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Socialism 2017: Organising to fight back

Over 1,000 workers, young people, campaigners, activists, trade unionists, students and international guests gathered in central London on 11-12 November for Socialism 2017.

It felt clear to all that this was our biggest event to date. The serious, determined and enthusiastic mood was contagious and left many wanting to get even more stuck in to the battles in workplaces and communities across the country.

We celebrated the [centenary of the Russian revolution](#) throughout the weekend and were inspired in particular by the work of our sister parties in the US and Catalonia.

But as Hannah Sell, Socialist Party deputy general secretary, pointed out in the closing rally, this wasn't just about the far away or the historical. Socialism 2017 was about taking those lessons and using them in the here and now.

The financial appeal at the Saturday night rally raised over £42,000 and many joined or expressed an interest in joining the Socialist Party.

Saturday rally: Revolutionary movements then and now

James Ivens

Behind the platform, moving pictures. Petrograd workers in black and white. Marchers today in colour. Their impatient strides the same.

"Who would believe that the janitor or watchman of the court building would suddenly become chief justice of the court of appeals, or the hospital orderly manager of the hospital?"

The lamentations of a tsarist general opened the Rally for Socialism in the centenary of the Russian revolution.

Chairing was Sarah Wrack, editor of the Socialist. "The Bolsheviks, under the leadership of Trotsky and Lenin, had believed it. And they fought for it. And they led the working class to win it."

But Peter Taaffe, general secretary of the Socialist Party, noted that "now we find the revolution and its lessons are ignored." Why? "Because revolution is on the agenda."

The profit system is turning inside out. We are "regaled every day by a blizzard of facts" such as in the Paradise Papers. "This is not tax evasion or avoidance. This is theft - on a gargantuan scale."

The bosses are wrestling with their own panic. The ruling classes face "massive" splits "on a world scale."

In the US, Donald Trump "could split the Republican Party." The world left renaissance could also split the Democrats. And in Britain, Labour "remains two parties in one."

"Of course we support Jeremy Corbyn's anti-austerity programme. But," Peter asks of Jeremy Corbyn, "do your own members" - Blairite councillors - "support your programme in local government, who are carrying through cuts?"

We do not want another 1931, where "the right kept quiet, and then stabbed the labour movement in the back," forming a 'national government' with part of the Tories.

"Those people who are opposed to Corbyn, at council level, we will oppose them. By all means possible."

"Why did the Russian revolution triumph? It was the Bolshevik Party" and its policy of "no compromise with the capitalist enemy."

"Long live the Russian revolution. Long live Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky" and all the "nameless heroes" of the working class. "Long live our own revolution... That is a future worth fighting for."

Workers in the PCS union, organised civil servants, rank among those heroes today. The Tory pay cap has straitened public sector workers' lives for seven years.

"And our answer," said Chris Baugh, the rally's opening speaker, "has been a consultative pay ballot, with 99% voting to reject the pay cap - and nearly 80% in a vote to take action."

Chris is a long-standing union militant and Socialist Party member. He's been elected assistant general secretary of PCS since 2004. "I'm proud of the contribution I've made over three decades of work."

This includes "helping defeat one of the most reactionary leaderships in the British trade union movement in the CPSA," predecessor of the PCS.

Cabinet papers released this year prove a "conspiracy between the Thatcher government and that right-wing leadership."

Union bureaucrats [connived to deny John Macreadie, a supporter of Militant, the Socialist Party's forerunner, his elected position as leader.](#)

And last year, "the mother of all recruitment exercises" foiled a Tory manoeuvre aimed at removing thousands of union members.

Chris wants to build "the coordinated industrial action needed to force back such an enfeebled Tory government."

But "to counter the vast imbalance of wealth and power between capital and labour" also means "offering an alternative to a failed capitalist system: offering the vision of a socialist society."

Alternatives are rising again. Ian Mearns, Labour MP for Gateshead, is one of Jeremy Corbyn's few allies in Westminster. "In the Labour Party now, nationalisation is no longer a dirty word.

"And guess what? Socialism isn't a dirty word either."

"Comrades, this government isn't on the verge of crisis. It isn't about to collapse. It is collapsing." Meanwhile, Ian says, Labour is "not reunited, but we are reuniting." This is one of our points of difference. A battle is needed to kick out the Blairites.

Ian is a former member of the Militant-led Labour Party Young Socialists (YS). He wants Labour to become a "campaigning movement" again. "We've never done political education. The political education I got in the YS was from the YS and the Militant!"

Corbyn's promise of "nationalisation of the railways and water isn't revolutionary." But "socialism is now re-emerging as a mainstream concept."

National liberation struggles are re-emerging too. Coral Latorre is general secretary of Catalonia's Sindicat d'Estudiants (students' union).

"People tired with the rule of the Spanish and Catalan oligarchy have filled the streets to fight against those who impose austerity and oppress us."

The Sindicat d'Estudiants [organised four student general strikes](#), leading to a general strike of workers. 150,000 marched in Barcelona.

"It was proved that with mass mobilisations, of course we can defeat an unjust law. And it doesn't matter how many times the state tried to forbid the referendum, or how many policemen they sent."

"We see that revolutionary potential in the movement." But we do not fight to install "the same Catalan ruling class that have provoked misery."

"Els carrers seran sempre els nostres: the streets will be forever ours. For a socialist Catalonia. For a socialist world."

2017 also marks [40 years since mass pickets defended low-paid strikers at Grunwick](#) - most Asian, most women.

Socialist Party member Isai Priya of [Tamil Solidarity](#) said that today, "refugees living in Britain are amongst the most oppressed in our society."

They languish for years in detention centres. Inside they work for as little as £1 an hour, "cheap labour for greedy bosses." Outside "they are denied the basic rights such as the right to work or study."

But the Refugee Rights campaign is led by refugees organising to win these rights. And they want the backing of the trade union movement.

A block of refugees and supporters stood and brandished their demands. The shining smiles of class fighters surrounding them showed delight in finding new comrades in the struggle.

That struggle needs resources. "Lenin looked at finance as a measure of the strength of Bolshevik support in the working class," said Paula Mitchell, Socialist Party London regional secretary.

Paula presided over a stunning collection. Goal: £30,000. Received: £42,021. "You could say that socialists are the original crowdfunders."

But new, mass participation does not end at donation.

"Millions of people are now clamouring for a left-wing agenda, even a radical agenda, something the Democratic establishment is not prepared to give."

Kshama Sawant, Seattle city councilmember for Socialist Alternative, the Socialist Party's co-thinkers in the United States.

"For all the candidates who have won this year on the Democratic ticket - we will need to see. This will be a test."

Trump's administration is in "crisis mode, month after month." But the bosses are "caught in a vice grip." Neither party dares move to impeach. "They fear the damage to the whole establishment."

Socialist Alternative lights the way with its audacity. It helped [mobilise 50,000 protesters after Trump's election](#).

It shut down Seatac airport to oppose his travel ban. It led the victorious fight for a \$15 minimum wage in Minneapolis.

And "while the right wing has been emboldened enough to call their own rallies, including in Charlottesville, the response, the counterprotests, have been even larger."

"We are indeed moving into a stage of revolt."

Sunday closing rally: "Socialism is back!"

Sarah Wrack

The themes of workers, youth, internationalism and socialism - which ran through the whole weekend - were reflected in the four speakers at the closing rally: national chair of Socialist Students Theo Sharrief, assistant

general secretary of Unite the Union Howard Beckett, Irish socialist MP Paul Murphy and deputy general secretary of the Socialist Party Hannah Sell.

Theo explained that on budget day on 22 November Socialist Students is organising an education shutdown - local protests, walkouts and occupations - in response to what will no doubt be yet another budget offering nothing for young people.

Pointing out the failure of the National Union of Students to take such a lead, he said: "Either get brave to lead the battles that are ahead or we will build ourselves a new leadership worthy of the struggles necessary to fight for our futures."

Howard said of the trade union leaders: "Our responsibility as leaders is to educate and organise." And part of that, he argued, must be to "call on Labour councils to act as socialists.

"It's no good for them to act as complicit agents of the treasury, no good for them to hide behind budgets."

"I will say clearly to all in the West Midlands who claim to be Labour but talk like Tories: if you act like a Tory, Unite in the West Midlands will treat you like a Tory.

