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Chatsworth ward victory shows

WE

CAN

SAVE OUR NHS

photo Paul Mattsson

Tom Hunt
Chatsworth nurse and
Mansfield Socialist Party

The Chatsworth rehabilitation unit at Mansfield Community Hospital in Nottinghamshire has been saved from closure by an excellent campaign - proving once more that if we fight, we can win.

The ward treats patients with long-term neurological conditions in Mansfield, Ashfield and Newark. As staff we knew the closure would be a devastating blow if our patients had to travel further afield for their care.

Our hospitals trust announced last July that Chatsworth ward was to close at the end of that October. They came to the ward with representatives of our union, Unison, to tell staff not to worry - we would be found other jobs within the trust. The NHS currently has 40,000 nursing vacancies.

It was made clear this was a done deal and there was nothing we could do about it because no-one would lose their jobs. However, the staff demanded: "What will happen to our patients with long-term conditions? Where

will they go?

"Will they have to travel miles away for their care? How will their loved ones be able to visit them on a daily basis?"

There were no answers. Neither the trust nor the clinical commissioning group (CCG) could answer these vital questions.

So instead of passively accepting closure, the brave staff - with full support from the Socialist Party, and at that time no one else - built a movement including patients, ex-patients and their families.

We quickly formed a committee and launched the slogan #WeAreAllChatsworth. We wanted to send the message that if they closed us, other NHS workplaces would be next.

Mobilising the workforce can sometimes be tricky due to fear and management intimidation. The Socialist Party helped lead the campaign from the start, including showing campaigners how to make use of the media. It wasn't long before the BBC came and filmed our public meeting.

A key moment came when the CCG asked #WeAreAllChatsworth to meet with them and trust representatives. We agreed - if the meeting took place on the ward.

We explained that current patients would like to attend, and indeed one bedbound patient was wheeled into the meeting on her bed, from which she asked searching questions that management didn't answer!

■ **Continued on page 4**



What we think

On 12 February, Prime Minister Theresa May and Irish Taoiseach (prime minister) Leo Varadkar, flew to Belfast to supposedly clinch a deal between Sinn Fein and the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) that would see the power-sharing executive at Stormont restored after it collapsed in acrimony 13 months ago.

May's claim that an agreement would be "up and running very soon" humiliatingly came to nothing when Arlene Foster, DUP leader, announced that her party was not going to sign up. The media had speculated that a deal was in the offing over several contentious issues, concerning same sex marriage rights, how to deal with 'Troubles legacy' issues and, in particular, regarding an Irish language act. But fierce opposition from sections of the DUP leadership and the party's grassroots forced Foster to back off.

The DUP leader is partly the victim of her own 'success'; for months the DUP adopted an increasingly hardline approach on an Irish language act, to shore up their support in the Protestant community. In doing so, they stirred up sectarian tensions and fears and made unfounded claims, including that Irish language would become compulsory teaching in all schools.

Sinn Fein

Sinn Fein also hardened their position in recent months, attempting to restrengthen their position as the largest party among Catholics. The party made little effort to counter provocative proposals from some Irish language activists, one who advocated Gaelic street signs on the Shankill Road, a working class Protestant area of Belfast.

Sinn Fein insists on no return to power sharing unless there is agreement on an Irish language act and no return to the "status quo". The leadership is well aware that many working class Catholics were angered the party made what they viewed as too many concessions to the DUP when sharing power and felt they got little in return. For years Sinn Fein and the DUP presided over deep austerity cuts and worsening poverty.

The election to the Stormont Assembly of two candidates pitching themselves to the left of Sinn Fein, in West Belfast and Derry - supposedly Sinn Fein strongholds - alarmed the leadership. Sinn Fein leaders were also slow to take action over the Renewable Heat Incentive 'cash for ash' scandal that could squander up to £700 million of public money for the benefit of businesses and enveloped the DUP leadership. It was only widespread anger among Catholics that forced Sinn Fein to call time on power sharing.

The 'talks process' is now in a quagmire. Foster has called for a period of direct rule from London while leaving



Our sister party, the Socialist Party in Ireland, has played a key and courageous role in campaigning for a strong, independent, working class force in the North for many years

NORTHERN IRELAND TALKS PROCESS PARALYSIS

■ For united working class struggle against austerity and sectarianism

photo Paul Mattsson



Stormont has been without a Northern Ireland power-sharing executive for 13 months photo Wknight94/CC



open "two to three months" for new negotiations. Direct rule is strongly opposed by Sinn Fein and the nationalist SDLP, and also the Irish government. Understandably most Northern Catholics do not regard the Tory government as a "neutral partner" in negotiations, given its reliance on the DUP's 'supply and demand' support to stay in power. Sinn Fein's call for a period of 'joint direct rule' between London and Dublin, in turn, is anathema for Unionists and opposed by the Tory government.

There may be intensified efforts by the British and Irish governments to find an agreement between the local parties ahead of the 20th anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement. This deal brought a formal end to decades of conflict and saw the introduction of power-sharing at Stormont.

To great fanfare, the Good Friday Agreement was held up as a model for other 'peace processes' throughout the world to follow. For the 'historic anniversary' to be

marked in April with Sinn Fein and the DUP at each-other's throats and failing to agree to share power would be deeply embarrassing for the establishment on both sides of the Irish Sea.

But today's political paralysis was always an inherent outcome of the Good Friday Agreement. It was not a genuine attempt to overcome divisions between Catholics and Protestants but actually institutionalised sectarianism (for example, the stipulation that Members of the Legislative Assembly officially state they are 'nationalist' or 'unionist' or 'other'). Instead of the much heralded "peace dividend" promised 20 years ago.

Northern Ireland today is the worst economic performing region of the UK. Over 25% of children live in poverty, public services are slashed, 'peace walls' still divide Catholic and Protestant working class

communities, and basic rights, such as same sex marriage and a woman's right to choose (which both Sinn Fein and the DUP oppose) are denied.

The policies of Sinn Fein and the DUP - austerity and their making sectarian capital out of issues - can only continue and compound the problems facing working class Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland. The DUP's role in propping up the Tory government also means more austerity misery for the working class across these islands. And in Southern Ireland Sinn Fein's new leader, Mary Lou McDonald, publicly stated recently her intention to seek to share power with either of the two largest right-wing parties, Fianna Fail and Fine Gael.

Working class people and youth in Northern Ireland desperately need a party that acts in their interests, opposing cuts and cutting across sectarian division. Our sister party, the Socialist Party in Ireland, has played a key and courageous role in campaigning for a strong, independent, working class force in the North for many years. Their initiative, Cross Community Labour Alternative, is an important step in this direction, making an impact in recent elections and drawing together trade union and community activists.

Complicating the situation even more in the North is Brexit. While a majority in Northern Ireland voted to remain in the EU, the 2016 referendum was largely split along religious lines; most Catholics who voted backed remain (though many abstained, especially in the most deprived areas) and of those Protestants who voted most opted to leave.

While there is no enthusiasm for the big business agenda of Brussels, many Catholics fear that exiting the EU will leave them without a 'buffer' to counter Westminster rule, which currently is a Tory government beholden to the DUP. Sinn Fein, formerly an anti-EU party, now champions the myth that the bosses' EU is a guarantor of democratic and civil rights.

All the parties oppose a return to a 'hard border' between the North and Republic because of the economic dislocation it would cause and fear that customs posts would be an highly visible sign of division and a potential target for republican dissident paramilitaries. Yet the anti-customs union position of the pro-Brexit faction of the Tory party, supported by the DUP, makes a hard border a possibility.

Tories divided

Theresa May, facing a cabinet divided on Brexit, has tried to fudge the issue. Last December, the UK government stated there would be "specific arrangements" for Northern Ireland. If this fails, the EU wants "full regulatory alignment with the Irish republic". However the DUP strongly opposes any measures that give Northern Ireland 'exceptional' status to the rest of the UK. And how can an "alignment" happen if May does take the UK out of the customs union and single market, as she currently states she will do?

Facing such contradictions, May claims to be working on a plan to achieve a "frictionless border" alongside Leo Varadkar. However Varadkar warned that achieving this would be "the tricky bit" in Brexit talks. An exasperated Financial Times commented: "Calling it the 'tricky bit' is an understatement. A solution to the border issue looks utterly intractable". This newspaper of big business predicts that "Ireland is the issue that could yet derail the entire Brexit process". But it could also see the end of the May government.

If the Irish government stands firm on its demand for full regulatory alignment between north and south, May will have to decide whether to accept and risk being brought down by the DUP. If May attempts to get Varadkar to back down, she will face a nationalist backlash and a dangerous heightening of sectarian tensions.

Playing on Catholics' post-Brexit fears, and their long-held national aspirations, Sinn Fein agitates for a 'border poll', arguing that demographic changes mean that a united Ireland is achievable in the medium term. In doing so, Sinn Fein leaders play down Protestant working class fears of being outvoted into a capitalist united Ireland and dismiss the fierce opposition such moves would entail.

On the basis of capitalism, it is clear that there is no solution to the problems facing working class Protestants and Catholics in the North and South of Ireland and for the working class across all these islands. Only a united working class struggle, with socialist policies, can show a way out of austerity, poverty, injustice and divisions.

Bosses divided - university pension strikes can win!



photo Hugh Caffrey

Sam Morecroft

Sheffield UCU anti-casualisation officer (personal capacity)

Just three days before UCU members in 61 universities begin a sustained programme of strike action, Essex vice-chancellor (VC) Anthony Forster became the eighth VC to speak out against devastating cuts to our pensions.

