

McStrike against low pay

"I have experienced first-hand the insecurity of zero-hour contracts, low pay and abuse by the management, to both me and my fellow workmates", says Richard, a McDonald's worker and Socialist Party member.

These grievances will be all too familiar to many workers and are among the reasons [McDonald's staff are striking for the first time on 4 September](#).

Richard says: "Seeing workers mobilise in two restaurants and balloting in favour of action has inspired me to build the union in my workplace and fight for the same pay and conditions.

"I am 100% behind the union taking strike action and will also be attending the protest outside McDonald's HQ in East Finchley, London, on 2 September. Solidarity with the McDonald's workers walking out on the 4 September!"

Historic

The workers, members of bakers' union BFAWU, balloted at Crayford, south east London, and Cambridge stores have voted by an incredible 95.7% in favour of strike action.

Already, by voting for the historic strike, the workers have forced McDonald's to implement the twice-promised offer of guaranteed hours for every McDonald's worker in the UK.

McDonald's workers will join a list including [health workers in east London](#), [bin workers in Birmingham](#) and [janitors in Glasgow](#) who have been fighting for better pay and conditions - and in the case of the latter two, winning.

Their action shows we can beat the bosses and their inspiring strike action should be a signal not just to employers, but to other low-paid, exploited workers that we can fight back and organise to get rid of zero-hour contracts, bullying bosses and poverty pay.

On 20 August, as a member of BFAWU, Richard attended a McDonald's strike committee meeting as a visitor. He reports: "The meeting took place at one of the strike locations in Crayford and a decision was made to walk out on 4 September. The step was a historic decision and will be the first ever McDonald's strike to take place in the UK.

"At the meeting McDonald's workers from Crayford and Cambridge spoke of the reasons why they decided to take strike action. These included the failure of the company to roll out fixed-term contracts and the continued utilisation of exploitative zero-hour contracts, low pay, job insecurity and bullying management."

The strike takes place on 4 September. Workers are also fighting for a £10 an hour minimum wage now, and union recognition.

The Socialist Party fights for these demands for all workers and will be supporting the McDonald's strikers in their dispute.

You can donate to the strike fund and send messages of support at fastfoodrights.wordpress.com, and join the #McStrike events and picket lines:

- On Saturday 2 September, BFAWU is holding a protest at McDonald's HQ in East Finchley, north London
 - On the day of the strike, Monday 4 September, workers at the Cambridge site will picket from 6-7am, while workers at the Crayford site will picket from 6-7.30am
 - The strikers and their supporters will then come together outside parliament at 10.30am for a rally
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School spend behind eastern Europe: kick out cutters and profiteers!

'Seth Brydon', teacher, Birmingham

UK education spending is behind many eastern European countries, [according to EU figures](#).

While the UK spent 5.1% of GDP on education in 2015, Slovenia spent 5.6%, Latvia 6% and Estonia 6.1%. Lithuania and Poland also give a greater share to schools.

Denmark is top of the pack at 7%, with Sweden and Belgium also above 6%. Britain might be still above the EU average of 4.9% - but that includes Romania which only spends 3% of GDP on education.

While the Tories [continue to claim](#) that school funding is at its highest ever, [the Institute for Fiscal Studies has found](#) that per-pupil funding will have fallen by 13% in a decade by 2020.

And if there's no school funding crisis, why did Tory education secretary [Justine Greening announce in July](#) that £1.3 billion would be transferred from the 'free schools' budget towards 'core' schools?

This sum, by the way, is only a fraction of the £3 billion [the National Audit Office calculates](#) is set to be cut by this government on top of the Con-Dems' slashing.

In my school, we are set to lose over £300,000 - the equivalent of nine teachers.

Already, standard resources are like gold dust. I have one ream of paper, for all my printing needs, to last until... whenever I get granted another one. No wonder my summer shopping list includes school supplies that used to be bought by the school.

One thing that isn't being cut is contracts to private companies. My school doesn't actually own the school! Instead it is rented from a private firm - one of New Labour's 'private finance initiatives'.

As a result, there are rules on where and how we can put up displays. And when the school was built around a decade ago, it wasn't foreseen that class sizes would hit 30 - we haven't got enough coat hooks for every child.

So some 'efficiency savings' can be made: kicking out the private profiteers, so all parts of education can be publicly owned and democratically run. We must fight not just to stop the cuts to come, but for an actual increase in per-pupil funding.

The newly merged [National Education Union](#) - formed from the National Union of Teachers and the Association of Teachers and Lecturers - comes into existence this term.

Members will be looking for [a combative approach on these vital issues](#).

May's lies about foreign students exposed

For students' and workers' unity against cuts and racism

Rebecca Gardner, Southampton Socialist Party

One of Theresa May's racist immigration myths has been exposed.

The [Office for National Statistics has revealed](#) that in 2016 only 4,600 international students failed to leave when their study visas expired. This figure is way off its earlier claims of up to 100,000 a year.

As home secretary, [May repeatedly placed blame on students from outside the EU](#) for taking jobs and burdening services. She also blamed higher education providers, claiming they were an easy route to Britain for economic migrants.

The real burden on jobs and services is the super-rich capitalist class and its Tory and Blairite representatives. They are the ones destroying jobs and slashing budgets.

But May needed scapegoats. She imposed [harsh visa restrictions](#) which came into force last year, and made it even more difficult for international students to work in Britain after graduating.

Non-EU students pay significantly higher fees - around £19,000 a year - and are not eligible for student loans. They are also excluded from government-funded disability and hardship money given to universities to support more vulnerable students.

Even at the time, then-chancellor [George Osborne wanted international students removed from official migration statistics](#) because of the income from their extortionate fees.

Rather than address the real issues that people face - housing, healthcare, jobs, pay, education - the Tories have chosen to victimise migrants. Although it is true that greedy bosses exploit migrant labour to drive down wages and maximise profits, [racist division among workers will not prevent that](#).

The Socialist Party stands for solidarity between students and workers of all national and racial backgrounds. Only by uniting and fighting together - in trade unions and political struggle - can we end austerity, racism and the rule of the capitalists who demand it.

Landlord licensing under threat - fight back, build homes, cap rents

Niall Mulholland, executive committee, London Federation of Housing Co-ops (personal capacity) and East London Socialist Party

Not only are many families in Newham, east London, living in overcrowded and inhumane conditions, the borough has now revealed that [half of its 27,000 landlords failed to declare their rental income](#).

Newham estimates that across London that means lost tax of £200 million a year. HM [Revenue and Customs estimated in 2014](#) that up to one million buy-to-let landlords are not declaring their rental income nationally.

From 2006 to 2016, private landlords' share of housing stock in Newham rocketed from 21% to 46%. The council came under pressure to do something about greedy, unscrupulous landlords.

The borough's private housing sector is notorious for illegal conversions, overcrowding, unsafe wiring, atrocious fire safety standards, damp, poor heating and pest infestation.

In 2013 the council took the minimum step needed by introducing a compulsory borough-wide licensing scheme for landlords, the first in the country.

It [claims 1,135 prosecutions for 'housing crimes'](#) - an incredible 70% of all prosecutions in London - and £2.6 million a year in additional council tax.

But what happens to tenants cleared from dangerous slum housing? Thousands of households on Newham's council home waiting list [have been there for over a decade](#). Newham needs to build homes.

