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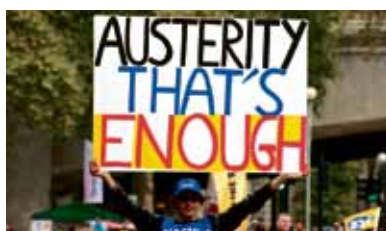
the Socialist

Formerly **Militant**



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New decade,
new challenge**

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NHS: FIGHT FOR FULL FUNDING!

■ End the crisis in A&E

Dave Reid
Socialist Party Wales

The working class of Rhondda Cynon Taff will be on the march on Saturday 15 February to stop the closure or partial closure of their A&E department in Royal Glamorgan Hospital. Hundreds have attended meetings and lobbies across the area.

Accident and emergency departments are in crisis across the UK. Understaffed and underfunded, they are putting patients' lives at risk. Doctors and nurses are being faced with terrible choices of who to treat first and who to leave on the trolley, sometimes with fatal consequences.

The Welsh Labour government's solution to this A&E crisis? Close the A&E department at Royal Glamorgan Hospital - forcing emergency patients to travel long distances to other hospitals which are already overwhelmed by the pressures they are under.



photo Dave reid

Labour first minister Mark Drakeford has criticised local MPs and Welsh assembly members who, responding to an upsurge of anger, have questioned this decision. He claims that it is clinicians in Cwm

Taf Morgannwg Health Board, not politicians, who are closing the A&E.

But it is clear to everyone that it is the Welsh government that decided to close the Royal Glamorgan A&E in the 'South Wales Programme'

proposed by Drakeford himself in 2014. He is carrying out the policies of the Tory government in Westminster in cutting NHS services, under the guise of "clinical safety".

...continued on page 10

University strikers walk out for better pay and pensions

Bea Gardner
UCU Southampton 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.

Before Christmas, 60 institutions, including approximately 42,000 members, took eight consecutive days of strike action, and have been participating in action short of strike since then over pensions. They will now be joined by more universities and workers taking strike action over pay and conditions.

So far, employers have refused to budge from their current below-inflation pay offer of 1.6%. Management claims it is unaffordable to increase pay, but university income, surpluses and reserves have all increased. A victory on pay is the most concrete way of ensuring university management concedes to improving staff conditions and our share of the income.

Like the 2018 strike, members must be willing to reject an inadequate offer. In 2018 the potential sell-out of the pension dispute was halted by members on the ground. One way of preparing members for this is by electing local strike committees to lead the next round of action.

This new round of strike action is a fantastic starting point for a fightback across both further and higher education destroyed by decades of marketisation and austerity.

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Editor of the Socialist

Sarah Sachs-Eldridge

Editorial staff

Dave Carr Scott Jones

James Ivens Ian Pattison

Circulation

Chris Newby

Editor of socialistparty.org.uk

Judy Beishon

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

Karl Marx

Labour leadership contest

HOW TO RESIST TORY ATTACKS ON LOCAL COMMUNITIES

Alistair Tice

Socialist Party national committee

One of the reasons why Labour lost seats in the North and Midlands in the general election was because Labour councils have carried out ten years of Tory government cuts. People's experience of Labour council cuts gave them no confidence that a Labour government would actually carry out its anti-austerity manifesto.

Now those same Labour council leaders are lining up to blame Jeremy Corbyn and the manifesto for the election defeat (see opposite page). Julie Dore, Sheffield council leader, who has presided over £480 million cuts, said "I do not want a Corbyn-continuity candidate". 30 out of 33 council leaders have said that the party would be "finished" in their areas if Rebecca Long-Bailey became leader.

So it's welcome that Long-Bailey, writing for Labour List, stated "As Labour leader, I will work with Labour councillors to fight the Tories every step of the way" and "hold the government to account and resist their attacks on our communities." But, unfortunately, she doesn't say how that can be done.

She says "I want to use community organising and campaigning in partnership with our local councillors." To achieve what? To "get more Labour councillors elected." But to do what? Get even more Labour councillors to just carry out the Tory cuts for the next five years?

Because for all Boris Johnson's populist rhetoric about 'levelling up' and the 'end of austerity' it's clear that the savage cuts in government funding of local authorities will continue. In fact, it's going to get worse.

The Tories' (un) Fair Funding review proposes that a further £320 million a year could be shifted out of councils in England's most deprived areas while Tory-controlled shire councils will gain £300 million. Former Labour constituencies that the Tories won in the so-called 'Red Wall' such as Workington, Sedgefield, Stoke, Redcar, West

97%

of councils plan to increase council tax in 2020/21

Bromwich, Bishop Auckland, Grimsby and Leigh all stand to lose millions on top of the funding already slashed by the Tories.

This 'unfairness' has even caused Liverpool Mayor Joe Anderson, who has presided over £436 million cuts over the last ten years, to finally say "enough is enough". He says, "I will refuse to make any more cuts to our budget" (apart from the £30 million already planned for the 2020-21 financial year!). But when questioned whether he would be "doing a Derek Hatton" meaning defying the government like the Militant-led Liverpool council did in the 1980s, he said he wouldn't.

But the 1980s Liverpool road, as advocated by the Socialist Party, of Labour councils setting no-cuts budgets while building a mass campaign among council workers and local communities to fight for 'fair funding', is the only way that the Tory cuts can be defeated.

The policies that the Socialist Party has campaigned for, using reserves and borrowing powers to legally 'balance' a no-cuts budget, are now being used by Labour councils - not to fight the cuts and demand more money from the Tory government but to balance budgets that actually carry out cuts!

In this year's annual State of Local Government Finance report, 57% of council leaders said they will be using reserves, 75% will be increasing their borrowing.

If Rebecca Long-Bailey is serious about leading councils' resistance to Tory cuts, she must herald the achievements of the 1983-87 Liverpool council - 2,000 new jobs, 5,000 new council houses, six new nurseries, five new sports centres and three new parks, to name just some of them.

She must instruct Labour councils to adopt a fighting strategy of building mass support for a needs-based budget and demanding the government pays back the millions it has robbed from local councils - the strategy that won those gains in Liverpool

Otherwise, all her talk will be just that, while Blairite council leaders continue to carry out the Tories' cuts.

Join our Budget Day Protest

11 March, 1pm
Parliament Square, London

See socialistparty.org.uk for more

photo Scott Jones



photo Paul Mattsson



Cuts councillors are the real problem

Elaine Brunskill

Secretary Socialist Party northern region

The attention-seeking, right-wing Labour leader of Newcastle City Council, Nick Forbes, described by the Guardian as "the leader of Labour's 6,600-strong army of councillors", has attacked Corbyn for being out of touch with Labour voters and disregarding local councillors' experiences.

So, what is this council army leader doing to defend working-class people against the next round of Tory cuts? Is Forbes going to lead a fightback against this onslaught? Unfortunately, the answer is a resounding 'no'!

Instead, Forbes is at the cutting edge of yet more vicious austerity - prepared to wield the Tory axe. In Newcastle, council tax charges are set to increase, alongside a further £20 million of cuts - part of a three-year package which will decimate services by a total of £60 million.

This will include even more

attacks on services for the disabled, additional cuts in library and museum services, alongside further job losses.

Forbes also displayed his anti-working class agenda by attacking drivers on Tyne & Wear Metro when they took strike action in December to increase their pay and defend their working conditions

From the outset, Nick Forbes and his ilk were a thorn in the side of Corbyn, determined to scupper any hint of a socialist programme.

Of course, Forbes omits to mention that in Newcastle back in 2004 (while Blair was still PM), the Labour Party lost control of the city council after 30 years in power. Even at that stage, before the economic crash of 2008, there was anger brewing against cuts being made by Labour councils.

If there is a move away from Corbynism, towards the politics put forward by the likes of Nick Forbes and his army of service-cutting Labour councillors, then more and more workers will be asking - what is the point of the Labour Party?

Council houses - not private property developers

■ Socialists protest Mayor Sadiq Khan's 'London Plan'

Paula Mitchell

London Socialist Party secretary

To the big number of Londoners forced to fight to save their homes and their local environment from private property developers, London mayor Sadiq Khan's 'London Plan' is notorious.

The plan claims it will solve London's immense housing crisis. But it hands public land to private property developers to build high-density blocks of expensive rabbit-hutch flats that no one in housing need can genuinely afford.

The poorest Londoners can even be assessed as too poor to qualify for 'social-rent' homes, so no one knows what they're supposed to do!

This May the London mayor and assembly are up for election. We're saying we need socialists in City Hall to fight for council housing and rent control.

So when the assembly debated Khan's plan, some campaigners from different housing campaigns

went to City Hall. Socialist Party members, hot from campaigns such as Save Our Square in Walthamstow, went too, to protest against Khan's new 'London Plan' and to call for council houses.

