

## Editorial of the Socialist, issue 984

# Corbyn's customs union dividing line: now stand firm for pro-worker Brexit

"Those who say that the European Union is a neoliberal plot are, of course, largely right" admitted financial journalist and billionaire Simon Nixon [in the Times](#) last autumn.

He went on: "Any single market that allows free movement of capital and people by its very nature pits country against country, region against region and town against town... since 2008, the downside of this competition for capital and labour have become clear."

The defenders of capitalism usually take more care to try to hide the reality which [the Socialist has long exposed](#) - that the present EU is a bosses' club, crafted to serve the interests of the top corporations and super-rich.

Britain's capitalists were among its leading architects and most of them have made it clear that it's against their interests to leave it, so they apply great pressure for a Brexit that would mean staying in the EU Single Market and Customs Union.

### Blairites

Doing their bidding is Labour's right wing, including most of its MPs, [led by shadow Brexit secretary Keir Starmer](#), who has made no secret of pushing for a pro-capitalist 'soft Brexit'.

A section of Labour's right are trying to push Labour's shadow cabinet to embrace the single market, as 80 Labour MPs, council leaders and others called for in a statement shortly before Jeremy Corbyn's Coventry speech on Labour's approach to Brexit.

[Corbyn's speech](#) was carefully crafted to try to ease workers' fears on the possible loss of jobs and disruption to trade that the Tory Theresa May government applying a 'hard Brexit' could lead to.

In essence, Corbyn sought to oppose the present pro-capitalist EU Customs Union with the idea of one that would be in the interests of working people.

He stressed Labour's priority as being "to get the best deal for people's jobs, living standards and the economy" and rejected "any race to the bottom in workers' rights, environmental safeguards, consumer protections or food safety standards."

The key part of the speech was the new departure of placing a dividing line between Labour's position and the Tory government's, by declaring that Labour "would seek to negotiate a new comprehensive UK-EU customs union to ensure that there are no tariffs with Europe and to help avoid any need for a hard border in Northern Ireland."

This has put May in an even more difficult position than she has already been in, raising the prospect that a number of pro-EU rebel Tories could help inflict a big enough defeat on May to threaten her leadership.

The first reaction of big business representatives was one of relief that the alarming prospect of massive queues for goods at cargo terminals that has been warned about could potentially be averted.

However, what does Jeremy Corbyn mean by a new tariff-free customs union and could it be achieved?

To address the many workers who [voted Leave in the EU referendum out of anger against the establishment](#), austerity, globalisation, and a distant, unaccountable EU, he said that he would "not countenance a deal that left Britain as a passive recipient of rules decided elsewhere by others" and that the UK would have to have a say in future EU trade deals as part of a new customs arrangement.

He also gave assurances that Labour would "seek to negotiate protections, clarifications or exemptions where necessary in relation to privatisation and public service competition directives, state aid and procurement rules and the posted workers directive."

This was a speech designed to appeal to potential Labour voters, whether they voted Leave or Remain. By raising the aim of keeping trade tariffs at bay but adding the caveats and conditions that he did, Corbyn put a position that could be used to challenge the EU leaders in Brussels on their anti-working class policies and expose their motives if they reject it.

Understandably, the reaction in the labour and trade union movement and in the working class generally has been mixed, with a layer expressing relief, and others fearing it is a further retreat, under pressure from the right.

Before Corbyn's speech, right-wing Labour MP Frank Field, who supported Leave, said that he would be "surprised and disappointed" if Corbyn proposed to keep Britain in a customs union after Brexit.

But after the speech he called the position "marvellous" on the basis that "Jeremy knows they won't ever let us have an agreement like that".

However, there are clearly doubts among many working class people who voted Leave - as expressed in reports in the media - over whether Corbyn is reneging on his promise to abide by the referendum result.

This doesn't necessarily mean though that they won't vote Labour in the next general election. There were many points in Corbyn's speech aimed at differentiating his proposal for a customs union from the present pro-capitalist one.

Coupled with [his manifesto policies](#) on housing, tuition fees, the minimum wage, nationalisations, etc, he can gain enough support for a victory, as the surge towards Labour in the last general election (which came after the EU referendum) indicated is possible.

Whether Corbyn's new position turns out to be unfavourable to the working class will depend on his subsequent positions and actions - in particular how firmly he and those around him take a stand in workers' interests and mobilise mass support behind that, and counter the pro-capitalist positions of the Blairites.

Labour's right wing obscures the class nature of capitalist society, the fact that the ruling class - whether inside or outside the EU - has diametrically opposed interests to the overwhelming majority.

UK corporate profits reached an all-time high in the fourth quarter of 2017, yet austerity continues for workers and inequality goes on rising.

The right threatens that Corbyn won't be able to deliver his anti-austerity agenda without staying in the single market, and, they say, he shouldn't move away from what they describe as the EU's protection of workers' rights, the environment and 'social justice'.

It is true that there are many EU laws concerning standards and workers' protections that should be kept in UK law and improved on.

But [the driving force of the Single Market is to promote the interests of big business across Europe](#) in its task of exploiting workers and competing for markets.

EU rules have included the posted workers' directive which [enables bosses to use migrant labour to undercut existing wage levels](#).

EU rules [promote the privatisation of public services and try to inhibit government subsidies and nationalisations](#) - potentially distracting obstacles to a left government wanting to protect jobs.

The City AM paper spelt this out when on the morning of Corbyn's speech [its front page](#) headline screamed: "Corbyn's Red Brexit. Labour backs customs union but wants freedom to nationalise core industries". And in [its editorial](#): "His vision of a largely state-owned, state-run economy is not compatible with membership of the single market. It never has been."

Also, City AM alluded to the class nature of the EU: "Corbyn's Euroscepticism has its roots in the honourable left-wing critique of a corporatist club run in the interests of capital, not labour.

"Looking at youth unemployment rates in bailed-out southern states, who could disagree?\*" The challenge for Corbyn... is that when it comes to Labour MPs, hard-left criticism of the EU is a position of the few, not the many."

## Manifesto

Corbyn's present manifesto doesn't contain the extent of nationalisation raised as a spectre by City AM and much feared by big business, but he was absolutely right to argue for confronting "the growing concentration of unaccountable wealth and power in the hands of a tiny corporate elite" and to say: "In or out of the European Union we have to deal with the reality of market failure and austerity."

This should be done by taking a clear, firm stand against the anti-working class nature of the EU, combined with bold socialist proposals for the removal from effective power of that 'tiny corporate elite'.

It would mean [extending the Labour manifesto to include public ownership of the banks and largest companies](#), under democratic workers' control and management.

It is also essential for the left Labour and trade union leaders to make an international appeal to workers throughout Europe to demand similar steps themselves, in their own interests and those of their class across the continent and beyond.

Corbyn and McDonnell shouldn't fight this battle on their own, but must link up with the workers' movement across Europe for a common anti-capitalist strategy and socialist road.

Write off the 'debts' to multi-billionaire investors! Break with the EU capitalist treaties! And build a socialist alternative based on the democratic planning of production and society, for a decent future for all in a voluntary socialist confederation of European states.

\* This question was in brackets in City AM's original text.

- See also the editorial of March's Socialism Today: ['Tory Brexit divisions, Corbyn's opportunity'](#)

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# Walthamstow Save Our Square occupation: "This land is our land!"

Waltham Forest Socialist Party members

"Who is Walthamstow for?" asked David Gardiner, secretary of the Save Our Square campaign, in his opening speech at [the campaign's protest and occupation event](#) in east London on 24 February. "Is it for the people who live here now, their descendants stretching forward into the future, and others like them? Or is it for the Gordon Gekkos - with their briefcases and their second homes out in the shires - to use as a weekday dormitory with an easy commute from their offices?"

This reflected the mood of the crowd - angry at the knowledge that [the planned development of the town centre](#), far from being for the benefit of the local community, is in fact part of the working class being forced out.

We'll lose one third of our green space, 81 trees, and the children's playground will be moved. 'Monster blocks' of up to 29 stories will provide 500 homes - only 20% of which will be 'affordable' (but not for the majority of the local population) shared ownership properties.

As the local trade union council commented: "After weeks of leafleting and raising the alarm, around 600 angry demonstrators came together. A whole range of people and organisations came, many with homemade placards; artists brought models of the proposed monster blocks and marked with posters the trees destined for the chop.

"A line was sprayed to show, according to the plans, exactly how much space was going to be lost. The demonstrators occupied the area by gathering along this huge line and then marched around the square, singing and chanting, joined by musicians playing 'This land is your land'. The tail of the demo only just set off as the front arrived back in the square!"

## **Housing need**

Suzanne Muna, secretary of the Unite housing workers' branch, said she was pleased to be taking part with "yet another community forced - unfortunately - to come together to defend the community, the community spaces and the community housing that they have, in the face of corporate greed, and government greed, and council greed."

Linda Taaffe, secretary of the local trade union council, asked: "Does anyone think that any one of those 8,000 families registered as in housing need in the borough will get one of these flats? Does anyone think any one of the rising number of street homeless in the area will get one of these flats?" The crowd roared a decisive "no!" in response.

## **Opposition expressed**

Many objections were raised to the plans. Tony Phillips, from Unison's fire authority branch (personal capacity) said: "It's outrageous that the council, just a few months after the tragedy at Grenfell Tower, is giving permission for a new tower block to be built, 26 to 29 stories."

