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TORY BREXIT FARCE, CORBYN AND UNIONS: CALL MASS ACTION NOW

Vicky Perrin
Unison national executive council member
(personal capacity)

For all those of us living in the real world, the pantomime season is long since over.

But, as the Tory Brexit crisis plays itself out daily in parliament, it can just seem like a toffs' slanging match stuck on a loop.

Out here, in austerity Britain, nobody's laughing.

While the Tory party crawls from one cliff edge of division and defeat to another, this enormous political crisis seems totally removed from our lives.

But all the time the sleeping lion of the trade union movement snores on, its leaders shamelessly squandering the key role organised workers could play in harnessing the anger and resentment at this ever more brutal them-and-us society.

If a lead was given by the unions and Corbyn, there could rapidly develop a mighty movement to push this rotten government over the precipice.

Because out here, jobs and terms and conditions are being slashed, life-and-death services destroyed, precarious working is at epidemic levels and foodbanks for working and non-working poor alike have become a normalised part of everyday existence.

Nine children in an average class of 30 are now living in poverty, with the Tories' catastrophe of Universal Credit plunging more families into crisis and desperation every week.

The Office for National Statistics trumpets wages being at their highest since 2011 - as if, after ten years of biting austerity and real-terms pay cuts, this is something to celebrate.

There are currently an estimated 78,000

homeless households in England in temporary accommodation and, if this continues, more than 100,000 households will be trapped by 2020.

The average UK household debt currently stands at £15,000 - money owed to credit card firms, banks and other lenders. The figure excludes mortgages.

May, who has said she won't lead the remains of her party into another election, is on borrowed time. This Brexit crisis must be the Tories' closing number. It's time to sweep this party of self-interested millionaire villains off the stage of history once and for all.

The Socialist Party says:

- End austerity - Tories out, Corbyn in! General election now
- Trade unions should organise mass struggle
- For a socialist alternative to the bosses' EU
- Kick out the Blairite saboteurs
- Nationalise the banks and major monopolies
- For a new collaboration of the peoples of Europe on a socialist basis



photo Paul Mattsson





What we think

Corbyn must prepare for a general election : REMOVE THE PRO-CAPITALIST SABOTEURS - FIGHT FOR THE SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE

Talk of a split by Blairite Remainder MPs has increased, with the Observer newspaper reporting on 3 February that “rebel Labour MPs are set to quit the party and form centre group”.

The Blairites clearly see Brexit as an opportunity to land a blow against Jeremy Corbyn, whether they strike from inside or outside Labour.

At this stage, only six MPs have been identified and it's far from certain that they would take this step now - either to become independents or form a new formation, possibly with Remainder Tories and Lib Dems.

It would still be a step into electoral uncertainty and hopefully oblivion if they stood outside Labour. But they could act as 'stalking horses' - taking a limited step now while leaving the main group of Blairites within Labour should a Corbyn-led Labour government be elected in the next period.

This plotting yet again shows that these agents of the capitalist establishment must be decisively defeated within Labour.

It was Socialist Party members in Unite that moved the resolution that ensured mandatory reselection is the union's policy.

In such a volatile period, with the next Brexit parliamentary vote on 14 February and with possibly months, if not weeks, before a general election, socialist candidates should be put up against the Blairites in reselection contests.

This is necessary to ensure that the ground is prepared to, in the first instance, win a general election, but also to withstand the big business pressure that will be exerted afterwards.

If necessary, these left candidates should come from fighting elements across the labour and trade union movement, including socialist organisations like ours.

These Blairites are apparently citing Corbyn's refusal to support a second EU referendum as their main reason for the scheming.

We have criticised Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell, along with the majority of trade union leaders, for not leading a left socialist Leave campaign in 2016 that would have changed the dynamic of the EU referendum.

Instead, a vacuum was opened to be filled by the Tory right and Ukip. As a result, there is now a polarisation regarding membership of the EU within the working class, which the far right is attempting to exploit.

Notwithstanding this, Corbyn has, up until now, been prepared to stand against calls for a 'people's vote' to reverse Brexit - rightly arguing that a real people's vote would be a general election.

The Trade Union Congress recently claimed that “the strongest possible protection for workers' rights would come from sticking by Single Market and Customs Union rules”.

