanced capitalist countries like Britain growing numbers are reliant on food banks.

Food is a basic necessity of our existence, and one index of the development of humans as a species has been the freeing of time from gathering and consuming food, for other activities.

The development of the ability to cook food was one such milestone. As food writer Michael Pollan comments in his [book Cooked](#): "Freed from the necessity of spending our days gathering large quantities of raw food and then chewing it, humans could now devote their time, and their metabolic resources, to other purposes..."

The industrial revolution also had its effect on food production, as vast sections of the rural population moved from direct involvement in the food production process to become urban workers buying food with their wages.

This process was deepened with the entry of larger sections of women into the workplace during the 20th century, where catering for families was no longer done by one person stuck in the home but after working hours.

While this hasn't removed the double burden on women, the advent of ready meals, takeaways, etc, meant less time spent preparing food. While less labour is performed in the kitchen today than in the past, working hours are longer.

However, these processes and the development of agribusiness multinationals have generally meant that the food we eat today is no longer as nutritious as what we had in the past. This has had major impacts on our health.

For example, the [Health Survey for England \(2015\)](#) found that 62.9% of all adults are overweight or obese. There have been increases in coronary heart disease and type-2 diabetes, among others.

'Bread and herrings'

Crises of food supplies have often been at the centre of social revolts. In the Russian Revolution, the [protests on International Women's Day 1917, which kicked off the revolution](#), were led with demands for 'bread and herrings'.

Access to decent nutritious meals for everyone was attempted by the Bolsheviks after the Russian Revolution with the establishment of a series of state-run canteens in the two major cities of Russia, Petrograd and Moscow.

Although ultimately undermined by the shortages caused by the war against the invading armies of imperialism, desperate to destroy the revolution, such cafés served around 900,000 people in each city in 1919.

In the modern era this should mean, firstly, making sure high quality, affordable canteens are available in all schools, colleges, universities and bigger workplaces. It would mean that, for at least one meal a day or possibly more, people had access to a good quality hot meal.

There have been big declines in workplace canteens in the last decades. [The Labour Research Department estimates](#) that in unionised workplaces in Britain, the percentage with canteens has declined from 88% in 1995 to 47% in 2015, and those with subsidies from 52% in 2010 to 41% in 2015.

This will have inevitable consequences for health, mostly as facilities made available will often be vending machines or microwave ovens.

The provision of high quality canteens should also be extended to 'public restaurants' catering for those in smaller workplaces, for people outside of work hours or for those not working.

But a key part of a socialist society would be a serious reduction in the working week. This would free up large quantities of time for participation in the running of society and for hobbies and pastimes.

Freedom from the necessity of cooking and preparing food does not mean people wouldn't choose to do this as a creative outlet. Decent quality kitchen facilities in housing would be necessary.

But what food we produce in our spare time would not be enough to feed the world. There would still need to be a portion of labour devoted to working to produce the bulk of food stuffs for humanity.

Under capitalism the drive in agriculture has been to 'get big or get out'. This has been hugely environmentally damaging from being a net producer of greenhouse gases, soil erosion, pollution from agrichemicals and damaging biodiversity.

Factory farms

Factory farms are a byword for animal cruelty, with animals living in cramped spaces, pumped full of antibiotics to try to keep them healthy, with lagoons of faecal waste. Farming subsidies are geared towards huge farms, with over 80% of [all EU Common Agricultural Policy money going to just 20% of farms](#).

Yet despite all of this, medium and small farms generally perform better when efficiency is measured in production per unit area. The largest farms now require bee hives to be brought in to pollinate crops due to the destruction of hedgerows.

Eco-friendly 'cover cropping' and 'no-till farming' techniques can often build soil quality while making farms a carbon sink rather than emitter.

But as long as short-term profit and the dictates of the main food processing industries and retailers reign supreme, the most eco-friendly methods will not be a priority.

Taking the big landed estates and tracts of land owned by agribusiness into public ownership, along with the big food production companies and retail firms, would allow the development of sustainable agriculture.

Agriculture, particularly the harvesting of fruit and vegetables, relies a lot on casual labour. In the UK [around 80,000 seasonal workers were employed in 2016, mostly EU migrants](#).

While extra labour is likely to be needed for harvesting, this should be trade union organised so that pay, terms and conditions are protected and standardised for all, with no 'race to the bottom,' and so that workers are not thrown on the unemployment scrapheap out of season.

There has never been more information about what people eat. The supermarket chains in particular gather huge amounts of data on consumption and stock levels.