Labour

The Labour administration pleads that it has lost half its 'core grant funding' from central government since 2010-11. But it has docilely [passed on these cuts](#) to housing, schools, social care and local services in one of the country's poorest boroughs.

And even this limited regulation is too much for the landlord-friendly Tory government. In 2015, Brandon Lewis, housing minister at the time, declared it imposes "additional unnecessary costs" on landlords.

He made it obligatory for local authorities to apply to the communities and local government secretary to license landlords if the scheme affects more than 20% of homes in a borough.

Newham may have its application for renewal of the scheme turned down by the December deadline.

Local authorities that followed Newham - Barking and Dagenham, Croydon, Waltham Forest and Liverpool - could then also see their schemes scrapped. [Redbridge had its refused](#) before it even began.

Compulsory registration of private landlords should be linked to private rent caps and no-cuts council budgets.

Councils need to [build campaigns to fight the government](#), not just accept its austerity diktats.

And instead of exporting those made homeless by councils - [like Newham's 'E15 mums'](#) - local authorities need to start building genuinely affordable, safe council homes.

Corbyn confirms £1bn for the arts - public ownership and wage subsidies needed

James Ivens, member of entertainers' union Equity (personal capacity) and Lambeth Socialist Party

Jeremy Corbyn has [confirmed his May pledge](#) to inject £1 billion into the arts.

Combined with his promise to end council and education cuts, this could mean significant gains for artists and audiences.

The [proposed 'cultural capital fund'](#) promises £200 million a year for the Arts Council to grant to infrastructure projects. On top of this, Corbyn pledges a £160 million annual 'pupil premium' for arts education in schools.

[These policies](#) are a fantastic start. But they need more detail.

Infrastructure investment is very important. Council cuts, falling disposable incomes and rising rents and rates have closed theatres, arts centres, [small pubs and clubs and other facilities](#).

But the biggest cost in the arts, as in most industries, is the workforce.

The arts can partly adapt to cuts by putting on shows in smaller or non-specialist venues. But the only way to cut staffing costs is to cut jobs, cut wages - or pay nothing at all.

A [2015 Equity survey found](#) 46% of respondents had worked without pay at some point in the previous year. Two-thirds earned £10,000 or less from their professional activities.

If new facilities are available cheaply or for free, this could release resources for established companies to employ more artists. But only guaranteed funding for actual projects - [Equity calls for ten-year deals](#) - will expand the number and variety of ventures and secure, well-paid employment.

'Subsidised repertory' theatre in particular is a vital employer and training ground - with slim margins that require public funding.

['Acting Up'](#), Labour's recent report into nosediving working class representation in the performing arts, could have contributed some of this detail. Written by opponents of Corbyn's anti-austerity leadership, it added little of substance.

Suggestions like encouraging theatres to offer cheaper tickets, and ending the scandal of drama school audition fees, are very welcome. But they must be linked to direct funding or management will pay for them out of artists' and tutors' pockets.

And as well as public funding for arts ventures, we need public ownership of big business. The biggest theatre, TV and cinema companies suck out millions every year.

Nationalise them - and take local facilities into municipal ownership - under the democratic control of arts workers and audiences, to guarantee access for all.

As part of a socialist plan of production, this could lift artists out of poverty and provide quality, affordable entertainment for everyone.

- [For more on socialist struggle in the arts, see badartworld.net](#)
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Editorial of the Socialist, issue 960

Reject Starmer's Single Market u-turn

"The Labour Party's announcement that it wants the UK to remain within all the EU's structures in the years right after Brexit is the best news to come out of British politics in a long time." So read the 28 August [editorial of the Financial Times](#), one of the main mouthpieces of big business and the super-rich. The glee of the establishment press of all persuasions, along with the pro-EU wing of the Tories and Blairite Labour politicians, shows who will benefit from and be satisfied with this completely wrong u-turn.

This position - coming just four weeks before the Labour Party conference where members and affiliates can supposedly have their say on policy - will anger the millions of working class people who voted Leave. It risks undermining the hard-won support garnered for Jeremy Corbyn's Labour during the general election campaign by [his pro-worker manifesto](#).

But it would also be false to suggest that it will appease those Labour voters who voted Remain, mainly as a result of revulsion at the reactionary, racist leadership of the establishment Leave campaign and to express a desire to defend the rights of EU migrants. In fact the new turn seems to be a big step back in terms of these issues. The party won't rule out [remaining in the Single Market and Customs Union permanently](#) - as long as a deal could be struck to opt out of the EU's free movement rules. The message is that all that needs to be achieved through Brexit is lower immigration.

Where is the ['workers' Brexit'](#) that Jeremy Corbyn spoke about during the general election campaign in this plan? Where is the promise to reject the EU rules which place barriers in the way of nationalisation - like that of the railways and energy companies promised in Corbyn's manifesto - or which say that [companies' right to make money trumps workers' right to strike](#)? As [explained in an article in the last issue of the Socialist](#): "From its inception [the EU] has aimed to drive through neoliberal, anti-working class measures in order to maximise the profits of the capitalist elite." This is a fact that Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell [have long argued too](#).

After all, it was only weeks before this announcement that [Corbyn said that under a Labour government Brexit would definitely mean leaving the Single Market](#). And only two months ago Corbyn, filled with confidence after the mass support his programme won in the general election, rightly [sacked three front benchers](#) for voting, against the Labour whip, for a parliamentary amendment saying that membership of the Single Market should be retained. There urgently needs to be a statement from Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell clearly opposing the position put by Starmer, and calling for a socialist Brexit in the interests of

the working class. Unless that happens, it will seem that, [as with their agreement to campaign for Remain in the referendum](#), Corbyn and McDonnell have conceded to the right wing on this issue.

This is a mistake which only weakens the position of Corbyn and the left within the Labour Party and their standing among the working class in general. As the Socialist Party has argued since Jeremy first won the leadership, [in the civil war within the Labour Party concession will only invite aggression](#), and instil among workers a scepticism that the left has the determination necessary to transform the party and implement their programme.

The Blairite wing of the Labour Party, having been weakened by the general election result, has been using the issue of a 'soft Brexit' as their main lever to organise against Corbyn. At the behest of the capitalist class they are openly [collaborating with pro-EU big business MPs in all parties](#), including the Tory Party. If it is not countered Starmer's announcement will be a significant victory for these pro-capitalist, neoliberal forces.

Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell should urgently come out fighting, mobilising all those workers and young people who have joined Labour, attended rallies and given support to Corbyn to carry out a top-to-bottom transformation of the party. The Socialist Party calls for:

- [Mandatory reselection](#) to allow Labour Party members a democratic say in who their elected representatives are - kick out the Blairites!
- Open up the Labour Party. [Restore the rights of the trade unions](#) within Labour. [Readmit the socialists](#), with the right to organise in an inclusive federation
- [No more cuts budgets from Labour councils!](#) Let the Tories dare to take on councils protecting our local services!
- [Fight for a socialist Brexit](#). Organise a campaign with European socialists and workers' organisations to use the Brexit talks to tear up the [EU bosses' club rules](#). For a new collaboration of the peoples of Europe on a socialist basis

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Barts health workers' strike: pay up Serco!

Paula Mitchell, London Socialist Party

As we go to press talks are taking place in the boldly fought [Barts NHS strike against greedy private company employer Serco](#).