He wasn't pleased to see us. When we held up our posters and asked about council houses we were thrown out by security staff. When we asked them: "Are you paid enough to live somewhere decent in London? Don't you need council housing too?", they went silent.

Two weeks ago we gave out our leaflet at the mayor's Question Time in Haringey. Inside the meeting we were told he was quite angry about it - and he did us the favour of reading some of it out loud. So we were very pleased to have given it out again and for him to have faced us in the gallery!

On the way in someone told us: "You Socialist Party people are everywhere". You better believe it, Mr Khan!

■ Fighting the cuts - see also pages 7, 10 and 11

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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 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 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!

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Windrush deportations: end the hostile environment



photo Refugee Rights Campaign

Berkay Kartav
North London Socialist Party

Two years after the Windrush scandal, the Home Office has operated a charter flight to Jamaica forcibly deporting Jamaican-born British citizens. Tragically, this will tear many families apart.

Among those deported to Jamaica are people who moved to Britain as children. Even the courts balked at some of the deportations, granting around half a last-minute reprieve. As well as lying about ending austerity, Johnson's government is stepping up the hostile environment for black and Asian people and migrant workers. This is aimed at distracting from the real causes of the problems all workers face in austerity Britain - the capitalist exploiters and their cuts politicians.

The government is misleadingly portraying these people as 'foreign criminals' in an attempt to justify their outrageous act. In fact, they were brought up here.

The Tories are also hiding the fact that most of these crimes were committed long ago, when they were

young adults, for which they have already spent time in prison, and in many cases reformed. In fact, by deporting them, the Tories are punishing them twice for the same crime.

Rashawn Davis, who was eleven years old when he came to live in Britain, was due to be deported for two cases of robbery - eleven years ago.

These deportations are happening against the backdrop of the leaked draft of 'Windrush Lessons Learned', an independent report that suggests the government should stop deportations of all offenders who came to Britain as children. But far from 'learning lessons', the Tory government is propping up the hostile environment.

However, the Tories are not alone in passing racist laws. 'New Labour' under Tony Blair introduced legislation making it more difficult for people fleeing war to claim asylum - and in fact came up with the phrase "hostile environment."

The deportations also pose the question: who sets and controls immigration policies? While many migrant workers are denied access to public services and face deporta-

tions, stealing millionaires and billionaires are permitted to buy property and skip citizenship queues.

Understandably, many have placed their hopes on legal challenges against the government. These are important. But we cannot rely solely on court rulings (or 'independent' reviews) to stop deportations, as the departure of the flight showed. These institutions ultimately defend the interests of the capitalist class against all sections of the working class.

Urgent action needs to be taken by trade unions to defend migrant workers and the whole working class. The RMT union, for example, has a proud record of blocking immigration inspectors' access to its migrant members at work.

A united, working-class campaign for jobs, homes and services for all has the power to cut across Tory attempts to whip up racism. 'This should be combined with demands to replace the bosses' racist immigration laws with democratic working-class control, to stop the bosses and their politicians pursuing their own class interests by dividing the working class.

Streatham attack: Johnson's bill can't stop terror - workers' struggle can

Tessa Warrington
Socialist Party national committee

"It's only February and this has already happened." The response from Becky Smyths, a resident of Streatham where terrorist stabbings took place on 2 February.

What an indictment; that acts of terrorism have become so normalised that the shock is not that they happen, but only that one has occurred so early into 2020. It comes as the latest of three terror attacks over the past two months, the other incidents being at Fishmongers' Hall near London Bridge and White-moor Prison in Cambridgeshire.

The Streatham assailant, Sudesh Amman, was shot dead by police at the scene. He had been automatically released from jail ten days prior after serving half of a three-year sentence for terror offences.

The Socialist Party condemns these terrorist acts. Protection of the public from acts of violence is a vital issue. But Boris Johnson's knee-jerk reaction of tabling an emergency law to prevent automatic early release of terror offenders offers no solution and seeks to divert attention from the real causes of terrorism.

Amman's mother, Haleema Faraz Khan, said of her 20-year-old son in an interview with Sky News that "he became more religious inside

prison, that's where I think he became radicalised." The government is merely "kicking the can down the road," said David Merritt, father of Jack Merritt, a 25-year-old prison rehabilitation worker who was killed in the November London Bridge attack.

He continued that the justice system is "spewing people out further down the line when they've been associating with other people of like minds... prisoners are locked up for 23 hours a day and there is very little in the way of education and rehabilitation. The resources are not there."

Merritt described the situation as "the austerity chickens coming home to roost." He explained that "an enormous amount of money has been taken out of the system in the ten years the Conservatives have been in government."

"The Ministry of Justice has suffered cuts of 40% since 2010 and you can't run a prison system by slashing like that. The system is failing."

Few would argue with maintaining custody where there is real risk to the public. But this alone is not enough: the justice system must be remodelled - fully funded and publicly owned, democratically controlled, with social work, education and rehabilitation at its core.

And it's not just the effect on prisons. Cuts in public sector funding across the board have created an environment where working-class people are left with not enough. Not enough social housing, not enough wages, not enough jobs or hours at work. Not enough access to healthcare, resources in education, or benefits to survive.

As mass anger builds up at our 'not enough' lives, the super-rich and their politicians would have us fight among ourselves for crumbs from their table and look to workers of other races, religions or nationalities to place the blame. Anything but the profit system.

The increase in terrorist attacks is the toxic result of over a decade of austerity, the legacy of imperialist wars in the Middle East, of national and religious oppression, and the whipping up of divisions by capitalist politicians.

Combatting this requires workers and young people to unite together to struggle for demands that can address the underlying problems and not allow sections of the working class to be picked off: a struggle for decent jobs, affordable housing, quality public services for all - and an end to war and oppression.

But this must be linked to the fight for a socialist society, based on democratic planning and cooperation to provide for everyone - to replace capitalism's austerity, division and war in the pursuit of private profit - so the conditions which breed terrorism could be eradicated once and for all.



photo London Socialist Party

Unnecessary surgery scandal shows need for democratic control of NHS

Heather Rawling
Leicester Socialist Party

It is shocking that a doctor, breast surgeon Ian Paterson, subjected more than 1,000 patients, mainly women, to unnecessary and damaging operations over 14 years.

We need full funding and public ownership of the entire health sector. But we must also fight for democratic workers' control and management to replace unaccountable leaders and the culture of secrecy.

Most of Paterson's victims were women who had found a lump in their breast or who had already been diagnosed with breast cancer. He cruelly exaggerated the risks to persuade them to have surgery, sometimes several operations.

It's hard to imagine the worry and stress they and their families experienced, as well as being subjected to needless operations and damage to their bodies.

An independent inquiry showed that his victims were lied to, deceived and exploited. The bishop who chaired the inquiry reported: "The scale of what happened; the length of time this malpractice went on; the terrible legacy for so many families: it is difficult to exaggerate the damage done, including to trust in medical organisations and clinicians."

Paterson was convicted in 2017, and is serving a 20-year jail sentence for wounding with intent. But that cannot be the end of the matter.

It is worrying that Paterson was able to continue abusing the trust and damaging the bodies of mainly women for so long between 1997 and 2011. It raises the questions,



photo Paul Mattsson



Elected reps of patients and health workers must control policy and hiring

why wasn't he found out, why wasn't he stopped? What safeguards are in place to protect patients from rogue doctors and other medical practitioners?

Paterson treated patients both through private practice and the NHS. The victims "were let down time and again," by Paterson, by both private and public hospitals, and by healthcare regulators who did not take complaints seriously. How can such scandals be prevented in the future?

The NHS, publicly funded and

mostly publicly owned, must be defended by the labour movement against attempts to further cut, privatise and undermine it.

Private healthcare increases the possibility of operations being 'sold' to patients in pursuit of profits. In the US, healthy women are persuaded to have unnecessary and intrusive vaginal examinations that have no scientifically proved benefits.

And the NHS is hugely underfunded and at breaking point. Healthcare professionals are under enormous pressure, making it more likely for malpractice to be missed or improperly addressed.

Accountability

Much of Paterson's most extreme crimes took place in the private sector, which is less accountable than the NHS. Bringing private care into fully integrated public ownership would make it harder for rogue practitioners to slip between the cracks.

But it's also clear that even if the NHS was adequately funded, this alone would not guarantee that patients couldn't be abused in the future.

There needs to be democratic accountability. This must include elected representatives of patients, healthcare practitioners and support workers, and the wider community controlling the health service, including budgets, hiring, and other policy.

A vigorous campaign is needed to defend the NHS, spearheaded by the unions. The Trade Union Congress should lead it, but the unions organised in the NHS, and campaigning community organisations, must also fight for its future.

NHS debt so high it can't be repaid - so don't pay it! Scrap the debt, reverse the cuts, kick out the privatisers

Mayola Demmenie
Basingstoke Socialist Party

Cuts and privatisation mean NHS trusts now have debts so high they might never be repaid, according to the National Audit Office (NAO).

