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the Socialist

Formerly **Militant**



FLOODS

Major funding for flood risk management needed
> p4-5



SAVE THE NHS: KICK OUT THE TORIES

> Tory lies > Labour's record and programme
> Rebuilding with socialist policies

> p8-9



INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR THE ELIMINATION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

What policies are needed? > p11



anti-union



anti-NHS



anti-working class...

TORIES

OUT



Corbyn in with socialist policies

High Court attacks Royal Mail workers



photo Paul Mattsson

The ruling by the High Court against the Communication Workers Union (CWU) voids its national strike ballot in Royal Mail. It is a massive attack on the union, its postal worker members, and the whole labour and trade union movement, which must now come to the CWU's aid.

This is a defining moment for workers, their unions and their ability to organise and strike.

It will not be lost on the 110,000 CWU posties, and many other trade unionists, that a strike vote of 97% on a 76% turnout, smashing the draconian and undemocratic voting thresholds in the Tory anti-union laws, has been ruled out by one single unelected judge acting for the bosses.

Political motivation

Moreover, as the CWU leadership has rightly claimed, one motivation is to stop a strike during the general election, called by Tory PM Boris Johnson because he can't govern as he doesn't have a majority!

The Tories, through David Cameron, supported by the likes of Boris Johnson, devised the Trade Union Act as the latest in the long line of their anti-union laws going back to Thatcher's.

After the two-million-strong 2011 public sector pensions strike, they wanted to make national strike action impossible by bringing in the undemocratic voting threshold of a 50% turnout to make a strike legal.

This is the most extreme example yet of the anti-worker character of the law. It's used to protect the Tory government and bullying Royal Mail management, who wanted to prevent action during their most profitable time of the year in the run-up to Christmas.

> Continued on p2

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"The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it."
Karl Marx

TORIES' ATTACK ON CWU - AN ATTACK ON ALL WORKERS

Socialist Party members in the CWU

continued from front page

The CWU won a successful strike ballot by an incredible campaign of mobilising members. But the judge ruled against them because, rightly, the union acted against the Thatcherite spirit of the anti-union laws, which seek to isolate and atomise union members, so that they vote alone, with all the propaganda from management bearing down on them.

The CWU now has to discuss its response to the court ruling. We have had regular national reps meetings, and an emergency one should be called in the next few days, with local gate meetings organised to report back.

This is the best way to prevent a vacuum opening up, and keep members together. The leadership's immediate response was to raise the possibility of a legal appeal and even a re-ballot. But the idea of militant action should be tested out with reps and members.

Postal workers have a proud history of taking unofficial action when necessary to defend victimised reps and members. This has been common over the last few years, and even during the current balloting process.

But the union should consider how best to ensure that action taken against this outrageous decision isn't isolated and sporadic.

The best defence against any management offensive is to act together - with properly prepared national action.

In the meantime, goodwill should be withdrawn in offices, including not volunteering for overtime. This would send a real message to Royal Mail that the union and postal workers aren't going anywhere.

Workers' solidarity

But posties have another tradition - supporting other workers taking action, often refusing to deliver mail across picket lines. The whole union movement must immediately give support to the CWU.

The response has to be defiant and collective across the movement. In its bulletin to members, the CWU leadership correctly states: "This injunction is not only a massive injustice to our members, it's also an injustice to every worker in the country."

"We all need to wake up and recognise that this Tory government has deliberately stacked the rules against workers, in favour of the constituency they were born to serve - which is big business and the establishment.

"We appeal to the TUC [Trade Union Congress] and workers everywhere - in what is a call to arms -



photo Naomi Byron

that it's time for us to fundamentally shift the balance of forces in this country back to working people and remove these draconian laws once and for all."

There should be an immediate joint meeting of the TUC General Council and the Labour leadership of Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell.

There should be unequivocal support for whatever action the CWU and its members decide to take. They should call an emergency national demonstration on these demands:

- Support the CWU and

- the posties
- Defend trade union rights and the right to strike
- Repeal the Tory anti-union laws
- Re-nationalise Royal Mail

This could link up with the increasing number of workers taking action - including what is effectively a national strike of university lecturers and staff who are taking eight days of action from Monday 25 November to Wednesday 4 December, as well as RMT union members who are on strike during November and December on South Western Railway and West Midlands Trains.

Jeremy Corbyn should publicly support the CWU - recommitting to his policies of repealing the Trade Union Act and renationalising Royal Mail.

This would give confidence to postal workers, and contrast him with pro-Royal Mail management Boris Johnson and expose his fake pro-worker populism.

The time to act is now - support the CWU and the postal workers. Defeat Royal Mail management. Get the Tories out - for a Jeremy Corbyn-led Labour government on socialist policies, including the renationalisation of Royal Mail.

CWU - ground laid for an almighty struggle

Socialist Party members have been visiting Royal Mail delivery and sorting offices all over the country and getting an excellent response to our leaflets and the Socialist.

Below, **Ryan Aldred** reports on his visit to a Plymouth sorting office.

"Deflated, frustrated and angry." These are the words used by the CWU rep to describe the mood at Plymouth's West Park sorting office after the high court scandalously ruled against the postal workers' tremendous national ballot result.

It was clear that despite the ruling, workers are more than prepared for the struggle against Rico Back and the other Royal Mail bosses. It was only a couple of months prior that the West Park sorting office had taken three days of unofficial strike action against a bullying manager. Not only did they not face prosecution for striking outside the law, but they secured a victory. The manager in question was quickly removed before solidarity action spread to the other depots across the city on the fourth day.

The ground has been laid for an almighty struggle, one which in the immediate weeks before a general election directly poses the question of Royal Mail's renationalisation.

"Solidarity to the CWU after this outrageous decision by the establishment-supporting courts. They have clearly acted to try and prevent strikes during the general election, which could embarrass Boris Johnson. They also want to protect Royal Mail from action during their busiest time of the year. The union smashes the undemocratic voting restrictions in the Tory Trade Union Act and yet still can't take official strike action!
The whole labour and trade

union movement must now come to the aid of the CWU and their members. There should be an emergency TUC general council.

We should support whatever action the CWU wants to take to defend union rights and their right to strike. Renationalise Royal Mail. Solidarity to the CWU and the posties!"

Marion Lloyd

■ Socialist Party, and candidate in PCS general secretary election (see page 6)

Broadband: Privatisation has failed to deliver, time for a socialist plan



photo BT/JohnniePakington/CC

CWU member in Openreach

Labour's policy announcement to nationalise Openreach and BT broadband infrastructure, and provide free internet for all, has had an impact. Debate on the Openreach in-house social media had to be shut down, with reminders that it should not be a forum for us to express our political opinions!

A privatised telecoms network has proven itself to have failed to deliver with only 6% of the UK with fibre-optic cables right to their front door, well behind much of the rest of the world. The failure of the market has meant that policy announcements from the Tories have spoken

of investment of £5 billion of public money. If we are paying for it, we should own it!

In reality, the public has paid historically for the construction of the infrastructure of underground ducts, telephone exchanges and telegraph poles, built before privatisation in the 1980s, as well as monthly through their "line-rental".

Left to their own devices, the companies competing to be the ones to upgrade to full-fibre first has meant an inefficient duplication of the network. Multiple companies are laying fibre to the same places in the most profitable locations. At the same time less profitable areas, especially more rural ones, are left without.

Even a Tory minister interviewed



Debate on the Openreach in-house social media had to be shut down to stop us expressing our opinions!

after the announcement acknowledged that this would be an issue unsolvable by a capitalist market.

The announcement is in line with the policy of the Communication Worker's Union (CWU) that represents workers in BT and Openreach. The process of nationalisation needs to be done in collaboration with the workforce delivering the network.

It is essential that it is communicated to workers that there would be no redundancies, an improvement in pay, terms and conditions as well as a democratic say in how work is

planned and delivered. This should be extended to communications workers not directly affected by the plans, who may have fears about how their jobs could be affected by a take-over.

Furthermore, it should be made clear that workers who have been sold BT shares, or hold pensions invested in BT, will not lose out. But as for the main shareholders, they don't deserve a penny.

Nationalisation of broadband, and of all telecoms companies, with the democratic control of workers, would mean that decent broadband could be effectively planned and delivered to everyone. Delivering it for free would give workers some relief from rocketing household bills.

It should be paid for by increased taxes for the super-rich, but also by taking control of the enormous wealth at the top of society by nationalising the banks and using that wealth, as part of a democratically agreed plan, to invest in infrastructure to improve all our lives.

Chile revolt

Mass social protests against inequality, injustice and state repression, continue to erupt in Chile weeks after an uprising was sparked by a hike in Metro fares in Santiago.

The rotten right-wing regime of president Piñera initially deployed armed police and the army under a state of emergency - redolent of the dark days of the Pinochet dictatorship - but with little effect, and massive protests are continuing.

■ Read eyewitness reports and analysis by the Socialist Party's sister organisation in Chile, Socialismo Revolucionario, on socialistworld.net

Socialist Party 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) which organises across the world. 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.