We received great shows of solidarity from other groups, including a speaker from the successful Haringey campaign against the planned mass privatisation of social housing there.

Councillors were deselected and now a majority of the candidates for May's election oppose the HDV. "We managed to turn around the largest planned demolition of council homes in UK history. We overturned 22 councillors. We overturned the leader of Haringey council."

Hundreds signed up to join Save Our Square on the day. Upcoming events related to the campaign include a meeting for those interested in standing as council candidates on 3 March, a protest at the headquarters of the developers Capital and Regional on 14 March, and a public meeting on 5 April (see more on the Facebook page: Save Walthamstow Town Centre).

## **May local elections**

The Socialist Party believes that the 3 March meeting is particularly important and that the next phase of the campaign must place a big emphasis on the upcoming local elections.

David said: "This square belongs to the residents of Waltham Forest and the job of the council is to act on our behalf with regards to how it's managed and used - it's called local democracy. The council does not dictate to us, we dictate to them - and this May we'll have the chance to issue new orders."

Linda added: "In the local elections there will be candidates asking for your vote. We want you to ask every candidate a question - are you in support of the plans or are you opposed? If they say they're in support, why on earth would anybody vote for them? If they are opposed - and we know there are a few at least - we say: put your head above the parapet, come out, start organising, get a council meeting and reverse the decision of the planning committee."

## **Needs-based budget**

Tom Taylor, the vice chair of Leyton and Wanstead Labour Party (neighbouring Walthamstow and in the same council area) highlighted that the council can make a stand: "Councils around the country are selling off land to generate income to pay for vital local services as a result of the chronic underfunding of local government. We believe there's a need to deal with the cause of that problem.

"The council could, for example, set a needs budget following this year's election, and campaign - ideally alongside other councils up and down the country - for the government to fund the difference between its income and its projected expenditure."

Socialist Party members were pleased to hear this approach, which we have long advocated, supported by others at the event.

Socialist Party member and young renter Isai Priya added: "One of the things we put forward is that local residents and young people in the borough should have the right to a say on what regeneration takes place - to a referendum.

"The right-wing councillors can't get away with turning their back and making the decision on our behalf. We need them to be accountable. We think they should be deselected. We want left-wing councillors with Jeremy Corbyn's policies to represent us."

The rally speakers were introduced by Save Our Square co-chair and Socialist Party member Nancy Taaffe.

Socialist Party members from around London took part in the protest, selling 74 copies of the Socialist and gathering details from several people interested in getting involved in the Socialist Party.

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# **Three major West Wales hospitals could close**

## **Corbyn and unions must fight Labour right**

**Beth Webster, nurse, Cardiff West Socialist Party**

Three major hospitals in West Wales could close under proposals by Hywel Dda University Health Board.

Until now, Welsh Labour has denied there is a crisis in the Welsh NHS - despite reports similar to those in England of waits of over 12 hours for ambulances and patients dying in corridors.

Management is considering various options. But potentially all three hospitals, with at least 850 beds collectively, will close.

In their place would be just one new hospital and various 'community hubs', with dangerous reductions in intensive and emergency care facilities.

The health board promises to 'consult' staff and the public, but offers only choices between which facilities to close, not how to prevent closures in the first place.

This will have a devastating impact on a vast area of West Wales, with the mainly rural population already having to travel vast distances for care.

Residents could be facing an hour's drive on rural roads to the nearest urgent care facility. That's assuming they have their own transport - public transport across Wales has faced massive cuts by Welsh Labour in recent years.

Pressure was already piled on to these hospitals a few years ago during an extensive 'restructure'. This saw the [closure of the A&E at Prince Philip Hospital](#) in Llanelli, the [special care baby unit in Withybush General Hospital](#), Haverfordwest, and the whole Mynydd Mawr Community Hospital in Tumble.

## **Underfunding**

Hywel Dda Health Board ascribes closures to lack of community care facilities, understaffing and underfunding. It has the highest level of overspend of any health board in Wales at £70 million.

The Welsh Government has repeatedly refused to bail out struggling health boards, [refusing to acknowledge longstanding problems in recruitment and increased demand](#).

Wales has an ageing population living with complex, chronic conditions, and worsening economic deprivation.

The Welsh NHS spent £19 million on healthcare from private providers in 2014-15 and this can only have increased since.

Labour MPs in the area have stated they are "closely monitoring the situation," meaning they will do nothing.

The [true nature of Welsh Labour](#) can no longer be denied. Corbyn must make a stand against the Blairites.

There will be massive public outcry if these closures go ahead. If Corbyn won't bring Welsh Labour to account, working class voters will lose faith in him.

And the unions need to lead a fightback too. We need mass action across the health service and public sector, with coordination of union action, for the working class to retake ownership of our NHS. No cuts, no closures, no privatisation!

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## **Sun 'commie spy' smear**

# **Corbyn didn't collaborate with Stalinism - but with Trotskyists against it**

**James Ivens**

Jeremy Corbyn stands accused of collaborating with Czechoslovak Stalinism. But in fact, his public backing of a Trotskyist call for workers' democracy shows the opposite.

The Sun's 'Corbyn and the commie spy' front page on 15 February made fantastical claims of 1980s espionage. The Times, more statesmanlike in its aspersions, said only that Czechoslovak agents "targeted" Corbyn.

The Mail and Telegraph joined the pile-on. So did the vice-chair of the Conservative Party, Ben Bradley MP.

Czechoslovak security files do allege that Ray Mawby, a Tory minister, sold British capitalism's secrets to Stalinism for years. A Czechoslovak defector revealed the same about right-wing Labour minister John Stonehouse. Both are now dead.

And - sensationally - Czech security archivists say Jeremy Corbyn... never gave the regime anything.

Back in reality, parliamentary records show Corbyn's open support for the 1989 rising against Czechoslovak Stalinism.

[Early day motion 210](#), 'Workers' democracy in eastern Europe', condemns "the corruption and mismanagement of the Stalinist bureaucracy." It calls for "genuine workers' democracy and socialism" and "not a return to capitalism."

The motion came from Terry Fields. Alongside Pat Wall and Dave Nellist, Terry was a Labour MP and supporter of Militant, forerunner of the Socialist Party. We are proud to [stand in the tradition of Trotskyism](#) - against both capitalism and Stalinism, and for international socialism.

Backbencher Corbyn was a signatory to the motion, reproduced in full below. So was Ken Livingstone, who in recent times has sadly made baseless attacks on Militant's record.

As for the spy thriller, Bradley has issued a [grovelling apology](#) after claiming Corbyn "sold British secrets to communist spies." Even Tory journalist Andrew Neil called this an "outrageous smear."

Funny as all this is - and it is very, very funny - it is also a warning.

For the bosses' press and the capitalist state, silly little lies like this are just an appetiser. They have a proven record of using [fabrication](#), [secret surveillance](#) and [subterfuge against the Socialist Party](#), and wider labour movement.

Corbyn will need to mobilise a mass movement of the working class to survive capitalist smears and sabotage.

## **Early day motion 210: workers' democracy in eastern Europe**

That this House...

- welcomes the magnificent movements in Eastern Europe for full democratic control over what happens in society and recognises that this outburst of discontent and opposition in East Germany and Czechoslovakia, in particular, reflects deep anger against the corruption and mismanagement of the Stalinist bureaucracy
- sees the movement leading in the direction of genuine socialism, not a return to capitalism
- congratulates the workers of the Soviet Union, particularly the striking miners of Vorkuta, in the Arctic Circle, who are leading the struggle for better pay and conditions and for an end to one-party dictatorship
- notes that their fight has been in the face of vicious anti-strike laws of a type that even Her Majesty's Government drew back from
- believes that these mighty working class struggles deserve the full support of the British and international labour and trade union movement
- and considers that the only way forward for the peoples of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe is on the basis of a return to the principles of genuine workers' democracy and socialism which formed the basis and inspiration for the October revolution

**Primary sponsor: Terry Fields, tabled 14 December 1989**

Signatures: Harry Cohen, Jeremy Corbyn, Ken Livingstone, Jimmy Wray

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## **Stormzy is right to slam Tories for Grenfell**

### **For an independent working class inquiry**

**Marvin Hay, Waltham Forest Socialist Party**

2018 has got off to a great start for young, black, working class artists. Daniel Kaluuya of Get Out and Marvel's Black Panther scooped the Bafta for best newcomer, and grime artist Stormzy scooped not one but two Brits.

Stormzy could have been any one of the 71 [killed at Grenfell Tower](#). When he took the stage, he correctly called out Theresa May and put the blame at the door of the government and the austerity agenda.

The prime minister replied by saying "Grenfell was an unimaginable tragedy." But it wasn't "unimaginable." A residents' group at the tower had been warning of the fire risk for years.

And the Daily Mail, in response, expounded that Stormzy had "happily benefited from the healthcare, housing and education opportunities the government, whether Tory or Labour, has provided."

It asked if he could "show a scintilla of gratitude to the country that offered his mother and him so much? Instead of trashing it."

This shows the contempt in which the establishment holds the working class. We are not allowed to pass judgment on the system that bloats the bosses on our labour.

The Mail's further implication is that immigrants and their descendants are somehow under some sort of contract of uncritical gratitude that renders them impotent in the face of the establishment's continued attacks on pay, housing and access to education.