But in saying this they act like a wing of the CBI bosses' organisation which, as the true representative of big business, wants the UK to stay in the neoliberal EU or, at least, the 'softest' Brexit possible.

Both Corbyn and Unite the Union general secretary Len McCluskey have been the main objects of attack by the Blairites for their stands.

They have also been criticised by many so-called Corbynistas who have mistakenly supported Remain



photo Paul Mattsson

- effectively ending up in an unofficial front with the Blairites - putting a second referendum before a general election.

Corbyn and McCluskey need to use their meetings with May to put forward, and promote widely outside parliament, the key demands for what would constitute a Brexit in the interests of workers and their families.

This approach could, at the same time, expose the real character of the EU and how May and the Tories are only interested in a Brexit that serves the interests of big business.

Such demands should include the repeal of the anti-union laws. When Labour changed its position on the closed shop, which was outlawed by the Tories in 1990, the then Labour shadow employment secretary, Tony Blair, claimed it was necessary to “bring our law into line with Europe... in the run up to the single European market”.

Repealing the 1990 Act and the other anti-union laws; banning zero-hour contracts; lifting the restrictions on secondary action or sympathy strikes; trade union control of agencies; enforcing collective agreements negotiated in sectors to all workers in those industries - all this would completely blow away the Single Market rules and could unite workers.

Corbyn should add to this the demand not to com-

ply any more with EU rules on state aid and against public ownership, which would come into collision with Corbyn's 2017 Labour manifesto that raised renationalisation of the railways.

It is apt that one of the charges levelled by the Blairites against Corbyn is his refusal to go along with calls for Maduro to be forced out of office in Venezuela.

Another indication of the anti-worker and pro-imperialist character of the EU is that the leading powers within it are supporting what is an attempted US-led, right-wing coup.

Corbyn should go much further in strongly and combatively calling May to account and exposing her. A government led by him with a low-key approach and half measures on domestic and foreign policy would only antagonise Corbyn's class enemies both inside Labour and outside, while not satisfying workers' demands.

The Blairite plots are a further indication of a redrawing of the political lines which can barely be contained by the main political parties.

It is therefore necessary to face up to this reality by reconstituting Labour as a federal party that includes all anti-austerity forces across the labour and trade union movement - including the Socialist Party - and that can give a lead to the mass of workers in fighting to force out the Tories and bring in a government on socialist policies.

Have you got news for us?

DEADLINE: Friday before publication date - urgent news: Monday

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Struggling unis account for bulk of unconditional offers - end education marketisation!



photo Kit/CC

Theo Sharieff
Socialist Students national chair

It has been revealed that 20 universities are responsible for the massive spike in unconditional offers to students.

Unconditional offers mean when universities offer a place to students before they sit their final exams at college or sixth form - without a requirement to pass them.

The increase in unconditional offers by universities is staggering - there were a total of 117,000 offers made in 2018 described as having an unconditional element to them, compared to 3,000 five years ago.

Data also revealed that three universities in 2018 apparently made more than 70% of their total offers unconditional, in what is an increasingly harsh competition between universities for undergraduates.

The Office for Students, the Tory-launched higher education regulator previously headed by the bigot Toby Young, has reportedly 'signalled its displeasure' at the news of the growth in number of these unconditional offers.

Of course, some may look at this news as a positive - that more students can be taken into higher education, without facing the stress and pressure of demanding grade requirements.

This can be true, but the reality is this is actually a symptom of a higher education system in crisis.

What is it that has caused this massive spike? The Tories' own policies of austerity and cuts to higher education!

The introduction and increase of

tuition fees, and the resulting marketisation of our universities, means that universities are encouraged to compete among one another for as many undergraduates as possible.

This system of competition - in which students are simply relied on to inject cash into the coffers of universities - is of no benefit to any students who go to university with the hope of attaining a decent education.

Socialists want to fight for a system in which all working-class people have access to higher education and to enter into, if they choose, the world of academic study.

But this recent report highlights the ludicrousness of an education system run on the principles of the market - a for-profit education system, not run in the interests of students or workers, but in the interests of the vice-chancellors and managers who sit at the top.

This story is just yet another indictment of Tory austerity, and the system for which austerity is carried out, capitalism.