In her book *Shopped*, Joanna Blythman points out: "The real value of loyalty cards to supermarket chains is that they are a means of gathering detailed information about buying habits, allowing customers to be targeted more effectively with tailor-made promotions."

Planning

This type of mechanism shows the possibilities for planning to meet the needs of all rather than just boost the profits of the super-rich 1%.

While the immediate companies to be brought into public ownership in a socialist plan would be the big food producers, distributors, wholesalers and supermarkets, this would bring with it a number of convenience stores. Tesco alone owns Tesco Express and One Stop, and its planned takeover of Booker would give it ownership of Londis, Premier and Budgens chains.

So it wouldn't be difficult to open up the supply chains of a combined, publicly owned supermarket distribution network to corner shops, etc. This, combined with a nationalised financial sector that could

supply cheap loans, would massively relieve some of the pressures on small business owners in the sector and would encourage fuller integration with the socialist plan.

Such a plan would attempt to source as much produce and goods in local areas in order to reduce 'food miles', meaning fresher produce and less environmental impact.

Decisions on what to stock would be made by local elected committees representing shop workers, consumers and representatives from the wider food supply network, with data on purchasing habits, etc, used to help guide discussions.

This would eradicate much of the wasteful duplication that currently exists in the food industry and give people real, informed choices about what we eat. Such moves would be a start. Undoubtedly, our relationship to food would continue to develop once free of the shackles that capitalism places upon our lives.

Our demands include:

- Open the books of the big companies that dominate the food industry and economy, to determine their real costs, profits, executive pay and bonuses, etc
- For a living minimum wage of £10 an hour now for all food industry workers from the farms to retail and fast food. Substantially increase pensions and other benefits to reflect the cost of living
- Invest in a massive programme of job creation; reduce the working week with no loss of pay
- Make cheap, nutritious food available in canteens in workplaces/schools/colleges/universities
- Nationalise the major agri-business, food processing and supermarket companies under democratic workers' control and management with compensation only on the basis of proven need
- Nationalise land owned by agri-business and large landed estates and lease to farmers at affordable rents
- Nationalise the banks and financial institutions and provide cheap credit to farmers to develop farms in a sustainable fashion
- For major investment into researching and developing safe, alternative sources of renewable energy. Develop techniques to phase out ecologically harmful farming techniques
- Plan agricultural production and distribution to provide nutritious food for all in a sustainable manner rather than for short-term profits for a few at the top

TUSC to challenge for the Merseyside 'metro-mayor'

The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) is on the ballot paper for the inaugural election of the Liverpool City Region directly-elected mayor (the 'metro-mayor').

Roger Bannister, a member of the Unison national executive council from the formation of the public services' union in 1993 until his retirement this February, [will represent TUSC's anti-austerity socialist message in the 4 May](#) contest.

Roger was a Labour Party member from 1970 until his expulsion in 1986 for his role in the struggle of the Liverpool Labour council against Margaret Thatcher's government. He stood as the TUSC candidate for the mayor of Liverpool council in May 2016, [polling 4,950 votes \(5.1%\), coming in ahead of the Tories](#).

The councils within the area the seat will cover are all solidly Labour-controlled authorities. The election will be conducted on a preference vote basis, with electors able to vote for a first and second choice candidate.

This system makes it easier for TUSC candidates to be supportive of Jeremy Corbyn's anti-austerity message while making sure that the Tories do not make electoral headway.

One of the most important election issues is the [dispute with Merseyrail over the plan to get rid of guards on trains](#) and introduce driver-only operation (DOO) on the new stock that will come into service during the

metro-mayor's first term of office.

The Merseyrail franchise is under the control of the Merseytravel committee of the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority which, as stated, is completely controlled by Labour councillors.

They could stop the introduction of DOO on Merseyrail now, striking a blow against the Tories' dangerous plans for safety on the railways, not just in Merseyside but across Britain. But, instead, the right-wing Labour councillors are pushing it through and local Labour MPs are making no protest.

Stand up

Unfortunately that includes the Labour metro-mayor candidate Steve Rotheram, MP for Liverpool Walton, despite repeated efforts by TUSC to get him to come out against DOO.

If he won't stand up to the Tories - and right-wing Labour - on such a clear question of putting public safety ahead of private profit, on what issue would he stand up to them?

Steve Rotheram voted for Andy Burnham in the 2015 leadership election although, like Burnham (but unlike others in the parliamentary Labour Party), he did not join the campaign to undermine Jeremy Corbyn, serving as his parliamentary private secretary.

That is why TUSC in Merseyside has consistently tried to open a dialogue with Steve since his selection as the metro-mayor candidate, but without success.