In calling out Theresa May, Stormzy correctly made the issue one of politics. The Socialist Party demands justice for all the lost souls of Grenfell.

We fight for [safe, genuinely affordable housing](#) for all, with an end to cuts and privatisation.

The trade unions have the resources and authority needed to [launch an independent inquiry](#), led by surviving residents, that shifts the focus from defending the establishment to getting the real answers and justice for all those who perished.

Stormzy reminded the world that what happened wasn't just a freak accident or simple tragedy. It was a predicted consequence of underfunding, overpricing and rampant profiteering.

It was a result of capitalism, and Stormzy was right to use this platform to help ensure the world never forgets.

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## **KFC delivery crisis: make the bosses pay, not the workers!**

**Rob Williams, chair, National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN)**

As I was eating my breakfast on 21 February, I was contacted by London's LBC radio about the crisis at Kentucky Fried Chicken.

The news headlines may have tried to make light of the frustrations of regulars missing out on their fill of fried chicken - but there is a serious side for workers.

Normally, the host Nick Ferrari is a fearsome defender of corporate rights, especially when it comes to transport union RMT and tube strikes. He tends to explode when there is any mention of nationalisation!

But on this occasion, even he didn't try to justify workers being forced to pay the price of management's mistakes by losing pay through cancelled shifts.

It has once again lifted the lid on the precarious nature of fast food workers' employment.

Last October, general union GMB wrote to KFC to warn management about changing couriers to DHL. As the public is now aware, moving to DHL led to KFC's supply crisis, which saw restaurants closed down or running a depleted service.

Correctly, GMB is fighting to ensure that no KFC or DHL staff lose money.

As I told Ferrari, in my capacity as chair of the NSSN, we are proud to be part of bakers' union BFAWU's Fast Food Rights campaign. That union organised the first strike in Britain by McDonald's workers last September.

KFC might miss a couple of days because of their error, but they make super-profits for 52 weeks a year, so could easily afford to pay workers.

I used the interview to publicly call on KFC workers to join a union, like the BFAWU or GMB, as the best way to fight super-exploitation by management.

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**#SocialistWomen**

## **International Women's Day: 8 March 2018**

# **Resist the Tory war on women**

## **Defend women's and domestic violence services**

Get. Them. Out. The Tories have got to go. What other response can there be to the Tories' annihilation of the services needed by women fleeing domestic violence? This equates to murder by political decisions.

598 women were killed by men identified as current or former partners in England and Wales between 2009 and 2015.

An estimated 1.3 million women in Britain have experienced domestic abuse in the last year.

Women's Aid estimates that the move to Universal Credit, along with changes to funding formulas, will contribute to four in ten [women's refuges closing](#).

They say that 17% of specialist women's refuges were already forced to close between 2010 and 2014. More than 1,000 women and children have been turned away from shelters in the past six months.

The Socialist Party opposes all cuts to the specialist services needed by women and anyone fleeing domestic violence.

For one thing, there isn't a lack of money. [The Panama and Paradise Papers proved that](#).

## **Fund all services**

We also say that Labour councils could fund these services and all public services by [using their reserves and borrowing powers and by fighting to replace the Tories](#) with a Jeremy Corbyn-led, anti-austerity government.

We will also need to build a movement to resist the attacks on such a government from the capitalists.

In Yorkshire, Socialist Party members are involved in the [Save South Yorkshire Women's Aid campaign](#). The Labour council has £91 million in reserves but has refused to spend the thousands that are needed to keep this vital service open.

In Derby, Socialist Party members are involved in the [campaign to defend the women's centre](#) there.

We fight for a world free of inequality and sexism. A united working class-led struggle of all genders can fight the cuts, get the Tories out and transfer the power and wealth into the hands of the millions not the millionaires.

**The Socialist Party fights for:**

- No to all cuts and privatisation of jobs, public services and benefits. Defend our pensions
- No to funding changes for women's refuges. Fully fund refuges and run them with democratic committees that include service workers and users
- Build council homes and introduce rent control. No to Universal Credit
- End discrimination on grounds of gender, race, disability, sexuality, age and all other forms of prejudice
- Defend abortion rights. For a woman's right to choose when and whether to have children
- Fight for a socialist world to end poverty, inequality and exploitation

**Sarah Sachs-Eldridge**

- The print version of this article on the back page of Socialist issue 984 can be used for selfies and photos to celebrate International Women's Day on 8 March - use #SocialistWomen and tag us on Twitter ([@Socialist\\_party](#)), Facebook ([/CWISocialistParty](#)) and Instagram ([socialistpartycwi](#))
  - See next week's issue of the Socialist for the Committee for a Workers' International statement for International Women's Day
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# Workers strike back!

## Coordinate the struggles

**Mick Whale, Hull Trade Union Council**

Faced with a fresh series of attacks from the Tories and their friends in big business, workers are striking back up and down the country.

National strikes by lecturers and rail workers are ongoing. And local struggles are on the rise, like [the mini-strike wave in Manchester](#).

In Hull, the national strikes are joined by striking recycling workers, and disputes brewing in construction and the local council.

### UCU

University lecturers in the UCU union have [walked out against plans to cut their pensions](#) by up to 40%.

They were supported on many campuses by their students, often organised by Socialist Students societies.

Students understand that high-quality teaching and experience depends on well-qualified, well-motivated lecturers. If the college bosses don't back down, lecturers will want to escalate the action.

## **RMT**

Rail workers in the RMT union continue [long-running strike action on lines across Britain](#) against plans to scrap the safety-critical role of guards on trains.

This is a battle to maintain health and safety standards, protect passengers, and defend pay and jobs.

Pete March, secretary of Hull RMT, explained that last month a train split in half in Leeds station during rush hour and had to be evacuated. Without the presence of a guard, passenger safety would have been at serious risk.

## **Hull**

In Hull, recycling workers employed by FCC Environment are also beginning a series of strikes to fight for the rights of all workers to equal sick pay. Tony Smith, shop steward, explained workers were solid and determined.

The bosses of FCC say they can't afford equal sick pay. But Madrid-based FCC Group reported €56.5 million profits in the first half of 2017 alone!

The FCC strike is significant because it is not a defensive strike, only defending existing conditions - as vital as those are.

Rather it is offensive, an attempt to win better conditions for a section of the workforce.

Already, GMB union steward Tony Graham has made it clear that no bin wagon driver will cross a picket line.

Other workers in Hull are balloting for industrial action, including housing officers at Hull City Council.

And local construction workers are also continuing protests against bosses' cynical attempt to use super-exploited foreign labour to undercut national union agreements on terms and conditions.

Socialist Party member Keith Gibson reported that Polish labourers queued up to join the union and the fight for equal treatment after he and other activists extended the message of trade union solidarity.

## **Confidence**

All the attempts by the Tories and Blairites to intimidate, split and [undermine the confidence of workers through the law](#) have failed. There is a growing confidence that we can win.

In Hull, the trade union council is organising a rally and demonstration in support of all the workers striking locally. We will also be establishing a hardship fund to help support their actions.

The Trade Union Congress should be looking to coordinate action on a national scale. With the battle to defend the NHS as a priority, it should be linking up disputes across the public sector and beyond.

Striking together, workers can force out this divided and hated Tory government, and push Jeremy Corbyn into power on anti-austerity programme.

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**Note: reports and pics of the latest UCU strikes in HE and FE will be posted up soon**

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# **Lecturers strike around country in defence of pensions**

The Socialist Party gives its full backing to University and College Union (UCU) members in 61 universities starting their 14 days of [strike action against plans to completely scrap the defined benefit pensions scheme](#). Here are some reports from picket lines and protests around the country:

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## Bristol

The brutal attack on lecturers' pensions was met with a massive show of strength at Bristol university. UCU members began the first of 14 days of strike action with the biggest pickets the university has ever seen.

Members reported how the union branch has grown by 40% recently as workers seek to fight back against cuts that will see a majority of staff losing half their pension.

Staff were joined by hundreds of students as the 1,000 strong strike rally marched from the university campus to the city centre.

Speakers explained how the attack on pensions is linked to cuts, fees and the drive to a market in education.

Everyone was clear that they want an education system for people, not profit. The president of Bristol Students' Union called on students not to cross picket lines, to loud applause and cheers. The solidarity was underlined by chants of: "Students and workers - unite and fight!"

**Tom Baldwin**

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## Southampton

Pickets were out across Southampton campus in large numbers determined to show their opposition to the massive attack on their pensions.

One picket explained: "This is just the latest in a long list of problems we face, which is probably why there has been such strong support for the strike.

It's part of the neoliberal agenda and if they succeed in reducing contributions to our pensions, they will make a more tempting package for privatisation. If our pension suffers, will it be teachers then health workers next?"

Strikers were buoyed up by the active solidarity of student activists who have been building support for the strike alongside opposing cuts and student debt.

Southampton Socialist Students has produced leaflets backing the strike and calling for the resignation of overpaid 'vice-cutter' Sir Christopher Snowden, linking the fight over pensions to the fight for free education.

**Nick Chaffey**

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## Nottingham

Pickets spoke to Socialist Party members about why they are striking and supporting action:

Cyril Rauch, a UCU rep said: "The change from a defined benefit scheme concerns me. Across Britain, university staff could lose between £10,000 and £40,000 a year, once retired. Why should the stock market define my pension in the future? We need laws to protect our pensions."