Twenty-four days of strike action have brought a new confidence and new levels of organisation to the workforce of cleaners, catering staff and porters across four hospitals in this massive east London NHS trust. One cleaner explained to Socialist Party members: "I see cleaners stand up for themselves at work now. They're more confident." We see cleaners who are now confident to publicly explain how essential their work is - they, like all health workers, are the basis on which the entire NHS rests.

Support has come from far and wide in the form of donations, messages and [visits to the picket lines](#). Importantly, from other NHS staff within the trust, but also from other trade unionists and socialists across London, and even internationally.

But most important has been [the fighting spirit of the strikers themselves](#), who have not only chanted, sang and danced on the liveliest of picket lines, but have held meetings and thousands of one-to-one conversations to democratically maintain the resolve of the workforce.

One striker, Amelia, summed up their simple message, which she asked Socialist Party members to publicise:

"The [main reason for our strike is our low pay](#), and loads of extra work created. Serco only think about profits. Of course the patients are our priority. I feel bad not being at my post. But we need people to understand, all we ask for is 3%, 30p."

This is from a company that makes [£82 million profit](#) from the NHS. A striker, who wishes for her name not to be used, adds: "We don't want a private company. We want to go back to the NHS."

[Pressure must continue on Serco](#) and on the trust management, who continue to stand aside. How can a multi-million pound company with millionaire executives not pay an extra 30p an hour to its essential workers - and how can an NHS trust turn a blind eye to this outrage? They should tell Serco to pay up or they won't have the contract! If Serco still digs in, the ideas to protest at the company HQ and at trust events must go ahead.

The [trade union leaders should seek to link up the strikes and generalise the demand for fair pay](#). This would give essential back up to all the disparate disputes that have occurred this summer, [from the Barts workers to the Bank of England](#). Everywhere workers are crying out for a pay rise and for the TUC to take a lead in making it happen.

- Send messages of support to len.hockey@unitetheunion.org
- Donations to Unite LE/7384L, sort code 60-83-01, account number 20344885
- Protest to Serco, send an email to generalenquiries@serco.com and [sign the online petition](#)

Bridgend Ford workers vote for action - the fight is on

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

Bridgend Ford workers have sent a clear message to the company: "Talk about sourcing that will save the plant or we'll fight."

Nearly three-quarters of the shop floor voted in the industrial action ballot, showing that Bridgend workers are absolutely committed to fighting to save the plant and the jobs and south Wales communities that depend on it. The whole of the Welsh labour and trade union movement must stand with the Ford workers.

The workers and their unions have had no alternative but to ballot after [Ford's sourcing plans became clear in February this year](#). They would mean that the workforce would be reduced from 1,800 to just over 600, putting the whole viability of the factory in doubt.

Already, shop floor workers have made themselves unavailable for overtime to build the pressure on senior management. The idea that Ford can be persuaded by mere reason to change its plans is not borne out by history.

In the last two decades, Ford has closed plant after plant. The fact that there are workers in the engine plant from closed [Ford factories in Swansea](#) and Treforest, [and Southampton](#), shows how ruthless the company will be. After the closure of the Southampton transit plant, Ford no longer even makes vehicles in the UK but instead only engines and gear boxes.

That's why the other Ford plants have to support the fight in Bridgend. If it closes, it will only make their factories easier to shut.

What now? The talk of negotiations with Ford are welcome but there has to be a time limit as the clock is ticking.

There has to be plant meetings to decide on the action.

Some may argue that the narrowness of the strike vote means that a work to rule [or overtime ban](#) should be put on instead. But a one-day strike would send a clearer warning to Ford. In any case, some action has to be taken within 28 days to maintain the industrial action ballot. It should be seen as the red line in any talks.

But over and above [the legal limits of the anti-union laws](#), there must be a clear message to Ford: while there is no satisfactory sourcing agreement that secures the plant, any attempt to remove machinery will be stopped by the shop floor.

This summer has seen a succession of disputes and strikes across the country. Recently, [Glasgow janitors](#) and [Birmingham bin workers](#) have forced their bosses back, showing that it's possible to win victories.

Nearly 2,000 car workers have enormous potential power and would have massive support across Wales. The vote for action is in - Ford has to deliver or the fight is on.

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 25 August 2017 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

BT attack on pension benefits

Clive Walder, CWU member (personal capacity)

For the second time in nine years BT is seeking to attack the pension benefits of its workers. In 2008 [the BT unions 'sold' their members a 1% increase in contributions and an increase in the pension age to 65 to protect the long-term interests of BT pensioners.](#)

An expected increase in the deficit by nearly £4 billion [was leaked to the press](#) in advance of this year's triennial review of the scheme's finances. It is very likely that this was a deliberate act on behalf of shareholders who are fed up with continually making contributions to reduce the deficit.

One of the reasons BT is claiming this is necessary is that the old final salary scheme is composed of a dwindling number of contributing members and an ever-increasing number of people drawing pensions.

The cost to the pension fund of financing mass redundancies is also a considerable factor in this situation. But BT decided to close this scheme to new entrants in 2001 helping to create this problem!

Pension fund trustees take advantage of workers' lack of understanding of pension finances by using large numbers to frighten them into accepting reduced benefits. The deficit quoted by BT is what it would be if every member drew their lifetime's pensions at once.

This is clearly something that is never going to happen but such propaganda will frighten workers. In fact BT has completely failed to demonstrate it is unable to afford to continue to finance the deficit.

It is encouraging that the Communication Workers' Union (CWU) has said that it will ballot for industrial action if BT stops further benefit accrual of workers still in the final salary scheme.

The current pensions time bomb demonstrates that capitalism can't guarantee a comfortable retirement. There is an urgent need not just to kick the Tories out of government but also the pension robbers out of the boardrooms and replace them with workers' control of a publicly owned economy which will use the enormous wealth currently enjoyed exclusively by the rich for the benefit of all.

Bron Afon housing workers step up strike

Support workers at Bron Afon Community Housing in Cwmbran, south Wales, have begun their second five-day strike in as many weeks, as the Unison members escalate their [action to send a message to management that £3,000 pay cuts will not be accepted](#) lying down.

Strikers have been boosted by visitors from other trade unions and trade union councils, and by messages of support from service users - one who said she "owed her life" to the workers.

[Jeremy Corbyn too has urged management](#) to "direct all their energy" to resolve the dispute. Some of the strikers were so moved by all the support they were weeping!

One worker told the Socialist: "The pay cuts are bad enough, but they also want to take us out of collective bargaining and give us spot salaries, so we're no longer entitled to any incremental pay increases. It's obvious to us, and increasingly obvious to the rest of the staff, that Bron Afon plans to do the same to other workers if they get away with it."

No doubt other third-sector organisations will jump on the bandwagon if it appears to be picking up momentum. That's why broadening the action makes sense. Bringing more workers out on strike would terrify management.

But although Bron Afon is a severe case of cuts to workers' living standards, its far from the only one. If other outsourced and council workers were inspired to follow the lead shown by those at Bron Afon, a movement could be built to end the relentless driving down of our pay and living standards.

Fight together to scrap the Tory pay cap!

