

This bosses' government must go

- Organise and strike for Corbyn's anti-austerity policies

No compromise with Tories or Blairites

- Fight for mandatory reselection now

The 'gig economy' is bad for workers - but good for fat-cat bosses. Like austerity, the gig economy is akin to a blood transfusion system for money.

Cash travels out of wage packets and public services, via privatisation, zero-hour contracts and cuts, only coming to rest on the bosses' bank balances.

Since the 1970s, the slice of the national income 'pie' paid in wages in Britain has shrunk to [about 53% from 65%](#). Wages have been slashed by around 10% since 2007.

First New Labour and then the Tories oversaw this. Hence the popularity of [Corbyn's manifesto pledge to ban zero-hour contracts](#).

The 'Taylor Review', named after the Blairite (as in an actual former Blair advisor) who oversaw it, has not been published at the time of writing, but here's a spoiler: lots of flannel, no banning of zero-hour contracts and no regulation of business to defend workers' rights.

One of the four-member panel who conducted the research is a former boss at [Deliveroo, the infamous gig economy exploiter](#).

This says everything about the Tories' [claims to be on the side of the workers](#). They aren't.

Workers know there is only one language that money-grabbing, condition-cutting bosses understand.

When contractor Serco attempted to withdraw the tea breaks from low-paid cleaning staff at the Royal London Hospital, the union there, Unite, did not merely appeal to the contractor's better nature.

The [super-exploited NHS workers walked out](#) and [won back their breaks](#).

In doing so they provided a vital lesson that we must spread far and wide. In austerity Britain there are two sides.

You are either on the side of the working class, the youth and the middle class and against privatisation and austerity, or you are on the side of austerity and the profiteers.

Our side has got to be ready to organise and to strike to use our collective strength to fight for Corbyn's policies which would make a good start to delivering the decent living standards we need.

Debate

Corbyn's manifesto shifted the political debate to the left and almost every day since the election there have been dazed Tory MPs, who expected a huge win, now proposing that the Tories adopt elements of the Corbyn manifesto - from [abolishing uni fees](#), to [raising public sector pay](#). But the Tory report into the gig economy reveals why they cannot be trusted to deliver.

Events in the last week have also revealed how the two sides of the austerity line are both still represented in the Labour Party.

On the one hand there are calls for MPs to be made more accountable to the members. [Pro-austerity, pro-war](#) MP Luciana Berger [has been told](#) by a newly elected left-wing officer in her Liverpool Wavertree constituency that "she will now have to sit round the table with us the next time she wants to vote for bombing in Syria or to pass a no-confidence motion in the leader of the party - she will have to be answerable to us".

On the other hand there is a stark warning. While there has been a chorus of [damascene conversions](#) into support for Jeremy Corbyn among the pro-capitalist right wing of the party following the election result, they are organising to maintain their position in controlling much of the party machine and to thwart attempts to move the party left.

The right has won election to the Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP) committee and will play the role of "shop stewards for the party's backbenchers" [as the Guardian put it](#). They are also seeking an expansion of the National Executive Committee to include more representatives from among right-wing councillors.

Neither unity nor conciliation is possible with right-wing Labour. Their role, on behalf of the big business interests served by the privatising, fee-introducing Blair governments and his cothinkers since, is to act on behalf of the bosses. That starts with undermining Jeremy Corbyn insofar as they can get away with it at this stage.

Unfortunately the mood and readiness of some of the membership to take on the right is not reflected in their leaders. It was regrettable and profoundly mistaken for shadow education secretary Angela Rayner on the Marr show to dismiss calls for reselection of MPs as "[fighting each other](#)."

Angela spoke about the traditions of the labour movement. But the best traditions are of mass struggle and of democratic organising. That is what reselection represents. In fact, it is an accepted and defended norm in the trade union movement that all representatives should face regular democratic and mandatory reselection contests.

The [exclusion of socialists](#) who did more to campaign for Corbyn's manifesto than most of the PLP must also be abandoned. Again the real traditions of the labour movement, and in fact of the early Labour Party, are for [democratic federal structures of socialist and workers' organisations](#).

Every part of the current structure is organised to defend the Blairite status quo. Referring to establishment circles, Corbyn has said he does not accept "[their rules](#)". This should include within Labour. The [changes that have taken place over the last decades](#) are designed to have removed all the traditions of the labour movement and its voice.

It is not enough to work through these structures alone. Jeremy should present, like the manifesto, a new democratic constitution to a referendum of all Labour Party members to transform Labour and build a new mass party under the democratic control, in programme and organisation, of its members.

Grenfell stitch-up: unions should call independent inquiry

Councils must act - cladding off now!

Bob Sulatycki, West London Socialist Party

The weeks go by, and still survivors of the Grenfell Tower fire are homeless, and still cladding testing is finding blocks around the country unsafe without action. Meanwhile, the official inquiry's descent into a cover-up makes the call for an independent workers' movement inquiry doubly urgent.

For an independent inquiry led by workers' and residents' organisations

When the government announced that judge Sir Martin Moore-Bick was to take charge, it was immediately apparent that the ruling class was choosing a safe pair of hands for itself. Although an expert in commercial law, Moore-Bick's foray into housing involved allowing Tory Westminster council [to rehouse a tenant 50 miles away in Milton Keynes](#).

Rightly the community has no confidence in him. It's increasingly clear that the class responsible for this crime cannot be trusted to investigate it.

[The Hillsborough stadium disaster campaigners' 28-year struggle for justice](#) has led to widespread understanding that the establishment's overriding concern in such situations is to cover its own back. This means, among other things, [blaming the victims](#) rather than the real perpetrators.

In a guarded form, this [started immediately in some quarters of the capitalist press](#) and political establishment. But it is clearly apparent to most observers who is to blame:

The authors of the austerity programmes that have savaged fire services and architects and building inspectors in councils. Profit-hungry private contractors. National and local governments' privatisation and deregulation drives.

In this situation, only the trade unions, working in liaison with local tenants' and residents' groups, have the authority to establish a meaningful investigation. For example, general union Unite which organises housing and construction workers, and the Fire Brigades Union.

The unions should use their resources to initiate a genuinely independent workers' inquiry, with far-reaching terms of reference set by survivors and those immediately affected. Jeremy Corbyn could also step in and use his huge authority to start this process.

Take the cladding off now

Nearly 200 towers around the country clad in 'aluminium composite material' like Grenfell [have now failed combustibility tests](#).

More are still waiting for results before any decision on removing cladding. Why? At this stage the material has been decisively proven unsafe.

In Greater Manchester, a housing association and an ex-council 'arm's-length management organisation' (Almo) have actually [suspended removal on 20 blocks](#) where cladding failed tests. An executive for one said: "Advice regarding the removal of cladding is now unclear and there is conflicting information about the need to remove the panels"!

Councils must act now to make working class homes safe. They should spend reserves to fund emergency maintenance work and 24-hour fire watches for all tower blocks, and send the bill to central government.

The Socialist Party encourages residents to organise to fight for safety. Our members have been [campaigning on this issue](#), and working with tower block residents to establish safety campaigns. We have raised the idea of withholding rent if necessary.

Requisition the empty properties

The issue of rehousing in Kensington and Chelsea is still live. There are [1,399 properties standing empty](#) there - more than any other London borough.

When [Jeremy Corbyn raised the idea of requisitioning](#) these empty properties, there was a horrified reaction in parts of the capitalist media. Unfortunately, the Labour Party locally and nationally does not seem to be echoing his call.

However, it remains a realistic and very popular demand.

After all, this is not about granny's flat that hasn't been sold yet, as the capitalist press would have us believe. Rather it's about land 'assets' mainly belonging to investment companies, hedge funds and oligarchs, traded on international markets to make millions for their owners.

The value of such assets drops if they acquire tenants, and so [some have remained empty for up to 15 years](#). In fact, the number of empty homes has swollen as the rate of return on property outperforms productive forms of investment in crisis-ridden capitalism.

The real scandal is that families with nothing left after the fire are pressured into taking inappropriate accommodation far from their home community, while these potentially suitable properties continue to stand empty.

And there is the continuing scandal of the [£300 million languishing in the council's reserves](#) while homeless survivors are stranded. The main purpose of Kensington and Chelsea's housing income surplus was not ensuring safe, well-maintained council homes, but providing the richest private residents with huge council tax rebates.

North Kensington: a history of struggle for housing

The local fear over dispersal is based on the real experiences of working class communities in North Kensington and neighbouring west London areas. The Tories - and Blairites - are the friends and representatives of big landlords and property developers.

This isn't a recent development. In the 1960s, tenants and labour organisations fought against local slum landlord Peter Rachman, a campaign involving many socialists.

Even before that, in the 1940s Communists in North Kensington lead a campaign of occupation of luxury houses. In a parallel with today, many grand homes were unoccupied while working class families who had been bombed out in the war remained homeless. These early examples of squatting attracted huge support and interest from working people across London.

