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photo Mary Finch

On 14 February, Theresa May suffered her tenth parliamentary defeat over Brexit. The Tory party is split down the middle. May's government is on the brink of collapse.

Yet it is at this precise moment, one of intense governmental crisis, that seven Blairite MPs have chosen to resign from the Labour Party, breaking away to form their own 'Independent Group' in parliament.

The timing is very deliberate. These MPs aim to inflict the maximum

possible damage on Jeremy Corbyn just as the government's Brexit crisis reaches fever pitch - just as many working-class people see an opportunity developing to force out the rotten Tories and their hated austerity agenda.

The 'Gang of Seven' have chosen to carry out this act of sabotage ahead of a possible general election - something that could be posed in the next months, especially if the parliamentary deadlock over the Brexit deal continues and if mass trade union action is organised to force the Tories out.

But the announcement of a Blairite breakaway should come as no surprise.

Since Jeremy Corbyn's election as leader, the Socialist Party has argued that the potential exists for the formation of a mass workers' party, with a socialist programme, around him. But we have also

warned consistently that this exists alongside a pro-cuts, pro-capitalist Labour party. It is this pro-capitalist wing that remains dominant in parliament, local council chambers, and Labour's bureaucratic machinery.

The ultra-Blairites who make up the Gang of Seven should have long ago faced replacement, via a democratic process of mandatory reselection, with working-class fighters and socialists.

Indeed, so should all the MPs, most of who remain on Labour's benches, who have acted to undermine Corbyn's anti-austerity, anti-war stand. After all, a whole number of them, including deputy leader Tom Watson, are now using this betrayal as an opportunity to attack not those who have split from the party, but Jeremy Corbyn.

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■ Gang of Seven traitors must face by-elections

■ Mandatory reselection to kick out the rest

■ Corbyn and unions must call mass action - for a general election now



What we think

>Continued from page 1

I ndeed, just hours after the breakaway was announced, Blairite MPs who have remained in Labour were publicly hinting that the Gang of Seven represents a kind of ‘advance guard’.

The Scottish MP Ian Murray, for example, responded to the announcement of the breakaway with a thinly veiled threat. It is Corbyn who needs to “decide whether he wants to keep his party together” Murray argued. The strong implication of these comments was that it is only on the basis of Corbyn capitulating to the demands of the pro-capitalist Labour right that he can hope to avoid similar walkouts down the line.

Sickening outpourings of sympathy have also been a common theme in the responses of right-wing Labour MPs to news of the seven having left the party. Outrageously, such sentiments have also been echoed by some trade union leaders.

Dave Prentis, right-wing general secretary of the public sector union Unison, tweeted that he felt: “Labour’s overriding concern must be to look long and hard at the reasons why the MPs feel they are no longer able to stay in the party”.

Here, he echoes the Blairites in placing the blame for this breakaway on the shoulders of Corbyn and his supporters, with not a hint of condemnation of the actions of those who split away. This is despite the fact that these MPs have acted to take the heat off the Tories in crisis - not to mention their generally pro-austerity, anti-working-class position.

These sympathetic sentiments stand in stark contrast to the outrage that will be felt by the majority of Labour Party members, rank-and-file trade unionists and working-class people more widely.

No confidence

Absolutely correctly, members of MP Luciana Berger’s Wavertree constituency party sought to raise a vote of no confidence in her after she refused to deny that she was planning to break with Labour - a plan which has subsequently been decisively confirmed.

Wrongly, local Labour members were put under pressure to withdraw this motion in the name of ‘unity’. Deputy leader Tom Watson intervened demanding the constituency party be suspended. He cited, among other things, spurious claims of antisemitism.

Unfortunately, mistaken attempts by Jeremy Corbyn’s leadership to conciliate with the Labour right have allowed this Blairite fifth column to continually undermine him.

This split in parliament underlines the urgent need for a change of approach on the part of Corbyn and John McDonnell - whose conciliatory tone continued even as he spoke less than 24 hours ahead of the widely predicted split on the Andrew Marr show.

The Labour leadership must now go on the offensive. As well as urgently mobilising the unions and working-class people to fight for a general election and to kick out the Tories, they must also mobilise to take on the Blairite saboteurs, most of who continue to don Labour rosettes.

The initial breakaway represents only a small portion of the pro-austerity wing of the Labour Party. It includes some relatively prominent figures - former shadow chancellor Chris Leslie, and a former Labour leadership candidate, Chuka Umunna, for example. But the fact that the majority of the pro-cuts Blairite MPs have, for now, remained behind in the Labour party, is almost

SEVEN BLAIRITES SPLIT - NOW KICK OUT THE REST

The ‘Gang of Seven’ clockwise from top: Luciana Berger, Chris Leslie, Angela Smith, Gavin Shuker, Ann Coffey, Mike Gapes and Chuka Umunna photos Chris McAndrew/CC and adambro/CC



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The Labour leadership must now go on the offensive. As well as urgently mobilising the unions and working-class people to kick out the Tories, they must also mobilise to take on the Blairites

certainly a calculated strategy.

So far this ‘split’ is evident only at a parliamentary level. The seven have not yet launched a political party taking with them substantial numbers of Labour members, instead suggesting that a new party may come further down the line. This indicates a possible expectation that more Labour MPs will leave to join a separate group in the future.

It will likely be hoped that this breakaway could act to help prevent a Corbyn-led government from coming to power. In this way, it could play a similar role to the Social Democratic Party split of 1981. But given the mass anger in society, and the deep crisis facing the Tory party, it is far from guaranteed that this will succeed.

It therefore makes sense, from the point of the view of the capitalist class, for the majority of its representatives within the Labour Party to remain there for now. These Blairite MPs could be used effectively to sabotage a Corbyn-led government should he be elected and attempt to implement pro-working-class policies. A mass walkout by Blairite MPs can be kept in reserve, potentially used in an attempt to bring down a Corbyn-led government should it begin to pose a serious threat to the interests of the capitalists.

The failure of the Gang of Seven to launch a party at this time also hints at what they hope will be a broader realignment - quite possibly involving a part of the pro-EU wing of the Tories, for example.

It is also a possible sign of the more deep-rooted problem that they face: the crisis of capitalism and the difficulty of building and securing a substantial base of support for their neoliberal, austerity agenda. It is only necessary to look across the channel to France, where the mass movement of the ‘gilets jaunes’ (yellow vests) continues to demand President Macron (who has been looked to as a ‘model’ for winning popular support for a neoliberal programme) resigns, to see the evidence for this.

By-elections

Correctly, Unite the Union general secretary Len McCluskey has called for by-elections to be triggered in the constituencies these former Labour MPs represent. If socialists and class fighters were selected as Labour candidates in their place, this could be an excellent first test of the real support that exists within society for their agenda.

Nonetheless, Corbyn’s failure to articulate, in a clear and consistent way, a socialist approach to the question of Brexit, does allow a potential space for these forces to win some support by playing on the confusion and division which exists within the working class on this issue.

This underlines the importance of Corbyn making clear a socialist approach to the question, arguing that a government led by him would fight to re-open negotiations on an entirely different basis.

A starting point for this would be outlining a programme for protecting and improving workers’ rights, including rights for migrant workers and refugees; abolishing all anti-trade union laws and rules like the EU posted-workers’ directive - which can be used by employers to facilitate a ‘race to the bottom’ in wages and conditions; opposing all EU regulations which act against the interests of working-class people, such as those that create obstacles to governments carrying out policies such as state aid and nationalisation; and outlining a programme for a new collaboration of the peoples of Europe on a socialist basis.

In a situation where jobs are currently being threatened, with the spectre of a no-deal Brexit often being used by bosses to justify closures and cuts, Corbyn should immediately pledge that a Labour government would act to protect jobs. This means pledging to nationalise plants threatened with closure - the most recent example of which is Honda in Swindon.

The Gang of Seven have exposed more clearly than ever the real nature of the battle that must be waged to refound Labour as a genuinely democratic, socialist party, with a renewed, federal structure. The Socialist Party calls for the convening of a labour movement conference, in which all anti-austerity forces, including trade unions and socialist groups such as our own, could participate.

Such a conference could discuss the urgent tasks facing our movement. Most immediately, these include building mass action to fight for a general election, deselecting Blairite MPs and their replacement with fighting socialist candidates, and building the struggle to transform society along socialist lines.

Nationalise Airbus and other manufacturing plants to save jobs now!

Thousands of jobs at plane manufacturer Airbus are under threat after the company announced it is ending production of its A380 passenger jet after failing to secure orders from the Emirates airline and others.

The move could affect 3,500 Airbus jobs at its wing-making factory in Broughton, north Wales and in Filton near Bristol, where landing gear and fuel systems are made.

The company employs around 9,000 workers in Britain altogether with two thirds of those at the Broughton site.

Bosses at this stage say that any potential job losses are being “evaluated” and Rhys McCarthy, the national officer for aerospace at Unite the Union, said the union is seeking assurances from Airbus that there



will be no job losses.

But Unite should also demand that the Labour-led Welsh Government, with new first minister Mark Drakeford, nationalise the Broughton plant to save jobs with a demand also made that the plant in Filton is also taken over by the Westminster government.