Another striker said: "So many reasons - it's not just about pensions - about education, universities as a sacred space - it's about being together, about learning."

One supporter said: "As a casualised teaching assistant employed via an agency, I am not part of the dispute; I am supporting the university lecturers who are on strike who work very hard, every weekend and evenings, to mark, sort things for teaching and do their own research."

**Also at University of Nottingham, Dr Neil Hughes, on the picket line, spoke to Pete Watson:**

"This is the longest most concerted strike action I can remember for 25 years. The number of strike days planned shows the strength of feeling about this issue. It's not just about pensions though, it's also against the marketisation of higher education as a whole. It's slowly dawning on people, both academics and students, that marketisation has to be opposed.

We've seen recently government's plans for making students choose which university to go to on the basis of the fees paid. This is just another example of market competition which has to be stopped."

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## Leeds

Around 500 staff, students and supporters joined the demonstration and rally organised by the UCU to mark the first day of their national strike action over attacks on pensions. 150-200 strikers turned up to help picket, with seemingly every one of the tens of entrances to the university covered by at least a couple of pickets if not half a dozen or so.

Notable was the number of younger academics joining this strike, many of whom are on short-term or other insecure contracts. While many had struck during the 'Sacker's Charter' dispute last year, many others were today picketing for the first time.

A key factor in this has been the huge student support at the university. Hundreds of students have signed petitions, including one initiated by Socialist Students, critical of the Leeds uni vice-chancellor's stance of not doing anything about the dispute, alleging that he has 'no influence'. On the picket lines many staff commented that the VC, a former head of HEFCE, always brags about how much influence he has.

This position has been combined with very hostile emails to students and staff over the dispute, which have proven counterproductive. This huge support has undoubtedly given staff a huge boost.

The strike also saw tremendous solidarity from the local trade union movement, with local trade union activists joining picket lines and banners from Leeds uni Unison, PCS and Leeds TUC being among those present on the strike rally demo.

Socialist Party members spent the morning visiting picket lines and discussing the action with strikers. We distributed copies of our strike bulletin and sold a dozen copies of the Socialist. We also helped with the success of the strike rally by lending UCU our PA system, a vital necessity given the huge numbers in attendance.

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## Newcastle

Vibrant pickets dotted the city centre as UCU members posted sentry at all entrances to Newcastle university. I spoke with workers determined not to let the pensions assault erode the conditions of their careers further into precariousness.

Off-the-scales public support arrived as bus drivers and motorists sounded horns with each change of traffic signals. Student mobilisations provided solidarity from the next generation which would suffer under pension 'reforms' amounting to little more than retirement savings accounts to be gambled on dodgy companies like Carillion.

A 500-strong rally followed at Grey's Monument with PCS, Unite, and Northern TUC, uniting the North East's trade union family in support of UCU members.

## Birmingham

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### Glasgow

The UCU strike has been very large across Glasgow and Strathclyde universities. There were pickets all over Strathclyde's sprawling campus and over 100 staff and students picketed the main gate at Glasgow university on Thursday. Students turned out to support to support pickets on Friday afternoon as well.

Hundreds of staff and students came out for a city centre rally on the first day, marching from both campuses. UCU pickets also supported the council workers' trade union protest later that day at the council's budget setting meeting.

The Strathclyde UCU branch is participating in a "teach in" on fighting austerity, in the students' union premises. Pickets told us the deputy principal at Strathclyde had emailed students saying the strike would have no impact but it seems students are coming out in support.

Adam, a UCU picket at Glasgow university, told us: "It's interesting to see the vice chancellors and university bosses divided. Even ours says there should be negotiation. But we need to keep the pressure on."

**Matt Dobson**

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### Sussex

At the University Of Sussex, students joined staff on picket lines across the campus in an enthusiastic display of solidarity, before marching through the university buildings, calling on those still in lectures to join them.

After speeches by lecturers and students, the strikers moved onto the road at the campus entrance to block buses from coming on site. They were successful and the bus company agreed not to send any buses for the duration of the action, and the vice chancellor even came out of his office to "negotiate".

However, he was evasive and refused to give any satisfactory answers to the questions asked by those present, on the university's apparent disregard for the demands of its staff.

Over the coming weeks, the pickets will continue and there will be various teach-ins taking place, organised by the lecturers.

**Connor Rosoman**

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### Manchester

The first two days of strike action gained strong support at the University of Manchester with all teaching buildings covered by well-attended picket lines. There was a large rally on the Thursday with speakers expressing the anger felt by university workers at the planned destruction of the pension scheme and the increasing marketisation of education. Students brought solidarity greetings and also handed over money they had raised for the strike fund.

Following the picket lines on Friday, UCU members marched along with students and supporters to a planned meeting at nearby Manchester Metropolitan University Students' Union where new universities minister, Sam

Gyimah, was due to speak.

A lively and noisy protest was held outside the building which then moved into and occupied the bar adjacent to the meeting hall. The minister was forced to come out and address the protesters and was faced with a barrage of angry questions about not only the pensions scheme, but higher education in general. Unable to answer the points being raised, he retreated back into the meeting hall to chants of "Tories out!".

A Manchester UCU member

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This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 23 February 2018 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

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## University bosses rocked - strikes can save staff pensions!

Sam Morecroft, Sheffield UCU anti-casualisation Officer (personal capacity)

"University chiefs split as strikes cause chaos!" read the front page of the Times on 23 February. They weren't wrong - after just two days of our planned 14-day strike programme!

Universities UK didn't expect this reaction. They thought they could get away with scrapping defined benefit pensions and stripping us of a decent guaranteed income in retirement.

But now they've provoked the [most disruptive strike action seen in British universities in many years](#). It shows that university workers have had enough of marketisation and privatisation.

What's more, [students angry at sky-high fees and savage education cuts](#) are completely on the side of staff. And since they're now 'paying customers' they're demanding refunds of their fees!

Student support has been fantastic and at our campus in Sheffield around 500 staff and students gathered at our rally, with a carnival atmosphere. We've also held teach-out sessions and discussions of the strike with students.

We also have the support of the leadership of the Labour Party - unthinkable just a few years ago. Some Labour MP's have refused to cross picket lines, John McDonnell spoke at the Goldsmiths strike rally and Jeremy Corbyn posted a YouTube video sending solidarity and thanks to striking UCU members.

We have to ensure that the fantastic strength and energy of the first week's picket lines continues.

[The bosses are divided, but we are strong](#) - this attack on our security in retirement has provoked a massive response.

We need to keep the pickets solid, continue to build solidarity, and increase the pressure on UUK.

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## Unite victory in EDF meter workers' union recognition fight

The successful battle for the trade union recognition of EDF Energy workers transferred to Morrison Data Services has been hailed as a key victory by general union Unite.

Around 40 meter readers had unanimously voted for strike action if Morrison's, based in Newcastle, had not recognised the EDF workers after they had been transferred.

However, following talks between Unite and the management at the conciliation service Acas, a recognition agreement was hammered out.

Unite regional officer Onay Kasab said: "This is a significant victory which demonstrates that union recognition rights can't be quietly forgotten and silently pushed into the shadows when workers are transferred between organisations.

"The issue was union recognition. Following the ballot for strike action the employers agreed to talks.

"The result is a recognition agreement with Unite. Members have now agreed with the proposal which the union recommended.

"It is an important win - in many cases where similar transfers happen, the recognition agreement does not transfer.

"This was a fight worth fighting and Unite won't be found wanting in this respect in the future."

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## Corbynism shows 'Clause IV' still relevant a hundred years on

Steve Score, Socialist Party national committee

A hundred years ago, in the wake of the Russian revolution, [Labour adopted the 'socialist clause' in its constitution - Clause IV, part 4](#). 23 years ago, in 1995, Tony Blair carried through its abolition and replacement with a pro-capitalist one.

The adoption of Clause IV reflected the demands of the organised workers' movement and the Marxist strand that had always existed in it.

It talked of the aim of the Labour Party as being the "common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange" in order to secure for the workers the "full fruits of their labour".

Its significance in the eyes of many activists was shown by the fact that it was printed on every Labour Party membership card for decades and was understood as the taking of industry and services out of the hands of big business, by means primarily of nationalisation.

It was of course never carried out by the leadership when in power. But there were battles inside Labour between those who really wanted this clause to be implemented and those who saw it as some distant or never achievable aim.

A constitution alone does not define a party of course, what it actually does is key. During the Blair era - and before it - Labour had been transforming into a fully pro-capitalist party.

He saw Clause IV's replacement as part of the 'modernisation' of Labour. In other words, further reassurance to big business that Labour no longer had even the pretence of socialist aims.

How much Labour had changed was reflected by Blair's success in its abolition, in contrast for example, to right-wing Labour leader Hugh Gaitskell's failure to eliminate it in 1959.

**Jeremy Corbyn**

The [election and re-election of Jeremy Corbyn as leader](#) of the Labour Party with his anti-austerity stance raises the possibility that Labour could be transformed again.

But as the Socialist has argued, the continued existence of the Blairite wing in local councils, parliament and in the party machine (despite the recent resignation of the Blairite general secretary) means that it is still two parties in one. The potential transformation has not yet been decided.