■ 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 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.

WORK AND INCOME

- Trade union struggle for an immediate increase in the minimum wage to £12 an hour without exemptions as a step towards a real living wage of at least £15 an hour. For an annual increase in the minimum wage linked to average earnings. Scrap zero hour contracts.
- 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.
- Scrap Universal Credit. For the right to decent benefits, education, training, or a job, without compulsion.

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MAJOR FUNDING FOR FLOOD RISK MANAGEMENT NEEDED

Flood risk worker
Yorkshire

The recent large floods in Derbyshire, South Yorkshire and other areas have resulted in damage to thousands of houses, some of which had already experienced this scale of flooding as recently as 2007. These floods have resulted in anger - such as that directed at Boris Johnson on his visit to Fishlake, South Yorkshire.

While flood events are inevitable, any country can be more resilient to flooding by increasing the standard of protection. But this costs money, which successive UK governments have been unwilling to increase.

The climate is already changing, and we can expect to see more frequent large floods, as well as new weather patterns. We are likely to need a major increase in funding for flood risk management. What we have seen instead are promises to not cut total funding!

There have already been cuts in the industry. While the capital budgets have been maintained - to deliver large projects such as flood storage areas, new walls, and other defences - government bodies such as the Environment Agency (EA) experience revenue budget cuts. This could mean staff receive less training in how to respond to floods - or the maintenance budget for new flood defences is reduced.

Cuts bring pressure on the workforce, and the EA risks having a high staff turnover and relying on temporary staff to do its non-emergency duties. These staffing issues could affect the readiness of the EA to respond to flooding.

Everyone expects our local and national governments to do their job correctly. Hence the huge and justifiable anger at failures in flood defences or, as is in Doncaster, the apparent lack of work to improve the defences since the summer

2007 floods. There was also anger at the lack of help for those who have now been homeless for several weeks; council rest centres are for emergency shelter, but people can't live in them indefinitely.

This summer we also saw the Wainfleet embankment failure, and the Whaley Bridge Dam failure - just two examples of the type of event which should never have become an emergency. These events dramatically demonstrate the need for funding to maintain our country's infrastructure, the need for better planning to respond to emergencies, and the need for democratic control.

Local government must ensure they use all their oversight powers where safety is at risk. But arm's length 'Quango' organisations like the Canal and Rivers Trust must be renationalised and fully funded so that they are able maintain their structures such as the Whaley Bridge dam.

We will always have floods, but the risk to homes can be reduced with more spending on defences. Risk to farmland can also be reduced, using better weather forecasting and increasing computer power so that flood storage areas are only used when absolutely necessary (with compensation for ruined crops as appropriate).

Other solutions like new woodlands would not be able to stop the most intense rain from causing floods, but it can be a useful approach in upland areas for small to medium floods. Such large areas of trees are needed to stop the largest floods, that farmland and national parks would be threatened. However such questions could easily be overcome in a socialist society, democratically planned and run to meet the needs of the vast majority of people, while maintaining and improving the natural environment.

As the waters subsided; dirt and anger remained. It is impossible to fully understand how this dirt and anger will be used by the people of Doncaster in the upcoming election, but water seems to be seeping through the cracks of this Labour stronghold.



Class frustration with establishment politicians

The second torrent or floods to hit Doncaster in 12 years has also seen a flood of concerned-looking politicians wading through Bentley, Fishlake, and many other affected areas. Those concerned faces often aren't for the people and their homes, but for their precious votes, and the worry that they too are being washed away.

The working-class areas drowning in three feet of water have always been Labour to the core. However, while I too waded through these areas, a wave of discontent with the status quo was easy to see. Angry, upset, and sodden, they directed these feelings towards both Boris Johnson and Doncaster North's right-wing Labour MP Ed Miliband.

Charges against Boris were for his inaction and almost obvious lack of attention for an area he neither understands nor cares about. Charges against Ed lie with his lack of local presence and an ever increasing friction from a seemingly widening split in the views of the people of Doncaster and himself.

As the waters subsided; dirt and anger remained. It is impossible to fully understand how this dirt and anger will be used by the people of Doncaster in the upcoming election, but water seems to be seeping through the cracks of this Labour stronghold.

Anger at cuts and private profiteers

Angie Waller
South Yorkshire Socialist Party branch secretary

Back in 2007, Sheffield was hit by floods and thousands of people were affected. But even though we had a Labour government it took five years to identify the schemes for flood defence systems. Then these schemes didn't go ahead because of the proposed cuts to the Environment Agency. The cuts eventually mounted to 15% of the workforce, including 550 jobs in flood prevention!

People paid out of their own pockets to fix their homes as the insurance companies would not pay out for damage, stating it was an 'act of nature' and they weren't covered for this. And now people living in areas where floods have occurred are not eligible for home and contents insurance.

Instead of investing in measures to defend land and property against flooding the Tory-led governments have pursued an austerity agenda of public spending cuts.

It's no wonder that anger is mounting. Residents have blamed the government for a lack of response. But they also know that the private water companies are raking in profits while not investing and not replacing old Victorian plumbing systems.

A planned programme of building and replacing the infrastructure and maintenance of existing systems must begin.

Firefighters speak out: Tories - too little, too late

Neil Carbutt
Fire Brigades Union
South Yorkshire brigade secretary

Boris Johnson - too little, too late! What do you expect from a Tory who as London mayor closed ten fire stations and cut 500 firefighters' jobs.

It was outrageous that Johnson didn't immediately declare the floods a national emergency, which triggers the Bellwin scheme of emergency financial assistance for local authorities.

We've just saved 84 firefighter posts here in South Yorkshire that were under threat. Imagine if those jobs had gone! There would have been 40 less firefighters from two watches who would have been able to work day and night on the floods.

We've had help from ten other fire and rescue services. High volume pumps have been brought in, but not the staff, training or equipment to go with them. The costs of this will be borne in South Yorkshire. So we're fearful that these extra costs incurred due to the floods will lead to demands for more job cuts year on year.

Pumps don't make rescues, firefighters do. There's a photo of two of our lads in Rotherham lifting a shopping bag on a ceiling hook up to an old lady in her bedroom window stranded by the flooding. They'd bought her two pints of milk, tea bags and a loaf of bread. That's what a firefighter looks like, that's what a socialist looks like. And our control operators, as well as handling all the flood calls, dealt with a 36-car scrapyard fire and an aircraft emergency at Donny airport, all on the same night and day.

At present, the Environment Agency (EA) is the primary agency dealing with flooding. Its funding is allocated according to population density and house prices. I've got a map that shows that most of the funding goes to 'Blue' areas down south.

We're hoping that a Jeremy Corbyn government will give the fire service the statutory duty for flooding leading to the necessary investment and funding we need, rather than the cuts we've suffered for the last decade and longer.

Floods show seriousness of climate change

Chris Bingham
Rotherham Socialist Party

The recent flooding across South Yorkshire has rightly elicited the anger of working people; the sluggish response from services degraded by austerity, an already creaking public transport service crippled for weeks, and contemptuous displays of concern by politicians, have all infuriated people who feel the effects of nature and class bias.

Flood defences, sluice gates and dredging are ultimately like plasters over a wound; their effectiveness in mitigating flooding is limited, and only pushes the problem downstream, figuratively and in fact - as people in parts of South Yorkshire downstream of Sheffield have found.

While we need new social housing, obviously building on floodplains is exactly the wrong thing to do. We need to reenvision the city and urban environments, and reconfigure work and recreation. Flood events are going to be more frequent as the climate warms. It is important to use events like these to communicate the seriousness of climate change, its relationship with the very real nature of class interest, and present realistic, honest assessments, answers and solutions that do exist - not platitudes, wishful thinking and ineffectual policies.

In a recent speech, Labour's John McDonnell mentioned 'retro-fitting' existing housing stock while talking about social housing policy. These are exactly the kind of things that need to be advocated; the rewilding and reforesting of uplands and urban centres is desperately needed to ensure that the working class stands a chance in an environment that is ever more volatile and inhospitable to life itself.

Solidarity and community spirit

Steve Flint
Bentley, Doncaster

My house, and many locally, do not have rainwater drainage, rely on soakaways for rain, and are often built below the level of the road.

By 8pm on 7 November a moat around my house was a foot deep. After the 2007 floods, all homes concerned were issued with a box of "Flood Sentries" which are basically large sticking plasters to put over air bricks to stop flood water getting underneath the house. What it didn't say was you had to use them BEFORE the brickwork becomes wet, so they failed spectacularly. At this point I decided the only way to do it was with sand bags.

A manager at the council yard explained he had no sandbags but expected several lorry loads imminently, so it was a case of waiting for them to show up. During this time several other people arrived from different places needing the same thing. Meanwhile the rain was still very heavy and showing no sign of slowing up. Around an hour later the first lorry showed up.

At 2am a lorry load of sandbags turned up in our area and we set about sandbagging anything we thought needed it. The neighbours were amazing. The bags weren't large, but they were heavy.