Airbus is not alone in British manufacturing in threatening job losses. In the car industry, Ford and Jaguar Land Rover have been joined by Honda (see page 12) in threatening plant closures.

Jeremy Corbyn should pledge now that a government led by him would promise to nationalise any manufacturing plant threatening job cuts and establish a national plan for the manufacturing industries.

With the Tories hanging by a thread in Westminster, this could raise the sights of workers and pile on the pressure. But action is needed now.



Blairite Leslie won't be missed

Nottingham’s now ex-Labour MP Chris Leslie has been a problem for a while now.

After the 2017 general election his constituency Labour Party passed a motion of censure to call for him to stop having a go at Labour and Jeremy Corbyn in public, and an open letter went around just recently exposing some of his rubbish.

I doubt we’ll miss him, but it’s disappointing that he got to walk out when we should have slung him out.

A Nottingham East Labour Party member

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“Socialism is storming back” declares the Economist magazine. It points out that 51% of ‘millennials’ in the US aged 18-29 have a positive view of socialism.

In the same breath, the Economist claims that inequality is not continuing to rise. That’s news to the millions at the wrong end of rising inequality! Its conclusion is that it would be “politically dangerous” to claim that socialism is “the answer to capitalism’s problems”.

Instead its answer is to call on liberals to oppose socialism - without saying in what ways they can “answer capitalism’s problems”. Because they can’t. Because they have no answers. Capitalism must go and socialism is the answer.

Also scared about the rise of socialist ideas is the right-wing Taxpayers’ Alliance, widely believed to be a Tory front organisation. They

have launched a “Stand Against Socialism” campaign to make the case for a “pro-enterprise economy”.

Will it include previous proposals put forward by the Alliance? Tory MP and Alliance organiser Phillip Davies’ idea is that disabled workers should receive less than the minimum wage. Their research director called on the Conservatives to cut older people’s benefits sooner rather than later. Because many of them would “not be around”, or would have forgotten who was responsible, by next election.

Let’s keep the Taxpayers’ Alliance frightened by fighting for a socialist economy, under democratic workers’ control, that meets the needs of all and not the profits of the rich.



Join the fightback! Join the Socialists!

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London

Thousands and thousands of teenagers took over central London on 15 February in a brilliant display of anger and determination.

“What do we want? Change!”, they chanted. Many carrying homemade placards, they stopped traffic, mounted buses, and used traffic cones as megaphones.

The police on horseback were surrounded by teenagers stroking the horses and saying “aaw”! Running back and forth, cheering,

chanting, the sun was shining and young people were demanding a future on this planet.

All our socialist material was snapped up in minutes. Our ‘red’ sound system enabled the young participants to make speeches and lead some of the chanting; while at the same time young people were just marching and chanting everywhere - on strike!

Paula Mitchell
London Socialist Party secretary

Leeds

Around 1,000 students joined the walkout and rally in Leeds. Socialist Students very rapidly ran out of “socialist change not climate change” placards and leaflets.

Leeds Socialist Party member Iain Dalton opened up the rally bringing solidarity from Leeds Trade Union Council, and Leeds Uni Socialist Students member Andrew Saxon also spoke, both highlighting the inability of capitalism to tackle climate change and the need for students to build links with the trade unions, the organised working class.

Lots of students said they were socialists, reflected in 26 people who bought copies of the Socialist newspaper.

Glasgow

Over 300 young people, including school students from Glasgow and as far as Bearsden who had walked out of classes, demonstrated at the Glasgow #youthstrike4climate as part of the UK-wide day of protests and school strikes.

School students from Boclair Academy in Bearsden told us: “We walked out of class and no teachers tried to stop us; in fact they gave full support as we are fighting for our future”.

Young people carried homemade placards saying “there’s no planet B”, “youth strike 4 climate”, “we don’t want to be dinosaurs”, “time is running out”, “denial is not a policy”.

Glasgow Gaelic School mobilised a group of politicised youth who would put all capitalist politicians

and their short-term ‘solutions’ to climate change to shame. Alan told us: “We have come here because the greenhouse effect is burning up the planet and the politicians seem to only have short-term solutions that benefit the rich”.

Students also came from the Glasgow universities and there were banners from the Unite trade union.

Socialist Students and Socialist Party Scotland gave out leaflets explaining that socialist change is needed to stop climate change and the need for this energetic growing youth movement to link up with workers and the trade unions to demand public ownership of the top companies that dominate the economy, and massive investment into renewable energy.

Glasgow Socialist Students



Glasgow photo Matt Dobson



Youth climate strikers block the road at Parliament Square, London photo James Ivens

Theo Sharieff
Socialist Party youth and student organiser

On 15 February, tens of thousands of school and college students walked out of their lessons to join protests across the country to demand action over climate change and environmental destruction.

Thousands of students gathered in towns and cities all over Britain, including Leeds, Cardiff, Brighton, Glasgow and Sheffield.

In London, tens of thousands of students gathered at Parliament Square from 10am onwards, marching up and down Whitehall multiple times over the course of the day between Parliament and Downing Street.

Chants of “hey, ho, fossil fuels have got to go” as well as chants calling for the kicking out of the Tories and Theresa May reflected not only the desperation among young people to fight for the future of the planet.

It showed the anger against the Tory government for its total complacency and incapability in the face of an impending climate catastrophe.

Socialist Students ran an open mic throughout the day and welcomed

students to speak to the crowds, talk about how they had built for the walkouts at their school and college, and what they thought was necessary to fight against climate change and how to build the strongest possible movement against it.

What developed was a genuine discussion and back and forth between those who spoke.

“”

We want to create an environment that will last for generations; we care and we need change. It'll be too late by the time we're adults!

Different views were exchanged on what programme and demands should be central to the movement.

Socialist Students and Socialist Party speakers argued that central to the fight against climate change had to be the fight for socialist change.

We pointed towards the fact that only 100 companies had been responsible for 71% of global greenhouse emissions since 1988, to

argue that the nationalisation under democratic workers' control and management of those monopolies was central to fighting against toxic air pollution and climate change.

Calls by Socialist Students to kick out the Tories, the party which defends the capitalist class and the big businesses which have created this calamitous situation, as the first step in fighting climate change, received rapturous applause.

But there was not complete agreement on these issues. Some came along to argue that the issue of climate change was ‘above’ politics. One woman heckled and said that the issue wasn't party political.

She was welcomed to put her view on the open mic. But despite her arguing that the campaign against climate change mustn't be political, she also attacked the 100 companies most responsible for climate change!

So perhaps her real disagreement was with pro-capitalist politicians, not socialist policies.

Countless students stood up in front of each other and lambasted the Tories sitting in Parliament behind them, not only for failing to take action on the issue of climate change, but also for cuts to education and over the absence of environmental studies on the national curriculum.

“”

Us and students pointed out only 100 companies had been responsible for 71% of global greenhouse emissions since 1988

One speaker from the group Extinction Rebellion outlined its previous campaign efforts in mobilising direct actions. These included blocking various roads and bridges throughout central London to bring traffic to a standstill - aiming to force action by the politicians on climate change.

This idea received a good reception, especially by the most militant and fighting school and college students present.

Socialist Students responded to these points by welcoming the desire to ‘shut down’ central London as a tactic - but posed the question of going further than just shutting down roads in the capital.

We raised ‘shutting down’ the country, pointing towards the only force in society capable of bringing that about - the organised working class through strike action.

By the end of the discussion, as the main protest was wrapping up, school and college students were addressing each other and denouncing the inability of capitalism to offer any solutions to the climate crisis - and raising that the only answer to this crisis was the fight for socialism.

15 March

The main question which will now be in the minds of all those who attended the 15 February climate

strikes will be how best to build for the next round of international walkouts on 15 March.

Socialist Students will be taking this campaign to the school and college gates - talking to students and helping them to get organised.

We will be leafletting schools and colleges, hosting banner-making sessions, organising planning meetings, and bringing together everyone wanting to build walkouts at their schools and colleges and to discuss the socialist solutions to climate change.

Many students we met on the 15 February protests reported that they had been threatened by their schools with detentions, suspensions and exclusions for attending the protests.

There were also reports that three students were arrested for participating in a sit-down protest near Westminster.

Socialist Students totally rejects the idea that students should be punished for fighting for our environment and the future of our planet.

If climate strikers are penalised, Socialist Students will support protests at any schools in defence of the right of students to protest.

We call for the creation of school student unions to help students get organised.

But these attempts to prevent students from protesting underscore the vital importance of trade union intervention into this movement. The education unions, such as the NEU and the UCU, should weigh in on this battle and fight to support students' right to protest. Parents have been threatened with fines.

But it shouldn't just be these unions. The trade union movement as a whole - with around six million members in Britain alone - could be key in escalating and building the struggle against climate change and environmental destruction.

Working class

It is the working class which has the power to grind all of society to a halt - the teachers who run our schools and colleges, the bus and train drivers who run our transport networks.

Working people create all the goods and run all the services in our society.

The trade unions should also offer assistance in stewarding the next round of protests to protect students from potential police intimidation.

Jeremy Corbyn raised in his 2017 manifesto the nationalisation of the energy companies. But the Socialist Party says why stop there?

Why not go further - to nationalise, under democratic workers' control and management, the top 150 big companies which dominate the British economy, including the big polluters and the banks?