The NAO recently published two damning reports on the state of the NHS's finances. One was on the debt, totalling £10.9 billion in March 2019.

£11bn

NHS debt in March 2019

The other was on the capital budget, which covers replacement and maintenance of equipment and buildings. The Department for Health and Social Care is using money earmarked for upkeep as loans to NHS trusts to pay for the day-to-day running of hospitals.

This results in a backlog of maintenance work - worth £6.5 billion - and increased risk of harm to patients. It also adds to the dangerous amount of debt.

These debts must be scrapped immediately, and full funding to save

the NHS from complete collapse urgently restored. Much of the money could be found within the pharmaceutical industry and other private companies supplying the NHS while raking in unimaginable profits.

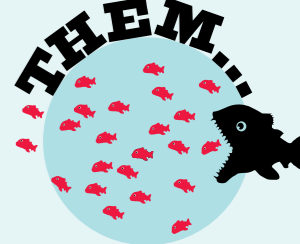
Those companies should be nationalised, with compensation only paid on the basis of proven need, not to super-rich owners. A state-owned pharmaceutical and supplies industry could also provide the NHS with cheap medicines and equipment.

Boris Johnson says austerity is over - so where's the money? Trade unions in the NHS should demand the money back and the outsourcers kicked out - and build for protests, strikes, and occupations if necessary to win the needed change. This could stop the government deliberately running the NHS into the ground and privatising more and more of it.

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56%
of UK's poor are in work



Temporary housing takings

English councils spent almost £1.1 billion on temporary accommodation in 2019 - with 86% going to private profiteers, reports Shelter. The amount they raked in doubled from £490 million in 2013-14 to £939 million in 2018-19. The big landlords and letting agents help create the housing crisis - and then profit from that too!

Musk stock electrified

Billionaire Elon Musk's electric car firm Tesla doubled its share price in the first five weeks of this year. Delays, faults, lack of infrastructure - and profit - have so far kept electric cars unaffordable and unreliable. Meanwhile, Tesla factory workers are notoriously ill-treated by Musk, who is worth \$45 billion.

Food banks 'perfect' for poor

Tory work and pensions secretary Therese Coffey called food banks "a perfect way to try to address the challenges that people face at difficult times in their lives" last month. Er, what about paying workers enough to buy food?

Utility usury: oh no, Ovo!

Private energy giant Ovo wrongly billed over half a million customers, leading regulator Ofgem to order it to pay back £8.9 million. Ovo had refunded a customer who was overcharged by more than £4,500, but decided not to bother with others, such as 120,000 customers owed up to £10.

Majority of poor in work

56% of people living in poverty were in a working household in 2018, says the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. The record high compares with 39% in 1998. 14 million people now live in poverty in the UK.

Storm services 'savings'

Fire and rescue services dealing with the chaos of Storm Ciara have had their funding cut by £141.5 million over the last four years, reports the FBU. The worst-hit areas in England have lost £16 million since 2016.

No more free money

Over a quarter of cash machines - and rising - now charge for withdrawals, says Which? Total charges rose from £75 million in 2018 to £104 million last year. Local branch and free ATM closures have made banks about £120 million since 2018.

Coronavirus medical martyr

The death of Li Wenliang, the doctor who first warned his colleagues about the new coronavirus, has caused fury. Instead of being congratulated for his sharp observations that may have saved many lives, he received a police warning for "spreading rumours."

Hundreds of millions of users of China's Twitter-like Weibo have now shared photos of Li, the keyword "whistleblower" and lyrics to "Do You Hear the People Sing?" from the musical Les Misérables about the 1832 Paris uprising.

■ Thanks to **Jon Dale** for this coronavirus update

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



Solidarity with Turkish workers



photo London Socialist Party

Socialist Party members joined a protest on 8 February called by the campaign Solidarity with the People of Turkey (SPOT - the Socialist Party and the National Shop Stewards Network are both on its committee).

The protest, outside the Mulberry store in Covent Garden, central London, targeted the retailer because it is one of the companies making a profit from

the labour of exploited workers in Turkey at the SF Leather factory in Izmir. Women workers have been sacked for the basic right of joining a trade union. Our protest also stood in support of workers at Mulberry in Britain, and against anti-trade union laws here.

■ To send support to the leather workers, see more at socialistparty.org.uk

Lambeth Unison letter



photo Paul Mattsson

An important discussion at Lambeth Unison's annual general meeting ended with a vote to endorse and circulate an open letter to Unison's leadership. The letter calls for a full consultation within the union after the union leadership announced its nomination of Keir Starmer for Labour leadership. The role of the Labour Party's position on Brexit in the general election, the importance of democratic debate in the union and more were all discussed.

London NSSN meeting



photo Mary Finch

Come to the London National Shop Stewards Network meeting, Tuesday 18 February 7.30pm at the Indian YMCA, 41 Fitzroy Square, Bloomsbury, W1T 6AQ.

Latest speakers and participants confirmed are: Howard Beckett, Unite the Union assistant general secretary, Terry Pullinger

Communication Workers Union deputy general secretary, Steve Hedley RMT assistant general secretary, and union reps from disputes and victories, including Unite Bromley libraries, PCS Ealing Tax Office, UCU university strike, United Voices at St Mary's hospital, Newham teachers, McStrikers, and more!

PCS union: Uniting the left around a leadership that can win for members

Katrine Williams
Vice-president PCS DWP group (personal capacity)

The 2020 national elections of the PCS, a union of civil servants and private sector workers on government contracts, are at a key stage. Branches throughout the union are meeting to agree nominations for president and national executive committee. The closing date for submitting nominations is 5 March.

Contesting these elections will be the newly formed Broad Left Network (BLN). Socialist Party members are on the list of BLN-supported candidates. These include Marion Lloyd for national president, David Semple for national

vice-president and Katrine Williams for national executive committee. The full list can be found at pcsbldn.wordpress.com.

At its inaugural meeting on 18 January, the BLN agreed its programme. This covers the union's campaigns on pay, pensions, redundancy rights, tax justice, social security, equality, mental health, climate change and other issues.

Improving the union's record of organising and recruiting members, better training for reps, defending facility time and ensuring our members in the private sector are fully supported have also been identified as key issues for the BLN.

Underpinning all of this is union democracy and accountability. The trend in the union has been the de-

velopment of a siege mentality by the current leadership.

The collapse of coordinated strike action across the public sector unions after the magnificent two million-strong pensions strike on 30 November 2011, and attacks on facility time and the end of check-off, have led the current leadership to move towards centralisation, and a full-time officer-directed model of organisation divorced from and unaccountable to reps and members.

A fundamental shift is required in how the union operates. For this reason we are calling on all PCS branches to nominate BLN-supported candidates for president and national executive committee in this year's elections.



photo Helen Pattison

Westex workers win increased pay offer in 11th week of strike

Kevin Pattison and Tanis Belsham-Wray
Leeds Socialist Party

The Westex carpet workers in Yorkshire are now into their 11th week of strike action. The strike is solid and no Unite the Union member has crossed the picket line.

They have won an increased offer of 2.4% after the initial offer was rejected and then withdrawn by management. The revised offer will now go to members to accept or reject.

Unfortunately, as the strike

mandate is nearing its end, Unite will be required to reballot. As the timescale is tight, the workforce will have to return to work while the reballot takes place. But the mood on the picket line is strong and they are determined to win.

For the last few weeks a "vacancies, apply within" sign has been added above the company signage near the picket line.

The strikers are receiving support from Unite at the highest level and are mounting a legal challenge to the company over recruiting to replace strikers, which is in breach

of employment laws. The company has also already given a pay rise to the existing members of staff who are not in a union.

The union branch was previously inactive but on the back of this strike it now has a new layer of union activists and the branch will be relaunched next month.

Whatever happens, the branch is now better organised for future action. But this also shows that workers are prepared to organise to fight for better pay and conditions, even in workplaces with previously low activity.

BIG UNISON SOUTH EAST REGIONAL MEETING VOTES FOR ANTI-CUTS POSITION



photo Paul Mattsson

Paul Couchman
Surrey County Unison (personal capacity)

a stand against the cuts. I gave the example of socialist-led Liverpool City Council in the 1980s.

Two other Socialist Party members spoke in the discussion, Paul Tovey and Chris Pickett. A range of other supporting speakers included Diana Leach (Unison national executive committee member) and Antoinette Solera from Reading, who spoke about how their branch and other local trade unions have been protesting against their Labour council outsourcing to union-busters Greenwich Leisure Limited!

National action

Ours was definitely the motion of the day, and it topped the poll for motions to go from the region to Unison's national conference in June. If it gets on the agenda and is passed there, we can use that to push the national union into taking

action which reflects this position.

All the Unison Action broad left candidates who stood for regional positions were elected.