National Shop Stewards Network rally at TUC congress

Sunday 10 September at 1pm, Arundel Suite, Holiday Inn, 137 King's Road, Brighton BN1 2JP - all welcome

Speakers: John McDonnell, shadow chancellor; Len McCluskey, Unite general secretary; Len Hockey, Unite Barts NHS Trust branch secretary; Mark Serwotka, PCS general secretary; Steve Gillan, POA general secretary; Ronnie Draper, BFAWU general secretary; Sean Hoyle, RMT president and Amy Murphy, Usdaw southern division EC member. Chaired by Janice Godrich, PCS president

Unite takes legal action against Argos

James Hunter, Tyneside Socialist Party

On 23 August, Unite the Union announced legal action against Argos, [now owned by the supermarket chain Sainsbury's](#), and employment agencies Single Resource and Templine. It materialised that they are attempting to break the workers' strikes by bringing in paid agency labour at Argos' central distribution centre at Barton business park in Burton-on-Trent.

Unite has accused Argos and those agencies of acting unlawfully.

Argos workers at Barton, along with colleagues at Castleford in Yorkshire, Basildon in Essex and Bridgwater in Somerset, are [striking over Argos' failure to negotiate a fair national agreement concerning redundancy and severance packages](#). The action began on 15 August and ends on 5 September.

The legal claim cuts the first turf for a high court injunction if Argos and the agencies continue to violate regulations that are there to prevent the use of agency staff during industrial action and collusion in an unlawful manner.

Unite has urged Argos' management to engage constructively and positively in talks, rather than attempting to strike bust, and to lay out the basis for a deal concerning the lack of conditions that safeguard workers.

A victory is important to send a message to those in the distribution sector that workers will not be pushed around. And to ensure that distribution contractors are organised on the same terms and conditions as in-house staff, or brought back in-house.

China: debt crisis, state repression and the prospects for workers' struggle

The following article is from an introductory speech on China by Hayashi to delegates attending the recent [Committee for a Workers' International \(CWI\) summer school](#) in Barcelona.

In 2016, there were 2,663 strikes in China, [according to the Hong Kong-based NGO China Labour Bulletin](#). For the first time, the combined numbers of strikes in transport, services and the retail sector was more than in manufacturing industry.

Service sector jobs are even lower paid and with less job security than manufacturing jobs, so it is growth based on the informal sector.

These workers have no contracts or their contracts only exist on a phone app and can be changed at any time. But this technology is also increasingly a platform used to link-up strikes.

In manufacturing industry, unpaid wages and social insurance are the main cause of workers' protests. In 2015, the total amount of unpaid wages was 27.2 billion yuan (\$4 billion). Migrants are the majority of the labour force in construction and manufacturing.

Extreme wealth gap

China has [the most dollar billionaires in the world - 594](#). In China's fake parliament - the National People's Congress - there are [100 billionaires](#)! It's the world's richest parliament. At the same time, workers' [average monthly salary](#) is \$475.

Around [280 million migrant workers](#) have left their home town and go to other cities in China to work. However, as factories have closed down due to the economic crisis, unemployment rates have increased and real wages stagnated. The coastal cities are very expensive places to live and many migrants can no longer afford to work there.

Migrant numbers are falling and this trend can make workers more confident to struggle as they can get greater support in their own home town.

Debt crisis

The [Institute of International Finance puts](#) China's debt in 2017 at 304% of GDP (total output). This is an extremely high level and the increase in the past decade, since the global capitalist crisis began, has been very rapid.

In 2008, [China launched a huge stimulus package](#) to inject cheap credit into the economy. Many local governments and state-owned companies borrowed huge amounts of cheap loans to expand investment. But this led to the accumulation of debt.

The Chinese regime can order the state-owned banks to implement its policies. This has allowed China to accumulate a much higher level of debt without a financial collapse. But this situation cannot continue forever.

President Xi Jinping wants to launch [economic reforms to channel more private capital into state-owned companies](#). His economic agenda is to allow more market competition, hoping to let some indebted small and medium-sized state-owned companies default. This is to reduce overcapacity and increase the efficiency of capital (reducing wasteful investments) and to clear the unsustainable debt.

But, if implemented, this programme means a further slowdown of economic growth. This explains why Xi has in practice rolled back on economic reform by injecting even more credit into the economy.

It also means that if the Chinese government uses the same stimulus measures to deal with the next economic crisis, the effect will be much less. So the government finds it harder and harder to soften the effects of crises.

Housing bubble

[Housing is absolutely unaffordable](#). In first-tier cities like Beijing and Shanghai, for instance, the price for one square metre of property at average housing prices costs a year's average income. In cities like New York and Tokyo it would cost buyers a month's income.

Speculators are increasingly investing in the housing sector because there are no other profitable sectors and the stock market is seen as too risky. This means that if China's housing bubble bursts it will have a bigger effect on the banking system even than in [Japan in the 1990s](#).

With China's low household consumption rate, huge debts and deflation, in the longer term China is likely to follow the Japanese model of low growth or stagnation. If this happens it will cause a bigger political crisis because of the much wider wealth gap and poorer social protection system compared to Japan.

Foreign policy

The Chinese regime's foreign policy is linked to the internal situation and potential for political and economic crises. Xi needs to present himself as a 'strongman' using nationalism to channel popular discontent away from his own policies.

China at this moment has [gained the upper hand over the US in the South China Sea conflict](#). Privately, US strategists accept they cannot reverse China's militarisation of the 'islands' it has built to secure its dominance in the disputed waters - that can only be achieved by war.

But the Chinese economy has also outgrown its national market, a problem that becomes more acute given the international situation, with globalisation in reverse and the rise of protectionism. These processes are reflected in many contradictory ways in relations between the Xi and Trump governments, geopolitics, and China's push for [the 'One Belt, One Road' - Obor - economic plan](#).

Obor is Xi's plan to link 65 countries - which make up 55% of global GDP, 70% of the world's population and 75% of global energy supplies - into a China-led economic sphere.

This is 'imperialism with Chinese characteristics' - it copies the [state capitalist investment model](#) from China to build infrastructure in the Obor countries, but also locking these governments into debt-dependency on China.

China will issue loans to these countries through its new Asian Infrastructure and Investment Bank (AIIB) and other financial agencies, and enable it to export the debt burden from China.

Obor countries include many that face military and security crises, terrorism and civil wars - countries like Pakistan, Afghanistan, Burma, and the central Asian states. That's why the Chinese regime is considering deploying or employing military forces in these countries to protect its assets.

There are already rumblings of mass resistance over land grabs, pollution, corruption and national oppression in several of these countries, which can also be reflected in heightened anti-China and anti-Chinese nationalist moods.

This points to political upheavals in the future between pro- and anti-China wings of local ruling elites. Taken together with the economic risks, this can lead to 'imperial overstretch' which, instead of saving the Chinese regime, can trigger economic and political crises in China.

New repression

More people are now being charged with the crime of 'subversion'. This [includes NGO staff](#) and [human rights lawyers](#) who have been arrested in recent crackdowns.

The liberals in China do not stand for the overthrow of the authoritarian regime. They do not put 'radical' proposals like free elections, but only very modest prescriptions, eg fewer media and internet restrictions.

Facing an increase in workers' strikes and mass protests, state repression is the most serious since the [1989 Tiananmen Square movement](#). For example, all newspapers (around 2,000) must now follow the orders of the central government propaganda departments on reporting political news. The wording must be exactly the same.