"If justice and socialism is not the drive for Birmingham councillors to behave as Labour, then perhaps next May's city council elections will be.

"Because Unite in Birmingham will not support any Tory, even those who are labelled Labour."

When she spoke, Hannah added that Corbyn and the Labour leadership "should insist councils say they will use reserves and borrowing powers so as not to make any more cuts.

"And Labour nationally can say any money spent locally fighting austerity we will reimburse when we're in government."

Since Paul spoke at last year's Socialism event, he and five other protesters [were found not guilty of false imprisonment](#) of the then deputy prime minister on a protest in 2014. "This was a collective victory of the Jobstown Not Guilty campaign, of the trade union movement that supported us, and particularly of our international, the CWI."

This massive defeat for the Irish establishment was mirrored by their defeat in the Citizens Assembly.

They set up this body to try to get a recommendation for very minor changes to abortion law in Ireland.

Instead it recommended a pro-choice position. Paul highlighted that the Socialist Party (our Irish sister organisation) is at [the forefront of the movement for abortion rights](#).

Hannah reminded the room of the contrast during party conference season. "On one side was Corbyn talking about standing for socialism in the 21st century.

"On the other was the Tories' response. That free market capitalism is unquestionably the best means of increasing living conditions for everyone in the country.

"Tell that to [the people in 2016 who were hospitalised with malnutrition](#) in supposedly the sixth richest country on the planet."

In the fight to change these conditions, Hannah highlighted the important role the Socialist Party has played in a number of campaigns. "We achieve what we do," she said, "primarily because of our ideas, because we have a clear programme for a new society. But while ideas are crucial, without organisation they are nothing."

She went on to explain that the Socialist Party faces eviction from our national headquarters for them to be turned into flats - part of the gentrification so prevalent in London.

We will therefore need to initiate a financial appeal towards new premises and Hannah announced that we are able to launch that fund with a donation of £45,000 from ex-MP Dave Nellist.

Dave followed the Socialist Party's policy of living on a workers' wage rather than an inflated parliamentary salary.

The rest of his pay he used for campaigning and labour movement causes - and is now doing the same with his parliamentary pension.

In closing the weekend, London Socialist Party organiser and chair of the rally Paul Callanan, said: "The class struggle in Britain and internationally has entered a new phase.

"Working class and young people across the world are building new movements, building new parties and looking for an alternative to capitalism... socialism is back!"

What we thought

Socialism 2017 was one of the best and most inspiring times of my life. Having looked forward to this event since joining the Socialist Party earlier this year, I have to say it exceeded all expectations.

It was a privilege to listen to such a range of courageous and inspirational speakers on the struggles faced by the working class throughout the world. To see so many people who care about the plights and rights of the oppressed and the ordinary coming together and organising to fight back was a profound experience.

I was deeply moved listening to the speakers on the platform and those from the floor. The passion and dedication of members across the globe, and the battles fought and won gave a real sense of hope and positivity of what we as a class can achieve if we stand united together against capitalism and corruption. It was particularly uplifting to see so many younger people involved with the movement and their enthusiasm and commitment to creating a better world for us all.

The forum on women and the fightback not only showed the inspiring role ordinary women played in the Russian revolution but also their continued efforts to fight for equality and women's rights today.

After Saturday's rally the trip to the Skinners Arms and stint in The Clink added yet another highlight to the weekend and it was great to meet, exchange ideas and socialise with members from all over. You could not have asked for better company, nor a more welcoming and friendly atmosphere.

This was my first time attending Socialism, but it certainly won't be the last. And I'm still humming the Internationale!

Kelly, Derby

Feel a little taller, a little wiser and immensely proud of the party I belong to - fantastic comrades doing amazing stuff around the world and around Britain against all sorts of odds. Well done and a huge thank you.

Maggie, Southampton

That was a fantastic weekend. I learned from some excellent speakers, had a great time with members from around the country and left hopeful and reenergised!

Daniel, Newcastle

Thank you to the Socialist Party for the highly informative and inspirational conference. The overall experience has provided a uniquely beneficial opportunity not available elsewhere and the lessons learned will be vital in my personal and political development as a socialist. See you all again next year!

James, South Tyne & Wear

It was an excellent weekend. As always the highlight of the weekend is hearing the reports of the struggles our comrades internationally are involved in. In Ireland for the right to abortion, in the US against attacks on the homeless and in Catalonia against the brutality of the Spanish state. Came away energised for the battles to come here!

Liat, Stoke

The biggest and best yet! From sessions on the ongoing crisis of capitalism to what went wrong in Venezuela, it is clear that our party has the best ideas and the best tactics to transform society for the better. The rallies were inspirational and the mood was optimistic and vibrant. After spending the weekend learning and hearing about the magnificent October revolution I got the 19-17 train home from London Euston! Long live the revolution!

Matt, Salford

For me, the highlight of Socialism 2017 was hearing about the inspiring work of the CWI worldwide, particularly the role our sister parties are able to play in the US and Catalonia. Both are shining examples of how relatively small organisations can play important roles in political struggle if you have the correct programme and adopt the correct tactics.

Jamie, Stoke

I'm a member of the Socialist Party in Scotland and a Unison steward. I was encouraged by fellow Socialist Party members and my partner to attend this weekend. At first I said no as I thought it would be too much and quite intense for me to take in, as I had never been before. I suppose I didn't know what to expect. But I decided to go and I can honestly say I wasn't disappointed.

I enjoyed the weekend from start to finish. All the speakers spoke with great passion and determination and made it clear that there's no better time than now to change society for the better. I enjoyed Kshama Sawant's session on the US, the women's forum was excellent, both rallies were outstanding and Peter Taaffe's speech at Saturday's rally was both inspiring and emotional.

I came away feeling both motivated and inspired. I feel very proud to be a member of a party that stands up for the working class and I'd just like to thank my fellow members for encouraging me to come along. Also, a big thank you to everyone who was involved in organising such a weekend. I hope to see you all next year.

Pam, Scotland

I enjoyed the weekend. It was very well organised - venue and accommodation and the speakers were good. I enjoyed the 'socialism made easy sessions'. They were shorter and gave people ample opportunity to discuss and ask questions, one of my reasons as a comparative novice for going.

Barbara, Southampton

As usual, the workshops were of exceedingly high quality, particularly the one on historical materialism, which has whetted my appetite for more reading!

Josie, Stafford

Both my girls loved the crèche. My 3-year-old was gutted she had to leave. She's named her dolly after one of the women who ran it!

Ross, Cardiff

I fully enjoyed Socialism 2017. Unite assistant general secretary Howard Beckett made a truly inspiring speech and explained his attitude towards the Tories and those Labour councillors and Labour MPs that act like Tories. Our Socialism event gets bigger and better every year.

Craig, Stafford

With this year's event being my first, I can gladly say that I was inspired. Having only been a member of the party for just over six months, I knew I still had a lot to learn. Thankfully, the sessions were extremely insightful. The information I learned has not only given me plenty of material to do lead-offs back at my branch, but also has given me hope and additional strength for my contribution to the fight against capitalism. I will definitely be attending next year's event. Thank you!

Joshua, Huddersfield

The highlight for me was the main rally on Saturday, what an inspiration our comrades are! Kshama Sawant was absolutely incredible - and what our comrades in America have achieved is also incredible.

I had a great stall selling my revolutionary bracelets. I made several different slogans which went down really well. I made £110 for the Fighting Fund. Anyone who wants to order any can do so through tigre3@talktalk.net. Any slogan you want - 'Marx was right', 'revolutionary', 'socialist' or any other.

Mandy, Stoke

I attended on Sunday and enjoyed the 'how can a Corbyn Government avoid sabotage' and the last of the October revolution sessions. Great atmosphere at the final rally! Well done to all the speakers and organisers.

Kelvin, Staines

The best thing about Socialism is the opportunity it provides to discuss and learn from other comrades, ultimately making us a stronger force.

Chris, Stoke

I had a really good weekend. I'm suffering a slight information overload but am slowly processing it in my head and possibly driving all my work colleagues mad with all I've learned. Thanks for making me feel so welcome.

Ita, Torbay

My first Socialism was informative and inspiring. Having MP Ian Mearns speak was an incredible experience and I look forward to next year.