Such traditions have left their mark on consciousness locally. It is to those traditions local people will need to return to build an effective fight against the super-wealthy elite which caused this disaster, and which will cause others if its rule is left unchallenged.

Read more

- [Working class residents can organise to fight for safe homes](#)

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G20 betrays refugees created by its own policies

Isai Priya, Tamil Solidarity

This year is on course to become the deadliest on record for refugees crossing the Mediterranean. Tragically, [2,000 people](#) have drowned so far.

These deaths could have been avoided with an increase in funding for rescue boats. However, instead of committing to search and rescue operations, the EU has helped [fund and train the Libyan coastguard](#) to force refugees and migrants away from Europe.

Meanwhile the G20 summit met in Hamburg on 7 and 8 July to discuss "issues of global significance." The refugee crisis was a tiny part of it.

[G20 countries](#) account for more than four-fifths of gross world product, and three-quarters of global trade. They are home to almost two-thirds of the world's population.

At the end of 2016 there were 65.6 million people in the world displaced because of war, poverty and repressive regimes, [according to the UN Refugee Agency](#). That's equivalent to the whole UK population.

Capitalist leaders are fast running out of excuses to tackle the crisis they created.

Across the globe the refugees are treated as criminals by capitalist governments, put in detention centres and falsely blamed for the lack of services those governments provide.

Trauma

Life as a refugee makes people question their own existence and feel like they have lost their identity. Many also suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder and other problems requiring medical assistance.

The Hamburg summit [made no decisions](#) about concrete support for refugees, showing yet again that capitalist leaders are not serious about helping them.

Neither the G20 leaders nor any representatives of the capitalist system can solve the refugee crisis. Capitalism is driven by exploitation and inequality.

The only way forward is for refugees to get organised, alongside workers, building solidarity and fighting for their rights.

In Britain, the [Refugee Rights campaign](#) is one such group organising to do this. It's run by refugees building support from workers' and students' organisations to demand fundamental rights. It is supported by Tamil Solidarity and the Socialist Party.

The campaign's main demands are: allow refugees the right to work, close down the detention centres, and implement a £10 an hour minimum wage with no exemptions. Refugee Rights also supports Jeremy Corbyn's anti-austerity policies, and his opposition to imperialist war.

The fight for the rights of refugees must be linked to the workers' movement across the globe - and with the struggle for a socialist society that puts lives of the majority above profit for the bosses.

- [Report of the G20 summit and protests at socialistworld.net](#)
- More about Refugee Rights at [refugeerightscampaign.org](#)

Striking Barts health workers an example of 'fighting trade unionism'

Paula Mitchell, London Socialist Party

"We want a famous victory for the east London working class!" So declared Unite union branch secretary and Socialist Party member Len Hockey to the magnificent rally of striking cleaners, porters and other ancillary staff in Barts Health NHS Trust on [the first day of their strike against vicious private employer Serco on 4 July](#).

Another seven days of strike started on 11 July, and if there is no resolution, a 14-day strike will begin on 25 July. Workers will lead a demonstration through the East End on 15 July.

Royal London Hospital rep Melissa said: "Together we fight. For a pay rise. Against stressful workloads. Fighting together we will win."

The big, bright picket lines have been an inspiration to all who have seen them. Workers proudly waving their union flags have marched, danced and sung.

These are mainly black, Asian and migrant workers, many of them women, all of them struggling on poverty pay and under increased workloads, and now determinedly fighting to break their exploitative conditions.

Support from the trade union movement will be very important if Serco digs in. It is important that Unite general secretary Len McCluskey sent a message to the strike, and that assistant general secretary Gail Cartmail addressed the strikers on the first day.

The Unite branch and organisers, the Socialist Party, Waltham Forest Trade Union Council and the National Shop Stewards Network are working hard to spread support for the strike.

Barts Health NHS Trust, which gave Serco the contract, must feel the pressure. If Serco doesn't pay up, remove the contract! In fact, as many strikers say themselves, these essential services should be brought back in-house.

Privatisation

Barts Health is the biggest acute health trust in the country, comprising five hospitals, and it is saddled by a massive private finance initiative (PFI) contract at the Royal London. In 2016 the trust was set to run a [£134.9 million deficit](#). We demand the PFI contract is cancelled. Stop private profiteers leeching off our health service!

The strike has exposed the gross reality of working life for those who provide a crucial service without which there would be no NHS. The crushing conditions, the pressure of carrying the workload that used to be done by double, triple or quadruple the number of workers, the poverty pay so that many have to work two or three jobs just to eat.

This is the brutal result of outsourcing - the privatisation of our public services. Twenty years ago these were NHS staff, on NHS pay and conditions.

Since then, one company after another has ground more and more profit out of a group of workers who they mistakenly believed would not fight back.

Their demand for an extra 30p an hour, in reality a modest demand, would smash through the public sector pay cap and could inspire thousands more in the NHS to fight for decent pay.

The anger, the bold rebellion against their bosses, once given a lead, is a glimpse of the kind of battles that could come over the next period as working class people, weighed down by years of austerity, grinding poverty and intensification of work, start to break out and fight.

One of the reasons why the bosses have felt so confident to intensify exploitation is that [there has been so little fight from the tops of the main health union, Unison](#).

As Frances Ryan [commented in the Guardian](#), the workers "started organising, and what began in a fifth-floor canteen has turned into a summer of activism". The canteen is a reference to [the fantastic walkout in April when Serco tried to take away morning tea breaks](#).

But these workers didn't just randomly "start organising". This strike is a brilliant example of how fighting trade unions can be built.

These workers have been inspired by Jeremy Corbyn's campaign and the offer of an anti-austerity alternative. After decades of New Labour offering little different from the Tories, big numbers of people have had their eyes opened and their confidence lifted by the possibility of an alternative.

Lead given

They have seen thousands march to defend the NHS on [the massive 4 March national demo](#).

And crucially, these factors came together with a fighting lead offered by the union.

Until very recently, many of these workers were not members of a union. The difference came with the transfer of porters and domestics at Whipps Cross hospital over into Unite from Unison, bringing with them their branch secretary, Socialist Party member Len Hockey. As the Unite organiser said when introducing the strike rally last week: "In Barts Trust, as far as Unite is concerned, there is BL and AL - Before Len and After Len".

The Unison branch in Whipps Cross had a long history of action and victories. [Twenty years ago porters struck and demonstrated against privatisation](#). In 2002 they set out to win harmonisation of pay, terms and conditions for new starters in line with workers employed prior to outsourcing.

This was a pioneering step. The much-celebrated campaign for a real living wage in London started from this struggle.

In a foretaste of the campaign across Barts Trust this year, mass recruitment to the union was key. In the words of Len Hockey: "Having a million conversations" with the mostly female domestic workers, from countries including Ghana and Nigeria.

The industrial action experience of the longer-organised porters helped show domestic workers the way. In the summer of 2003, [porters and domestics participated in an inspirational movement for equality and the end of poverty pay](#).

The unity of black and white workers in action was a living example of how to defeat racism and the bosses' divide-and-rule tactics.

However, as with Serco now, when the contracted company changed, it dragged its feet over implementation of the agreement, leading to [further, victorious strike action in 2006](#).

The workers' confidence and determination stemmed from the resolute local strike leadership. Len, as a Socialist Party member, had the support of many other workers and trade unionists and was able to draw upon that collective strength and experience to help to guide the dispute.

In July 2013 [Barts Health Trust threatened £77.5 million of cuts](#) and the Unison branch at Whipps Cross again [launched a campaign](#). They mobilised the workforce and drew other unions and community campaigners behind them.

Mass meetings took place around the hospital. More workers joined the union and became stewards.

[Packed public meetings](#), a weekday evening protest at the hospital gate and [a local demonstration](#) were brilliant preemptive displays of unity and opposition to cuts and closures.

The trust had constantly denied there was a threat but the voice of the workers on those demos told a different story. It was later announced that 161 nursing and 60 managerial and clerical posts were to be axed, and 463 nursing posts would be downgraded.

Bullying

[Branch chair Charlotte Monro was suspended](#) and then [sacked on trumped up charges](#) in an attempt to intimidate workers. She was [reinstated following a campaign, and following a damning report by the Care](#)

[Quality Commission](#) (CQC) into the hospital including the culture of bullying towards staff. Four senior trust managers resigned.

At meeting after meeting workers said they wanted to fight the cuts, and raised their hands for strike action. The branch ran [an indicative ballot for strike action with a 98% yes vote](#).

As three Unison branches organised in Barts Health Trust at the different hospitals, they all needed to be part of the campaign, so the Whipps Cross branch attempted discussion with the other branches.

Members rightly expected that the branch in Whipps Cross would get full backing from Unison's regional officials. But workers were systematically blocked by the regional bureaucracy including denying members a strike ballot. This followed a history of undermining the branch and its leadership.

In 2014 Len and the porters' and domestics' stewards concluded [they had no choice but to transfer membership from Unison to Unite](#) if they were to give workers at Whipps and across the rest of Barts Trust the best chance of building a united struggle.