With the Tories in such disarray, a mass movement of students and workers, called by Jeremy Corbyn and the trade union leaders - through national and local demonstrations, campaigns, and crucially strike actions - could end the Tories and their austerity agenda.

We call for a socialist education system - an education system that is publicly owned, democratically run and universally free at all levels.

What's your view? email: editors@socialistparty.org.uk

Dutch historian Rutger Bregman went viral by putting the cat among the pigeons at billionaires get together Davos in Switzerland recently.

During a panel discussion at the World Economic Forum Bregman laid into billionaires for not paying tax or even discussing it at the event, he said: "It feels like I'm at a firefighters conference and no one's allowed to speak about water."

And that industry had to "stop talking about philanthropy and start talking about taxes, taxes, taxes. All the rest is bullshit in my opinion."

He has a point. The same week, Amazon announced record profits for a third year in a row reporting a profit of \$3.03 billion - up from \$1.86 billion on the same quarter a year earlier. Revenue grew 20% to \$72.38 billion.

But despite these record profits the company only pays £1.7 million in tax in the UK, for example In 2018, through loopholes in US tax law, Amazon paid no income tax at all. During the five previous years, Amazon had an effective tax rate of

Billionaires avoid paying and even talking about tax! Take the wealth off the 1%

just 11.4% compared to the 35% to 40% average for traditional retailers.

And Amazon is not alone. Billions of pounds and dollars in owed and unpaid tax is squirreled away by the rich and big companies every year. But we do not agree completely with Bregman. It's not all about taxes, taxes, taxes.

Yes, we call for the reversal of all cuts to HM Revenue and Customs and for the collection of the uncollected tax, as well as a huge increase taxes on the super-rich and big business.

But we also go further. We call for the nationalisation of the banks and top 150 corporations - many of which are major tax avoiders - so we can have a democratically planned economy, under the democratic control and management of workers, which could actually start to plan production in the interests of the 99%.



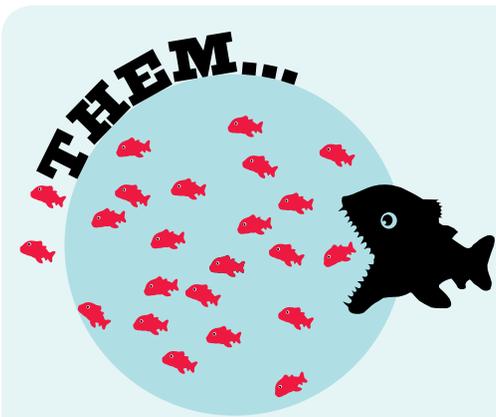
The helipad at Davos where many of the over 1,000 of the world's elite fly in to meet each other every year photo Kecko/CC



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■ Job for life for new hereditary lord...

Aeneas Simon Mackay, a Tory investment banker, can now vote on our laws and claim £305 a day for life after an election he could only enter because his great-granddad's cousin's dad's fourth cousin's dad's cousin's great-great-great-granddad was made a Lord in 1628.

Mackay is the 15th Lord Reay and won a recent 'hereditary peer by-election' and is now a member of the House of Lords. The 53-year-old is the chief of ancient Scottish Clan Mackay, whose former leader Donald Mackay was handed a peerage by Charles I.

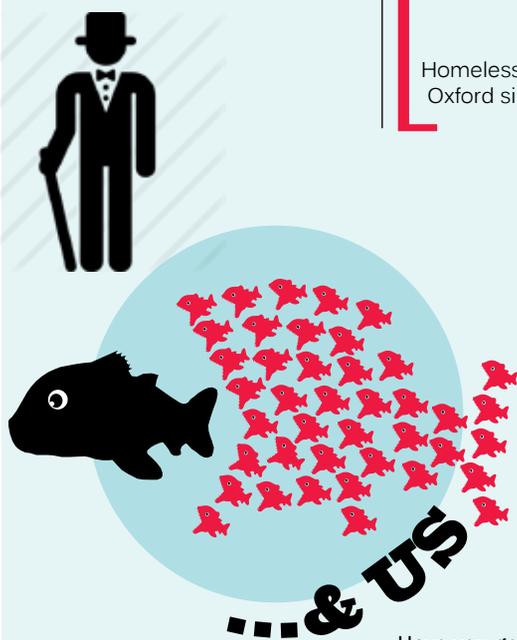
Charles I must have been off his head to award a peerage to the original Lord Reay as he was described by the family as a "magician who won a work-loving gang of fairies in an encounter with a witch in a cave".