Connor, Staffs University

I spent it all in the Marxist theory seminars. This morning I realised how reinvigorated I feel and how I actually did reach a new level of understanding. Really enjoyed the speakers in the main hall each afternoon - we've got a talented bunch of orators on our side. Organisation was fantastic too. Thanks to all.

Nicola, Bracknell

I thought Socialism 2017 was a worthy celebration of the centenary of the Russian revolution. The session on Catalonia confirmed that we are following in the footsteps of the Bolsheviks and European and world revolutions are developing. The mood was confident and optimistic. Looking forward to Socialism 2018 already!

Heather, Leicester

Our coach was buzzing on the long journey back to Wales.

Alec T

Ideas, programme, strategy, tactics and methods are paramount. But you also know you are in the correct revolutionary organisation when you hear a left-wing Labour MP saying that he owes all his political education to the Young Socialists and Militant (predecessor of the Socialist Party). Then the assistant general secretary of the biggest union in the country saying the Socialist Party has always been on the side of the working class. Then that former Labour MP Dave Nellist, who took only a worker's wage while being in Parliament, is now taking a worker's pension and donating £45,000 to the Socialist Party. Great Socialism 2017 event!

Vlad, Greenwich

What a great and historically best ever socialism! Thank you.

Charlie, Derby

Excellent and inspirational event. Speakers were brilliant!

Marion, Sheffield

I think the participation of members from other countries makes it a truly international event - Spain, Catalonia, Ireland (north and south), Scotland, Nepal, Malaysia, South Korea, Austria, Turkey, Germany, Portugal, Cyprus, United States, Sri Lanka, France, Kurdistan, to name just a few. The Fighting Fund collection at the main rally raised an incredible £42,000! So good to meet many new people and people I had just known on social media.

Paul, Coventry

Record book sales

For a very old hand like myself it was a great boost to my morale to see so many young people, as well as the seasoned socialist fighters, at Socialism 17. This was evident from the record sales and queues that the volunteer book stall helpers could hardly keep up with in the breaks.

The large increase showed the thirst for socialist ideas. Also the readings by authors Edward Wilson and Meena Kandasamy were obviously well received as their titles sold out.

In addition, the sales of the Socialist Party's new publishing house [Socialist Books](#) were excellent. Peter Taaffe's 'From Militant to the Socialist Party', plus a new edition of Trotsky's 'Lessons of October' created big interest.

Thanks and congratulations to all organisers and helpers.

Keith Dickinson, Left Books coordinator

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TV review: The Vietnam War

Comprehensive account of bloody conflict

Neil Cafferky, Tower Hamlets Socialist Party

The US's role in endless wars in Afghanistan and the Middle East. Rising tensions between the US, Russia and China. Watching Ken Burns and Lynn Novick's [monumental ten-part documentary on the Vietnam War](#) in this context, the viewer cannot escape the idea that the lessons from that conflict have never been more relevant. But also that they've been completely ignored in the corridors of power of various capital cities.

This is without doubt the most comprehensive treatment of the conflict on English language television. The twin strengths of the documentary are the visceral footage of events throughout the period and the broad range of testimony from all sides of the conflict. A personal favourite was the footage of everyday life in North Vietnam and the astonishingly intense mass protests in South Vietnam against the Diem regime in the early 1960s.

However, the testimonies of those caught up in the conflict are where the production really shines. Unusually for an English language production there is a broad range of people from Vietnamese society, north and south from both sides of the conflict, who give eyewitness accounts.

Nothing sums up the cataclysm faced by Vietnam from the period better than the moving account of Nguyen Thanh Tung, a guerrilla with the National Liberation Front (NLF). All eight of her brothers died fighting the French. On 1 February 1975, with the end of the war in sight, her two sons were killed too.

American society

On the US side the interviews and footage of the protests against the war illustrate how US society was split from top to bottom by the conflict. Brutal footage of police beating demonstrators and the Kent State massacre show the lengths the US capitalists were prepared to go to crack down on opposition to the war.

Nonetheless, the movement began to have an impact among the troops on the ground. Jon Musgrave, a marine from a working class family who later joined Vietnam Veterans Against the War, makes the telling point that once working class soldiers (who made up the vast bulk of those conscripted) turned against the war, any chance of the US continuing the conflict was doomed.

The documentary is not without weaknesses however - the biggest being its treatment of American motivation for intervening in Vietnam in the first place.

Why the need for the US to contain so-called 'communism' in south east Asia? It restricts its explanation to Cold War rivalry. While this was certainly a major factor, it doesn't bring out US policy going back to the early 19th century that the US should have "open door" access to markets in the whole of Asia.

Although the NLF had a Stalinist leadership and did not base itself on a genuine Marxist policy of workers' democracy and international socialism, they did challenge capitalism and landlords. The US feared that the victory of "communism" in Vietnam would spur socialist revolutions throughout Asia.

This 'communism' meant restricting the US's market access. That was the driver for US support first for French imperialism then direct military support for a series of unpopular regimes in the south.

Nevertheless 'The Vietnam War' is still an excellent visual introduction to the period and the people caught up in the conflict.

- Empire Defeated: Vietnam War - the lessons for today by Peter Taaffe - £8 including postage [at leftbooks.co.uk](#)

TV review: Abortion on Trial - hard-hitting look at impact of 1967 act

Mary Finch, East London Socialist Party

Abortion on Trial is a hard-hitting, personal and political look at the 1967 Abortion Act. Eight women, who had all had abortions, and one man were invited to discuss their experiences and opinions of abortion.

The programme's participants emphasised the fact that abortion always has and always will happen, regardless of legality. Laws restricting abortion only serve to make abortion dangerous, as women are forced to visit backstreet clinics, or even attempt to perform the procedure themselves.

It's especially dangerous for working class women. Before 1967, the only way to legally obtain an abortion was to pay a psychiatrist to declare a woman suicidal - this was the route taken by one woman on the programme.

Her friend, who couldn't afford the legal procedure, had a backstreet abortion and died as a result. This harrowing confrontation with the reality of illegal abortions was the catalyst for her becoming a life-long campaigner for the right to choose.

The only two anti-abortion participants, the man and one of the women, both admitted their reasons for their pro-life position were intensely personal. The pro-life man was pro-choice before his ex-partner aborted a pregnancy against his wishes.

But such arbitrary personal beliefs cannot be allowed to determine whether or not a woman will carry a pregnancy to term.

Abortion on Trial is resolute in its conclusions that free, safe, and legal access to abortion is an absolute necessity. It's equally clear that the 1967 Abortion Act is insufficient, primarily because it legalises abortion only in certain circumstances.

Because of its focus on the experiences and current legal rights of women, though, it only cursorily covers how to actually expand the law.

[The 1967 Abortion Act](#) was a reflection of the mass social upheaval of the 1960s. Women took a lead from black civil rights campaigners and others, and used the method of mass action to win the right to choose. Similar mass, united struggle of working class people is what will win the battle to defend and extend abortion rights today.

The Socialist Party fights for access to abortion but also living wages, decent affordable housing and childcare and everything that is needed to have full and genuine choice over when and whether to have children.

The Socialist Inbox

Do you have something to say?

Send your news, views and criticism in no more than 150 words to editors@socialistparty.org.uk - or if you're not online, Socialist Inbox, PO Box 24697, London E11 1YD

Privatised cancer care

Members of my cancer support group were recently offered a free trip to a cancer treatment centre in Newport, 50 miles away, to see the first proton beam treatment set-up in Wales. Basically a private hospital. But curious to see this latest treatment in action, a dozen of us put our names down.

On the day, to our surprise, rather than the minibus we'd expected, transport was in four large private hire taxis. On arrival we were ushered into a large, well-furnished lounge, welcomed by an affable management type and provided with coffee, biscuits and a goody bag with promotional pens etc. We were then taken on a tour.

We were shown a chemotherapy suite, and a radiotherapy unit, but not the proton beam system we'd come to see - it turns out it hasn't been installed yet! The nearest we got to it was a video of large chunks of machinery being imported from Germany, driven along the M4 and put into a half-completed building.

When it came down to it, we had been given a tour of an installation just like we have in our NHS hospital in Swansea! Granted, the waiting rooms were more luxurious, the coffee better and the equipment perhaps a bit newer, but currently this private unit has nothing we don't have through the NHS.

So what was the point of the trip, which must have cost something over £1,000?

