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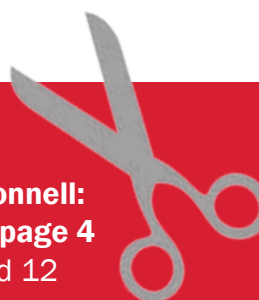
SOCIALIST STUDENTS

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LABOUR AND CUTS

> Open letter to John McDonnell:
Yes, we can fight the cuts: page 4
> Local reports: pages 5 and 12

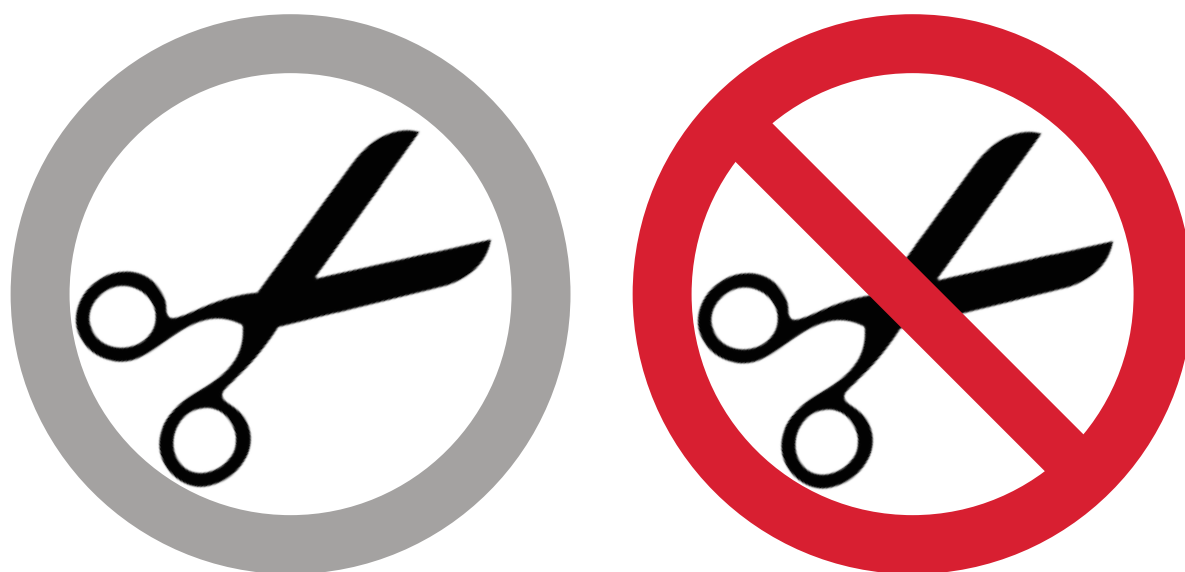


FIGHTING EVICTIONS



> Butterfields: page 13

COUNCILS HAVE A CHOICE



No cuts to jobs or services

Councillor Kevin Bennett
Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition,
Warrington Borough Council

Councillors in local government do have the power to resist the government cuts. The notion that 'there is nothing else we can do' is wrong.

Labour councils around the country are passing their budgets for 2015-16. But they seem to have forgotten their supposed core values: to protect jobs, services, housing and other amenities for workers and residents.

Councils have the legal and financial powers to delay cuts by drawing on reserves, using borrowing powers, and working with tenants and trade unions to avoid evictions and privatisation. This can all be done within the law and cannot be overruled by central government.

None of these policies mean setting a deficit budget, though that in itself is not necessarily illegal.

Reserves

It's true that some smaller councils don't have large reserves, but the bigger ones do. The combined reserves Labour councils are holding are enough to set no-cuts budgets in them all.

Funding for local councils will have dropped this year by 37% in real terms compared to 2010. But English councils still control budgets totalling £114 billion pounds, over one fifth of all public spending. They have responsibility for adult social care, housing, education support, transport, recycling and rubbish collection, libraries and other services.

That's a powerful position from which to organise a fightback.

What is to stop Labour councils coming together, pooling reserves and using prudential borrowing powers? Collectively they could refuse to implement a single further cut, creating space to organise a mass campaign to win the necessary funding back from central government.

■ Government sets aside £300 million to cushion cuts in Tory councils: page 2

£300M TO CUSHION CUTS IN TORY COUNCILS

Roger Bannister
Unison national executive committee (personal capacity)

Threatened with backbench revolt, the Tory government has produced a £300 million 'transition grant' to partially cover gaping shortfalls in local government over the next two years.

But the recipients will almost exclusively be relatively well-heeled Conservative councils!

Councils like Liverpool, Manchester and Knowsley, that top the list of authorities with the highest poverty, will not get a penny. Neither will poor inner London boroughs like Hackney, Tower Hamlets and Southwark.

Birmingham, Leeds, Leicester and Newcastle will also miss out. The government will instead buy off Tory councils and MPs in their electoral heartlands, such as Surrey, Hampshire and Hertfordshire.

The Tories have hammered local government. Initially in partnership with the Lib Dems, cutting 37% of funding, and now as a rule-alone administration.

Local services have been slashed, hundreds of thousands of jobs have been lost, and local government workers have faced cuts to their pay and conditions of service.

These cuts have been so great that the whole future of local government in Britain is at risk, to the extent that even Tory councillors are protesting. The prime minister's own mother recently signed a petition against cuts in Oxfordshire!

The government plans to move towards a model where councils must

raise more and more of their money locally by 2020. Income from service charges, council tax and business rates will replace central funding.

Previously, part of local business rates was redistributed nationally. This will end under Tory plans. Wealthy areas will have more resources, and poorer areas with more demand on services will have less.

At the same time, the Tories plan to abolish the 'revenue support grant' - the main component of national funding for councils - by 2020. Only diminishing grants for ring-fenced services like policing and schools will remain. This will totally gut jobs and services.



The Tories can find extra funding when it suits them

The Tories can find extra funding for local government when it suits them. They will pay attention to their own disgruntled MPs, but must also be forced to pay attention to working class communities.

Labour councils must abandon their strategy of passing on cuts to their employees and electorates and instead support no-cuts budgets. They can legally buy time by using reserves and borrowing to bridge the gap. This would allow them to organise a major campaign with trade unions and residents to win full funding from central government.



Care workers marching against council cuts in Ammanford, south Wales photo SP Wales

■ Boycott ban

The Tories plan to prevent councils - and possibly student unions - democratically boycotting human rights abusers.

Any bodies that receive the bulk of their funding from the government will be subject to the ban. They will not be allowed to have policy refusing to procure goods and services from 'unethical' suppliers.

This could include pension funds which invest in armaments and tobacco, or goods from Israeli-occupied territory in the West Bank. Ministers said there will be "severe penalties" for ordering boycotts.

The Socialist supports the right of democratic organisations to decide who and who not to buy from. Institutional boycotts, carefully applied, can play a useful secondary role in supporting some industrial and political struggles.

US fears EU exit will hinder vulture privatisers

Clive Heemskerk
National election agent, Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition

It was recently revealed that the US government is discussing how to make a direct intervention in the EU referendum debate. It fears a leave vote would have "disastrous consequences" for US capitalist interests.

The Senate Foreign Relations Committee heard former national security advisor Julianne Smith warn that "disaffection about globalisation" is creating "a very dangerous mix". The speculation is that Obama himself will publicly back a remain vote when he visits Europe in April.

Sections of the US capitalist establishment, particularly during the Iraq war, have sought to weaken the

effectiveness of the EU as a counter-power to the US - but not to actually break it up.

US big business and its political representatives are largely united, for example, behind the EU-US Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP). Even more than now, TTIP would open up public services - including the NHS - to takeover by private corporations.

TTIP

The Senate committee heard Cameron's EU referendum gamble described as "very risky". The impetus that opposition to TTIP would receive from a leave vote is, no doubt, foremost among the establishment's fears.

But Obama and other supporters of the EU bosses' club cannot be ef-

fectively answered by the equally pro-big business 'Vote Leave' and 'Leave.EU' campaigns, dominated by Tory and Ukip figures.

An independent working class leave campaign is vital. This must pose an exit vote as a defence of public services against corporate power, and for international workers' solidarity, towards a socialist Europe.

An immediate first step is to support the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) petition to the Electoral Commission. Public resources must not go to Ukip and Tory projects in the referendum campaign.