A motion was also moved by Socialist Party member Paul Tovey from Bucks Health branch on developing a campaign for a South East cost of living allowance, building on the current Thames Valley Allowance campaign. This was also passed unanimously.

The day was topped off with Kye Gbangbola, from the Truth About Zane campaign, as the guest speaker (see 'Five years on - and still no justice for Zane' at socialistparty.org.uk). The campaign has 90,000 signatures on its petition now and is holding a commemorative public event at the House of Lords on 12 February.

■ Watch Paul moving the anti-cuts motion at the meeting: <https://youtu.be/elsSDD9eZ4c>.

East London school strike against academisation continue

Ian Pattison
East London Socialist Party

When will schools in Newham see sense? We do not want academisation.

National Education Union (NEU) members at St Michael's and St Bon's in east London are on strike again 12-13 and 25-27 February. St Bon's workers were particularly incensed when the head teacher made an offer and then withdrew it.



These are Catholic schools. The diocese wants all its schools to join a multi-academy trust.

Academy privatisation has been ruled out for five years at St Angela's. And Bede's in Romford has voted 74% to strike on a 90% turnout.

Newham council has an anti-academy policy. It should use its powers to help the campaign to keep schools in community control.

Other Newham residents are furious with Labour mayor Rokhsana Fiaz. The mayor has refused to rule out gentrification of Queen's Market in Upton Park, £48 million more cuts, or guarantee the future of Hamara Ghar sheltered accommodation.

■ See pages 10-11

Do you agree?
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socialistparty.org.uk/join

Foreign Office workers' strike

One week into a month-long strike PCS union members working for Interserve at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in London were joined by the Trade Union Congress and PCS general secretaries and Labour Party Socialist Campaign Group MPs, including Jeremy Corbyn, on their 11 February picket line to mark 'heart unions' week.

These cleaners, security and maintenance staff, many of whom are migrant workers, are fighting to be properly paid and, crucially, for union recognition. And as many of the strikers say, they should be brought back in-house! Socialist Party members have been supporting the pickets almost every day and will continue to show our solidarity.



photo Paula Mitchell

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Solidarity with victimised bus rep Moe

Moe Muhsin Manir, a Unite rep on London buses and Socialist Party member, has a disciplinary hearing, on 13 February at bus company Abellio, and is facing the sack.

Moe, with others, has been a major campaigner for the London-wide consultative ballot on safety, which took place on 7 February, regarding long hours, fatigue and exhaustion. Members of Unite voted on average by 97% in favour of strike action.

Get ready for the fight if the company sack him!



Support Clive Walder

Clive Walder, a Unite rep, is a longstanding member of the Socialist Party and the National Shop Stewards Network steering committee. He was dismissed on 7 February by National Express in Birmingham. He is appealing and a campaign is being launched to demand his reinstatement.

Get all the latest union news...

national shop stewards network
with the NSSN bulletin
shopstewards.net

Rob Williams
Socialist Party industrial organiser

After the general election, the unions and their members are facing serious challenges - not least a Boris Johnson-led Tory government with a working majority.

What is the state of play with the unions and what effect has the last decade had on them and the workers they represent? More importantly, what are the lessons for the period ahead?

In the previous decade, the union movement had to face the effects of the 'Great Recession' of 2007-8, continued de-industrialisation and the Tory austerity offensive that claimed 800,000 public sector jobs - the sector where union density is at its highest.

With this in mind, it is perhaps surprising that union membership is at 6.35 million members, only 150,000 less than a decade ago. But the trend of low union membership and density, and an aging membership, has continued along with historically record-low strike figures. Related to this, only 20% of workers are covered by a collective agreements compared to 80% 40 years ago.

The pessimists and cynics in the union movement, many of whom are found at leadership level, will use this information to argue for partnership with the employers and the Tory government. They will also point to the new anti-union laws and the 'impossibility' of national strike action, as well as Boris Johnson's planned new anti-union legislation, targeted specifically at the rail and transport unions.

But this would amount to a shallow reading of the 2010s, and a deliberate deflection from the role that many of the union leaders have played.

TUC silence

The silence from the Trade Union Congress (TUC) and most union leaders has been deafening since Johnson's plans were laid out in the Queen's Speech in December. Many of them still appear to be in shock from the election result. They were clearly hoping against hope that Jeremy Corbyn would be elected to ride to their rescue. But had Labour won, they would have likely acted as a cover for any retreats made under pressure from the capitalists.

The power that the organised working class still retains should not be underestimated. Workers do not have the luxury of inaction, particularly when facing a catastrophic economic situation and the looming threat of a new recession.

However, there is no direct correlation between economic downturn and workers' struggle. A sharp slump can sap workers' confidence, while temporary economic stability or growth can give them confidence to demand wage rises to claim their share.

Ironically, if Johnson relaxes spending cuts to appeal to those workers behind the former 'red wall', he could inadvertently spur them to fight for more. There has been an element of this in Scotland in the last few years. When the Scottish National Party (SNP) government broke the Tory pay cap, workers then demanded, fought for, and won bigger pay rises.

TRADE UNIONS - NEW DECADE, NEW CHALLENGES



photo Senan

In the last few years, pay settlements have drifted up, often on the back of disputes as workers feel the crisis bottoming out, for the moment at least.

There was nothing inevitable about the developments that took place in the last decade. Moreover, there were significant clashes between unions and the employers, including the Tory government.

Marxists are imbued with optimism but we are rooted in reality. The unions retain their enormous potential power but nothing is automatic. The question of leadership is crucial, whether it is of a national union of hundreds of thousands of workers or of a workplace or union branch. The key task remains to fight to transform the unions into militant organisations, capable of facing up to the employers and their government.

Increasingly, in crisis-ridden capitalism, this means having a union leadership with a socialist perspective which is able to withstand the logic of the bosses and raise an alternative society to members as they deal with the day-to-day issues they face. This is how the mass unions were built, often by revolutionary socialists, in the period of 'new unionism' of the late nineteenth century.

Post-economic crisis

In reality, this inability of the union leaders to face up to the post-economic crisis period has been one of the main reasons for their passivity. Whether it is a question of Tory public sector cuts or closures of steelworks and car plants, the method of resistance needed is on a much higher level than before.

Socialist Party members have consistently raised the need to occupy plants threatened with closure and for them to be nationalised to save jobs and communities. This was essential in the struggle against Ineos in Grangemouth which threatened to close the plant to bully workers into accepting attacks to their pensions, and also in the fights to save Port Talbot steelworks and the Swindon Honda and Bridgend Ford car plants. This will be a feature that will return again and again, particularly when the bosses aren't able or willing to come up with attractive redundancy packages.

As with the early 1970s, with the Upper Clyde Shipbuilders' 'work-in', one major occupation could set an example and force even Johnson's Tory government to intervene. Last autumn, the remaining Harland & Wolff workers in Belfast won a reprieve from closure by occupying the shipyards and appealing for solidarity from the rest of the union movement and the local community.

The austerity offensive of Tories David Cameron and George Osborne, after the electoral defeat of New Labour in 2010, was a full-frontal assault on the working class and the historical gains won in the post-war boom. It would have required a generalised resistance to have halted it. This was absolutely possible, but the union leaders were either unable or unwilling to face up to the reality of what they were facing and what was necessary.

In the autumn of 2010, a mass movement of students and young people was ignited against the decision to treble tuition fees. For six

weeks, young people marched in towns and cities and occupied universities. Workers watched TV footage of mounted police being sent in to mow down their children. Yet the union leaders did nothing and stood aside from the struggle.

Socialist Party members fought within the unions for the TUC to call a mass demonstration with the students before the parliamentary vote on increasing tuition fees. We raised this with the leadership of the PCS union, of which we were a part, arguing that it could have prepared the ground for later struggles.

But unfortunately, this didn't happen, showing that even the best union leaders can be found wanting in decisive moments, trapped in the consciousness of a different, more stable period.

However, the movement of the students did lay down a marker for the tumultuous events of 2011, as the Tories turned their attention towards massive public sector cuts.

In early 2011, the National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) organised a special one-day anti-cuts conference. This event was called to discuss whether the NSSN had a role to play in the fight against Tory austerity. It was perhaps the only debate, by over 600 union activists, that took place in the labour and trade union movement on what programme was needed by the unions to face down the historical attack by the Tories.

Socialist Party members and our allies argued that the unions must call generalised strike action, and that Labour councils should unite in a campaign of refusal to pass on Tory cuts. The NSSN was a lever, along with the most militant unions, to put demands on the TUC and the major unions.

Throughout 2011, the ground was being prepared for the biggest collision with the Tories over cuts. In March, the biggest union demonstration for over a century saw 750,000 workers and their families march through London.