A few publicity shots of cancer patients? Or to demonstrate that, in the words of their glossy brochure - they could "create a better future for cancer patients"? Their services are provided to "insured private patients, self-paying patients, and NHS patients" - in that order! So, rather than have its own treatment centres the NHS would pay private providers.

In other words, another example of creeping privatisation. I don't think any of us were convinced that comfy lounges and more spacious units would be any substitute for our bustling, sometimes overcrowded, sometimes a bit tatty round the edges, but free health service under our ownership and control.

Geoff Jones, Swansea

Stalinists lampooned

I enjoyed [Caroline Vincent's review of 'The Death of Stalin' in issue 968](#), and I particularly liked the parallels she drew between Ianucci's lampooning of Blairites in 'The Thick Of It' and Stalinists in this film. Both sets of apparatchiks are bumbling clowns but whereas the Blairites wreck people's careers, the Stalinists destroy lives and families.

But I don't share her criticisms of the film.

The misogyny she refers to is entirely in the heads of the vulgar, sadistic, macho bureaucrats. In Ianucci's scenario it is the lead female character, the concert pianist Maria Yudina, who is the only genuine oppositionist, because Stalin has destroyed her family and she's not prepared to work for him or the other monsters, even if it costs her own life.

But Caroline's more important criticism is that the film "goes nowhere near clarifying the important role played by the old Bolsheviks under Lenin in freeing Russian workers and peasants from the tsarist regime". Are we really going to demand that of Ianucci? That's a tall order, and would, I suspect, be a case of setting him up to fail.

I do agree with Caroline that in everything to do with the centenary of 1917 the media seek to conflate Bolshevism and Stalinism. Even the recent acclaimed Radio 4 dramatisation of John Reed's 'Ten Days That Shook The World', which many Socialist Party members have enjoyed, couldn't forego a final sinister appearance from the future general secretary: "Just call me Stalin, everyone does". So I for one am glad Ianucci kept the focus of his black humour relentlessly on the Stalinists.

Paul Gerrard, Salford

Cruel cuts

The cuts carried out by the Tory government continue to make themselves felt. I know this from personal experience.

First, the Tory-controlled Cambridgeshire County Council closed down the Bowthorpe Mental Health Day Centre at the instructions of the government.

Second, I was taken off the books of my consultant psychiatrist at Agenoria House, the office of Wisbech community mental health team.

Third, my psychiatric nurse at North Brink Surgery left and hasn't been replaced.

Fourth, I failed my personal independence payment medical, meaning I can no longer afford to see a counsellor.

Fifth, my nurse practitioner at North Brink Surgery can no longer see me as she now only does home visits.

What next?

Perhaps I'll fail my employment and support allowance medical. Thankfully that won't take place until July 2019.

John Smithee, Wisbech, Cambs

Arriva profits

So far this year Arriva has £3.3 billion in sales profit and £368 million in operating profit across Europe, this is nothing new for the transport company with their sales profit and operating profit in 2015 being £4.28 billion and £464 million respectively. Currently Arriva employs 16,000 bus drivers and mechanics who have a basic pay of £22,500 a year. The 3% pay rise that their employees are asking for wouldn't even reduce their profits by 1%, yet they are refusing to budge despite the fact that many of its employees are facing a real terms pay cut due to inflation rising to 3%.

With the profits that Arriva is making they could end the atrocious wages that they have their drivers and mechanics operating under and still make large profits.

For this reason I believe that the British government needs to renationalise the transport industry. Profits can then be better distributed and give the employees of the transport industry fair pay.

Joseph Ventre, Liverpool

Workers' control

At work recently neither of our managers were there, one had a day off and the other was off sick.

Guess what? The team functioned, we allocated who would perform which duties and organised lunch and rest breaks.

Who says workers can't run the workplace?

Clive Walder, Birmingham

USA: Historic vote for Ginger Jentzen campaign in Minneapolis

Calvin Priest and Bryan Koulouris from Socialist Alternative (Socialist Party co-thinkers in the USA) report on the second place finish for socialist Ginger Jentzen in the Minneapolis election.

On 7 November, [the Ginger Jentzen campaign](#) won a historic vote in the race for Minneapolis City Council, Ward 3. The initial six point lead on election night was fitting for our powerful campaign which had defined the issues in this year's city elections from the start.

But while Socialist Alternative's campaign struck a powerful chord and won more first choice votes than any other campaign, when the third and final round of the ranked choice voting (RCV) was done the following day, we had lost by a thousand votes.

We put a discussion about rent control back on the map and received widespread support from working people for our call to tax big developers and the rich to fund affordable housing, education and mass transit. We mounted one of the strongest ground games in an election campaign that Minneapolis has ever seen.

The result was a major victory for socialist politics. We won in every precinct except those in wealthy downtown Minneapolis. In working class neighbourhoods there was a powerful dynamic as thousands of people were inspired by our bold demands and call for a political revolution in city hall.

The high level of support was palpable. Red and white vote Ginger Jentzen campaign signs were to be found on virtually every street in working class areas in Ward 3, with "not for sale" written across them in bold letters.

This main slogan indicated that the Ginger campaign accepted no corporate or developer donations, and was entirely funded by ordinary working people. We shattered all prior records for a Minneapolis city council race, with more than \$175,000 raised without a penny in corporate cash and a median donation of just \$25.

In neighbourhoods around the University of Minnesota, made up of predominantly student renters, our campaign tripled student turnout and won by over 50% in the precinct overall.

But the vote was highly polarised, and the areas downtown dominated by luxury apartments and condos went just as strongly for the DFL candidates (Democratic Farmer Labor Party, the Democratic Party in Minnesota). This was on the basis of class interests but also due to the deep roots of the DFL.

The stage was set for a historic election campaign this summer when Minneapolis City Council was forced to pass a \$15 minimum wage under the leadership of Ginger and Socialist Alternative - who launched 15 Now and built a broad coalition of unions, progressive organisations and activists.

This coalition brought huge pressure to bear against the majority of the city council and the mayor who had said that \$15 was too high, not in the domain of city government, and impossible.

Our campaign faced the united opposition of the political establishment, corporate media and a last minute rush of pac (political action committee) money into the race, backed by big business and for-profit developers.

Anybody but Ginger

The billionaire-owned StarTribune's editorial board spoke for Minneapolis big business leaders when it penned its "anybody but Ginger" endorsement article in which it ranked and made the case for all three of the other candidates in the race: Democratic (DFL) establishment candidates Steve Fletcher and Tim Bildsoe as well as Green Party candidate Samantha Pree-Stinson.

Big business was threatened by our independent socialist campaign. Millionaire developer Steve Minn and his "Minneapolis Works" pac singled out Ginger in their "call to action" in mid-October, saying: "If you thought it was impossible for a committed socialist to run on a platform of rent control and establishing a municipal income tax... meet: Ginger Jentzen," and warning that she was a "leading candidate" in Ward 3. Corporate money quickly began to pour into the race.

Six pac mailers landed in the ward in the final weeks backing Tim Bildsoe. Meanwhile, three attack mailers went out calling Ginger "nuts" for wanting to tax the super rich and big business and advocating for rent control and with the outright lie that Ginger wanted to create "new taxes on working families."

Our campaign's strong result showed that Seattle is in no way an aberration in supporting independent socialists, with city council member Kshama Sawant's campaigns. As Socialist Alternative has explained before, the hunger for bold working class politics exists all across the country.

And while many who voted for us don't consider themselves socialists, the socialist label is not a barrier for ordinary people. Ginger running openly as a socialist was in fact an asset, with many young and working class people who had supported [Bernie Sanders in 2016](#).

The campaign took on something of a national left profile, receiving coverage in several prominent media outlets, including The Nation, The Intercept and The Young Turks, as well as a series of stories in major local media of the StarTribune and the front cover of the main Minneapolis weekly, the City Pages.

We won endorsements from several key left unions, including ones that had endorsed Bernie Sanders, like the Minneapolis Nurses Association, Communication Workers of America MN council, and the United Transportation Union.

Ginger was also endorsed locally and nationally by the Democratic Socialists of America, as well as the local Our Revolution.

The campaign and coalition we built will help lay the basis for a struggle for expanded mass transit and rent control in Minneapolis over the coming months.