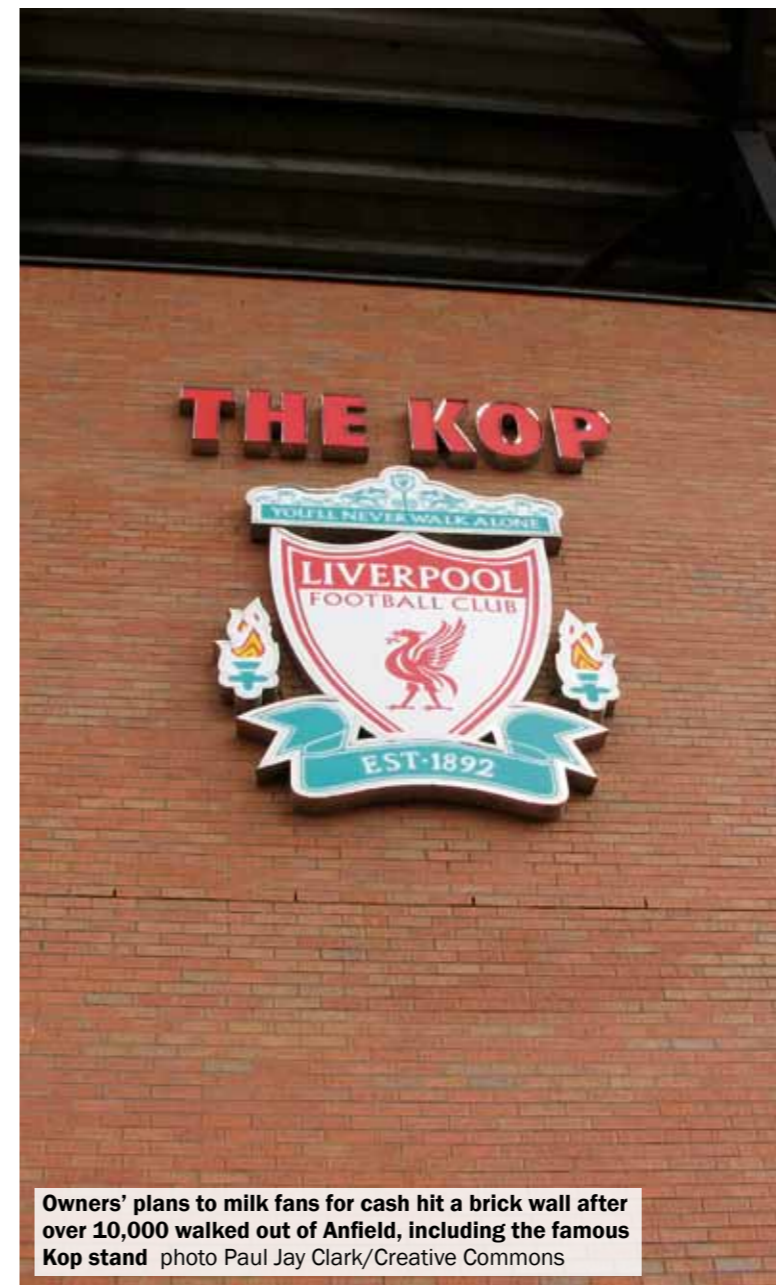
■ Read more at socialistparty.org.uk
'Don't give taxpayers' money to Ukip and Tory EU campaigners!'

■ Sign the petition at tiny.cc/EUpetitionTUSC (case sensitive)



Vulture photo Anita Rittenour /Creative Commons

Liverpool fans score victory v £77 ticket hike



Owners' plans to milk fans for cash hit a brick wall after over 10,000 walked out of Anfield, including the famous Kop stand photo Paul Jay Clark/Creative Commons

Dave Walsh
Liverpool FC supporter

Liverpool Football Club has backed down over ticket price hikes after thousands of fans walked out during a match.

Fenway Sports Group, Liverpool's US-based owner, had announced eye-watering increases. A season ticket in Anfield's rebuilt main stand would cost up to £1,029, with match day tickets up to £77. Supporters' groups were outraged.

After the 1989 Hillsborough crowd crush disaster and the cover-up which followed, Liverpool fans have known the importance of being organised to make themselves heard.

Earlier this season a protest took place before the side's game with Manchester United involving three groups: the Blacklist Support Group, the Hillsborough Justice Campaign and the Orgreave Truth and Justice Campaign. Liverpool's new stand is being built by Carillion, heavily involved in blacklisting trade unionists.

Walkout

To protest against £77 tickets, supporters' groups Spion Kop 1906 and Spirit of Shankly called for a 77th minute walkout during the match against Sunderland on 6 February. This call found an echo among fans and over 10,000 walked out.

Recognising the strength of feeling, Fenway Sports immediately backed down and apologised. It has frozen ticket prices for two years, and said the most expensive ticket will remain at £59.

This victory shows that working class people can get big results when we act collectively. Roy Benthall from Spirit of Shankly has received messages of solidarity from supporters' groups across Britain who are planning their own activities.

Spirit of Shankly, Spion Kop 1906 and the Liverpool Disabled Supporters' Association have arranged a follow-up meeting on 20 February to discuss a range of issues that affect supporters.

Supporters' meeting

■ New Picket, 64 Jordan Street, Liverpool L1 0BW (near Jamaica Street), 1.30pm on 20 February

RECORD-HIGH 170 EVICTIONS A DAY

Stephanie Hammond

Evictions in England and Wales reached a record high last year as over 170 people lost their homes every day.

Ministry of Justice figures revealed a 53% increase since 2010. Nearly 20,000 evictions in England were from social landlords and 5,919 were by private landlords.

16,440 were made using the "accelerated procedure" - where landlords hurry evictions through the courts.

16 of the 20 worst areas were in London. The highest rate of repossession was in Labour-controlled Newham, east London, at 191 for

every 100,000 households.

The Conservative Party is intent on destroying social housing for good.

The Housing and Planning Bill will fully transform housing associations into cut-throat businesses. Councils will sell off the last of their stock.

Market

And 'pay to stay' will force social tenants on joint incomes of £40,000 to rent at the inflated market rate.

Recently, Conservative MPs filibustered a motion to put an end to revenge evictions, and this year voted down a proposal for homes to be 'fit for human habitation'.

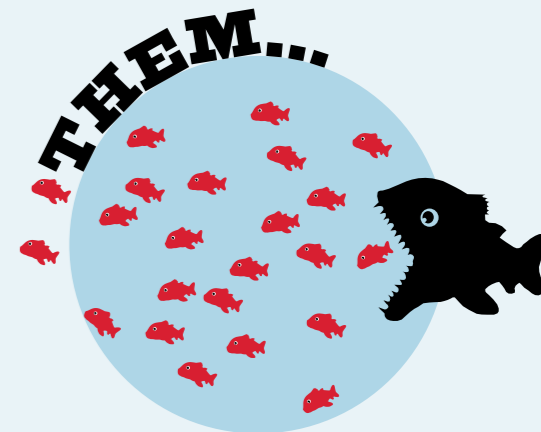
Meanwhile, Labour councils have enthusiastically sold off council

housing and played a shameful role in social cleansing.

But tenants can organise together to resist evictions. From the historic Glasgow rent strikes to the recent win by students at University College London, the record shows that when tenants join forces we can win.

This must take place as part of a general movement against austerity.

The Socialist Party calls for councils to refuse to evict social tenants, and start compulsory registration of private landlords to help prevent abuses. We want democratic committees of tenants and workers to set controls on private rents. And we demand a mass programme of council house building to provide homes for all.



■ Mansion butlers...

Establishment politicians are little better than "ushers and butlers to the wealthy" according to new research on the housing crisis.

Researchers at Goldsmiths, Sheffield and York universities blame social cleansing on toadying MPs and councillors

The research makes the obvious point that out-of-reach rental and mortgage costs are due in part to the mansions of the super-rich distorting the market. But it places the blame squarely with the oily politicians who OK it.



4 in 5

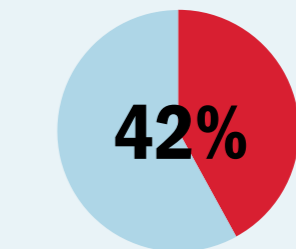
Londoners in their 20s have considered leaving due to housing costs

■ ...boomerang MP

Meanwhile, the housing crisis is getting so bad that even one Tory MP has moved back in with his parents.

William Wragg, 28, earns £74,000 a year plus expenses. Even so, high rental costs mean he says he can't afford a deposit for a house while renting. The MP for Hazel Grove in Greater Manchester isn't alone.

42% of Londoners in their 20s are holding off on starting a family due to high housing costs. And four in five aged between 20 and 29 have thought about moving out of London, according to the survey by Opinion Research.



42% of Londoners in their 20s are holding off starting a family due to housing costs

■ 'Prevent' v badge

Britain's anti-terror police have saved us again - from the chilling prospect of a school student being allowed to go about wearing a badge.

A school in Bedfordshire referred 17-year-old Rahmann Mohammadi to cops, apparently for sporting a "Free Palestine" badge in class. Rahmann also asked to raise money for Palestinian children and read out pro-Palestine literature.

The referral was part of the government's 'Prevent' scheme. The Socialist has called for opposition to Prevent, which is anti-democratic, divisive and racist. We support workers in Palestine and Israel struggling against occupation, state and individual terrorism, and capitalism.

■ Read more about fighting Prevent at socialistparty.org.uk, 'Tories "Prevent" civil liberties'



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An open letter to John McDonnell from Tony Mulhearn



Dear John,

Your assessment of the Tory government's brutal attack on local authorities in your article in the February edition of Labour Briefing is absolutely correct.

This is a government acting as the political wing of the fat cats, hedge fund managers, private equity companies and the bankers - the class that crashed the economy in 2008 for which the working class is paying at enormous social cost. It is recognised, even by Cameron's mother, that councils are now staring into the abyss.

It is obviously welcome then that you support Labour councils using their reserves in an attempt to defend services. But without this being linked to developing a campaign of refusing to implement any further cuts, it falls far short of what is necessary.