On this basis - a socialist basis - we could plan what society produces, to bring about an immediate conversion to renewable energy, with guaranteed retraining and skilled work for every job at risk, without loss of pay, funded by the energy companies' profits.

■ Read more reports and programme at socialistparty.org.uk

Brighton

More than 1,000 people marched in Brighton, joined by hundreds of school students who walked out of their lessons against climate change. The lively demonstration and chants of “Tories out” showed the mood that exists to change how our society is run.

Now young people must join with workers organised in the trade unions to build a mass movement that can end the climate crisis.

The whole economy rests on the labour of working-class people and, as such, the unions are the most powerful force for ordinary people to

win our demands.

With big business producing the vast majority of carbon dioxide emissions and chasing environmentally unsustainable growth, the climate crisis is a crisis of capitalism itself. Socialist Students calls for public ownership of these major industries, under democratic workers' control and management.

Only on that basis can we plan the economy for the needs of people and the planet rather than for private profit.

Connor Rosoman
Brighton Socialist Party

Climate strikers using the Socialist Party's open mic photo Helen Pattison



York

Seventy school students marched on the streets of York. They were there to protest against climate change and the mass extinctions that face our planet. They were there to rage against the threat to all of their futures.

Many of them were also there to discuss ideas. I took copies of the Socialist newspaper and leaflets - I was there to promote socialist ideas. Most of the students were keen to enter into a discussion around how we might be able to prevent climate change.

Most students I spoke to thought that socialism, with workers' democracy, was a better way and the only possible solution.

Nigel Smith
York Socialist Party

Plymouth

Around 100 students from a number of different schools and colleges gathered in Plymouth city centre on Friday. As the morning went on, more students arrived.

They were singing “we've got the whole world in our hands” and chants of “there's no planet B” started to break out. At 1pm they decided to march through the city centre to the office of the local MP.

Ikes was keen to share why she was involved: “We need to encourage youth and future generations to fix these issues. Governments and corporations are not doing enough. We need to become carbon neutral and we need to stop using so much plastic.”

Companies need to be clamped down upon for using excessive plastics.”

Eloise, who organised the Plymouth strike said: “I organised this on Facebook less than 24 hours ago because the closest strike that was taking place was in Exeter and I felt that Plymouth should get involved too.”

“We want to create an environment that will last for generations to come; we care and we need change. It'll be too late by the time we're adults! I'm so pleased with the turnout we've had today. This is a great start”.

Ryan Aldred
Plymouth Socialist Party



photo London Socialist Party

Marion Lloyd
PCS national executive committee
(personal capacity)

Forty years of union activists' work, building the broad left of the civil servants' union PCS Left Unity - and democratising the union, is being put at risk by the divisive and sectarian antics of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) and Socialist View group. They remain determined to prevent the Left Unity nominee, Chris Baugh, from being re-elected as PCS assistant general secretary.

Left Unity's success has been due to its emphasis of unity on democratically agreed slates with room for debate and differences on issues. That discipline on candidates is threatened by the Socialist View, SWP and some individual Left Unity members, who are refusing to support Chris Baugh.

They allege he is against the 2019 national pay campaign. This is a lie and repeating the allegation does not make it any more true!

Flexibility

Along with others, in the period of consultation and discussion within Left Unity and the union, Chris and his supporters have raised tactical flexibility on the pay ballot to give the union its best chance to achieve the 50% threshold needed. The union fell short of this in last year's pay ballot.

Chris fully supports the national executive decision about the pay ballot. The SWP and Socialist View, with their continued attacks on Chris Baugh, risk damaging the ballot.

The SWP's involvement in Left Unity over the years has been inconsistent at best. Its recent statement "we are unable to support Chris Baugh as the Left Unity candidate for PCS AGS" shows their sectarianism and indifference to the traditions and democracy of Left Unity.

It also shows hypocrisy. When the SWP opposed Left Unity support for a deal on pensions its journal said: "Honest debate over issues is not a barrier... it is essential".

Socialist View - a group formed within Left Unity around the campaign by the union's general secretary Mark Serwotka against Chris Baugh - poses a serious threat to the inclusive nature of Left Unity. Despite Chris's election as the Left Unity candidate, Socialist View continues to make attacks on him and the Left Unity members who support his re-election.

Socialist View, with SWP support, is the majority group on the Left Unity national committee. In Socialist View articles and in Left Unity national committee majority statements, they approvingly refer to the reluctance of some Left Unity members to support Chris Baugh.

They make no mention of Left Unity rules which require members to support all Left Unity candidates.

Socialist View attacks its opponents for drawing attention to the rules. We are accused of calling for the expulsion of those not complying with them. This is yet another of Socialist View's divisive

smears. Supporters of Chris Baugh's re-election have correctly called upon those holding prominent Left Unity positions to respect the clear rules on supporting Left Unity slates or resign from these positions.

Mark Serwotka created division within Left Unity, but has now turned his back on it with his public support for Lynn Henderson, a PCS full-time officer who has never been in Left Unity.

The continued attacks on Chris Baugh by Socialist View and the SWP weaken Left Unity as a democratic, inclusive, and rank-and-file organisation. The exaggeration of differences, for sectarian reasons,

threatens the election campaign. Socialist View's misrepresentation of the 2019 pay campaign undermines the united effort required to win the statutory ballot.

In contrast, the Socialist Party, Chris Baugh and the increasing number of lay reps who support his re-election are clear. We stand for a united campaign on the agreed candidates in the union elections, for the election of Chris Baugh as assistant general secretary and for the Democracy Alliance national executive slate. We stand behind the national pay campaign unanimously agreed at the national executive on 5 February.

Chris Baugh's record of over 40 years as a union activist and senior elected full-time officer is unrivalled - building the left, fighting for union democracy, campaigning for pay and against austerity, and being elected assistant general secretary three times. But now his critics say they will not back him because he wanted a discussion on how we can win on pay, including employing the best tactics to beat the undemocratic Tory threshold.

Left Unity must unite to win the elections and the pay campaign.

■ See slate at
chrisbaughpcs.wordpress.com

■ Universal Credit staff ballot for action

The possibility of strike action on 11-12 March is on the cards at Wall-sall and Wolverhampton Universal Credit service centres. The ballot finishes on 25 Feb.

Workers in Universal Credit sites constantly suffer under the pressure of huge numbers of phone calls, many from desperate claimants. Chronic understaffing means only one in four claimants gets through to their designated case worker, and staff do not always get the time to help callers.

Dave Semple is a civil servants'

union PCS rep and leads the Universal Credit negotiations in the Department of Work and Pensions. He's a member of the union's national executive committee. Writing in a personal capacity, he said: "Five all-members meetings at these two sites have made clear staff are unhappy and want changes."

"The union has talked to the Department of Work Pensions, has talked to Parliament, and has raised every reasonable argument. But they do not want to listen. The union will support members taking action - and socialists must fight to broaden out this dispute to the many other Universal Credit workplaces deeply unhappy at their treatment."

PCS estimates that at least 5,000 additional staff are needed to deal with the Universal Credit workload alone! Universal Credit is another area where staff are hired on fixed-term contracts, despite the massive workloads.

Hand-in-hand with the issues facing Universal Credit workers are the appalling problems that claimants deal with. Universal Credit's roll out has brought with it sharp rises in foodbank usage and homelessness.

The union will soon be balloting nationally over pay. It's so low in the Department of Work and Pensions that more than 10,000 staff have to claim tax credits and will ultimately be on Universal Credit.

Universal Credit must be scrapped. Claimants and workers must unite in fighting against all forms of Tory austerity and attacks on the working class.

A PCS member

■ Annoyed?! I'm annoyed to be on poverty wages

There was another lively picket outside the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy in London on 13 February. The staff, PCS members, are outsourced on contracts that pay poverty wages. They want to be brought back in-house and paid a living wage.

One striker from the catering department said a meeting was annoyed they wouldn't be served tea and coffee during the strike. But she said she was annoyed to be working and living in one of the richest and most expensive cities on poverty wages.

PCS has grown out of the strike, recruiting new members on strike for the first time. One first-time striker said she had joined PCS because she realised they would have to fight to get decent pay and conditions.

Helen Pattison
London Socialist Party

PCS: RE-ELECT

CHRIS BAUGH

#Chris4AGS



Rob Williams photos Lenny Shail



Birmingham bin strike against 'blacklisting'

Hundreds of Birmingham bin workers in Unite the Union took strike action on 19 February to protest the council making secret payments to workers who did not take part in the 2017 bin strike. There were picket lines across four depots.

20 Socialist Party members went down to support the strike. One of them, Rob Williams, spoke at

two picket-line rallies of hundreds, alongside Unite assistant general secretary Howard Beckett. Rob offered the full support of the Socialist Party and National Shop Stewards Network to huge cheer and applause.

The bin workers are approaching the dispute seriously. The stakes are higher than before. Birmingham's

pro-austerity Blairite council is attempting to get a high-court injunction to stop the strike.

When the bin workers strike again on 22 February they will be joined by home-care workers in public sector union Unison. Home carers, taking action against pay cuts, will join the bin-depot picket lines.

The council is under even more pressure to step back from a full-frontal assault on the working class of Birmingham. The Socialist Party is calling for coordinated and escalated action in defence of jobs, services and ordinary people.