State repression is also extending overseas. The regime wants to show its power to [increase its control over Hong Kong](#) and Taiwan and block ideas of independence.

Power struggle

The regime's 19th 'Communist Party' congress later this year will see a five-yearly change of leadership. Behind the scenes [a sharp power struggle is being fought among the ruling elite](#).

Xi is due to stay in power for five more years but he also wants to expand his power, promote his supporters and weaken all other factions.

The factional struggle within the regime is not at all about political ideas or programme. It is about protecting the interests of different factions, with their power based on their regions and sectors of the economy.

Xi has used the anti-corruption campaign for five years as a tool in the power struggle to remove some opponents and warn rival factions not to oppose him. The anti-corruption campaign was never really about corruption because all the factions are corrupt.

Political reform?

Xi Jinping is forced to try to centralise power within the Chinese state because of its weakening grip over regional governments and their increasing unwillingness to follow Beijing's orders on economic policy.

Unless facing mass revolutionary upheavals, Xi's regime is unlikely to make significant democratic concessions.

The Chinese regime's fear is that any small reforms will trigger mass revolutionary waves and hasten its overthrow. They fear the territorial break-up of China under these conditions, and that is not completely unrealistic.

The ideas of [Trotsky's permanent revolution](#) are more applicable in China today in the struggle to transform what is a unique form of state capitalist dictatorship because the capitalist class is extremely dependent on the current state; the remaining capitalist democratic tasks (ie democratic elections, resolution of national question, etc) must be carried out by working class people.

However, the working class will not stop at bourgeois democratic change but proceed to carry out a socialist revolution.

- [Full article at socialistworld.net](#)
 - For more analysis see [chinaworker.info](#)
-

Hong Kong: mass demonstration against repression

Socialist Action (CWI Hong Kong) reporters

On 20 August, up to 140,000 people poured onto Hong Kong's streets in the biggest anti-government protest since [the 2014 'umbrella movement'](#). This incredible demonstration, protesting the [imprisonment of 16 young democracy activists](#) (including [three student leaders](#) of the 2014 movement), was called at just five days' notice.

By responding in such overwhelming numbers the people of Hong Kong provided a stark contrast to the pan-democratic opposition leaders who have been reluctant to call for protests despite the worsening crackdown by the pro-Beijing government.

Discontent has been building up in the face of a deepening crackdown that is blatantly coordinated to rig future elections (those jailed for three months or more are banned for five years from running in elections). But until now this discontent found no outlet to show itself openly.

The government's ultra-repressive master plan which includes ejecting elected legislators from the legislature and stepping up arrests and charges linked to political protests is clearly coordinated from Beijing to suit the needs of the Chinese dictatorship.

Now, the government of Chief Executive Carrie Lam Cheng Yuet-ngor has been thrown onto the defensive and is attempting to portray itself as a victim of unfair criticism. Nobody believes this.

Significantly, the march was initiated by smaller, more radical parties and groups including the left-leaning League of Social Democrats and the student-led Demosisto. The main pan-democratic organisations were forced to follow.

The urgent question now is how to follow up with further action. The strategy of the government is to ride out the storm of anger.

Socialist Action believes there is a historic opportunity to rebuild the democratic struggle, we cannot allow the mass anger and readiness to struggle to dissipate. But that needs a clear plan of escalating mass action to be put forward, including the need for a one-day strike to be called as the next step.

There is also the need to link the democracy struggle to the fight against capitalism, as well as linking to [the struggle against dictatorship inside China](#).

- [Full article at chinaworker.info](#)

Where is Scotland going?

Fight for socialist change

Philip Stott, Socialist Party Scotland

The dramatic rise of the Scottish National Party (SNP) has been thrown into a sharp reverse recently. The [partial collapse in the electoral support for the SNP](#) at the June 2017 general election - a loss of 21 of their 56 MPs and 500,000 votes - speaks of a growing mood of disappointment in a party that claimed to be "anti-austerity".

In practice the opposite has been the case, [as Socialist Party Scotland has explained](#) on many occasions. By implementing spending cuts on an unprecedented scale in Scotland, the SNP leadership has begun to be exposed in the eyes of broad sections of working class and young people.

Increasingly the SNP is also clashing with groups of workers taking strike action, including [college lecturers](#), [teachers](#), [ScotRail staff](#) and other public sector workers.

Even though [the 2014 independence referendum was narrowly lost](#), the [SNP gained a landslide victory in the 2015 Westminster elections](#) as hundreds of thousands of radicalised independence supporters rallied to the 'anti-establishment' SNP.

The growth of this middle class-led radical nationalist party to over 100,000 - including many new working class and young members - was itself a distorted reflection of the space for a mass workers' party in Scotland.

The SNP has never been a left party. SNP policy has generally opposed tax rises on the super-rich and big business and indeed for decades advocated major tax cuts for corporations in their blueprint for an independent Scotland.

It is true that as [Labour stampeded to the right under Blair and Brown](#) the SNP successfully positioned itself to the left of New Labour, making significant electoral gains as a result. However, its radical populism has, so far, never gone beyond a stout defence of capitalism, albeit of a 'fairer' variety.

An SNP-led Scottish government for over a decade, and now in control of many local councils, has seen them largely act as a conveyor belt for Tory austerity.

Brexit

A marked turn to the right by Nicola Sturgeon and the SNP leaders followed the Brexit vote of June 2016. On Brexit, the SNP's position is at all costs to fight to retain access to the single market and the customs union - ie in the interests of big business.

While the 2014 referendum was fought as a proxy for opposition to vast inequality and cuts, and was a mass expression of class anger at the establishment, today Sturgeon et al have sought to frame a second referendum as being necessary to "protect access to the European single market".

Alongside the role of the SNP in making cuts, the prioritisation of big-business interests is undermining the SNP's base of support among the working class in Scotland.

This is especially pronounced among the [one third of pro-independence supporters who are opposed to the EU](#). At the June 2017 Westminster election the SNP lost 40% of their voters who backed Leave in 2016.

Socialist Party Scotland, along with the RMT trade union, made a [socialist, internationalist case for exit from the bosses EU](#) during that referendum.

The conduct of SNP politicians has also come under increasing scrutiny - the overwhelming majority of who are drawn from the middle class, managerial, small and medium business community.

Dismay is an accurate depiction of the mood of many of those who looked to the SNP following the 2014 referendum. This change in outlook has also impacted on the prospects for a second referendum.

Indyref 2?

SNP leader Nicola Sturgeon "reset" the Scottish government's plans for a second independence referendum at the end of June following the party's heavy losses at the general election. Their plans to legislate immediately for a second referendum, [voted through the Scottish parliament in March 2017](#), have now been shelved.

A deep polarisation has now set in. Scottish Tory leader Ruth Davidson's single issue campaign in the general election - no to indyref 2 - effectively mobilised a large part of the anti-independence vote from 2014, allowing the Tories to win 13 seats at Westminster.

Significantly, support for independence is still at the same level as it was in 2014, [around 45%](#), a historic high, despite falling support for the SNP. Yet it is clearly the case that the intensity of the mood on the national

question has dipped.

No longer do a section of radicalised working class and young people currently believe that the SNP offers a real alternative to fighting austerity. And this has had an impact on the immediate prospect for a second referendum as the SNP has moved in a more explicit pro-business direction.