A reestablishment of a version of Clause IV, even if in more modern language, alongside clear socialist policies would help that process of transformation if it was a serious programme rather than an empty symbol.

The original Clause IV, passed at the Labour Party conference in 1918, was written by Sidney Webb, a member of the Fabians. This group reflected the continuation of a liberal approach within Labour and had no intention of overthrowing capitalism.

It was a compromise by the leadership, knowing they had to concede to the militant and even revolutionary mood that existed among the organised working class at the time.

Labour had been created out of the struggles of workers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The eventual realisation of the majority of trade unions that a 'party of labour' was needed was crucial.

Marxists played a key role in the process. But from the beginning the leadership was always more pro-capitalist.

The struggle between different wings of the movement was reflected in motions put to conferences. In 1908 the Labour conference passed a resolution calling for: "socialisation of the means of production, distribution and exchange, to be controlled by a democratic state in the interests of the entire community, and the complete emancipation of labour from the domination of capitalism, and landlordism, with the establishment of social and economic equality between the sexes."

## **World War One**

During World War One, the majority of the leaders of the party and Trade Union Congress supported the government in the imperialist war.

This went along with sacrificing the needs of working class people to the 'national interest', accepting the 'Treasury Agreement' suspending trade union rights and the Munitions Act that made strikes illegal.

Yet the class struggle did continue during the war. Miners came out on strike against cuts in pay and increasingly [the rank-and-file shop stewards movement, originally an unofficial movement, took a lead](#).

Mass engineering strikes broke out on Clydeside and the Clyde Workers' Committee was formed. Shop stewards in Sheffield formed their own committee and led strikes against the enlistment into the army of skilled engineers. Similar committees were established elsewhere.

The [February revolution in Russia](#) with its reestablishment of the soviets - workers', soldiers' and peasants' councils - and subsequently [the October revolution, when they came to power](#), had a massive impact.

In June 1917 a conference was called in Leeds by the United Socialist Council attended by 1,150 delegates, including some of the Labour leaders.

This conference passed a motion calling for [labour movement organisations "to establish in every town...councils of workers and soldiers' delegates](#) for initiating and coordinating working class activity" and "for the complete political and economic emancipation of international labour".

The national conference of the Metal Engineering and Shipbuilding committee met in October and came out in support of the Bolshevik revolution.

The call for the establishment of soviets did not materialise, but these events all had an impact on the Labour Party conference which began in Nottingham in January 1918 and reconvened in London in February.

The adoption of Clause IV, part 4 was forced onto the leadership from below. It was a compromise which left out the popular demand of workers' control in favour of a vaguer "best obtainable system of popular administration and control of each industry of service."

Conference also agreed a programme including a minimum wage, a 48-hour week, a million houses to be built within two years with capital supplied free of interest by the government, a publicly owned and integrated transport system, a wealth tax and a vast increase in public services.

This was a symbolic turning point in the history of Labour. For the first time it described itself constitutionally as a socialist party.

The dual character of Labour persisted, one where the leadership remained pro-capitalist but it had roots in the working class and a structure that enabled pressure from the base on to the leaders.

## **Nationalisation**

The [1945 Labour government did carry through significant nationalisation](#) and huge steps forward in the lives of working class people such as through the establishment of the NHS, the welfare state and a mass expansion of council housing.

The end of World War Two was again an era of mass pressure, reforms from above relieving the pressure of revolution from below.

The [post-war gains were also made possible and were long-lasting because of the long economic upswing](#). Something that now no longer exists.

However, these nationalisations of key industries such as coal, steel and railways, rather than being part of a democratic socialist plan, were used to prop up capitalism itself and run it in a bureaucratic way.

In the later era of leftward swinging Labour Party membership in the late 1970s and 1980s nationalisation again became a key debate.

Inside the Labour Party, Militant, forerunner of the Socialist Party today, put forward a programme of nationalisation of the banks and commanding heights of the economy under democratic workers' control and management. A genuine realisation of Clause IV. This would need to be backed up by a mass movement of working class people outside of parliament.

This gained significant support, although those on the reformist left did not agree with it. Yet those around left Labour MP Tony Benn did advocate the nationalisation of the banks and top 25 companies, way further to the left of the programme of Jeremy Corbyn today.

The defeats of workers' struggles in the late 1980s and the shift in the political situation following the collapse in the Stalinist regimes in Russia and eastern Europe created a new era.

The Labour right were able to take advantage of the dropping socialist consciousness to [begin the transformation of Labour, completed under Tony Blair](#). The expulsion of Militant supporters was the start of that process.

In the new capitalist Labour Party privatisation and the primacy of 'the market' was key. Blair's version of Clause IV, now in Labour's constitution, replaced common ownership with the "enterprise of the market and the rigour of competition...joined with the forces of partnership".

But today the reaction against neoliberal austerity, especially following the banking crisis of 2008, has resulted in a new interest in socialist ideas.

Corbyn's election to Labour leader raises huge hopes of a new approach. Policies of reversing cuts, renationalisation of rail and utilities, raising the minimum wage to £10 an hour, free education and building council homes are all hugely popular.

A Corbyn-led Labour government trying to carry through this programme will [face fierce resistance from big business](#) as well as opposition from the Blairites. The Socialist Party fully supports these policies, but would go further.

## **Socialist plan**

To ensure big business is unable to sabotage the economy it is necessary once again to raise [the need for the banks and commanding heights of the economy to be brought into public ownership under democratic control](#).

A democratic socialist plan would then be possible to fundamentally benefit the lives and living standards of the vast majority of society instead of the super-rich.

100 years on, Clause IV is still relevant. Then it reflected the desire of working class people to end capitalism which had created poverty and war.

Today, after record levels of inequality and falls in living standards for the majority, after austerity and the destruction of public services, the debate on a socialist alternative is as important as ever. Building a mass working class party to carry through that programme is vital.

## **Extracts from Clause IV, part 4, 1918**

"To secure for the workers by hand or by brain the full fruits of their industry and the most equitable distribution thereof that may be possible upon the basis of the common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange, and the best obtainable system of popular administration and control of each industry of service."

## **Extracts from the 1995 version (still in Labour's constitution)**

"We work for: a dynamic economy, serving the public interest, in which the enterprise of the market and the rigour of competition are joined with the forces of partnership and co-operation to produce the wealth the nation needs and the opportunity for all to work and prosper, with a thriving public sector and high quality services, where those undertakings essential to the common good are either owned by the public or accountable to them."

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# **Socialist Students conference highlights successful work and international solidarity**

**Theo Sharieff, Socialist Students national chair**

Over 100 students attended the annual Socialist Students conference at Birmingham University on 24 February.

The day highlighted the successes of Socialist Students' work over the last 12 months and the growth, not only of Socialist Students in a number of areas, but also in the popularity of a socialist ideas and search for an alternative to the capitalist system among students and young people.

I started the discussion on [the role of students in the fight against austerity](#). Other speakers included a Birmingham University lecturer, who spoke about the [ongoing lecturers' strike action](#) in defence of pensions and Richard Beddows, Unite convenor during [the Birmingham bins dispute](#).

Meeting the day after the first wave of lecturers' walkouts, there was an outpouring of solidarity towards the striking lecturers. Students later discussed and voted in support of Socialist Students building for student

strikes alongside the industrial action being taken by the University and College Union.

Richard spoke about the bitter dispute between refuse workers and their employers, the Labour-run Birmingham council. Richard reaffirmed the importance of student and worker solidarity.

Two sessions were then run side by side. The first was to discuss the [mass movement of youth and workers in Catalonia](#) at the end of 2017. This was introduced by Jose Antonio Lopez Bueno, organiser for the Sindicato de Estudiantes (a socialist-led student union) and a member of [Izqueirda Revolucionaria](#), the Socialist Party's sister organisation in the Spanish state.

The second session, introduced by Socialist Students national organiser Claire Laker-Mansfield, marked the anniversary of the [revolutionary strike wave which swept across France in 1968](#).

After taking elections on a range of motions submitted to the conference by the elected national steering committee and Socialist Students groups around the country, conference voted to elect a new steering committee, which has grown substantially since last year.

The day finished with a rally which highlighted the international links Socialist Students has to a whole host of socialist organisations across the world.

Conference received messages from young activists and co-thinkers in Hong Kong fighting against clampdowns on democratic rights by the regime, heard from Refugee Rights organiser Lawanya Chandra, and a greeting from Nigerian co-thinkers running a campaign in defence of education rights. Speakers also included Socialist Party organiser Lenny Shail and William Campbell from Socialist Students Scotland.

The conference demonstrated the serious work countless Socialist Students groups are conducting up and down the country, building the forces for the socialist transformation of society in schools, colleges and universities.

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## Great turnout and discussion at 200 years of Marxism meeting

Students from University of Liverpool, nearby Liverpool John Moores University and Edgehill University Socialist Students societies came together for a '200 years of Marxism' meeting on 21 February.

We did this to show students just how relevant Marx's ideas are in 2018 - 200 years after he was born and 170 years since [the publication of the Communist Manifesto](#). Socialist Students national organiser Claire Laker-Mansfield introduced the discussion, describing how Marx's analysis remains the most accurate explanation for the functioning of the world economy and the problems we face today, from the low paid 'gig economy' and public sector cuts, to the existential threat of climate change.