Dented shield

Your stance appears to be a repeat of the 'dented shield policy' - in reality a 'no shield' policy - advocated in the 1980s by the then Labour leader Neil Kinnock. You mention the 'no rates' strategy pursued by some councils in the 1980s, naming Lambeth as a brave example. But you say that as it failed then so it will fail again.

But nobody is proposing today that councils should not set a council tax rate - raising that is really a red herring.

In Liverpool at that time, we spectacularly won the first round of the battle against Thatcher's assault on local

councils. We argued against the strategy of refusing to set a rate. After the other councils (except for Lambeth) had abandoned the struggle, we adopted the tactic of setting a 'needs budget'.

We identified the shortfall in our budget - which was £30 million. We then launched a mass campaign based on the slogans 'better to break the law than break the poor' and 'no cuts in jobs and services,' which set as its objective winning back the cash that the government had stolen from the city.

If all of those councils who had initially engaged in that campaign stood firm like Liverpool instead of knuckling under, there is no doubt in my mind that Thatcher would have been compelled to retreat. In the event, we were left isolated as the likes of David Blunkett and Graham Stringer (the then leaders of Sheffield and Manchester councils) one by one retreated.

I know you were a staunch supporter of Liverpool at that time so it seemed strange that in your article you didn't refer to our success.

I note that you do call for a mass campaign of opposition to cuts with the objective of placing the blame on the Tories. But if this is to be effective it must be on the basis of Labour councillors refusing to vote for cuts.

Our campaign involved all sections of the labour movement and rank and file community organisations. Mass rallies, demonstrations and strike action by 30,000 council work-

ers supported by thousands of other workers, were part of this campaign.

This mass activity succeeded in forcing the Tory government to make concessions worth £60 million to Liverpool which enabled us to continue to build houses, create jobs, open nursery classes and defend services.

An essential element in the success of that campaign was our refusal to implement cuts. In short, the opposite of what Labour councils are currently doing. Liverpool was the only council which actually extracted funds from the government. That is truly a record to be proud of.

Commissioners

The same threats of commissioners which are used today to justify implementing cuts were used in the 1980s by those who balked at emulating Liverpool's action. But such was the level of support we received, both on the streets and in the ballot box, that even Thatcher drew back from sending them in.

You argue that because legislation allegedly enables "council officers to take over from councillors the ability to set budgets", councillors have no choice but to do their dirty work for them.

But it is just not true that council officers have such powers. It is ultimately a matter for councillors themselves to decide to accept their officers' advice or not on whether their budget is 'balanced'.

Councillors standing firm and mobilising mass support can effectively neutralise these petty bureaucrats, particularly if councillors in more than one council stood together to resist

the cuts. I would hope that you and Jeremy Corbyn would give energetic support to this.

We need Labour councillors to adopt the brave stance, not only of Liverpool and Lambeth, but also of Clay Cross in 1972 and of the Poplar councillors in 1921.

We can't wait

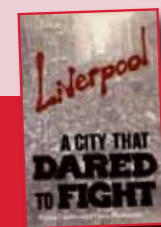
Labour councils today should refuse to make working class people pay for the reckless crimes of the financial spivs who are still unregulated and amassing huge wealth. Those under attack cannot wait until the election of a Corbyn-led government in 2020. The question is what to do now.

Remember, Jeremy Corbyn was propelled into the leadership on a clear anti-austerity programme. This must include Labour councillors voting against cuts.

If such a call was made by you and Jeremy and linked to a mass campaign against austerity, the Tories could be compelled to retreat and to abandon the current all-out assault on the working class and every gain it has made since 1945.

**Yours fraternally,
 Tony Mulhearn, former
 Liverpool City Councillor
 1984-87**

“
**We need
 Labour
 councillors
 to adopt
 the brave
 stance of
 Liverpool,
 Lambeth,
 Clay Cross
 and Poplar**



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ABSENCE OF CORBYNISM AS LABOUR SWINGS TORY AXE AGAIN!



Liz Filer
Southampton Socialist Party

Southampton Labour Council squandered a major opportunity to change course and build on the anti-austerity mood that swept Jeremy Corbyn to the leadership of Labour and produced the first junior doctors strike in 40 years.

As the council's budget debate unfolded sharp words were exchanged across the chamber. But when it came to contributions from the public gallery it was all too much and the police were called to remove us. We refused to leave and stood our ground in support of anti-cuts councillors Keith Morrell, Don Thomas and Andrew Pope, who all voted against cuts.

Prettifying austerity

If anything, this was a step further to the right as Labour councillors presented their enthusiastic vision of 'transformation' - in truth cuts through privatisation. Incapable of honest debate with the alternative presented to them by Declan Clune of Southampton Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition and Denise Wyatt, a Millbrook resident, we were treated to 30 minutes of prettifying austerity and distortion.

The housing crisis in the city has been 'tackled' by removing 5,000 names from the council waiting list, classifying them as those 'who don't have justified housing needs'.

As care for the elderly faces growing strains, with many kept unnecessarily in hospitals for lack of community beds, the council proposes to close another 45-bed council care home.



Anti-cuts councillors Keith Morrell (2nd from left) and Don Thomas (back) Inset: Police in council chamber
photos Southampton Socialist Party

The stark reality of austerity, growing poverty and family breakdown is that 25% of children in Southampton live in poverty.

Rather than standing with the community, refusing to vote for cuts and fighting for the government funding the city urgently needs, council leader Simon Letts, justified, his position by distorting the position of Southampton anti-cuts councillors as a 'failed call to borrow our way out of a crisis'. It's no surprise his comments were met with heckles from the public gallery to fight the cuts, not carry them out!

More alarming was the claim from councillor Challoner that these cuts were being carried out with the 'consent' of the council trade unions. Over 200 jobs will be cut by this budget.

Council workers are facing enormous pressures as staff

numbers are cut, those left are bearing impossible workloads. With further cuts to come, the support of the Unite and Unison local government committees for Labour councils to set no-cuts budgets is certain to be added to by others in the trade unions.

Pressure

Regardless of the vote, these cuts will be opposed.

We need to pressure the council to use its £40 million reserves to maintain library funding, protect jobs and services and link up with other campaigns across the country to turn the tide on this weak and divided Tory government.

That will include the task of challenging the 'no choice' councillors with a clear anti-cuts alternative at the ballot box in May.

SHEFFIELD PEOPLE'S BUDGET MEETING PRESENTS AN ALTERNATIVE TO CUTS

Alistair Tice
Sheffield Socialist Party

Initially, John McDonnell accepted civil servants' union PCS's invitation to speak at the Sheffield People's Budget conference on 13 February. In the end he couldn't attend, but did send a message of support.

However at the Labour Party meeting he did speak at, he excused Sheffield's Labour councillors, who are proposing 400 redundancies

and £28 million in service cuts! He said: "They can't do anything else. Councillors are in the most difficult position, because, legally, they have to set a budget and if they don't, the officers will do it for them."

It's a pity John didn't attend our conference, because he would have heard how Labour councillors do have a choice and could set a legal, balanced no-cuts budget for 2016-17.

The conference, initiated by the PCS, was supported by the trades council, the GMB union and the

People's Assembly, as well as the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition. 45 activists from several unions and campaigns attended.

Northern Powerhouse?

Marion Lloyd from PCS opened the meeting by explaining that the Tory government was moving the Northern Powerhouse to London by closing her Business, Innovation and Skills office costing 250 jobs (see issue 887), on top of 500 jobs going with the closure of the city's tax office.

Chris Baugh, PCS assistant general secretary, exposed the Tory austerity agenda and called on all unions to take solidarity action with the junior doctors. Helen Davies from Barnet council Unison explained how their strike action against outsourcing had built the confidence of council workers to fight the cuts.

Neil Carbutt, South Yorkshire Fire Brigades Union secretary, explained how the South Yorkshire Fire authority had quadrupled its reserves since 2008 by cutting the number of firefighters by over a third and shutting stations down.

Other speakers included representatives from the Benefit Justice Campaign, South Yorkshire Freedom Riders and Defend Council Housing.

All these campaign issues are incorporated in the ten point alternative budget that Jeremy Short, Socialist Party and TUSC election agent, proposed to the conference. Jeremy outlined a Peoples' Budget that would reverse redundancies and service cuts.

How will this be paid for? Sheffield Labour council leader Julie Dore had accused "those talking of using reserves as making political

mischief". Now, lo and behold, we find that the council is proposing to raid the reserves to plug the authority's pension fund deficit by £80 million.

No redundancies

Our alternative budget would be financed by saving £8 million on redundancy payments (because there would be no redundancies) and diverting £27 million from the private finance initiative reserves.

This one year of making no cuts would give the council time to build support among trade unions and local communities and link up with other local authorities to present a united front against the Tories.

The conference agreed the ten point alternative budget which we will publicise prior to our lobby of the budget setting council meeting on 4 March.