Lenny Shail
Birmingham Socialist Party

■ Harrowing accounts of austerity at Unison women's conference

Delegates at the women's conference of public sector union Unison gave harrowing accounts of living their lives in debt, and how they have been reduced to choosing between eating and heating while trying to put food on the table for their families.

Most of the motions on the agenda, heard by 800 trade unionists attending, covered how women are not coping with the effects of austerity. A motion on women and debt outlined that of the 8.8 million people struggling with debt, 64% were women.

The meeting of broad left Unison Action was well attended. At the meeting, Socialist Party and Unison national executive committee member Vicky Perrin, in a personal capacity, spoke about the consultative strike ballot of school staff and the Birmingham home care and Glasgow equal pay strikers. In Glasgow, the workers have proved that where you fight collectively, you can win!

Socialist Party member Mia Holsing said councils like Birmingham - which are cutting the hours of the home carers - have a choice not to make cuts. They should set no-cuts budgets. But if they carry out the cuts, we should be prepared to fight them.

A Unison women's conference delegate

■ Unite pay campaign

Unite the Union has launched a pay campaign targeting GLL. The company, operating under brand name 'Better', competes for leisure and library contracts around the country.

They promise to run services up to 25% more cheaply than local councils by paying workers less, offering lower terms and conditions and employing two-thirds of staff on zero-hour contracts.

Some companies, like Veolia, rule out negotiating across councils. Unite says this must now be challenged - starting with GLL.

GLL claims to be worker-led. This is nonsense. What kind of worker-led organisation allows a clause in contracts which states that, when the company is in financial trouble, it reserves the right to cut pay by 5%?

GLL is often held up as an alternative to privatisation. The truth is that local government services belong in local government.

Unite is clear about what the answer must be - balanced, no-cuts, no-privatisation budgets, using reserves and borrowing to plug gaps, while mounting a joint campaign with the community and trade unions to win the necessary funding from central government.

■ Rail strike suspended

Strike action by the transport union RMT on South Western Railways has been suspended for talks, showing the impact sustained action has had.

See the next issue of the Socialist for more. This announcement comes after 'heroic RMT guards beat back Northern rail' which you can read at socialistparty.org.uk.

NEW RECESSION FEAR STALKS THE WORLD ECONOMY

Robin Clapp
Socialist Party national committee

2018 marked ten years since the collapse of Lehman Brothers bank which plunged the world economy into the deepest economic recession since the 1930s. The financial virus spread quickly, causing production and trade to seize up. Only swift coordinated action by world capitalists and political leaders averted a 1930s-style depression.

The triggers for the crisis included excessive state, corporate and household debt levels, reckless speculation in US sub-prime mortgages and a collapse in the largely unregulated international derivatives market, described by economists as financial ‘weapons of mass destruction’.

Panic spread across borders as European banks ran out of dollars needed to repay their dollar-denominated borrowing, prompting the US Federal Reserve to inject \$11 trillion of liquidity to keep the system afloat. However, even this sum was dwarfed by China’s simultaneous stimulus package.

Renewed crisis

Last month at the annual get-together of billionaires in Davos, little optimism was visible, as a whole array of geopolitical, economic and social problems rose up like spectres before them.

A potent symbol of the growing fracturing of the capitalist world order was the absence of Donald Trump, French president Emmanuel Macron and Theresa May, all grounded at home to firefight the explosive issues of the US shutdown, the ‘gilets jaunes’ (yellow vests) protest movement, and Brexit respectively.

Davos laid bare the concerns of the world’s rulers, forced to acknowledge clear signs of a slowing world economy, a dangerous ramping up of trade battles between the US and China, the lowest Chinese growth rate in almost 30 years, a simmering developing world debt crisis, recession in Italy and the possibility of a no-deal Brexit that will have damaging and uncertain international impacts.

The total cost across the west of recapitalising broken banks and underwriting their debts exceeded \$14 trillion. By slashing interest rates to historical lows - and creating ‘quantitative easing’ which allowed central banks to purchase securities from the market in order to increase the money supply - a full-blown collapse of the economic system was narrowly prevented.

These emergency measures have not created a sustainable recovery however. Instead they have assisted in inflating booming asset prices and in many countries consumer debt has soared back to pre-2008 levels. The real causes of the last crash have been ignored. The total value of global debt in both the public and private sectors has now reached an all-time high of \$182 trillion.

Twice last year there were panics on Wall Street, as fears of ebbing growth and the impact of tighter US monetary policy took hold. In February, \$4 trillion was wiped from the world’s stock markets in just two days. Later the rebound in the US was spectacular, yet between October 2018 and January 2019, the falls have recommenced with 20% of share market ‘value’ evaporating.

Despite assurances from big banks that they have cleaned up their acts, unnerving parallels

lurk. The largest world banks have become bigger with the percentage of assets held by the big five increasing, creating fears that they remain too important to be allowed to fail in another severe downturn.

In February last year, US hedge fund manager Chris Cole, took a break from his job of making millions out of financial hedging, to comment cynically: “The entire global system is an Ouroboros - a snake eating its own tail. We are going to have a full-blown financial crisis on the same level as the last one, if not worse.”

One sign of the depleted credit quality of international markets is the deterioration globally in median bond ratings. Since 1980 they have dropped from ‘A’ to ‘BBB’, just one notch above junk status.

Trade wars

Trump’s presidency has added a dangerous new unpredictability to an already volatile situation. Trade tensions between the US and China remain unresolved and may worsen in March. He has railed against China with allegations of cyber-espionage, accusing Beijing of US property rights theft.

Although the US’s economic clashes with Mexico and Canada over the North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) have receded for now, the EU was hit with tariffs of 25% on imported steel and 10% on aluminium last March, and retaliated with counter-tariffs in June.

These naked protectionist measures further complicate already-strained inter-imperialist geopolitical relations. Tariffs push up the cost of imports, add to business costs and eat into profits. Reduction in global growth has a knock-on effect on US exports.

Trump thunders against perceived anti-US bias in the World Trade Organisation (WTO), created 20 years ago when confident capitalists believed globalisation was irreversible. In an interview with Bloomberg in September he threatened: “If they don’t shape up, I would withdraw from the WTO.”

Today’s international trade tensions underline a shift that has been developing since 2008 and is fanned by right-wing populist politicians who demagogically attack globalisation and its institutions, including the EU, demanding a return to protecting ‘national interests’.

In its 24 January edition, the Economist refers to this era of partial retreat into protectionism as one of ‘globalisation’, noting that the global value of cross-border investment by multinational companies fell by about 20% in 2018 alone.

A handbrake is being applied to world trade, which coupled with the current US backlash against international agreements, further undermines prospects for a coordinated response to any future economic crisis.

US economy

Indicative of growing uncertainties is the barely concealed rift between Trump and the US central bank, over the issue of interest rates and the sustainability of the recovery.

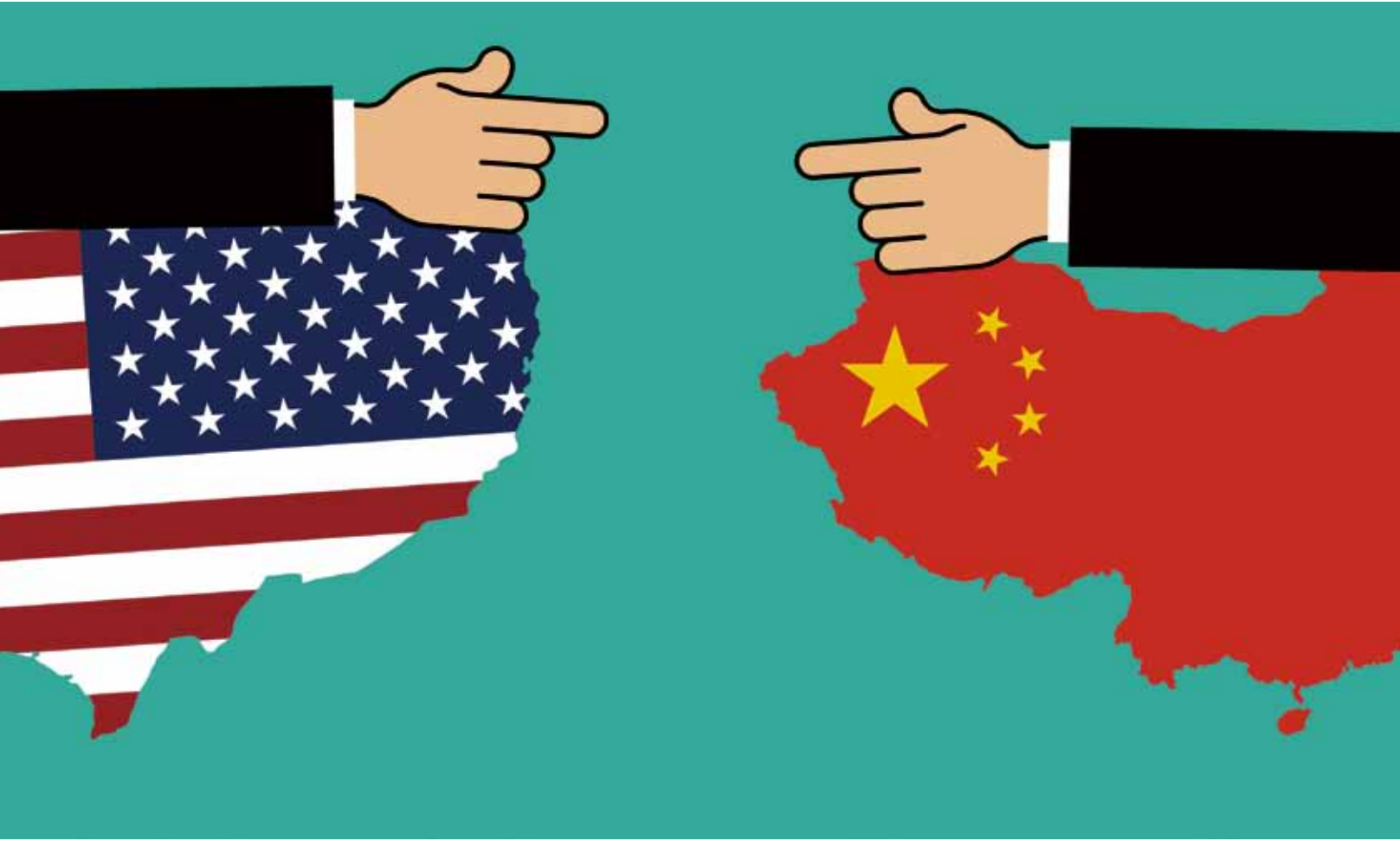
The US economy appears robust, growing by 4.1% in the last quarter. Yet average growth rate in the current expansion phase is 2.2%, paltry next to the 4.9% a year on average during the 1960s, or even the 3.6% achieved in the 1990s. This recovery is the first business cycle since 1945 in which there has not been a single year of growth above 3%.