Weeks of leafleting and postering paid off with a great turnout of new faces, several of which have already agreed to get involved in Socialist Students, have attended our meetings and taken part in our leafleting campaigns. This meeting also coincides with [the lecturers' pension strike](#) which has enjoyed overwhelming and highly visible support from students both here in Liverpool and at campuses across the country. It has not only helped Socialist Students boost our profile on campus in Liverpool with our campaign in support of the strike, it has also helped to prove the continued importance of Marxism after 200 years!

**Jack Yarlett, Liverpool John Moores Uni Socialist Students**

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## US school shooting massacre

# Young people mobilise against establishment to demand change

Following the shooting massacre at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, on 14 February, thousands of students defied disciplinary threats and walked out of schools across the USA in solidarity with the surviving Parkland students and to demand gun control.

Six Parkland survivors who had an audience with Donald Trump to demand gun control came away empty handed after the right-wing president instead suggested arming teachers. An unsurprising response for a politician whose presidential campaign was backed by the National Rifle Association (NRA).

Many more walkouts will take place in the coming weeks. Stephen Edwards from Socialist Alternative (US co-thinkers of the Socialist Party) reports on this grassroots movement.

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The killing of 17 young people in Florida, with many more injured, is yet another massacre in a seemingly endless succession of mass shootings at schools.

However, this time the survivors have stood up to the arms industry and the politicians they control and called time on their enabling of mass killings.

The dam has been broken by a group of energised and furiously angry high school students, five years and 239 school shootings after the massacre at Sandy Hook.

During these years politicians hired by the gun lobby have repeatedly used "thoughts and prayers" to silence any serious discussion about addressing the madness of a society awash with guns, including automatic weapons meant for the battlefield.

At a 7,000-strong meeting a squirming Republican Florida Senator Marco Rubio was confronted by Parkland student Cameron Kasky, who demanded that he should decline NRA sponsorship.

## Protests spread

Inspired by the Florida students, multiple demonstrations have taken place throughout the country, including on the headquarters of the central organisation of the gun manufacturers' lobby, the NRA.

A march in Chicago, called at a few days' notice, brought out about 3,000 people, mainly women, on 18 February. Calls from the platform against NRA-supported politicians, to "vote them out" were replaced on the street by "throw them out"! This is indicative of a mood in society that does not want to wait for the November mid-term congressional elections.

The lead is being given by young people. Students in high school today were ten, eleven, or 12 when Sandy Hook happened in December 2012. They have grown up with active shooter drills - drills that tragically didn't save the Parkland students.

Further protests are planned, including a national day of action on 20 April which is the anniversary of the Columbine school shooting (1999) as well as for a march in Washington DC on 24 March.

Unions that represent teachers and other school employees should support these calls and mobilise their members to take action alongside students, including strike action where possible. The mobilisations should escalate around concrete demands including banning semi-automatic weapons and other basic gun safety measures; full funding for all school services to help students in crisis situations and demilitarisation of our communities.

## Gun violence

There are many reasons for the scale of violence but all point back to the savage history of American capitalism and the brutal alienation and inequality it engenders today. The past 40 years of neoliberal policies have seen relentless attacks on the historic gains of working people, women and black people. These attacks have been carried out under both Republican and Democratic administrations.

With the profound weakening of the labour movement and the massive increase in inequality there has been a loss of the traditions of collective action and solidarity, which are vital to pushing back the dark forces tearing at our social fabric.

While acknowledging that there are many legitimate reasons why people want to own a weapon in this society, including personal protection, Socialist Alternative has directly posed the question of whether the present situation is in any way in the interests of working people. The history of mass shootings is enough to show that the prevalence of guns in society is not a positive thing for the vast majority of people.

But we also reject the idea that only the state can be trusted with weapons. The history of police and military interventions is one of attacks on unions and civil rights organisations, of spying, provocations and as we have seen in too many instances, the ability of the police to shoot unarmed suspects, particularly people of colour, without consequence.

Peaceful political protests such as Occupy and demonstrations against corporate politics have been attacked by the police, and undemocratically infiltrated by agents provocateurs.

When communities have exploded in anger against police brutality as in Ferguson and Baltimore, military equipment has been deployed that, like assault weapons, were developed for use in a war - except that as troops returning from Iraq and Afghanistan have pointed out, in a war there are clearer rules of engagement.

Peaceful demonstrations have been attacked, beaten, pepper gassed and the participants pursued using legislative measures against the right to protest. The enormous number of military-style weapons that are available in the US present a clear and present danger to working class people and youth.

A majority of young and working class people agree that we need reasonable limits on the type of firearms available, and also restrictions on the ability of people with a history of violence and threats of violence to have access to them.

Socialists support some limitations on access to guns, and the types of guns that are available, as a public health measure. However, gun control measures will clearly not solve the problems of poverty, inequality and alienation that underlay gun violence. Measures to sharply curtail the guns already in circulation would require a massive police intervention of a kind which few would support.

## **The NRA**

It is very important to see that this emerging movement of students and teachers is not only demanding restrictions on the type and availability of firearms. It is also very clearly directed against the gun lobby, specifically the NRA, the arms manufacturers and the right-wing politicians they support.

The NRA is a multi-million dollar corporate lobby for an industry which, like other polluting and dangerous industries such as tobacco, asbestos, oil, coal, gas, and agro-chemicals, seeks to block legislation and prevent research into measures that might protect humans and their environment from their products in order to protect their profits.

One of the NRA's standard responses to massacres like the ones in Las Vegas or at the First Baptist Church in Sutherland, is to say that the answer to "bad guys" with guns is to arm the "good guys" to the teeth.

In a society where the idea of collective solidarity has been so severely undermined and where individuals feel helpless, this unfortunately has an effect. In Florida, there is now serious discussion about arming teachers in the classroom. We reject this approach which will only tend to worsen the climate of fear and violence.

## Broader programme

The students are correctly pointing to Trump and the NRA and saying, 'if you can't fix this you should get out of the way'. They are correctly pointing to the corrupting influence of corporate money. But this applies not just to the Republicans but to the Democrats as well. The Democrats and their allies will naturally seek to turn these events into a further argument that the key issue is to vote for them in November.

But we need to insist that the only way to defeat Trump and the right is to build a mass movement based on a programme that speaks to the needs of ordinary people. The revolt of youth against violence and political corruption can be the spark to reignite the movement.

Empower, the Women's March youth section which launched the call for a national 17 minute walkout on 14 March by students and teachers, said in a statement: "Congress must take meaningful action to keep us safe and pass federal gun reform legislation that address the public health crisis of gun violence." This is a good formulation which points further than simply gun control - it's pointing to the need for far more resources in the schools to treat people with various issues.

Young people and their parents have the right to demand that they be able to go to school every day safe from the horror that visited Parkland. Young Dreamers (undocumented young migrants given the right to remain under the 2012 Obama Daca programme) have the right to be safe from deportation; young women have the right to be safe from sexual assault; young black people have the right to be safe from police brutality.

Through collective, mass struggle we can bring down the Trump regime and win real reforms. But we will need to go further and root out the capitalist system that keeps breeding horror upon horror.

- [Read the article in full on socialistworld.net](#)

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## 'Anti-austerity' Bristol Labour passes £34 million cuts budget

**Tom Baldwin, Bristol Socialist Party**

Bristol City Council will make another £34 million of cuts in the coming year. This cuts budget was proposed by Labour mayor Marvin Rees and voted for by Labour councillors.

This was despite the intervention of a distraught mother whose daughter had taken her own life a few days before.

Her explanation of the failures of social and mental health services brought home the brutal reality of what austerity means. She said that further cuts would mean "a lot of blood in this council chamber". But still the cuts continue.

Rees even congratulated himself and the council on passing a 'prudent' budget that would protect services! He ignores the fact that he is making the cuts the Tories are demanding. There can be no kind way to make these cuts.

I spoke at the start of the meeting, presenting a petition from the Bristol and District Anti-Cuts Alliance calling for a no-cuts budget. [The council has choices and could use its position to resist the cuts.](#)

Bristol council has around £80 million in general reserves and over £200 million in 'usable' reserves, as well as the power to borrow cheaply. By using some of this money it would be entirely possible to set a legal and balanced budget, without cuts, while a mass campaign is built.

It is not just the Socialist Party and the anti-cuts alliance that have put forward this approach. It has even been [urged on the mayor by elected bodies of his own party.](#) Yet he still parrots lies about 'illegality' and claims to

be powerless in the face of cuts.

We will [continue to push for an anti-cuts fight from our council](#). Even if they don't then we will continue to fight every cut ourselves. We cannot stand to see another worker lose their job. We certainly cannot stand to see another parent lose their child.

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## **Newham: teaching workers and parents determined to halt academies**

Teachers and teaching assistants, with the active support of students and the public, have been [taking strike action in the east London borough of Newham](#) against the forced academisation of schools.

On 26 February a hundreds-strong noisy and vibrant demonstration, organised by the local National Education Union (NEU) branch, marched to the town hall in East Ham to demand support from the recalcitrant Labour council and mayor.

At the full council meeting following the march, Newham Labour council voted to reverse its long-held position of support for academisation.

Unfortunately many Labour councillors abstained or refused to accept the anti-academy motion.

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### **Ian Pattison, East London Socialist Party**

The mood at the NEU rally against academisation, held on 22 February, was electric as 90 people from three striking schools - Avenue, Cumberland, and Keir Hardie - crammed into Highway church after being on the schools' picket lines.