Transit workers, with Socialist Alternative member Ryan Timlin as the union's new local president, are going into a contract battle involving workers across Minneapolis.

Ginger's campaign shows the popular support for rent control, and this can be built upon to fight against the big developers and their attempts to turn Minneapolis into a playground for the rich.

Ranked choice voting

The Minneapolis establishment made use of the ranked choice voting system against our independent socialist campaign. When the weaknesses of Fletcher's campaign became apparent it led to the late entry of Tim Bildsoe into the race in mid-August.

The other candidates ultimately delivered the second and third choice votes that the DFL needed to win to Steve Fletcher, including the Green Party candidate Samantha Pree-Stinson. This shows not only that RCV is not a panacea, but that it can even be used as a tool by the establishment to attack independent campaigns.

Of course, in the absence of RCV the race would have had a different dynamic. There is no doubt that

"lesser evil" arguments would have been used against our campaign to push voters toward Steve Fletcher saying it was necessary stop the more conservative Tim Bildsoe, who ran under the Democrat label after serving on a suburban city council for 16 years as a Republican.

The candidate who most openly and fiercely attacked the Ginger Jentzen campaign was the Green Party's Samantha Pree-Stinson. She was formerly an establishment Democrat who chaired committees and actively built the Democratic Party for years until earlier this year when she sought the Green Party endorsement.

She was endorsed and backed by the Green Party in spite of running clearly to the right of Democrat Steve Fletcher. She made statements against the \$15 minimum wage and attacked the campaign for supporting movement demands like "black lives matter", "Medicare for all", and "no ban, no wall, no raids", while herself not supporting rent control or taxing the rich.

Unfortunately, the national leadership of the Green Party amplified Pree-Stinson's campaign despite multiple appeals from Socialist Alternative members for them to encourage second-choice votes for Ginger.

Across the country, many candidates backed by 'Our Revolution' and the Democratic Socialists of America were elected. This is an extremely positive development, but it will also be a test to see if they can withstand the pressure of the corporations, big developers, Democratic Party and political establishment to tone down their politics.

In Seattle, we've shown how just one elected office for the socialist movement can transform city politics if connected to a clear programme, mobilisation of working people from below and building an independent organization.

A new generation of workers is losing faith in the bankrupt system of capitalism and searching for an alternative. Socialism is rising again.

Tories on the brink - kick them out!

Claire Laker-Mansfield

Division, scandal and crisis: these are the most striking features of Theresa May's government today.

If faced with mass protest by workers and youth - this shambolic Tory regime could be forced from power. Indeed, they could be pressed into calling a general election at any moment. Our movement must therefore go on the offensive.

On 15 November students demonstrated to demand free education. Socialist Students is calling for this to be followed with huge protests on campuses around the country on budget day, 22 November.

But crucial in building a movement to force the Tories out are the trade unions. As a first step, the Trade Union Congress should call and mobilise a huge national demonstration - to demand an end to the public sector pay cap, and to build support for mass, coordinated strike action.

Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell could also play a major role in seeing the government out of the door. As well as seeking to exploit Tory divisions in parliament, they should be calling for workers and young people to mobilise on the streets.

But even without such developments, it remains possible this weak minority government could collapse under the weight of scandal and infighting. May faces battles on multiple fronts.

As the EU Withdrawal Bill enters its 'committee stage' reading in parliament, rebellion is in the air among Tory MPs. Already, David Davis, the Brexit secretary, has been forced to concede that parliament [will be granted a 'take it or leave it' vote on the final deal.](#)

But this has only served to embolden the so-called 'soft Brexiteers' - with no indication of any appetite for compromise on either side of the Tories' gaping divide. Other points of contention include the question of whether the government ought to increase its 'financial offer' to the EU.

Meanwhile, May's former chief of staff has written a scathing attack on the chancellor, Phillip Hammond, in the lead-up to budget day. [Writing in Murdoch's Sun 'newspaper'](#), Nick Timothy lays into "Fiscal Phil" for what he argues is his rigid approach and lack of willingness to improve "economic justice."

Timothy and May are, of course, no friends of the working class. They certainly have no real interest in delivering a more fair or just society. What this really represents is a disagreement about how to respond to [the electoral revolt that took place on 8 June](#).

Timothy seemingly favours loosening the screws of austerity in a desperate attempt to regain credibility and halt the rise of Corbyn. But Hammond is clearly fearful that any concessions to working class people would only whet our appetite for more, feeding into the desire for a fundamental break with austerity.

This is something the Tories, whose raison d'être is to defend the interests of the super-rich 1%, are unable to offer. In truth, neither approach offers them a way out of this quagmire.

Rumbling on is [the scandal over sexual abuse and harassment in Westminster](#). Among the latest revelations are allegations that a television producer was groped by a member of David Cameron's staff in 10 Downing Street itself.

May's deputy, Damien Green, remains under pressure over similar accusations. The prime minister's weakness is laid bare by her inability to sack or appoint cabinet ministers at her choosing. This includes the ongoing farce over Boris Johnson's appalling blunders over the status of a British woman jailed in Iran.

This crisis for the Tories is itself a reflection of the deep crisis faced by the capitalist class as a whole. For the workers' movement, this should be an opportunity to fight for a fundamentally different type of society.

This means organising to force the Tories from power. It means conducting a battle not just against the representatives of the 1% in the Conservative Party, but those Blairite Labour MPs whose politics has more in common with that of Hammond and May than with the ideas of socialism.

And it means fighting for a fundamentally different type of society - for socialist change.

No more excuses: fit sprinklers now!

Bill the government, not the residents

Publish all block safety assessments

Paul Kershaw, chair, Unite union LE/1111 housing workers branch

In the immediate aftermath of the terrible fire at Grenfell Tower the government pledged that money would not prevent vital safety work being done.

But since then they have set their face against paying for sprinklers - an essential measure according to the London Fire Brigade. And at least one council, Tory-controlled Wandsworth in south London, plans to punish leaseholders with [a charge of £4,000!](#)

Jeremy Corbyn is [absolutely right to demand that the Tories allocate £1 billion to fit sprinklers](#). As he says, it is obscene the government will not commit retrofitting funds while failing to tackle tax avoidance.

Safety can't wait

It is also right that Labour is pledging to fund installation when elected to government. But safety can't wait. Socialists will support residents and tenants in demanding that sprinklers are fitted now. Social landlords should take action now and bill the government.

Local authority landlords could proceed now using reserves, and housing associations should draw on their own resources. Housing associations' surpluses this year will amount to £5.6 billion, an increase over last year of 15.6%, according to consultancy firm Vantage Business Solutions.

Operating margins average 30%, much higher than private construction companies. Property developer Bellway recently boasted of a record margin of 22.3%, for example. If they prioritise safety, housing associations can afford sprinklers.

Sprinklers must be fitted - but the government, not residents, should pay. Non-payment and legal action are among the options being considered by some of the more than 1,000 leaseholders in Wandsworth, who met last week to form a group to oppose the plans.

The labour movement must back such campaigns. Some leaseholders may be better off - but many would be pushed further into debt, or forced to move, in order to pay these sums.

Social housing residents have had difficulty accessing fire safety assessments from landlords. If landlords resist providing this basic information, the labour movement must support residents with a massive campaign. No safety - no rent!

The Information Commissioner has called for social landlords to proactively share safety assessments. The Department for Communities and Local Government has backed this up. But some landlords remain unwilling.

Inside Housing, the trade magazine, invited housing associations to post assessments on their website in the interests of transparency - but associations have been unwilling to do so.

Councils can be subject to Freedom of Information requests. As independent bodies, housing associations are not subjects to this legislation. But there is no good reason to withhold it.

Fund the regulator, kick out the developers, build council homes!

Publicly owned land sold off, with minimal affordable housing built on the development. The so-called 'affordable' housing that is built is unaffordable for local people.

Poor maintenance and shoddy construction standards. Minimal regulation, regulators underfunded, with leaders' credibility deeply compromised by conflicts of interest.

These were the aspects of the "Great Housing Scandal" highlighted by Channel 4's 'Dispatches' on 13 November. All of these are familiar issues to Unite union members in the social housing sector - and all are issues we have raised in the past.

In our branch, Unite LE/1111, we have workers in the social housing regulator, the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA). We have members living on the Lancaster West estate whose lives have been turned upside down by the Grenfell fire. We have frontline housing managers battling with the direct impact of austerity.