Writing in the Times on Monday, he said: "University employers must commit to increasing contributions" in order to safeguard pensions.

Plans to scrap defined benefit pensions will not only leave university staff thousands of pounds a year worse off in retirement but could also make the scheme unsustainable. Many others have called for more talks.

What's more it's becoming increasingly clear that Oxford and Cambridge are the key institutions that are pushing forward these proposals, and that other universities are less keen on attempting such a huge attack on our members.

They are right to be worried. The University and College Union (UCU) nationally has recruited over 2,000 new members. My own branch has grown by over 12% since 1 December, and even heads of department are threatening to strike.

That shows how much anger the proposed pension cuts have caused, but also how enthusiastically university staff have reacted to UCU showing leadership and determination to fight to defend our pensions.

We've been boosted by student support. Strikes will disrupt student education, and they are rightly angry about that given the sky high

fees they pay. But up and down the country students are clear that they blame the employers and the effects of marketisation on higher education - not hard working teachers, lecturers and administrators that make our universities function.

At Sheffield Socialist Students was instrumental in setting up a staff student solidarity group which has put pressure on management to speak out against the cuts. Where groups like this do not exist we must work to create them during the dispute.

Labour Party

It's been heartening to see a Labour MP, Lucy Powell, cancel a lecture at the University of Manchester rather than cross a picket line. But we need to see more support from Labour and particularly the leadership. A few years ago former Labour MP Tristram Hunt crossed a UCU picket line to deliver a lecture on Marx and Engels! We need to see that under Jeremy Corbyn Labour is different.

Corbyn's pledge to scrap tuition fees won huge support in the general election - he should go further and tie supporting our strike to reversing marketisation and privatisation and promising to fully publicly fund the sector, including grants for students and decent pay and pensions for university workers.

In UCU we're ready for the fight of our lives. Our employers are publicly divided and this dispute is winnable. We ask for the full support of the labour movement as we prepare to take the first ever national strike action since the new anti-union laws were introduced.

 Have you got news for us? DEADLINE: Friday before publication date - urgent news: Monday

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photo Elaine Evans

NHS: LATEST VICTORY AGAINST CLOSURE SHOWS CAMPAIGNING WORKS

■ Continued from page 1

Jon Dale, secretary of the local health workers' branch of the Unite union and a Socialist Party member, chaired the meeting. He warned the trust and CCG: "If any staff who are part of this campaign on behalf of their patients are disciplined in any way, what is currently a local issue will become a national issue."

The committee met regularly and elected officers. We opened a bank account, produced a banner

and t-shirts, and started to build for a march in September. The ward stayed open past the original closure date.

As thousands signed the Socialist Party petition in town, including many health workers, the wider workforce started to feel bolder in offering messages of support, including some union reps who had been hesitant at first.

Under pressure from below, Unison gave official backing to the campaign, as did the Royal College of Nursing. Jeremy Corbyn also spoke in support. The campaign

continued to receive messages of support from around the globe.

The staff stayed strong, and even under the stress of insecurity only three found other jobs. In similar cases staff have understandably voted with their feet and sought employment elsewhere, making the closure a fait accompli.

There were several public consultation meetings called by the CCG and every time there was standing room only. The march and rally were hugely successful with massive support from the public.

On 12 February the trust and CCG called a meeting at the hospital, packed with staff once again. Management announced to poker-faced workers that the ward would stay open.

The Chatsworth staff are a family like no other. Their courage in standing up for what they believe in is inspirational.

We will now be working closely with the trust and the CCG to develop the service to include reaching into the community. Also, ex-patients are very keen to restart the self-help organisation that closed a

few years ago.

Patients with long-term neurological conditions can now feel secure in the knowledge they can access care at the right time, in the right place.

#WeAreAllChatsworth has won this battle. This shows again that with bold leadership and organising, NHS workers and patients can stop the cuts.

Now let's take the campaign national. The health unions must build for action to save the NHS from the vile clutches of the capitalists and privateers.

Tories raid £1bn from NHS facilities budget - unions must act

Josh Asker
Southampton Socialist Party

For the last four years the government has been delving into the NHS maintenance budget to fund everyday running of services. This year that figure comes in at £1 billion, wiping out in one stroke the £506 million capital investment announced by Phillip Hammond in his autumn budget.

And this month the Times found that Boots the chemist charged the NHS £1,579 for a pot of moisturiser available for just £1.73 elsewhere. Selling medicines to the NHS is a lucrative business, with billions made every year by the big pharmaceutical companies.

The NHS is breaking down and crumbling in front of our eyes. This is something workers in St Mary's Hospital in west London would attest to after part of their first floor

and ceiling collapsed in September. Urgent investment is needed to maintain, repair and upgrade NHS infrastructure.

For a health service being run at its limits the consequences of faults and damage can be catastrophic. Technical failures were one of the factors leading to record numbers of A&E patients in England being diverted to other hospitals in the last week of December.

"They are running it down so they

can sell it off!" is a common refrain from workers stopping at Socialist Party campaign stalls up and down the country. If there is any question over motivation for this, look no further than Unite the Union's 2014 report detailing 71 coalition government MPs with financial interests in private healthcare.

Private interests must be removed from every part of the NHS - including by nationalising the big pharmaceuticals. There needs to be a massive

investment in the health service - to not only provide services today, but build the infrastructure of the future.

These demands are on the lips of most health workers and patients. A determined campaign, including strike action, led by the health unions, would win mass support from the public - and likely mean the end of the Tory government.

Jeremy Corbyn should call for this. The Socialist Party will continue to build and fight for it.



photo London Socialist Party

Facebook sides with state repression - reinstate the Tamil Solidarity page

Tamil Solidarity statement

Facebook shut down the Tamil Solidarity campaign page on 9 February.

This followed a peaceful protest organised by Tamil Solidarity and other Tamil community groups against the threatening behaviour of a Sri Lankan army brigadier, and against the ongoing oppression of Tamil-speaking people in Sri Lanka.

In shutting down Tamil Solidarity's page, Facebook has attacked freedom of speech and the right to protest. It is unacceptable, and we demand that our Facebook page be reinstated immediately.

It would appear Facebook's action follows a malicious campaign by Sinhala nationalists, supporters of Sri Lankan state oppression. But surely there must be some process whereby Facebook tests any allegations of inappropriate content - completely false in this case - before such drastic action is taken?

Facebook made no attempt to contact Tamil Solidarity to check out the claims made against us. Yet just a glance at our website, tamil-solidarity.org, would be enough to show Tamil Solidarity is a legitimate campaigning organisation, with the backing of numerous trade unions in Britain, working alongside activists from other oppressed communities including the Refugee Rights campaigns.

Furthermore, the strapline of

Tamil Solidarity reads: "For the rights of workers and all oppressed people in Sri Lanka." That means that we not only take up issues concerning Tamils, but also Tamil Muslims, Upcountry people, and workers and students from the majority Sinhala population - from Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, Christian or any other ethnic or religious background.

Of course, given the scale of the oppression in Sri Lanka, the campaign for Tamil rights is our main focus. After all, Tamils were massacred in their tens of thousands at the end of the civil war in 2009.

Hundreds of thousands were then held in open prison camps. Thousands are still imprisoned. Thousands have been disappeared.

There is an effective military occupation in the north and east of Sri Lanka. There has been no genuine investigation of war crime allegations, and widespread abuse of power continues with impunity.

This has all been well documented and condemned by the United Nations, Human Rights Watch, the International Committee of the Red Cross, and many other agencies. It has been exposed in numerous Channel 4 documentaries, by the Guardian newspaper, and in countless other media reports.

Tamil Solidarity has every right to speak out against this injustice and oppression. There is no justification for the Facebook ban. Tamil Solidarity's Facebook page must be reinstated immediately.



E15 mums were evicted from their homeless hostel by Robin Wales after he withdrew funding support

BLAIRITE MAYOR FACES OPEN ELECTION AFTER DEMOCRATIC 'IRREGULARITIES' - FIGHT FOR A NO-CUTS MAYOR

'Donna Steeds'
Labour Party member, Newham

Hated Newham mayor Robin Wales, the Labour right-winger who's held onto power for 23 years, is finally facing an open election.

20 wards voted overwhelmingly against automatic reselection of Wales as Labour's mayoral candidate for the east London borough. In West Ham Constituency Labour Party, he was able to muster no more than one vote in all wards but one - where he got two votes.

Newham is one of the poorest boroughs in London and has been one of the hardest hit by austerity, directed by the Tories and implemented by the all-Labour council Wales leads.

Meanwhile, Sir Robin has overseen massive wastage - such as £52 million of the borough's funds sunk on the London Stadium it no longer owns - while claiming cutbacks are necessary.

His term as a Tory-lite executive mayor has also been marred by accusations of suppression of

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democracy. Members threatened legal action when a 'trigger ballot' held last year automatically reselected him.

He won through the votes of local branches of some affiliated unions and societies - many of which give the appearance of being empty bodies, casting their votes without democratic involvement.

Labour Party members in Newham challenged the result, citing procedural "irregularities and inconsistencies." To avoid the scandal of a legal battle, Labour's national executive committee ruled the trigger ballot would be re-run.

Councillor Rokhsana Fiaz, a charity director who describes herself as a "democratic socialist" and has been involved in Newham Against

Austerity, plans to challenge him.

