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Issue 1072
6-12 February 2020



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the Socialist

Formerly **Militant**

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era of crisis
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6.5M WORKING POOR FIGHT TO END LOW PAY



Nancy Taaffe
Waltham Forest Socialist Party

There are now 6.5 million workers in the UK who are part of the “working poor.” There are now more people who are both working and in poverty than people who are officially unemployed. There are more employed people in rent arrears than there are people officially unemployed!

When the BBC screened a new adaptation of Charles Dickens’ A Christmas Carol in December, the right-wing press and commentators slammed it.

Perhaps part of this was because the drama had a contemporary theme. It made you feel that Victorian poverty wasn’t so very far away from Britain in 2020.

The Conservative Party mantra of “making work pay” is re-futed in the lives of over six million people where work is no route out of poverty. Work, for many, has become the modern equivalent of the Victorian workhouse.

Throughout the nineties and noughties, many well-paid, secure jobs were wiped out, in manufacturing, public services and other sectors. In many sectors, such as retail and the caring professions, government subsidies were introduced to mask the scandal of low-paying employers.

Rather than the trade union leaders mobilising workers to fight against low pay, they never did. Well-paid jobs have become scarcer - and government subsidies have all but gone.

To ‘make work pay’ we need to start by forcing bosses to pay decent wages that reflect the real cost of living. The Socialist Party demands a minimum wage of at least £12 an hour as an immediate step towards £15.

We need cheap and affordable rents through council housing and rent caps, and housing benefit that matches the real cost of housing.

We need our travel expenses to be affordable. We need childcare costs that don’t prohibit us from being able to afford to work. We need to cut the working week without a loss of pay and share work out - it’s illogical to have some toiling for 70 hours a week while others can’t get anything but a part-time job. In short, we need socialist policies.

Just like today, in Dickens’ day the bosses’ profits boomed. They hoarded and speculated while those who toiled suffered.

Now, as then, we need a militant trade union fightback and a mass party to represent organised workers in the struggle against poverty, low pay and inequality.

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Send us reports of your workplace and community campaigns, short letters on working-class issues, or ideas for other articles.

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

'POST-BREXIT' ERA OF CRISIS AHEAD



WHAT WE THINK

Brexit Day has been and gone. Now Johnson is promising the "dawn of a new era." According to the Tories' optimistic script a 'Brexit bounce' will mean more investment, more jobs and more money to 'level up' spending and 'pay back' those working-class people who loaned the Tories their vote in the general election.

With an 80-seat majority and Brexit 'out of the way' the old Tory divisions are supposedly now healed and a period of growth and stability will open up before us. The chancellor Sajid Javid has pledged to restore the economy to its "post-war glory days" with growth of 2.7%-2.8%. But just last week the Bank of England downgraded its growth forecast by the largest amount since 2016.

This year it expects the economy to 'grow' by just 0.8%, the worst level for over ten years. An economist at the think tank IPPR called Javid's growth goal "a fantasy". In an already uncertain international economic environment made more fragile by the possible repercussions from the coronavirus (see page 4), and with the worst slowdown in productivity in Britain for 250 years, why would the capitalists rush to invest?

Johnson's boast that austerity is over has been exposed by Javid ordering government departments to make at least 5% cuts in areas that do not correspond with the government's priorities - not to mention the councils all over the country which are about to vote through budgets slashing local services already pared to the bone (see page 11).

Tory infighting has broken out over Johnson's decision to allow Huawei licences for building part of the 5G internet network, and the likely OK for going ahead with the HS2 high-speed rail link (see page 10).

Fault lines

New Tory party fault lines are emerging over what a post-Brexit Britain will look like. The ultra-free-marketeers saw Brexit as a route to a low-tax, deregulated, small-state 'Singapore-on-Thames.' This is the aim of cabinet members Liz Truss, Priti Patel and Dominic Raab, authors in 2012 of Britannia Unchained, a free-market manifesto in which they bemoaned a "bloated state, high taxes and excessive regulation" and described British workers as being "among the worst idlers in the world".

On the other hand, the new intake of Tory MPs in the North and West Midlands are under pressure to call for more protectionist measures and state intervention to save jobs and



Infrastructure and investment needs; austerity and free-market profiteering; Tory divisions are once more opening up
photo New Zealand Defence Force/CC

boost growth in the areas they represent. But it's precisely these areas that will be hardest hit by the fallout from Brexit because of its effects on manufacturing industry.

Rather than the rosy scenario painted by Johnson and Javid, the reality of Brexit on a capitalist basis is likely to be less investment, job losses and factory closures - causing enormous anger and bitterness among those working-class people who might have hoped that getting Brexit done would have the opposite effect.

So far Johnson has leaned towards policies aimed at shoring up

working-class support. So, as well as promising increased public spending and not going ahead with a rise in corporation tax, he has intervened to give tax breaks to Flybe, a regional airline, and to bring Northern Rail into public ownership.

But if the budget for current spending on public services is going to be balanced by 2022-23, as Javid has pledged, and with anaemic economic growth, the economic resources for intervening and 'leveling up' will be extremely limited. In fact, according to calculations by the Financial Times, if the Bank of England forecasts play out, Javid will be

facing a budget deficit of £12 billion rather than the surplus of £5 billion he is expecting.

Any attempt to raise taxes or borrowing further to pay for increased spending and investment would be fiercely resisted by the free-marketeers and, if it threatened their profits, the capitalists all the Tory politicians ultimately represent.

Far from strong and stable, the 'new era' in Britain will be one of crisis in which working-class people will have no choice but to get organised and fight back against the further attacks that are coming their way.

Labour leadership contest and public ownership



The Socialist Party welcomed the pledge to nationalise Royal Mail as well as energy and rail in Corbyn's manifesto photo Paul Mattsson



Keir Starmer photo Chris McAndrew/CC

Lisa Nandy... photo rwendland/CC



...who opposes public ownership of energy photo CCO/CC



Sarah Sachs-Eldridge
Socialist Party executive committee

A debate, of sorts, is opening up on nationalisation in the Labour leadership election. Support for public ownership - or not - is an indication of which class interests a party serves - workers or bosses.

The Socialist Party welcomed the pledges to renationalise rail, the water companies, Royal Mail, the energy companies and BT Openreach in Jeremy Corbyn's general election anti-austerity manifesto.

But we also said that it is necessary to go further still - to take the main levers of the economy out of the hands of the billionaires and place them into the hands of the working-class majority - in order to democratically plan production in the interests of all.

Voters polled in December 2019 were six percentage points more likely to support railway and water nationalisation than they were at the 2017 election. The same poll found that support for nationalising bus companies is up nine points.

Support for public ownership is even higher among young people.

A spokesperson for the right-wing frontrunner Keir Starmer said: "Keir supports expanding common ownership, whether by outright nationalisation or by other forms such as municipals, community organisations or co-operatives: all of which mean services are run for the public, not for shareholders."

Another right-wing candidate, Lisa Nandy, backs rail nationalisation (who doesn't?) but opposes public ownership of energy. Rebecca Long-Bailey on the other hand says she supports the Labour Party manifesto.

There may be circumstances where genuine workers' cooperatives can play a positive role - but Starmer is attempting to blur the lines on what nationalisation is about.

Publicly owned companies should be run not "for the public" under "common ownership" but under democratic workers' control and management, based on elected committees of service users and representatives of the trade union movement in each workplace, the trade unions nationally, and a government representing working-class

interests as a whole.

Compensation should be paid to small shareholders and pension schemes on the basis of proven need. Elected committees, accountable to the working class, could make the call.

To solve the problems faced by both people and the environment requires more than just removing the profit motive from those parts of the economy where it's clear privatisation has failed - it means removing the grip of big business from society altogether.

Recent figures put it clearly. While austerity has seen wages stagnate over the last decade, the amount paid to shareholders by the UK's largest companies listed in the Ftse 100 has doubled. It reached a record £110 billion last year! Since 2011, another £20 billion a year has been spent by companies on share buybacks in the UK.

Nationalisation of the top 150 companies and banks that dominate the economy would provide the basis to begin democratically planning production, and the use of resources properly, without interference from the 0.1%.



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.

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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- 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.

SOCIALISM AND INTERNATIONALISM

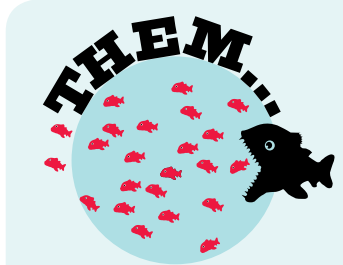
- No to imperialist wars and occupations.
- Tax the super-rich! For a socialist government to take into public ownership the top 150 companies and the banking system that dominate the British economy, and run them under democratic working class control and management. Compensation to be paid only on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

Do you agree? Join the fightback!

JOIN THE SOCIALISTS

Visit socialistparty.org.uk/join
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07761 818 206
to find out more today!





British billionaire's Wonka mansion

Phones4U founder John Caudwell's second home in Mayfair is worth a quarter of a billion pounds. The eight-floor, 15-bedroom palace boasts a basement spa, "snow shower" (what?) and indoor river with live fish.

Purchased from a Channel Island tax haven, the mansion's £65 million renovation needed 20,000 sheets of gold leaf and a workforce of 300 at one stage. Billionaire Caudwell, 97th richest person in the UK, had to press his ballroom into service as a canteen.

A Sunday Times journalist invited into this "Willy Wonka" compound reported feeling "nauseous and keenly aware of my own insignificance in the universe" beneath the marble stairway's five crystal chandeliers.