And then there is the issue of the cuts. The six Labour councils in the Liverpool City Region have this year agreed further budget cuts of over £90 million between them - without a word of opposition from the region's Labour MPs.

Fighting austerity and cuts - not just in words but in practice - will be central to the TUSC metro-mayor campaign.

- Come to the pre-election public meeting on 2 May, 7.30pm, at the Liverpool Pub, 14 James Street, Liverpool L2 7PQ
- For more information contact rogerformayor@gmail.com or check out the Facebook page at facebook.com/rogerbannisterformayor

The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) is an anti-austerity electoral alliance including the transport union RMT, the Socialist Party, leading members of other trade unions and non-affiliated socialists and community campaigners.

- See tusc.org.uk for more

NHS worker to stand for mayor of Doncaster

TUSC is pleased to announce that Steve Williams will be standing as the TUSC candidate for Doncaster mayor in the May elections.

Steve is the chair of the Doncaster District and Bassetlaw Unison health branch, with a decades-long record of fighting for the NHS.

Steve says: "I've worked in the NHS for 27 years as a mental health nurse. Thirty years ago I stood on miners' picket lines fighting Thatcher's attack on our communities. Now I am a Unison public services union shop steward and [marched last month with up to 250,000 others to save our NHS](#)."

"Social care in Doncaster has been devastated by the council closing homes and privatising services. I was proud to stand with the Doncaster Care UK workers who took 90 days of strike action in 2014 against the privatisation of their service.

Cuts

"Although I support Jeremy Corbyn's anti-austerity message, nothing has changed in Doncaster where the Labour mayor and council have carried out the Tory cuts of £109 million in the last three years, closing libraries, residential homes, children's centres and leisure facilities. They plan another £67 million cuts by 2021. There'll be nothing left!

"If elected as mayor, I would stand up for local people and propose a budget based on the needs of Doncaster, not the demands of the Conservative government. I would rally the townspeople against the Tories to fight for the funding we need to protect our jobs and services.

"There has been a huge increase in homelessness in Doncaster. As mayor, I would take emergency measures to open unused council buildings to offer temporary shelter for those living rough on the streets and I would use the council's borrowing powers to finance a massive council house-building programme.

"I supported the Women's Lives Matter campaign against the closure of the Women's Aid centre that provides support for sufferers of domestic violence. I would restore guaranteed council funding to sustain this vital service.

"I also support the Fire Brigade Union's campaign to keep the second night-time appliance at Doncaster central fire station, especially as the Fire Authority has millions of pounds held in reserves.

"I oppose fracking in the former coalfields as it is a proven danger to the environment and public health. I'm also opposed to HS2 which is an expensive waste of money that will not benefit ordinary people in Doncaster".

- Come to the pre-election public meeting on Tuesday 2 May, starting at 7pm, at the Danum Hotel, High Street, Doncaster DN1 1DN
- For more information contact Steve at sw014p1970@blueyonder.co.uk

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Walkout on three rail networks against driver-only operated trains

RMT union members

Further strike action across the country's rail network will take place on 8 April as the transport union RMT [continues to fight](#) the [further introduction of driver-only operation](#) (DOO) on Southern Rail, Northern Rail and Merseyrail. The strike will come days after [drivers on Southern Rail again rejected an offer](#) from the leadership of their union Aslef to settle the dispute.

Aslef should now approach the RMT to plan coordinated action. The disputes with all three train operating companies are centred on the RMT's campaign to keep guards on all trains. Contrary to much media reporting, the dispute cannot be reduced to who operates the automatic doors on trains.

Guards play a whole number of safety-critical roles on trains, especially in emergency situations. With rail companies receiving massive public subsidies, rail workers and passengers are entitled to two members of staff on trains.

The action on 8 April, which will hit Merseyrail on the [day of the Grand National horse race](#), will be the second such action since workers on Merseyrail and Northern Rail joined Southern guards in taking strike action against DOO.

Rejected

Many train drivers, who are overwhelmingly organised in Aslef, have refused to cross RMT picket lines, especially on Merseyrail. All credit is due to these drivers and to [Aslef members who rejected an earlier miserable sell-out deal](#) cooked up by the leaders of the Trade Union Congress (TUC) and Aslef to settle the drivers' dispute over DOO on Southern Rail, before rejecting another on 3 April.

RMT guards fight on. The dispute on Southern Rail is a year old and guards have not given in, in spite of the government backing Southern to the hilt with taxpayers' money to try and defeat RMT's resistance.