It's good that left-leaning councillors see the need to organise against the Labour right. The Socialist Party, for example, has long argued for this. But it needs to go further than just winning elected positions.

It's vital that an anti-austerity mayor - if this is what Cllr Fiaz hopes to be - uses council reserves and borrowing powers to end the cuts now. By mobilising the local workforce and community, they can fight for more funding from central government.

We know the money is there. The recent PFI scandals show how much the Tories have forked out to big business privatising public services. An anti-cuts mayor could lead the fight to win it back.

LIKE RATS FROM A SINKING UKIP

Ukip has lost its fifth leader since the 2016 EU referendum. Henry Bolton, who joined Ukip from the Liberal Democrats, lost a confidence motion at an extraordinary general meeting this month.

Contrary to arguments by some left figures that a Leave vote would strengthen Ukip, its subsequent de-

cline is undeniable. It now has no MPs - and lost every council seat it defended in 2017's local elections.

The right-wing populism of its racist leaders only gained traction in the absence of a viable challenge to the establishment - be it the Blairites or their beloved bosses' EU - the populist right could again pose as the only 'alternative.'



photo British Pest Control Association/CC

USDAW VICTORY - SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBER AMY MURPHY WINS PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION



Amy Murphy (holding banner left) photo Usdaw Activist

Socialist Party members in Usdaw

Tesco worker and Socialist Party member Amy Murphy has been elected president of the shop workers' union Usdaw.

Amy won on a campaign based on giving Usdaw a fighting and democratic leadership, and fighting for policies such as a £10 an hour minimum wage, an end to zero-hour contracts, supporting members who wish to take industrial action and standing up to companies' attacks on jobs and terms and conditions.

Amy says: "I would like to thank everyone who supported me, so, so much, from the bottom of my heart. Your support has been immense. The time has come to stand up to the companies we work for.

"As president I will continue to challenge the union leadership and the bosses and be 100% behind the members."

During the campaign over 11,000 leaflets were distributed by Socialist Party members, Usdaw Broad Left activists and other supporters. Amy spoke at meetings and toured the country speaking to union members.

General secretary

Usdaw will also have a new general secretary after current deputy general secretary Paddy Lillis was elected unopposed.

It is welcome that in speeches at Usdaw divisional conferences Lillis has been much more positive towards Jeremy Corbyn and the radical policies that were in the most recent Labour election manifesto - many of which have been passed as policy at Usdaw conferences.

However, Lillis was also chair of the Labour national executive committee during the 2016 leadership election that went to court to deny many Labour Party members a vote in that election.

And alongside outgoing general secretary John Hannett, he has presided over large scale attacks on Usdaw members' terms and conditions and the loss of jobs through the approach of 'partnership' - working with the bosses in Tesco and other large retailers.

The election of Amy offers a chance to advance the union in a new direction, working with Broad Left members on the executive council and ensuring Usdaw takes a fighting approach in a sector that desperately needs it.

The many Usdaw members and shop workers we met during the campaign who expressed support for Amy and her policies will be delighted by this massive step forward.

It gives the Socialist Party and the Broad Left a great opportunity to continue the campaign to give Usdaw a bold, fighting, socialist leadership that stands up to the major retail companies and fights for Usdaw's 430,000 members.



Mears housing workers protest outside employer Northwards housing photo Becci Heagney

MEARS STRIKERS WIN AVERAGE 22% PAY RISE!

■ Mears shop steward speaks to the Socialist

The long running Mears dispute has ended in victory! Workers voted to accept a deal which means an average pay rise of 22%, parity of pay across the workforce and in line with others in Manchester.

It also involves the revoking of the 'sackers charter' Mears were trying to bring in (to attack terms and conditions) and no changes to pensions and holiday pay which had also been planned. After taking over 80 days of strike action, 180 workers at Mears have been able to go back to work with their heads held high.

One of the Unite the Union stewards at Mears spoke to the Socialist:

"The average operative will receive a 22% pay rise going up to £27,000 and £28,000. Some painters and decorators who were on £19,500 a year are getting a massive 33% pay rise, their money was that low.

"The workers were Tupe transferred from Manchester council in 2006 who operated a bonus scheme, so that's why people were on different rates of pay. The workers were put on their average bonus before the transfer and kept on this for nine years.

"The workers were constantly told there was no money in the pot. But just like Carillion, Mears were giving public cash to their shareholders and senior management in massive pay rises, while their workers, suppliers and subcontractors suffered.

"The resolve of the striking workers strengthened during the dispute, especially due to the underhand tactics deployed by the Mears account director and general manager. The workers received fantastic support from around the country. They had magnificent support from the socialist media and Fujitsu workers who have their own ongoing battle."

Necessary

This dispute shows, on the one hand, what is necessary in order to win - a programme of strike action coupled with protests and mobilisations, along with other striking workers, to put pressure on the council and management.

And on the other hand, that it is possible to win significant pay rises when the workforce is united and prepared to fight.



Previous Avenue picket line photo James Ivens

Newham academies strike continues with three schools to strike together

Helen Pattison
East London Socialist Party

"No to academies", chanted 50 teachers, parents and supporters outside Avenue Primary School in east London on 20 February. This is their longest strike yet - three days - as the campaign to save the school from academy status heats up.

They will be joined by two other schools on strike for the same reason in Newham on 22 February. This will be followed by a protest outside the next council meeting on 26 February, calling on their support in opposition to academies.

Currently the teachers and parents are fighting at Avenue for there to be a parents' ballot on academies and the Socialist Party has raised locally the idea of a referendum in the borough on whether schools should become academies or not.

Complaints

But when parents and teachers gathered on the picket line, academy status wasn't their only complaint. The day before there was no clean water in the school for the duration of day. For six-and-a-half hours primary school pupils went without water.

"If this is happening now, imagine

what will happen when it becomes an academy", shouted one parent, "there are shops down the road, they could have bought water".

Parents feel the head teacher has a lot of explaining to do. These are the people who the community is meant to have faith in to do what's best for students' education. These are the people fighting for the school to become an academy but they can't even ensure the students have clean water to drink.

Read more online at socialistparty.org.uk



photo Northampton Socialist Party

Northants council crisis - protesters demand an end to cuts and privatisation

Steve Score and Katie Simpson
Northants Socialist Party

Hundreds of people protested against the devastating cuts and dire financial state of Tory-controlled Northamptonshire council on 17 February. Labour councillor and parliamentary candidate Gareth Eales told the crowd how his first attempt to run for council was denied after he expressed a strong opposition to private finance initiatives (PFI).

According to Eales he was deemed "not suitable to be a Labour councillor." Gareth stood alongside fellow Corbyn-backing Labour councillors, 'Save Northants Services', the Socialist Party and many other campaign groups in calling for the end of PFI, privatisation and cuts.

The council has issued a 'Section 114 notice' banning all new expenditure other than on statutory

services. It says it risks 'overspending' by £21 million in 2017-18 and plans a total of £33.6 million in cuts for 2018-19. But this is on top of £400 million cuts since 2010.

As a model Tory authority it has outsourced (privatised) virtually every service, cutting its directly employed workforce from around 4,000 to 150. Unbelievably it has a billion pounds of debt for PFI schemes according to Save Northants Services! Repayments cost nearly £50 million a year.

Such is the scale of the crisis that the government has sent inspectors into the council. Campaigners, however, have no trust in the government to solve the crisis in a way that will help local services.

In contrast there needs to be a trade union and community-led investigation into the financial books, what services the county really needs and an alternative strategy. The cuts must be immediately

reversed, services brought back in-house and PFI debt scrapped.

Campaigners are also demanding the council should resign and force new elections to give local people a genuine alternative to Tory cuts. However, even if this were to happen it is vital that candidates aiming to replace the Tories adopt a no-cuts budget approach, including a readiness to use reserves and borrowing powers.

With or without an emergency election, a mass campaign needs to be built linking trade unions and the workforce - both direct and outsourced - with the community across Northamptonshire to force extra funding from the government.

This is a glimpse of the future for all councils unless the Tory plans for the destruction of local services are stopped. We need fighting no-cuts councillors and national trade union action to back up mass local campaigns.



photo USDA/CC

Labour councillors push through savage cuts in Kirklees budget

Matthew Hirst
Huddersfield Socialist Party

Every single Labour councillor in Kirklees, Yorkshire, pushed through an eye-watering budget on 14 February, with over £29 million of cuts to services, and promises of more to come in future years. This is on top of a 6% hike in council tax, increases to car parking costs, school bus fares and school meals.

Public anger is seething because despite hearing from Jeremy Corbyn that Labour is "for the many, not the few", Labour councillors are ignoring him and heaping misery on constituents at the behest of the Tory government.

300 council jobs and £1.9 million is to be cut from library services. The council has already closed down two children's play areas with no notice to residents and a further £400,000 is to be slashed from parks and greenspaces.

And while every council up and down the country is saying that they are spending more and more on adult social care, Kirklees council has decided to cut its budget by over £4 million by reducing care grants and the amount of petrol allowance

that carers can claim, driving wages down even further in what is already a poorly paid role.

While Labour councillors argue that this is due to a reduction in central government funding, they sit on combined total reserves estimated at £120 million! Instead they should be using these reserves, along with their prudential borrowing powers, to plug the gap in funding from the Tory government and then demand the money from Theresa May.

The cut to central government grants is simply a backdoor tax that the teetering Tory government dare not pass themselves, so instead they reduce the funding to councils and then expect the councils to plug the gap with council tax hikes and cuts.