As for Caudwell himself, he insisted the reporter record his conviction that "the rich-poor divide in society is really quite disgusting. It's very difficult to justify people with billions of pounds when there are people all around the world starving to death and living in extraordinary poverty." Indeed.

He says he intends to donate 70-90% of his riches to charity (so as not to spoil his kids - leaving them a mere hundred million or so). We say: cut out the middleman! Nationalise the billionaires' assets now.

£3bn

Airbus's record-breaking penalties for bribery

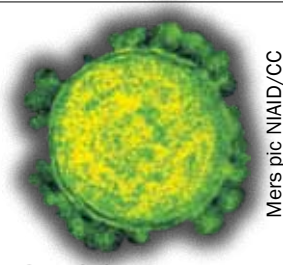
Airbus bribe bust

European aerospace giant Airbus must pay a record-breaking £3 billion in international fines and costs for corruption. Senior figures spent years systematically bribing buyers to outcompete US rival Boeing.

Among others, the wife of a Sri Lankan airline executive was promised \$16.8 million in backhanders, and agents for a Taiwanese airline pocketed \$14.3 million for ordering 20 planes. But the Serious Fraud Office's use of a 'deferred prosecution agreement' means Airbus chiefs might not face trial.

Misclaim a few hundred quid of the pittance on offer from the welfare system, and you could lose your benefits or even go to jail. But oversee millions in kickbacks to make millions more in profits, and you might only get a fine for your firm and a stern telling off.

Coronavirus exposes capitalism's weaknesses in healthcare and economy



Mers pic NIAD/CC

Steve Score
Socialist Party national committee

Tragedies like the deaths from novel coronavirus, over 400 at the time of writing, are never just 'natural disasters'. They are not isolated from society. They are impacted by capitalism and also have an effect on the system itself.

By the beginning of February there were over 14,000 people confirmed as infected. The overwhelming majority are in China, but there were cases in over 20 countries.

While only a small percentage of people die from it, there is currently no vaccine or treatment. Because people are infectious before the symptoms appear, the real number of cases is probably far higher, and the death toll will undoubtedly rise.

The United Nations' public health agency, the World Health Organisation (WHO), has declared a global emergency. Its director-general is concerned about coronavirus spreading to poorer countries with weak health systems where the dangers would be higher. World capitalism and imperialism massively increase this risk.

Only two cases so far have been confirmed in the UK. The chief medical officer for England reassuringly said the NHS was "extremely well-prepared for managing infections." Clearly at this stage there is no need to panic.

However, before the new virus appeared, this winter's crisis led to the NHS Confederation, which links up trusts and organisations across the health service, saying the NHS was "on its knees." Underfunding,

insufficient capacity and understaffing mean there would be questions asked of the ability of the NHS to cope with a big influx of patients resulting from new infections.

Strains on health systems around the world are reflected in the planned five-day strike of thousands of Hong Kong medical staff. They are demanding closure of the border with mainland China because the under-resourced and understaffed health services in Hong Kong cannot cope.

Inefficiency

The Chinese state has responded much faster than in the 2003 Sars outbreak. But problems are still compounded by censorship and bureaucracy having made it more difficult to sound the alarm and coordinate responses.

There is an outpouring of anger on Chinese social media - usually dominated by censors - against the rosy image

portrayed in official reports. Medical personnel say that in reality they are exhausted and ill-equipped. One photo even seems to show government officials wearing specialised respirator masks while doctors only have normal surgical masks.

This is the third outbreak of coronaviruses since the beginning of the century. One professor involved in research into a Sars vaccine said: "What's so tragic is that once Sars was gone, the investor enthusiasm for a Sars vaccine was zero. If the global health community had followed through and produced and stockpiled a vaccine, something might be ready to go now."

A publicly owned pharmaceutical industry - under democratic workers' control and management - is needed now to maximise the response. International socialist cooperation is also vital to break these blockages.

The coronavirus outbreak has overlapped with the frictions in the world economy, especially world trade

tensions. While the WHO said that unilateral travel restrictions aimed at China by other countries were counterproductive, a number of countries, led by the US, have done just that.

If in some countries people are forced to travel illegally, it increases the risk of cases not being spotted. This happened during the Ebola outbreak which peaked a few years ago.

Economy

Economists are predicting that the impact on the world economy will be much greater than the £22 billion estimated cost of the Sars epidemic. Thousands of factories have temporarily closed, and tens of millions of people are quarantined in their own areas in China.

Even leaving aside the impact on global tourism, the measures taken inside China will have the effect of slowing its economy even further, after years of declining growth and the recent blows of the trade war with the US.

The regime has flooded Chinese money markets with over £130 billion of new cash to counteract tumbling stock market prices. This follows years of similar injections.

A leading economist at consultancy firm Capital Economics pointed out that consequently "valuations of some financial assets are stretched." So "the new virus is a plausible catalyst for a market correction" - a crash. With or without a "market correction," Chinese capitalism's slowdown will have a knock-on effect on the world economy, already in a precarious state.

Capitalism cannot be relied on to safely deal with these kinds of emergencies. We need an international working-class movement to replace it with socialism.

Martin Powell-Davies
Socialist Party national committee

The strategists of capitalism are worried. Global levels of distrust in democracy are at an all-time high. In reality, this represents a growing dissatisfaction with capitalism itself.

The University of Cambridge has just released its 'Global Satisfaction with Democracy' report. It is based on surveys taken from the 1970s to 2019, representing nearly 2.5 billion individuals across 77 nations.

Capitalism therefore has to take its conclusion seriously: that a clear majority - 57.5% - are "dissatisfied" with democracy in their countries.

The report gives 2005 as the global high point - although, even then, 39% were still unhappy with their democracy. But since that time, in the aftermath of the global recession of the late 2000s, there has been a sharp rise in dissatisfaction. Some of the most populous parliamentary democracies - the United States,

Brazil, Nigeria and Mexico - have led the way.

In Britain, following temporary peaks in dissatisfaction following Blair's decision to support war in Iraq (2003) and the scandal over parliamentary expenses (2009), dissatisfaction has surged since the Brexit referendum result. It now stands at around 60%, a majority of British respondents for the first time since the mid-1970s.

Are these results really any surprise? Of course, real power in a capitalist democracy remains with those who own and control the economy, not with parliament. But democracy still matters for the working class.

Even in Britain, the universal right to vote for your MP in the supposed 'mother of parliaments' was only won through determined working-class struggle. Internationally, many have perished at the hands of dictatorships or in the struggle to overthrow them.

But workers who voted for politicians in the hope they would make

Refuges turn away 64% of women - set no-cuts budgets now!



Fighting cuts to domestic violence services in Doncaster photo Women's Lives Matter

One of the most thorough reports about support services for people seeking to escape domestic abuse, researched by Women's Aid and released on 28 January, confirmed that 64% of those who seek shelter in a refuge are turned away due to lack of funding.

The Council of Europe, a human rights organisation covering 47 European states, highlights that the number of refuge bed spaces in England is now 30% below the number recommended.

For an increasing number of women, it's even worse, where there is no access to refuge provision at all. Many domestic violence services are run on a shoestring by volunteers and funding gets tighter every year.

It's not just the lack of refuge spaces that is the problem, it's also the lack of affordable social housing. Only 37,825 new homes built in England were let at discounted rents last year, despite a waiting list of 1.1 million.

For many fleeing abusive relationships, their choices are bleak. Either return to homes and the perpetrator they're trying to leave, or face poor, unregulated, private rented accommodation - or even worse, homelessness.

More deaths

This is outrageous. And bluntly, what it means is that more women will die as a result of a violent partner, or face an earlier death due to living on the streets. I've been shocked talking to homeless women on the streets in Coventry as to how many of them talk about domestic violence as the reason they are forced into that situation.

There are two other factors highlighted in the Women's Aid report. Firstly, cuts to mental health services, for those with more complex needs, mean that women do not get the right support quickly enough. And secondly, the number of

families who have "no recourse to public funds" because of their immigration status.

Universal Credit works against those fleeing a violent relationship. With long waits to get benefits paid, many are forced to stay in refuges longer than they need to.

With the re-election of the Tories, the fight against cuts is even more vital. Labour councils must lead the fight for the resources our local communities need, instead of presiding over the rationing of an ever-reducing budget. We say, spend the reserves, demand the stolen millions back, and organise the fight!

And to build a society that guarantees the needs of all and faces up

to the challenge of ending the fear of domestic violence, thoroughly and permanently, we must fight for socialism. The Socialist Party demands:

- Reverse all cuts to domestic violence services now - use council reserves and borrowing powers to fully fund local jobs and services, and build mass campaigns of workers and service users to demand the money back from Westminster
- Scrap Universal Credit - for benefits which reflect the real cost of living, and start immediately to support a woman to leave a violent partner
- Mass building of council homes, and rent caps in the private sector

- For affordable and accessible, publicly funded and owned, high-quality child and social care, run under the control of service users, workers and the community - not for profit
- Trade union struggle for real living wages
- End zero-hour and precarious employment practices - job security for all, and full-time hours for all who want them, with flexibility on workers' terms, not the bosses'

Read and sign the pledge not to cut domestic violence services at socialistparty.org.uk, 'Cuts to women's services cost lives'

Record dissatisfaction with democracy: capitalism's dead end

their lives better are increasingly disappointed. For growing numbers of people, 21st century capitalism is failing to lift their living conditions.

The report goes through different regions and countries globally. The failure of capitalism to deliver for its citizens is starkly shown by the corresponding levels of disillusionment in parliamentary democracy.