Labour's mistakes

Labour's modest recovery in Scotland, winning back six of the 40 seats they lost in 2015, was a pale reflection of what would have been possible. Continuing to oppose independence outright and a second referendum is a huge barrier to winning over the many anti-austerity workers and young people who are attracted to Corbyn's left policies.

In practice the Labour left has carried on with a policy that is in reality identical to that of Kezia Dugdale (Scottish Labour leader) and the anti-Corbyn Labour right.

The SNP gained massively as a result by championing democratic rights but also posing as an anti-austerity alternative to Labour. The consequences of Corbyn allowing the Labour right in Scotland to frame the manifesto on Scotland and indyref 2 for the general election was to hugely limit the potential gains they could have made.

By standing on a [fighting platform in favour of an independent socialist Scotland](#) and a reversal of all austerity, socialist ideas could grow dramatically. This has to be linked to the building of a voluntary and democratic socialist confederation between an independent socialist Scotland and a socialist England, Wales and Ireland as a step to a socialist Europe.

There is no solution to any of the problems we face - poverty, deprivation and cuts - within the crushing straitjacket of capitalism. It is this approach that Socialist Party Scotland argues that the trade unions, the Corbyn movement and the socialist left should adopt.

Tasks

A serious struggle must be [waged by the Labour left to wrestle control from the right wing](#) in Scotland. This should be allied to a pledge that under the new leadership all Labour's elected politicians must refuse to vote for cuts in councils, the Scottish parliament and at Westminster.

The trade [unions who are affiliated to Labour should have their full rights restored](#). In addition, the party should be opened up to all socialists and left and anti-austerity activists to join, [including those who were expelled](#) in the past.

Given the reluctance of the Labour left to challenge the out-and-out capitalist elements in their party, we must continue building an electoral alternative to cuts and austerity. While of course this means not standing against left Labour candidates who pledge to fight cuts, in most cases that is not currently the case.

Since 2010 Socialist Party Scotland has pioneered, alongside the RMT union, the building of the Scottish Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) and local anti-cuts groups to stand in elections. We would appeal to trade unions and left activists to discuss how we can take this further.

The building of organised and coordinated mass struggle by the trade unions and communities in order to defeat austerity is also essential. The recent [victory by the Glasgow janitors](#) shows what is possible, as did the recent [victory by college lecturers over pay](#).

Socialist Party Scotland has always opposed the SNP leaders and their pro-capitalist policies, including during the referendum when we fought for a Yes majority.

We did not make the fundamental errors of groups on the left who to one degree or another gave uncritical support to the SNP, both during and since the 2014 referendum.

The key task facing the working class, young people, the trade unions and the left is to build a mass combative movement to end austerity and oppose all the parties who inflict it.

- [Full article on socialistpartyscotland.org.uk](http://socialistpartyscotland.org.uk)
-

Chatsworth workers and patients fight to save ward

"We will not stop until we have ripped this decision apart!"

- No to NHS cuts and closures!

Alison Beaumont, Lucy Bush, Claire Broughton and Tom Hunt, Chatsworth nurses

Chatsworth ward in Mansfield is a vital facility for some of the most vulnerable members of our society. This is where we as staff members come in!

We are advocates for people with life-long neurological conditions. They need a local unit that can love, nurture and support them. No other local services can replace us. We are a family in every sense of the word. And we are immensely proud of what we do!

At 3pm on 21 July we heard the sad news our ward was to close. Staff left with heavy hearts, horrified at this appalling decision. Immediately discussions turned into ideas and hope to save our much-loved ward. It was amazing how people moved forward swiftly with plans.

With our patients our priority, [we formed a campaign](#). Current patients, ex-patients and their families rallied round.

We hold regular committee meetings, stalls to make the public aware of the true facts and are now planning for our march. We're delivering huge numbers of posters and leaflets across town.

We have destroyed every argument the trust can offer. It is clearly about saving money - targets set by a Tory government with no authority or mandate!

On 23 August the trust chief executive came to the ward. He acknowledged they had to come up with a plan before closure. November's deadline was quashed, the team won't be separated and no disciplinary action will be taken against staff involved in the campaign.

Although these are significant gains, the service remains under threat. It's been a very hard five weeks. We have had the might of the trust pressing down on us and we fight valiantly on. Mansfield has a right to this service. We will not stop until we have ripped this decision apart!

The trust hasn't realised the staff's concern for their patients take precedent over their own careers!

A public meeting was organised and the BBC brought their cameras. There were radio interviews and press releases.

Most of the staff have never been involved in a protest, never mind led a campaign! The sense of fear that they may get into trouble for organising a campaign was soon overcome.

We are currently campaigning with stalls in the town centre. The stall is popular and is gaining lots of attention. Alison's daughter has produced a campaign song.

Public support has been overwhelming. Eventually the clinical commissioning group (CCG) took the unprecedented step of requesting a meeting with the campaign. On 17 August [the ward day-room was packed](#)

[with staff and patients, ex-patients and families](#), all demanding: 'what will happen to us?' Four CCG members, including the chief executive and two trust directors, listened but had no answers.

We have destroyed every argument the trust can offer. It is clearly about saving money - targets set by a Tory government with no authority or mandate!

- Join our Save Chatsworth demonstration on 2 September. Assemble 11am at Mansfield Community Hospital followed by a rally at 12noon at Butter Cross Square
- Send messages of support to weareallchatsworth17@gmail.com

The Socialist Party says:

Courageous Chatsworth ward staff show how the NHS can be defended. Just one 16-bed ward in a three-ward hospital has forced senior management to back off from its original closure plan.

The campaign calls itself #WeAreAllChatsworth because if it closed today, somewhere else will close tomorrow. Chatsworth's stand is for the whole NHS.

Health trade union leaders, locally and nationally, must show similar commitment. Given a lead, NHS workers are prepared to fight to save their service.

One reason management wants to close Chatsworth is to transfer staff to the nearby main hospital. Years of falling pay and removal of student bursaries make it harder to recruit.

Cuts administered by bullying management and the drive to privatisation are forcing many out of NHS employment.

After the huge [Health Campaigns Together demo in March](#) and alongside [the Barts Serco strikers](#), Chatsworth ward's stand shows there must be no further delay.

The TUC, health unions and Jeremy Corbyn must turn autumn into a campaign to defeat the government's public sector pay cap, oust the Tories and save our NHS.

Campaigners fight second Yorkshire Women's Aid closure in two years

Amy Cousens, Leeds Socialist Party

'Women's Lives Matter' campaigners took to the streets of Doncaster on 26 August to defend the last Women's Aid in south Yorkshire.

South Yorkshire Women's Aid (SYWA) was set up in January of this year after [Doncaster Women's Aid closed in March 2016 due to funding cuts](#). The campaign, which was set up last year to defend the service, heroically fought Doncaster council and won a grant from them to re-set up a Women's Aid.

The hard-fought-for £30,000 grant pays for three part-time staff and limited resources - it does not cover the rent for their one-room office. Since setting up the service has had over 100 referrals and the case load of the staff is growing.

Despite the dire situation, Doncaster council has told SYWA that they will not be able to apply for any funds from the council as there will be no money for the voluntary sector at all now in Doncaster. This comes after Doncaster council has been told by central government that it needs to make a [further £70 million worth of cuts](#).