The Tories' attack on public sector pensions gave an opportunity for mass co-ordinated strike action against the government. On the demonstration the NSSN campaigned around the demand of a public sector general strike and brought hundreds of union members to lobby the TUC in September.

N30 strike

The N30 November public sector strike of 29 unions did amount to a public sector general strike of over two million workers. In Northern Ireland, where most transport workers are in the public sector, it went even further. Most towns and cities saw mass demonstrations and protests in what was the biggest workers' mobilisation for decades, perhaps since the 1926 general strike.

It could and should have been the platform for a fight to the finish against the Tories. But weeks after N30, the TUC, along with the leaderships of Unison and GMB, signed up to a deal with Cameron. It was a serious setback, emboldening the Tories to go much further with public sector cuts, anti-union laws and cuts to union facility-time.

The PCS, in particular, was targeted and threatened with bankruptcy as the government stopped 'check-off'

- the automatic deduction of union subs from salaries. The union had to effectively re-recruit the entire membership to survive.

Perhaps also as damaging were the layers of older, experienced union reps and members taking retirement. This is a process that is still continuing. But the previous decade showed that in many battles, a newer, younger generation of workers can come to the fore, forced into action by the severity of the situation they face.

In terms of incomes cut, jobs lost and services outsourced, Tory austerity and the employers' attacks have been a catastrophe for workers. But they have also led to many bitter struggles and disputes - from the rank-and-file construction workers against the Besna contract, to the blockade at Hovis in Wigan.

Trade Union Act

Since the Tory Trade Union Act was brought in four years ago, many of these struggles have been on a local or sectoral basis. Ironically, with its ruling that unions need to re-ballot six months after an initial strike vote, the Act is partially responsible for the move away from isolated one-day strikes, to multiple days and even indefinite action. The failure of one-off stoppages has also been a cause of more intensive action.

We don't share the view of many union officials that the Act has made national strike action impossible. Shamefully, these leaders totally ignore the scandalous role they played in not mobilising against the anti-union law. Not one national Saturday demonstration was organised, let alone any industrial action. This against a weak Tory government led by Cameron, in the mire of the crisis over the EU referendum.

Worse still, is how the union leaders left the Communication Workers' Union alone when it overwhelmingly defeated the undemocratic voting thresholds in the Trade Union Act yet had its national strike action in Royal Mail dismissed by an unelected High Court Judge. Members of all unions must fight for no union to be isolated in this way, including the rail and transport unions if Johnson brings in his planned new laws.

But we have seen national strike action, by higher education staff - in early 2018, at the end of 2019 and again this month. The earlier strike showed that unions can be transformed through a struggle.

The University and College Union (UCU) has faced a testing period in both further and higher education with increased marketisation of education and the resultant casualisation of employment.

This has led to an explosive situation, with the trigger being the employers' latest attack on pensions. The picket lines were increasingly led by staff who weren't even in the pension fund but understood that their whole future, on decent terms were at stake.

When the union leadership tried to settle the dispute a revolt took place. Hundreds of UCU members surrounded the union head office and forced the leadership to continue the action. This resulted directly in the election of a new general secretary and opens the door to the union being pushed to the left.

➤continued on page 10

>continued from page 9

However, the creation of a democratic, fighting broad left is a crucial step in not just changing the character of a union but maintaining it. This is the lesson of the struggle that has developed in PCS. Even the most militant leaders can be affected by the complex situation and the pressures of the employers and the union officialdom, and need the check and scrutiny of an independent left force within the union.

The experience of the UCU is symptomatic of another development: layers of workers from a professional background being drawn into the working-class and the traditions and methods of the union movement. The last decade saw significant disputes involving junior doctors, midwives and radiographers - some of whom had not taken action for decades or were moving into action for the first time.

The Royal College of Nurses, has also taken its first ever action in the last two months, as part of an NHS-wide strike in Northern Ireland. These disputes show that the social reserves of the ruling class are being eroded by the capitalist crisis.

At the same time, there have been a whole number of bitter disputes involving the lowest-paid and most exploited workers, some following outsourcing from the public sector, others involving workers in fast food and hospitality, such as at McDonald's and Deliveroo.

Some of these struggles have been organised by new, small, independent unions, others by the main established unions. Socialists have an open and friendly approach to these developments, but the main task facing us is still to fight to transform the mass unions.



Socialist Party members have consistently raised the need to occupy plants threatened with closure and for them to be nationalised to save jobs and communities such as Swindon Honda photo Steve German

Get all the latest union news...



Where this has happened, on a national or a more localised basis, a fighting leadership has had a huge effect. PCS has had such a leadership, but this is now in the balance, and Socialist Party members are fighting to maintain the union's fighting record. Nipsa in Northern Ireland has socialists in leading positions, and the union is involved in battles now in the NHS and the civil service.

Also, there was the massive victory of the Glasgow equal pay strikers. 10,000 female workers took action to win a massive £500 million compensation. They were organised in the Glasgow Unison branch led by Socialist Party members. Mainly male refuse workers came out on unofficial action in solidarity. Just days later, 30,000 teachers marched in Glasgow on their way to a pay victory against the SNP government.

The last decade showed that unless capitalism is replaced by socialism, there is no final victory in terms of the jobs and living standards of workers. In this period in particular, rapacious capitalism looks to grab back any gains made by workers. This will only increase in any new economic crisis.

However, at the same time, there are no final defeats. Despite the setbacks and defeats the union movement has experienced, they are still intact. The organised working class still remains the main agency of economic and social change, and a potential attractive force to the many workers not in the unions. The fight for the socialist, fighting leadership it deserves is still the fundamental task facing militant workers.

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Build independent workers' media with May Day greetings

James Ivens

May Day greetings campaign organiser

The working class needs its own independent media to represent its own interests. This is ever more evident in the hopeless confusion and monstrous smears from the established press. We need organised workers to support the alternative - the Socialist newspaper.

Globally, the capitalist establishment has been rocked by mass popular uprisings. In Britain, the need for organised workers' action against the Tories couldn't be clearer.

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? The Socialist.

We report and discuss strategy for the strikes and struggles the bosses' media slanders or snubs. So celebrate International Workers' Day 2020 by sending May Day greetings to help fund the Socialist.

Socialist sellers and buyers should use a sign-up sheet to ask colleagues for contributions to a workplace greeting. Visit the strikers the Socialist has supported to ask

for a greeting as well.

Trade unionists should propose a motion for May Day greetings to their union branch or committee. Make sure you send it now! The deadline for a 20% discount is full payment by 1 April - and the final deadline for greetings is 16 April.

More and more young people have moved into action in the last year. Groups of supportive students in school, college and university should campaign for funds to send a greeting. Community campaigns too, on every issue where the working class is fighting.

But it's crucial that you start now. Select an organiser in your region, trade union group or Socialist Party branch. List who you want to ask for greetings. And schedule the time to campaign for the funds.

In 2019 we broke all the records once more. 123 greetings and almost £8,200 pledged! Any group of workers or campaigners which wants to help fund us is welcome - our minimum price is negotiable if needed.

But the tasks facing socialists and workers are mounting. We must build on our successes again. Let's get those greetings in!

- Send greetings, see prices and make payments: socialistparty.org.uk/mayday
- Resources and enquiries: jamesivens@socialistparty.org.uk

The PCS was targeted and threatened with bankruptcy as the Tories stopped 'check-off' - the automatic deduction of union subs from salaries. The union had to effectively re-recruit the entire membership to survive photo Paul Mattsson



Support the working-class press in 2020
MAY DAY GREETINGS IN THE SOCIALIST
20% discount for payment by 1 April!

- Calling all trade union branches and committees, community campaigns and student groups!
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TV: Universal Credit: inside the welfare state New BBC series - Insight or whitewash?



A claimant featured on the BBC programme

Karen Seymour
Mansfield Socialist Party

The BBC programme 'Universal Credit: inside the welfare state' is a series of three programmes on the highly criticised benefit system.

The first programme, set in a Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) office in Peckham, south London, follows the experiences of both Universal Credit (UC) claimants and Jobcentre staff. However, the programme has been panned by some welfare claimants' groups as attempting to sanitise a failing system.

Billed as the biggest overhaul of benefits in a generation, UC, initiated by former Tory minister Iain Duncan Smith, rolls six working-age benefits into one monthly payment. However it is controversial, with more claimants losing out than gainers.

The civil servants union, PCS, whose members have gone on strike over properly resourcing UC, has previously commented: "The government's arrogant refusal to listen to its own staff, experts, charities, those affected, and even its own MPs shows their aim is not to help people, but to simply cut support from those who need it most."

Currently, there are seven million people on some kind of benefit. By 2023, it is expected that there will be seven million UC claimants alone.

If you make a new claim for benefit, or if you have a change of circumstances such as losing your job, then you have to claim UC.

One claimant featured in the programme, Rachel, who had spent 27

years working at Kings College Hospital, London, and had left to care for her mum, was forced to claim UC when her mum's health conditions improved.