We are intending to stand two no-cuts Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition candidates in the area to argue the case that another way is possible. Already in debates with Labour supporters, they are "seeing our point" after explaining that a no-cuts budget is legal, despite what the capitalist press may say!

We already have two public meetings called and are canvassing and leafleting both wards in the run up to the council elections in May.

Socialism Today The Socialist Party's magazine

February issue includes:

■ **Corbynism**

The prospects for Corbyn and building the anti-austerity fightback by Hannah Sell

■ **Finland**

Inspired by events in Russia 1917-1918, Finnish workers push for power by Per Olsson



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Theo Sharieff
National chair, Socialist Students

Prime Minister Theresa May has proposed cutting tuition fees for some students. Possible changes include lowering fees for students in England to £6,000, paid for by cutting the already meagre support for disadvantaged students. Another proposal is charging less for humanities courses compared with degrees which tend to produce higher earners.

None of these options mean free education, and they all could further limit working class students' access. But why does May feel pressured to talk about reform?

Jeremy Corbyn's strength after the general election is the Tories' weakness. His anti-austerity stance has swelled Labour to 570,000 members, and he enjoys the support of the vast majority of young people.

“”
Millions of young people
voted for free education

But the Tory party - which some of its own activists believe has plummeted below 70,000 members - only retains majority support in the 65+ age bracket, according to YouGov.

Millions of young people voted for extending public ownership in key services such as the railways and energy; kicking 'PFI' out of the NHS; scrapping tuition fees, as part of a wider system of free education "from the cradle to the grave;" and launching a programme of affordable home construction.

These are steps in the right direction. But unfortunately Corbyn has not yet capitalised on the impetus and mood which were building in the run-up to 8 June.

If Corbyn gives a lead - addressing directly the millions of young people and workers who voted for him, calling for mass protests and building for strikes by students and workers - they could finish the job they started at the ballot box.

However, the leadership of the National Union of Students (NUS) - the national body which around 600 further and higher education students' unions are affiliated to - is dominated by Labour's Blairite right, the enemies of Corbyn's anti-austerity politics.

Student movement

NUS leaders have failed to use their massive resources to coordinate and lead student protests. Not only this, but they have even refused to officially support pre-existing student demonstrations for free education.

But in the face of the NUS's cowardly retreats on the national plane, many students have moved into determined local action. At the end of 2017, movements developed on a number of campuses against excessive vice-chancellor pay.

Bosses' pay increases were accompanied by vicious attacks on lecturers' pensions nationally, and job cuts locally at many universities. So the

news that some university executives receive over £400,000 a year provoked a reaction from workers and students alike.

Spontaneous movements of students and workers developed on a number of campuses, most notably at the University of Bath. Demonstrations of hundreds at Bath forced Dame Glynis Breakwell, who was earning £471,000 a year, from her post.

Following Breakwell's resignation, Sir David Eastwood, the vice-chancellor of the University of Birmingham, became the new highest-earning university chief - on a salary of £436,000. He had overseen 70% of teaching staff moving onto zero-hour contracts, and support staff's wages falling by up to £1,800 in real terms.

A 'Vice-Chancellor Question Time' event gave students a chance to grill Eastwood. One Socialist Students speaker received rapturous applause for putting the question to Eastwood: "When are you going to resign?"

Eastwood will no doubt come under further pressure over the course of the ongoing national strike by the University and College Union (UCU) against attacks on pensions at the pre-1992 universities. He receives £90,000 a year to chair the national university pension scheme in question.

At the University of Southampton, Vice-Chancellor Chris Snowden received £81,000 more in 2017 than the year before. A student poll found 90% in favour of giving him a pay cut, while 92% voted to oppose 75 proposed job cuts at the university.

Socialist Students in Southampton played a fantastic role in reaching out to other student groups on campus, as well as the UCU branch. We have initiated a campaign to defeat the job cuts and force the resignation of Snowden.

UCU strikes

Meanwhile, lecturers across dozens of universities are preparing for strikes.

The result of the UCU's national ballot for action against pension cuts smashed the Tories' anti-trade union laws. 88% voted for industrial action on a turnout of 58%. This is further testament to the mood to fight which exists among broad layers of our society.

What's more, this action could give confidence to other workers on campus, such as support staff, both inside and outside the trade unions, to fight themselves. The 14 days of strikes planned are a very welcome step forward as contrasted with some previous nominal strike action by UCU.

“”
In the face of the NUS's
national retreats, many
students have moved into
determined local action

Socialist Student groups across the country will be attending the picket lines, offering solidarity to strikers, and hosting joint meetings with strikers and UCU representatives, to discuss the next steps in a strategy to fight the Tories and defeat the pension attacks.



HOW CAN STUDENTS
AND YOUNG PEOPLE
FIGHT THE TORIES?

Students are clamouring to get involved with any issue they think they can fight and win on. While students have seen NUS leaders retreat on the question of building a student movement nationally, they have proved on more than one occasion that where a battle is to be had, they will move into action.

The weaknesses and splits within the Tory government on many issues; the popular demand for free education; the vice-chancellor pay scandals; the UCU pensions strike - these are the ingredients of a mass movement.

The question is: how can they be linked up with workers and translated into a national movement which challenges the government directly? Could this potential be harnessed, and led to defeat the Tories, helping to force an early general election and usher in a Corbyn-led anti-austerity government?

Socialist Students says the leadership of the NUS must use its resources, profile and mass membership to initiate a mass campaign for free education and against marketisation and privatisation. As a start, it should use the opportunity of the UCU strikes to call co-ordinated student walkouts and demonstrations in support.

Jeremy Corbyn should use his huge authority to call for these measures too - especially if NUS's right-wing national leaders refuse.

Local elections

But the role of students in fighting the Tories doesn't begin and end at the boundaries of the university campus. In this May's local elections, students and workers will be looking for a chance to vote for the same clear, anti-austerity alternative they backed in Jeremy Corbyn eight months ago.

How will the youthquake which took place then be translated into this May's local elections? The vast majority of Labour councillors oppose Corbyn's programme, and continue to spread the myth that there is no al-

ternative but to implement Tory cuts.

The Labour Party is two parties in one. The anti-austerity party in formation around Corbyn and the new mass membership needs to kick out the pro-capitalist, pro-fees old party which controls the NUS and includes the majority of Labour MPs and councillors.

Welsh Labour, for example, has the power to scrap tuition fees in Wales right now. But it refuses to do so!

“”
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right-wing leaders refuse

The enthusiasm for Corbyn's anti-austerity alternative cannot survive indefinitely on a diet of empty promises. Many young people are deeply dissatisfied with simply waiting for the government to collapse.

And with the Tories so clearly on the back foot, they are searching for a way to play their part in consigning May's government to history.

Some will have seen that since the general election more local communities have challenged the idea that cuts and privatisation cannot be fought.

In Haringey, Labour members have replaced council candidates who backed the 'HDV' housing privatisation scheme. In Bristol, the Labour mayor led a march against the cuts -

which he was making - while Labour members are discussing pushing for a no-cuts council budget.

Left-wing Labour MP Chris Williams, one of Jeremy Corbyn's few allies in parliament, raised the idea of using council tax increases to fight cuts locally. Unfortunately this is not a viable method for avoiding the impact of austerity, but it does show willingness to look for one.

Fight Tory cuts

The net effect of all these experiences is that the idea that Labour councils can fight Tory cuts is gaining authority.

Corbyn should call on Labour councils to adopt the strategy proposed by the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC), the electoral alliance including transport union RMT and the Socialist Party. By using reserves and borrowing powers to stop austerity now, councils can buy time to build a campaign to win the money back.

As part of this, Labour councils should build campaigns against 'academy' privatisation of schools, cuts to further education, and for the reinstatement of the Education Maintenance Allowance. This would give real confidence to young people that by getting organised, we can win.

By building campaigns which challenge pro-austerity candidates at May's local elections, as well as a national student movement linking up the battles unfolding on our campuses, we as students and young workers can help consign the Tories to history.

These are but a few of the big political questions facing the student movement and young people in general which we will be discussing at this year's Socialist Students conference.

■ **Socialist Students national conference:**
Saturday 24 February, 10am to 6pm, University of Birmingham, Guild Council Chamber, Edgbaston Park Road, Birmingham B15 2TU

Leicester makes Tory fee tripler
Willetts chancellor - sack Willetts!

Luke O'Brien
Leicester Socialist Students

The University of Leicester has appointed former Tory universities minister David Willetts its new chancellor.

During his time in government, Willetts was a key orchestrator in raising tuition fees from £3,000 to £9,000, which at the time he called "fair and affordable."

Last year he published a book titled 'A University Education' where he celebrates the increase, saying "we were able to deliver one of the biggest single cuts in public spending of the coalition."

Willetts has defended the hyper-inflated pay of university vice-chancellors, saying "let's keep this in proportion."

Worse still, in an interview in 2011, he said "the key factor" hindering men's social mobility is... the growth

“”
David Willetts was a key
orchestrator in raising
tuition fees from £3,000
to £9,000 - which at the
time he called "fair and
affordable"

in the number of women who have careers!

On 15 February around 100 angry students and staff gathered outside Leicester's Fielding Johnson Building - where Willetts was busy promoting his new book - to demonstrate against this appointment.

Students expressed their disgust at the prospect of being awarded a degree by one of the men responsible for our crippling debt.