The next morning I realised how much water was coming out of the sewer in our front garden and that of my neighbours. I set off to the local hire store and hired a water pump. But overnight water had gotten into my air bricks and my ring main had been blown, so I had no way of powering the pump. A neighbour whose power was intact, kindly let me use his.

Without the solidarity shown by my the neighbours and close residents, I'm certain we would have been flooded out. They worked without complaint until the job was done and showed enormous community spirit in coming together to help those who needed it.



Such questions could easily be overcome in a socialist society democratically planned and run to meet the needs of the vast majority of people, while maintaining and improving the natural environment



We've just saved 84 firefighter posts here in South Yorkshire that were under threat. Imagine if those jobs had gone!

photo Chris Moore

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PCS: Elect Marion Lloyd!

The Public and Commercial Services (PCS) union general secretary ballot has started and it closes on 12 December. With the pressing issues of low pay, job cuts, office closures and pensions it is vital that the union has a fighting general secretary to champion members' interests.

Socialist Party member Marion Lloyd, with 39 branch nominations, is the best placed candidate to beat the incumbent, Mark Serwotka. A growing number of activists are uniting behind her to make this happen. A few of them, in a personal capacity, explain why.

"Marion Lloyd is committed to delivering a programme of action that puts lay reps, PCS members, and the working class front and centre. I have watched as the senior leadership of PCS become ever more content to let full-time unelected officers take control of union activities over lay reps, often with the result of quashing any dissent or alternative viewpoints - even to the extent that Mark Serwotka backed an full-time officer against the elected candidate of his own faction for assistant general secretary. Marion as general secretary would be a true servant of the national executive committee and wider union."

Fiona Brittle, PCS national executive committee member

"For Marion the words 'equality is at the heart of everything we do' is not just an empty phrase but core to her work as a trade unionist and a socialist. In her unwavering support for trans rights, when some in our movement are attacking the community, she has shown the personal strength and moral fibre to oppose those would divide, not unite, us."

Saorsa Tweedale, branch chair PCS DWP Bradford

"Marion is one of the most hard-working and dedicated lay activists I have come across. She is the longest serving current group president and has been a constant support to me as we fought two successful campaigns against privatisation."

"Now, having lost two national ballots on pay, we need a fresh look at tactics and campaigning. I believe that Marion provides this, as has been evidenced by her leadership in the latest successful BEIS [the government's business department] dispute."

"Marion can re-energise PCS as a campaigning union that wins for members."

Michael Kavanagh
President PCS Land Registry

Meanwhile, some supporters of Mark Serwotka have resorted to personal attacks on Marion and peddling lies about her fighting programme and her record in the union. A reply to these critics can be read at socialistparty.org.uk



Marion Lloyd photo Mary Finch

Cleaners strike over low pay at Haringey secondary school

A Haringey teacher

On the same day that it was announced that the recommended London Living Wage was to be increased to £10.75 an hour, cleaners employed by Lakethorne Cleaning Services at Highgate Wood School in north London went on a one-day strike to demand an end to their appalling working conditions.

Cleaners are currently paid only £8.21 an hour, without any sick pay

or holiday pay. Despite Labour-run Haringey Council's commitment to support the London Living Wage, this policy clearly does not extend to those workers employed by companies to whom their essential public services, such as school-cleaning services, have been outsourced.

Lakethorne is a company which specialises in 'race to the bottom' outsourced public sector contracts, and they are also resolutely anti-union.

The cleaners, who are largely

Latin American migrant workers, have been campaigning for decent conditions since May. However, until now, Lakethorne has refused to meet with their union, the CAIWU. As a result, on 12 November, the cleaners staged a one-day strike with a lively protest on the school gates as people were arriving for a parents' evening.

They were joined on their picket line by teaching and support staff from the Highgate Wood National Education Union (NEU) who also raised a solidarity fund to ensure that none of the cleaners were out of pocket as a result of their strike.

Their action has the support not only of NEU members, but also parents, school leadership and the governors. Under pressure from the school, Lakethorne has now finally agreed to meet with the cleaners' union to resolve the dispute.

■ **Follow caiwu.org.uk/hws for more updates on the campaign**



photo Paul Mattsson

Wages flatline, while shareholders profit

Alex Wedlake

Unite Young Members National Committee, personal capacity

A Trade Union Congress report into the top 100 firms in the UK has found that the returns for top company shareholders have increased by 56% in just five years. That's six times faster than workers' wages.

If wages had kept pace with shareholder increases, the average worker in the UK would be £9,500 a year better off.

This figure is an absolute disgrace when you consider the increasing number of families relying on foodbanks to provide the bare essentials for life.

The TUC calls for a ban on dividends for companies not paying the living wage. The TUC should be call-



If wages had kept pace with shareholder increases, the average worker in the UK would be £9,500 a year better off

ing for a minimum wage of at least £10 an hour, a ban on zero-hour contracts, and reversing other attacks on terms and conditions.

The High Pay Centre quite rightly identified that "Britain's corporate culture prioritised shareholders over investments in the workforce,

new equipment and protecting the environment." But it failed to address an alternative.

Under capitalism, companies are unable to prioritise the issues that affect our planet and the 99%.

A socialist system, where companies are owned and run by the workers would be able to prioritise these issues, allowing long-term economic growth. These top 100 companies should be nationalised, with compensation only given with proven need.

■ **The FTSE 100 (top) companies generated net profits of £551 billion and returned £442 billion of this to shareholders over the period 2014 to 2018. This means that overall the FTSE 100 paid shareholders an average of £1.7 billion a week.**

LIBRARY AND MUSEUM STRIKERS ENTER THIRD ROUND OF STRIKE ACTION



Unite members striking in Bradford photo Iain Dalton

Iain Dalton

West Yorkshire Socialist Party organiser

Library and museum workers in Bradford were holding firm as they entered their third round of action, beginning with library workers in Keighley taking strike action on 18 November, building up to all workers in the service striking together on 21 November.

John Giles, Unite union rep in Bradford libraries and museums said: "The dispute is going fantastically well; we've had great support from members of the public."

After the previous round of strike action, Unite met with the council, and while it hasn't resolved all the issues in the dispute, it is clear that the strike has forced it to move. John explained: "The councillors are now looking at putting more money into the service, or cutting less. They're looking at paying the rent on the city centre library from other sources, and they've put in an extra £300,000 that they hadn't wanted to, as they had wanted to make these cuts in April!"

"We also know from their own figures that there's an underspend in the department of £200,000."

"The council has tried over the

years to make these cuts without letting people know what is actually going on."

The council is finally consulting over the next few weeks over the cuts to library services, although as John pointed out: "It's heavily weighted towards reducing paid staff, it's weighted towards volunteers, self-service machines, closing libraries and reducing opening hours."

Unite are appealing to Bradford residents to attend these consultations and demand a fully funded library service.

In the meantime, the strike continues at Shipley and Baildon, and then the whole service is out, with further strike action planned for the week starting Monday 2 December, if the council don't meet the strikers' demands.

The ongoing support for the strike by Socialist Party members in Bradford, holding stalls in the city centre to build support for the strike, and supporting picket lines and rallies, was recognised in the sale of six copies of the Socialist on the picket line.

Get all the latest union news...

[nationalshop
stewardsnetwork](http://nationalshop.stewardsnetwork.org.uk)
NSSN bulletin: shopstewards.net

West Midlands Trains:

Guards strike to defend safety-critical role



Socialist Party members join the RMT picket on 16 November photo Birmingham SP

Tom Woodcock
RMT member

On 16 November, senior conductors (guards) at West Midlands Trains took their first day of strike action in defence of their safety-critical role.

In a desperate attempt to end the dispute, management made the RMT transport union reps a last minute offer. They promised to withdraw their original plans to remove key safety responsibilities from the guards' job description and instead only remove the guards' door controls and introduce a new system of drivers operating doors to guards' signals.

However, the reps unanimously

rejected this and, respecting the tremendous strike mandate from the members, told the company that the strike is on.

The guards are absolutely determined to win, and can see that any downgrading of safety responsibilities is a dangerous step on a slippery slope towards driver-only operation (DOO), which must be resisted. This was not only demonstrated by the magnificent 89% vote for action, but also the fighting spirit on the picket lines.

Socialist Party members visited pickets at Birmingham New Street, Snow Hill, Coventry, Leamington and Worcester and it was clear that the guards are up for the fight.

In a welcome move, a significant minority of drivers at some depots refused to cross the guards' picket

“
Any downgrading of safety responsibilities is a dangerous step on a slippery slope towards driver only operation
”

line. This had an immediate impact on the service and scuppered management's plans to have scab guards working the trains.

This is a fantastic show of solidarity and if this were to spread to other depots it would tip the balance of forces very quickly in the guards' favour.

RMT will be striking every

Saturday until the end of the year unless the company backs down.