Women's Lives Matter campaigners absolutely refute this 'no money' verdict from the council. A recent [report by the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition shows](#) that Doncaster has £81.7 million in reserves.

Activists from [Women's Lives Matter](#) are absolutely clear that this is a part of the wider austerity agenda being implemented by the Tory government but being carried out by local authorities, 124 of which, including Doncaster, are Labour-controlled.

The campaign is made up of staff, volunteers, trustees, ex-clients (of SYWA), community campaigners, ex-Care UK strikers and the Socialist Party.

We are adamant that we will protest the council [until they provide funds](#). However our demands go further than this. The cuts facing SYWA are just a part of the funding cuts that are happening to public services across the country.

The campaign not only demands funds to continue to run SYWA but an end to all austerity, which is a political and ideological decision against the poor, not a fiscal reality.

We demand that all public services, education and housing are funded adequately. All of these are essential in not only assisting domestic violence victims to have safe and secure lives, but for all working class people.

Without widening our fight to save this service to one that fights all austerity and argues for funding for all services, we will only win services that barely tread water to support domestic violence victims. For the women using SYWA we have no choice but to fight the cuts - when they cut, women bleed.

Last year, the [Doncaster Free Press reported](#) that Doncaster Children's Services Trust had released figures which showed that in the three month period between October and December 2015 there had been 2,057 incidents of domestic abuse reported in the town.

This works out to be the equivalent of one every hour. And this is just the ones that we know about. [Refuge, a leading domestic violence charity, has found](#) that a woman is assaulted on average 35 times before making her first call to the police. This means that in reality, domestic abuse rates could be much higher than what figures show.

Exact, up-to-date figures on domestic abuse are not available for Doncaster. But [Women's Aid nationally reports](#) that two women a week are murdered by a violent partner or ex-partner, and [Refuge says](#) three women a week die by suicide to escape abuse.

Community and artists campaign to save Todmorden College

Peter Robson, Bradford Socialist Party and community-based artist

The town of Todmorden, nestling in the south Pennines on the border between Lancashire and Yorkshire, has had a community college since the 1950s.

In 2016 Calderdale Labour council announced the complete cessation of funding for the building and therefore a death sentence on a community asset that has trained and educated working class people in this town for years.

But the local authority is 'sitting' on assets of nearly £100 million. If this college ceases to exist, the nearest further education colleges will be Burnley nine miles away, Rochdale ten miles away and Halifax 12 miles away.

The community is also enraged as [Aldi has applied to build a supermarket](#) on the site.

Connected to this would be a children's centre and youth centre, provided by Aldi.

These companies know that in poorer towns they just have to suggest the potential for cash and jobs and councils cannot wait to get their noses in the trough. This also shows the further privatisation of once public services.

A campaign has been set up called [Save Our College In Todmorden](#), which I am part of. I am also campaigning for the college to continue to be used as an artistic hub.

We will continue to fight for this essential service in a town that has some of the highest levels of deprivation.

Orgreave campaign calls Halloween rally

Orgreave Truth and Justice Campaign

The Orgreave Truth and Justice Campaign has called a 'Death of Justice Rally' to mark the one year anniversary of Home Secretary Amber Rudd's shocking decision not to hold any form of [inquiry into the infamous 'Battle of Orgreave'](#) where 95 miners were beaten up, fitted up and locked up in June 1984.

We see it fitting that this decision was made on Halloween as we all know it's the old monsters and ghosts of the Tory party who were responsible for the injustice then, and that deny us justice now, 33 years later.

We encourage you to join us on this Halloween night to rally against the evil of the past and present!

Fancy dress optional but encouraged!

There will be a 'zombie army', spooky samba band and circus acts to entertain the crowd, along with speakers from a wide range of campaigns plus after party!

Below is a list of ways you can help make this Halloween a nightmare for the Tories!

- Join the demonstration on 31 October, at 5.30pm at Sheffield, Devonshire Green before a march to Sheffield Law Court
 - Keep checking our blog for the latest info at otjc.org.uk/deathofjustice-rally
 - Make a financial donation to the rally. You can use the PayPal link on our website or send cheques payable to 'Orgreave Truth and Justice Campaign' to Joe Rollin, Unite the Union, Organising Department, NEY&H Region, 55 Call Lane, Leeds, LS1 7BW
 - Display our posters, badges and stickers - download and print from our website
-

Comment: safe cycling

Should you be furious about 'furious cycling'?

Martin Powell-Davies, Lewisham Socialist Party and Penge Cycle Club (personal capacity)

As I cycled back from work along the South Circular Road, I decided I should write some thoughts about some of the anti-cyclist prejudice that seems to have been whipped up as a consequence of the [conviction of cyclist Charlie Alliston](#).

Let me say at the outset that I am certainly not automatically jumping to the defence of the convicted cyclist. There can only be heartfelt sympathy for pedestrian Kim Briggs' husband and family who have suffered such a sudden and tragic loss.

The trial and verdict have also been hotly debated among regular cyclists like myself. We all know that, just like car drivers, there are people who cycle badly and give others a bad name.

However, we also know that when you crash on two wheels rather than four it is the bike rider who is likely to come off worse. That includes crashes with pedestrians - as my brother-in-law can vouch for when he ended up hospitalised when someone stepped off the pavement into his path as he was riding slowly past.

Fatalities

Kim Briggs was just one of the many fatalities and serious injuries that have resulted from cycling accidents. The [Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents reported](#) 100 cyclists dying in 2015 alone, many at roundabouts and junctions when either a driver or cyclist failed to look properly.

Commuting on a bike in London is not just physical exercise, but also an exercise in constant concentration.

Looking out for the driver who is about to turn without indicating. The pedestrian about to walk off the kerb without looking. The erratic driving of those texting in the traffic, or even under the influence of one substance or another.

Of course, nobody but Charlie Alliston knows exactly what the circumstances were when he collided with Kim Briggs. He certainly didn't do himself any favours with the insensitive comments he posted online after the crash.

However, many cyclists have questioned attempts by the prosecution to demonise him, and the debatable 'expert witness' claims about stopping distances.

Alliston should certainly have had a front brake fitted. But without knowing more about how much time he had to react, it's hard to know whether or not that brake would have actually avoided the collision.

Unfortunately press reporting of trials rarely gives a balanced account - as the Jobstown defendants discovered in Ireland! We will have to trust that the jury who heard the whole evidence reached the right conclusion in rejecting the manslaughter charge.

Certainly some cyclists have complained that there appear to be double standards at work. They ask whether a driver would have been prosecuted if a pedestrian had walked out in front of a car without looking - if that was in fact the case with Kim Briggs.

On the other hand, I do wonder whether Alliston - without being able to change to a lower gear on his 'fixie' bike - could have been too concerned about maintaining his speed.

Having said that, it's important to stress that riding at a good speed does not imply riding dangerously. In fact, research suggests that slower riders are often the most vulnerable because - [as the Times put it](#) - "faster cyclists may be treated with more respect by drivers and subjected to fewer overtaking manoeuvres."

So when cyclists ride fast enough to keep up with the traffic, and go to the front of traffic queues so that cars can't turn left across their path, we are riding safely, not dangerously.