This feudal relic is a hangover from Tony Blair's reform of the House of Lords in 1999. As part of the reform he compromised and allowed 92 hereditary peers to remain.

But even those who are not hereditary peers only get there by pleasing the government that appointed them.

We need elected workers' representatives in parliament. But for fundamental social change to come about we also need independent working-class movements outside parliament.

Abolition of the House of Lords is an important step in the democratisation of politics.



Have you got news for the 'fishes'?
Email: editors@socialistparty.org.uk

■ ...homeless deaths rise



The 15th Lord Reay went to university in Oxford which, despite educating Britain's elite, has seen a massive spike in homeless deaths as the city's poor face a severe lack of housing and little support for people with mental health and addiction problems.

Four homeless people have died in Oxford since November. One formerly homeless woman who volunteers to support rough sleepers in the city, said: "I am worried about who is going to be next. This is the worst I have seen it in Oxford."

Oxford is not alone either. Other towns and cities have seen homeless deaths, and the amount of rough sleepers has gone up considerably.

The high rents that force people out need to be capped. The cuts to housing and homelessness services that have taken place so far should be stopped and reversed. Build houses and fund services now to stop any more homeless deaths!

4

Homeless people have died in Oxford since November 2018

HARINGEY 'CORBYN COUNCIL' MUST FIGHT BOROUGH REGENERATION



Haringey Socialist Party

The Latin American market and cafe at Wards Corner in Haringey, north London, has provided a much-loved community hub for two decades. For over ten years the traders and community have fought plans for demolition and 'regeneration'.

There has been anger at the decision of Haringey Council's leadership to press ahead with the demolition and redevelopment according to a plan which will provide no affordable housing.

The decision by the Momentum-supporting council leadership contradicts the decision of the Haringey Labour manifesto conference to stop the demolition of the Latin Market.

The council leadership claim that their hands are tied by agreements made by the previous Blairite Clare Kober administration. But their decision pre-empts the investigation of the council's scrutiny panel.

An emergency motion condemning the council's actions was submitted to the local Labour Party's general committee meeting in January, but the chair did not bring it up for discussion.

Also in January, the council Leader Joe Ejiofor announced the sack-

ing of two cabinet members. One of them, Zena Brabazon, had previously been head of the scrutiny panel. She played a key role in exposing the Haringey Development Vehicle (HDV) and had been selected by Labour Party members as their choice to lead the council - a choice which was ignored by the councillors. She

has been replaced by councillor Kaushika Amin, a former supporter of the HDV and of the previous Blairite council leadership.

The council is also in the process of deciding the budget for next year. The council leadership had proposed £23 million worth of cuts, but retreated in the face of vehement opposition from the local Labour Party bodies.

Less than one year after taking office, Haringey's 'Corbyn council' is becoming increasingly similar to its Blairite predecessor. A layer of careerist local politicians have re-branded themselves in Corbynista colours, without any serious programme to implement change for the benefit of working people.

Unlike the previous administration they are attempting to stay on good terms with local Labour Party activists. But this is becoming increasingly difficult as the gap between the council's actions and their Corbynista pretensions widens.

The Wards Corner campaigners are determined to fight on. It's not over until the bulldozers move in!

As well as giving full backing to the Latin American campaigners, socialists and anti-cuts activists in Haringey, both inside and outside the Labour Party, need to get organised to defend the borough from cuts and so-called regeneration schemes.

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photo Roger Blackwell/CC

Unison Democracy and the right to speak out are under threat

Socialist Party members in Unison

Three members of public sector union Unison's national executive council (NEC), including two Socialist Party supporters, have received a letter from the union stating that there have been complaints made that they "breached collective responsibility" at the NEC meeting on 6 December and that they are now under investigation.

What happened in December?

At that meeting, new election rules were proposed for the forthcoming NEC elections. These new procedures ban groups of Unison members from getting together to campaign in the election. This ban comes on top of last year's ban on members of political parties campaigning in Unison elections.

The Socialist Party believes this

new ban is a breach of the union's rules and conference policy.