This fight deserves the full support of the TUC, yet the RMT was excluded from talks between the employer, Aslef and the TUC. This should offend every trade union member in the country.

The very idea that the TUC should intervene to undermine a strike in this way is outrageous. Trade union branches should be passing resolutions to their own national executives calling on the movement to speak out against this TUC intervention and to support RMT guards.

- As we go to press the night tube strike on 8 April has been called off. The [RMT announced a victory after London Underground](#) agreed to end the practice of preventing workers from moving into vacant full-time positions for a period of at least 18 months

Ferrybridge workers protest against 'race to bottom'

Alistair Tice

Today I was told that some companies have started employing engineering construction workers on zero-hour contracts! This is how far the 'race to the bottom' has gone. This in an industry that has - on the big sites - a national agreement, the NAECI. But the employers have been attacking, eroding, undermining and by-passing the NAECI for over a decade.

It's no wonder that 150-200 construction workers protested outside Ferrybridge power station in Yorkshire this morning. A second 'multi-fuels' project is starting at Ferrybridge, with fears that local labour will again be excluded as contracts are given to foreign companies who bring in their own core workforces.

On the first project a Croatian company paid its Croatian workers less than the NAECI rate. The unions then won the 'rate for the job' for the workers, but their bosses took the money off them when they got back home!

The protest was organised over social media by rank-and-file workers because of dissatisfaction with the inaction of the trade unions and the officials. Around 100 workers came from the Capenhurst site in Cheshire which is a well organised job.

The Socialist Party leaflet was well received by the protesters. One steward from Capenhurst took more copies to put up in the cabins and another said: "Thanks for coming, it's a good read that."

The Socialist Party called for:

- National action is needed again. We should demand that our trade unions campaign for and secure a Yes vote in a national ballot for strike action
- But more important is to build support on all sites so that if action is taken at one site, it can and will spread

What are we fighting for?

- The bosses will always go for the cheapest labour, unless we stop them
- We need to demonstrate and strike to win trade union control over job allocation, pay rates, and terms and conditions
- Trade unions should register all local unemployed construction worker union members and demand jobs on local sites
- Trade unions should have access to all foreign workers, with translators, to appeal for them to join a union and have oversight that NAECI pay rates and terms and conditions are being adhered to, and that there is no dilution of the workforce on the grounds of 'skills ratio' or 'health and safety'
- Trade unions should demand a ratio of apprenticeships to be taken on at every site in addition to the jobs advertised, to train a new generation of skilled workers and ensure a future in the industry for our kids

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 29 March 2017 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

Solid Picturehouse picket and protest

Claire Laker-Mansfield, Hackney Socialist Party

Around 30 striking workers and their supporters gathered outside Hackney Picturehouse on 31 March for a three-hour protest and picket. This marked the [sixteenth strike organised by these workers since October 2016](#).

Morale was high and the strike was solid. An excellent turnout from the community offered everyone a boost.

The Socialist Party took part in the action, with members of the local branch handing out leaflets and helping to discuss the issues with passers-by, as well as with the cinema workers.

This was the latest action in an ongoing campaign demanding the London Living Wage and sick pay for cinema workers at this and other members of the Picturehouse chain.

Workers at two other Picturehouses - Ritzy and Central - were also taking strike action. This coordination is helping to escalate the pressure on management to meet the workers' demands.

Outrageously, Picturehouse management had drafted in a strikebreaking workforce from elsewhere, which was used to keep the cinema open in spite of the strike's solidity.

But the lively picket, combined with the protest and support organised from the community, meant that the cinema was almost empty for much of what would normally be a very busy Friday night. When confronted with the picket and protest, many members of the public chose to show solidarity with the strike and take their custom elsewhere.

The workers are clearly preparing for a fight to the finish. A further strike is being prepared for 15 April with action at all six sites and a gathering of strikers at the east Dulwich site which has voted to join the dispute.

Bromley library workers strike against privatisation

A Unite member

Unite union members working in Bromley libraries began the first of eight days of strike action on 1 April. The [long-running dispute](#) is in defence of the library service from privatisation.

The campaign has already seen off the privateers from Carillion and a proposal to replace permanent staff with volunteers. Now Greenwich Leisure Limited (GLL) is thought to be the last realistic bidder for the contract - although the council ludicrously claims that commercial confidentiality means that they cannot disclose the remaining bidders!

GLL claims to be a 'social enterprise' yet acts like the worst of private companies, employing three-quarters of staff on zero-hour contracts and refusing to pay the London Living Wage to many of its own leisure-based staff.