Since 2014, the dollar has risen by nearly 25%, buoyed by a stronger domestic performance



photo Paul Mattsson

Increasing trade wars between the US, China and the EU; a slowing global economy; deepening world debt crisis; Brexit uncertainty and so on, could precipitate a new recession. Such a prospect means the working class must prepare, through struggle, to end the rule of capital rather than submit to it



Workers and youth, already becoming radicalised around the world, will fight back and forge new mass workers’ parties that will end the rule of capital, rather than submit to it

and rising interest rates. This has severely damaged developing market economies, which have seen dollars leaving their shores to chase higher US interest rates. Turkey and Argentina have already been prominent casualties of this process.

Trump has slashed corporate taxation from 35% to 21%. Indicating their lack of confidence in the long-term profitability of manufacturing investment however, many big US companies have used these windfalls to buy back their own shares and thus sit on huge cash piles.

As the Fed reverses the bond-buying quantitative easing (QE) programme, the US now faces quantitative tightening (QT). While QE helped to sustain the boom in asset prices, shares and property, QT will do the opposite.

Some US financial indicators are beginning to flash amber and many economists now believe a big market correction is lurking. This may originate in the financial sector, perhaps this time triggered by distress in the ‘exchange traded fund’ market, financial products that offer risk diversification.

In trading houses governed by algorithms that can move the US treasury bond market 10% in ten minutes, these instruments remain untested and susceptible to the effects of large-scale panic selling.

Trump believes he can win another term on his record of presiding over a strong economy. However, he may well face the prospect of fighting for re-election during a recession.

Tech giant Apple’s profit warning last month was a harbinger of things to come. When US Treasury secretary Steve Mnuchin suddenly stated in December that banks have ‘ample liquidity’, markets responded with palpable fear.

China syndrome

China’s slowdown also creates new tensions. It produces 16% of global GDP (total output) today, compared to 6% in 2008, but in the same period has seen its debt balloon from 150% of GDP to 300%.

US tariffs have hit the Chinese economy hard and an additional \$300 billion is threatened in March unless Beijing concedes further ground. China is acutely vulnerable to a full-scale trade war.

Social tensions are rising, with over 1,700 industrial strikes or protests in 2018, the vast majority of which are linked to lay-offs from debt-ridden enterprises.

While it is not possible to be precise about either the immediate causes or the timescale for the coming recession, nor even its severity, it is apparent that a swift and committed response by capitalist governments to fighting its impacts will be more difficult to achieve this time, given the increasingly fragmented capitalist world.

Prospects

There may be a stock market crash, higher interest rates may ignite debt crises in over-extended developing countries, banking collapses may cause a financial meltdown or there can be an oil shock arising from political upheaval through US meddling in Iran.

Having reduced interest rates to historical lows after 2008 and loaded up the world economy with QE debt, the depleted stock of financial firepower in finance ministries and central banks makes a future downturn or crash a potentially more fraught affair.

Compounding all capitalism’s pre-existing structural weaknesses is the shocking report from the UN’s Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change which warns the world has only 12 years to take the necessary steps to avert a global warming disaster.

The working class was largely stunned and ill-prepared to mount a fightback after 2008, deceived and abandoned by treacherous former social-democratic parties who had bought into the idea of the infallibility of the market. Betrayals in Greece and elsewhere have meant that capitalism has bailed itself out on our backs and through our wallets.

Next time will be different. Workers and youth, already becoming radicalised around the world, will fight back and forge new mass workers’ parties that will end the rule of capital, rather than submit to it.

The programme of Marxism will be taken up internationally, arming the new generation with the political weapons that can finally dispatch the dictatorship of the market into the dustbin for ever.



George Bush gathers Congressional leaders and presidential candidates in 2008 on the eve of signing the Emergency Economic Stabilisation Act, aka the bank bailout act

Unite union London council workers back Enfield Labour no-cuts call

London local government workers' representatives have agreed to support Enfield North Constituency Labour Party's no-cuts campaign.

Reps in general union Unite backed the demand for Labour-run Enfield council to refuse to pass a cuts budget. (See 'Enfield North CLP backs no-cuts budget - now councillors must act' at socialistparty.org.uk.)

Instead, the call is for the council to pass a no-cuts budget, making use of reserves and borrowing powers. Meanwhile, the council should demand that central government immediately restore funding to at least pre-austerity 2010 levels.

The north London borough council is preparing a further £18 million worth of Tory cuts to jobs and services, on top of £178 million



We call for a campaign, uniting anti-cuts councillors with trade unions, service users and communities, to demand much-needed funding for our services

of cuts since 2010.

The chair of Unite's regional industrial sector committee (Risc), Socialist Party member Danny Hoggan, stated: "Our Risc

wholeheartedly supports the position of Enfield North. The only way to defend local government services is to take the road taken by Enfield North Labour Party.

"We call on all those who want to fight cuts to join with this struggle. The consequences of not doing so are dire. This is about vital services, it's about the future of local government.

"We call for a campaign, uniting anti-cuts councillors with trade unions, service users and communities, to demand much-needed funding for our services.

"We could spread the campaign to other Labour councils, which in turn would give us the best opportunity to get rid of this Tory government who have spread such misery across the country."



photo Paul Mattsson

Leeds Trade Union Council presents a no-cuts alternative budget for city



photo Paul Mattsson

Iain Dalton
Leeds Socialist Party

The anti-austerity committee of Leeds Trade Union Council (TUC) - which brings together the city's unions - presented its alternative city budget at a special public meeting on 12 February.

If adopted, this budget would use reserves and borrowing to reverse all the Labour-run local authority's cuts to jobs and services, as well as reversing this year's fee and rent increases.

In contrast, this is the ninth cuts budget in a row proposed by Leeds Labour. For the last year, Leeds City Council has received no 'revenue support grant', part of £266 million cuts from central government.

But the council has not led any serious fight for the return of this stolen funding. It has instead passed on Tory cuts. Meanwhile it has sought partial replacement though local business tax growth from city centre development, trialling 100% business rate retention.

Even the council's own proposals admit that any "apparent growth in the economy has not translated into business rate growth; in fact the income from business rates available to the council declined from 2014-

15 to 2016-17, only returning to 2014-15 levels in 2018-19."

With a £90.8 million projected budget gap up to 2021-22, the council will consider "stopping, delivering differently or charging for those services that are no longer affordable."

Leeds City Council is already spending reserves to support its budget, such as 'un-earmarking' the 'Early Leavers' Initiative' reserve, and making temporary use of the 'Section 106' money developers must pay. But this year it is actually putting an extra £4.5 million into reserves, following a large portion of a £7.3 million VAT rebate last year!

Leeds TUC identified £6.63 million of cuts to jobs and services, and increases to rents and fees, in this year's budget. This is out of a larger budget gap partially plugged by reserves, as well as cost-saving capital investments like upgrading to LED street lamps.

Important among the council's attacks is an inflation-busting 4.3% rent hike for tenants of council homes built on profit-sucking 'private finance initiative' schemes - while other council tenants receive 1% rent cuts. The council is also pushing for 'efficiencies' in various departments, including leisure and libraries.

As well as scrapping these attacks, Leeds TUC's alternative budget proposes additional spending. This includes reversing the £230,000 cuts to domestic violence services fought by the Women's Lives Matter campaign.

The alternative budget incorporates demands from the Leeds Labour Representation Committee, a Labour left group, like ending the use of bailiffs to chase council tax arrears. And it calls for the council to pay outsourced workers the same as in-house workers, as demanded by the Leeds branch of public service union Unison.