She was given a Short Term Benefit Advance to tide her over until her first payment came through. But these loans must be paid back, and Rachel found herself £106 a month short, before she even thought about rent or food. She says: "You don't expect to be able to live a lavish lifestyle on UC, but you do expect to be able to live from one week to the next".

61-year-old Phil, who had been unemployed for ten years and had a history of drug misuse, felt forced to take a job cleaning trains for a private company contracted out from Transport for London (TfL).

Underpaid

This company was getting away with paying £8.25 an hour, while directly employed TfL workers were being paid the London Living Wage of £10.55 an hour. The job only made him £30 a week better off than he was on Jobseeker's Allowance. As Phil himself said, "I've joined the working poor".

Declan, 47 years old but looking 67, had recently been made homeless, and had been attacked while sleeping rough. He ended up with a place to live, but no money for electricity until his UC payment came through. He also needed to be referred to a food bank like many other claimants have.

Amber Rudd, who in 2018 became the sixth secretary of state for work and pensions after UC began in 2010, has only recently admitted to a link between food bank use and UC delays.

The programme took the viewer on a brief tour of Caxton House, the building in which the DWP is housed. The director general of UC, Neil Couling, showed us what was called the 'Mother Wall', which was the project plan for UC. This hideously complex structure contained things such as feedback from claimants, including a request to pay benefits on time, something which had apparently defeated the old legacy system for 35 years!

Jobcentre staff do generally care about claimants and want to help, but feel their hands are tied. Many are on such low pay they have to claim UC themselves, and/or take on extra work. Karen, one of the Jobcentre workers in Peckham, has to work another 16 hours on top of her job as an adviser just to make ends meet.

The Universal Credit system has been designed by people who will never know, or care, what it is like to be unemployed or on low wages.

Workers deserve better than a welfare system that treats them with nothing but contempt. So we demand:

- **Benefits staff, claimants, trade unions and other interested parties must urgently build a mass campaign to scrap Universal Credit and the brutal sanctions regime - replacing them with a system that is fair and compassionate, with support into employment if required**
- **A minimum wage of £12 an hour, without exemptions, as a step towards a real living wage of at least £15 an hour**
- **A mass job creation programme with decent pay, conditions and trade union rights for all**



Trade unionists on a benefit 'die in' protest. Tragically, this became a reality in Nottingham photo Elaine Evans

Nottingham: death of vulnerable claimant

A vigil was held in Nottingham on 7 February to remember Errol Graham, who died when the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) stopped his benefit. The event was supported by Nottingham Trade Union Council (TUC).

In a statement Notts TUC pointed out that Errol's benefit was his only source of income. Errol had serious mental health issues which his family had tried to have addressed.

The DWP stopped Errol's Employment Support Allowance when he failed to attend a Work Capability Assessment. However, they knew Errol was vulnerable and their own rules should have prevented this.

A combination of the crisis in mental health services and the government's benefits sanctions led to Errol's death, and his family want a criminal inquiry.

UC stopped without warning

Cesar Zanin, a part-time NHS worker living in temporary accommodation and bringing up a six-year-old daughter, didn't know where their next meal was coming from after the DWP stopped his Universal Credit without warning.

The Bristol healthworker says he was later told by the DWP that he had failed to produce enough evidence about his childcare payments. However, Cesar says he'd supplied the DWP with screenshots and confirmed payments by email.

Cesar told the local Bristol Post newspaper: "They [DWP] didn't sanction me, they didn't suspend my childcare costs reimbursements but the fact is my Universal Credit was completely stopped, with no formal notification."





Socialist sellers

■ Leeds: Nationalisation is welcome, but don't trust Tories

There was great support in Leeds for bringing the railways and buses back into public ownership. While people welcomed the announcement of Northern Rail being brought into public ownership, many were suspicious of the motives of the Tories.

There was lots of interest in the feature in the Socialist on nationalising the railways (see 'Nationalise the railways' at socialistparty.org.uk). We sold 17 copies, and 14 the week before.

■ Newham, London: There's nothing left to cut

Newham council wants to gentrify the borough and next they're coming for Queen's Market. The Socialist Party was raising the alarm - campaigning at Queen's Market for it to be saved.

£ received		£ target	January to March 2019		Deadline: 1 April 2020
Northern	596	750			79%
Wales	1,172	2,300			
Southern and SE	1,113	2,350			47%
South West	738	1,800			41%
North West	441	1,150		38%	
East Midlands	551	1,850		30%	
London	1,332	4,600		29%	
Yorkshire	572	2,550		22%	
Eastern	115	1,200		10%	
West Midlands	236	2,600		9%	
Other	5,540	3,850			144%
TOTAL	12,406	25,000			50%



WELSH GOVERNMENT HAS MONEY TO SAVE ROYAL GLAM A&E

■ Continued from front

The Welsh Labour government is carrying out the same cuts as the Tory government is making to NHS hospitals in England. Both claim that A&E wards should be closed and services centralised for "patient safety".

But the reality is that both governments are cutting spending on the NHS in real terms. The NHS in Wales spends £1 billion a year less than 2010 compared to the increasing needs of the population. The UK Tory government has cut the funding and the Welsh Labour government has meekly cut the services to meet the Tory budget.

Politicians from both parties admit that there is a shortage of 1,200 consultants across the UK. But they do nothing to resolve that shortage by investing in training new doctors. We need a cash injection into our NHS to train the new medical professionals that the NHS needs.

Instead of doing Boris Johnson's dirty work for him, Welsh Labour assembly members must fight to save our NHS and demand the £1 bil-

lion that has been robbed from the health service is returned. When Labour health minister Aneurin Bevan founded the NHS in 1948 he said that it "will last as long as there's folk with faith left to fight for it."

If Welsh Labour is not prepared to fight for the NHS then they must make way for those that will. A socialist challenge to the cuts is needed, including at the Welsh parliament elections next year, to tackle the NHS emergency.

- We demand:**
- No more cuts to A&E services
 - Keep Royal Glamorgan A&E open permanently
 - Reverse all the cuts to our NHS
 - Invest now in a crash programme of recruitment and training of A&E doctors and nurses and other NHS staff
 - For the Welsh government to reverse NHS cuts by drawing on public sector reserves in this budget and fight the Tory government for adequate funding
 - For a socialist challenge to the cuts politicians, including in the 2021 Welsh parliament elections

■ Callous Tory cuts to children's speech therapy in Nottinghamshire

Tory-controlled Nottinghamshire County Council wants to cut two-thirds from the budget for early-intervention speech-therapy services. These centres, formerly 'SureStart', provide vital help to pre-school children. The cuts will save just £1 million.

It is crucial that speech defects are picked up and dealt with as quickly as possible, to prevent problems in adulthood.

The council also plans to cut the funding for volunteer-led Footsteps, which provides support to mums and pregnant women going through mild to moderate mental health difficulties.

As if those brutal cuts weren't

enough, the council aims to close children's centres in Broxtowe, Mansfield and Ashfield - all areas of high deprivation.

Enough is enough! No more cuts to our vital public services. Every cut means a drop in our living standards.

The petition by Mansfield Socialist Party on these issues has generated a lot of interest and signatures. And we're also planning to host a public meeting too. People are starting to see through the Tory lie that austerity is over.

A campaign of service users, their families and trade unions need to be built to oppose these cuts and any others.

Councillors must stand up to the government and refuse to implement crippling austerity. If they won't, we need to elect those who will.

Karen Seymour
Mansfield Socialist Party



HOUSING CRISIS

■ Hackney: We don't want homes and retail units working-class people can't afford

Angry residents, from Hackney east London, packed into a meeting at the Dan West Trelawney estate community hall. Labour mayor Philip Glanville tried to justify the council's decision to ask a private developer to revamp the site of the local Tesco.

The proposal is for a smaller Tesco supermarket, more retail and work units and two 19-storey tower blocks with 531 flats. We don't want more retail units that working-class people can't afford.

None of the flats will be at council rents and less than 50% will be so-called affordable. Residents are angry at the lack of council housing.

When we pushed the mayor to explain what he meant by "affordable housing", he couldn't answer, and instead just referred us to the council website. This meeting showed the potential to build a big effective campaign around this issue.

Another meeting has been organised. Socialist Party member Brian Debus also suggested a committee be formed - involving residents, tenants' organisations and trade unions - to coordinate the fight. That would really help this campaign.

Chris Newby
Hackney Socialist Party

■ 20 years of housing failure

"20 years of building regulation failures" have fallen on the one body that is completely innocent - the residents. Former firefighter Roy Wilsher is now chair of the National Fire Chiefs' Council. Cladding "does not comply and never has complied" with building regulations, he added.

130 residents from effected tower blocks in London, Leeds and Manchester met in the capital at City Hall.

40% of fire safety staff have been cut. Another Grenfell grows closer.