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[News in brief]

■ Taxi tumult

On 10 February after visiting a junior doctors' picket line I got off the train in Bromsgrove, Birmingham to see the road blocked by taxis. Drivers explained that the council closed their rank without discussion the day before. A new station is being built and the council's move has sparked anger. A joke homemade sign pointed to the next nearest rank a mile away. A message went round the previous night to strike and blockade the road. The word was that the Tory council was panicking and a councillor was on his way. The mood was solid and they were planning to stay all day. The councillor turned up to negotiate and gave in! He promised strikers that the rank would be restored. One driver said: "look at the different nationalities here, people go on about 'foreign workers' but without these lads - all of us in fact - acting together, we wouldn't have got this result."

Kevin Greenway
Birmingham Central Socialist Party

■ Rubbish revolt

Coventry refuse workers based at Whitley Depot downed tools on 9 February in response to the suspension of a Unite shop steward amid allegations of ongoing bullying by management. In a show of strength and solidarity over 30 workers descended on Coventry Council House to protest and support their colleague, as union representatives talked with management. Determined to show their support, workers remained outside the building all morning and early afternoon. It is vital that Unite nationally throws its support behind the rep and this group of workers.

Coventry Socialist Party

■ Bullying bosses

The Communication Workers' Union (CWU) has been in talks with BT Openreach over the treatment of their members employed as engineers. This has gone on for years with the company using the process to dismiss and discipline members. Many colleagues believe it's used to get rid of older workers and replace them with cheaper labour. Performance management has been a problem for BT workers with regular reference to the issue at annual conference. Talks have finished and the CWU is giving BT a matter of weeks to improve their approach or a ballot for industrial action will be invoked.

A BT engineer

Junior doctors continue defiant strike action on eve of contract imposition



The picket line at Arrowe Park Hospital on the Wirral photo Roy Corke

Socialist Party members across England visited junior doctor picket lines as they took their second day of strike action on 10 February over the imposition of unfair and unsafe contracts (see back page). Below is a round-up:

Kevin Greenway reports that in Bromsgrove, Birmingham there was a lively picket and demo at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital. Num-

bers varied throughout with up to 100 attending at the peak. Patients and families arriving were overwhelmingly supportive taking leaflets and stickers.

Strikers welcomed a group of Birmingham University students who turned out to back the strikers. Also in Birmingham striking Small Heath School teachers visited the picket line at Queen Elizabeth Hospital.

Andy Bentley joined junior doc-

tors on the picket line at the Royal Stoke University Hospital. Their confidence has grown since the last strike in January.

A firefighter in uniform turned up to the picket with cakes and a message of support. Also, Joe Cairnes, an ex-miner who was on strike in 1984/85, had not come alone to show support but brought his whole family as well!

In Leicester picket lines took place at all three main hospitals,

as well as a 'meet the doctors' event in the city centre. Socialist Students in Leicester has been supporting the doctors too with a successful meeting at Leicester University before the strike. Jeanna Strutinsky-Mason, a junior doctor, explained their case alongside Socialist Party member Matt Whale, a student nurse.

In Nottingham, junior doctor Helen Powell told the Socialist: "We have been picked on by the government because they thought, we would be the easiest target. These new contracts are the thin end of the wedge."

Nurses

At Manchester Royal Infirmary the picket lines were buoyed up by a lively march of student nurses and other students around the hospital, says Becci Heagney. They stopped traffic while chanting "students and doctors, unite and fight!"

In Gateshead, even more than the first strike day, it was clearly not just about junior doctors' pay and conditions but also about ensuring we have a well-funded NHS. There was recognition that the NHS should provide free dental care and free prescriptions. One of the junior doctors commented that some of her peers

training to be doctors couldn't afford to go to the dentist!

There was again a very determined mood among junior doctors in the picket line at Royal Free hospital in north London. At times there was a constant barrage of hooting from passing drivers including bus drivers and local council workers.

Privatisation

In south London at Springfield Hospital, pickets recognised that the proposed contractual changes were about making the service more attractive for privatisation. And at Kings College and Maudsley Hospitals around 40 student nurses and midwives joined the protest!

Junior doctors were out in force in Bristol with several pickets throughout the city.

They were determined to keep fighting for their terms and conditions and to defend the NHS despite the Tories' threats to impose the new contract. Tom Baldwin's conversations with doctors were punctuated by the frequent honking of car horns in support!

For more reports, photos and videos the Socialist Party website: socialistparty.org.uk/articles/22184

Library workers prepare to escalate strike action



Picket line photo Unite

A Unite member

Unite members in Greenwich and Bromley are escalating the libraries' campaigns in both boroughs following recent strike action which launched a joint campaign (see last week's issue).

In Bromley the Tories are handing six libraries over to Community Links who will run libraries with unpaid volunteers replacing paid, professional staff. The remaining libraries will be handed over to a private company.

So far, the council is refusing to say who has made a bid. Unite will now target our campaign at Community Links to persuade them to pull out - and when we get the identity of the privateers, they too will be targeted.

In Greenwich, there will be two lobbies of the Labour council in the coming weeks. Attempts will be made to persuade Greenwich Labour members to support the campaign - so far an appeal to Greenwich Momentum has fallen on deaf ears. The council is conducting a 'public consultation.' Judging by the

1,000 plus signatures gathered on the picket lines, the response from the public will be to oppose the closure. Unite has issued a clear warning - should the council ignore the protests and strikes, there will be further escalated strike action.

Unite is making a call to all those opposing library closures to unite in a coordinated campaign. This can start in south London, where campaigners and unions in Lewisham and Lambeth are also fighting to defend libraries.

A public meeting bringing all four borough campaigns together, alongside campaign group Stand Up For Libraries and the National Shop Stewards Network, could launch a London trade union-led campaign.

Since the Tories came into government, over 400 libraries have closed. Families relying on food banks and benefits and those on low incomes cannot buy books and many will not have internet at home.

One campaigner said: "Libraries facilitate a collective social science - library closures lead to collective, social dementia."

Historic joint further education strike

Sam Morecroft

Sheffield UCU (personal capacity)

On the 24 February, lecturer's union UCU and Unison will take joint strike action across England in the further education sector for the first time.

This is a huge step and is to be welcomed, particularly in a sector where pay, terms and conditions have been savaged in recent years. Unison joining UCU to take industrial action can potentially provide a huge boost to our members in further education.

The unions' pay claim, which amounts to just £1 an hour extra for further education workers, has been rejected by the employers. Union members

have been balloted for action and voted overwhelmingly in favour, with 74% voting to take action. That's a fantastic indication of the willingness of further education workers to struggle in the face of attacks.

But we need to be clear that one day of action alone is unlikely to force the employers to agree to the pay claim. It's great that Unison and UCU will be taking action together, but what is needed now is a serious plan of escalating action, to show the employers that workers are prepared to struggle and will carry out a serious programme of action.

There cannot and should not be any retreat from the dispute, as has happened all too often in the past, when the leaderships of both unions have shied away from escalating disputes.



photo Paul Mattsson

■ Rally to defend jobs in Northern Ireland

"WE WON'T SIT ON THE SIDE-LINES AND WATCH AS BALLYMENA IS LEFT AN ECONOMIC WASTELAND"

Daniel Waldron

Socialist Party Northern Ireland

On 8 February, 800 people gathered in Ballymena, Northern Ireland, in opposition to the threatened destruction of manufacturing jobs in the area. The JTI Gallaher cigarette factory and the Michelin tyre plant - the largest employers in the town - are to close with the loss of almost 2,000 jobs, which would have a devastating impact on the local community.

The rally - the first of its kind in the town since 1982 - was called by Unite the Union to try to secure a future for Ballymena and its young people.

It received backing from local sports clubs and community associations, as well as high-profile support from award-winning actors Liam Neeson and James Nesbitt, both from the town.

"We are unstoppable"

"I'm proud to be a unionised worker," said John Allen, Unite convenor in the Michelin factory and Chair of the local area activist committee. "A worker is far from powerless. When we stand together, we are unstoppable. Today shows that when we stand together, there is nothing we cannot achieve. We won't be just the



Socialist Youth and Unite members march before the meeting photo Socialist Party NI

object of investment decisions. We won't sit on the sidelines and watch as Ballymena is left an economic wasteland."

Socialist Youth member Emma Montgomery - a 19-year-old from the town whose mother used to work at JTI Gallaher - spoke of the bleak future already facing young people in the area thanks to Tory and Stormont cuts. Many have to travel long distances to college and the jobs on offer are overwhelmingly low paid and precarious.

The national and regional leadership of Unite were represented on the platform. Irish regional secretary Jimmy Kelly told the crowd: "We're not here to demand crumbs off the top table. This is to demand a better future, a future for our class, across all communities."

Unite the Union - particularly its local activists - are to be congratulated on this excellent initiative. It is vital that working class communities do not simply lie down and accept the loss of manufacturing jobs.

The companies behind the closures should not be let off the hook. They are shifting production to lower-wage economies to maximise profits.

The trade union movement should step up the call for nationalisation of factories threatened with closure by profit-hungry bosses, in order to save jobs and skills. The Socialist Party and Socialist Youth were the only political group to intervene in the rally and raise this demand.

■ Wales

WORKERS READY TO FIGHT BACK



Owen Herbert, left and Rob Williams, right, speaking at the NSSN meeting in Port Talbot photo Ross Saunders

Alec Thraves

Socialist Party Wales

Dozens of activists from across south west Wales attended three public meetings between 8-10 February that were initiated and supported by Socialist Party Wales

members fighting against cuts and job losses.