In Europe, for example, the report notes a growing "satisfaction gap" between the still-relatively-stable Germany, Scandinavia and the Netherlands, and growing discontent in France, Greece and Spain. The right-

ward collapse of former mass workers' parties will have added to the general distrust of politicians.

The failure to deliver real change for the mass of the population through either the Arab Spring revolutions, social-democratic governments in Latin America, or the end of apartheid in South Africa is also all evident.

The report acknowledges where the problem lies. "If satisfaction with democracy is now falling... it is not because citizens' expectations are excessive or unrealistic, but because democratic institutions are falling

short of the outcomes that matter most for their legitimacy, including probity in office, upholding the rule of law, responsiveness to public concerns, ensuring economic and financial security, and raising living standards for the larger majority of society."

It concludes that "the best means of restoring democratic legitimacy would be for this to change." But that will be much easier said than done for crisis-bound global capitalism.

The report points out how right-wing populists like Trump in the US and Bolsonaro in Brazil have

profited from this dissatisfaction by falsely presenting themselves as standing for 'the people' against the establishment politicians. Boris Johnson has, of course, done the same over Brexit. In reality they also represent the interests of big business against workers.

As workers realise they have been duped by Johnson - and by Trump and the other right-wing populists - their dissatisfaction with the results of capitalist "democracy" will only rise further.

A socialist society would be based instead on public ownership of the commanding heights of the economy and huge wealth they generate, planned under democratic workers' control and management. Mass workers' parties fighting for socialism, to allow ordinary people to genuinely "take back control" of their lives, are urgently needed to provide a way forward.

■ Read the full report via cam.ac.uk/stories/dissatisfactiondemocracy

Retail redundancies

Almost 10,000 UK retail jobs went in the first month of this year alone, reports the Centre for Retail Research. By the end of January, bosses had destroyed 9,949 posts, with another 1,200 under threat at Beales and Hawkin's Bazaar. 143,100 retail jobs went during 2019.

1.2m

Households waiting for social housing in England

Homes on hold

1.15 million households were trapped on England's social housing waiting lists in 2019 - a 4% increase, says Shelter. Meanwhile, the number of social homes actually decreased last year - by more than 17,000.

Around 60,000 more social homes have been sold or demolished than have been built in the last decade.

Doctors drained

Almost a third of NHS doctors - 31% - are suffering burnout and "compassion fatigue," reports medical journal BMJ Open. The study found shattered docs resorting to distractions and blaming themselves.

Last year, doctors' union BMA found eight in ten medics at significant risk of burnout, and 27% previously diagnosed with a mental health problem. A separate survey discovered 18% of obstetricians and gynaecologists even suffered "clinically significant PTSD symptoms."

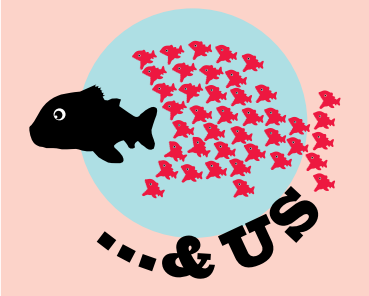
31%

of NHS doctors are suffering burnout

EU v refugees

The neoliberal European Union's 'Trust Fund for Africa' - purportedly aid for poverty - in fact uses over €1 billion of its €4.7 billion pledge on ejecting desperate refugees, reports Oxfam.

The 'internationalist' EU allowed 34,361 people fleeing destitution, repression and war to die between 1993 and mid-2018, most of them at sea, said Dutch NGO Opened. Over 1,000 drowned in the Mediterranean in the first nine months of 2019, according to the UN.



■ Have you got news for us? Email editors@socialistparty.org.uk

500 BBC journalists' jobs under threat

Anton McCabe
National Union of Journalists
national executive committee
(personal capacity)

BBC top management have announced that 500 journalists' jobs are to go. This is a direct attack on the National Union of Journalists (NUJ). BBC journalists are the largest single group in the union. All is far from perfect in the BBC. That said, because of union organisation it is one of the better-paid sections of the union, with better conditions. A defeat for BBC members would embolden employers across the media.

Cuts are to be spread across the world service, radio and news.

The implications of the cuts go beyond the pay and conditions of

journalists. They directly touch on the public's right to know. Newsnight is being particularly targeted. Half of its in-depth films are to be cut. Its investigative journalism is also to be reduced.

Newsnight investigations have exposed a number of important scandals, involving politicians and major business figures. Because of their complexity, and the draconian nature of the libel laws, these are usually the sort of investigations that only a large organisation like the BBC can undertake.

A significant part of this is the Johnson government trying to silence the BBC and intimidate it into restricting itself to 'safe' programming.

Internationally, the BBC provides the most comprehensive news coverage, through the world service

and other platforms. It is not above criticism. However, it is provided by journalists who are mostly members of the NUJ.

Weakening the BBC is to allow news coverage to be filtered through Rupert Murdoch and his ilk. They are profit-driven, with an explicitly right-wing agenda, and non-union.

BBC News is not just about world events and exposing scandals. BBC local news provides a news service for communities across Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

That is very important because, between 2004 and the end of 2018, there was a net loss of 245 local newspapers. It is no longer unusual for large towns not to have a local paper.

These are important for covering local issues - and covering local campaigns. BBC regional and TV journalism often has to make up the gap.

The NUJ has said it will resist the BBC cuts. Plans have yet to be announced. Any action the union takes must have the widest support from the trade union movement.

14 more days of university strikes over pensions, pay and conditions



photo Elaine Brunskill

Bea Gardner
UCU Southamptton branch executive
(personal capacity)

The University and College Union (UCU) has announced 14 days of further strike action for universities currently in dispute over pensions, pay and conditions.

The action will start on Thursday 20 February and escalate each week, finishing with a week-long walkout from Monday 9 to Friday 13 March. In total, 74 universities will be taking part, 14 more than in the eight days of action before Christmas.

As a result, over 1.2 million students will be affected. UCU general secretary, Jo Grady, has warned that the union is prepared to re-ballot members over Easter to keep the mandate for industrial action live when students sit their exams later in the summer.

While the UCU higher education committee was expected to announce the dates for the USS pensions dispute, as we reported in the Socialist previously, in the 'four fights' dispute the situation was less clear.

It was thrown into even more uncertainty when, just two days

before the higher education committee met, employer representatives, UCEA, tabled and published an offer in the dispute over pay, workload, unequal pay gaps and casualisation.

However, the higher education committee voted to reject the offer which did not include any increase in pay from their current offer of 1.8%, or anything beyond loose commitments on the other aspects of the dispute.

This decision to reject the offer and sustain the combined action is a positive step forward for the union and reflects a determination amongst members to rewind years of marketisation in higher education.

However, rank and file members on the ground must be prepared to respond to further attempts to undermine or derail the action in the build-up to the strikes. This must include being prepared to reject any offers which do not deliver on all areas of the two disputes.

This will be best achieved by electing strong local strike committees to democratically organise and lead the action, including linking up with student unions and student groups on campus.

Support the working-class press in 2020

MAY DAY GREETINGS IN THE SOCIALIST

20% discount for payment by 1 April!

Which paper details a fighting industrial strategy to beat the anti-union laws? Who explains how councils can set budgets that defy the Tory cuts? Where can you read about the practical programme needed to reconstitute a mass party for working-class political representation?

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- socialistparty.org.uk/mayday
- jamesivens@socialistparty.org.uk

HUGE VICTORY FOR BROMLEY LIBRARY WORKERS AFTER 241 DAYS ON INDEFINITE STRIKE!

South East London Socialist Party members

Library workers in Bromley, south London have won a huge victory after eight months of continuous, indefinite strike action which began on 6 June 2019.

The settlement includes new posts, no compulsory redundancies and backdated pay awards for those who had been underpaid. The final strike meeting on 30 January agreed that a return to work would take place on 3 February.

The strike originally began in protest at the failure of Greenwich Leisure Limited to fill vacant posts. This was leading to huge strains on the service. Unite the Union also knew that a restructure was coming - this was why the posts were not being filled.

Advantage

Rather than wait for the restructure to be imposed, the union took the bold step of calling for an indefinite strike before the employer formally made its proposals. This gave the union a huge advantage.



photo Unite the Union

A restructure in the workplace, including where job cuts are imposed, can be a very quick process. The unions have legal time limits attached to industrial action ballots. By the time strike action can begin, an employer will often 'persuade' workers to take voluntary redundancy - with one arm held behind their back.

Bosses have no problem telling workers that unless they take a voluntary redundancy settlement with a small enhancement, then they will face compulsory redundancy with a smaller severance package.

Unsurprisingly, workers often feel they have no choice but to take the offer. Time after time this will either scupper a campaign or be used as an excuse by some union leaders not to take action.

For these reasons, the early strike notice in this campaign meant that the employers did not have this option. Instead of being isolated and vulnerable to threats, workers were out on strike and anything that the employer had to say needed to go via the union.

Jobs threat

Just as the union predicted, half way through the strike the employers proposed a new structure slashing over 30 jobs. The strike and the campaign that had been built in support of the workers allowed the union to negotiate from a position of strength.

In addition to the strike action, the union campaigned to hit Greenwich Leisure where it hurt - its brand image. This had a huge impact. Press reports over the last few weeks have stated that membership in the company's leisure centres has dropped drastically.

Ealing tax office workers strike against closure

Civil service workers at Ealing tax office took further strike action on 29-31 January against its closure and staff redundancies.