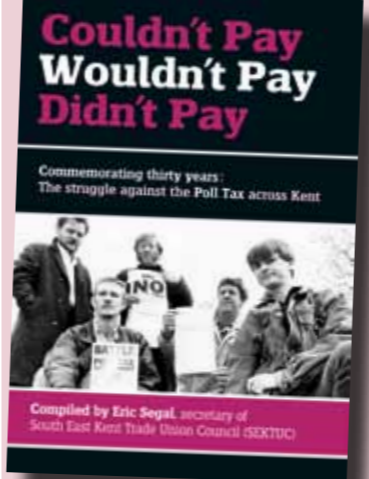


Leaseholders in the private blocks cannot afford the cost of removing flammable cladding, yet landlords will not pay. 85% of blocks have made zero progress on the issue.

I handed out a Socialist Party leaflet that said:

- The government is guilty and must pay
 - The blocks must be confiscated from the equally culpable big landlords
 - The leaseholders must be granted the commonhold - the collective ownership of the blocks
- Pete Mason**
East London Socialist Party

Dave Nellist - Socialist Party member and former Labour MP - says: "While a definitive history of the great battle against the Poll Tax is yet to be written, the invaluable importance of Couldn't Pay, Wouldn't Pay, Didn't Pay lies in the oral history of personal reminiscences and the contemporaneous minutes of those in the front line of the struggle and the lessons it contains for battles yet to come."



Available for £5 from leftbooks.co.uk | 020 8988 8789 | PO Box 1398, Enfield EN1 9GT

Isai Priya
Tamil Solidarity and Waltham Forest Socialist Party

Despite Storm Ciara, 150 people attended the book launch meeting that Tamil Solidarity co-organised on 9 February. The book - Keenie Meenie: The British mercenaries who got away with war crimes - highlights in detail how these mercenaries created immense profits for their company, Keenie Meenie Services.

The mercenaries were protected and defended by the British government, politicians and foreign authorities. They were paid several million pounds to go to Sri Lanka to kill people and train the Sri Lankan army on how to commit mass murder.

Keenie Meenie Services were in Sri Lanka in the 1980s. This was a period of neoliberal offensive to privatise, deregulate and drive down conditions to increase profit -

Packed meeting about Keenie Meenie

BRITISH MERCENARIES WHO GOT AWAY WITH WAR CRIMES

spearheaded by US President Ronald Reagan and British prime minister Margaret Thatcher.

The then Sri Lankan president, JR Jeyawardene, opened up the economy for sale. He became the favourite ally of neoliberalism in South Asia.

The imperialist powers were prepared to do anything to protect this situation. Keenie Meenie was used to strengthen right-wing governments around the world, and to suppress any left-wing government or potential uprising.

Tamil Solidarity

Building a working-class movement for Tamil rights

4 February protest - black day for Tamils of Sri Lanka

Kel Kethesnaran
Tamil Solidarity and East London Socialist Party

On 4 February, Tamil Solidarity called a protest outside the Sri Lankan High Commission in London. This protest marked a black day for Tamils.

The current Sri Lankan president was defence minister during the 2009 massacre. He has now declared that 20,000 people who disappeared since the war are dead. This is little comfort or explanation to the families of the missing.

These families deserve justice - to actually know what happened to missing loved ones. Tamil Solidarity calls for the releasing of all information held by the Sri Lankan government about the civil war.

We demand an investigation into these war crimes, under the democratic control of ordinary people and their representative organisations including the trade unions, community groups and the bereaved.

Tamils and other minorities have been systematically refused their national democratic rights since Sri Lankan independence from Britain in 1948. We called out the hypocrisy of celebrating independence while secret camps still operate, political prisoners languish behind bars, families of the victims have not received any sort of explanation, and Tamil-owned land has not been given back.

When the Sri Lankan government was organising a celebration inside the warm building, hundreds



photo Isai Priya

protested in the cold weather outside. We mourned the thousands who perished at the hands of the Sri Lankan government and demanded justice for those who are still suffering.

The Socialist Party brought solidarity, calling for the right of self-determination. We sold over 10 copies of the Socialist and 36 cop-

ies of Ethir, a Tamil and English language paper produced by Tamil Solidarity.

The Sri Lankan officials were rattled and their natural reaction was to photograph and video protesters once again. The Sri Lankan government had called in the help of British police - wasting taxpayers' money - to provide 'security'. But the

protest was peaceful despite anger, sadness and disgust

We do not believe that the Sri Lankan government - that shamelessly continues to justify killing tens of thousands - will deliver justice. But the demand for freedom - recognition of right to self-determination for the Tamil-speaking masses - is stronger than ever.

Lebanon - mass protests cut across sectarian division



In the following article - the fourth in a continuing series in the Socialist on countries in turmoil in the Middle East - Socialist Party national committee member **Iain Dalton** looks at the most recent protests shaking the political establishment in Lebanon.

In Lebanon there's been the biggest movement of opposition to the government for at least 14 years, since the previous 'cedar revolution'. Lebanese flags have flown on the protests rather than those of sectarian militias photo Shahan Books/CC

Last year a mass, non-sectarian protest movement in Lebanon arose over the burdens of crippling taxes, a lack of services, high unemployment, and government corruption. The daily protests and street blockades forced the resignation of prime minister, Saad Hariri.

The movement cut across the sectarianism - written into the DNA of the state when it was founded under the supervision of French imperialism in the first half of the 20th century. The constitution requires a Christian president, a Sunni prime minister and a Shia speaker of the parliament.

For years this helped to act as a block to the development of a cross-community working-class alternative. As the Economist magazine pointed out: "If Lebanon stopped forcing candidates to compete for seats that are allocated by religion, more might run on secular platforms, not sectarian ones" (7 December 2019).

These sectarian tensions have periodically erupted, including a brutal civil war between 1975 and 1990. They have also been inflamed by neighbouring conflicts in Israel, and in Syria, where around one million of the eight million population have become refugees.

'Ponzi Scheme in Reverse'

The roots of the crisis lie in Lebanon's high debt levels, now the third highest 'debt-to-GDP' (total output) ratio in the world.

A guest article on the Financial Times website described the funding of this debt as a "Ponzi scheme in reverse", with the central bank offering high interest rates to banks to deposit dollar reserves with it, and financing these interest rates by attracting more and more deposits.



Meanwhile, the economic crisis has continued to deepen, with companies shutting down and others paying only half wages

In particular, interest rates soared after Hariri 'temporarily' resigned while visiting Saudi Arabia in 2017, only to rescind it a few weeks later. These events seem to have spooked investors, leading to an economic slowdown and a squeeze on the availability of dollars.

Like all capitalist governments, their way out from this crisis was to make workers' pay. Cross-party talks drew up an austerity budget, which included attacks on the retirement age of civil servants, drawing protests and strikes.

But it is the combination of this austerity, with years of corrupt use of the patronage given by the balancing act of the division of positions in government, which drew out the most popular slogans of the protest - "All means all" and "Everyone means everyone".

In October 2019 when the worst wildfires in a decade broke out across Lebanon, the country's lack of investment in firefighting equipment was starkly demonstrated, with the country's three firefighting and helicopters having been out of commission for years.

This, combined with the announcement of a monthly tax on using voice-over internet protocol apps like WhatsApp and Facetime via the state owned mobile operators, provoked mass demonstrations.

As Fahad, a Beirut protester interviewed by the Ecologist journal said: "This isn't about WhatsApp, this is about how this government is simply incapable of doing its job. They [politicians] would let the whole country burn if it meant they can make money."

Significantly, these protests didn't take place along sectarian lines, as previous movements in Lebanon in 2005 and 2015 had. One protester,

Manachi a Christian, told the BBC: "People are realising that a Christian living in extreme poverty is no different from a Sunni or Shia living in extreme poverty."

After Hariri's resignation, further mass mobilisations blocked two proposed businessmen replacements. But the protests have also revealed the limits of such spontaneous movements.

Class alternative needed

Without a clear, independent working-class political alternative a vacuum has been created which will be filled in some way. Recent weeks have seen rioting on the streets of Beirut, clashes with the police, and the trashing of the presidential palace - venting the young protesters rage against the system.

A new government was formed on 22 January that at first glance could be said to comply with the demand 'All means all!'

A government, a third smaller (20 ministers as opposed to 30), with an increased number of women, and mostly comprised of university professors, has been established. But around half of them are former government advisors (the finance minister was a previous finance minister in 2005) and have been nominated by the same political parties the protesters wish to see the backs of.

For 'All means all' to come to fruition, the sectarian constitution which is the cornerstone of this horse-trading has to go. The movement must fight for the convocation of a genuinely representative constituent assembly, but this in itself is not sufficient.

Unless a non-sectarian workers' party is built, then these same parties, representing the interests of big business, will continue to dominate.