Leicester Socialist Students is strongly opposed to this appointment. We believe Willetts is not representative of the values of students or staff.

We are not alone, with both the Leicester UCU branch and students' union releasing statements expressing their opposition. The students' union has launched an online petition, and at the time of writing had received almost 3,000 signatures.

■ Sign the petition at goo.gl/PwtdX8



photo Paul Mattsson

MAY DAY, MAY DAY!

Paul Gerrard
North West Socialist Party
paper organiser

No, we're not in distress! But we do want to celebrate May Day, and we want to see a paper full of May Day greetings that proudly reflects the hard work of our members but also the solidarity we've worked for across the labour movement.

Every Socialist Party branch should have this on their agenda each week, urgently drawing up lists of organisations to approach, checking which members are going to chase them up, and, importantly, monitoring progress each week.

In 2017 in the North West we had a target of nine greetings, and we achieved ten, so this year we're aiming for 12. Already the Lancashire branch has drawn up an impressive 'hit-list' of four trades councils, two anti-cuts campaigns, two trade union branches and a Socialist Students group. In each case someone is checking contact details of secretaries and the dates when they meet so we can approach them in good time.

Following Manchester's 'mini strike wave' around Christmas and on the strength of the outstanding coverage in the Socialist, we are approaching housing maintenance

and bus workers. After the successful strike at Arriva in Merseyside and Cheshire we're targeting all the Unite the Union branches affected. Plus of course the RMT branches who are still locked in battle over driver-only operation.

What you need to know:

- Urgent - for trade union branches and trades councils make sure May Day greetings for the Socialist comes up in 'correspondence', ideally at their March meetings
- If you can't get a donation from your union branch use a sign-up sheet to get donations and book greetings in the name of 'Socialist Party members and supporters in X union'
- There is a 20% discount on greetings placed by 30 March, so, for example, a 1/8 page advert costs £72 instead of £90
- Final date is 11 April

Lets' make this a record-breaking May Day edition of our paper!

- **Do you want resources? Do you have suggestions? Can we help you get those greetings in? Email jamesivens@socialistparty.org.uk**
- **You can see prices and send greetings at socialistparty.org.uk/mayday**

Socialist Party Fighting Fund

	£ received	£ target	January-March 2018				Deadline: 30 March 2018			
Northern	379	750				53%				
East Midlands	975	1,850				53%				
North West	1,096	2,100				52%				
West Midlands	1,200	2,600				46%				
South West	826	1,800				46%				
Yorkshire	1,235	3,300				37%				
Wales	789	2,300				34%				
Southern	508	1,600				32%				
London	1,861	6,100				31%				
Eastern	279	1,200				21%				
South East	78	750				10%				
Other	772	5,650				14%				
TOTAL	10,017	30,000				33%				

Successful Socialist Party Wales sets tone for the year ahead

Cardiff West Socialist Party members

The recent earthquake in South Wales pales in comparison with the shifts in the political landscape described at the Socialist Party Wales conference on 18 February. Members from across Wales gathered in Cardiff to discuss the successes and challenges of the past year, while planning for the future.

Hannah Sell, Socialist Party deputy general secretary, introduced the complex but exciting times ahead. There has been a seeming pause in the struggle after the excitement of the general election, with layers of the wider labour movement seemingly willing to wait for a Corbyn government. But the working class cannot afford to wait for an 'eventual' election.

The reality is that we do have a Labour government in Wales led by First Minister Carwyn Jones and his fellow Blairites who willingly

implement the cuts. This attitude is synonymous with Labour councils across the country where we are told there is no legal option but to become Tory policy executors.

Further contributions were made by trade unionists about the upcoming disputes and strikes planned by university workers and civil servants.

The importance of the #MeToo movement was also highlighted with a Welsh Socialist Party women's meeting scheduled for 2 March in preparation for International Women's Day.

Wales Socialist Party showed its unwavering commitment by raising a staggering £12,000 for the building fund (to help find a new national premises for the Socialist Party as we're being evicted) with more pledges to come. A further £360 was raised for the fighting fund appeal.

Socialist Party Wales is the largest left force in Cardiff and has been dubbed 'the unofficial opposition' by members of Swansea council.



photo Socialist Party Wales

Socialist Students and Young Socialists have led the youth movement in Wales, organising a show of solidarity with striking lecturers.

The success of this conference mirrors the way Socialist Party Wales acts in its everyday work and has set the tone for a year of solidarity and struggle to come.

Tremendous determination on show at West Midlands conference

Lenny Shail
West Midlands Socialist Party
organiser

With 71 in attendance from eleven branches or groups, a fantastic West Midlands Socialist Party conference took place on 17 February in Birmingham. Alistair Tice, Yorkshire regional secretary, kicked off the first session on Britain and Sarah Sachs-Eldridge, Socialist Party national organiser, introduced the afternoon's session on party building.

Both discussions reflected the tremendous role of the party in the many local NHS campaigns, the Birmingham 'bin workers' strike and council cuts disputes as well as the Corbyn movement.

Bernadette O'Connor from Nune-



A small group discussion at the conference photo Lenny Shail

aton set the scene for the party building discussion with a great report of the hard work put in by members in Nuneaton to build the organisation in a small town. Many new young members reported on the hard work and success in building Socialist Student, Young Socialists and Marxist ideas among young people.

Commissions on left reformism, women and the Middle East and a final report of the work of the

Committee for a Workers' International brought a tremendous conference to an end.

A marvellous collection for the building fund of £15,560, including three donations of £1,000, and £548 in the fighting fund collection reflected the growing strength of the Socialist Party in the West Midlands and the determination of our membership to build the forces of socialism in the current period.

Lively discussion at East Midlands Socialist Party conference

Tom Barker
Leicester West Socialist Party

The Socialist Party East Midlands conference on 18 February was a day of lively political discussion, detailing the tasks ahead but also drawing out the lessons of the successful Glenfield and Chatsworth NHS campaigns - led by Socialist Party members.

Socialist Party executive committee member Rob Williams led the opening session on British, where he outlined Corbyn's excellent general election campaign. But he also

warned of the many obstacles that stand in the way of transforming Labour into a mass party of the working class.

The pro-capitalist policies of many Labour councils pose a significant threat to Corbyn's electoral support.

In Derby, for example, the local Labour-led council has been widely condemned for their appalling treatment of local teaching assistants.

Understandably, they now face the possibility of losing their majority in local elections in May. Selectively standing Trade Unionist

and Socialist Coalition candidates against the Blairites can play an important role in fighting for Corbyn's anti-austerity programme.

The workshop discussions highlighted the need for members to take every opportunity to build on our successes by recruiting new members. The Socialist Party punches above its weight. Our recent victories continue to attract Corbyn supporters and working-class fighters, into our party.

More than £6,000 was raised for the building fund appeal, with many sacrificing more than a week's wages.



photo Save Pontllanfraith Leisure Centre

VICTORY: PONTLLANFRAITH LEISURE CENTRE SAVED

Sasha O'Neil
Caerphilly Socialist Party

Campaigners in Pontllanfraith have forced Caerphilly Council to back down on plans to close Pontllanfraith leisure centre. Their victory shows that if you fight the cuts you can win.

This is the second successful blow against the cuts in the Blackwood area. Two years ago, in a hard-fought campaign, the same campaigners stopped the closure of the leisure centre in Cefn Fforest.

At a very well-attended public meeting called to organise a fight-back, individual after individual explained how important the leisure centre and its football pitch is to the whole community.

In a blatant attempt to wrong-foot the campaign, the council announced that it would be installing a new football pitch five miles away. The meeting agreed one area must not be pitted against another. They pledged to ask other areas for solidarity - and to give solidarity if other facilities were threatened.

School children and pensioners - people of all ages - made banners

together and went to lobby the council. They'd been told they wouldn't be allowed to address the council meeting - and if they were, they wouldn't be allowed to explain what the closure would mean to them. Still, campaigners showed up in force, determined to have a go.

Councillors were unimpressed. Rather than give up, campaigners determined to take Caerphilly Council to court. They secured the help of a solicitor with considerable experience of fighting such cases. The solicitor sent a letter to the council informing them of the legal proceedings - and the very next day,

the council backed down.

"We have listened to the community," the council declared disingenuously, "and it is clear from the feedback received... that there is widespread opposition to the closure of this facility... We have agreed that we will defer the decision".

Caerphilly Council has one of the largest reserves in Wales. They should be dipping into those reserves to preserve jobs and services - while at the same time banding together with other councils to demand the funding we need from the Welsh Assembly and Westminster.

Kids' services protest

Socialist Party members joined a protest in Bradford city centre on 10 February in response to £13 million of cuts to prevention and early help child services. Around 50 people attended, including Unite union representatives, council workers and families that have been helped by these services.

A local Unite rep told the protest that 437 people are to lose their jobs.

I spoke at the protest to talk about cuts in Bradford in general. I felt it was important to do so as they all have a knock-on effect. Especially in the case of the planned 'sustainability and transformation plan' NHS cuts in West Yorkshire, such as reducing the number of stroke units.

Often it is the job of child services to support disabled or ill parents. If there is no support, who is going help stroke victims with childcare and travel during rehabilitation?

Julie Carr, Bradford Socialist Party

Hospital black alert

The continuing winter crisis in our hospitals has resulted in black alert status being declared at a Nottingham hospital for a whole week. On 16 February there were 70 patients waiting for an emergency bed at the Queens Medical Centre.