We have only too much direct experience of the issues raised by Channel 4.

When the Tories came in they announced the HCA was 'toast' - to be placed on the 'bonfire of red tape'. This plan met with considerable opposition from banks who rely on the staff of the regulator for assurance their money is safe.

The government partially backed down. It allowed the HCA to continue - in a much reduced form, with far less resources. Tenants and residents were not important to the Tories or Lib Dems. But the banks were!

In the wake of Grenfell it is clear that regulation must be properly resourced.

The regulator had its 'tenant empowerment and engagement' team cut, shifting the regulator's focus exclusively onto housing associations' financial viability. Underlying government ideology sees no further than commercialisation of social housing.

Tellingly, surviving residents of Grenfell Tower - who had warned so publicly of the fire risk their landlord's management created - said they did not know of the HCA's existence.

What makes this worse is that the HCA might still have found out about the serious concerns at Grenfell: one of the landlord's board members at the time, Anthony Preiskel, is also an HCA board member! There has been widespread concern at this within the agency.

But from what Dispatches reported, Preiskel sees no conflict. Certainly he has not seen fit to resign following the fire.

But the chair of the agency is Boris Johnson's former deputy mayor with responsibility for planning - and now acts as a consultant for property developers adept at reducing the proportion of 'affordable' housing in their luxury developments. Apparent conflicts abound.

The programme also featured well-known cases of substandard new developments by housing associations. Surveys suggest staff increasingly feel their employers have lost sight of their social purpose.

Unite LE/1111 has consistently called for a massive programme of council house building; rent control and secure tenancy in the private rented sector; and improved, properly resourced regulation.

- This is an edited version of [the article at housingworkers.org.uk](http://housingworkers.org.uk)
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We're freezing: reverse cuts to boiler replacement schemes!

Nationalise the energy firms

Ben Robinson, Waltham Forest Socialist Party

"The heating, ventilation, water, drainage and electrical systems are now extremely antiquated and improvements to fire safety are needed."

This is part of the justification for a major, high-profile government spending programme.

Tackling the housing crisis? No - [doing up parliament](#).

As the work started, MPs marked the occasion by bowing their heads and issuing statements to the press. As costs spiral, it is deemed necessary expenditure for the public good.

But outside the Palace of Westminster, energy efficiency measures for the hardest-up are being undermined by austerity. [National Energy Action reports daily accounts](#) of condemned gas appliances not being replaced because of poverty and lack of support.

Government action is limited to say the least.

The scheme set up to replace boilers is not funded by [May's Paradise Paper pals](#), or by the taxes the Tories actually do manage to collect - or even out of the record profits of the energy providers. It is funded from energy bills - by you and me.

But instead of threatening profits, the government has cut funding to the boiler replacement scheme. This has resulted in the number of boilers replaced falling from 85,000 in 2013 to just 7,000 between April and June this year.

May has promised further action: energy price caps. These are due to start in February for a million households, with further measures expected in 2019.

But the temperatures are freezing now! We cannot wait another winter, seeing millions choose between food and fuel, with needless deaths and illness - while energy companies continue to rake in billions.

Already planned is a merger between two of the 'Big Six' energy companies - which would result in an even greater monopoly, supplying over half of households. But even breaking the suppliers up will not rid us of the profit motive.

The market has failed and will go on failing to provide the basics of food, heat and shelter to millions. Nationalising the utilities and big corporations, linked to a socialist plan of production, is the only way to guarantee the basics of living.

Is cuts-making Preston 'beating Tory austerity'?

Fight for no-cuts budgets

Becci Heagney, Lancashire Socialist Party

Labour-controlled Preston Council has received press coverage as ["beating Tory austerity" \(Mirror\)](#), ["where workers are in control of wealth" \(Guardian\)](#) and ["Jeremy Corbyn's model town" \(Economist\)](#). Is this too good to be true?

There have been positive initiatives taken by the council. For example, it's an accredited Living Wage employer. It has put an emphasis on contracting local firms rather than big businesses. It's setting up a credit union, and has set up a council-owned energy supplier.

The council claims these measures have resulted in a massive increase in money spent in the local economy. This is all well and good. But there are hard limitations to what it can achieve. And meanwhile the council has cut jobs and privatised services!

Some have argued the credit union will be able to compete with the big banks in Preston, and actually take power away from them. But no local credit union will be able to lend the sort of money or offer all the products a big bank can.

Similarly, a council-owned energy supplier will be able to save some people money. But it cannot sustainably compete with the cartel of the 'Big Six'.

Private

Of course creating jobs is a good thing. But the private construction company held up for doing so, Conlon, has only created a handful. And the jobs created by Preston's focus on attracting more shops and restaurants to the high street will be of the low-paid, zero-hour type.

And many Preston initiatives are not positive at all - such as privatising leisure centres, and charging for bin collections, as part of the city's cuts budget.

The council is backing the Lancashire ['sustainability and transformation plan'](#) in the NHS, which will mean massive cuts to hospitals. It aims to copy the 'housing boom' in Manchester by attracting private developers to build luxury apartments - with very few plans for affordable housing.

Meanwhile, homelessness is a growing problem. The council puts out propaganda that 80% of people on the streets aren't "genuinely homeless." It has brought in a rule that ["beggars" will be given five minutes' notice to move on](#) - or they will be fined or taken to court!

Many of the positive proposals in Jeremy Corbyn's hugely popular manifesto do not yet go far enough. For example on energy companies. We argue the sector must be nationalised, ending the control of the Big Six. It will be even harder to carry out these half-measures effectively in just one city.

And Preston's measures are not even far-reaching enough to deal with the issues people are facing through the austerity it continues to implement: low pay, rising living costs, lack of decent jobs and more.

The way for councillors in Preston to start "beating Tory austerity" is by refusing to pass on Tory cuts. This means using reserves and prudential borrowing, and mobilising a mass movement to win the money back across Lancashire - almost £300 million by 2020.

If Corbyn and McDonnell backed 'model towns' like that - and promised to reimburse them on coming to power - they could bring down this hated Tory government now.

4,800 young people hurt after officers 'restrain' them

End assaults on inmates

No to profit-making prisons

Theo Sharieff, Socialist Party youth organiser

Thousands of young people have been harmed while being 'restrained' by officers in secure facilities.

Around [4,800 under-18s have been injured this way in young offenders' institutions and 'secure training centres' since 2010](#), figures obtained by a Labour MP indicate. Meanwhile, the Commons recently discussed reforming physical restraint of patients in psychiatric institutions.

The Socialist Party would welcome measures improving the accountability of staff in all detention facilities. Scandals in recent years have uncovered appalling psychological and physical abuse in privatised institutions.

We demand a full, genuinely independent inquiry into these horrendous revelations, led by the trade unions.

The working class is ever more accustomed to 'official', 'independent' or 'public' inquiries devolving into blatant miscarriages of justice. Instead of providing answers, the establishment deliberately uses them to draw out proceedings and muddy the waters, counteracting any accountability.

Legislation from up high - while important - would not on its own be sufficient to improve the dreadful regimes in these institutions. For a start we have to kick out sinister privateers like G4S.

And only the active, democratic control of workers and communities can ensure accountability and protect the lives of often vulnerable people.

Many inmates should be in care or probation, not locked away in profit-making prisons.

What we saw

The establishment press has tried to slander rail strikers as greedy. But we think Dave, a letter writer in the 10 November Metro, has a better angle.

"There are around 1,400 people on my train from East Grinstead to Victoria, each paying £15.

"The train driver's hourly rate is £28, which means two passengers pay for the driver, meaning the other 1,398 passengers' fares go to shareholders, private equity groups, foreign investment groups and some to

government."

- Spotted by Laurence Maples

[A tantrum-throwing boss scrapped his bus company overnight](#) - and let his entire staff know they were redundant by email.

Sydney Hardy, owner of Somerset public transport firm 'Nippybus', shut up shop without warning on 29 October.

A sacked driver said "everyone was doing long shifts, but he just expected us to do them. The memo makes out that it's the drivers' fault this has happened, but without us he would never have had his company."

Too true. Sydney deserves the sack, not the hard-working staff who made his money for him. Nationalise Nippybus!