In Llanelli, Carmarthenshire Unison representatives explained the determined stand of their Unison branch in arguing for a 'no cuts' budget and the opposition they face from the Plaid-led council that is carrying out cuts with the same de-

termination as the previous Labour-led council.

Mark Evans, Unison branch secretary, said whichever party slashes jobs and services will face fierce opposition from his branch - the only Unison branch in Wales supporting a 'no cuts' budget.

This was repeated at a Swansea Trades Council meeting the following evening - where news that the local government committees of Britain's two largest unions, Unite and Unison, were now demanding that councils support 'no-cuts' budgets, was greeted enthusiastically.

Welcomed

This was particularly welcomed by the education reps present who are battling Swansea Council's plans to cut the education budget by £5 million for each of the next three years!

Finally, Rob Williams, chair of the National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN), addressed an NSSN solidarity meeting in Port Talbot for steel workers who are facing mass

redundancies at the Tata plant.

Rob, highlighting the real danger of the run down and possible closure of the plant, said that nationalisation, with compensation paid only on the basis of proven need (which means Tata's executives would get nothing!) was the only realistic plan to guarantee the jobs of thousands of workers in the area.

Owen Herbert, RMT regional secretary, reminded the meeting of how popular the idea of re-nationalisation of the railways has become and said that nationalisation of steel would receive similar support.

All three meetings had a common theme: a willingness of workers to organise a fightback against the Tories and the employers.

They also discussed the failure of the Labour and trade union leadership in Wales to mount any effective challenge to this slaughter of jobs and services. Socialist Party members throughout Wales are participating offering a fighting, socialist alternative.

Socialist Students conference 2016

DELEGATES ENTHUSIASTIC AND CONFIDENT IN OPPOSING EDUCATION CUTS

On Saturday 13 February, 100 people packed into the Socialist Students national conference in Coventry. Students from over 30 institutions were represented, including nine school students from east London. The conference passed lots of policy to direct the work for the next year, particularly focusing on opposing austerity in education (see socialiststudents.org.uk). Reflecting the growth of Socialist Students, a larger national steering committee was elected. Socialist Students are internationalists. The conference ended on a high with video solidarity messages by student members of the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI, the socialist international organisation to which the Socialist Party is affiliated) in South Africa and the USA. They told us about their struggles for free education, to end privatisation, and the fight to raise the minimum wage. In the following articles Socialist Students delegates report on the different political discussions and workshops that ran throughout the day.

Embracing socialist ideas in the age of austerity

Claire Laker-Mansfield
national organiser Socialist Students

Socialist Students met for an enthrusing national conference. The day's discussions showed a flourishing organisation, confident in socialist ideas and leading in the fight to defend education. In the main, delegates were university students. But this year, for the first time, a large group of school and college students attended. Throughout the day's discussions tremendous enthusiasm for socialist ideas shone through. There was a sense that these ideas are resurgent - as international developments like the campaign to elect "democratic socialist" Bernie Sanders in the US attest. The conference took stock of the huge steps forward that Socialist Students has taken in the past year - evidence of the growing appetite for an alternative to austerity and for ideas that can offer a future to the next generation. The opening session was: 'Building the student movement in the age of austerity'. This set the scene for the day's discussions. Platform speakers - who included Lily Douglas of Willowfield School, Huddersfield Socialist Students member Jackson Mouldycliffe, Jane Nellist of the NUT teachers' union executive and Myka Abramson, a UCU member and anti-casualisation campaigner - outlined the devastating attacks taking place on

education and the much needed fightback. A video from the 2010 student movement was a good introduction to this - a reminder of how rapidly a seeming calm in society can give way to explosive developments and mass movements. Lily outlined how her and her school friends had drawn the conclusion that they needed to get organised as part of the fight to stop the war on Syria. She described the anger that she and many students at her school had felt when the local Labour MP - Stella Creasy - had voted for the bombing. Since then, Socialist Students has set up a group at the school, and they have been organising discussions, taking part in protests and have even had to face disciplinary measures for wearing 'books not bombs' badges! Now Socialist Students at Willowfield school is getting involved in the campaign against the huge cuts that are on the way. Schools in some areas are facing more than 20% of their funding being lost.

Union action
This picture was expanded on by Jane Nellist, who described the huge pressure piled on teachers. Jane spoke about the need for coordinated national trade union action in the fight against cuts, and the importance of students linking up with workers and trade unions to defend education. This was a point reinforced by Myka, who explained that, incredibly, more than half of teaching staff in universities are now on casual contracts. Jackson gave plenty of examples of the work our societies are involved in on uni-

versity campuses. At Huddersfield, Socialist Students has organised a substantial free education protest this year and is now playing a part in the campaign to save a local hospital's A&E. These examples were expanded on in the discussion - with students from other universities contributing reports of similar successful initiatives. Seb Robyns from Cardiff University described how their society had initiated a housing campaign, taking up the sky-high rents and problems with quality. Amy Cousens from Leeds Beckett talked about building for a regional demonstration in Yorkshire against tuition fees and cutbacks. Gareth Bomhall from Swansea described how his group is participating in a campaign to oppose cuts to mental health services. Vlad from Portsmouth explained how Socialist Students there had initiated a campaign to fight for the university to provide scholarships to refugees, linking this demand with the fight for free and decent education for all. A theme of the discussion was the failure of both the National Union of Students (NUS) and other left organisations within the student field to measure up to the task of building a movement capable of defending education at a time of such unprecedented attack. There is a clear need for a mass national campaign to combat both the vicious attacks outlined in the Higher Education green paper and the new round of austerity being visited on schools and colleges. That's why Socialist Students has decided to launch 'Education Fightback'. This will be a campaign opposing the attacks taking place on our education system at all levels. To kick-start this, we have called for a national day of action to take place on 26 February. This was a date that had been named by some on the left as a student strike. But in the absence of a proper strategy to mobilise for this, it has been cancelled. Rather than accept that nothing will happen, Socialist Students is taking the opportunity to launch a re-invigorated campaign to end austerity in education. We plan to organise protests, stunts, lobbies and sit-ins at all the universities, schools and colleges where we are present, and to use this as a springboard to building a huge campaign to defend and improve education. Join us and get involved!

“”
They leafletted their school twice, produced badges against the war and took to social media to directly question Stella Creasy's voting



photo Johnny Dickens

Building in schools and colleges

Ellis Mulholland and Nur Bahram
Newham school students

We went to the inspiring Socialist Students conference and one of the workshops we attended was on 'Building in Schools and Colleges'. Lauren and Trishika from Walthamstow introduced it by saying how they organised with school friends in opposition to their local MP, Stella Creasy, voting for the bombing of Syria. They leafletted their school twice, produced badges against the war and took to social media to directly question Stella Creasy's voting. They ran a petition asking their school's head to invite the MP and an anti-war activist to speak to students. One of their meetings in a café was reported on Channel Four news. The TV reporter tried to patronise the meeting because it was mainly made up of 15 year old students. But that was the point of it - young people organising themselves. Walthamstow Socialist Students are also campaigning against cuts and over fast food workers' rights, including attending two meetings in Parliament. During the workshop we discussed the first steps to getting school students involved in campaigns. Nancy said: "If you realise that people are angry about stuff, make leaflets and badges about it and go as far as you can on the issue". Holding bake sales is a good way to get money to pay for the campaign. Walthamstow Socialist Students holds local meetings each week at Costa and goes on demonstrations, leading chants. The workshop agreed that meetings should always be inviting for students - informal, held near their schools and not using jargon.



www.socialiststudents.org.uk

NUS conference and elections

During the conference a breakout meeting was held for those students who are looking to intervene further in the NUS over the coming year. A number of Socialist Students members will be attending NUS conference as delegates - a nationwide conference to decide the direction of the union for the following year. Socialist Students are also standing for sabbatical positions at some universities, a position which would allow them to influence the running of and campaigning within student unions. Students standing for sabbatical positions agreed to coordinate campaigns between universities and support each other via social media. Delegates to the NUS conference will meet again in the coming months to submit motions to the conference and agree who will speak on which motions. The meeting also discussed standing for a position on the NUS NEC, which, if successful, would allow Socialist Students to participate in the running of the NUS at a national level. We are confident that involvement with the NUS will help Socialist Students engage with a wider audience and are excited to push on with the campaign! **Zoe Brunswick** Manchester Socialist Students

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Corbyn, Labour and the fight against the Tories

Introduced by Lenny Shail from the Socialist Party, the session on Jeremy Corbyn and the Labour Party was full of enthusiastic contributions. Momentum, the Corbyn supporting group, was invited to debate but didn't attend. The discussion was mainly concerned with in what way Socialist Students should now engage with the Labour Party in light of Jeremy Corbyn's election to the party leadership.