Meanwhile, the economic crisis has continued to deepen, with companies shutting down and others paying only half wages.

The Lebanese pound, while officially pegged to exchange at 1,500 to one US dollar, was exchanging for over 2,000 to a dollar in December 2019, and slumped to 2,500 this January.

While capital controls (to limit the flow of capital out of the country) haven't formally been imposed, a Reuters reporter found that eight out of ten currency exchanges were refusing to sell dollars in Beirut. Various banks are limiting withdrawals of dollar currency.

Foreign debt repayments are falling due. A \$1.2 billion Eurobond repayment is due in March.

Imperialism

Undoubtedly, this crisis is being seen as a way for the imperialist powers to influence the situation, particularly given Iran-backed Hezbollah's (an armed Shia movement that has attempted to cut across the protest movement) growing influence in the government over the past period.

As the US Brookings Institute think-tank commented: "Lebanon's acute financial and economic crisis gives us leverage."

Capitalism in Lebanon and globally has nothing to offer ordinary people in Lebanon. The protest movement needs to challenge, not just the politicians and sectarian division, but the capitalist system as a whole.

Its demands must include nationalising the banks and decisive sectors of the economy, as part of a democratically planned economy. Only such socialist measures can lead to a way out of the morass.

Irish election - establishment parties hammered

Sinn Féin harnesses working-class anger to top poll

■ Left must seize new opportunities and rebuild

Fiona O'Loughlin
Committee for a Workers' International (CWI), Ireland

The general election in Ireland saw a seismic change in the electoral landscape, with a big surge in support for Sinn Féin. Presenting itself as a radical, anti-establishment alternative, Sinn Féin was able to channel much of the voters' anger, especially among the youth.

The party, which had its first TD (a member of the Dáil - the Irish parliament) elected in 1997, took 24.5% of the vote. Prime Minister Leo Varadkar's right-wing Fine Gael was pushed into third place on 20.9%.

Fianna Fáil, another pro-capitalist party, which propped up the last Fine Gael government, came second on 22.2%. At a combined 43%, this is the lowest vote for the two main parties of southern Irish capitalism in the history of the state.

Fine Gael has been in government since 2011, after voters severely punished Fianna Fáil for the capitalist financial crash that led to an international bailout and severe austerity.

Varadkar's attempts to sell himself as a safe pair of hands to continue presiding over recent economic growth failed badly. The election was dominated by the acute housing and health crisis.

Social and economic crisis

Alongside economic growth, there have been high levels of inequality, homelessness, insecure jobs and low pay, and attacks on pensions. For all the fulsome praise by the Irish and European media for Varadkar's diplomacy during the Brexit crisis, an exit poll for RTE (state broadcaster) suggest only 1% of voters saw Brexit as a priority.

For decades, Sinn Féin was contemptuously dismissed to the 'fringes' of politics in the south of Ireland by the main parties. As the 'political wing' of the Provisional IRA, Sinn Féin's support was stymied in the south.

From the signing of the 1998 Good Friday Agreement (the basis of the

Northern Ireland 'peace process'), the party attempted to extend its appeal in the south by reassuring the ruling class that the 'armed struggle' is over and the party in government would not be a fundamental threat to their interests.

At the same time, Sinn Féin campaigned on social and class issues in working-class areas to broaden its support, with limited success.

In 2016, Sinn Féin replaced its longstanding leader, Gerry Adams, with Mary Lou McDonald - hoping that replacing a figure closely associated with the IRA with a middle-class Dubliner would gain wider support. But in the last European and local elections, Sinn Féin was disappointed by its showing at the polls.

Underestimated anger

The Sinn Féin leadership did not expect a significant change in the 2020 general election and fielded a limited number of candidates in the multi-seat constituencies.

Like all the main parties and media, Sinn Féin underestimated the well of anger among voters at the cost of living and crisis of housing and health.

This meant that the party failed to fully exploit the massive voter shift towards it, which went way beyond its traditional base and included sections of the middle class. Sinn Féin ended up with one less seat in the Dáil than Fianna Fáil.

Both Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil previously stated they will not share power with Sinn Féin. Now that Sinn Féin is likely to hold the balance of power, Fianna Fáil leader, Michael Martin, has stopped short of ruling out a coalition with Sinn Féin.

Days and even weeks of horse-trading are possible, as the main parties try to cobble together a coalition government.

Should Sinn Féin use their unprecedented levels of support to prop up another right-wing, cuts-making coalition, with either Fianna Fáil or Fine Gael, they may deservedly suffer the same fate as the Greens, in 2011, and Irish Labour Party, in 2016, which were punished by voters for participating in such



If Sinn Féin, led by Mary Lou McDonald (above), enters into a coalition with either of the two main capitalist parties it will be seen as a betrayal by voters demanding change photo Sinn Féin

coalition governments.

A Sinn Féin coalition with Fianna Fáil or Fine Gael would be seen as a betrayal of the hundreds of thousands of working-class people looking for radical political change.

Alternatively, Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael could try to form a coalition, with the latter propping up the former, this time. But this would be a risky strategy. More of the same unpopular right-wing policies would mark the continued historic decline of the two main parties of big business.

If Sinn Féin cobbles together a coalition government with Labour, the Greens and others, its willingness to deliver on its claims to help working people will be severely tested and judged by the working class, many of whom will have big hopes in such a change of government.

They will be under huge pressure from their working-class voters to deliver on housing, health and other key issues. However, the track record of Sinn Féin, Labour and the Greens, in governments, North and South, shows it carried out austerity cuts and imposed new taxes on working-class people, for example.

All left TDs should make it clear West.

that they will not take part in a coalition government that is not prepared to stop austerity and to break with pro-capitalist policies.

Whatever the resulting forms of coalition government, the mould is truly broken. The major swing to Sinn Féin is an indication of a working-class revolt, in a distorted form, against the establishment and right-wing policies.

The Sinn Féin surge put pressure on the smaller left parties and alliances trying to hold onto their Dáil seats. In several constituencies, they most likely would have lost out to Sinn Féin if the party had run more candidates.

Left challenge

CWI Ireland called for a vote for genuine left-wing candidates and alliances. Despite major political differences with the current left groups in the Dáil, CWI Ireland recognises the importance of retaining a Left presence in parliament.

All three People Before Profit TDs were reelected, more or less matching their 2016 general election performances. Paul Murphy (RISE) saw a fall in first preference votes but retained his seat in Dublin South



CWI Ireland members campaigning in Dublin on the housing crisis photo CWI Ireland

■ More analysis will be carried later on socialistworld.net



Tackling climate change

JOHNSON EMITS HUGE QUANTITIES OF HOT AIR!



■ Socialist policies needed to create green jobs and net-zero carbon emissions as part of a sustainable economy



Young people have been to the fore in highlighting the failure of capitalist politicians to halt catastrophic climate change photos Paul Mattsson

Simon Carter

Antarctica has just experienced its hottest temperature on record and, globally, January 2020 was the warmest January ever recorded.

The consequences of continual and rapid global heating - rising sea levels, increasing frequency and intensity of extreme weather events - will be catastrophic for the environment, including human populations.

Tackling the cause of global heating, that is, increased greenhouse gas emissions from capitalist industry, transport and agribusiness, is therefore vital.

So, what's the Tory government doing about it?

Prime Minister Boris Johnson is hosting the latest climate change summit in Glasgow this November. The COP26 event is meant to break the deadlocked Madrid summit of last December. Deadlocked because

the likes of Trump, Putin, Brazil's Bolsonaro, and the Saudi Arabia regime, support the increased development of the big energy companies.

Johnson has recently grabbed the headlines with his accelerated net-zero carbon emissions pledge for the UK.

However, he blotted his copybook by sacking the COP26 president, former Tory MP Claire O'Neill. She accused the Tory government of being "miles off track globally where we are meant to be", and condemned Johnson over what's needed on climate change, saying: "He doesn't get it!"

Indeed, Johnson revealed the utter hypocrisy of his 'green' credentials when at the recent UK-Africa summit he sealed £2 billion of energy deals favouring oil and gas companies, with only £161 million (8% of total) related to clean energy.

Meanwhile, it's been revealed that the government agency UK Export Finance is supporting gas and oil projects abroad that will emit 69

million tonnes of carbon a year - one-sixth of the total UK emissions!

Back in the UK, there's no national plan to properly insulate homes to reduce energy consumption. And the government has stymied the further expansion of renewable energy projects such as offshore wind turbine farms.

O'Neill said: "My advice to anybody to whom Boris is making promises - whether it is voters, world leaders, ministers, employees... is to get it in writing, get a lawyer to look at it and make sure the money is in the bank." Sound advice.

But the only real guarantee of halting catastrophic climate change is to fight for socialist policies - including nationalisation of the major industries under democratic workers' control - to create a millions of new green jobs and achieve net-zero carbon emissions in years, not decades.

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