But the key to the alternative budget is not simply passing on no cuts this year, but mobilising trade unions and community campaigns to demand the return of all funding stolen from our city. We also demand that Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell pledge an incoming Labour government will reimburse councils who use reserves and borrowing to set no-cuts budgets.

Leeds TUC lobby of Leeds City Council budget-setting meeting: Wednesday 27 February, 12 noon, outside Leeds Civic Hall, Calverley Street, Leeds LS1 1UR
Read the full alternative budget proposals at leedstuc.wordpress.com

Socialist Students conference shows potential for fighting leadership



photo Corinthia Ward

Bea Gardner

Socialist Students national chair

Around 90 delegates and visitors from Socialist Students groups across Britain debated the student movement and its socialist potential on Saturday 9 February.

Socialist Students national organiser Theo Sharieff introduced the new national programme for Socialist Students, approved by the conference. He spoke about the potential role of the student movement in helping to kick out the decaying Tory government.

We welcomed Sam Morecroft from the Sheffield branch of the University and College Union (UCU). He highlighted the importance of Socialist Students' solidarity work during last year's pensions strike.

Mandy Buckley, a striking Birmingham home care worker, spoke about her union Unison's battle against Blairite Birmingham Labour council's cuts to jobs and pay. She thanked Socialist Students for our continued solidarity.

Commissions

In the afternoon, conference held separate commissions. Friedrich Engels' classic 'Socialism: Utopian and Scientific', just republished by Socialist Books. The lessons 100 years on from the German revolution.

And a commission on the very important upcoming strike for women's rights in the Spanish state. This was introduced by Marina Mata, visiting from the Sindicato de Estudiantes (Students' Union) and the Libres y Combativas (Free and Combative) socialist-feminist campaign.

A robust and political motions

debate dealt with various pressing issues. We discussed our response to the capitalists' political crisis and growth of the far right. We resolved to support youth strikes for climate action, with our message that workers' struggle for socialist change is the only way of ending capitalist environmental destruction.

The UCU is again balloting for strike action on campus, this year over pay and conditions. Socialist Students continues to be an organisation with an enormous potential to bring about real change on campus and more widely.

In a year where the National Union of Students, controlled by the right, finds itself in an unprecedented financial crisis, the importance of building a fighting student leadership has never been more important.

New programme, school cuts, Women's Lives Matter - read the full report at socialistparty.org.uk

London housing campaigners disrupt social homes auction



Socialist Party members joined campaigners - including the Social Housing Action Campaign (Shac), which links housing workers with residents - to protest at a Savills auction. The venue was a swanky central London hotel, and housing association homes were up for grabs. We wanted to protest that they should stay as social housing stock. Campaigners went into the auction. Socialist Party member Nancy Taaffe spoke when the first housing association property came up, to call on buyers not to bid, and Savills not to handle these badly needed homes. Tens of thousands of socially rented homes are lost due to housing associations selling them in this way. See the video on the London Socialist Party Facebook page: [facebook.com/LondonSocialists](https://www.facebook.com/LondonSocialists)

Stop witch-hunt of socialists at Brum Uni!

The University of Birmingham Guild of Students formally derecognised our Socialist Students society on 1 February. The background to this attack on democracy and free speech on campus was a false - and now retracted - accusation of antisemitism levelled at us.

The Guild was forced instead to use an accusation of 'harassment' - based on a student who is not a committee member rightly challenging racist posts on social media made by a complainant. The president of the Guild rejected our right to appeal.

In our campaign for reinstatement as a recognised political society, we appeal to students and workers to send messages of solidarity to birminghamsocialiststudents@gmail.com, and messages of protest to president@guild.bham.ac.uk...

Birmingham Socialist Students

Protest: Wednesday 27 February at 12 noon, outside the Guild of Students, University of Birmingham, Edgbaston Park Road, Birmingham B15 2TU

Leicester socialists stand against Blairite mayor

Leicester Socialist Party has selected Steve Score to stand in May's mayoral elections against Blairite incumbent Peter Soulsby. Steve chaired the successful Save Glenfield Children's Heart Centre campaign and is a longstanding Socialist Party organiser.

Steve said: "Instead of standing up to the government, Leicester's city mayor has been meekly passing on the cuts. People power saved the Glenfield heart centre. Similarly, a mass trade union campaign led by the mayor and councillors could save our services..."

Leicester Socialist Party

Lincoln students back UCU ballot

Lincoln Socialist Students held a meeting on 28 January about the University and College Union (UCU) strike ballot. A UCU speaker gave an overview of the pay and conditions dispute, and what a "yes" and "yes" vote - for refusal to mark work, and for strike action - would mean.

We agreed to form a 'Lincoln Students Support the Lecturers' group to help mobilise the vote, and build student support during industrial action. We have set a date for our first round of leafleting...

Tom Vale

Leicestershire needs NHS beds

NHS bosses plan to reorganise acute hospital services in Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland. Costing around £370 million, the plans involve moving services onto multiple sites without increasing beds. But lack of beds led to cancellation of thousands of operations last year. And the county council's 30-year plans envision a population growth of hundreds of thousands...

Tom Barker

Claimants and union slam Universal Credit

About 100 came to a Haringey Against Universal Credit public meeting on 24 January. Socialist Party member Chris Baugh - assistant general secretary of civil service union PCS, which organises benefits workers - called for the social catastrophe of Universal Credit to be scrapped...

John Dolan

Energy retail firm collapse hits Tyneside

Utilitywise sells energy on a second-hand basis following speculation on prices. Workers told North Tyneside Socialist Party about high-pressure selling, reckless management, an 'in' clique and hard-partying culture encouraged by bosses, and totally inappropriate managerial gambles on the corporate roulette wheel.

While chief executive Brendan Flattery was in hiding somewhere at the facility, it was director Chris Blench who informed the 1,000-strong workforce that not only were they being made redundant, but they would receive no commission or wage payments for February.

Incredibly, Blench insisted workers should continue to work as normal, implying they could turn the situation around! One worker fell to the floor and suffered a seizure.

The Communication Workers Union and other unions must turn to organising workplaces like this. And the Socialist Party says the energy sector belongs in public hands, owned and operated by and for workers and service users...

William Jarrett

Full stories online at socialistparty.org.uk

Nationalise to save jobs at Honda!

■ Car manufacturer Honda has said it will close its Swindon plant in 2021. If the closure goes ahead it will devastate the town as 3,500 jobs will be destroyed.

The Socialist Party stands fully behind the workforce and we think the factory should be nationalised to save jobs. See the next issue of the Socialist and socialistparty.org.uk for updates.

Cardiff Uni: urgent action needed to stop job cuts

Cardiff UCU member

Cardiff University plans to cut 380 posts over five years.

The University and College Union (UCU) is combining its national ballot over workload, casualisation and pay with a simultaneous ballot over the threat of local compulsory redundancies to hit the Tories 50% turnout threshold.

Staffing cuts won't just affect those losing work. A 2016 survey by the union found that university staff were already working on average almost 2-days unpaid overtime a week.

The university has a budget deficit of more than £20 million. But cuts aren't aimed the Vice Chancellor's £256,000 salary, or his five-figure 'performance bonus'.

The university favours new buildings over staff. It's undergoing a £600 million campus development, and in 2016 borrowed £300 million - the largest public bond in UK higher education history - at £9 million

interest a year.

This time last year, the union was preparing to strike over pensions - a strike which led to serious employer concessions. At Cardiff University, Socialist Students and the trade union council spoke at picket lines and rallies.

The trade union council arranged for the strikers to speak at other union branches where they won donations to our strike fund. UCU affiliated to the local trade union council and led the May Day march.

These impressive strikes showed the potential power of organised collective action, and this year, the workers are better prepared for what's ahead.

Support by students, the wider trade union movement and militant rank-and-file action will send a clear message to Cardiff University management.

Staff will not tolerate further assaults on their working conditions, and we must also use the union elections to elect a fighting left leadership to coordinate our fightback.

Hackney: Unite fights racism and victimisation

Hackney Council Unite the Union is preparing to consult members on industrial action following the dismissal of the branch equalities officer, Natasha Johnson. Natasha had raised a grievance complaint following a number of racist and sexist incidents.

Instead of taking the complaint seriously, the employer has circled its wagons around the managers accused of appalling behaviour. In fact, the employer has accused Natasha of not taking into account the feelings of her managers - when she made the complaints!

The allegations against Natasha include the complaint that by allowing the union to publicly defend her, she again did not take account of the feelings of managers. Clearly, Hackney Council cares more for managers' feelings than about eradicating racism and sexism.

To its immense credit, Hackney Central Constituency Labour Party have agreed a motion in support of the campaign. However, the response from Labour councillors so far has been poor.

Councillors claim that they can-

not intervene in disciplinary matters. This is clearly nonsense. Not so long ago, it was councillors who heard and decided on appeals for dismissed council employees.

The claim that councillors cannot intervene when senior council managers fail to deal with racism and sexism is nothing less than an abdication of leadership. The attack on Natasha is without doubt an attack on the union.

Unite has run a number of effective campaigns in the borough - winning the minimum wage for parking enforcement officers and school cleaners, preventing the implementation of term-time-only pay for cleaning contractors and winning permanent jobs for agency staff.