Yet Lord John Bird - founder of the Big Issue - claims that GLL is the saviour of libraries! Lord Bird attended the libraries and culture march in London last November, demanding to speak at the event as a very important campaigner!

There is a lesson here - support is always welcome from whatever quarter - however, it is the trade unions that will lead the fight to save public service, not Lords!

- Send messages of support to Unite officer Onay Kasab at onay.kasab@unitetheunion.org and post donations to Unite the Union, 33-37 Moreland Street, Clerkenwell, London EC1V 8BB

Hackney children's inclusion unit forced to strike

Labour authorities often claim that their cuts are kinder than the Tories'. But what could be worse than Hackney Labour council trying to slash in half the small but vital Early Years part of the Inclusion and Specialist Support Team?

The present team of just three specialist teachers and six nursery officers is already struggling to cope with nearly 700 children and their families in 118 nurseries and Early Years settings across the borough. And this is a borough where other cuts and social deprivation already mean a growing number of children who need extra support.

This angry team of workers in the NUT and in Unison, has taken strike action to say no to the cuts. The Higher Needs Budget, which pays for this service, is not even being cut. Other departments that are due for cuts, such as the 12 advisory teachers who work inside the Learning Trust office, are actually taking on staff!

Their action on 30th March, which included visiting every one of the pre-school establishments across the borough, is the beginning of a fight to the end.

At the lunchtime rally outside the Town Hall one of the strikers spoke to Brian Debus, chair of Hackney Unison:

"We visited 30 settings this morning and got a very positive response from parents who said they had not been told about our strike. Some teachers on strike at Parkwood School today over cuts are here with us and parents have come along to support us. They know these cuts would have a big impact on the children's future and they support us fighting against them all the way!"

Clare Doyle Hackney Socialist Party

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Support Len McCluskey and United Left candidates before ballot closes

The ballot in the Unite union general secretary and executive elections closes on 19 April with the Blairite challenger to Len McCluskey, Gerard Coyne, [continuing to use the hated Sun newspaper](#) to attack McCluskey and Jeremy Corbyn.

As the Socialist Party has consistently argued, there needs to be a united front behind Len McCluskey against Coyne because his challenge represents another attempt of the Labour right to remove Jeremy Corbyn as Labour leader and any prospect of an anti-austerity Labour Party.

A Coyne leadership would also represent a retreat from the more fighting stance of the union under Len McCluskey's leadership.

Unite has become more militant and more responsive to rank-and-file pressure. Len has ended the practice of repudiating unofficial action, which has given confidence for unofficial walkouts, for example on Crossrail. He has consistently supported and resourced workplace battles against exploitative employers.

There are also four Socialist Party members on the [United Left slate](#) in the executive elections - Suzanne Muna (London and Eastern), Jamie Coccozza (Scotland), Jimmy Tyson (Construction) and Kevin Bennett (GEMS).

PCS payday protests

PCS [payday protests on 31 March](#) were strongly supported across the country with thousands of members sending a clear message to the government. Members held photoshoots with PCS "break the 1% pay cap" placards at their workplaces and at protests to support the PCS demand for a rise of 5% or £1,200. The Socialist Party joined the protests including in London (above).

Homeless due to the housing crisis

A recent meeting of [Waltham Forest Housing Action](#), set up by the local trades council, heard from several housing campaigns and people affected by the housing crisis. One was Claire Murphy, who told her story:

I've lived in Waltham Forest all my life. I've got two kids - my daughter is 12 and my son is ten. I was living in rented accommodation in Waltham Forest. The owner wanted to increase the rent by £600 a month because it was cheap compared to others in the area. For me that was impossible, as a working single parent.

So I was evicted on 9 March. I told the council I was homeless and I've been placed in 'emergency accommodation' outside of the borough, in Dagenham. Me and my kids are in one room in a shared house. We've got a double bed and a single bed for the three of us. For my daughter, who's just hitting puberty, it's a really big issue having no privacy, having to share with me and her brother.

Every day we have to get three buses to school and work. The room costs £176 a week. I work part time, four days a week. A three-bedroom private rental in Waltham Forest is at least £1,500 a month - that's more than my wages, without thinking about bills or food. A mortgage would be cheaper but I don't earn enough to get one.

The letter I got from the council when they placed us clearly said "this property is not suitable for you" but they're not doing anything about it. Someone else in the shared house we're in has been there for eight months.

It's all because the area is changing. If I went elsewhere maybe I could afford a nice three-bedroom but it would mean leaving behind where I was born and all my friends and family.

- Housing Action, including Socialist Party members, will be organising action to raise awareness of Claire's case and the housing situation in general.
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