They explained: "To fight, we need to be able to organise action as a union, including strike action. Community campaigns are important, but it is the workforce that has the power to act decisively, if it is organised in an effective and combative union branch."

The Socialist Party has always opposed premature breaks away from traditional unions. There are [1.3 million workers](#) in Unison and the stewards explained that their resignation "does not for one minute mean we turn our backs on those workers, who are 'lions led by donkeys'".

"We support a strategy to fight for a democratic and combative Unison, putting forward a fighting programme and candidates at all levels. We support the aim of building a left in the union based on those members and branches that want a fight."

But this move to Unite was in order to preserve fighting trade unionism, so that the workforce would be able to organise and defend itself.

This move to Unite was opposed by the Socialist Workers Party (SWP). Their member in the trust, Sam Strudwick, wrote to all Unison members at Whipps Cross calling it a "damaging step" that "can only lead to cynicism and demoralisation". [She wrote in Socialist Worker](#): "This can only demoralise workers and boost the bosses."

In fact the opposite has proved to be the case. Without the block from the top, workers across the different hospitals in the trust have been able to come together in one Unite branch.

Using the example of the struggle and victories at Whipps Cross, [workers at the Royal London, Barts and Mile End hospitals have been convinced that fighting trade unionism is possible](#). Len has been backed up by Unite's organising team.

In December 2016 [workers including cleaners and porters at Whipps Cross and Mile End won a significant pay increase](#). The rise, over 20%, followed a sustained campaign by Unite.

The union's success meant a pay rise from £7.20 to the current London Living Wage of £9.75 an hour. Casual 'bank' jobs would convert into permanent contracts.

This pay increase was won for all bank workers. But also and significantly, for all agency workers with 12 weeks' minimum service indirectly employed by Serco in Whipps Cross, Barts, Mile End and Royal London, who had in some cases been on minimum rates for six years.

This huge victory then gave the confidence to fight for the current 3% pay claim. Through a meticulous and vigorous recruitment campaign, 1,100 have joined the union and the result is the magnificent action we see today.

It is fighting trade unionism that builds trade unions. The Unite branch offers a united front to all workers in the hospitals to build a massive fight to defend the NHS.

- To support the strike, send a message to len.hockey@unitetheunion.org
- Bring a delegation from your workplace and union to the demonstration on Saturday 15 July, 12 noon starting at the Royal London (Whitechapel) to Mile End hospital
- Donations to branch LE/7384L sort code 60-83-01 account number 20344885

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- See also: ['Jubilant' hospital workers strike against poverty pay in east London](#)
 - For a reply to Sam Strudwick written in 2014, see: [Defending jobs, pay and services at Whipps Cross hospital](#)
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Vote for action to save Bridgend Ford plant

Rob Williams, Socialist Party national industrial organiser and former Visteon (ex-Ford) Unite convenor

Bridgend Ford workers will be voting on industrial action when ballot papers go out at the end of this week. They want answers.

They know that the clock is ticking and the future of the plant is on the line. The time to act is now before it is too late.

This struggle is one of the most important in south Wales for years and is as crucial to retaining Welsh manufacturing as [the fight to save Port Talbot steelworks](#) last year. It is absolutely vital that the whole Welsh trade union movement gives full support and solidarity to the Ford unions and their members, who could be on strike as early as August.

[Back in February](#), general union Unite alerted its members in the factory that [Ford's sourcing plans](#) going forward would mean that 1,160 out of 1,800 jobs would be lost - putting the viability of the engine plant in doubt.

Correctly, Unite told Ford that if it didn't change its plans, or at least enter serious talks, the union would consult members on balloting for industrial action.

However, in the meantime - after being provoked by management, who stopped union notices going onto the shop floor - [members stopped working overtime](#).

This was always meant to send a signal to the company that members are serious and it can't be 'business as usual' while the shadow of doubt hangs over the plant. This has been reinforced by the indicative ballot result.

Just as happened with the coal and steel industries when they contracted, Bridgend has become the Ford plant of last resort. So there will be workers from the plant who transferred from the closed factories in Treforest, [Swansea](#) and [Southampton](#), who know very well about Ford's ruthlessness.

The main lesson of these closures is that the time to take action to put pressure on Ford to change its plans is when you are making products that Ford needs. We therefore welcome the recent letter from Unite general secretary Len McCluskey, updating members on developments and committing the union to an official industrial action ballot.

But support has to be built for it to ensure that the higher voting thresholds set by [the Tories' latest Trade Union Act](#) are overcome. It is a scandal that a Conservative government that couldn't win a majority in the

election is able to impose undemocratic restrictions on workers, especially those who are fighting for their livelihoods.

This week, in the run-up to ballot papers going out, there need to be plant meetings addressed by the union both from inside and outside the plant to give members confidence to vote for action.

The biggest possible 'yes' vote and the preparedness to take the necessary action will put the maximum pressure on Ford to talk properly to the union - about committing to sourcing that will maintain the plant at its current size.

At the same time, the workforce has to send a clear message to Ford: any attempt to take out machinery will be met with an immediate stoppage. If the company tries to stop the union organising plant meetings with its own representatives and officers, the union should call them outside if necessary.

It is Ford - not the union - that has created this crisis, which has caused stress for workers and their families through its sourcing announcement.

There also has to be a national meeting of Ford convenors and shop stewards to discuss solidarity to ensure that Bridgend isn't isolated. If this plant closes, it will only make it easier to close the rest.

And pressure must be put on the Labour-led Welsh assembly government to intervene.

If necessary, it should take the plant into public ownership to keep Bridgend open and save jobs and the community. The general election showed that [Jeremy Corbyn's policies for public ownership in railways, utilities and Royal Mail](#) are popular with workers.

It's time to step up the fight to save Bridgend plant.

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Low-paid cabin crew protest in middle of 16-day stoppage

The National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) and the Socialist Party joined the protest by striking mixed fleet cabin crew workers in Unite the Union outside Qatari Airways on 5 July, in the middle of [their 16-day stoppage that kicked off a new wave of action](#).

Their employer, British Airways (BA), has been allowed by the Tory government to 'wet-lease' nine aircraft from the Qataris. This in effect legalises a scabbing operation by BA, which can use the aircraft and crew to get round what is becoming an increasingly solid strike by low-paid cabin crew.

It's ironic that the government's ally [Saudi Arabia sees Qatar as a pariah](#) but the Tories are more than happy to move heaven and earth to enable the company to strike-break. Unite has now launched legal action against the government for this decision.

The loud protest took place outside the foreboding high gates and fences of the airline offices in Earls Court and then moved onto the side of the busy road round the corner, where the strikers were met with huge cheers and beeps from the oncoming traffic.

The workers, who only earn a basic £12,000 a year, had negotiated an offer after taking 26 days of strike action this year.

However, in a vengeful act on top of the lost pay for strike action days, BA imposed sanctions on strikers of removing the bonus payments and staff travel concessions for a year.

These payments are worth hundreds of pounds and are a big part of how these workers bump up their low salaries. Scandalously, at the same time BA is paying this money as an extra bonus of at least £250 to those staff who are working normally. On top of this they are also paying those working up to £100 in travel money a day if they don't want to use their cars and £40 if they don't want to check in luggage for toiletries.

This is happening while the striking workers are forced to use a foodbank at their strike HQ near Heathrow. That is why the whole of the trade union movement must continue to support the workers, particularly as they will follow up this action with a 14-day strike.

- Please attend the picket line next to Hatton Cross tube and bus station
 - Email messages of support to Matt.Smith@unitetheunion.org
 - Send donations to Unite Mixed Fleet, 33-37 Moreland St, Clerkenwell, London EC1V 8BB
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Wales: DWP announces office closures and job losses

Dave Reid, Socialist Party Wales

Civil service union PCS has reacted with anger to the announcement that the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) has announced that [it intends to close and merge jobcentres](#) across the country resulting in 750 job losses. This includes four sites in Wales by March 2018.

Llanelli Jobcentre will close causing the loss of 146 jobs in the town and the real threat of compulsory redundancies.

Three jobcentres at Pyle in Bridgend, Mountain Ash in the Cynon Valley and Tredegar in Blaenau Gwent will also close. Claimants in these areas face expensive bus journeys and long walks to sign on.

DWP also announced further office closures in Merthyr, Caerphilly, Cwmbran, Newport and Cardiff which will force 1,700 workers to travel long and expensive distances to work every day, sometimes involving three bus journeys each way.

Condemnation

Katrine Williams, PCS Wales chair and PCS DWP group vice president, condemned the office closures: "The DWP should not be removing jobs and services from areas of high unemployment and threatening our members with the risk of redundancy.

"There is a massive amount of work and support that we need to deliver to the public and the best way to do this is with sites and our members based in the local communities. PCS will continue to fight all office closures that adversely impact jobs and services to the public."