The council wants to push the union back - but it will not work.

The union has already won council agreement for an independent inquiry into racism.

Now the union will continue to push to win justice for Natasha and demand that the council acts to combat racism and sexism in the workplace.

Deliveroo riders strike against poverty pay



Strikers in Manchester
photo Tom Costello

Tom Costello
Manchester Socialist Party

Fast food giant Deliveroo can usually expect to have a surge in orders on Valentine's Day. Things were slightly different this year, as around 40 riders in Manchester took militant strike action. Their central demands were: £5 per delivery, £10 an hour for waiting times, and pay boosts for freezing weather.

Deliveroo riders face some of the harshest and most exploitative working conditions in the country.

The company describes its workers

as 'self-employed'. This gives senior management an excuse to cut back on services and vital protections for staff.

Strikers pointed this out - they drew attention to the lack of support they receive after accidents and injuries they face on the job.

Appalled

The strike started early at the company's offices. Riders were appalled to see the gates had been locked and security had been sent out to try and move us on.

This didn't break our spirit. We marched, horns blaring, to Deliveroo's other office in the city centre!

The public mood was overwhelmingly supportive. Cars and vans regularly pulled up to show solidarity and take leaflets to show to workmates.

This is not surprising. The last decade has been one of vicious assaults from capitalist bosses and their governments, and workers are more desperate than ever to see mass action to follow as an example.

What we need now is for the trade unions to properly mobilise. The Trade Union Congress must act immediately to call action to end the gig economy. We cannot sit through any more years of this!

Leicester college pay strike goes on

Heather Rawling
Leicester Socialist Party

After their successful one-day strike on 6 February, staff from both sites at WQE college in Leicester struck again on 13-14 February.

The workers are striking to protect pay and conditions and achieve parity between both sites after a recent merger.

Picketing is not easy, with several entrances to cover, but there were plenty of willing pickets from

the National Education Union and teaching union NASUWT.

30 people attended a National Education Union meeting immediately after picketing. The head teacher was refusing to speak to the unions before but strike action has forced him to negotiate. However, the National Education Union has kept on the table a proposed three-day strike in March.

The head of the two sites is attempting to divide the workforce, and there are dangers here. Different unions are involved, and one

site has better terms and conditions than the other.

It is disappointing that member of public sector union Unison, representing support staff, have not been asked to strike. Joint strike meetings between the unions taking action would help to maintain unity between the strikers.

■ Read a report from the previous strike days, 'Leicester college workers refuse to accept cut in terms and conditions', at socialistparty.org.uk

TV: Les Misérables

Hugo's novel and this adaptation both offer a message of hope

Derek McMillan

Les Misérables started life as a three-volume novel by Victor Hugo written during his political exile from France. In the preface, he wrote: "So long as the three problems of the age - the degradation of man by poverty, the ruin of women by starvation, and the dwarfing of childhood by physical and spiritual night - are not solved; ... so long as ignorance and misery remain on earth, books like this cannot be useless."

Victor Hugo was identified in the public mind with the main character, Jean Valjean. When a reactionary mob attacked Hugo's house in Brussels at the time of the Paris Commune (1871) - he had denounced the Belgian government's refusal to grant political asylum to the revolutionary Communards - they shouted "Down with Jean Valjean!"

To adapt a three-volume novel into a TV series is no mean feat and it does make the story available to a whole new audience.

The character played by Dominic West - prisoner 24601, Jean Valjean - dominates the narrative of the BBC production of Les Misérables. There are no spoilers in this review but his fate represents the incredible injustice of the regime in France and the appalling treatment of the poor in the wake of the defeat of Napoleon at the Battle of Waterloo.

Fantine and her impossible task of keeping her daughter and her job is brilliantly portrayed by Lily Collins. The poor in general had a rough deal in that period; the working-class women suffered it twofold. It is the death of Fantine which spurs



Jean Valjean (Dominic West)

Fantine (Lily Collins)

Jean Valjean into action and begins a chain of events which disrupt the comfortable life he has made for himself.

Dark side

The vicious behaviour of Javert, the policeman, played by David Oyelowo is a personalisation of the cruelty of the law. Jean Valjean's 19 years in prison for stealing a loaf of bread is justified for Javert because "it's the law".

Those familiar with the musical version will remember the comic roles of Thénardier and his wife. The dark side of the characters is much more to the fore in this adaptation. However, the scene in episode three where Madame

Thénardier (Olivia Colman) is making a game out of beating Cosette, to the great amusement of the clientele of their inn, is brilliantly choreographed. It is a situation in which the laughter of the audience is crueler than the actions of the actor.

For all the darkness, the novel and this adaptation both offer a message of hope. Jean Valjean's personal struggle for redemption could be a metaphor for the redemption of French society - which the revolutionaries of the day, like the 'gilets jaunes' (yellow vests) of today, seek to bring about. Socialists should be inspired by this story.

■ **All six episodes of Les Misérables are available on the BBC iPlayer**

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■ Solidarity with Wavertree Labour Party

Merseyside Pensioners Association (MPA) condemns Labour deputy leader Tom Watson's slanderous attack on Wavertree Labour Party.

Watson uses the witch-hunting methods of McCarthyism - 'The practice of making accusations of disloyalty, subversion, or treason without proper regard for evidence'.

Speaking on the Andrew Marr show he invoked the vile attacks on Ms Berger by fascist thugs (who were jailed for their criminal activities), as he did the murder of Jo Cox by a far-right fanatic and, by implication, linked these monstrosities to the stance of Wavertree party members, frequently interspersing the word "bullying" or "bullied".

Watson failed to mention that Wavertree members condemned these

racist attacks and had frequently demonstrated against them.

We stand four-square in solidarity with the Wavertree members and support them in their total rejection of Watson's allegations.

This MPA defends the fundamental right of rank and file members to hold their elected representatives to account either at council or parliamentary level. This is a fundamental democratic right which Mr Watson and his allies are attempting to stifle.

The real crime, in his eyes, is that, unlike Mr Watson, Wavertree Labour Party is campaigning for the defeat of the Tories and for the election of a Corbyn-led government.

Tony Mulhearn,
MPA Media Officer

■ Villainous Churchill

"Tonypandy?" "Villain", is how Labour shadow chancellor John McDonnell responded when asked if Winston Churchill was a hero or villain.

Churchill and his legacy has made headlines recently with some, mainly Tory MPs like Jeremy Hunt, trotting out the usual 'war hero' and 'greatest Briton' nonsense. But McDonnell is right and most workers over the years agreed.

Especially in places like south Wales, where Churchill sent in troops against striking workers. In Tonypandy in the Rhondda during a miners' strike in 1910, troops killed one miner and injured about 580 people.

During a railway workers' strike in Llanelli in 1911 troops charged to clear a picket line for a passenger train but strikers were able to immobilise it by raking out the fire. The confrontation

that followed culminated in soldiers opening fire. Two men were killed including 19-year-old Leonard Worsell, who had nothing to do with the strike.

My grandfather tells me that Churchill - even during the war - would be booed when he appeared on newsreels in the cinema. And he was booed in person when he visited Cardiff in 1950. And not just Cardiff, the same story is repeated in east London and in industrial towns and cities in Scotland and the north of England where Churchill placed battleships on the Mersey and Tyne during the 1926 general strike.

Add to this the Bengal famine in 1943, the 'Siege of Sidney Street', his role during the Boer War, his views on race... The list goes on. Villain is putting it quite mildly actually!

Scott Jones, Loughton

We reserve the right to shorten letters.

Don't forget to give your name, address and phone number. Confidentiality will be respected if requested.



Socialist Party Fighting Fund

	£ target	£ received	January-March 2019	Deadline: 3 April 2019
Wales	2,300	1,945		85%
North West	2,100	1,679		80%
Northern	750	457		61%
West Midlands	2,600	1,228	47%	
East Midlands	1,850	857	46%	
Yorkshire	3,300	1,216	37%	
South West	1,800	598	33%	
Southern	1,600	325	20%	
Eastern	1,200	208	17%	
London	6,100	781	13%	
South East	750	42	6%	
Other	5,650	368	7%	
TOTAL	30,000	9,703	32%	

Spanish state: social polarisation and budget defeat force snap election

■ Defeat the right in the
ballot box and the streets!

Izquierda Revolucionaria
(Revolutionary Left,
CWI in the Spanish state)

Pedro Sánchez's term is over. A government of the social-democratic 'PSOE' party, formed eight months ago after the vote of no confidence against Rajoy of the traditional right-wing 'PP' party, has been brought down by a vote in parliament against budget proposals.

But beyond parliamentary arithmetic, what the early election shows is the complete instability and discredit that corrode the 'Regime of 1978' established after the end of the Franco dictatorship.

Its most visible expressions include the mass movement for self-determination and a republic in Catalonia. Also the advance of the extreme right - boosted by the rise of Spanish nationalism and the crisis in the PP. And a social movement with roots in the impoverishment of the population and growing inequality - which does not stop despite all attempts to deactivate it by the union bureaucracies, social democrats, and leadership of the left electoral movement 'Podemos'.

Capitalist crisis

The crisis of Spanish and international capitalism is the material basis of these convulsive political developments. At present, figures show a rapid slowdown in economic growth after years of social catastrophe.