A memo to staff at the Nottingham University Hospital Trust from Rachel Eddie, deputy chief operating officer, said: "The additional community beds that we opened in early 2018 are full. These pressures have been compounded by bed closures."

Mike Scott, spokesperson for Nottingham/Notts Keep Our NHS Public, said: "Every time we think rock bottom has been reached, things get worse. The government, the trust and local councils are still pushing ahead with plans to cut 200 acute beds when patient numbers are going through the roof. This is complete madness. We call on the trust and councils to stop the plans to restructure local services and to ensure there is a sustainable excess of beds before the numbers are reduced."

The current crisis is disastrous for both staff and patients. It is clear that unless adequate funding is pumped in to the NHS now, more people will die needlessly and the government will have their blood on its hands.

Refugee Rights gig

Cardiff hosted a successful gig and art auction, organised by Young Socialists in conjunction with the Refugee Rights Campaign, on 10 February. Socialists, artists and musicians, trade union organisers, local students and young people gathered raising in excess of £500. Months in the planning, not even Wales' loss to England at rugby could dampen the mood!

The Refugee Rights Campaign is a grass-roots movement established and led by a group of refugees and asylum seekers in Britain, seeking to ally with political movements and trade unions to further their aims of fair treatment and solidarity. The campaign has already garnered support for its model motion from Cardiff trades union council, securing a £1,000 donation from an affiliated union branch. Local musical talent, featuring the likes of CVC and Sock, entertained between rousing speeches and an art action that raised over £250. All profits went to the Refugee Rights Campaign and Cardiff West Socialist Party branch also raised £36.45 for the Socialist Party fighting fund through selling food.

Alex Wedlake and Meg Cicero



photo CEmphoto/Uwe Aranas/CC

Glenn Kelly
Socialist Party industrial organiser

With one in four of all full-time workers working over 40 hours a week in Britain, the notion of a proper work-life balance, to be able to spend more time with family, care for children or look after relatives, is but an empty slogan for millions.

At the same time, millions of part-time workers desperately scramble around week to week to find enough hours to make ends meet.



The legal right to ask for flexible working is increasingly becoming a right to ask, and the right of the boss to tell you to get lost!

Increasingly the legal right to ask for flexible working is becoming just that: a right to ask, and the right of the boss to tell you to get lost! In particular, many women are forced out of work after having a child, unable able to afford childcare and unable to get agreement from the employer to reduce their hours.

The truth is that the current UK law on flexible working rights has more holes in it than a sieve, and gives the employers an easy escape route.

That is why the recent deal agreed by the German engineering workers' union IG Metall has attracted widespread international interest. Coming on the back of workers' action its a glimpse of what could be won - not by pleading with the employers, or asking the EU, but by militant industrial action.

The union did not win all its demands, and all the details of the final deal are not fully clear. But it did win a 7.4% pay rise over two years.

It won the right to a 28-hour working week for up to two years - unfortunately not without loss of pay, but with the right to return to the job full-time - and for reduced hours to be shared out among other workers. The bigger question of a shorter working week with no loss in pay is even more valid in today's world of rapid technological change.

IG Metall, with over two million members, launched the campaign for the right to a temporary reduced working week - albeit with reduced pay - and for an 8% pay rise, under the slogan of "more time to live, love and laugh."

One union leader said: "In the past it was the employers who demanded flexibility. Now it's the other way round."

The union targeted hundreds of companies, including some of the big car plants, first with warning strikes, and then 24-hour 'lighting strikes' - a new tactic - involving around 930,000 workers.

These saw massive participation and real anger from workers. They wanted both a share of their bosses' huge profits, and a loosening of

working hours.

When the employers refused to move, the unions threatened to escalate to an all-out strike. The bosses panicked, fearful of workers' anger, and called for talks. The 24-hour strikes had already cost the bosses £200 million in lost production.

It is clear that more could have been won as German industry is booming. There is also the danger the bosses could use the deal's details to impose and increase working hours.

While some smaller employers are unhappy, Rainer Dulger, head of the bosses' association Gesamtmetall, welcomed the deal, as it enables employers to increase the working week from the existing 35 hours in western Germany to 40 hours.

Furthermore, the implementation of some parts of the deal is conditional on company profitability, while other parts are unclear and need to be clarified. Bernd Riexinger, co-leader of Die Linke (the Left Party) and a former regional union leader, criticised the deal.

The right-wing IG Metall leaders did make radical-sounding statements that recognised it was the threat of longer strike action that won the deal. One union leader said: "It was like a tube of toothpaste - you have to apply pressure from the bottom to force something out of the top."

But the majority of union leaders feared calling further strikes.

So unfortunately, the overall results are mixed. The wage rise is to be welcomed, although more could have been won. However, the deal

does not solve the issue of many workers feeling burdened by pressure at work.

It is good working time has been put on the agenda. The question now is how to campaign for fewer hours with no loss in pay.

And, showing this issue has many sides, workers have also questioned why families should have the main responsibility for social care, demanding the state provide support for children, the sick and elderly.



More could've been won as German industry is booming. There's a danger the bosses could use the deal's details to impose and increase working hours

There are many lessons for British workers struggling with too much or not enough work, trying to juggle family life and the need to earn a living - and add to this the threat of automation destroying jobs.

That is why the British unions need to resurrect the old slogans of a shorter working week with no loss of pay, and to share out the work. And, more importantly, recognise the bosses will never willingly give it over without a determined fight.

■ Stock answer

A quote from an Australian market strategist earlier this month - I thought it was funny: "Everyone is just running for the hills because nobody actually knows what is causing this move."

Pete Watson
Nottingham

■ Course cruelty

I have long been campaigning for the whip to be removed in horse racing, whereby jockeys lash the horses to make them run faster or harder. That was partially successful where they have been limited in the number of times they can hit a horse. Of course, that has been shown to not really work, jockeys continue to hit and are then fined or banned. You only have to think of how sensitive a horse's skin is when they feel a fly land on them to realise how much it must hurt.

The other major issue is the number of horse deaths on the race courses. A tally has been kept since 2007 and, despite talk about increasing safety on the courses, more horses are dying every year.

No horse has the choice whether to run or not, even though every race could be their last, and I think it is safe to say that if the jockeys died in the numbers that horses do then racing would be outlawed.

A total of 1,649 deaths have now been recorded out of 3,994 days of racing, with more than 1,500 in the ten years up to 2017.

Living near Cheltenham race course,



The Socialist Inbox

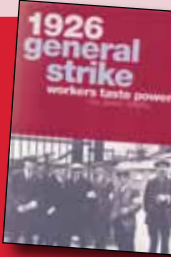
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which has the worst death rate of any around the country, brings it home all the more - as the posters say: "You bet, they die." Racing is not natural - these

horses have been specifically bred to go faster.

Ruthie McNally
Malvern



OUTRAGEOUS SENTENCE FOR TUSC AGENT IN 'MISLEADING ELECTORS' COURT CASE

Chris Fernandez, the local election agent for eight Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) candidates at the 2016 council elections in Derby, was sentenced on 13 February to 15 months' imprisonment for 'electoral fraud'.

After a two-and-a-half-week trial in December, Chris had been found guilty on 12 out of 14 counts of 'misleading voters' into signing the TUSC candidates' nomination papers.

The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) argued many electors signed believing they were backing a petition against the closure of Derby's Moorways swimming pool, and not a local election nomination form.

TUSC's national election agent, **Clive Heemskerk**, present at the sentencing, said:

While recognising the jury's verdict, it is important to understand that in this case there was no question of actual votes being fraudulently cast, of ballot papers being interfered with, of people's right to vote how they wish being denied, of impersonation of voters, or postal ballot irregularities.

Nor was public money misspent, or any financial or other material gain achieved, by Chris's acts. It was purely a question of the formal process by which candidates are enabled to appear on ballot papers in local elections.



There was no question of actual votes being fraudulently cast or any financial gain

That is why the comments at the sentencing hearing by the trial judge, Peter Cooke, that this case "strikes at the heart of our democracy," were frankly ludicrous.

Candidates for election to the Scottish parliament, the Welsh assembly, and Greater London Authority regional list seats, for example, unlike local council candidates, can all self-nominate, without going through the process of collecting signatures before they can appear on the ballot paper.

Do these elections too 'strike at the heart of our democracy'?

In reality a 15-month prison sentence is totally disproportionate, even if the offences had been proven beyond reasonable doubt. But what is most disturbing about this case is that there was, in fact, plenty of doubt.

I attended throughout the trial in December and submitted a 22-page account to the TUSC national steering committee, raising serious questions about the CPS's case - which, unfortunately, were not addressed

in the trial. These include:

■ There is no statutory test that canvassers are expected to make to ensure that 'subscribers' to nomination papers have 'sufficiently understood' what it is they have signed. But the CPS, unchallenged in court, set the bar not far from the level of a Mastermind contestant

■ There is no statutory or even informal guidance on what political campaign material canvassers can or cannot take with them when they collect signatures for nomination papers, and the closure of the Moorways pool was a burning local political issue

■ There was no discussion in court on what responsibility people have for their own actions when they sign a form headed "Local government election - nomination paper", which includes two declarations that the person signing is agreeing to nominate an election candidate

■ There was no questioning of the role of the police - yet officers visited the 80 electors who nominated the TUSC candidates, sometimes on two or three occasions, and spent more time with them than Chris Fernandez did! How did that shape what people 'remembered' from their earlier encounter with Chris?