“”
There is a clear need for a mass national campaign to combat both the vicious attacks outlined in the Higher Education green paper and the new round of austerity being visited on schools and colleges

Corbyn was unexpectedly thrust into power after Labour's defeat in the 2015 general election. This defeat was largely a result of Labour's politically deficient programme. Instead of mobilising the mass anger present throughout society after five years of the Con-Dem government, Labour sought to mimic the narrative peddled by the Conservative Party and its allies in the media. It was clear to everyone in the room that Corbyn's victory has opened up a new period for the growth of socialist consciousness for students wanting to fight the Tories and their austerity agenda. Yet beyond this was an acute awareness of the tasks which still lie ahead if Corbyn's anti-austerity message is to be realised. Clearly, the Labour Party is divided between Corbyn (supported overwhelmingly by students and young people) on the one side and Blairite MPs and councillors on the other. Labour for the time being contains within it two irreconcilable opposing forces. There was a clear consensus from all who contributed during the session that the capitalist policies of the Labour Party up and down the country have not changed. The right wing still holds a dead hand grip on the party in local councils, voting to cut public services and undermining Corbyn's leadership. "If Corbyn isn't careful, he runs the risk of compromising on what made him so popular. The right wing of the party shows no signs of taking a conciliatory approach," said one student. As such, Socialist Students has to intervene at every opportunity in public meetings to both help Corbyn and his supporters in the fight against the Blairites, as well as building Socialist Students as a campaigning socialist organisation. In my view this means all Socialist Students groups supporting anti-austerity candidates in upcoming local elections, be they Labour Party candidates or otherwise.

Theodore Winston



Willowfield students supporting health workers' action



Featured letter: **Militant's** real role

IF I HAD BEEN IN 1980s LABOUR, I'D HAVE SUPPORTED MILITANT



photo Dave Sinclair

Richard Price
Gloucestershire Socialist Party

I used to think Militant were the bad guys.

I joined the Labour Party in 1995 as a 20-year-old student. Most if not all of Militant (then in Labour, now called the Socialist Party) had already been expelled or had resigned from Labour.

Blair was already in charge, and all I could see was that we were finally going to be rid of the Tories. I thought Labour was still a socialist party - my political knowledge and history were not enough for me to think otherwise.

Labour swept to power of course, and I proudly carried my membership card with the new 'Clause Four' printed on its reverse. I did not appreciate the significance of what it had replaced.

When, with other Labour Party members, I first saw footage of Neil

Kinnock's famous speech delivered to the 1985 party conference, which I had been too young to recall from the time, I cheered with the rest of them. Militant had been wreckers, stopping Labour from being able to achieve power and to help the people that really needed it.

That is what I was led to believe, and I bought into it. This hugely embarrasses me now.

Labour government

I had visions of perhaps forging a career with Labour when I left university in 1998. Instead I went into local government, where I have mostly worked ever since. It was through my work in local government that I first discovered for myself that the Labour Party was not so different to the Tories.

In my first three roles, I worked in Labour-controlled authorities under a Labour government. The cuts were arguably even more severe in the late 1990s to mid-2000s than

now, as there were more services to slash or privatise, and more workers to make redundant.

I became active as a rep in my union, helping members facing bullying and harassment and 'performance management', the rising number of disciplinary cases at the hands of bosses. We struck over pay and pensions and detrimental changes to our terms and conditions. And we saw valued colleagues leave through redundancy, or simply because they had had enough.

I finally left the Labour Party and joined the Socialist Party. My story appeared recently in the Socialist (see socialistparty.org.uk "Why I joined: I already feel as if I am finally home").

I have certainly learned a lot about the history of Militant from my new comrades over the past few months. I would like to think that had I been in the Labour Party in the 1980s, I would have been one of them.

Socialists' anti-war art on show in Bradford

Ian Slattery
Bradford Socialist Party

Currently on display at the Bradford Playhouse is a series of paintings by artist and Socialist Party member Peter Robson. The watercolours cover a number of issues relating to war, from collateral damage to those ignored by the history books.

In advance of his publication of



Bradford Socialist artist Peter Robson with one of his paintings

a new series of paintings about the World War One, Peter spoke to the Socialist about the role art can play in political movements.

"Artists have a right - a duty - to put up a mirror and reflect what's going on in the world. What is the purpose of art if it doesn't prod and agitate people?"

"That's what I'm passionate about my art doing. It isn't always easy

to look at, but hopefully it angers people and motivates them.

"Life can be hard for prospective artists, with confrontational work often ignored by galleries who want safer pieces that will be a more reliable attraction. But you have to be honest and unafraid - and to those looking for protest art then don't give up searching, there are plenty of us out there!"



The Socialist Inbox

Do you have something to say?

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

Brum Blairite

Hannah Sell answered the false claim of sexism on the part of Jeremy Corbyn and his supporters really well in issue 885 of the Socialist.

(See socialistparty.org.uk, 'Outrageous attacks on Corbyn for "sexism"'.)

The Blairite MP Jess Phillips led the accusations. Her opposition to democratic accountability, and the aggressive defence of her career, are becoming increasingly well-known.

In fact she has

been aggressively defending two careers since last May's general election. She is still actually one of my local councillors!

She refused to stand down before her term expired to save the hard-pressed council taxpayers the £25,000 cost of a by-election. When councillors' expenses are published, we will be able to see if her concern for local taxpayers stretched to not claiming her councillor's allowance

Clive Walder,
Birmingham
Socialist Party



Jess Phillips

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



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Poem: Journey

Festive lights float above the streets below
as the bus starts, stops and starts again
on the journey through town. Upstairs a hubbub
of world languages that resemble an orchestra
warming up. The occasional cymbal crash
of a mobile phone breaks the aural warmth.
It is home here and we feel safe so we dream
of monsoons, rivers, islands and the stars.
On Oxford Street a one legged man in white shorts
begs outside a Body Shop, old wooden crutches
to emphasise his plight. Crutches that speak of
another time, the train to Dover and an earlier war.
Our little world is well lit up as we pass through
a perpetual cool Britannia where style is for sale.
Around us the black cabs bully the red buses, a sign
that there is a gap between the gaudily dressed shops
and a war of salvation that is to be delivered courtesy
of a Pandora's Box of suited rats, who want for nothing
but a conscience. The grass of Parliament Square
is slippery underfoot as the fiery speeches float above.
As one we have lights and some peace at Christmas
but for them it will be where to lay this broken body
or where to lay that broken body. Then weep.

Steve Nally

■ Scotland

Battle heats up against council cuts



John Swinney, Scottish finance secretary called the cuts “challenging but fair”
 photo Daniel Evans/Creative Commons

Matt Dobson
 Socialist Party Scotland

£1 billion in council cuts over the next two years is the consequence of the funding deal from the Scottish National Party (SNP) government, which will mean the loss of 15,000 jobs and the decimation of services if implemented.

Both the SNP and Labour oppose Tory austerity in words but their councils have all signed up to this deal and look likely to be setting budgets to implement cuts over the next few weeks.

However, a fightback from workers and the trade unions is developing with Socialist Party Scotland activists playing a crucial role. In Glasgow and Dundee the local authority trade unions representing 26,000 workers are jointly campaigning for no-cuts budgets.

Union resistance

In Glasgow the Labour administration is seeking to implement £133 million of cuts. However they have already been checked by the resistance of the trade unions into stepping back from immediately implementing attacks on terms and conditions worth £3.5 million.

Reports of the attacks have immediately fuelled large attendances at workplace union meetings and the

local press reported on the likelihood of industrial confrontation on a wide scale.

School janitors in Unison are already entering their fourth week of an industrial action boycott of duties in a “dirty, smelly, heavy, outdoor” payment dispute.

Glasgow Labour council is paying out £3,000 a day to hire non-union workers in an attempt to undermine the action. The #justice4janies campaign is getting wide support, despite the worsening mess in schools, and the jannies are determined to fight on.

The resolute fighting mood and an understanding of the serious battle that is developing was shown by the impressive 350 strong turnout to the Glasgow City Unison AGM, the largest turnout for some years.

The branch, with its fighting record, its successful leadership of recent strikes like the homeless caseworkers and being the key reference point for anti-austerity struggle in the city, shows what can be achieved with a fighting socialist leadership.

In Dundee there is growing anger at the SNP implementing £23 million of Tory austerity. Several hundred braved a snow blizzard on 30 January, to march through the city demanding a no-cuts budget.

Jim McFarlane, Dundee City Uni-

son branch secretary and Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition candidate for Dundee West in a recent statement said: “Savage cuts are planned for garden maintenance services, waste recycling, roads and street lighting as well as child and family services.

“Hundreds of jobs will be lost. The council workforce has already been reduced by around 1,300 jobs. We need politicians prepared to actually put the programme of anti-austerity into action.”

Work to rule

Also the West Dunbartonshire teachers’ action, reported in issue 884, continues. Teachers have organised a work-to-rule and are balloting over an offer from the council. Scottish teachers’ union the EIS is campaigning to reject with another one-day strike set for 18 February.

We are organising a political electoral challenge as part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) in the Scottish Parliament election in May.

Protests at council budget setting meetings have been called by local authority trade unions in Dundee on 25 February at 2.30pm in City Square and in Glasgow on 10 March at 12.30pm in George Square.

For the full article see
socialistpartyscotland.org.uk

LONDON LOBBIES AGAINST CUTS TO JOBS AND SERVICES

Paula Mitchell
 London Socialist Party

In Tower Hamlets on 17 February a second People’s Budget meeting is being held jointly between the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition and the Tower Hamlets Independent group of councillors. Following a successful first forum, people have been signing petitions and filling out consultation sheets to say they want no cuts in Tower Hamlets.