More than nine million workers earn less than €800 a month. Among people under the age of 25 who work, it is €600 a month. 90% of contracts signed this year are temporary, and precariousness is like an oil slick that does not leave unaffected any sector of production. Unemployment affects more than 3.5 million people, and the prospect of a new industrial 'restructuring' is just around the corner.

The situation is desperate for the majority of the population. Under these conditions it is not possible to expect political stability.

There are more than a few capitalist politicians, the traditional right and the social democrats, who yearn

for the years of the 'Transition' (after Franco). That is not a surprise!

The revolutionary situation of the 1970s was frustrated by the leaderships of the left parties - the PCE ('Communist' Party) and PSOE ('Socialist' Party). They capitulated to the big capitalists and political apparatus of the dictatorship.

But democratic conquests were won thanks to the mass mobilisation of the working class and youth, and by the blood of hundreds of fighters murdered by the repressive state forces that enjoyed total impunity.

The peculiar capitalist "democracy" created in the heat of that confrontation benefited from the political ebb of the mass movement, the economic boom of the late 1980s and 90s, and substantial aid from the capitalist European Union. The Regime of 1978 achieved an alternation in power between social democracy and the right, with more or less stable governments.

The current situation has little in common with those years. The savage offensive against the economic and trade union rights of the working class; the dismantling of the welfare state; the infamous cuts to education and public healthcare; the lack of opportunities for young people, except in forced economic exile - all these have created an explosive scenario.

Social revolt

From this drastic change in the objective situation following the Great Recession after 2007-08, a social revolt unprecedented since the 1970s has emerged.

General strikes. Mass movements such as the Green and White Tides (against attacks on education and healthcare respectively). The Marches for Dignity (against corruption, insecure work and poverty pay). Gamonal (location of a famous victory for struggle against criminal speculation in the city of Burgos).

The great student strikes. The mass mobilisations for self-determination and a republic in Catalonia. The remarkable International Women's Day general strike of 8 March 2018. And the large-scale demonstrations by pensioners.

The escalation of class struggle - and the shift to the left of broad



Part of the student general strike in November 2018
photo Sindicato de Estudiantes

layers of workers, youth and the impoverished middle class - explains a number of important developments.

The emergence of Podemos. The election on 20 December 2015 not leading to the formation of a government, and having to be repeated on 26 June 2016. And, in order for Rajoy to be sworn in as president, the Spanish capitalists carrying out a coup within PSOE to oust Pedro Sánchez (who, as leader, had opposed allowing the PP to form a government).

The most ironic thing is that this latter far-reaching movement - in which the 'socialist' barons, former PSOE leader Felipe González, and the entire 'Prisa' Spanish media squad were involved - failed. Pedro Sánchez was returned as PSOE general secretary, winning against all the odds over Susana Díaz, thanks to the mobilisation of the party's members.

Now the situation has taken a new turn. Pedro Sánchez does not have the negative image that Felipe González has among the masses. Nor does he appear as a leader integrated with the most established part of the capitalist oligarchy.

The attacks he has received in recent weeks from the right have given

him more credibility among parts of the working class than he deserves. The right has accused him of being a 'traitor' to the 'homeland', and branded him head of a present-day 'Popular Front' (the left forces in the Spanish Civil War - for his pacts with Podemos).

Something similar is happening with his position on Catalonia. He supported the application of 'Article 155' of the Spanish constitution (allowing the Spanish government to suspend the autonomy of Catalonia) which firmly denies the right to self-determination. He also defended the infamous action of the public prosecutor's office against the imprisoned pro-independence leaders on trial. Despite this, the right considers him the main promoter of "separatism".

The snap election on 28 April will mean a new escalation in political polarisation. The dilemma presented is evident.

Either a government of the reactionary bloc of the PP, the right-populist Ciudadanos party, and the far-right Vox party. Or a possible coalition between PSOE and Podemos, with the parliamentary support

of Catalan and Basque nationalists.

In these circumstances it would be foolhardy to make a definitive prediction of what may come out of 28 April.

PSOE has contributed decisively to demobilising the left's electoral base - with its policy of continuing cuts and austerity, with its unfulfilled promises, and with its acceptance of the logic of capitalism. But so too have the leaders of Podemos - with their desire to get into government at any cost, abandoning social mobilisation and challenging the capitalist system, mimicking the programme and parliamentary forms of social democracy.

Workers' consciousness

But the events in Andalusia (where PSOE was defeated and the far right made gains) and the rise of Vox have had a tremendous impact on the consciousness of millions of workers and young people throughout the Spanish state.

Following sure class instincts, right now in the bosom of working families arises the question: can we allow the right to rise and triumph? The answer will be based on an

electoral campaign in a very volatile and changing environment.

There was a failure of the "patriotic Spanish" mobilisation in Madrid on 10 February, in which the PP, Ciudadanos and Vox were unable to mobilise their social base in the streets.

There was the great demonstration in favour of the right to self-determination on Saturday 16 February in Barcelona with more than half a million participants. This explains the enormous social pressure towards the leaders of the main capitalist Catalan nationalist PDeCat party, and left-liberal Catalan nationalist ERC party, and their vote against the budget.

There were enormous demonstrations for public healthcare in Galicia and Teruel. There were multitudinous demonstrations of pensioners in all regions.

There is the great taxi strike in Madrid. And there is what will be a new historic strike day on 8 March 2019, which will fill the streets with millions of women workers and young people from the working class - along with their colleagues, male workers.

All this shows the right can be defeated. As for Izquierda Revolucion-

aria (Revolutionary Left - the Socialist Party's sister party in the Spanish state), we will contribute with all our might to this defeat.

But we will not do it to hand a blank cheque to Pedro Sánchez or PSOE - rather, to underline the idea that voting is not enough.

We must defeat the right in the ballot boxes, yes. But to defeat the policies of the right, and force the parliamentary left to implement policies which serve the interests of workers and the oppressed, we need to continue the massive mobilisation in the streets.

We need also to build a combative left, with strong roots in the workers' movement and trade unions, among youth and students and in social movements, putting forward a programme of breaking with capitalism, for the right of self-determination, and a socialist republic.

There is no time to lose! To defeat the right in the ballot boxes and in the streets - join Izquierda Revolucionaria!

■ Lessons of the 1930s run-up to the Spanish Civil War: read the full article at socialistparty.org.uk



What we stand 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.

ENVIRONMENT

- Major research and investment into replacing fossil fuels with renewable energy and into ending the problems of early obsolescence and un-recycled 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 and 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!



**Join the fightback!
Join the Socialists!**

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✉ @socialist_party 📞 text 07761 818 206 🌐 /CWiSocialistParty

NHS crisis deepens WORKERS' AND COMMUNITY ACTION CAN SAVE OUR HEALTH SERVICE



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Matt
NHS Nurse

The news that A&E waiting times have hit the worst level since records began is yet further proof of the ongoing crisis in our NHS.

Despite a milder winter, less norovirus and fewer recorded flu cases, NHS trusts have dipped below 85% of patients being seen - then admitted or discharged - within four hours. The figure gets worse in 'Type 1 centres' (24-hour A&E departments) with nearly one in four failing to meet the four-hour target.

Chronic underfunding, crisis levels of staffing and privatisation have created a toxic cocktail of disaster for patients and staff within the NHS.

The brutal robbery of funding from local councils by the Tory government has seen social care budgets slashed, with patients remaining in hospital awaiting care packages. This results in hospital beds being filled by patients who do not require acute hospital care, creating a backlog that sees patients left on stretchers strewn across A&E corridors up and down the country.

Councils have a duty to fight the cuts and defend the most vulnerable in society. The Socialist Party calls for councils to set no-cuts budgets, while fighting to build a mass struggle to win the necessary funding from government (see page 10).

The NHS, despite the underfunding and the problems that causes, remains a jewel in the crown of the British working class. Fought for by previous generations of workers, the NHS wasn't handed to us by the ruling class but

was hard won through struggle.

Since its formation in 1948 the Tories and their friends and backers in the capitalist class have sought to undermine its existence - committed instead to a profit-driven, exclusive private healthcare model. But as Nye Bevan, architect of the NHS, famously said: "The NHS will last as long as there are folk with the faith to fight for it".

Successes

On a local level we've seen successful campaigns in recent years, such as saving from closure Glenfield heart unit in Leicester and Chatsworth rehabilitation unit in Mansfield.

Also, trade unionists taking industrial action have stopped the introduction of a 'wholly owned subsidiary' - ie privatisation - in Mid Yorks NHS trust; Tees, Esk and Wear Valley NHS trust; and Wrightington, Wigan

and Leigh NHS trust.

Socialist Party members have played important roles in these campaigns.

Despite these incredible victories at a local level, the national trade union leaderships have been deafeningly quiet on the issue of taking action over the NHS crisis. Yet the 2015-16 junior doctors' strikes showed the strength of public support for the NHS and its staff.

A coordinated campaign of action - including strikes - from the health trade unions, together with a national demonstration along with community campaigns to demand increased funding for the NHS and scrapping privatisation; and a call for a general election to return a Corbyn-led Labour government committed to socialist policies, could give a huge confidence boost to both NHS workers and patients, and begin to tackle the crisis in our health service.