We say:

- **No to DOO - defend the role of the guard on our trains**
- **Widen the dispute - drivers should support their brothers and sisters in the senior conductor grade**
- **Renationalise the railways and stop profiteering on the backs of vital safety-critical rail workers**

SWR walkouts in December

- **Train crews, members of the RMT union on South Western Railway, have also voted to go on strike for 27 days in December in order to stop the private rail operator imposing DOO. More in a future issue.**

Long hours in the world of security

Pete McNally
Worcester Socialist Party

There was a well organised and determined RMT transport union picket with leaflets, flags, and placards at Worcester Shrub Hill Railway station on 16 November. Visiting Socialist Party members were welcomed.

Rail replacement coaches were at the station along with some security staff. One of the RMT members asked a coach driver about rates of pay. The coach driver said he was on £10 an hour. The RMT member said when he had been a bus driver, rates of pay were £12 an hour because it was a unionised workforce, and therefore they needed to unionise coach driving.

Another issue came up with the security staff, who were on site because of building work at the station. One was asked about working hours. He said he had started at 4am and would be working till 8pm, and then going on to work on the door at a pub.

The pickets and Socialist Party members found this incredible until another security guard said they had worked continuously for 28 hours.

As the first security guard said: "Welcome to the world of security"!

Frimley NHS Trust: Strikers remain determined to defeat privatisation

Terry Pearce
Chair, Bracknell Unite
(personal capacity)

Members of Unite and GMB trade unions, along with community supporters, were out on strike at Heatherwood Hospital near Bracknell (part of the Frimley NHS Foundation Trust) on 18 and 19 November.

The health workers had walked out over being transferred out of the NHS to a wholly owned subsidiary (WOS) company - effectively, privatised.

The mood on the picket line was resolute and defiant, but the strikers cause has not been helped by the actions of Unison union officials who, unilaterally, stopped strike action by their members.

It was reported that the transfer to the WOS has been suspended while discussions take place on a smaller WOS involving management being transferred but not other staff. These discussions have not involved Unite or GMB.

This caused much anger among union members and I was told that many Unison members had joined GMB, including three reps. Meanwhile, the strike continued without Unison.

Unison is wrong to act independently of the other unions as this can only play into the bosses' hands and weaken the strike.

It's reported that a meeting will take place on 21 November between all the unions and the health trust. GMB members say that they and Unite are standing firm in opposing the WOS and further action is being planned.



Previous protest against NHS staff transfer to a 'wholly owned subsidiary' photo John Gillman

SAVE THE NHS

Although the Tories wanted to make this the 'Brexit election,' the NHS remains a vital issue - in some polls it comes out as the most important issue in the election. A publicly owned, funded and controlled National Health Service meant to provide free health care for all is one of the most important gains in the last 70 years. But the NHS is in crisis. After high alerts even during the quieter summer months, some hospitals are now declaring

"black alerts" - now called 'Opel 4' - where demand for services exceeds the ability of the hospital trust to supply them. Hospital waiting lists are at an all-time high of 4.6 million, 34,000 cancer patients are waiting longer than two months for treatment. **Steve Score**, Socialist Party national committee, exposes the Tories' lies, looks at Labour's approach and explains how a real socialist programme can save and develop the NHS.



A junior doctors' picket line during their historic national strike in 2016 photo James Ivens



TORY LIES EXPOSED

Boris Johnson claimed "we are the party of the NHS" at Tory Party conference, echoing Margaret Thatcher's "The NHS is safe in our hands", before she began a process of marketisation and privatisation that continues to this day. Johnson claimed that they would build "40 new hospitals" in ten years. Previously the Tories claimed they will increase overall NHS spending by an extra £20.5 billion by 2024 and that spending on the NHS is "higher than ever". But the "40 new hospitals" turned out to be a lie. It was in fact a release of capital funding for new buildings that had been held back, sometimes for years, by government-imposed austerity restrictions.

is unconvincing when the Tories made a similar claim in 2015 to increase by 5,000, and there are now 1,500 less! There is a massive staffing crisis across the NHS, with a shortage of at least 100,000 of all staff, 40,000 of those are nursing posts. The lack of forward planning in training, the abolition of bursaries for student nurses, the high cost of tuition fees, low and frozen pay for staff, and huge levels of stress from overwork, all contribute to this crisis. NHS staff work one million hours a week in unpaid overtime.

Tory privatisation
Over their years in power the Tories have carried out, and continue to propose, reorganisations of the NHS which push in the direction of more privatisation. The NHS has been divided up. Over 200 'Clinical Commissioning Groups' (CCGs) were created, with 'providers' such as NHS hospital trusts, private companies and other organisations competing with each other to get contracts from the CCGs.

It took the competitive market approach a step further and brought increased privatisation. The unpopularity of privatisation with the public has forced the Tories to play it down, with health Secretary Matt Hancock promising "no more privatisation on my watch". It is of course another lie.

The language and focus of various plans have more recently been on "integration" of services including with social care. The latest bodies being proposed are 'Integrated Care Systems' or 'Integrated Care Providers'. It all sounds nice but, in reality, these are more bodies in the same competitive mold, with even less accountability.



photo Paul Mattsson

“Johnson's '40 new hospitals' turned out to be a lie - it was in fact a release of capital funding for new buildings that had been held back, sometimes for years, by government-imposed austerity restrictions



Over 100,000 marched for the NHS in March 2017 photo Mary Finch



John McDonnell (second from right) marching for the NHS photo Paul Mattsson

LABOUR'S RECORD AND LABOUR'S PROGRAMME

Labour has promised an increase in funding of £26 billion extra in England by 2023-24. (All these figures are for England with equivalent increases on top in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland). This is a welcome start and better than the Labour promise in the last general election.

In addition, Labour promises to increase funding in mental health services that are in a dire position after years of drastic cuts, spend £15 billion capital spending on hospital buildings over five years, scrap prescription charges and reinstate nursing bursaries.

Labour also promises to reverse the privatisation that has crippled the NHS for many years. This is also very welcome, especially because privatisation soared under previous Blairite Labour governments.

While Thatcher laid the groundwork by introducing the 'internal market' it was the Blair government that ramped up the 'Private Finance Initiative' schemes, continued by subsequent Tory governments, that handed over control to private companies and have cost the NHS dearly.

Blairite privatisation
Outsourcing of non-clinical services of all kinds to private companies has meant they extract profits from the NHS, and cut staffing and service quality in order to increase them. Often these companies have failed to do the job, forcing hospitals to take services back in-house. This has taken place under governments led by all three main parties.

It was under Blairite governments that, using the excuse that waiting lists couldn't be quickly reduced any other way, that some operations (the cheapest and easiest ones) were handed out to private hospitals, again at the cost of the NHS. This has led to a blossoming of those companies and a shift of staff and resources away from the NHS.

Now, after years of cuts, the number of procedures carried out by private companies is rocketing. There were 613,000 people treated in private hospitals last year, three times the number nine years earlier.

Massive cuts in the funding of social care have a huge impact on the NHS, with long delays in elderly patients being discharged from hospital for example, because the care services are not available. The

excuse given by NHS management for not increasing the number of beds in line with a growing and ageing population is that more patients will be helped at home, yet nothing is done to make that possible. To solve the NHS crisis, proper provision and funding of social care is vital.

Labour has promised to provide free personal care for those with the most severe needs, which is much needed. But that will require a massive reversal of the cuts made to local council budgets over many years.

Whether the NHS is 'up for sale' has been part of the election debate. Labour has pointed to the discussions between Boris Johnson and Donald Trump about a possible trade deal with the US after leaving the EU. Trump first made comments implying the NHS would be "on the table" then later denied it.

At the moment, big US companies can bid for NHS contracts only if they have a subsidiary based inside the EU. As part of a new trade deal, access for those companies could be made easier. Although the real issue is to end privatisation full stop, whatever the country of origin of the companies. The truth is that the NHS is already 'up for sale' and has been for a long time.

What could also be a threat in a new trade deal could be regulations allowing US pharmaceutical companies to charge the NHS higher prices for its drugs. Labour says that the drugs bill for the NHS could rise from £18 billion a year currently to £45 billion.

In Britain, the NHS is able to use its monopoly position to negotiate on drug prices, advised by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence. If it was a totally 'free market, as in the US, prices would be even higher. Any deal involving an increase in costs to the NHS must be resisted.

But that drugs bill is already too high. It represents a huge draining of resources from the NHS into the profits of the big pharmaceutical companies. Patent rules allow companies a monopoly position on new drugs so that they can hugely hike their prices. Labour has proposed regulation changes and the establishment of a publicly owned manufacturer to help combat this (see Socialism Today, issue 233, November 2019).

KICK OUT THE TORIES



East London hospital support workers on strike for higher pay in 2017 photo London Socialist Party



A mass movement of local people saved Glenfield children's heart centre in 2017 photo Leicester Socialist Party



photo Mary Finch

“What is really needed is the rapid nationalisation of the bigger private companies, with compensation based only on need, to ensure their capacity is absorbed into the NHS



Marching against Blairite attacks on the NHS, 2006 photo Socialist Party



HOW TO DEFEND AND REBUILD THE NHS WITH A SOCIALIST PROGRAMME

Piecemeal measures will not be enough to solve the crisis in the NHS. Piecemeal measures are inadequate to deal with the power of 'big pharma'. The Socialist Party proposes the nationalisation of the pharmaceutical industry to enable its integration into the NHS, improve research and development and allow the resources and profits of these companies to fully benefit patients.