These closures would have been even worse but for [an energetic campaign by PCS in the consultation phase](#) that pushed the government back on some issues. The Porth office will close but instead of nearly 100 workers being relocated to Caerphilly they will move to Tonypany two miles away, so these valuable jobs will remain in the Rhondda valley.

But the government still intends to uproot workers and relocate many of them in a new building in Treforest, near Pontypridd. The DWP bosses were left with red faces as the design for the new offices were discovered on an architect company's website, only to be hastily taken down as word spread.

BMA doctor's union in shift to left at conference

Zoë Brunswick, BMA conference delegate

This year's annual representatives meeting, the conference of the BMA doctor's trade union, saw some of the most left wing policy agreed by the BMA so far.

Motions were passed condemning the government's underfunding of the NHS as purposeful and to reject sustainability and transformation plans in their entirety.

Also, [progressive policy was passed to support decriminalising abortion](#) - currently a very important issue, particularly in Northern Ireland.

These changes were in part due to the large student and [junior doctor contingent](#) this year. However, many passionate speeches in support of the NHS were delivered by delegates from all branches of practice.

Socialist ideas were welcomed by many, both in the speeches given within the conference and the response outside. One evening even ended with chants of "Oh, Jeremy Corbyn" by a large group of junior doctors. We sold 22 copies of the Socialist over two days.

Enthusiasm

This move to the left by the BMA and the enthusiasm of its members must be welcomed, but things should go further. Despite passing good policy outlining the BMA's position on the current situation, motions were lacking in concrete action plans.

All too often, motions asked the BMA to "lobby the government" or simply stated a position on current affairs.

In the current context, united action could bring down the government. The BMA should be looking to back up its strong positions with concrete plans - to support [mass demonstrations such as the one that took place in London on 1 July](#) and forge links with other trade unions to [fight back against the public sector pay cap](#) and underfunding of the NHS.

Coordinated mass action between health unions can bring down this weak and wobbly government and save our NHS.

Strike action against driver-only operated trains continues

Continued coordinated action [against driver-only operation](#) on [three rail networks has continued](#), with strikes on Merseyrail, Northern and Southern starting on 8 July.

Kirkdale, Merseyside

There was a good turnout of pickets at Merseyrail's Kirkdale Depot on the morning of 8 July, in support of the RMT's strike against the introduction of a new fleet of driver-only operated trains. Ironically the strong show of pickets was produced in part by the fact that management had introduced secret locations for scabs to report for work, so some strikers who might just have stayed at home on the strike day, went to the picket lines to ensure that they were seen to be on strike! Most vehicles that passed hooted their horns in support. The local radio station phone-in programmes demonstrate overwhelming public support for retaining the guards on the trains.

Roger Bannister

Skipton, Yorkshire

Pickets were out on 8, 9 and 10 July at Skipton railway station. Public reaction to the strike has been more positive than that portrayed in the majority of the press.

[75% of passengers](#) are concerned about their safety if guards are removed, yet this is not reflected in the media, which depicts railusers as wholly inconvenienced and unsympathetic to the strike.

We need more people showing solidarity at picket lines and meetings, posting on social media, informing the public that it's not about money. It's about having skilled staff on hand in the event of disability access problems, or accidents, or sexual assault, or the threat of terrorism.

Catherine MacLennon

Leeds

RMT members are taking three days of strike action from 8 July against the introduction of driver-only operated trains on Northern Rail.

Even in the early hours, around a dozen RMT members and supporters were picketing and leafleting outside Leeds train station.

Reps commented that while RMT members are prepared to take whatever action is needed to defeat this, really the whole trade union movement should be organising to force the Tories out and replace them with a Corbyn government committed to keeping guards on trains, renationalising the railways and scrapping the public sector pay cap.

Iain Dalton

Harrogate

All eleven RMT members that are guards at Harrogate station went on strike against Northern Rail for the three days. Simon Black the RMT branch secretary was up-beat with the response of members and the public.

Paul Viney

Durham TAs reject council's pay offer

Durham teaching assistants (TAs) in education unions Unison and the ATL have voted to reject the latest divisive offer from Durham council. The fight for fairness continues.

Up to 2,000 TAs have taken numerous days of strike action over the last 18 months against Durham council's plans to sack all 2,700 teaching assistants and re-engage them on term-time contracts that could cut their pay by up to 23%.

The [TAs have run a solid, energetic campaign against the attacks by the Labour council](#) including at [Durham Miners' Gala](#) where they chanted: "Who are we? Durham TAs! What do we want? Fair pay! When do we want it? Now!"

A political voice for workers

The left unions and the Labour Party affiliation debate

Who controls the Labour Party remains unresolved, with the pro-capitalist right wing using the structures established under the long years of Blairism to preserve its position while plotting its next move.

The left-led trade unions must urgently build on Jeremy Corbyn's election campaign momentum to really transform Labour into a working class, socialist party.

Does that mean the non-affiliated left unions should now affiliate? Following the recent RMT union annual general meeting, Socialist Party executive committee member Clive Heemskerk looks at the arguments.

In a significant development for the whole labour movement, [the recent annual general meeting \(conference\) of the RMT transport workers' union agreed to open a branch consultation on reaffiliation to the Labour Party](#). A special general meeting will be organised subsequently to discuss the results.

An RMT predecessor union was one of Labour's principal founding organisations in 1900, as the larger unions initially maintained their support for the capitalist Liberal Party. [Expelled over a hundred years later in 2004](#), the union continued to fight for a political voice for working class voters, effectively disenfranchised by the transformation of Labour into Blairite New Labour.

The late [Bob Crow, as RMT general secretary, was a co-founder, with the Socialist Party and others, of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition \(TUSC\)](#) in 2010 and the union retains its representation on the TUSC national steering committee. For the RMT to now open a discussion on the possibility of re-affiliation to the Labour Party is an important move.

The Socialist Party welcomes the political strategy report approved at the AGM that proposed the consultation. The report rightly poses the issue of affiliation in the context of the union's consistent policy of trying to help "to create a mass party of labour that fights in the interests of the working class, as Labour arguably now has the potential at least to be that party". The question, as it then goes on to state, is what terms of affiliation would take forward that goal?

As part of the consultation, the report goes on, the union should "seek answers from the Labour Party" including on "what powers affiliation would actually give the union, if any" and whether it "would still be free to pursue its own policy agenda".

In engaging in this process, not least in the opportunity it opens up for a dialogue with Jeremy Corbyn and other left-led unions on what needs to be done to [dismantle the legacy of Blairism and transform the Labour Party](#), the RMT could once more be poised to play a pivotal role.

Still two parties

The RMT never disaffiliated from Labour but was expelled, formally for [agreeing a rule change at its 2003 AGM to allow branches to back non-Labour organisations](#). That decision reflected a growing [frustration within the union that it was being politically gagged by New Labour](#), which had become an unqualified upholder of capitalism. At [the last Labour Party conference the RMT attended](#), for example, its anti-war motion was peremptorily ruled out of order, just months after Blair's criminal invasion of Iraq.

So when in February 2004 Labour's national executive committee (NEC) gave the union an ultimatum to reverse the AGM decision, after five branches had agreed to back the Scottish Socialist Party, [a special general meeting voted by five to one to defy them](#). The hundred-year link was broken.

How to preserve the political independence of the union to pursue its own policies and socialist objectives - the RMT is one of the few unions to have kept [a commitment to socialism in its constitution](#) - will be a critical consideration in the forthcoming consultation. Even compared to [the situation in 2004](#) the rights and powers of trade unions within the formal structures of the Labour Party have been weakened, nationally and in local parties (see below, 'Making Labour's structures safe for business').

Affiliated unions have a proportionate share, based on their affiliated membership, of half of the voting weight at Labour Party conferences; one-third of the NEC; and one-sixth of the policy-making National Policy Forum (NPF).

If the RMT was to affiliate its full 80,000-strong membership on the current basis, at an annual cost of £240,000, it would not be guaranteed a seat on the NEC. Its conference vote would be the equivalent of just 23 local Constituency Labour Parties. And it would have less say at the NPF than the House of Lords Labour Group!

A lesser affiliation, perhaps excluding the Scottish membership in "recognition of the different political landscape in Scotland" as the political strategy report puts it, would result in even less influence. And the input into local parties that affiliation gives union branches as collective organisations is almost negligible.

Jeremy Corbyn's leadership is a bridgehead for the working class against the forces of capitalism within the Labour Party, and the non-affiliated RMT was the [second biggest donor](#) to his leadership campaigns, behind only the 1.4 million-member Unite union. But almost two years on it is still far from consolidated.

The failure to fight for mandatory re-selection means that last year's coup-plotters still dominate the parliamentary Labour Party. There is an anti-Corbyn majority on the NEC, which is legally responsible for the functioning of the Labour Party including the interpretation of the rules, selection procedures, the deployment of staff etc - and the notorious 'Compliance Unit' monitoring party members and excluding socialists.