As Chris begins his prison sentence, it is impossible not to draw the contrast between the Crown's approach to this case and that of the Conservative Party's 'Battle Bus' 2015 general election expenses scandal.

The Tories' extra spending then on the 20 or so marginal seats involved may well have made the difference in their winning the election, and everything that has followed from that.

Yet in the Battle Bus case, while the CPS accepted that Tory candidates' election returns "may have been inaccurate" and therefore breaking election law, they decided it was "not in the public interest to charge anyone referred to us."

Who said what on the doorstep

during a municipal election in Derbyshire was obviously of greater concern!

In reality the CPS wanted a prosecution on the extremely unusual 'false pretences' charge to satisfy the demand from the Tory government to clamp down on so-called 'sham nominations'.

This is part of the Tories' moves against democratic rights, including electoral rights, as a response to the accumulating rage at their never-ending austerity agenda.

However, this was one case, with specific circumstances, tried in one court. It does not establish case law which could be applicable to other possible instances in the future.



The vindictive political prosecution of Chris Fernandez should not cow activists - or stop them from taking their battle against austerity, and for a new society, to the ballot box

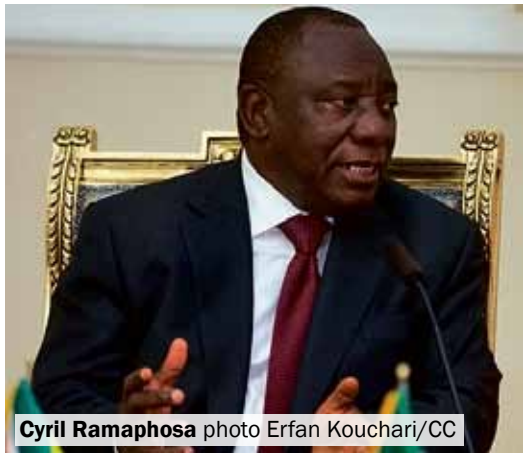
The vindictive political prosecution of Chris Fernandez should not cow trade unionists, socialists and working class community activists - or stop them from taking their battle against austerity, and for a new society, to the ballot box.

■ The TUSC report on the trial, challenging the CPS case in close detail, is available at tusc.org.uk/txt/413.pdf

■ Please send messages of support to Chris Fernandez (21-12-1957), A5447ED, B wing, HMP Nottingham, 112 Perry Road, Sherwood, Nottingham NG5 3AG. The envelope should include your name and address on the back

South Africa: ANC president Zuma ousted RAMAPHOSA - A SAFE PAIR OF HANDS FOR CAPITALISM

Build a mass working class political alternative



Cyril Ramaphosa photo Erfan Kouchari/CC

Weizmann Hamilton
Workers and Socialist Party (WASP),
CWI, South Africa

Inside two months following his election as ANC (African National Congress) president at the party's December 2017 national conference, Cyril Ramaphosa has realised his ambition to become the country's president.

If his victory in the ANC presidential succession race was not at all certain, the narrow margin of his victory made Jacob Zuma's dramatic resignation so soon after the conference seem improbable.

Ramaphosa's ascendancy to the highest office in the land was built on a 50-50 split that ran right through its top structures.

Even more unpromisingly for Ramaphosa, his triumph was the result of the betrayal of Mpumalanga Premier David Mabuza, the most powerful member of the pro-Zuma so-called 'Premier League'.

This alliance of corrupt provincial premiers manipulated provincial conference elections, stripping the national conference of all credibility and reducing it to a gigantic auction of corrupted delegates.

By instructing his delegates, in the name of "unity", to switch their votes from Zuma's anointed successor, his ex-wife, Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, it could be reasonably expected that Ramaphosa would be beholden to the most corrupt of the trio.

By the evening of 14 February, the reality of the decisive shift in the balance of forces in the ANC that set in after Ramaphosa's conference victory, finally dawned on Zuma.

Humiliation

For the second time in ten years, the ANC has humiliated its president by not permitting him to complete his term of office.

The drama of Zuma's ousting is rich with irony. He became the victim of the same process he had led to prevent Thabo Mbeki from completing his term nine years ago - a recall.

So discredited had Zuma and his cronies become that the demand that Zuma step down was supported by virtually every layer of society including big business. It is this factor, the tsunami of public opinion,

that overwhelmed the ANC. Zuma's erstwhile allies dumped him like rats leaving a sinking ship.

Zuma's regime was born in scandal and morphed into a kleptocracy. He converted government into a criminal enterprise for the self-enrichment of his family and cronies.

It is estimated that the looting spree has resulted in the loss of over R100 billion (£6.13 billion) to the public purse. Under his watch the economy has nosedived, gasping for breath.

55% of the population live in poverty, with 9 million unemployed and 15 million going to bed hungry every night. The economy has experienced two recessions and a rating agency downgrade.

Splits

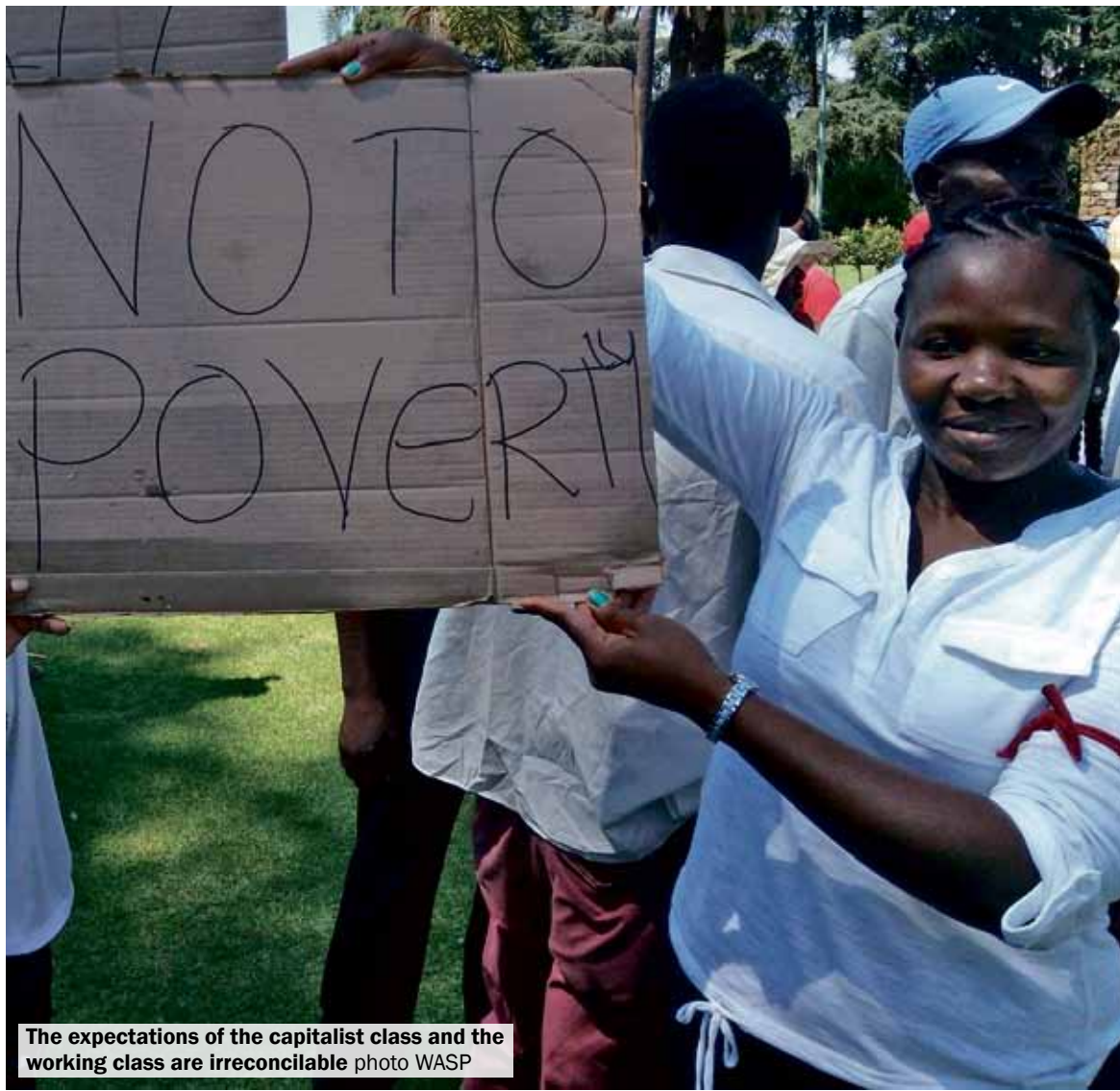
Under Zuma the ANC has undergone two splits - the birth of the Congress of the People in 2008 and the Economic Freedom Fighters in 2012. The Tripartite Alliance (the ANC, Communist Party and Cosatu union federation) has lost all credibility.

Cosatu expelled the 340,000-strong National Union of Metal Workers following its 2013 decision not to support the ANC in the 2014 elections.

Nothing expresses the political bankruptcy of Cosatu and the Communist Party than the fact that they cling on for dear life to the Tripartite Alliance having campaigned for the billionaire Ramaphosa - one of the richest men in the country and 'butcher' of the Marikana mineworkers.

Understandably, Ramaphosa's victory has been welcomed by most people, including the working class. They hope he will make good on his promise to root out corruption, lift the economy out of the doldrums, create jobs, eradicate poverty and raise living standards.