“It will need a mass movement in support of the NHS to ensure Corbyn's programme is carried out

On privatisation, shadow Chancellor John McDonnell has said that Labour would bring private contracts "back in-house" when they "come to an end", allowing privatisation to continue for some time. He may argue that time is needed to expand NHS services so that they can absorb the extra work. However, what is really needed is the rapid nationalisation of the bigger private companies, with compensation based only on proven need, to ensure their capacity is absorbed into the NHS.

Corbyn government
The election of a Corbyn-led Labour government would be a big step forward. But we also know that many of the Blairite Labour MPs voted in the past for cuts and privatisation. It will need a mass movement in support of the NHS to ensure their programme is carried out and that we get the improvements we need.

If there isn't a Labour government after this election, we will need that movement even more. Over the last few years there has been local strike action taken by different groups of workers in the

NHS in defence of jobs and conditions as well as the NHS as a whole. We have seen national action by junior doctors as well. There have been many local campaigns established to fight particular cuts and closures. Some have successfully fought those attacks.

If a Tory or other variety of pro-big business government comes to power, we will need national action led by the trade unions in the NHS, and backed by the movement as a whole, linking up with the local campaigns through organisations like Health Campaigns Together.

The immediate task over the next few weeks is to fight for a Corbyn government. But there is no doubt that capitalism casts its greedy eye over national resources spent on the NHS. For big business, profit comes before everything.

We need a fully funded, fully publicly owned and genuinely free National Health service with democratic working-class control and management. Health is a vital human need and can only be secured by ending capitalism and replacing it with a socialist society.

Join the fightback JOIN THE SOCIALISTS
Visit socialistparty.org.uk/join or call 020 8988 8777 or text your name and postcode to 07761 818 206 to find out more about joining us today



The Socialist Inbox

Do you have something to say?

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

What right does this or any other government have in interfering with the democratic procedure of a free trade union?

I would urge people who wish to defend democratic rights and public services like the NHS, to vote this lot out of office in the forthcoming general election.

Defend free trade unions!
Bill Buchanan
Nottingham

No rape justice

It was reported last week that the number of people charged with rape fell last year by 38% and the number of prosecutions fell by 32%. It would be naive to imagine that this has happened because fewer rapes have occurred, or even because fewer rapes had been reported to the police.

In reality, what has been happening is that fewer cases have resulted in suspects being charged. The Guardian reported that the CPS has been operating a 60% 'level of ambition' as regards rape cases.

This means that the CPS are aiming to secure convictions in 60% of the cases it brings to court, in an effort to make the public believe that more rapists are being brought to justice. The easiest way to do that, of course, is to drop any cases which it is not sure will result in conviction.

The Guardian notes that this change will most strongly affect women who are not seen as 'perfect victims'. By this they mean that some women are less likely to receive justice than others.

Young women, poor women, ethnic minorities and those who were 'provocatively' dressed or suffering from mental health conditions at the time are likely to be particularly badly served.

Ruth Mason
East London

Disabled poor

With regards to the minimum wage debate launched in the Socialist (see 'How can we end the scandal of low pay?' at socialistparty.org.uk) we at Disability Campaigners have always believed in the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, and have for a long time referred to ourselves as poor.

This is because the benefit levels paid by both Employment Support Allowance (ESA) and Personal Independence Payment (PIP) leave a single person some £6,800 below the Minimum Income Standard.

We campaign upon the basis set down by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, as we cannot call upon a union or the Trade Union Congress to offer us any form of research.

In terms of a worker, taking the example shown, the benefit is equal to working 35 hours a week for the minimum wage. This reflects very badly upon the disabled and even more so upon a worker so poorly paid.

We are in frequent contact with the Labour MPs in our area, as we expect nothing from the Tories.

Clearly the debate illustrates just how much the working class needs to pressure capitalism in order for our people to merely survive!

Adrian B Rimington
Chair, Disability Campaigners
Chesterfield



Two and a half years after the catastrophic fire at Grenfell Tower, the government is still failing to act on fire safety photo Natalie Oxford/CC

Bolton university fire Government inaction puts safety at risk

North London Socialist Party member

Fire ripped through a six-storey student accommodation block, with what eyewitnesses described as terrifying speed, on the evening of Friday 15 November.

The fire started on the fourth floor of the Cube, a six-storey University of Bolton building. Within 90 seconds it had spread to the top level, and reached the roof 40 seconds, later leaping across floors spread by cladding. 211 students have been left in temporary accommodation.

Two and a half years after the catastrophic fire at Grenfell Tower the government is still failing to act on fire safety.

Firefighters' union (FBU) leader Matt Wrack rightly commented, "It's deeply troubling to see fire spread rapidly up a building's exterior again - a shocking indictment of the government's shameful inaction after Grenfell."

Unsafe cladding

It is reported that the cladding is not the same as the ACM (aluminium composite material) used at Grenfell - this points to the scale of the safety problem. The government has failed to act on warnings about HPL (high pressure laminate) cladding, apparently used in Bolton.

Attention has focused on Grenfell-style cladding, but progress has been slow in social housing and worse in the private sector. At the current rate of progress it would take until October 2033 for the buildings to be made safe.

Government targets are inadequate and are being missed. But this was another terrifying fire, like the recent Barking Reach fire, in a building under 18 metres high, and therefore outside the scope of the government ban on combustibles.

The position is made worse by cuts to the fire service. Boris Johnson made deep cuts when London mayor and the cuts continue.

Fire service Cuts

Les Skarratts, FBU North West executive council member said, "Greater Manchester has lost more than 600 firefighters since 2010 alone and, alarmingly, Andy Burnham is trying to cut another six fire engines, including one in Bolton. We need to stop the senseless cuts to our fire and rescue service before we see another awful incident like this."

Student unions and tenant groups should demand to see fire risk assessments. Ultimately, if they don't get satisfactory answers they could organise to withhold rent - 'no safety, no rent.'

Trade union safety reps in workplaces with buildings covered in cladding should ask employers about the type, the risks and what they have done and are doing to make it safe.

Labour shadow housing minister John Healey said the fire should be a "wake-up call" for cladding to be removed.

This is a chance for Labour to campaign on reversing fire service cuts and a programme of housing investment to make buildings safe. It should pledge to reimburse local councils that start the work immediately.

International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women

WHAT POLICIES ARE NEEDED TO END DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND ABUSE?

Helen Pattison
Socialist Party national committee

This year, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women (25 November) is taking place during the UK general election campaign.

With the possibility of the election of a Corbyn-led government, this is an ideal opportunity for campaigners, socialists and domestic violence service users and staff to set out the policies that would be necessary to help women experiencing domestic violence and abuse.

Two women killed a week

Reforms have been won by the labour movement, socialists and women that have challenged oppression, inequality, sexism, domestic violence and abuse. Yet two women a week are killed by a current or ex-partner, and many women suffer in silence.

People have had to fight for everything including the NHS, holiday, maternity and sick pay. Women's domestic violence services were also hard fought for.

The Campaign Against Domestic Violence was launched by Militant, the forerunner of the Socialist Party, in the early 1990s and involved trade unions and other organisations. They won important legal changes and protections for women suffering violence and abuse.

But the last decade of capitalism in crisis has threatened many hard-won reforms. Women's refuges have lost £7 million in funding, cut by both Labour and Tory councils.



Protesting against the shocking lack of domestic violence services provided by Newham's Blairite council in east London on International Women's Day photo East London Socialist Party

30 women's refuges have closed, and the welfare system no longer offers a proper safety net to women trying to leave a violent partner.

Around one in ten women trying to leave a violent relationship will end up sleeping rough before finding accommodation, and about 46% of women sofa-surf while waiting for a place in a refuge.

Due to the lack of support and housing for women leaving a violent

relationship just fewer than one in ten women will end up returning to a violent partner because of having nowhere else to go.

Workers' rights have also been under attack from successive governments. The rise of zero-hour contracts and precarious working conditions can leave all workers feeling vulnerable in the workplace, especially women who need adjustments because of trying to leave a

violent partner.

Women in violent relationships lose an average of 137 hours work and pay a year, and 10% of women in violent relationships will lose their jobs as a result.

In addition, low pay, precarious and inadequate hours and attacks on benefits undermine the ability of women to be financially independent, a vital issue for women looking to leave violent and abusive

relationships. 86% of cuts to the welfare system have come out of women's pockets. Cuts to social and childcare have pushed these responsibilities back onto women and their families.

The hated Universal Credit has pushed many into debt and hardship. Combining benefit payments into one per household can give total financial control to abusive partners.

Many Tories and their rich and powerful backers may no longer feel able to express blatant sexism. Theresa May even called herself a feminist. But austerity and a system in crisis is responsible for the cuts in services that have so cruelly impacted on women.