Following their successful action in spring 2019, PCS union members were rebalotted in November when talks broke down.

At a strike rally, Labour's shadow chancellor John McDonnell spoke against the closure of the office and strikers were joined by representatives from the RMT, Unite and Unison trade unions, the NSSN and Ealing and Hillingdon trade union councils.

Strikers chose to target HMRC's tax deadline date as they continue to fight to save their jobs and services.

■ They can be supported at justgiving.com/crowdfunding/saveealingtaxoffice



PCS NEC elections

In the upcoming PCS elections the newly formed Broad Left Network, made up of socialists from across the union, is standing on a fighting programme. Socialist Party members Marion Lloyd and Dave Semple head up the list of candidates standing for president and vice-president respectively, and other members are standing for the national executive committee.

■ See the full slate and programme at pcsbln.wordpress.com

Get all the latest union news...

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No to academisation of east London schools!

Brentwood Catholic Diocese in east London wants to turn all its schools into academies. Already academisation at St Angela's in Newham has been ruled out for five years after strike action. Newham National Education Union joint-branch secretary and Socialist Party member Louise Cuffaro told the Socialist:

"There is nothing about academisation that benefits staff or pupils. Working together with other schools an economy of scale can be achieved without academisation. The board of trustees who run academy trusts may keep individual school governing bodies to give a veneer of local accountability but ultimately the trustees have control of the 'business'.

"Stand-alone and multi-academy trusts are registered companies. Marketing, branding and growing the trust are all terms that are talked about in the 'Statement of the Diocese Future Plans'! These are all terms that should have no place in any state-funded education.

"St Michael's and St Bonaventure's in Newham and St Bede's in Romford have balloted for action



to stop the academisation of their schools. The National Education Union calls for no further academisation of any schools and the taking back of existing Academies.

"Solidarity to all workers and parents who are standing together against the undemocratic, unaccountable, privatisation of their community schools!"

EXPENSIVE, OVERCROWDED AND UNRELIABLE: RENATIONALISE THE RAILWAYS!

Nick Chaffey
Socialist Party national committee

How hard can it be to run a train from Carlisle to Newcastle? The collapse of the Northern Rail franchise, forcing the Tories to renationalise the service, shows privatisation has not been the way. The Socialist warned that a privatised rail service would fail, be run for profit, fares would increase, safety compromised and investment fall. How ironic that as Tory Transport Secretary Grant Shapps wrings his hands, he is compelled to implement a policy he ferociously opposed just a few weeks ago in lambasting Crobyn's pro-nationalisation manifesto. Currently, Britain's railways are the most expensive, overcrowded and unreliable in Europe. And if you ask a striking guard in the RMT transport

union fighting to maintain safety, not great to work for. The Tories, advocates of privatisation, fail to see the need for an efficient, integrated, cheap rail and transport service, and its economic, social and environmental benefits. The capitalists are now debating the way forward and how to make privatised rail work. It is clear, for them, renationalisation is a temporary expediency. **Who should pay?** So who should pay? Anyone but them. So as fares have gone up, so too has the anger of passengers and especially commuters. And it's no surprise the Tories and rail privateers see the railworkers and their militant union the RMT as the key target. While RMT guards are fighting to maintain their safety critical role, the Tory government has subsidised train operating companies during strikes. After the election

Johnson announced his intention to ban transport strikes, specifically targeting the RMT. High on their hit list to make rail more attractive to private investors is the 'Railway Pension Scheme', which they claim train operating companies are unwilling to accept liability for. The Crossrail project, massively over budget and way behind its completion date, has led to widening Tory divisions over the future of 'HS2', the high-speed rail link between London and the north of England. This has been condemned by many as a vanity project, rather than a rational development of the rail network. was never going to happen. Privatisation is a policy of profits first and last. With more public money going in than under British Rail, the problem is that a lot of that public money goes directly into the pockets of a handful of shareholders. The Crossrail project, massively over budget and way behind its completion date, has led to widening Tory divisions over the future of 'HS2', the high-speed rail link between London and the north of England. This has been condemned by many as a vanity project, rather than a rational development of the rail network.

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Privatisation has failed, but what is the answer? How would socialists solve the crisis of rail and public transport? Britain's early history of railways saw speculative expansion while profits were to be made, but when the bubble burst, rail went into decline as profitable routes were monopolised by four private companies who were then rescued from bankruptcy by Labour's nationalisation in 1948. Labour's nationalisation programme included not only rail, but rail engineering, road transport, and key industries of steel, gas and electricity, opening up the possibility of democratic planning. But while the Labour government made important reforms, the economy remained in the hands of big business and the capitalists who didn't want to see expensive government investment at their expense. As a result, British Rail was starved of the investment needed. In the 1960s the Beeching report axed a third of the network with Tory demands to cuts subsidies. British Rail was deemed unprofitable and the Tories were keen to promote the auto industry instead. This continued under the Thatcher era with British Rail finally privatised between 1994 and 1997 by John Major's Tory government. Today's debacle and renationalisation of Northern Rail is just the latest of a 23-year period that has failed to see the necessary investment in track, stations and rolling stock. Where new, longer and more efficient trains are needed, the infrastructure doesn't exist. It's hard to believe that the most recent South Western Railway contract was agreed to include plans for longer trains to carry more passengers in comfort, when it was clear that the station

“**Nationalising rail need not be expensive, why should the private fat cats be compensated after creaming vast profits for decades?**”

platforms were too short. There is a clear need for an integrated, environmentally sustainable transport system, using rail and bus to meet the needs of the economy and communities. But the motive of the capitalists is to seek short-term profits rather than meet community need. The consequence has been to push up fares, rely on old rolling stock and infrastructure, leaving commuters crammed like sardines. Those areas not deemed economically important (profitable) are left isolated and falling further into decline. Workers ask what would happen to their jobs and industries if subsidised rail reduced car travel or road haulage. What would then be the knock-on effect to the car industry if car use fell sharply? On a capitalist basis, industries that don't meet market demand are left to fail, such as Ford and Honda, leaving economic wastelands and unemployment in their wake. But a socialist transport plan, drawn up democratically by elected bodies of railworkers, passengers, the trade unions, communities, and local and central government, could ensure that the investment in an integrated public transport system entailed no job losses. It would see an expansion in green jobs, that could utilise the skills of workers at Honda and Nissan to work alongside the railworkers at Bombardier. Private industry and the capitalists would resist any such moves that further threatened their profits. And, as we have seen, they can be unwound by future privatising governments. The case for a socialist transport plan has to be linked to the need for a socialist planned economy where the banks and big corporations would be nationalised under democratic workers' control and management, ensuring a permanent development of transport and its benefits. It is these socialist policies that have to be championed in the trade union and labour movement as the debate rages about the ongoing crisis in rail and public transport.

Fight the Tory attacks on rail workers and their unions

Tom Woodcock
RMT member, Birmingham

In the 1980s, Margaret Thatcher decided that in order to drive through her plans to attack the living standards of the working class in Britain, she would need to neuter the trade unions. Therefore she needed to audaciously attack and beat the section seen by the public as the strongest, which at the time was the mineworkers. To help facilitate this her Tory government passed new highly restrictive anti-union laws which made solidarity strike action illegal. Unfortunately this, along with the treacherous inaction of the Trade Union Congress and Labour Party leaderships, left the miners isolated and the state was able to violently beat the miners into submission.



photo Paul Mattsson

My trade union, the RMT transport workers union, has been in the sights of this Tory government since day one. Because of its militant traditions and the fact that it organises workers in the vitally important transport sectors, governments, both Tory and Labour, have clashed with us as we vigorously defend our members' jobs, pay and conditions. Perhaps the most visible battle at the moment is at several companies against the imposition of driver-only operation (DOO). Our train guard members on South Western Railway took 27 days of strike action in defence of their jobs during December alone! This militant approach is proving to be a constant headache for the bosses and their friends in government, as we are a serious

“**The trade unions must urgently organise to defeat the Tory government and their anti-union laws**”

obstacle to their plans to degrade our jobs through cuts and privatisation. Therefore a new set of anti-union laws is being prepared which would require trade unions in key sectors such as transport to agree with employers to provide a minimum service level on strike days. This is obviously an attempt to ensure that strike action is as ineffective as possible. There are many practical problems with attempting to set minimum service levels on public transport, not least the serious risk to passenger and staff safety presented in running a skeleton service due to inevitable overcrowding that would result. Along with many other reasons, such as how any union can compel members to cross its own picket lines, there are serious questions over how these proposals can possibly work. Nevertheless these new anti-union laws are yet another an attack on our class, and present more obstacles to workers organising legal and effective

strike action. Look at how last year the Communication Workers' Union (CWU) comfortably satisfied the undemocratic minimum ballot turnout at Royal Mail, only to see an unelected judge ban the union from calling legal action. The trade unions cannot afford to wait for a future Labour government to come to their aid. They must urgently organise to defeat the government. The Trade Union Congress is best placed to organise strikes and demonstrations against the anti-union laws. But if they continue to drag their heels then the RMT, CWU, and other individual unions, should come together as a coalition of the willing and provide the leadership that is needed to start the fightback.

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★Feature/campaigns

Cancel the franchise, not our trains

Campaign launched by West Midlands Socialist Party

The performance of West Midlands Trains - the current franchise holder for rail services in the West Midlands - is talked about everywhere; in newspapers, on radio and TV and of course among rail travellers.

The Mayor of the West Midlands, Tory Andy Street, also put his oar in. Apparently, he does not have enough to keep him busy in his £79,000-a-year job. He thinks he can run the railway as well, but there is also an election coming up.