And locally the vast majority of Labour councillors do not support Jeremy Corbyn's anti-austerity policies, instead implementing Tory cuts in the council chambers. This includes the Labour-led transport authorities responsible for the Merseyrail and Northern Rail franchises which have the power to defeat [driver-only operated trains](#) but refuse to do so. Until this changes [there is still a role for TUSC](#).

The right wing anticipated an election disaster and has been thrown back by the response to Corbyn's radical campaign. But they are still there, entrenched in the apparatus, biding their time. Ultimately the structures and power relations that were developed under New Labour to curb the representation of working class interests within the party remain in place. Labour is still two parties in one.

The RMT rightly seeks "answers from the Labour Party" before it considers affiliation. But which Labour Party will turn up to the negotiations to provide them? The Blairite general secretary Iain McNicol, or Jeremy Corbyn?

Breaking the logjam

Jeremy Corbyn could certainly break the logjam. The Socialist Party argues that he should go over the heads of the Blairite apparatus and present his own proposals for a new Labour Party constitution directly to party members and trade union supporters.

In the latest issue of our monthly magazine, Socialism Today, [Socialist Party general secretary Peter Taaffe argues](#) that Jeremy should act boldly "as he did with the general election manifesto. [Then] he appealed over the heads of the right and got support for his radical proposals. That confronted the right with a fait accompli!

"He should do the same by presenting his own democratic constitution to a referendum of all Labour Party members - full and associate - which would have at its heart mandatory reselection of MPs and the replacement of the bureaucratic machine, with power resting in the hands of the membership, particularly new members and the trade unions. It should also enshrine the principle of a federal arrangement which would lead to the readmittance of all expelled socialists and organisations back into the Labour Party."

Such a constitution would mean restoring the unions' rights of collective representation in the formation of Labour Party policy, the selection and reselection of Labour Party candidates, and the governance of the party locally and nationally. This really would take forward the RMT's goal of 'a fighting party of labour'.

Then the process of negotiating affiliation could become a factor in putting into action the necessary steps to transform Labour. And not just the affiliation of the RMT.

The PCS civil service union held a consultation on its political strategy late last year. The consultation document circulated to members could not but accurately inform them that "formal policy making in the Labour Party has not been a genuine democratic process" and, despite Jeremy's leadership, which the union leadership fully supports, the party's "structures have not yet changed fundamentally to allow meaningful trade union input". Not surprisingly, the consultation saw 86% oppose affiliation and just 6% in favour.

But a clear signal now from Jeremy Corbyn that he will take the action needed to transform the Labour Party would produce a different response. Other left-led unaffiliated unions, but with political funds, include the POA prison officers union, the National Union of Teachers, and the University and College Union.

The left-led unions currently affiliated must also step up. The right-wing union leaders are rallying to defend their co-thinkers in the Labour Party. Unison's Dave Prentis, Usdaw's John Hannett and the small Community union have denounced mandatory reselection of MPs. [Gerard Coyne's challenge to Len McCluskey for general secretary of Unite](#) was in part a third Labour leadership contest.

The left unions cannot allow a Labour Party version of [the Trade Union Congress's disgraceful attempt to isolate and break the RMT in the Southern Rail dispute](#), only averted by [the rank and file of train drivers' union Aslef bravely defying their leadership](#). The Labour affiliation debate, re-ignited for the whole movement by the RMT AGM decision, must include an urgent summit of the left unions to discuss concrete steps to transform the party.

The RMT's predecessor played a historic role in establishing the Labour Party. Now the union could write a new chapter in firmly re-establishing it as a political voice for workers.

Making Labour's structures safe for business

As Labour was transformed into New Labour the unions' power within the party was gutted, not in one act but over years.

1992: The unions' share of the vote at Labour Party conferences is reduced from 90% to 70%.

1993: Local trade union representation in selecting parliamentary candidates is replaced with individual member-only ballots, a change later described by John Prescott as more important in creating New Labour even than [the abolition of the socialist Clause Four of the party constitution in 1995](#).

1995: The unions' share of the conference vote is cut to 50%.

1997: The National Policy Forum, with unions holding just 16% of the votes, takes over policy-making powers from the party conference.

2003: All-members meetings are recommended to replace Constituency Labour Party General Committees, where local union branches had representation, with constituency executives deciding business.

2011: Local Campaign Forums led by council Labour Groups replace Local Government Committees (which had trade union delegates), with power over council candidate selection and local election manifestos.

2014: The [Collins Review changes](#) restrict individual trade union affiliated members' rights to a vote in leadership elections but not in local candidate selections.

2016: The Scottish and Welsh Labour Party leaders get places on Labour's National Executive Committee, further diluting the weight of the union section (to 12 members out of 35).

July Days 1917: battles with counterrevolution

Judy Beishon, Socialist Party executive committee

Massive demonstrations involving nearly a million people erupted in Petrograd on 2-3 July 1917, in a colossal outburst of anger and discontent.

Workers, soldiers and peasants were reacting in fury at the failure of the provisional government - installed after [the February 1917 revolution](#) - to transform their terrible conditions. They were suffering high food prices, poverty wages, factory lockouts and lack of transport.

Worse, the government had decided in June to initiate a new offensive in World War One, inflicting even greater mass misery. The population was under the cosh of renewed war conditions while the rich wallowed in profits from the high prices of basic goods and from supplying the needs of the war.

The huge force of the early July movement brought the government close to collapse. Reeling in shock at what it saw as a challenge for power - which it was in the minds of many of Petrograd's workers - it ordered soldiers to shoot at protesters, followed by heavy wider repression in which hundreds were killed.

Counterrevolutionary troops were sent to Petrograd, workers and soldiers' arms were seized and revolutionary troops at the front were disarmed.

The Bolsheviks were blamed for the events by the government and their political enemies and suffered a wave of brutality. Many were thrown into prison, including Trotsky and a number of other leaders. Their newspapers and offices were raided and shut down. Lenin fled to Finland, unable to return until the end of September.

So the Bolsheviks - in the middle of a year of mass movements and two revolutions - had suffered a significant setback and were forced into semi-underground work for a number of weeks. As well as the physical attacks against them, they were also up against a major government propaganda offensive that blamed them for the lack of supplies at the front and successes of the German army.

The Bolsheviks' national leaders had not in fact called the demonstrations; they had decided against them taking place.

But when the movement erupted anyway, they realised that their place as a revolutionary party was to get fully involved in the movement - which was expressing desperation for change - in order to try to channel it in an organised direction and minimise the consequences of defeat.

A layer of the population, especially in Petrograd and among soldiers at the front, was in huge ferment and outright revolt. Also, in rural areas attempts by peasants to seize land were taking place.

The movement was disorganised, with many street fights, and grassroots preparations for armed actions; for example, a machine gun regiment was visiting factories to build support for an armed attack on the government.

Workers and soldiers were descending on the headquarters of the soviet executive committee in the Tauride palace, demanding that the soviet - councils of workers, soldiers and peasants - take power. Meanwhile the counter-revolutionary Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries (SRs) inside the palace were condemning the movement as an assault on democracy by armed gangs!

The Bolsheviks participated in the demonstrations with slogans that included: 'no coalition with the bourgeoisie', 'all power to the Soviets', 'end the military offensive' and 'state control of production'.

Consciousness

The great difficulty they faced was that the consciousness of that very combative layer leading the Petrograd uprising was ahead of the rest of the country. Reflecting this, the Bolsheviks were still only a minority in the key soviets.

The Mensheviks and SRs had the allegiance of a majority of the workers and peasants, as illusions remained in the ability of those two parties to deliver on their promises: to end the war, give land to the peasants, allow workers' control over production, and so on.

But these parties, based mainly on intellectuals and the peasantry, had no viable planned route for delivering their promises or a will to do so, and in reality served as "an instrument of the bourgeoisie for deceiving the people," to use the words of Lenin.

They had learnt nothing from the February revolution which had showed the impossibility of the capitalist class delivering capitalist democracy and economic development, and proved over and over again that they would do their utmost to hand power back to the forces of capitalism and landlordism.

Were the Bolsheviks correct to initially oppose the prospect of the demonstrations, and then to issue a call on the night of 4 July for them to end?

Despite the obstacles, could the movement have gone on to place power in the hands of the soviets or the working class?

Differences in consciousness and mood will always be inevitable, but could those differences at that stage have been overcome by action?

Both Lenin and Trotsky - who together went on to lead the Bolsheviks to achieve a successful workers' revolution in October - explained that at that stage the seizure of power would not have led to holding onto it.

They both judged, at the time and in later analysis, that once the movement had erupted it was correct to call for it to be a peaceful demonstration and not an insurrection. Otherwise, as Trotsky later elaborated, Petrograd in July could have become a 'Petrograd Commune', blockaded in and starved as the Paris Commune had been in 1871.

Repeated outbursts

The July Days were not the first outbreak of mass discontent following the February revolution. There had been [big flare-ups in April](#) and June too, during which the Bolsheviks demanded that the soviet leaders take full power and dismiss the useless, capitalist provisional government.