"If you don't fight, you don't win. If you lie down, they'll walk all over you. Fighting school by school is isolating, we want to unite together" said newly elected Newham NEU secretary and Avenue union rep, Louise Cuffaro, to ringing applause.

Louise, who chaired the rally, also read out a message of support from Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn, again to applause.

School governors in the east London borough are trying to impose academy status on the affected schools.

Hundreds of angry schools staff across the borough have joined the NEU in recent weeks - encouraged by the strike action.

Regional officials, regional NEU elected members and parents offered their full backing to the striking workforce.

On academisation, one person demanded to know: "Where are the compelling arguments?"

Many in the audience said parents and staff should be balloted to see whether they want academisation, a demand the Socialist Party supports.

In a limited survey by Avenue primary school 134 parents voted against losing control of their school, with only four in favour. Staff also overwhelmingly rejected academy status.

One parent said that the Labour Party couldn't continue to rely on their vote if they continued to act like this.

Louise said that if councillors want to truly show they oppose academisation, they must do so in deeds, not just words.

At the strike rally, one person reported that 14 of the 60 Labour councillors (there are no opposition councillors) have links with academy trusts.

Even Blairite mayor Robin Wales felt compelled to oppose academisation while he's under threat from deselection.

The Socialist Party will support [Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition \(TUSC\) anti-academy and no-cuts candidates](#) in this May's elections against Blairites in Newham who refuse to accept the democratic demands of parents and staff.

If Robin Wales isn't replaced by somebody who genuinely opposes cuts and academisation in Labour's re-run mayoral selection process, then we'll push to stand against him too.

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## **Building fund appeal: Behind the scenes at the Socialist Party office**

### **Tessa Warrington, Building fund organiser**

The Socialist Party is being [evicted from our national headquarters](#) in London. The depth of the housing crisis has seen 60% of commercial property wiped from the market as office space is transformed into luxury flats. However, we are determined not to be chased out by gentrification. We have launched an appeal asking members and supporters to donate a week's income, or whatever is affordable, to help us find new premises.

Why do we need a national centre? Let me take you on a tour of some of our office. As you enter, the London team are stapling placards preparing to support an anti-academies protest in Newham. The placards read: 'Say no to academies, give us a vote' advancing the idea of democratic accountability to the staff and community.

Around the corner is the bookshop. The numerous titles discuss socialist ideas on a whole range of issues from the environment to the history of the international labour movement. Access to these enables our members to develop their understanding, something we have taken a huge step forward with this year by launching our publishing house Socialist Books.

In the editors' office they are deep in discussion. For every issue of the Socialist they need at least four meetings to discuss what's going in the paper, what articles and reports are needed. They frequently consult each other and other departments on material during production, discussing political developments as they happen.

The organisation department are designing leaflets and posters as well as coordinating preparations for our national congress while the youth department organise student support for the ongoing lecturers' strike. Recently Tamil Solidarity members used the office to build a demo of 2,000 in just two days.

None of this would be possible without a place where we can discuss, organise and coordinate. The Socialist Party fights for working class people, for affordable rents for all and a society free from want and oppression. Help us keep it that way. Please donate to the building fund.

- [Make a donation online now](#) - put "building fund" in the comments
  - Or you can pay with a card over the phone on 020 8988 8777
  - Or with a cheque or postal order payable to "Socialist Party," sent to Building Fund, PO Box 24697, London E11 1YD
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## **Mary Jackson: funeral and memorial meeting say goodbye to working class fighter**

Alistair Tice, Yorkshire Socialist Party

Long-standing Doncaster Militant then Socialist Party member Mary Jackson sadly died on 17 January (see the Socialist's obituary: [Red Mary - a force of nature](#)). Around 150 people attended her funeral on 14 February reflecting the enormous love and respect she was held in by family, friends and comrades, as did the £405 donated the Socialist Party's fighting fund at the end of the service.

I was asked by Mary's husband John to pay tribute to her on behalf of the Socialist Party. I recounted that it was during her 2013 ['Mary for Mayor' campaign](#) that [Margaret Thatcher died](#). I will always remember being at Mary's having a cuppa after a campaign stall when we heard the news.

But it was never personal with Mary, it was about the exploitation of the capitalist system that causes so much unnecessary misery and suffering for so many people.

At a memorial meeting on 21 February, Joyce Sheppard, long-time friend and comrade from Women Against Pit Closures, Steve Williams, Doncaster Socialist Party branch secretary, and Dave Nellist, former Militant-supporting Labour MP and now national chair of Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC), all spoke recounting personal and political memories of Mary.

Dave highlighted the pivotal role Mary had played in cementing the close relationship between Socialist Party and the RMT transport union - who also sent a delegation to Mary's funeral.

Mary Jackson was such a strong woman, a working class fighter and an eternal optimist in a socialist future, an inspiration to all who had the privilege to struggle alongside her for a better society.

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## Union-led campaign beats Blairite attacks on homeless

**Housing campaigners have shamed right-wing Labour councillors in Waltham Forest, east London, into withdrawing their latest attacks on homeless people.**

**The housing workers' branch of general union Unite helped lead the campaign. Suzanne Muna, secretary of the branch and Socialist Party member, spoke to a [rally against gentrification of the borough's Walthamstow town square](#):**

This council, who cares so much about the homeless, cut £1 billion off its housing support budget. Of course, the hostels in the area said if you do that you will have more rough sleepers on the streets of Waltham Forest.

And what happened? We've got more rough sleepers than ever before on the streets. You only need to walk around, six, seven o'clock in the evening, and you will see that.

The council's solution was not to reinstate the housing support budget.

The council's solution was to go round so that when people woke up in the morning what they saw next to them was a letter taped to the wall, telling them that if they didn't move on they would have all of their possessions - in other words, their sleeping bags and their blankets - confiscated. And they were told to go to a campsite miles off.

So we started a petition and we shamed the council into withdrawing those letters - which apparently were all 'just a mistake' anyway. But we shamed the council, and they should be ashamed.

Homelessness has many, many different facets. And of course what they're doing here at Walthamstow town square is one of those. The driving out of communities, and unaffordable homes.

But we also have to end the harassment of rough sleepers. We have to end people being on the streets. We have to reinstate the money that has been cut from those budgets.

So many times what we hear - just as we hear that these corporations are going to come in and save the day - we also hear that housing associations are going to do the same.

Well we saw in this borough what Peabody did. Peabody is not building housing people can afford any longer. They're putting new units up - but for market rent, like so many housing associations.

The only solution is to build mass council housing that is not an emergency provision but is there for every working person that wants to live in council housing.

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## Belper hospital threatened

Campaigners to save threatened Babington Hospital protested on 23 February at an NHS clinical commissioning group meeting in Derby.

The hospital in Belper, Derbyshire, provides a number of services such as blood tests, a baby clinic, specialist scans and 18 beds for rehabilitation, palliative and end-of-life care.

The clinical commissioning group claims that all services will be provided in a new facility in Belper but the 18 beds will not be retained and the projected cost of the new build may well exceed the projected budget, nobody will tell us the amount.

There has been no full, open and public consultation over hospital closures and the loss of nursed beds.

We can't trust NHS managers to retain our services. Campaigners must continue to put pressure on and build the campaign.

The recent victories by campaigns that [saved Glenfield heart unit](#) in Leicester and [Chatsworth ward in Mansfield](#) show that if you fight, you can win.

**Charlie Taylor, Derby Socialist Party**

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## Selling the Socialist in Stoke

In Stoke we use our famous 'boards' which use slogans to attract people to our campaign stall. We invite people over to sign our petition which frequently results in someone buying a copy of the Socialist, something we ask everyone to do.

It's very obvious that members enjoy being on the frontline meeting people and discussing socialist ideas.

It's brilliant to see new members growing in confidence. We have found over the months we have built up regulars who turn up in the areas we campaign in on a regular basis - we are on first name terms with many of them.

This has resulted in recruiting new members to the Socialist Party at the stall.

People are amazingly generous, especially when you consider Stoke is an area where the manufacturing industry has been destroyed over the last 30 years, first the pits, then the pottery and steel industry.

Which is why a lot of local people are looking for a party which will fight for a decent future for all.

**Cait Mallon, Stoke Socialist Party**

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# What's behind the surge in eating disorders?

Iain Dalton, Yorkshire Socialist Party

Many will have been shocked by recent NHS figures showing the doubling over the last six years of hospitalisations due to life-threatening eating disorders.

In 2017-18, the health service made 13,885 hospital admissions with either a primary or secondary diagnosis of eating disorders - up from 7,260 in 2010-11. Beat, an eating disorder charity, reported an increase from 7,000 calls to their helpline last financial year to an expected 17,000 by the end of this March.

The NHS categorises four types of eating disorders:

- Anorexia nervosa - where people try to consume as little food as possible
- Bulimia - where people eat a lot of food in a short period of time, and then try to rid themselves of this in a short period of time, via deliberately being sick, using laxatives or over-exercise
- Binge eating disorder - regularly losing control of eating, consuming large portions until feeling uncomfortably full and then becoming upset or feeling guilty
- 'Other specified feeding or eating disorder' (OSFED) - conditions that don't quite match the above symptoms but are no less serious

OSFED disorders are the most common, and anorexia the least common. Yet even anorexia admissions have doubled in the last six years for under-19s.