Years of cuts

May's Domestic Violence Bill came weeks before she left office after years of cuts, leading to the closure of refuges, the front line of support for women leaving violent relationships.

Socialists, services users and staff should use this general election to outline what is really needed to defend women's rights and their lives. A programme for women suffering domestic violence and abuse must campaign on more than expanding the limited number of refuges and beds.

Ultimately though, we don't just want services which support women fleeing violent relationships; we want a socialist society which drastically changes women's position and brings about an end to sexism, inequality and oppression.

Here are some important points to highlight in the general election campaign:

Domestic violence services

- No more council cuts
- Restore domestic violence service funding
- Corbyn should guarantee that an incoming Labour government would replenish any reserves Labour councils use to avoid cuts to domestic violence services and refuges now
- Secure funding for all domestic violence refuges and support services, including

- specialised services where needed
- Build enough council homes with genuinely affordable rents to solve the housing crisis. Everyone has the right to a decent home
- Cap private sector rents
- End privatisation in the NHS
- For specialist-trained staff and high-quality domestic violence awareness training.
- For fully funded, safe and confidential health services to support women experiencing violence and abuse

Legal rights

- Reverse cuts to legal aid
- Access to specialist-trained and high-quality domestic violence solicitors so that no woman is priced out of legal representation
- For specialist-training at all levels of the judiciary and police, with democratic community and working-class oversight, as part of a programme to democratise the justice system through democratic election of judges and police committees

Rights at work and economic independence

- For an active, combative trade union movement which defends women in the workplace
- Special leave for women experiencing violence and abuse and safe-guarding from violent partners at work
- Specialist training for trade union reps so they

- can support women at work
- End zero-hour and precarious employment practices. Job security and flexibility on workers' terms
- Decent wages and benefits which start immediately a woman leaves a violent partner
- Scrap Universal Credit
- For affordable and accessible, publicly funded quality child and social care, run in the interests of services users, workers and the community - not for profit

Socialism

- End poverty, inequality and oppression
- Take over the banks and major monopolies under democratic workers' control and management
- Use the wealth in society for the benefit of the many not the few



Postal workers have had their massive democratic vote for strike action overturned by an unelected judge photo Urte Fultinaviciute

Defend free trade unions

So, an unelected Tory judge denies the democratic will of 140,000 postal workers to take industrial action in defence of 40,000 jobs which Royal Mail plan to axe, on the spurious grounds of irregular ballot procedures - with not a scrap of

evidence. It's despicable. It's class hatred and class fear from a rotten Tory government which has been propped up by the reactionary 'Democratic' Unionist Party for the past two years. They don't know the meaning of democracy. If the vote had been not to strike, you'd not have heard a peep from them.

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.

Keep the National Poetry Library free

Niall Mulholland
East London Socialist Party

A fight is on to keep the National Poetry Library free to join and use by the public. The library at the Southbank Centre, London contains the largest public collection of modern poetry in the world.

A few weeks ago, senior management announced it was planning to introduce a fee of over £30 a year for all new members, with "enhanced" library use compared to current members. This resulted in a storm of protest on social media from many of the 9,000 library members, and over 2,000 people signed an online petition.

Management hastily retreated and instead invited members to attend workshops to 'consult' about ways to ensure the future of the institution. At the workshop I attended on 11 November, the 'options' included another form of paid membership, seeking corporate sponsorship or asking the better-off to make donations.

As someone who became a member 20 years ago while living in a nearby housing association flat, regularly bringing my two young children to the library, I strongly opposed management's creeping privatisation plans.

Arts Council cuts have, in all likelihood, caused funding shortfalls at the library. But managers indicated



the way to resolve problems was by introducing the sort of commercialisation seen elsewhere at the Southbank Centre, where many facilities are contracted out to private business.

Any paid or two-tier memberships will be a barrier to many working-class people joining the library, and only add to any existing perceptions of elitism. Stopping commercialisation, and fighting for adequate public funding, alongside safeguarding library workers' terms and conditions, is the only acceptable option.

Heather Rawling
Leicester Socialist Party

Socialist Party members were among more than 150 supporters of Save Our NHS Leicestershire who protested on the streets of Leicester city centre on 16 November opposing cuts in the NHS nationally and locally.

Thousands of leaflets were given out by campaigners. Many passers-by stopped to listen to the speeches. Some took extra leaflets to give to their workmates, families and neighbours.

People were shocked to hear about the planned closure of Leicester General Hospital as an acute hospital but were inspired by the successful campaign to save Glenfield Children's heart unit.

While the government has agreed money for hospital buildings in Leicester, the plans do not include enough beds and hospital capacity, so could result in a worse service in the future.

One couple with a young family walked past and refused a leaflet - but turned around when they heard that the General was threatened with closure. They agreed to take a bundle of leaflets to give out on their street.

Brexit Party

The Brexit Party, campaigning close by with their expensive promotional material and gazebo, appeared miffed at being outflanked and completely sidelined. They resorted to heckling but were unable to make any impact. Shoppers largely ignored them.

Involving thousands of people in the Glenfield children's heart unit campaign, and linking it to the trade union movement, contributed greatly to its success. Save Our NHS Leicestershire is building on that experience.

Speakers including health workers, trade unionists and NHS campaigners condemned this Tory government and the cuts. The Socialist Party's Steve Score, co-chair of Save Our NHS Leicestershire, speaking in a personal capacity, called for the election of a Corbyn-led government on socialist policies that can reverse the cuts in the NHS and abolish privatisation.

But continuing the campaign is vital whatever the election result.

150 protest against Leicester hospital downgrading attack



Steve Score addresses the crowd
photos Leicester Socialist Party



Swansea: students protest against Hillary Clinton hypocrisy

Hong Kong demo brushes with pro-dictatorship students

Francis Radford
Swansea Socialist Students

Former US secretary of state and failed Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton returned to Swansea University on 15 November.

After arriving via a back door, to avoid the embarrassment of the 'welcome' she received from our protest in 2017, Clinton's time was spent on watered-down pleasantries about

'equality'. The event was entitled 'Gutsy Welsh Women', with a panel also including Lib Dem assembly member Kirsty Williams.

Swansea Socialist Students' message, however, was undiluted. We protested against Hillary's visit, her imperialist foreign policy, hostility towards the working class, pro-big business agenda, and recent anti-trans comments.

The protests grabbed students' attention and our placards and banners were shared on social media

throughout the day. Several students joined our protest and are keen to help organise on campus.

And we were not alone in protesting that day. Pro-democracy protesters from Hong Kong gave out flyers detailing the realities of life under the Chinese Communist Party-backed regime, chanting "free Hong Kong!"

However, this eventually gained the attention of a larger number of wealthy, pro-regime Chinese students. This led to competing chants, verbal battles, and even some physical scuffles instigated by the pro-CCP crowd.

John Viner
Unison union rep (personal capacity) and West London Socialist Party

Up to 200 socialists, trade union activists and community campaigners took part in the important Trade Union Conference Opposing Political Policing on 16 November. With capitalism in crisis and political turmoil ahead, we can be certain that secret state interference in campaign groups is not limited to the past.

The Campaign Opposing Police Surveillance (Cops) was launched in response to revelations that undercover police officers infiltrated trade unions and campaigning organisations, including the Socialist Party and its forerunner Militant.

Police spies even formed long-term sexual relationships under false pretences with at least 30 women. The women of the Police Spies Out Of Lives campaign have led a courageous fight for justice.

Professor Sian Moore opened by describing some of the ways gig economy workers are spied on by employers. Dave Smith, chair of the Blacklist Support Group, said union activists in the building industry had long suspected employers ran an illegal 'blacklist' but previously lacked the proof.

'Cops' believes this specific sort of infiltration began at least as far back as 1972. "1968 was a step change," said the Guardian's Rob Evans, author of the book 'Undercover'. The police were caught out by the big protest movements that took place from the mid-1960s.

Previously, police relied on their network of informers, later deemed unreliable. The Metropolitan Police founded the 'Special Demonstration Squad' in 1968, with undercover officers infiltrating left-wing groups and campaigns that grew up around opposition to the Vietnam war.

In total, the SDS was to employ 140 officers up until 2010. It spied on at least 1,000 groups and 18 families, from the Young Liberals to the Stephen Lawrence family's campaign for justice in that racist murder case.

Mark Evans
Branch secretary, Carmarthenshire Unison (personal capacity)

Trade unionists and socialists in Carmarthenshire, southwest Wales, have demanded the county's Plaid Cymru council implement a no-cuts budget.

The Carmarthenshire branch of local government union Unison, supported by Socialist Party and anti-cuts campaigners, lobbied councillors on 13 November. We called on them to stop acting in the interests of the super-rich by implementing the devastating Tory cuts.

A prominent Plaid executive member told Unison members that Plaid

Trade Union Conference Opposing Political Policing

SECRET POLICE INFILTRATION OF WORKERS' MOVEMENT EXPOSED



Undercover officers crossing police lines
photo Paul Mattsson

Under pressure from public outrage, Theresa May, Tory home secretary at the time, launched a public inquiry into undercover policing in 2013. But it won't be until June 2020 that the inquiry hears from the first witness!