What has been lacking is any action. So West Midlands Socialist Party has launched a campaign - 'Cancel the franchise, not our trains' - to offer a way to get involved in the debate over the future of rail and to offer a socialist alternative to the profits-first approach.

We call for public ownership and democratic workers' control. We say a new body should run the system - made up of one-third from rail workers and their unions, one-third from rail users, and one-third from

the local authorities.

We know that a change of control and leadership would be only a start. The problems of the rail industry include lack of capacity, outdated equipment such as semaphore signalling (first used in the 1840s), overcrowding, and a "shortage of train crew" caused by the profit-before-everything approach of the private operators.

We will be out campaigning on this issue. We call for the current franchise to end on 16 May, the next timetable change. We want democratic control and accountability from the people who work on, travel on and otherwise rely on a safe, reliable and affordable railway.

Pete McNally
Worcester Socialist Party



Will the North get investment and transport infrastructure?

Tories promise the earth, but fail to deliver

Boris Johnson has pledged to earn the trust of working-class voters who 'lent' him their vote in the general election. One of his catchphrases is to 'level up' the Midlands and the North with increased investment earmarked for infrastructure.

After over a decade of austerity, can the Tories now be trusted by former Labour voters? Any promises given on improvements should be put in context of years of Tory neglect on transport infrastructure, which have taken their toll in these regions.

In the north of England, the average speed of trains between main cities is just 46mph. It takes longer to travel coast to coast in the North, than it takes to travel by Eurostar from London to Paris.

Tory governments have a track record of promising the earth, then failing to deliver. Past pledges of their intention to improve rail, road and bus links consistently fail to materialise.

2017 figures highlight the extent of neglect. Transport spending in London was more than all the areas of the Northern Powerhouse and Midlands Engine combined. If the North had received the same amount for transport per person

as London, then £66 billion more would have flowed our way over the past decade.

Where will the money for increases in investment come from? The HS2 high-speed rail project could cost £106 billion - more than double the estimate from five years ago.

It will take years to complete and inevitably go over budget again. It will be the working class which pays the human cost - doing exhausting work on the lowest wages and conditions the Tories and their friends in big business can get away with.

The only way to really level up the conditions of working-class people is through the fight for socialism.

The majority of those who lent their votes to Johnson can be won over by a programme which includes fighting for the nationalisation of the railways, buses and transport infrastructure projects - all under democratic workers' control as part of a planned economy.

Elaine Brunskill
South Tyne and Wear
Socialist Party



Outrageous waiting times will put lives at risk

■ Protests and meetings to save Royal Glam A&E

Dave Reid
Socialist Party Wales

There has been a huge response to the announcement of the closure of the A&E at the Royal Glamorgan hospital. 200 people lobbied the Cwm Taf health board at short notice. And meetings have been held all across Rhondda Cynon Taff.

There's an angry mood of opposition. People living in the Rhondda valley especially, face long journeys to hospitals in Bridgend or Merthyr.

Most reserve their anger for the Welsh Labour government. Its plan, the South Wales Programme, was always to close Royal Glam's A&E. Most suspect that the department has been run down deliberately. The Welsh government has been carrying out NHS cuts on behalf of the Tory government in Westminster.

The Welsh government says that it doesn't matter that patients will have to travel long distances in an ambulance. But the ambulance service is struggling already, with five-hour waits common. And people visiting sick relatives will have to catch two or three buses each way, taking hours of travel time.

The health board claims that it has no choice but to close the A&E, because it cannot recruit consultants to staff the department. But its



medical director admits that the plan to close the A&E has unsurprisingly made it difficult to attract potential consultants!

The Welsh government must immediately step in with a plan to invest in training and recruitment of consultants across Wales, and with an emergency plan to save Royal

Glamorgan A&E.

At the Socialist Party campaign stall on this issue in Pontypridd, people were furious at the plans. 82 people bought a copy of the Socialist.

■ See 'Fight the closure of Royal Glamorgan A&E' at socialistparty.org.uk

NHS: Save stroke beds in Coventry and Warwickshire

Coventry and Warwickshire will lose 30 stroke beds when existing facilities in hospitals in Nuneaton and Warwick close. All future emergency care for stroke patients will be centralised in Coventry, putting pressure on already-stretched facilities.

Warwickshire patients previously would have gone to more local facilities, but will now be taken to Coventry. Additional ambulance travel times could put lives at risk

Under the plans, 70% of stroke patients who have received emergency treatment will then be discharged to at-home care, at a time when community health and social services are already overstretched and underfunded.

The remaining 30% will be relocated to Nuneaton and Leamington, increasing the cost and difficulties of travel and inevitably reducing visits from some families, just at the time when patients need most support.

NHS managers claim the re-designed service will provide better care, but admit there are "insufficient specialist stroke consultants to operate an improved and effective service within the current configuration." They are essentially making a virtue out of a necessity, reducing emergency treatment locations to match staff shortages.

It's underfunding that is forcing the redesign of services, taking them further away from local

communities. And underfunding should be tackled not local people disadvantaged.

Activists from Coventry and Rugby Keep Our NHS Public, including Socialist Party members, have collected nearly 500 signatures opposing the plan to cut stroke beds

Health campaigners and trade unionists should demand a national demonstration to unite the dozens of similar campaigns around the country, with national trade union action to force the end of these Tory 'rationalisations', and win proper national funding for the NHS.

Dave Nellist
Coventry Socialist Party

Socialist Party statement

Boris Johnson has claimed austerity is over, but he lies as he speaks. The Tories have already indicated they will demand 5% cuts across government departments.

More Tory plans to cut local government funding will mean further devastation piled on what millions have already been suffered. We have no choice but to carry on the fight against austerity.

In fact, the level of poverty is indicated by the fact that mortality rates in parts of Britain, such as Blackpool, Manchester and Hull, are higher than in parts of Turkey, Slovenia and Romania.

Since 2010 almost 800 libraries have closed; there's been a 73% cut in spending on youth services; social care is a social crisis; councils have cut over 800,000 jobs; almost 200,000 council homes have been lost. There's no future for young people in particular.

Anti-cuts mood is growing

But the mood to fight the cuts is growing. Look at the recent decision by the million-strong Unite union. Unite's London and Eastern region voted to back anti-cuts Enfield Labour councillor Tolga Aramaz and call on other councillors to make the same stand.

Even Liverpool mayor Joe Anderson appears to be finally coming round to the position of refusing to carry on carrying out Tory cuts!

Is he finally learning the lessons of the heroic Liverpool council in the 1980s? It refused to make cuts and mobilised a mass movement in the city - including city-wide general strikes and mass demos of 50,000.

It won £60 million back off the Thatcher government, built 5,000 homes, opened six nurseries, and created 2,000 jobs.

When Liverpool council started out in its battle, it linked up with councils across the country.

If Joe is prepared to fight to defend the living conditions of working people now - and not postpone the battle - then we will fight with him.

We are prepared to give the maxi-



mum support to councils and anyone who is prepared to stand up and defy Johnson and the Tories.

The Labour leadership candidates are keen to show they're on the side of the working class. We call on the Labour leadership and deputy leadership candidates to demand that Labour councils take a stand, refuse

to make cuts and fight for the money the Tories have stolen from our jobs and services.

We're calling for the trade unions and communities to rise up against Tory austerity. We call on trade unions to commit to fight the Tory plans to attack the right to strike and to back workers to fight every cut.

We demand councils take the 'Liverpool road' - using their existing powers to fight austerity - no-cuts budgets and mobilising a fight in the workplaces, colleges, communities, tenants' and residents' associations, and everywhere austerity's cold cruelty touches our lives.

If they don't do that, they will face

a challenge by those who will, and the Socialist Party will be there in the front line.

On budget day, Johnson's lie that he has working-class interests at heart will be exposed.

■ **Budget day protest - 11 March, 1pm, Parliament Square**

■ London - Sadiq Khan is the mayor for property developers and tech giants

London mayor Sadiq Khan has once more revealed that despite being the son of a bus driver, he's firmly a friend of the multinationals and corporate companies based in the city.

In an interview in London newspaper City AM on 31 January, he said that he doesn't support the noises made by "Saj" - Sajid Javid, Tory chancellor - regarding taxing global tech firms like Google and Facebook.

Not content to be the 'property developers man,' he is also the 'global-tech-giant tax advisers man.'

His remarks came the same week he stated that every council tax bill in London should go up by £40 a month in 2021 to pay for Tory police cuts.

There is no mention of mobilising the London working class to demand that if austerity is over - as the Tories have stated - we shouldn't have to pay one penny more. Instead, Khan pushes further misery onto struggling workers.

The Socialist Party stands for taxing the tech companies to make them pay their fair share, but we do not believe that regions or countries should be held to ransom by the threat of multinationals leaving. Socialism would take giant companies

into democratic public ownership, run by working-class people in the interests of the many, not the few at the top.

The Socialist Party is campaigning to raise money to potentially put forward anti-austerity socialist candidates in the Greater London Assembly and mayoral elections in May.

If you are angered by Khan's remarks, donate to our campaign to get socialists into city hall. London needs to work for those that make London work.

Nancy Taaffe
Waltham Forest Socialist Party

■ See londonsocialistparty.org.uk or read 'We need socialists in London's City Hall' at socialistparty.org.uk

■ Reading Labour council: Stop privatising our leisure services

If the right-wing Labour council succeeds, a private company will be given a 25-year contract to design, build, operate and maintain Reading's sports centres.