Labour Mayor John Biggs is proposing savage cuts to the tune of £31 million, including cruel closures such as the incontinence laundry service and school trips to a rural studies centre - when they have £71 million in the bank!

Service users

TUSC supporters and Socialist Party members are campaigning for a no-cuts budget amendment to be put to the council meeting on 24 February - which local trade unionists and service users will lobby to back up the speakers against cuts inside.

Around London there are meetings taking place to argue for no-



Tower Hamlets People’s Budget meeting photo Tower Hamlets TUSC

cuts budgets - from Ealing Against Cuts, to Hackney TUSC, to Socialist Party hosted meetings in Newham and Waltham Forest.

And these are followed by lobbies of the budget setting meetings. Combined, Labour councils have billions in reserves, yet they are slashing youth and children’s services, libraries and other vital services.

All over London people are asking, if Jeremy Corbyn won the leadership of the Labour Party on an anti-cuts platform, why don’t Labour councillors make a stand and vote no cuts?

Read more online at
socialistparty.org.uk

Join the London lobbies: call on councillors not to vote for cuts!

- **Greenwich:** 17 & 24 February
- **Newham:** 22 February
- **Ealing:** 23 February
- **Lewisham:** 24 February
- **Tower Hamlets:** 24 February
- **Camden:** 29 February
- **Hackney:** 2 March
- **Waltham Forest:** 3 March

See www.socialistparty.org.uk as more lobby dates are added!

Hull Ukip councillor resigns to join...Labour?

Mike Whale
 Hull Socialist Party

Richard Barrett, Hull’s only Ukip councillor has resigned and announced that he has applied to join the Labour Party. It has not been formally confirmed by Labour that he has been accepted, but it is unlikely that he would have announced his application if such a move was not likely to go through.

Referendum

Barrett, more known for his absences from the council than anything that he has said or done, condemns Ukip for its obsession with the EU referendum and for not taking up the “general needs of the public”.

He also suggests that a bullying culture exists in Ukip.

Is he attracted to the anti-

austerity policies of Jeremy Corbyn or does he want to snuggle up with councillor Steve Brady, Labour leader of the council, who continues to implement massive cuts in the city?

It is not unheard of for members of right-wing or racist parties to become disillusioned and move to the left and we welcome his decision to leave Ukip.

We wonder, however, whether anti-cuts councillor Gill Kennett, who announced her preparedness to re-join the Labour Party when Jeremy Corbyn was elected leader, will be welcomed back with the same fanfare of publicity. Somehow we doubt it!



photo Paul Mattsson



photos Socialist Party

HANDS OFF THE BUTTERFIELDS ESTATE!

Resist evictions and gentrification – homes for people, not for profit

Sarah Wrack
Waltham Forest Socialist Party

“Everyone talks about community but this is a real community and they’re breaking it up!” That’s what Joyce, one of the residents on the Butterfields estate in Walthamstow told me after a street meeting on 13 February which the Socialist Party helped tenants organise.

The Butterfields was owned by Glasspool – a charitable trust which charged relatively low rents compared to the rocketing local market rate. But without a word to the tenants, Glasspool sold the properties to private developers.

At least 15 households have now received eviction notices saying they must be out of their homes within two months and six properties have already been up for sale at auction. The company that now owns 63 of the properties, Butterfields E17 Ltd, is openly saying that more evictions will follow with further rounds of sales.

Protests

Glasspool claims there was a promise that nobody would be evicted. Tenants want to see the contract that was agreed and are considering lobbies of Glasspool and the new landlords.

They will also join the Socialist Party lobbying the budget setting meeting of Waltham Forest council on 3 March. We have raised the idea that the council could step in and compulsory purchase the properties, making them council homes on council rents with secure tenancies for all current tenants. As a very last resort, the tenants should at least be offered immediate council housing elsewhere in the borough.

Joyce told me that a tiny patch of land next to her house and the space currently occupied by two garages behind it have just been granted planning permission for new houses to be built.

This is the pattern across Waltham Forest. The council is selling off public land to private developers to build shoebox sized buy-to-let flats to satisfy the ballooning private rental sector in one of the most rapidly gentrifying areas of London.

The Butterfields homes have been there since the 1930s. As Anna said at the street meeting “This is a nice street, it’s quiet and the houses are nice. They’re not perfect – we all know of the problems with [at this point everyone joined in to complete the sentence] mould. But we’re used to dealing with that and the prices are reasonable.”

Compensation?

Local Labour MP Stella Creasy has highlighted the situation in the national Guardian and has written to all the tenants expressing her outrage at Glasspool’s behaviour. But her proposed solution is that evicted tenants should be given a lump sum as compensation.

This might help with immediate costs of moving but it won’t make up for the lifetime of inflated rents compared to what they pay now. And it won’t compensate the whole community for losing yet more ‘affordable’ housing in favour of rip-off buy-to-let landlords.

Most of the Butterfields residents are low paid, some need benefits to help them pay even the rents they have now. Mr and Mrs Rashit invited us in for a Turkish coffee after the meeting. Dogan is retired and receives a small pension. Sukran works as a cleaner in a school two hours a day. She receives housing benefit and already has to top up £130 a month from her minimal wage to make the rent.

They’re already on the waiting list for council housing. But they don’t want to move away from their friends, Sukran’s job, and Whipps Cross hospital where Dogan gets medical treatment regularly. Their daughter lives ten minutes away.

Joyce explained to the meeting

that she has an assured tenancy and can’t be touched for now. But she wants to be involved in the campaign to defend her neighbours. “I’ve got friends here. My neighbour over the road died recently and I’d been looking after her. It’s that kind of street.”

The street meeting agreed to call another meeting a couple of days later which everyone took away leaflets for and promised to spread the word. The second meeting started with reports from residents who had been investigating Butterfields E17 Ltd.

Marc-Anthony had been to visit the registered address of the company but there was no sign of it. Nicole had looked into the two registered officers of the company, who have had a number of short-lived small businesses before.

Battle ahead

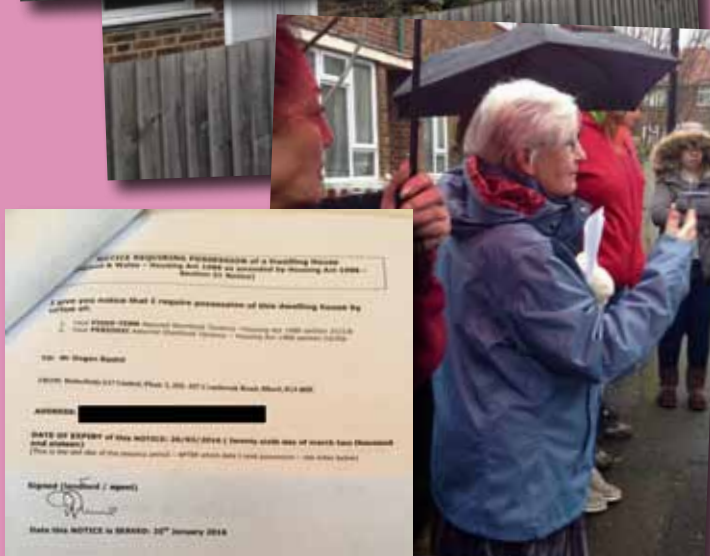
The meeting agreed to launch a public campaign and organise a public meeting appealing for support from other housing campaigners, trade unionists and the whole community.

There’s a battle ahead at the Butterfields but it’s clear that the residents are overwhelmingly up for a fight. They know the alternative is ending up in a private rental market that’s gone mad and probably being forced out of the borough, if not out of London.

Linda Taaffe spoke at the meeting from the Socialist Party and explained the importance of getting organised and keeping track of who lives where and when evictions are threatened so that we can mobilise to resist. At the second meeting Anna and Sylvia took responsibility for going door-to-door to make a start on this.

Marc-Anthony summed up the mood on the estate saying: “We know we might not win, but we’ve got to try to do something.”

■ **Public meeting 7pm, 24 February, Shernhall Street Methodist Church, E17**
■ **National housing demo 12pm, 13 March, Lincoln’s Inn Field, WC2A 3TL**



Irish general election

FIGHTING ON AN ANTI-AUSTERITY AGENDA

Campaigning in the Irish general election to be held on 26 February is in full swing. The Socialist Party in Ireland is participating as part of the broader Anti Austerity Alliance (AAA). This includes seeking reelection for Paul Murphy, AAA TD (MP), and Ruth Coppinger, Socialist Party TD. Longstanding Socialist Party TD **Joe Higgins** is standing down but is continuing to play a leading part in the campaign. Joe spoke to the Socialist about the key election issues and debates. Additional material (opposite page) is provided by **Kevin McLoughlin** of the Socialist Party Ireland.

Socialist TD Joe Higgins explains what's at stake in this election

The austerity agenda of the last nearly eight years has intensified inequality in Irish society. It mirrors very much what has happened internationally, reflected in the recent report by the Oxfam charity which shows that for the first time in history the richest 1% own more wealth than the other 99% of humanity.