Socialist Party member Lois Austin, 'Cops' chair, called on the trade union movement to take up the fight against political policing. A model resolution is available for union branches.

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The Met's 'Special Demonstration Squad' spied on at least 1,000 groups and 18 families

Afternoon workshops highlighted various areas of campaigning. The conference concluded with the Socialist Party's Dave Nellist, former Militant-supporting Labour MP for Coventry South East, asking: "On whose authority was the surveillance and monitoring of not just members of the public, but at least eleven left-wing Labour MPs, authorised?"

More at campaignopposingpolicesurveillance.com

Carmarthenshire union demands no-cuts budget

didn't want to make cuts. He pointed the finger at the Tories in Westminster and the Labour-led Welsh Assembly. But he forgot to mention that until recently, Plaid Cymru has voted for the budget cuts of the Labour-led Welsh government.

It's true that cuts originate with the Tory government and are passed on by the Welsh Labour government. But they have not mounted any campaign to oppose either!

Neither the Welsh Assembly, nor local councils, have taken any responsibility for practically stopping the cuts and mobilising for the needed funds. Little wonder that over 20% of local government jobs in Carmarthenshire, and Wales as a whole, have gone.

Carmarthenshire Unison has a proud record of fighting cuts. We have produced no-cuts budget plans that we have urged Plaid and the previous Labour administration to implement.

We lobbied Plaid councillors, calling on them to stop wringing their hands and stand up for council services by using reserves and borrowing powers. This would win big support

and buy the council time to build a campaign of resistance, calling on trade unions, the local community and other councils for support.

We need a Corbyn-led government that ends austerity and reimburses councils for all the cuts. But in the meantime, with both Labour and the Tories promising more spending, there is no excuse for any council to make more cuts.

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Seizing chances in Leicester

In the last few days, we've stood outside McDonald's with the BFAWU union in solidarity with the McStrikers, fighting low pay and bullying bosses. School students and workers were stopping and talking to us, enthused by the strike.

We also held our regular bus station sale before our Socialist Party branch meeting, where one person gave us £10 for a copy of the Socialist! The anger at the Tories is palpable and people are glad to see us fighting back.

We were then up at the Royal Mail depot showing solidarity with the posties over the High Court's political decision to stop the Communication Workers Union (CWU) strike. All our leaflets were snapped up, union members thankful for the support.

One worker said the judiciary always sides with the establishment. Another said that although it was a blow, the will to fight is still there.

We were then down at a rally against the downgrading of Leicester General Hospital, which we helped organise as part of the Save Our NHS Leicestershire campaign. We said the next step in saving the health service should be to kick the Tories out in the election. We sold 17 copies of the Socialist.

That evening we did a sale outside a showing of Ken Loach's new film 'Sorry We Missed You' about the savagery of the gig economy. Another six people bought our newspaper in just 20 minutes.

By going out and seizing every chance to share our ideas, our small local actions are adding up. We are using the Socialist at every moment to reach workers with our socialist programme to change the world!

Tessa Warrington

Cleethorpes election action

We sold 16 copies of the Socialist in Cleethorpes on 15 November. The election is polarising the mood. There's hatred of Boris - he's a "muppet," should be "dead in a ditch," and much worse - but hostility towards and mistrust of Corbyn as well.

It's a 70% Leave-voting constituency but Brexit was hardly mentioned. Makes for interesting conversations - you can turn people round - and good sales here on St Peters Avenue.

One Tory got both barrels from Grimsby Socialist Party branch secretary Dave Mitchell after he told Dave to "get a job" - Dave had been in work at 5.30 that morning on his day off!

Alistair Tice

York CWU solidarity

We sold six copies of the Socialist in an hour in York, campaigning with the slogan "support the postal workers, defend the right to strike, renationalise Royal Mail," on 15 November.

Many of those stopping were outraged that an unelected judge had blocked such a decisive strike vote. They told us they were desperate to see Johnson and the Tories kicked out.

One who couldn't stop long signed our petition in support of the CWU and bought a paper for the £2 solidarity price, telling us "it's what Jeremy would do."

Iain Dalton

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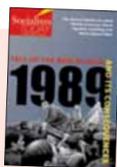
Socialist Party Fighting Fund

	£ target	£ received	October - December 2019	Deadline 3 January
Northern	750	1,674		223%
Eastern	1,200	2,563		214%
South West	1,800	2,775		154%
South East	750	1,136		151%
Wales	2,300	2,693		117%
West Midlands	2,600	2,875		111%
East Midlands	1,850	2,020		109%
Southern	1,600	1,587		99%
North West	2,100	1,832		87%
London	6,100	4,074	67%	
Yorkshire	3,300	1,345	41%	
Other	5,650	12,936		229%
TOTAL	30,000	37,511		125%

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AMAZON BOSSES DEFEATED IN SEATTLE - KSHAMA SAWANT REELECTED

Robert Bechert
Committee for a Workers' International

The attempt by bosses of Amazon and other companies to effectively buy control of Seattle city council was defeated by a city-wide reaction against their takeover attempt. Despite the big business-dominated Seattle Chamber of Commerce spending over \$4.1 million in the election - \$1.5 million of which came from Amazon - they were unable to change the council to prevent any radical challenges to their interests.

In particular, they failed in their aim of defeating the left-wing councillor, Kshama Sawant. Kshama's victory was a welcome defeat for Jeff Bezos, the Amazon boss and richest man in the world, and his fellow plutocrats.

The amount companies spent on this city election, nearly five times their previous spending high, showed the hostility of Amazon and other big business bosses to attempts by some Seattle city council members to implement reforms that would even slightly impinge on their vast profits. They feared that this would become an example to be followed in other cities and states.

But the scale of this spending, equalling over \$5 per head of Seattle's 756,000 population, provoked both a polarisation and an angry reaction. In particular, there was widespread hostility after Amazon's mid-October \$1 million donation to the Chamber of Commerce.

It was seen as an attempt to 'buy' the election and thereby the council, in the same way that Amazon has bought into at least 128 companies in the last 20 years. It became a

whip of reaction which provoked a backlash. The result was that all but one of the candidates Amazon and Co backed was defeated in the 5 November election.

A central target of Amazon's campaign was Kshama Sawant. She was first elected as a socialist to the council in 2013, in a city-wide vote, and then reelected in 2015, as the councillor for Seattle's District 3. The city's polarisation was shown in District 3 by a jump both in the number of registered voters and those who voted.

Despite Seattle's current economic boom, there are deep economic and social problems facing the city's population, particularly the rapidly increasing cost of housing.

The contrast between this and the huge profits Seattle-based big companies like Amazon are making played a part in the defeat of their attempt to get a tame, pro-big business council.

'Amazon tax'

Previously, in 2018, Amazon and other bosses successfully got the Democrat-controlled Seattle council to rapidly reverse its unanimous decision to impose a modest annual 'head tax' on businesses with revenues of over \$20 million a year in order to build affordable housing units and expand services for the homeless.

But a few weeks of an Amazon and Starbucks-led campaign resulted in the council voting to repeal this tax, with only Kshama Sawant and one other councillor voting against.

Amazon's electoral intervention, coming after the 2018 experience, changed the election dynamics. It became both a nationally reported issue and a factor in Seattle's election.

As a columnist on Seattle's main



Kshama speaking at the Socialist Party hosted Socialism event in London, November 2017 photo Paul Mattsson

newspaper wrote a couple of weeks before the vote: "Now (the election) could well be a referendum on Amazon and corporate power". The result was that, despite the money it spent, big business failed to meet its political targets in Seattle.

However, the Seattle council, like in most US cities, remains dominated by the Democrats. They have always been, in essence, a pro-capitalist and pro-big business party, something illustrated by their rapid capitulation last year on the Amazon issue.

When Kshama Sawant was first elected in 2013 her success achieved national and international attention. This was because it was the first time in many years an openly declared socialist had defeated a capitalist politician in any major US city. The symbolism of this election victory taking place in Seattle, the home of Amazon, Boeing, Microsoft and Starbucks, is not lost on many people.