The contractor, Greenwich Leisure Limited (GLL), is known for bad pay and terms and conditions (page 7 for Bromley workers' victory against GLL).

It is a disgrace that a Labour council is carrying out this act of

privatisation.

A wide range of local community and political groups - including the Socialist Party and Reading Trade Union Council - lobbied the council in opposition to the plans.

To defeat these proposals, we need a mobilisation of all the trade unionists working for the council, along with the Trade Union Council, local union branches, Labour Party members and community activists.

John Gillman and Terry Pearce
Reading Socialist Party

■ **No privatisation of council services**
■ **No more cuts**
■ **Reading Labour council stop carrying out Tory policies**

The rich fund the Tories and Blairites, so help fund the working-class fightback

Ian Pattison

Socialist Party membership subs organiser

The Socialist Party needs you to increase your subs.

The rich back their own parties. A donors' dining club has given the Tories £130 million since they were elected in 2010 to implement brutal austerity. Similarly, big business backed Labour under Tony Blair - donating over £9 million in 2003 alone - when they thought the Blairites best served their interests.

The Socialist Party has no rich backers. We rely solely on the support from working-class people - through the subs of our members and from donations. And the last quarter of 2019 was a record for donations.

We raised over £50,000 in fighting fund between October and December, the highest in a three-month period since the millennium. That's on top of regular donations, sales of the Socialist and pledges to our building fund - which helped us secure our own premises in 2019.

Now we're asking all our members to increase their regular membership subs. Please think about increasing yours. Can you increase your monthly subs by £30, £40, £50 or more, or if not by a smaller amount? Every extra pound

is vitally important.

Ordinary people are still being hit hard by austerity. And now Tory chancellor Sajid Javid is proposing more - 5% cuts, weeks after saying austerity is over.

We say stand firm for socialist policies against the Tories. To Labour councils we say don't carry out Tory cuts - stand firm like Liverpool council did in the 1980s, with the slogan of "better to break the law than break the poor". We want our fighting socialist message to be part of every campaign against these terrible cuts.

But we need resources to do so. We need to maintain our premises, to continue the production of our weekly colour 16-page Socialist paper and monthly magazine Socialism Today; for our podcast - Socialism - and our website. For leaflets, petitions, posters, banners and flags.

Capitalism worldwide is in crisis - dozens of countries have been rocked by protests against capitalist austerity and oppression. A part of your subs also goes to the Committee for a Workers' International - CWI, the socialist international organisation the Socialist Party is a part of - to fund the fight for a socialist world.

If you like what we say, join us. But you don't have to be a member to start making a regular donation.

Defend and fight for warm, safe housing for Samira and everyone

North London Socialist Party

Samira and her family have suffered damp and mouldy housing for ten years.

The Socialist Party took part in a protest - organised by the London

Renters Union, at One Housing offices - to defend and fight for warm, safe housing for her.

One Housing agreed to meet representatives and Samira has been offered a visit from a senior surveyor and possible rehousing. She thanked everyone for solidarity.

Alternative Burns Night success

Brent Kennedy

Carlisle Socialist Party

Some came by word of mouth. Others saw our posters, read the article in the local paper or heard the interview on BBC Radio Cumbria.

It was another successful and enjoyable Alternative Burns Night in Carlisle. This year was the best yet.

Over 60 people tucked into haggis, neeps and tatties - including a group of factory workers from over the border, who again honoured us Sassenachs by choosing this event for their work's outing. They got £100 off their boss to go.

At the end, many went home with a copy of the Socialist or Socialism

Today to read more about the poet fighter for social justice.

As far back as 1859, "in Carlisle a call was made for an entertainment to which Burns himself could have come when at his poorest estate and a meeting was got up and conducted by working men."

Just add the word 'women' and we're proud to have revived that tradition.

■ Read 'Robert Burns: of the people, for the people' at socialistparty.org.uk

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Socialist sellers



Leeds - A day in the life of a seller of the Socialist

I sold 13 copies of the Socialist across three campaign activities on 29 January.

This shows how important it is for Socialist sellers to always carry copies of the latest paper with them. That way you can keep an eye open for more opportunities to spread our ideas.

In the morning, we sold the Socialist outside the main council office. We started selling the Socialist there when the paper marked issue 1000 in 2018.

Sales go up and down depending on the mood and what's on the front page, but also whether our regular buyers are working from home or on annual leave. Consistently selling here has helped the Socialist Party stay in contact with an important workforce in the city as well as union activists.

That evening we also heard about a rally for Rebecca Long-Bailey's Labour leadership campaign. Outside the venue we sold papers to those attending the rally.

Another person, who was just passing, bought a paper. They'd already read one of our articles online. See 'Protesting is not terrorism' at socialistparty.org.uk.

Later at the trade union council, where Socialist Party members play a leading role, we sold a further five copies, including one to a shop steward we hadn't earlier met in the day at the council office.

Four of these copies were also sold at solidarity price. If you buy the Socialist for £2 or more, you can help the Socialist Party to raise fighting fund to support our campaign activities.

Iain Dalton

Canterbury: It's an NHS, pay and housing crisis for the working class

From across Kent, Socialist Party members were out in Canterbury. We met more angry people who see nothing will improve with the Tories. They were keen to give us their support.

The NHS crisis means it's difficult to see a GP. The housing crisis, high rents and low pay make paying the bills hard. A young family with three children told us they need three jobs to survive.

We sold eleven Socialist papers. After the stall, we had a good discussion and made plans for more campaigning, meetings and preparation for our national congress.

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Waltham Forest, London: Our stall was so busy, you couldn't see us!

So many people at our Saturday campaign stall in Walthamstow you couldn't see it! We called for council housing and rent control.

It's such a massive issue. Even well-paid professionals are sofa surfing and in housing need.

34 people bought the Socialist and we raised £37 on top for the fighting fund.

Nancy Taaffe and Theo Sharieff



Walthamstow, east London
 photos Socialist Party



Bradford



Huddersfield

Stevenage: Call the doctor, get the sack

While campaigning to save the NHS in Stevenage, one worker explained how he had phoned his local surgery to make an appointment and was told he was 68th in line! He said he got to 32nd and gave up because his boss would have sacked him.

We sold 23 Socialist papers and raised over £25 fighting fund.

Mark Pickersgill

Hackney, London: People agree: It's a weak government that can be beaten by strikes

Most people in Hackney agreed that this isn't a strong government. When I mentioned about strike action to defend the NHS, everyone agreed.

Across two stalls we sold 19 Socialist papers and raised £24. A retired bus driver came back to buy the paper for the second week in a row.

Chris Newby



Southampton



Wolverhampton



The Socialist Inbox

Do you have something to say?

Send your news, views and criticism in not more than 150 words to Socialist Postbox, PO Box 1398, Enfield EN1 9GT or phone 020 8988 8795, email: editors@socialistparty.org.uk

Fat cats on the line

Sometimes the combination of greed and incompetence makes capitalism look bad. Northern Rail - branded the worst rail operator in the country (that will be a surprise to those who use Southern Rail!) paid out £83 million in shareholder dividends between 2013-14 and 2017-2018.

If your train is late there's probably a fat cat on the line. It's time they were kicked out of public transport as even the mild-mannered TUC has observed.

Transport minister Grant Shapps has indicated that Northern will be taken into public ownership.

Grant Shapps is an ideological Conservative, sworn to oppose nationalisation. As a Tory he loves three-word slogans. How about "I was wrong"?

Derek McMillan
East Grinstead



Services please

For ten years I've been campaigning for socialism in Southampton. And for eight or nine of those years we've said to the right-wing Labour council "use the reserves and borrowing facilities to halt the cuts. Use this stop-gap to launch a campaign to fight to get the money back from the government."

And now, having been obliterated by Tory cuts and doing nothing, that same Labour council is borrowing £200 million - but to speculate on the property market!

How about some council houses? Reinstating youth services? Restoring council-run elderly care?...

Josh Asker
Southampton

Boris out!

The article in the Socialist - 'Why Johnson's juggernaut is set to jackknife', by Robin Clapp - is the best news this year, and given the support from the Institute of Fiscal Studies, it is most likely

to come true.

Clearly those who voted Boris into power, through force of circumstances, need to have the same Boris address them.

If all that Robin writes about comes to pass, there can only be one outcome - a mass move to socialist values.

I say to Boris, bring it on! - and work for your own eviction from power.

Adrian B Rimington
Chesterfield

A day in the life

In the last two weeks I have had to help two friends facing disciplinarys at work on spurious grounds. One got off with a warning, the other was incredulously let go.

Last night I had to move a homeless person's tent out of my workplace's sheltered fire exit or risk serious disciplinary action for not securing my store.