On 18 June nearly half a million people had demonstrated, with Bolshevik slogans being popular. But despite their size, in those protest movements too, leading Bolsheviks had to play a restraining role, warning against attempts to forcibly seize power.

They didn't want to see workers' blood and energy sacrificed needlessly in violent clashes with the pro-capitalist Cadets (Constitutional Democratic Party), reactionary pro-tsarist Black Hundreds and state forces.

Since soon after the February revolution the soviets had co-existed along with the pro-capitalist provisional government, with neither having the upper hand over the other. The representatives of capitalism, in alliance with the landowners, wanted to shut down the soviets but were not powerful enough to do so.

On the other hand the soviets were led by the likes of Tsereteli and Chernov - Mensheviks and SRs who were refusing to seriously challenge the capitalist government. Rather, they were keeping it alive and just aiming to 'check' it.

Wait for the convening of a constituent assembly to solve all the problems, they kept promising, while at the same time doing their best to postpone an assembly.

On 6 May a number of Menshevik and SR leaders had even joined the government cabinet, creating a coalition that for the capitalist class and landlords could better muddy the waters on the true nature of the

government. The Mensheviks and SRs proceeded to engage in making deals and shoddy compromises with the anti-working class ministers.

Lenin later commented: "The capitalists gleefully rubbed their hands at having found helpers against the people in the persons of the 'leaders of the soviets' and at having secured their promise to support 'offensive operations at the front', ie a resumption of the imperialist predatory war".

In early July, six government ministers who were in the main party of capitalism, the Cadets, resigned their positions, handing the poisoned chalice of head of government to the SR Alexander Kerensky. However, Kerensky and co were "merely a screen for the counter-revolutionary Cadets and the military clique which is in power at present", assessed Lenin.

This 'military clique' had been deliberately pushed to the fore by the government as a consequence of it ordering the June military offensive. One of the government's objectives was to cut across the revolutionary ferment that was refusing to die down; the population was still desperate to see some results from the February revolution.

The military arm of the state was therefore primed up for the brutal clampdown on opposition to the government and the Bolsheviks after the July uprising.

Outrageously, the Menshevik and SR leaders in various ways either tacitly or more overtly backed the attacks on the Bolsheviks, further exposing their counter-revolutionary nature. "They have sunk to the very bottom of the foul counter-revolutionary cesspool... they basely betrayed the Bolsheviks", said Lenin.

Lenin reassessed the overall situation after the July Days. In June he had already been considering the changes taking place, but he now fully realised that a decisive, objective change had occurred. Instead of 'dual power', the counterrevolution had gained the upper hand, spearheaded by the top military officers and backed by the capitalists and monarchists.

Analysis

The enemies of the working class backed up Lenin's analysis. After the July demonstrations, Prince Lvov, former head of the provisional government, said in a speech: "What strengthens my optimism above all else, are the events of the past few days inside the country. I am convinced that our 'deep breach' in the Lenin front is incomparably more significant for Russia than the German breach in our south-western front".

Lenin explained that this changed situation meant that calling for the soviets to take power was no longer a correct demand, because they could no longer do so in a straightforward manner, just by deciding to dissolve the provisional government.

Revolts and 'partial resistance' would not be enough, he concluded. Instead it was necessary to win a majority of workers and peasants to the programme of the Bolsheviks and to carefully prepare for an armed uprising when the right conditions come together for it to succeed. There would be complete victory for a military dictatorship unless there was a new workers' revolution.

In laying down this clear path, Lenin was issuing an obituary for the soviets if they remained led by counterrevolutionary parties: "At the moment these soviets are like sheep brought to the slaughterhouse and bleating pitifully under the knife. The soviets at present are powerless and helpless against the triumphant and triumphing counter-revolution."

Lenin's position was agreed by the Bolshevik congress that started on 26 July (during which Trotsky's Bolshevik membership was also agreed).

The slogan 'all power to the soviets' was withdrawn in favour of 'power for the working class and peasantry'.

Just seven weeks later, when the Bolsheviks won a majority in the workers' section of the Petrograd Soviet on 9 September - with Trotsky elected as its chair - they were then able to say: 'all power to the Bolshevik Soviets!'

The July Days contain many lessons for struggles and movements today.

One of them is that a revolutionary party should not simply endorse every mass movement or assault on capitalism that arises, without trying to steer it in a direction that will help to unify, strengthen and take the entire workers' movement forwards, as the Bolsheviks did.

However, perhaps the most important lesson is the way in which vigilant Marxist analysis along with democratic debate and discussion can enable a revolutionary party to weather a period of setback and reorientate its forces to build for future victory.

- [Read more about the 1917 Russian revolution at 1917revolution.org](http://1917revolution.org)
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Lots of discussions at the Durham Miners Gala on the way forward

Dave Jones

Crowds of up to 250,000 flocked to a sun-soaked Durham for the 133rd Durham Miners Gala on Saturday 8th July. This is the largest attendance at the Big Meeting (as it is known locally) for at least 50 years, and the mood was both celebratory and optimistic as people basked in the new found popularity of Jeremy Corbyn's left-wing policies.

Jeremy Corbyn himself attended the Gala, and speaking from the platform, received loud roars of approval when he called on the Tories to resign and called for a new election.

The Gala is undoubtedly the biggest gathering and celebration of trade unionism in Europe, with trade unionists gathering from across the country. The hundreds of colourful banners and the music of the accompanying colliery bands are a poignant reminder of the hundreds of pits that were lost in the 1980s and 90s. But there was no mourning on Saturday, only numerous discussions on how we must now organise.

In the showground, on the streets and in the pubs there were many discussions on how the struggle must advance in the Labour Party and in the trade unions. The talk was of how to defeat the Blairites, with real support for de-selection of those undermining Corbyn and his programme, not just amongst some MPs but crucially councillors as well. The Durham Miners Association (DMA) for the second year running refused to invite local MPs who have been vocal in opposition to Corbyn.

A number of leading trade unionists spoke at the rally, with radical calls for action accompanying tributes to Davey Hopper, the secretary of the DMA, who died a week after last year's Gala. The key themes from the platform were health and safety, and the need to smash the public sector pay cap. However it was left to filmmaker Ken Loach to make the call for [reselection of MPs](#), and to remind the other speakers that it is one thing to speak of taking action, but what is needed is to take action.

The 350 copies of the Socialist sold by Socialist Party members and £350 raised for our party's Fighting Fund reinforced the message that socialism is back.

Iain Dalton also comments on the Gala:

Sun shining high in the sky blessed those attending what was probably one of the largest attendances at the Durham Miners Gala ever. As well as the traditional brass bands and banners of miners' lodges, there were some huge trade union contingents. Unison seemed to have a bigger presence than the previous year, but the Unite presence was massive.

Given this, and the fantastic response to the headline of the Socialist demanding an end to the public sector pay cap, then it was disappointing that none of the leading public sector trade unionists on the platform at the

Gala's rally raised the question of coordinated industrial action to force the government to end it.

Yet the upbeat mood was undoubtedly a reflection of the renewed support for Jeremy Corbyn on the basis of [the radical policies he included in the Labour manifesto](#). The field to hear him speak was absolutely rammed, with people happily waiting in beating hot sunshine for an hour or so of speeches before hearing him.

This mood even influenced the contingent of the usually 'moderate' union Usdaw on the parade, who were passing the County hotel when Corbyn appeared on the balcony, leading them to stop marching and start the crowd off on a round of "Oh Jeremy Corbyn". The 'Progress' supporting general secretary of Usdaw won't be happy about that!

Undoubtedly there is an increased interest, not just about opposing austerity and the evils of capitalism, but in what we replace it with and how we can achieve that. Like many Socialist Party members at the Gala, I seemed to be engaged in non-stop conversations all day from the journey there to when I stopped to rest my feet and escape the sun for a few minutes.

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 10 July 2017 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

The Socialist spring offensive

Ian Pattison, the Socialist campaign organiser

Sales of the Socialist hit a six-year high this spring thanks to the tireless work of Socialist Party members and supporters during the recent general election. We were out on the streets from the beginning to the end of the general election, initially alone in [saying that Jeremy Corbyn could win with a bold anti-austerity message](#).

Birmingham branch started a new regular sale during the election. Many of its sales were to undecided voters, showing the impact of the Socialist Party on boosting support for Corbyn and for socialist policies.

Huge sales were achieved at Jeremy Corbyn's election rallies: 250 in Islington, 194 in Hull, 150 in Birmingham, 130 in Wirral and 100 in Gateshead, to name a few. People agreed with our proposals to transform Labour into a truly anti-austerity party and to kick out the Blairites.

You may have seen Socialist sellers at bus and train stations. Coventry West branch started a weekly sale just over a year ago, 700 papers have been sold since then. Coventry East has followed suit, selling 45 in its first six weeks.

This summer has also seen some big sales - over 800 at the 1 July anti-austerity London demo, and 350 at [the Durham Miners' Gala](#).