Rather than allowing the press to whip up division between pedestrians, cyclists and drivers, we should be united in demanding the urgent investment that is needed - particularly in London - to provide a safe, affordable, efficient and sustainable public transport system.

That needs to include investment in cycling infrastructure to provide for the increasing numbers of commuters who rightly see it as a healthy, cheaper and non-polluting way of getting to work.

Music review: Another Day

Catchy folk rock with a socialist edge

Phil Culshaw, Hull Socialist Party

'Another Day' is a new collection of strong songs written and performed by Hull socialist Bernie Laverick, accompanied by his friends The Made in Hull Band.

Together they create a great folk-rock sound reminiscent of Rod Stewart's 'Maggie May'. It's music which the pioneers of the labour movement, the Chartists, would recognise - but with a modern twist.

The opening title track is a breakneck skiffle diatribe against the everyday injustices faced by working class people. It has a flavour of Billy Bragg's version of the Red Flag on his album 'The Internationale'.

'Louder You Scream' continues the thunderous pace, the sound of Hull Fair drowns out the struggle of ordinary people to have their grievances heard above the mantra of the media, "they're all the same it's you to blame."

Bernie is a fine songsmith with a talent for crafting great harmonies and hook lines. His music has a passionate message, but is deceptively bright and breezy with the interplay of the violin and banjo summoning up a pastoral soundscape.

The album takes a melancholy turn with its middle songs, starting with 'British Revolution', a song of defiance and determination. It dwells upon the determination to struggle for change even though that involves sacrifice because of the belief a better world is possible.

'Hear My Voice' continues in this mood, but is an intimate song of shared love and comradeship. Similarly 'If This Were You' is bittersweet. The lyrics expose the suffering we witness daily in the news around the world and provocatively pose the question: faced with the same circumstances, how would you respond?

'Light the Flame' then picks up the beat, passionately imploring you to rally to the cause. The album ends all too soon with ['Humber Calling', an atmospheric finale](#) which celebrates the dawning optimism in Hull's year as city of culture.

It conjures up the Humber Bridge stretching out through the early morning mist on the estuary, inviting the world to cross over and experience the city and its people now illuminated in the first sunrays of a new dawn.

Another Day stands in the best tradition of British radical folk music. Its catchy tunes are instantly memorable and have a pop sensibility that disarms. But this belies a greater depth of lyric which challenges you to look at the world in a different light.

- Another Day is available from the band on CD at £7 - [visit 'Bernie Laverick and The Made in Hull Band' on Facebook](#)

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.

Beggar bosses

Yes, even the bosses are feeling the pinch! It seems that pay for the chief executives of Britain's biggest companies is down on average by nearly £1 million.

It appears [the bosses' wages fell by 17%](#) - to £4.5 million each on average in 2016. While millions of workers are struggling to get by or having to resort to foodbanks!

If ever there was a need to get rid of this rotten capitalist system which goes to benefit these few rich parasites feeding off the backs of workers then it's time to change it and bring socialism centre stage!

Bill Murray, Birmingham

Selection stir

Full marks to Jeremy Corbyn for [personally backing a rule change](#) that will allow new members to participate in council candidate selection meetings. Previously only those who joined before summer of 2015 were allowed a vote.

Meanwhile the Whingeing Tendency is in full cry. The democratic decision of Wavertree Constituency Labour Party members to elect a general committee of their choice has been greeted with horror by the Blairites.

Yvette Cooper has described the eminently reasonable [suggestion for their MP Luciana Berger to "get on board"](#) as an [attempt to "intimidate" her](#). These sensitive souls seem to forget their diatribe of hate and sabotage against JC and calls for many of his supporters to be expelled.

Caroline Flint, apparently suffering from amnesia, joined calls for talk of reselection to be abandoned as a distraction when Labour should be concentrating on fighting the Tories.

Even right-wing BBC hack Andrew Neil reminded her the Blairites had done exactly that after Cameron and co resigned. Instead of attacking the Tories, they turned their fire on their democratically elected leader.

The [fantastic reception for JC at Durham](#) and the clear hostility to the Blairites indicate massive support for empowering the members to select candidates of their choice.

Tony Mulhearn, Liverpool

Health and safety gone mad

Not so long ago, union health and safety reps would know the local Health and Safety Executive (HSE) officer delegated to cover their workplace by sight or by name.

Nowadays we have more chance of seeing a ghost, or communicating with a working brain cell belonging to Donald Trump, than seeing an HSE officer - unless there's been a fatality or close to one.

Certainly since 2010 the idea of an independent HSE has been slowly deteriorating as [lurking privatisation sets in](#). There's a move to run the HSE much the same way as the US runs its health and safety department.

Many companies hide under the guise of 'best practice', especially where health and safety is concerned. Best practice for who?

The worker covertly followed and monitored for time off due to a works accident?

The worker who is visited at home after suffering an injury at work, under the so-called duty of care? More to do with pressurising a person to return to work before it needs to be reported to the HSE.

Workers dismissed for allegedly contributing to their own accident? That's sending a message to others: don't report an accident or we will move heaven and earth to prove you were at fault.

I ask again: where have all the HSE inspectors gone?

Rebel with a Cause, Rotherham

The Machine Age

Steve met Ruth at the factory gates when the bell went, as they did five days a week.

"They've got another new machine in," he said.

"Really?" Ruth pulled her lipstick and a mirror out of her bag and began doing up her face as she walked.

"Yep. Fastens rivets, this one. Seems they bring a new machine in every week. Mr Harris is talking about one of these things to scan order forms now. Put another department out of work, I daresay." He sighed.

"Sometimes I wonder how much longer I'm going to have a living. I worked so hard for this job, you know? Since I was 15. It takes skill, working on an assembly line, that's what some people don't seem to realise.

"Well, I don't mind putting the work in, but after all the years I've worked for this company, all the years we've all worked for Mr bloody Harris, they could at least show us some respect. I mean, that's what it's about, isn't it? Respect. 'Cause for all his talk about working environments where everyone feels valued, the minute he can find a machine which can do our jobs, out we go.

"Do they ever wonder how we're gonna support ourselves? There's a girl I know, Mary. She's just lost her job. Just had a baby. How's she gonna pay the rent? How's she gonna look after her kid? And when he grows up, how's he gonna look after himself and his family? 'Cause there aren't any jobs. There just aren't any jobs.

"It doesn't matter how hard you work, how clever you are, how much money you spent on degrees and the like, unless you can do what a machine can't - or you know the right people - there just aren't any jobs."

He sighed again. "I don't feel valued in my working environment... Say, you don't seem to care very much."

Ruth lowered her lipstick. "Don't you see? If there are machines to do all the work that needs doing, to keep society going and such, then the only thing standing between us and wealth, plenty, and lives of leisure is... Mr Harris."

Rebecca Dale

Fascism falsehood

A Conservative Gloucestershire county councillor has taken the debate about the Labour vote in the general election to a new level.

Councillor Lynden Stowe, cabinet member for economy, skills and growth, compared the record youth turnout in June to the Hitler Youth. He also likened the Labour Party to the Nazi party, and Jeremy Corbyn to Adolf Hitler.

His comments on social media were in response to Corbyn's speech at Glastonbury. They have since been deleted, although [he told a local newspaper he stands by them](#).

Sue Powell, Gloucester

<http://www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/26043>