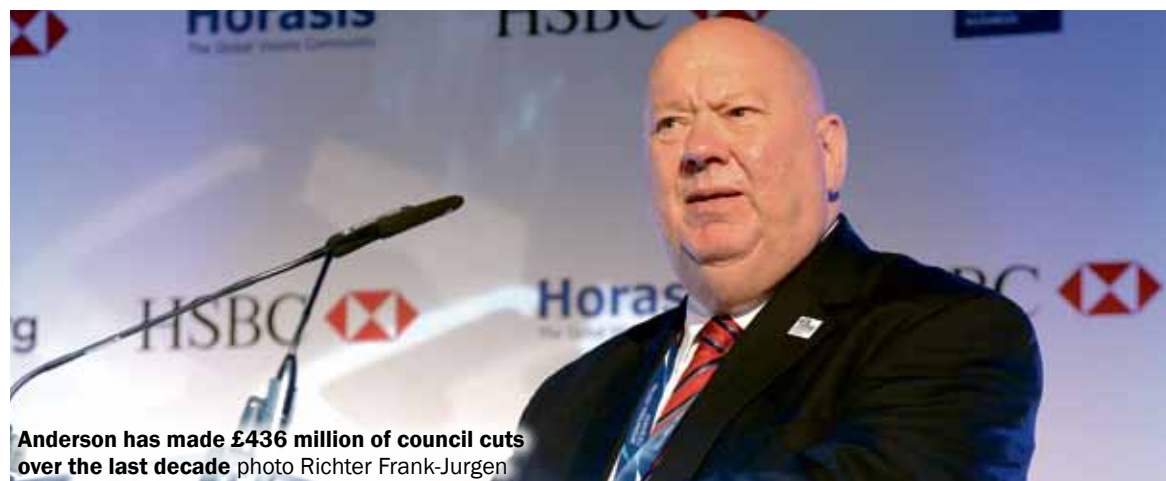
Job uncertainty has been driven home in the last month as more shops announce cuts in working hours, closures and redundancies.

Meanwhile, the Tories have already scrapped their supposed 'end of austerity'; Trump gets away with outright corruption and assassination; Australia smoulders; France and Iran erupt in mass movements, and China battles a new viral outbreak.

Is there anyone, outside of the arms trade, a bank or corporate boardroom, who still believes in capitalism?

A shopworker
Plymouth

Liverpool council "No more cuts" - Is Joe Anderson serious?



Anderson has made £436 million of council cuts over the last decade photo Richter Frank-Jurgen

Roger Bannister
Liverpool and District Socialist Party

Joe Anderson, Liverpool's elected mayor, has caused a publicity storm in the city by publicly announcing that he will refuse to make any more cuts at the behest of the Tory government.

Over the past decade Anderson has been happy enough to pass on cuts totalling £436 million, devastating services in the city, and plans another £30 million cuts in the budget currently being prepared for 2020-21.

However, having won the general election with an overall majority, the Tories have rejigged the funding formula for local government, ironically termed the "Fair Funding Review". It's directed at forcing further cuts on hard-hit urban areas, many of which were part of the 'Brexit revolt' during the general election, returning Tory MPs for the first time. It appears that a further £27 million will be cut from Liverpool, and this has enraged Anderson.

However, examining his

statements carefully, there is a wide gap between the headlines and the small print. In fact, on 31 January, Anderson was asked directly by Roger Phillips, the host of BBC Radio Merseyside's weekday phone-in programme: "You are not going to be doing a Derek Hatton then?" [Derek was deputy leader of Liverpool's socialist council in the mid-1980s] Anderson replied: "No, we are not going to be setting an illegal budget, I promise you."

Anderson went on to say that the government would have to send people up to make the cuts themselves!

In other words, what Anderson is really doing is little more than empty sabre rattling, deliberately grabbing headlines in advance of the mayoral election in May, with no realistic intention of stopping the cuts.

This charade illustrates the need for a proper challenge to the Tory attacks on Liverpool. The city needs a Mayor who is prepared to use council reserves to balance a budget, working alongside the local authority trade unions, the Merseyside trade unions generally,

and working-class people on the city's housing estates, organising demonstrations, strikes and political pressure to force the necessary funding out of the Tory government.

■ **Taking the real 'Liverpool road' is spelt out in Peter Taaffe's and the late Tony Mulhearn's classic book 'Liverpool - A city that dared to fight', chronicling the successful Militant-led struggle against Thatcher's cuts in the 1980s.**



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Cuts and community wellbeing

Ian Hunter
Derby Socialist Party

Over the past decade the massive austerity cuts to local government spending have savaged the provision of local services and employment. Such cuts ruin people's lives and their well-being and contribute to the decline of communities.

Statutory services that councils are obliged to provide have been pared to the bone, while non-statutory provision, which councils are not therefore obliged to fund, has been decimated.

One area of non-statutory provision is leisure facilities. A recent report from the Local Government Association (LGA) stated that "nearly

two-thirds of leisure centres are in need of urgent investment" and are "...in desperate need of being updated and refurbished."

The report goes on to claim that a quarter of all sports halls and swimming pools have not been refurbished in over 20 years. In the past decade leisure infrastructure has seen a reduction in central government funding by one-third.

The LGA has called on the government for £500 million to enable councils to re-design, upgrade and renovate facilities to the required standard to help support healthy and active communities and transform the nation's health.

In 2022 the Commonwealth games take place in Birmingham.

To help prepare for the post-games 'legacy', vital funds need to be provided now. Getting communities more active and using leisure facilities will help tackle child obesity, loneliness, and mental health issues.

The NHS spends hundreds of millions of pounds annually treating preventative diseases and illnesses. Much of this could be avoided with wider provision and access, at affordable cost, to better and well-staffed leisure facilities.

Such investment would pay for itself by offsetting savings for the NHS from the increased benefits of improved health and well-being of citizens and communities, and, it can also contribute to meeting climate targets.

SYRIA: ASSAD REGIME CONSOLIDATES POWER AFTER BRUTAL COUNTERREVOLUTION



Many of Syria's towns and cities have been bombed into rubble during the civil war

■ Future movement requires building an independent, united working-class movement, committed to socialist transformation of society, in order to succeed

Ross Saunders
Socialist Party national committee

Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad has succeeded, for now, in defeating the revolutionary uprising and subsequent armed rebellion that has swept over the country since the 'Arab Spring' of 2011.

Rebels and civilians are being pulverised in the northern Idlib province, which borders Turkey and the Kurdish north-east, by Assad's forces, massively bolstered by Russia and Iran. This is repeating the pattern in the rest of the country, including Syria's main cities, where the Assad regime has crushed the uprising at a terrible cost in human life.

The population has fallen by almost a quarter, with 570,000 dead and 7.6 million in refugee camps, mainly in Turkey and Lebanon. Another quarter have been internally displaced, and much of the country's basic infrastructure has been devastated. More will die as a result of poverty and disease in the next few years.

But the regime is far from secure. Assad has demonstrated the weak base of support for his regime, which lost control of over two-thirds of the country at the height of the uprising, and the Ba'athist dictatorship he led hung by a thread.

All of the factors which drove mass protest are still present in Syria, and now on an even greater scale. The movement which erupted in 2011 was fuelled by anger at the regime's repression under the so-called 'Emergency Law' - kept in place for 43 years - and the terrible poverty and inequality over which Assad presides.

Unemployment in 2011 was at 20% for the general population and higher for the youth. At one time, a majority of Syrians worked in the public sector, but privatisation cut jobs and pushed down wages at the same time as subsidies for basic goods were reduced, leading to huge price rises in some cases: in December 2008, for example, the price of diesel increased by 375% overnight!

No wonder Syrians rose up as a wave of protest swept north Africa and the Middle East in 2011. The first protests were small, and Assad

boasted that Syria was "immune" to the Arab Spring. But the regime's strategy of arresting en masse known activists could not hold back the tide forever and, in early March 2011, when teenage protesters were arrested and tortured in the southern city of Dara'a, the streets erupted as people lost their fear of the regime.

By the end of March, thousands were marching in most of Syria's cities, including Damascus and Aleppo.

Regime response

The regime responded brutally. But despite the state terrorism, the Local Coordination Committee, the protest-organising network that sprang up was still, in August, opposing calls for protestors to arm themselves for purposes of defence.

Alongside the violence, the regime offered concessions to try and buy off the movement with a few crumbs, but nothing could stem the flood.

Syria is a complex mix of different ethnic and religious communities. At the outset, demonstrators chanted "One Syria!" in opposition to attempts by the regime to divide

the movement along sectarian lines. There was anger throughout the Syrian working class and the rest of the poor masses, including in the minority Druze, Shia and Christian communities, and in the Alawite community elevated by Assad's regime and French imperialism before it.

The rage at the corruption and exploitation by the elite could have been harnessed to win over every section of the working class in Syria to a united movement. Graffiti denouncing Rami Makhlouf, a cousin of Assad who owns telecoms company SyriaTel, appeared all over the country. Neighbouring Lebanon, with similar ethnic and religious divides, saw a united movement last year that spanned all communities.

The civil war in Syria showed the need for a programme to unite in action workers and poor from all communities. Without this Assad, and also jihadists, were able to divide and rule.

Rival groups claimed the political leadership of the movement and many were in hock to Western imperialism. One, the Syrian National Committee, antagonised Kurds in

Syria through its links to the Turkish state where Kurds are being brutally repressed. These puppet 'governments-in-waiting' confined themselves to demanding a liberal form of capitalism that left unanswered the demands of Syrian workers, and the working class failed to win the leadership of the movement.

The calls for 'strikes' were answered mainly by shopkeepers, not by workers, including in the powerful oil industry. The leaders of Syria's yellow trade unions denounced the protests as the result of "foreign influence" and the Syrian Communist Party remained part of Assad's cabinet.

Minority communities hesitated to join the revolt, especially after the Free Syria Army collapsed and, from 2013, militias based more exclusively on single communities became dominant. Assad managed to hang onto key urban centres like Damascus where minorities are more concentrated, playing on fear that his downfall would mean repression by the Sunni Arab majority.

His job was made easy as Islamists in the al-Nusra front - an affiliate of al-Qa'ida - and Islamic State came



Assad's survival has depended on Putin's military support as well as that of Iran photo kremlin.ru/CC



2019 saw powerful mass movements in Algeria, Sudan, Iraq, Lebanon and Egypt - which will at a certain stage find an echo in Syria, Turkey and elsewhere in the region

to dominate much of the country.