For just £1 a copy, the Socialist provides readers with campaign reports and political analysis written by working class people at the forefront of struggle, unrivalled by the capitalist media. That £1 also goes to fund the fight to improve the lives of millions of people, and end capitalist cutbacks and misery. That's why many people pay the solidarity price of £2 or more.

Socialism and ice cream!

Wirral Socialist Party Branch has a regular Saturday campaign stall in Birkenhead (a recent stall sold 32 copies of the Socialist and raised £170 fighting fund). However, we have decided to start a regular Sunday stall in New Brighton.

In both places we have been campaigning in support of [the RMT union strikes to keep safety-critical guards on Merseyrail trains](#). Public support is overwhelming.

New Brighton is a seaside town where Scousers traditionally come to for a day out. Over the last two sunny Sundays we have sold 44 copies of the Socialist and raised £110 fighting fund. Clearly on Wirral workers prefer a dash of socialism with their ice cream!

Dave Jones

Southampton Labour must reverse devastating council cuts

Nick Chaffey , Southampton

Devastating Tory cuts are set to continue unless action is taken. School funding has hit the headlines since the election as a key issue among voters. No wonder, with [60% of secondary schools](#) running deficits.

In Southampton one school has asked parents to volunteer to clean the toilets! Other schools have stopped teaching music, IT and business studies.

The [new funding formula threatens to cut a further £3 billion from school budgets](#) nationally. In Southampton, that would mean losing over 350 teachers by 2019.

Public meetings held under the banner of Fair Funding for All Schools resulted in hundreds of parents, teachers, school staff and children marching through Southampton on the eve of the election.

[A petition](#) is now taking up the call of Southampton National Union of Teachers' branch for Southampton Council to "use all of its powers, including the use of licensed deficits, to make sure they provide funding so no schools will have to make cuts to their services or provision." Parents have queued at school gates across the city to sign, showing the anger that could be mobilised.

Other vital services are also facing cuts. Anti-cuts councillor Keith Morrell has demanded that Southampton Labour council reverse its decision to close Kentish Road Respite Centre.

In an open letter to council leader Simon Letts, Keith said: "The reality is that the closure of the centre is being driven by the government's reduction in local government funding. The attempt by the council to justify the decision by claiming that it will lead to better outcomes for users and carers is insulting and a betrayal of them."

It is vital Southampton Labour council changes course, puts an end to the cycle of cuts and demands that Jeremy Corbyn and an incoming Labour government reimburse any council that [uses reserves or borrowing powers to protect services](#).

Waltham Forest - fighting school cuts

A joint meeting of workplace reps from GMB, Unite, National Union of Teachers and Unison was held on 4 July to discuss [a strategy to fight school cuts](#) in Labour-run Waltham Forest council, north east London.

The meeting heard how teaching assistants are threatened with job losses. It was agreed to organise a joint trade union rally at the town hall against any education cuts in the new autumn term.

The Fair Funding For All Schools campaign group has organised a Carnival Against the Cuts on Sunday 16 July. Assemble: Whitehall Gardens, London SW1, 12noon. Rally at Parliament Square, 1.30pm.

Fighting corporate takeover at London Pride

There was more criticism than usual of the organisers in the run-up to this year's London pride event, [dominated as it is by corporate marketing and with its apolitical stance](#). It reinforced the call for LGBT+ people to reclaim it as a campaigning vehicle.

Socialist Party members campaigned energetically. Our posters said: "Build a fighting socialist movement for LGBT+ rights" and got much attention. We gave out 500 "pride is political" leaflets and raised £45 for the fighting fund.

Chingford: Corbyn attacks pay freeze during tour of marginals

Ian Pattison, Waltham Forest Socialist Party

Jeremy Corbyn has launched a 60-seat tour of the most marginal constituencies. Chingford, east London - once a safe Tory seat - was his stop on 6 June.

Up to 400 turned up at less than 24 hours' notice. Even more would have come if the venue was widely advertised in advance.

When Corbyn said he'd end the public sector pay freeze, it went down a storm. Locally, [Barts NHS Trust workers are on strike demanding a pay rise](#).

Whipps Cross Hospital porters volunteered to speak to the crowd to appeal for their support. Unfortunately this offer wasn't taken up by the organisers.

The striking workers held up signs for Jeremy's entire speech asking him to back their campaign. Although he didn't refer to them in front of the assembled audience, he did tell them personally that he'd be in touch to back their strike.

Socialist Party placards backing Corbyn's policies were taken quickly. There were only enough for a fraction of the crowd. But scandalously, one of the organisers of the event went around telling people to put them down.

These undemocratic methods, normally associated with the right wing of the Labour Party, do not help to build the anti-austerity movement.

Despite this, 37 people bought copies of the Socialist. And four of them left their details to find out more about the Socialist Party. As workers tire of the Blairites, more and more [demand their deselection](#).

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 10 July 2017 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

Huddersfield parties in the park to save hospital A&E

The [second annual](#) Hands Off Huddersfield Royal Infirmary (HRI) 'Party in the Park' attracted thousands to Greenhead Park, Huddersfield on 24 June. It was a magnificent display of solidarity and helped raise funds for [the campaign to keep Huddersfield's A&E department open](#).

After a short, silent tribute to those involved in the recent London and Manchester tragedies, where many NHS employees selflessly assisted the injured, a newly formed choir, "NHStival" sang its heart out to Coldplay's Fix You, an apt song for the NHS.

Eight rock bands encouraged the crowds to sing, chant and dance throughout the day. The crowds were also entertained with a funfair and outside sports activities.

Other campaign groups and charities were represented.

Adrian O'Malley, hospital porter and union representative and Socialist Party member, said the recent general election results had helped to slow down the Tory cuts, however, there is still a refusal to give NHS staff a decent pay rise.

Mike Forster, Huddersfield Socialist Party secretary and chair of Hands Off HRI, led an enthusiastic rally cry, almost as loud as the rock bands! "Whose NHS?" "Our NHS" the audience chanted back.

The event raised an estimated £4,000 which will go into a fighting fund to pay the legal costs of fighting the local Clinical Commissioning Group.

Huddersfield Socialist Party had its own stall and raised money towards the party's fighting fund, sold dozens of papers and badges, and filled up several petitions calling for full funding for the NHS and also for social housing in [the wake of the Grenfell Tower fire](#).

Huddersfield Socialist Party member

Save Glenfield heart centre

The latest protest [against the proposed closure of Glenfield Congenital Heart Centre](#) took place in Leicester on 8 July. A year after the threat was first raised, the campaign shows no sign of cooling down. Over 200 people turned up to show support and listen as parents, campaigners and staff from the centre spoke.

The words of affected parents were particularly touching. One mother talked about how her son was rushed in when his heart failed, and the emergency surgery he received at Glenfield saved his life.

A grandmother spoke of how much it meant for her and her family to be able to visit regularly and stay over at the hospital when her grandson was ill.

She said "Why is it that people don't come first, and that all these decisions are made about money." Her point that the NHS "belongs to us" and "we shouldn't give our money to people to privatise it" got a resounding response from the audience.

The chair of the campaign, [Socialist Party member Steve Score](#), made the point that with the current weakness of the government there could never be a better time to press the case for reversing these proposals and winning the battle.

The NHS England consultation about the future of three congenital heart centres across England, including Glenfield, closes on 17 July.

Recently the Manchester specialist heart unit - another of the three earmarked for closure - has been forced to "abruptly end all surgery for adults with serious congenital heart conditions" due to staff shortage.

The unit has rapidly collapsed after the NHS England review and the uncertainty it caused made it impossible for them to retain and hire new staff.

This is why we cannot afford to let the campaign wind down, but must keep putting pressure on both NHS England and local politicians to save the centre - without a minute to lose!

Sofia Wiking, Leicester Socialist Party

Leeds campaigns to save NHS on its 69th birthday

Kate Youngs, RCN Student Information Officer, Leeds University

Leeds Keep Our NHS Public and its supporters gathered outside the Leeds General Infirmary on 5 July and later outside St James University Hospital to celebrate the NHS's 69th birthday.

Union members from Unison, Unite, Trades Council and RCN were all present with banners flying. The RCN handed out campaign postcards which are to be sent to MPs and badges handed out in line with its 'Scrap the Cap' campaign calling for [the government's pay restraint to be lifted](#) from nurses, which has led to a 14% real time wage reduction for frontline staff since 2010.

Other issues were aired around the ongoing privatisation that sees vital services reduced and closed down across the country, leading to ineffective patient care and low staff morale.

Theatre review: Ocho

School students' remarkable tribute to workers' Spanish Civil War bravery

Nigel Smith, York Socialist Party

A remarkable production.

By Jane Thornton, it tells the stories of eight men from Hull who went to [fight fascism for the republicans in the Spanish Civil War](#). It also tells the stories of the families and friends left behind.