The election of Jeremy Corbyn in Britain and the enormous support for Bernie Sanders in the USA reflect a growing opposition and anger to this unequal society that is growing apace under international capitalism. That's very much reflected in Ireland too.

We've had a statistical recovery in the economy but many ordinary people just don't feel it, because of the burdens of austerity continuing on them. Subsequent to the financial crash, for example, new jobs tend to be low-skilled, low paid, precarious, zero-hour contracts, and so forth.

We also have a horrific housing crisis which is a real issue in the election. There is a major health service crisis, with A&E's overwhelmed because of a lack of resources and the accumulation of spending cuts.

What we are trying to bring out is that the establishment parties and Sinn Féin are trying to close down the debate on the economy to what they call the 'fiscal space' - a very narrow band of extra tax income which they hope will become avail-

able if the economy grows, without problems, over the next five years. They've had an obsessive discussion here on that but it really is a device for diverting attention from the huge wealth concentrated in the hands of a tiny elite and the big profits major corporations are making. Ireland is really a tax haven for these companies.

We have tried to shift public attention by pointing out there are resources potentially available for boosting people's living standards.

To utilise these resources we need progressive taxation and the banks brought into public ownership. We need large-scale public investment into building new homes.

We link these key demands to the need for a political alternative. We call for a 'political revolution' to cast aside the establishment parties and build a new force that working class people need to represent their interests."



Joe accuses the bankers photo Creative Commons/Wikimedia

The issues

The election is not being fought simply on who will form the next government. People are concerned with the general political direction of the country and specific issues like water charges, living standards, etc.

The election campaign is also being fought on broader economic questions and a number of very important social issues.

One social issue that stands out in this election, especially among young people and women, is the question of the need to repeal the 8th amendment of the constitution - ie the ban on abortion rights.



TDs Paul Murphy, Ruth Coppinger and Joe Higgins (foreground, left to right) photos Irish Socialist Party

Why aren't the bankers in jail?

In 2014 a parliamentary committee was set up to inquire into the huge banking crisis of 2007-08 that led to bailouts and austerity. **Joe Higgins** was a dissenting voice on that inquiry (with Pearse Doherty TD) and refused to sign off the majority report. Instead he published a damning 146-page alternative last month, blaming the crisis on the top politicians, financiers and capitalist speculators.

"It meant an intense 18 months of research. We interviewed a parade of former top bankers, property developers, media people, regulators, etc. Our minority report showed that the crisis was the result of extreme profiteering driven by greedy bankers and developers, facilitated by the government and leading politicians.

We asked why no bankers or any of the major participants in the financial bubble were in jail? Of course 99.9% of transactions that caused the bubble were perfectly legal and in fact were legislated for by the establishment parties in the Dail [Irish Parliament]. So we wouldn't sign the official report and instead brought out our own report on the same day. Many ordinary people appreciated this.

We demanded that the major financial institutions be brought into public ownership under democratic control.

Speculation in homes and other property should be outlawed and we called for public investment in providing homes. Some financial institutions have been nationalised. We argued they should be kept in public ownership but democratised and made to work for the benefit of the majority."

I was in parliament at the time and there was no one else shouting out about this extreme profiteering. Inevitably it crashed.

Unfortunately, the inquiry's terms of reference were restrictive but nevertheless we took the approach of trying to be a voice for the victims - those who suffered from the speculative financial bubble and the subsequent crash.

It was an eleven member committee with a big majority of TDs drawn from the establishment parties. These people firmly believe in the right of the capitalist bankers and developers to exploit the majority of the population for a profit.

We exposed the whole financial deregulation process which took place throughout the 1990s in pursuit of profits.

The banks acquired massive amounts of money from European financial markets. They then lent billions of euros to speculators.

The price of a home in Ireland went up 400% from 1996 to 2006. Mortgages went from 20 to 40 years duration - unsustainable levels of debt.

The bubble itself acted as a huge crisis on first-time home buy-

It's a recovery for the rich – not us

There has been much debate about the so-called recovery in the economy following the financial crash and the government's severe austerity bailout measures.

While the governing parties have been playing up the limited economic growth others, including Sinn Féin (SF), have been calling for a 'fair recovery'.

The Socialist Party, campaigning as part of the AAA, says that this recovery is primarily a recovery for the rich. To achieve real economic justice, workers should vote for the party that will challenge the system and provide a real alternative.

Fiscal space

Recently there has been an intense debate about what the outgoing Fine Gael/Labour Party coalition government has referred to as "fiscal space".

For years these politicians have been saying there are no funds available to maintain vital services, hence their justification for austerity measures.

But now there's an election, they cynically put forward promises about increasing public spending over the next five years.

They are also giving the false impression that this is a large amount of money. First they said this 'pot' is €12 billion but then revised it down to €10 billion. However, the previous years' cuts total more than €50 billion!

So even if this extra spending was delivered, which is doubtful given the state of the global capitalist economy, it doesn't go anywhere near repairing the earlier damage.

SF accepts this 'fiscal space', which means they also accept no radical change in the economy.

The fact that SF has taken this position indicates a shift to the right by them in the middle of the election campaign. This is in response to criticism from the establishment that the 'choice' in this election is between 'recovery or chaos'.

So all the main parties have said the election is all about who will spend this €8 billion or €10 billion over the next five years. This is nowhere near good enough. It will mean that the crisis in the health service, in education, public services in general, and the cost of living crisis will continue to adversely impact on the working class.

Kevin McLoughlin



Fine Gael leader Enda Kenny photo EPP/Creative Commons

The campaign - 'Real change, not spare change'



We started knocking on doors before the formal announcement of the election. Alongside this intensive canvassing we've organised numerous street activities and put up posters, etc. Our posters say: "End inequality"... "Real change, not spare change" which neatly dovetails with the economy recovery debate.

The response of voters on the doorsteps is generally positive to our anti-austerity message. The AAA is well known - standing in defence of ordinary working people, etc. Many people are open to our message, especially given the dire record of the pro-big business austerity measures of the government parties.



Socialist Party

What we stand for

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

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

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

Our demands include:

PUBLIC SERVICES

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

ENVIRONMENT

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

RIGHTS

- Oppose discrimination on the grounds of race, gender, disability, sexuality, age, and all other forms of prejudice.
- Repeal all laws that trample over civil liberties. For the right to protest! End police harassment.
- Keep 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.

NEW MASS WORKERS' PARTY

- For a new mass workers' party drawing together workers, young people and activists from workplace, community, environmental and anti-war campaigns, to provide a fighting, political alternative to the pro-big business parties. Support the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition as an important step towards this.

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! For a socialist Europe and a socialist world!

WORK AND INCOME

- Trade union struggle to increase the minimum wage to £10 an hour without exemptions as an immediate step towards a real living wage. For an annual increase in the minimum wage linked to average earnings.
- All workers, including part-timers, temps, casual and migrant workers to have trade union rates of pay, employment protection, and sickness and holiday rights from day one of employment.
- An immediate 50% increase in the state retirement pension, as a step towards a living pension.
- Reject 'workfare'. For the right to decent benefits, education, training, or a job, without compulsion.
- Scrap the anti-trade union laws! For fighting trade unions, democratically controlled by their members. Full-time union officials to be regularly elected and receive no more than a worker's wage. Support the National Shop Stewards Network.
- A maximum 35-hour week with no loss of pay.

Join the fightback!
Join the Socialists!

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Hunt imposes new contract for junior docs

JUNIOR DOCTORS MUST STAND FIRM

Dr Clare Blackwell

Junior doctor, Poole Hospital

Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt unilaterally imposed his unsafe and unfair new contract on junior doctors in England on 11 February.

The new conditions, which include dangerous longer hours for reduced overall pay, are due to take effect in August. Last year, members of doctors' union BMA voted overwhelmingly for industrial action against the change. We have struck twice already.

The BMA is currently considering its options for how to resist Hunt's decision. More strike action is one possibility. There have also been discussions about 'mass resignation', where doctors quit collectively if a certain number signs up to do so.

The mood among junior doctors is mixed. People are quite despondent about Hunt's imposition, and feel devalued and demoralised. But we are determined to resist what has happened.

Junior doctors came out solidly on the last strike day (see page 6). In Poole we had 50 people on the picket line at times. We had support from the paramedics and members of public sector union Unison.

The fire brigade drove past and

honked their horns.

There was a lot of public support from local people as well. It was all quite heartening.

Before Hunt's imposition, it looked like there might have been a weak compromise proposal on the table. But after years of goodwill in the face of vicious attacks on the NHS, doctors are not willing to accept any deal worse than our current arrangement.

The strikes have politicised junior doctors. People have realised the collective power they have. This has spread to other healthcare staff as well: nurses are talking about striking again. Striking together would be a huge step forward.

The Socialist Party suggests next steps should include:

- Mass, joint trade union meetings to discuss what next
- United local union and community protests demanding trusts maintain existing contracts
- Call on Jeremy Corbyn to instigate emergency meeting of Labour's national executive committee and the Trade Union Congress
- This meeting to look at organising a mass demonstration and solidarity action in support of the junior doctors and to save the NHS
- Coordinated strikes across the NHS in defence of pay and conditions, as a step towards a 24-hour general strike against austerity



photo Paul Mattsson

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