Fight to keep guards on trains continues despite setback Aslef deal

RMT Socialist Party members

Drivers at GTR Southern have finally voted to accept a deal which was recommended by the Aslef union leadership, which allows trains to run without a guard.

This will be seen by workers across the national railway and beyond as a historic betrayal by Aslef, aided and abetted by the TUC, which has pushed their lower-paid team mates, the guards, one step closer towards elimination from Britain's railways.

Presented with [a whopping 28% pay rise](#) Aslef leaders needed to put the offer to members via referenda no fewer than three times before it was finally accepted.

But it was accepted and it is the clause stating that driver only operation (DOO) is allowed under 'exceptional' circumstances that gives the bosses the weapon to finish the process of changing the whole of Southern's network to DOO.

DOO leaves disabled people unable to 'turn up and go' and must pre-book their journeys, many people are less willing to travel alone at night and the driver is left to deal with all emergency situations alone even when incapacitated or following a fatality.

The Tories want DOO to be the norm on the railway in an attempt to drive down costs and the RMT union, which represents all grades of rail worker, has been fighting its introduction along with all other staff cuts since day one.

It has been reported that Aslef faces massive legal costs in addition to the £250,000 already levied against the union by the courts as a result of the anti-trade union laws relating to earlier action.

This is likely to have been a motivating factor in Aslef pushing for acceptance of the offer. However this shabby deal needs to be seen as what it is: a sell-out and no less, and rank-and-file Aslef members should remember this capitulation whenever their leadership makes any future public commitment to jobs and safety.

Struggle goes on

However, despite this serious setback the struggle against DOO can still be won. Guards at five train companies - including Southern - are taking rock solid strike action this week in defence of their role and for

railway safety. So far the guards have won a guarantee of a second person on trains in Wales and Scotland.

In poll after poll the travelling public overwhelmingly want to keep guards on trains.

Most passenger trains in Britain still run with a guard and the vast majority of drivers do not want to take on the additional responsibility and risks of station dispatch and the other roles performed by the guard.

The resolve shown by the GTR Southern guards has been inspiring and is an example of the kind of persistence against the attacks of the government and GTR Southern management that is needed to defend workers across all industries.

Unity of all railway workers is needed to stop the race to the bottom and uphold the principal of a safe and fully staffed railway.

The drivers have a vital role to play in this campaign. But there can be no more deals in the future like the one made with GTR Southern.

Aslef members at all the other train operating companies must urgently sit down with their workmates in the RMT and form a united front from the bottom up, against all job cuts and against our common enemy, the railway bosses.

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 9 November 2017 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

RMT strikers picket the South Western Railway network

Nick Chaffey & Maggie Fricker, Southampton Socialist Party

Pickets stretched from London Waterloo all the way to Bournemouth and the Isle of Wight, as the largest rail franchise in the country, South Western Railway, joined other areas in [the largest strike action to date against Driver Only Operations](#).

With 900 train guards as RMT members, RMT Wessex regional organiser Mick Tosh reported: "Our strike was solidly supported. Members are upbeat, resolute and prepared to continue the struggle."

Strikers massed in large numbers across the network, getting their message out that the RMT wants operators to put 'Safety Before Profit' and ensure the safety critical role of the guard.

Stations were as quiet as the news reports on the strike, showing the impact of the strike action. Leafleting at Southampton central station, passengers took leaflets and showed their sympathy and support for the campaign, stopping to talk about the importance of keeping guards.

Speaking to pickets at Basingstoke, that message was loud and clear:

"Neither passengers or workers will benefit from this. It's all about profit, profit, profit. They are using 'contingency guards' with two days' training to look after passengers on strike days. Theresa May said she was fighting for 'skilled workers doing skilled jobs.' Now everyone is fighting for their jobs!"

Significant numbers of RMT drivers were also on the picket lines, and Aslef union members were refusing to cross picket lines and were organising collections for the RMT strike funds.

Discussions are now developing on how to escalate the action after the success of this week if South Western Railways doesn't guarantee the continued role of the guard.

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

Manchester strike wave continues with 49 walkout days by housing workers

Hugh Caffrey, North West Socialist Party

Mears housing maintenance workers began (on 13 November) a programme of 49 days of strike action, joining numerous other groups of workers fighting back in Greater Manchester.

[Bus drivers at Arriva](#) and Firstbus, train guards also employed by Arriva on the Northern franchise, Manchester airport cleaners and cabin crew, university staff and employees of IT companies Capita and Fujitsu.

Mostly in the private sector, nonetheless many of these disputes have as their root the privatisation and austerity carried out by successive governments - and councils, especially the Blairite Manchester city council.

Labour-run Manchester city council is behind the 'Rail North' project pushing driver-only operation on the trains and the outsourcing of social housing. It's a major shareholder in Manchester Airport, and it's overseeing a patchwork of privatised buses.

Residents are suffering £30 million of cuts as the council carries out austerity for its Tory friends, and stashes away another £27 million in reserves.

Meanwhile, Greater Manchester's mayor, Andy Burnham, visited the Capita picket line - but not the pickets by housing or bus workers, policy areas for which he is actually responsible.

Clearly, Corbyn's new politics hasn't reached the Blairite establishment that's firmly in charge of local government in Manchester.

Housing and transport workers, and others, can tap into massive public support: solidarity that is multiplied by wanting to resist companies which make working class people's lives a misery!

- Mears strikers can mobilise tenants and the wider community in a major demonstration aimed at the leadership of Manchester city council, demanding fair pay and the return of social housing 'in-house' with investment and accountability to meet tenants' needs.
- Bus workers can coordinate their strikes and build a mass public demonstration demanding higher pay, lower fares and a return of the buses to local public ownership.
- Rail workers could join that and demand an end to Rail North, to keep the guards, and the immediate renationalisation of the railways with no compensation to fat-cats.
- The wider trade union movement can mobilise big support.

With determined strike action and mass struggle, major victories can be won for the working class. These are the kind of ideas that the Socialist Party in Manchester is discussing with all the strikers. Unity in action is strength, and socialist policies point the way forward.

Send messages of support to Unite rep Colin Pitt: colinpitt65@hotmail.co.uk and Unite regional officer Andy.fisher@unitetheunion.org; and post donations to: Unite House, Merchants Quay, Salford Quays, Salford M50 3SG

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 13 November 2017 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

Huge support for Merseyside strikes of bus drivers and train guards

Hugh Caffrey, North West Socialist Party

Public transport across Merseyside was nearly shut down by bus drivers and train guards taking strike action on Wednesday 8 November.

Bus drivers employed by Arriva in the Unite union mounted another day of solid strike action in pursuit of a 3% pay rise.

Train guards in the RMT union, on the Northern franchise and on the Merseyrail network, took equally solid action.

This left mainly only Stagecoach buses running - and those because Stagecoach backed down and gave a pay rise earlier this year!

Commuters using the arterial route through the Birkenhead tunnel found it took 35 minutes to travel the usual five or ten, with city centre carparks overflowing well before office hours began.

This is a powerful reminder to workers and employers of the potential power which working people hold - without our labour, nothing moves! While both the buses and the guards' disputes are connected with wider strikes, the major employers in the city centre will no doubt have beaten an angry path to the doors of Arriva management, and to city region mayor Steve Rotheram who is overseeing the removal of the Merseyrail guards.

Mayor Rotheram is already very sensitive on the guards issue, having not reacted well when greeted at a demonstration in Huyton on Monday with shouts of "Keep the guards".

A members' meeting of the RMT union unanimously agreed to organise a big "Keep the Guards" public lobby of the Transport Committee on Thursday 7 December, 1-2pm at the Cunard Building on Mann Island, Liverpool waterfront.

The Liverpool-based mayor, Joe Anderson, has entered the fray, trying to pit bus drivers against guards by agreeing with one and attacking the other.

No-one will be fooled by this transparent attempt at divide and rule. Transport strikes on Merseyside have a particularly historic resonance with their role in the past of bringing the working class together across divides induced by the ruling elite.

Effective action

Across the national rail network, about 30% of it will have been affected by the guards' strike, despite the so-called PUGs (persons utilised as guards) scabs organised by management, bringing new meaning to the phrase 'pug ugly'.

The morale of strikers remains high, for example on the Green Lane Arriva picket line a vote to continue the strike action was unanimous.