After her 2013 victory, Kshama, and the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI), explained that her campaign had been based upon "not taking any money from big business and running independently from the Democrats, not seeking the endorsements of the Democratic Party establishment... What's striking is that an open socialist won the seat, that the campaign did not

take any money from big business and did not rely on the Democratic Party apparatus to win. We need the left to draw on these lessons and realise that there is an opening to build movements and to build a viable anti-capitalist, anti-corporate working people's alternative to the two big business parties." ("Victory for socialist in Seattle!" socialist-world.net)

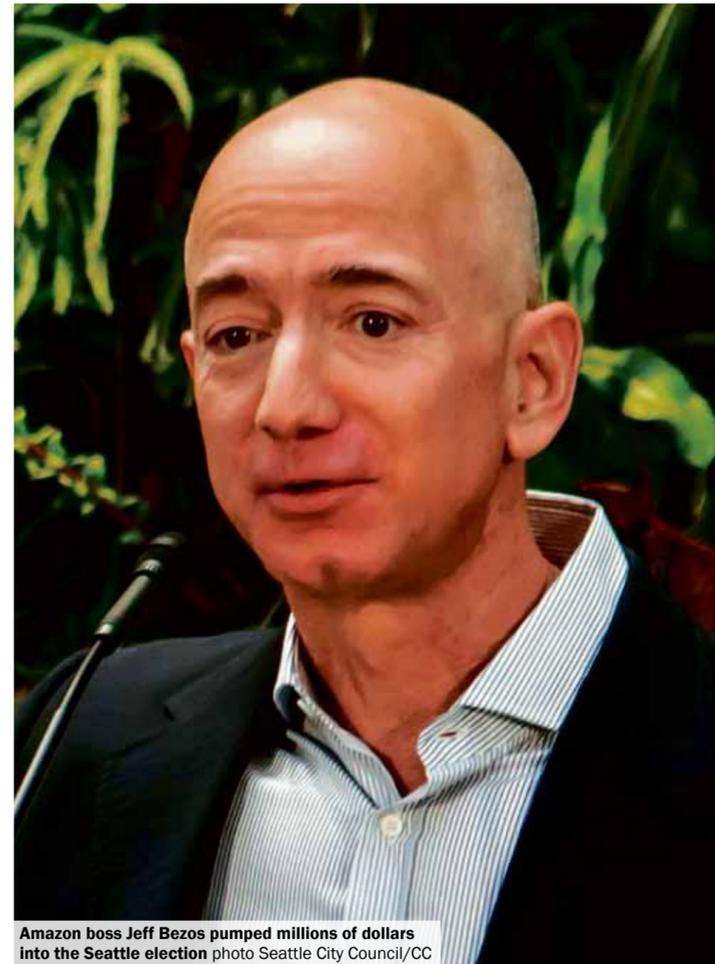
New workers' party

Following on from her first victory, Kshama urged Bernie Sanders at a New York public meeting that they both spoke at, to follow her example and run independently in 2016 for the presidency. Sanders obviously saw the potential that Kshama's election represented.

He decided to try to stand in the 2016 presidential election but not, as Kshama did, as a socialist running independently from the Democrats. Instead, Sanders chose to run on a radical, but not socialist, platform for the Democratic nomination and ended up endorsing Hillary Clinton.

This was not just a lost opportunity to take a mighty step towards building a party of the US working class and oppressed. It also threw away the possibility of limiting Trump's populist appeal to some sections of the working class and thereby preventing his election.

Unfortunately, in recent months



Amazon boss Jeff Bezos pumped millions of dollars into the Seattle election photo Seattle City Council/CC

the emphasis that Kshama and her organisation had placed on continuing to take steps towards the building of an independent workers' political party, and emphasising that she was a socialist, has lessened. An inconsistency developed, with these issues not being generally raised.

This change became one of the issues in the recent debate among CWI comrades internationally that led to a division in our ranks, earlier this year.

Despite our political differences and separation with Kshama, the refounded CWI supported her reelection. Following requests from Kshama's organisation, Socialist Alternative, we did not do anything during this election that could have been publicly interpreted as harming her campaign.

Naturally, Kshama's victory is being celebrated on the US left as a success; her defeat would have been trumpeted as a setback both for socialists and left organisations outside the Democratic Party.

However, this time Kshama's victory will not be seen so clearly as a step forward for building an independent workers' political organisation and building support for socialist policies because of the shift which has been taking place within Kshama's political organisation, Socialist Alternative.

In this election, Kshama's

campaign put great emphasis on what it described as building "maximum unity against big business". Obviously, socialists stand for workers' unity in the class struggle. While this election was a limited form of class struggle, building electoral support was obviously important.

The fact that some local Democratic Party organisations supported Kshama's reelection was to be welcomed. But accepting such support needed to be accompanied by arguments aimed at convincing those Democratic supporters who were open to left ideas that the Democratic Party - a body which nationally is neither democratic nor a real political party - is not an organisation which can be transformed into one that fights for working people.

There was a blurring of lines between Kshama and 'progressive' members of the Democratic Party, leaving open the impression that Kshama was a candidate on the fringes of the Democratic Party, somehow linked with both 'progressive' and more mainstream Democrats.

She was lavish in her praise of the Democratic representatives who supported her, saying she was "proud to receive the endorsement" of two Seattle council members who, last year, voted to repeal the city's 'Amazon tax'!



Kshama said she was "proud to receive the endorsement" of two Seattle council members who, last year, voted to repeal the city's 'Amazon tax'!

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This adaption towards accepting Democratic Party support and downplaying the struggle to build an independent workers' party is not any form of 'united front'.

For Marxists, a united front is between workers' organisations. But even when jointly campaigning with other forces in an election, it is necessary to maintain one of the principles of the united front, namely, each component retaining and explaining its independent political position while cooperating on concrete goals.

Yet this idea is steadily being lost by Socialist Alternative. While recent longer texts by Socialist Alternative have repeated the arguments for a new party and mentioned socialism, these have been downplayed in their more widely distributed material.

Socialist programme

For socialists to hide or downplay their ideas is an opportunist step. It leads towards abandoning linking today's struggles with the need to build support for a socialist programme, and a movement which can implement them, which is a basic idea that Marx and Engels put at the end of the Communist Manifesto.

There are some similarities between the situation in the US today and that in Britain in the late nineteenth century when politics was dominated by two capitalist parties, the Conservatives and Liberals, and the majority of trade unions followed the Liberals.

But Kshama and Socialist Alternative are moving away from what Friedrich Engels, co-founder with Karl Marx of scientific socialism, then described as key: "In our tactics one thing is thoroughly established for all modern countries and times: to bring the workers to the point of forming their own party, independent and opposed to all bourgeois parties."

Kshama's reelection is an important defeat for the bosses

of Amazon and Co and can lead to genuine reforms being made in Seattle. But there are severe limits as to what a single councillor can do. The longer-term significance of this election success will only be seen by what extent it contributes to an increase in the number of independent working-class and socialist candidates running in US elections, the steps made towards the creation of an independent workers' party, and how support for a clear socialist programme is built in the US.

Unfortunately, the answer to the question of what Kshama's reelection will mean for the building of an independent workers' based socialist movement in the US is open.

Socialist Alternative's increasing downplaying of both consistent socialist arguments and campaigning for the vital steps needed to build a socialist alternative in the US, opens the way towards a political adaptation to those forces that are unwilling to break from the Democrats. This is a road which has led to lost opportunities for socialist policies in the US many times in the past.

The CWI will strive to help activists in the US to take the opportunities to build the socialist movement necessary to end capitalism in the world's number one imperialist country.

■ Full article can be read on socialistworld.net



UCU pay and pension strike



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photo Iain Dalton

UNIVERSITY STAFF HAVE HAD ENOUGH

Socialist Party UCU members

On 25 November, university staff in the University and College Union (UCU) across the UK will be sending a clear message to management that we've had enough.

Like many workers, we've had enough of excessive workloads leaving us stressed and exhausted. We've had enough of insecure contracts leaving us worried about where our next work will come from or how to pay our bills.

It's unacceptable that our managers make us pay more in and get less from our pensions, that our pay has

fallen about 20% in real terms over the past ten years, and that universities won't agree to address the gender and ethnic pay gaps.

Ultimately, we've had enough of the marketisation of the higher education sector which has seen the erosion of work and learning conditions, disadvantaging staff and students, to drive up profit.

Us not them

As we start our eight days of consecutive strike action, we are reminded that we are the ones who really run the university, not the fat-cat vice-chancellors, who attend the meetings which sets their pay, and now earn a 'basic' salary of over £250,000.

It is us, the researchers, technicians, lecturers, working students, professional service and academic-related staff, together with other workers, that keep the university functioning.

And by taking this bold action, we are pushing back against this rotten system of exploitation and greed which has seen our conditions eroded while senior pay soars.

But to win, we will need a strong union and leadership which can keep the pressure on university managers. Our strike last year showed that concessions can be won through determined struggle. We must be prepared to continue the fight if managers don't agree to concessions straight away.

That's why the UCU branches that

didn't hit the anti-union 50% ballot threshold this time should be re-balloted, so that they can join us if more action is needed.

Our decision to fight back over these issues is a massive step forward for our union and sector. But the issues we are fighting on aren't limited to university staff.

Falling pay, job insecurity and crippling workloads will continue to be the status quo across the UK until we kick the Tories out, along with their austerity policies.

We call for students, trade union activists and anti-cuts campaigners to support our fight and to send a clear message to campaigning politicians that if they don't fight for us, we're bringing the fight to them.

NEU members' sixth-form walkouts

National Education Union members will be striking at over 30 sixth-form colleges on 20 November. NEU members are fighting for fair pay, conditions and employment.

This includes reversing job losses, class size increases and cuts to teaching time and curriculum provision.

The 20 November walkouts follow successful strikes in 25 sixth-form colleges on 17 October and 5 November and public protests in towns and cities.