Kurds, who are the majority in the north of Syria, were alienated from the movement in the rest of the country by the links between rebels and the Turkish state. Kurds took the opportunity though, as Assad was tied down in the south and east of the country, to set up their own de-facto autonomous federal state.

Many sought to run it on democratic lines but accepting support from US imperialism, which began its bombing campaign in September of 2014 against Isis.

Role of imperialism

The Committee for a Workers' International (CWI, see below right) warned at the time that imperialism could not be trusted to defend ordinary people of any community in the region.

Trump proved us right in spectacular fashion when, once Isis was territorially defeated, he abruptly announced the USA was withdrawing from Syria, giving the green light to Turkey to invade.

Kurds are now caught between Turkish Prime Minister Recep Erdogan, whose army has reportedly captured 80 Kurdish villages within Syria, and Assad who has forced his way back into a "buffer zone" of territory within the Kurdish area, and plans to go further once Idlib is pacified.

Erdogan is replacing the 400,000 Kurds forced to flee their homes with Sunni Arab refugees in order to try and frustrate Kurdish aspirations for their own state.

Assad's counterrevolution has largely been possible because of

his wholesale reliance on Iranian-backed militias, including the Lebanese Hizbollah movement, and on Russian air power.

The quid pro quo of this arrangement has been to massively expand Iran and Russia's geopolitical influence in the region. It was this expansion that prompted the Trump administration to carry out the recent assassination of the head of Iran's Quds special forces, general Qassem Sulameini.

Revolution has been defeated in Syria, but there is no going back to 2011 for Assad or anyone in the region. 2019 saw powerful mass movements in Algeria, Sudan, Iraq, Lebanon and Egypt - which will at a certain stage find an echo in Syria, Turkey and other countries in the region. Assad, and the rotten capitalist system he defends, should beware.

- Our programme:
- **Working class solidarity and mass protests around the world to oppose the Turkish army's bloody invasion of Syria.**
 - **Organise workers' boycotts and strikes against the weapons trade to Turkey.**
 - **Build multi-ethnic defence militias, democratically run, to resist Turkish army attacks.**
 - **No trust in regional and imperialist powers, who have only ever betrayed the masses in the region.**
 - **Build powerful independent workers' organisations, including trade unions and mass workers' parties, on a socialist programme, in Syria, Turkey and across the region**
 - **Link the Kurds' struggle with Turkish workers resisting Erdogan's anti-working class policies and Syrians opposed to Assad.**
 - **Full cultural and national rights for Kurds, including the right to self-determination.**
 - **Overthrow capitalism! For a socialist federation of the Middle East and Turkey, on a voluntary and equal basis, to bring lasting peace and a transformation of living standards. Realising such an aspiration requires constructing a revolutionary socialist party rooted in a united working class.**

Israel/Palestine

Trump 'peace plan' promises further conflict

Dave Reid
Socialist Party national committee

The recent 'deal' announced by US President Donald Trump and enthusiastically endorsed by Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was billed as a 'Middle East peace plan'. But as the Economist journal wrote: "As a blueprint for a two-state solution it was dead on arrival".

It entrenches the national oppression of the Palestinians and formalises the end of the myth that a genuine Palestinian state is possible under capitalism. It dashes the hopes of Arab and Jewish working people in the region that a peaceful solution is possible.

Under the 'plan' the US will recognise Israeli sovereignty over large areas of the West Bank, including illegal Jewish settlements and much of the fertile Jordan valley. A Palestinian quasi-'state' would extend over a patchwork of tiny Palestinian territories with its capital in a suburb east of Jerusalem cut off from the city by an Israeli wall, swallowed up by a greater Israel.

It would be completely encircled, would have no army or air force, and Israel would continue to control its skies, borders and seas. Israeli forces would have the right to invade Palestine at any time. The US and Israel could veto Palestinian moves for independence.

The 1993 Oslo agreement held out the hope to Palestinians that theoretically a Palestinian state could be formed as part of a 'two-state' solution.

The Socialist Party and the CWI warned that in practice the majority of the Israeli ruling class would not allow a Palestinian state to be formed, out of fears that it would be a destabilising factor which would threaten Israel itself.

The Palestinian Authority, split between the West Bank and Gaza, was never allowed to develop towards a state. A corrupt Fatah government, now led by Mohammed Abbas, has control



Trump and Netanyahu continue to strangle the prospect of a genuine Palestinian state

of the West Bank and in Gaza the Islamist party Hamas gained mass support and took over after winning the 2006 election in the area. In both territories dissident groups are repressed.

Successive right-wing Israeli governments have undermined and attacked the Palestinian areas (in Gaza, in 2009, killing over 1,000 civilians) and allowed/assisted the seizure of large parts of land in the West Bank and Jerusalem by Israeli settlers and developers. Rocket attacks sanctioned by Hamas have been launched from Gaza into Israeli towns.

Burying a Palestine state

The suffocation of the Palestinian Authority had undermined any hopes that Palestinian people have of a new Palestinian state. The Trump plan buries the idea completely.

Apart from the US administration, only the Netanyahu government was involved in the drawing up of this 'peace plan'. And if the Palestinian Authority does not sign up to the deal in the next four years then Israel could annex other areas too, unless Israeli settlers seize it first.

Clearly this is not a serious peace plan. It has more to do with the personal interests of the two parties to the agreement: Trump and Netanyahu.

As the 'peace plan' was announced both men were facing trials - Trump being tried in the US senate, and Netanyahu facing criminal charges for corruption.

Trump wants to solidify his right-wing base before this year's presidential election and also assist Netanyahu to hang on to power in Israel's general election on 2 March.

However, the 'peace plan'

bombed among Netanyahu's hard-line Likud and settlers' constituency, who fear any mention of a 'Palestinian state' and instead want full annexation. At the same time, the US administration put pressure on Netanyahu to avoid such a provocative move as it could ignite protests throughout the Middle East. Consequently, Netanyahu had to cancel a cabinet meeting which was meant to endorse the 'peace plan' before the forthcoming general election.

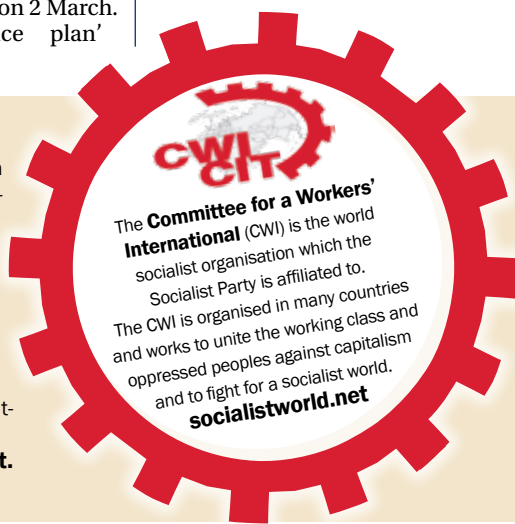
Moreover, Netanyahu's plan does not offer any prospect of peace for the Israeli working class - it promises only more conflict and war as the Palestinian people are denied their national aspirations. Jordan could be drawn into a wider conflict.

And a continuation of the corrupt Netanyahu regime would promise even greater poverty for the Israeli working class in one of the most unequal societies in the OECD.

For the Palestinian masses the plan promises more agony without end. The pro-capitalist authoritarian Fatah and Hamas regimes in the West Bank and the Gaza are incapable of organising a successful struggle for national and social rights.

The building of a democratically organised mass struggle against the Israeli occupation, that also sweeps aside the corrupt Palestinian leaders, is needed for the Palestinian working people to achieve liberation.

The movement needs to adopt a socialist programme that can guarantee the rights of both the Palestinian and Jewish people, overcome the powerful Israeli capitalist state and promise an end to poverty, insecurity, exploitation and war for all, as the only means of securing a decent future.



Irish general election

Low wages, persistent inequality, a lack of affordable housing, and a crisis in the health service, set the backdrop to Ireland's general election on 8 February.

While these issues are pressing down hard on working-class communities, the parties of the capitalist class - Fine Gael and Fianna Fail - have no solutions but instead continue to offer 'more of the same'.

Ireland's social and economic problems should be fertile soil for the left parties in the Dail (parliament) to grow, but opinion polls are instead indicating growing support for nationalist party Sinn Fein - which is likely to use a bigger bloc of TDs (MPs) to enter into coalition with right-wing parties, thereby colluding with more cuts.

■ **An election report will be in the next issue of the Socialist. For background information see socialistworld.net**

NATIONALISE THE RAILWAYS

For an integrated public transport system

Privatisation doesn't work! That's the real message from the Tories' decision to take Britain's worst train operator, Northern Rail, back into public ownership. South Western could be

next, and the list is getting longer all the time. This is on top of the failures of the East Coast Main Line and ScotRail, and the 'bailout' of Flybe.

The whole system is a total mess. Even Keith Williams, head of an 'independent'

review into the rail franchise system, has said we need "revolution not evolution".

We agree. But unlike Mr Williams, former chief executive of British Airways, we won't be satisfied with a state 'fat controller' regulating more

private franchises.

We want all the privateers out of the railways - and out of all of our public services.

We want an integrated and affordable transport system, fully funded and publicly owned, democratically

controlled by transport workers and transport users - a system which puts the needs of working-class people and the environment before the profits of the super-rich.

■ See also pages 8,9 and 10

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photo Paul Mattsson