Since Ramaphosa's election as ANC president the priority crimes unit (the 'Hawks') and police appear to have been energised, leading to raids on the Gupta compound, the offices of the Free State Premier and the arrest of a number of corruption suspects. The state electricity utility Eskom's entire board has been replaced. The National Prosecuting Authority is under pressure to reinstate the corruption charges against Zuma.



The expectations of the capitalist class and the working class are irreconcilable photo WASP

These developments have given the impression that Ramaphosa means business. He thus comes to power carrying the hopes of all sections of society. But herein lies the contradiction. The expectations of the capitalist class and the working class are irreconcilable.

Billionaire

Ramaphosa is the candidate of big business. His entire career has constituted preparation for the role the capitalist ruling class has thrust on him and he has enthusiastically placed himself at their disposal.

He forged close ties with big business in the 1980s in the Urban Foundation, established to create the basis for the development of a black capitalist class as the strate-

gists of capital became increasingly alarmed by the socialist consciousness that had developed especially in Cosatu.

Embittered at being overlooked for the position of deputy to Nelson Mandela in the first post-apartheid government, he left politics and got on with the business of becoming a billionaire.

He comes to power when rating agencies are demanding savage austerity measures to avoid a further downgrade. Given the state of the world economy, and lack of demand in the domestic economy because of the levels of poverty, there is in fact little incentive for capitalism to invest at home and no way out on the world market.

Ramaphosa's spring will therefore

be short-lived. For this reason it is not excluded that Ramaphosa may call an early election. The birth of the new South African Federation of Trade Unions (Safu) in 2017 represented the first steps towards the working class reclaiming its political and class independence.

The debate in the trade unions on the establishment of a workers' party must be concluded urgently and a workers' party established.

The Safu leadership has the opportunity to put an end to this undue delay. It must set a date for the launch a mass workers party on a socialist programme that will unite community, student and workplace struggles.

Read article in full on socialistworld.net



'Hands off Ali' contingent on Moscow's anti-fascist march, 19 January 2018 photo Socialist Alternative

Russia: Ali Feruz, journalist and human rights activist, freed from jail

Igor Yasin
Socialist Alternative (CWI Russia)

On 15 February an aircraft left Moscow for Germany. On board was Ali Feruz, his partner, his lawyer and a representative of the Red Cross, which has arranged the necessary documents for him to enter and live in exile in Germany. This is, without doubt, a victory for the Hands-off Ali campaign and all who supported him.

The campaign to free Ali, who works for the opposition paper Novaya Gazeta, lasted almost a year.

He was first arrested in March 2017, accused of breaking immigration laws. This followed the refusal by the Russian authorities to grant him asylum after he fled Uzbekistan, where he had been arrested and tortured due to his opposition to the brutal Karimov regime.

For the last six months, after a Moscow court decided to deport him back to Uzbekistan, Ali was held in a special prison for foreign citizens.

The campaign in Ali's defence has attracted attention to the arbitrary treatment of immigrants and refugees, and to the inhumane treatment of foreigners in the so-called detention centres, which are no better than real jails.

Until his arrest in August, Ali wrote to expose the exploitation of immigrants in Russia and about the crimes of the Uzbek regime. He volunteered for human rights organisations, was an LGBT+ activist and a member of the Independent Trade Union of Media Workers.

When the threat of deportation back to Uzbekistan was made by Russia's courts, where Ali faced the threat of further imprisonment,

a huge campaign was mobilised - rights activists, trade unionists, LGBT+ activists, all joined in. Socialist Alternative was one of the main driving forces behind the public campaign in defence of Ali.

The campaign has attracted attention to the arbitrary treatment of immigrants and refugees, and to the inhumane treatment of foreigners in the so-called detention centres

During the year, many public activities were organised. We picketed the president's administration, the police's immigration department and the courts. We took part in marches and protests, displaying placards in support of Ali.

There were acts of solidarity in many other countries. The online petition collected over 70,000 signatures. There were fundraising evenings, collections to support Ali, his family and other immigrants who have found themselves held in the Sakharovo prison. We distributed leaflets, recorded videos, issued press releases and held many meetings.

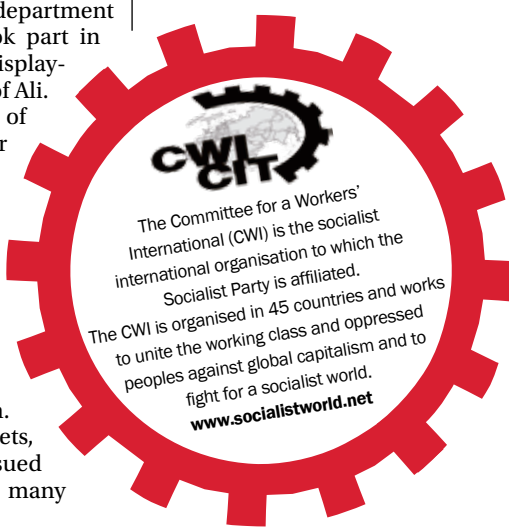
In essence, we have been fighting to force the Russian state to observe its own laws. The authorities should have granted Ali the right to political asylum and not try to hand him over to the Uzbekistan political police. When it became clear that obtaining political asylum was not going to happen, the demand to allow Ali to leave Russia for a third country became key.

No doubt those people who, over the course of the year, spread lies about Ali in the mass media and the social networks will now claim that all he ever wanted was 'to get out to the west'.

Others will think that by letting Ali leave for the west is the best outcome for Ali. But we do not agree. Freedom for Ali is a victory but a happy end would have been to allow Ali to stay, live and work in Russia.

Nonetheless, even in these difficult political conditions, Ali's case shows that solidarity campaigns can succeed.

Read article in full on socialistworld.net



Socialist Party

What we stand for

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

As capitalism dominates the globe, the struggle for genuine socialism must be international. The Socialist Party is part of the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI), a socialist international that organises in over 40 countries.

Our demands include:

PUBLIC SERVICES

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

ENVIRONMENT

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

RIGHTS

- Oppose discrimination on the grounds of race, gender, disability, sexuality, age, and all other forms of prejudice.
- Repeal all laws that trample over civil liberties. For the right to protest! End police harassment.
- Defend abortion rights. For a woman's right to choose when and whether to have children.
- For the right to asylum. No to racist immigration laws.
- For the right to vote at 16.

MASS WORKERS' PARTY

- For a mass workers' party drawing together workers, young people and activists from workplace, community, environmental and anti-racist and anti-cuts campaigns, to provide a fighting, political alternative to the pro-big business parties.
- Fight for Labour to be transformed into such a party: deselect the Blairites.

SOCIALISM AND INTERNATIONALISM

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

Join the fightback!
Join the Socialists!

www.socialistparty.org.uk 02089888777

@Socialist_party Text 07761 818206 / CWISocialistParty

COMMUNITIES AGAINST CORPORATIONS

WALTHAMSTOW SAYS: WE NEED PUBLIC SPACES & COUNCIL HOMES



image Save Our Square

Sarah Sachs-Eldridge
Waltham Forest Socialist Party

Where are Jeremy Corbyn's representatives in Waltham Forest's Labour council? That is what campaigners will be asking - especially after they saw council leader Clare Coghill write to the Evening Standard to tell the Labour leadership to butt out of a local battle over her latest hated regeneration plans!

The east London council has approved a plan to hand public land in the town square over to private developers. This will deliver 500 flats - but none will be affordable to those in housing need.

It also includes a reduction in the number of trees and replacing the children's play area with one that is smaller and nearer to the bus station fumes.

Coghill's statement followed the Evening Standard's report of a trades council meeting where John McDonnell spoke.

Chair of Walthamstow Save Our Square and Socialist Party member Nancy Taaffe appealed to John for support. He replied: "My message is listen to local people... and if you can't convince them, think again whether it's the appropriate scheme."

According to the Standard, Coghill said Mr McDonnell should focus on winning Tory marginals rather than "querying" the work of Waltham Forest council.

But demanding that Labour councils show in practice the difference Jeremy Corbyn's leadership could make is exactly what is needed to convince more people to vote Labour and to build the movement to get the Tories out.

Building the campaign

After 300-400 attended the council's planning meeting in December, 150 attended a trades council-hosted campaign launch.

In January a campaign activist moved an amendment to an anti-development motion at a Labour Party branch calling for a referendum on it, as per Jeremy Corbyn's call at Labour Party conference.

We have attempted to use the council's petition mechanism to get a debate in the council chamber. But an unelected council officer on £110,000 a year has ruled this out.

We have written to Sadiq Khan and requested that he use his power to intervene and block the plan. When Sadiq visited the borough, the campaign went to appeal to him.

We're just three months from the local elections. But unfortunately, unlike our neighbours in Haringey - where a groundswell of opposition emboldened the left inside Labour to deselections of pro-private developer councillors - we have the very same proponents standing for re-election who have been carrying out all the anti-working class policies.

The Socialist Party proposed that the Labour members in the campaign ask election candidates to show which side they are on by pledging to reverse the decision and pushing for an emergency council meeting. This was agreed by majority vote.

The meeting also agreed to deliver a letter to Stella Creasy, Walthamstow's anti-Corbyn Labour MP, appealing for her to intervene on the council's plans.

Let's unite against social cleansing and fight the forces of austerity.

■ **Protest - 1pm**
24 February,
Walthamstow Town
Square

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