Coordinated strike action has shown an enormous power, and should be repeated until the employers and office-holding politicians back down.

Public support is colossal. Endless media stories putting the management case and highlighting the handful of individuals who agree with them, have had almost no effect whatsoever.

Mobilising public support by calling big demonstrations led by the striking unions would bolster the strike action and put enormous pressure on the managers to resolve the disputes.

Also, it would put big pressure on an incoming Labour government to swiftly return public transport to the public sector, reverse the cuts to services and staff and instead cut fares to an affordable level.

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

Virgin train workers ballot for strike action

Ted Woodley, RMT Midlands political officer

Train managers, caterers, customer service and the other non-driving grades represented by the RMT union at Virgin West Coast are in dispute with bosses over a divisive pay offer.

Management are offering train drivers a £500 pay increase to drop their claim for a reduction in the working week. But they demand all of the other grades 'self-finance' their reduction with 'productivity improvements' - in other words giving up hard-won terms and conditions.

At union meetings across the country customer-facing Virgin staff have been shown photographs of the industry awards the company has won for customer service. This 'final offer' pay deal demotes these same staff to second class workers when compared to what's been offered to their colleagues in the driving grade.

Virgin West Coast has seen passenger numbers increase by 6%, increased the number of executive directors from three to five, made a saving of £5.2 million on pensions and made in excess of £50 million a year in profits over the last few years so there is clearly money in the pot.

RMT members are now gearing up for a massive fight to be treated fairly and equally and with the respect they deserve for keeping the railway running.

The strike ballot closes on 16 November.

Plymouth PCS members fight relocation threat

On 6 November PCS members took strike action to prevent a relocation which would likely result in around 50 redundancies. On the picket line the Socialist had the opportunity to speak to Jerry Crowley, Devon Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) PCS branch secretary and Robin Nicholl, South West PCS DWP regional organiser.

What is the reason for today's strike action?

Jerry Crowley (JC) We're striking to prevent a relocation to Clear Brook House. Should this relocation go ahead around 50 people could lose their jobs because they will be unable to travel to the new site for a variety of reasons: health, caring commitments, or through simple lack of transport.

What is the reason for the suggested relocation?

JC We don't understand the rationale. We were told it was to save money but we believe that could be best achieved by maintaining the current set up. The back-of-house work still needs to be done and we believe it could and should be done here in the city centre. Retaining the current set up will eliminate the cost of relocation and potential redundancy payments and, most importantly save jobs.

What's the mood been like on the picket line?

Robin Nicholl (RN) The mood has been buoyant.

JC It's definitely been one of the best attended pickets we've held at this site.

RN And that's really had a positive impact. We've signed up new members and we've emboldened a number of people not to cross the picket line.

What are the next steps from here?

RN If the employer proceeds with the planned relocation, our members are more than ready to take further action. Especially after the huge amount of support we've had from coworkers, members of the public and all those who have come out with us today on the picket line.

March for free education! We demand a future!

Tom Costello

Millions of young people face a future of only insecure work and a lifetime of debt. They're being repelled even further from the Tories' politics. May's government is weaker than ever. By contrast, Corbyn's anti-austerity, pro-worker politics have resonated with young people all over the country and inspired thousands into action.

In a pathetic attempt to undermine this, just prior to Tory conference May announced that tuition fees would be 'frozen' at £9,250 a year, with the repayment threshold being raised to £25,000. It goes without saying that this is nothing more than a desperate attempt to tap into a radical mood that the Tories will not and cannot have anything to gain from.

The capitalist class has fewer and fewer places to run or hide. Corbyn's general election manifesto drew fear straight into their hearts and the 'weak and wobbly' condition of the Tories means they're not a stable voice for the bosses either.

Students must organise and strike together now to put the final nail in the coffin of this corrupt Tory government. A great start would be for students nationwide to get together to demonstrate and send out a clear message - the Tories have no mandate to govern in the eyes of young people!

On 22 November, Socialist Students, with the full support of the Socialist Party, [will be staging protests at university campuses across the country](#) as part of an initiative to build a national fightback for free education and the cancellation of student debt. Join us!

Corbyn must challenge pro-gentrification council leader or others will

Nick Auvache, North London Socialist Party

Claire Kober, the Labour leader of Haringey council, has been reselected to stand as a councillor in the May 2018 elections. Kober supports [the Haringey Development Vehicle](#) (HDV), a scheme to privatise £2 billion worth of council housing, and hand it over to a joint venture with a private developer who will demolish entire estates and replace them with luxury apartments.

The HDV is opposed by local Labour parties and by the two local Labour MPs. Jeremy Corbyn's speech at the Labour Party annual conference attacked regeneration schemes which in reality mean "forced gentrification and social cleansing, as private developers move in and tenants and leaseholders are moved out".

But the majority of Labour councillors in Haringey are determined to ignore local and Labour Party opposition and to push ahead with the HDV.

Efforts by the left in the Labour Party have been focussed on deselecting pro-HDV councillors who have very little support among the Labour Party membership. According to reports by Labour Party members, Claire Kober secured reselection by signing up around 65 members during a two-week period in the Autumn of 2016.

It is reported that whole families joined at once recording the same mobile phone number and email address, and paying membership fees through a single transaction. These new members had not come to Labour meetings or canvassing sessions, until last week's selection meeting, where it is reported that they packed the meeting, outnumbering the left by 60 to 30, and voting as a block to reselect Claire Kober.

The Lib Dems (who are the opposition in Haringey Council) are opportunistically trying to reinvent themselves as the anti-HDV party, and make the HDV into the number one issue in the May elections.

The Labour council is blatantly disregarding the position of the party locally and nationally, enforcing privatisation policies that will be extremely damaging to local working class people and risk allowing the Lib Dems to make gains.

Jeremy Corbyn should personally intervene to prevent HDV proponents Claire Kober and Alan Strickland from standing as Labour Party candidates in these elections.

If Jeremy Corbyn fails to do this, then community anti-HDV candidates should stand in the May election to challenge Kober and other pro-HDV candidates.

Why I joined the Socialist Party: "I started to question whether there was a better way"

Adam Lines, Exeter Socialist Party

As far back as I can remember I have struggled to come to terms with the staggering and blatant inequality in the world. Why should one person have more money than they could ever possibly spend while another person starves?

In school I was often uninterested, unhappy and at times unteachable. Due to my dyslexia I experienced first-hand the harsh realities of inequality and discrimination.

As time progressed I became more aware of the failings of capitalism. I worked long hours in an extremely challenging job only to be faced with pay freezes, a lack of recognition and a lack of humanity when I needed it most. As I'm sure is the case with many others, I started to question whether there was a better way.

I have simply had enough of the current system. A capitalist society works only for those who have the ability to acquire capital or are fortunate enough to have it handed to them.

We have all watched as the rich are bailed out or manage to escape the requisite punishment for their crimes along with many other injustices that are often seen as the norm in a capitalist society. More and more people are pushed to their absolute limits by this parasitic belief system that pits human against human in a race to the bottom.

We need to try and create a society that realises that the current way of life is not sustainable, for the planet or indeed the human spirit. We need a more community based system in which people can use their skills to better themselves and society as a whole.

Most importantly we need to realise that capitalism is failing and that the pitfalls of this unbalanced way of life are becoming apparent. It is socialism that can and will provide a better world for all.

Carlisle socialists campaign against Universal Credit

Carlisle Socialist Party

[Universal Credit benefit changes](#) will cause untold misery for thousands in Carlisle when they are fully rolled out in April next year. On 4 November members of Carlisle Socialist Party, who are part of 'Carlisle Universal Credit Action Group' held a campaign stall in the town centre to highlight its effects.

The number of families with children being referred to foodbanks by social workers has shot up in the last couple of years. Already 30% of children in the UK are classed as poor, two thirds of those from working families.

Households with someone claiming Universal Credit are described by the Department for Work and Pensions as 'benefit units' - a deliberately dehumanising term which treats everyone as a unit of productivity, rather than addressing their individual needs.

Many people who have experienced the system will be scared to claim money they are entitled to, falling into poverty and destitution. The government has deliberately made the system as nasty as possible.

Members of the public signed our petition calling for Universal Credit to be stopped and replaced with a living income and proper public services for those in need, as well as calling for the outlawing of precarious work and providing people with proper jobs and a real living wage.

<http://www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/26470>