['Ocho' premiered on 27 June at Archbishop Sentamu Academy in Hull](#). It was specially commissioned to be performed by young students from the school's drama department.

The play draws heavily on real-life stories. It focuses on two of the men who were killed in action - and the way this loss was felt by the community and their families.

It deals superbly with the pathos and politics of the events. But it is the remarkable young cast that ensures this evening will stay in my memory for a very long time.

The focus and precision in performance from every single member was remarkable. It was the emotional truth underpinning every performance that moved me so much.

This is a story of the bravery of working class men and women, performed by a talented group of young people from east Hull who could clearly connect with the subject matter.

There were shades of Brecht and Lorca in the realisation of the piece. Elle Ideson and Jade Farnill, playing the two central women, carried an emotional integrity that brought to mind 'Mother Courage' or 'Yerma'.

The story told of bravery and the cast itself showed a brave approach to the work. There was no holding back at any stage. The ensemble work was performed with passion and precision.

It is a tribute to all who gave their time and skill that Hull can boast such a remarkable piece. But it is an indictment of the 'City of Culture' project that no funding was available for this amazing artwork.

Nevertheless, the team responsible has managed to raise the cash to tour the show across the region - and also to travel to Barcelona to perform at the English-language 'Institute of the Arts'.

The audience in Spain is in for a treat. This is a production of which all involved can be truly proud.

No surrender!

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.

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.

Scrap the cap

The old and favoured method of the ruling class, divide and rule, is once again on full display over the question of [the public sector pay cap](#).

The ex-chancellor of the exchequer under Thatcher, [Lord Lamont, claims](#) it's fair because "public sector pay is on average higher than in the private sector."

This is the same method they trotted out in the general election when they tried to say that the older generation was better off than the younger generation [to defend their vicious 'dementia tax'](#) and winter fuel allowance cuts.

It is a handy way of trying to distract the workers from the real inequalities in society: between the super-rich and the rest of us.

The real question for us is: are our living standards worse or better as a result of government policies - and what are we going to do about it? Or rather, what are the trade union leaders going to do about it. We see [the inflation rate taking off](#) once again.

By diverting the pay debate into 'private versus public' the Tories hope to distract us from the real problems that all workers face, irrespective of occupation or age.

Bill Mullins, Bermondsey, south London

On guard

On a recent journey into London I was horrified to see the doors of the tube close on an elderly woman's hand. Her hand and handbag were inside the train and she was outside.

Immediately two young men and I ran up to help. We managed to prise the doors apart with some effort, and when they fully opened she was lying on her back on the platform as the doors releasing affected her balance. She must have been terrified.

When I reached my destination I told my friend what had happened. She related an incident that happened to her the previous week.

As she was exiting a train she was pushed by a woman trying to get on and ended up with her torso inside and her legs sticking out. She too was terrified the train would leave with her legs outside.

These are just two of what must be many incidents that happen daily. They illustrate how important it is to have guards on trains and platforms to ensure everyone has boarded safely.

The [RMT union is currently in dispute with Southern Rail and other regional train operators](#) over this very issue.

Many of the platforms Southern uses are curved which means the whole length cannot be monitored by the driver. Often visibility is poor in wet conditions. Many trains are 12 coaches long, adding to the impossibility of the driver seeing the whole length.

Barbara Clare, Stevenage

Grenfell Tower

The Worcestershire Unite union community branch coach made its way to London on 1 July to [join the tens of thousands marching against the Tories' murderous austerity](#).

The weather was perfect and the protesters all united in [anger against the recent horrific events at Grenfell](#) due to cutting corners and penny pinching to line the pockets of the wealthy.

We were also united on saving our NHS. Worcester NHS is suffering from overstretched resources and underpaid and overworked staff.

The memory that I will carry though, after a magnificent demo, was on the coach home. Driving through Kensington and seeing the gigantic blackened shell of Grenfell Tower, eerily menacing in the summer evening sun.

Calvin Fowler, Worcester

Truth About Zane

Staines Socialist Party members [supported the 'Truth About Zane'](#) contingent on the 1 July 'Tories out' demo, campaigning for justice following the seven-year-old's death from poisonous fumes in the 2014 Surrey floods (read more at truthaboutzane.com).

We all travelled up together by train from Staines with Zane's mum and our new banner. We sold 12 copies of the Socialist to campaigners on the train.

The fight for justice goes on.

Paul Couchman, Staines

Homeland hooley

CIA spy drama Homeland is compelling watching. Although I love the show, I don't like the message it puts out.

It's a programme influenced by the 'war on terror'. It reinforces the establishment's point of view. However, the world has changed since the first season aired in 2011.

Trump is president, while [Bernie Sanders ran a fantastic campaign](#). Disdain for the war in Iraq is high, and support for foreign wars extremely low. Homeland makers felt compelled to reflect the changed mood in the latest season of the show.

Elizabeth Keane is elected president on an anti-war ticket. But the programme makers fail to understand what a political situation like that would look like.

There were four protests featured in season six, all of them organised by right-wing forces. I think the opposite would be happening. Bernie Sanders mobilised bigger rallies than Clinton and Trump combined.

Obama betrayed hopes by continuing Middle East interventions. Before then, when he was seen as different, 250,000 came to hear him speak on the night of his election.

The ending of the final episode was very disappointing, awkwardly equating left-wing alternative ideas with Trump and totalitarianism.

Ian Pattison, Leytonstone, east London

Sickening statistics

There's so much talk about 'fake news' and 'alternative facts', surely we can trust [the Office for National Statistics](#) to get it right?

Despite workplace stress, a fall in real income, worsening environmental conditions, a housing crisis, cuts, poor diet, job insecurity, sanctions and the myriad of factors affecting our health - the stats show workers must be getting healthier!

About 137 million working days - 4.3 days per worker - were lost to sickness or injury in 2016, compared to 132 million in 2013. That was the lowest level since 1993 when the study began and absence due to sickness was at its highest - 7.2 days per worker.

There's been a fairly steady decline since 2003, especially during the economic downturn - surprised?

Minor illnesses like coughs and colds remain the most common given excuse at 25%, followed by musculoskeletal problems like back or neck pain. "Other" stated causes - stress, depression, anxiety and serious physical conditions - make up 12%.

Women, older workers, people with long-term health problems, smokers, health workers and employees in firms with more than 500 staff were most likely to be off sick.

Over the last 20 years the greatest reduction in sickness absence rates was among workers with long-term health problems, workers aged 50 to 64, and public sector workers.

It's all a matter of interpretation. You might argue health is improving. Or you could conclude that in these groups people are scared to stay home, however ill they may feel.

Workers with chronic health problems, older workers and those in precarious jobs or smaller companies without union organisation simply soldier on.

Perhaps this explains why agency workers frequently turn up at work - including hospitals - with heavy colds, potentially infecting others. And why meals-on-wheels staff with stomach bugs are told not to work in the kitchen, but sent to deliver meals to the elderly and vulnerable.

Sometimes looking beyond the data reveals the truth behind the stats.

Sue Powell, Gloucester

Poland and Trotsky

I found [the letter by Agnieszka Ford in issue 938 of the Socialist, 'Trotsky and Poland'](#), quite informative about Adam Michnik and the group around Henry Szlajfer - that they were reading and discussing the ideas of Leon Trotsky in the 1960s in the Warsaw underground.

My wife grew up in the '60s in Wroclaw. She recalls that in the general population Trotsky's ideas and even his name were not familiar - to her, people from her generation or even the generation of her parents.

I have visited Poland countless times visiting relatives and friends. I have had many discussions with them. I mainly listened.

The main point which came was that for their generation "socialism" is a dirty word. They did not see the regime as Stalinism, but genuine socialism. They saw Poland as "socialist" as they were taught that in school.

I said to my wife: how could the workers of Gdansk cheer Thatcher when she visited in the late 1980s? She replied: "You have to understand - for us the 'socialist' system we were living under was terrible. There was great hardship. People wanted something different, a change, a better system, and that to them was capitalism."

Having listened to what many people who lived through that period have said to me, I can understand why they moved to embrace capitalism. At the time there was a capitalist boom in the West. There were no forces of Trotskyism on the ground who were active in workers' organisations at that time.

One of my wife's friends said to me two years ago: "This is a new system for us and we are still learning."

Having said all that, people did tell me there were some positive things in the old system. Education, healthcare and housing were all better. They told me they are very proud of their country, their independence and history - but that does not make them nationalists, they have said.

Things are changing and there are encouraging signs.

In [the last general election](#), 'Razem' - a new left party formed in 2015 not long before the election, which has some radical demands including expanding workers' rights and opposing privatisation - received 3.6% of the vote. This is, however, below the 5% threshold to gain seats in parliament.

Poland is becoming more polarised now than ever due to the actions of the present right-wing government. There will be social upheaval, of that there is no doubt.

I know that the genuine forces of Trotskyism in Poland today are small. But with the events that will unfold there in the future, I am confident these forces will grow and gain influence.

Chris Fernandez, Derby