One psychiatrist [told the Guardian](#) that "outpatient eating disorder service remains a postcode lottery." This is a reflection of the cutbacks and privatisation of services.

The Guardian [also reported](#) on one woman and daughter who had to leave their jobs and relocate from Norfolk to Gloucestershire to access outpatient services!

Eating disorders are complex and don't have simple causes. But in general young women are the most affected - a reflection of the intense objectification of women's bodies in particular.

Many commentators point to the development of social media and widespread sharing of personal photos as one factor fuelling the recent increases. But this takes place in the general context of misogyny and alienation under capitalism.

And another factor, less talked about in the press, is the issue of growing dependence on processed foods.

These often include excessive amounts of salt, sugar and fat, completely out of kilter with what is necessary to maintain a healthy weight. Such foods are readily available, cheaply, in large quantities - people don't usually binge-eat on home-cooked foods!

But it is precisely the lack of time for most people to eat well-prepared, nutritious meals - whether cooked at home or in affordable restaurants and canteens - that has fuelled the growth of snacking. Often this is due to insufficient breaks at work, long hours and commutes to make enough to live.

Combined with a more sedentary lifestyle in the deindustrialised economies, this has [contributed to a trend towards obesity](#).

The rise in eating disorder admissions, and cuts to the NHS, all highlight one thing. So long as capitalism continues to have a workforce to make sufficient profits from, our health and that of our families is of little importance or priority.

Socialists must fight for an end to cuts and sell-offs and the full funding of eating disorder services, particularly outpatient services, in every part of the country, alongside other vital NHS services.

But beyond that, we struggle for [a world where people have the time and facilities to live a healthy lifestyle](#), in an environment and culture geared to support everyone fulfilling their potential - rather than trying to shape them into cogs of the capitalist machine.

A socialist society would lay the basis for dealing with the problems at the root of eating disorders.

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## The Socialist inbox

### Do you have something to say?

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

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

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

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**Featured letter: a Labour member writes**

### Blairite councillors attack homeless

Issue 982 of the Socialist featured [an article about Tory Windsor Council attacking homeless people](#) while closing and cutting shelters and homeless services.

It's not just Tory councils that victimise and attack the homeless, however. I joined the Labour Party to support Jeremy Corbyn. I attended one ward meeting - and doubt I'll be attending another.

The local Labour council cabinet member, in her report to the meeting, spent 20 minutes detailing how the council was tackling the "scourge" of beggars in the local community.

She said many homeless people are "professional beggars" preying on people's goodwill. She characterised them as people that wake up in a house, put on dirty clothes and make thousands of pounds.

This same Labour councillor is one of the biggest proponents of the 'monster block' gentrification scheme (see page 4), sitting on the council's planning committee.

So it's clear: the Blairites within Labour continue to act the same as the Tories. Cosying up to private developers and using the police to fine and harass homeless people instead of building council houses and funding shelters and much-needed services.

These councillors are up for election again this year, imposed on us without any Haringey-style organised challenge to get rid of them.

A serious fightback to kick out all the Blairites, especially among the MPs and councillors, is needed to transform the Labour Party into one that fights on the side of workers, young people and those most let down by society.

**A Labour Party member, Waltham Forest, east London**

- Campaigners have won a victory on this issue: [read more](#)
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## 'Universal credit' crunch

On 1 March at Sheffield City Hall there is a demonstration, 12-3pm, against 'universal credit'.

All welfare claimants will be [brought into the universal credit system](#) by November, and face the prospect of five weeks with no money when the claim starts.

We, I am sure, will vote with all forms of direct action that will disrupt both the DWP and wider society, such will be the desperation of people.

**Adrian B Rimington, Chesterfield, Derbyshire**

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## Tide is turning

I was recently on a Socialist Party stall collecting signatures to [stop the closure of five 'outstanding' local authority-run nurseries](#) in Salford. A middle-aged man signed and we got talking about how angry the parents are.

"There's a lot to be angry about," he said. "When I hear the word 'austerity' a shiver goes through me." Then he told me his story.

He had a breakdown a few months ago and there was no bed at the local mental health trust. He spent four weeks, over Christmas, on a ward in Sussex. Christmas 250 miles away from friends and family.

I felt really guilty about this, because [three years ago we campaigned against the closure of a ward in that trust](#).

We set up Save Mental Health Services in Salford, had great support from a service users' group, got a Coronation Street star publicly in support, held lobbies, and a march from Eccles to the hospital.

Unfortunately for this man and countless others, the closure still happened.

We shouldn't feel guilty. We fought hard and gave it our best shot.

Now the tide is turning and lately we've been able to celebrate the victories over NHS cuts in [Leicester](#) and [Mansfield](#).

We have hardened activists around us who have learnt a lot from the mental health campaign.

Now let's help save the nurseries.

**Paul Gerrard, Salford**

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## Socialist anti-war exhibition opens in Kingston

Socialist artist [Peter Robson's exhibition 'Unobtania'](#) comes to south London this month. Unobtania examines the horrors of the wars waged to defend the bosses' profit system.

Peter, a member of the Socialist Party in Yorkshire, said: "As a teenager I started to reflect on the horrors of war. In particular the horrendous carpet bombing of [Vietnam](#). This was the start of me presenting, through paintings, politically driven questions to those in power.

"Unobtania is a body of work that critiques man's inhumanity to man.

["The First World War was the first industrialised war"](#) and certainly the first to use on an industrial scale chemical warfare. I wanted the painting 'Trenches' to represent the working class.

"The desolation is also what they came back to, with the lack of any aftercare. Indeed, psychiatric care was in its infancy.

"'Boots on the Ground' is a reflection of the mantra that politicians still espouse ad nauseam and infinitum. The reality is that actually thousands of men, women and children are being [slaughtered in the likes of Syria by bombings](#).

"Within my work there is a deliberate tension between the brightness of colour and seriousness of the subject matter."

- Unobtania, 1-31 March at Cass Art, 103 Clarence Street, Kingston-upon-Thames, London KT1 1QY
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## Audio version of this document

[To hear an audio version of this document click here.](#)

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## What the Socialist Party stands for

The Socialist Party fights for socialism – a democratic society run for the needs of all and not the profits of a few. We also oppose every cut, fighting in our day-to-day campaigning for every possible improvement for working class people.

The organised working class has the potential power to stop the cuts and transform society.

As capitalism dominates the globe, the struggle for genuine socialism must be international.

The Socialist Party is part of the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI), a socialist international that organises in over 40 countries.

Our demands include:

### Public services

- No to ALL cuts in jobs, public services and benefits. Defend our pensions.
- No to privatisation and the Private Finance Initiative (PFI). Renationalise all privatised utilities and services, with compensation paid only on the basis of proven need.
- Fully fund all services and run them under accountable, democratic committees that include representatives of service workers and users.
- Free, publicly run, good quality education, available to all at any age. Abolish university tuition fees now and introduce a living grant. No to academies and 'free schools'!
- A socialist NHS to provide for everyone's health needs - free at the point of use and under democratic control. Kick out private contractors!
- Keep council housing publicly owned. For a massive building programme of publicly owned housing, on an environmentally sustainable basis, to provide good quality homes with low rents.

### Work and income

- Trade union struggle to increase the minimum wage to £10 an hour without exemptions as an immediate step towards a real living wage. For an annual increase in the minimum wage linked to average earnings.

- All workers, including part-timers, temps, casual and migrant workers to have trade union rates of pay, employment protection, and sickness and holiday rights from day one of employment.
- An immediate 50% increase in the state retirement pension, as a step towards a living pension.
- Reject 'workfare'. For the right to decent benefits, education, training, or a job, without compulsion.
- Scrap the anti-trade union laws! For fighting trade unions, democratically controlled by their members. Full-time union officials to be regularly elected and receive no more than a worker's wage. Support the National Shop Stewards Network.
- A maximum 35-hour week with no loss of pay.

## **Environment**

- Major research and investment into replacing fossil fuels with renewable energy and into ending the problems of early obsolescence and unrecycled waste.
- Public ownership of the energy generating industries. No to nuclear power. No to Trident.
- A democratically planned, low-fare, publicly-owned transport system, as part of an overall plan against environmental pollution.

## **Rights**

- Oppose discrimination on the grounds of race, gender, disability, sexuality, age, and all other forms of prejudice.
- Repeal all laws that trample over civil liberties. For the right to protest! End police harassment.
- Defend abortion rights. For a woman's right to choose when and whether to have children.
- For the right to asylum. No to racist immigration laws.
- For the right to vote at 16.

## **Mass workers' party**

- For a mass workers' party drawing together workers, young people and activists from workplace, community, environmental, anti-racist and anti-cuts campaigns, to provide a fighting, political alternative to the pro-big business parties.
- Fight for Labour to be transformed into such a party: deselect the Blairites!

## **Socialism and internationalism**

- No to imperialist wars and occupations.
- Tax the super-rich! For a socialist government to take into public ownership the top 150 companies and the banking system that dominate the British economy, and run them under democratic working-class control and management. Compensation to be paid only on the basis of proven need.
- A democratic socialist plan of production based on the interests of the overwhelming majority of people, and in a way that safeguards the environment.
- No to the bosses' neoliberal European Union and single market. For a socialist Europe and a socialist world!

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<http://www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/26960>