The right of members to campaign is specifically provided for in the union rule book and this was reinforced at the national conference. The rules state that the NEC "shall not do anything that is inconsistent with these rules or the policy of the union as laid down by the national delegate conference".

Duty bound

Because of this, Socialist Party members on Unison's NEC believed they were duty bound to challenge this issue and speak out at the NEC. During the course of the meeting, Socialist Party members spoke up to raise these concerns and voted against the new rules.

At the meeting, they were warned about "breaching collective responsibility", i.e. for having the cheek to

try and speak and vote against a proposal. The Socialist Party does not accept that NEC members should be gagged from speaking up at NEC meetings, denying them the right to advocate on behalf of the constituency they are democratically elected to represent.

There can be no legitimate reason to ask NEC members to be bound by a decision that they genuinely believe to be a breach union rules, or in fact the law.

The fact that they are now under investigation for sticking up for the rules and democracy in Unison is disgraceful. It must be challenged by all Unison members.

We call on union members to write to the general secretary to complain, to raise the matter in the branches, and pass motions in support of the three NEC members now facing investigation.



photo Ra Ragavan

'STANSTED 15' DEPORTATION PROTESTERS COULD FACE JAIL

- Defend the right to protest!
- Defend the right to asylum!

Linda Taaffe

Secretary, Waltham Forest Trade Union Council

At the time of going to press, 15 young people will be anxiously facing the judge at Chelmsford Crown Court, waiting to be sentenced. Many fear it will be jail.

In March 2017, the 15 felt so outraged by the injustice being meted out to desperate migrants by the Home Office that they took direct action to stop a Stansted plane bound for Africa from taking off with 60 deportees.

"We took action"

Melanie Strickland, one of those convicted, said: "We knew people on that flight who were in fear of their lives. We took humanitarian action in peacefully stopping that plane to assist them."

"As a result, eleven people were able to secure legal representation and file legal papers to prevent their unlawful deportation. These people include trafficking survivors, parents of dependent children and

those who seek asylum here.

"They are human beings and they did not deserve to be treated that way. We did what we could, because we know if we were in their position, we'd want people to act to assist us."

Initially arrested under trespass laws, the charges were then inexplicably changed to charges under the terror-related Aviation and Maritime Act 1990, which carries harsh jail sentences, including life imprisonment.

Socialists say our fight is not only against unjust deportations. It's also about the right to protest that is increasingly under threat.

Despite an avalanche of protest letters from all quarters, and masses of young people demonstrating their support, the Crown Prosecution Service has decided to proceed. Coaches bringing supporters to the court have been organised with the help of the local trade union and labour movement.

■ **The Stansted 15 are due to be sentenced on 6 February - see socialistparty.org.uk for the latest update**

COLLEGE LECTURERS STRIKE FOR A PAY RISE

■ Bradford

Lecturers at Bradford College had their third and fourth days of strike action.

There was a confident mood on the picket lines with very few people crossing. A delegation of RMT members involved in the strike against driver-only operation on Northern Rail came to return solidarity shown by University and College Union members throughout their dispute. A few students also joined the picket line.

Elaine White, Bradford striker and UCU national executive committee member, told us: "Over the last ten years of austerity, UCU members working in further education colleges like Bradford have seen at least a 25% drop in the value of their pay with no significant pay rise in those years."

"At least 30% of teachers in colleges are working on precarious, often hourly paid, zero-hour contracts, and many through agencies or

subsidiary companies.

"29 and 30 January have been Bradford's third and fourth days of action. If management continue to fail to talk to us over this issue, we are preparing for a further three days in March, with more to come after that"

Iain Dalton
Socialist Party West Yorkshire organiser

■ Messages of support for Bradford College UCU can be sent to g.evans@bradfordcollege.ac.uk and supporters are welcome to join the picket lines

■ Wolverhampton

Lecturers at City of Wolverhampton College took strike action for a living pay increase of 5%. Socialist Party members visited the picket line organised by the UCU to show solidarity and learn more about the dispute.



Lambeth photos Socialist Party

After years of below-inflation pay increases, many further education college lecturers now earn

£7,000 less a year than secondary school teachers with equivalent experience. College budget cuts have meant increased workloads, for effectively less real-terms pay!

To add insult to injury, while strikes at other colleges have been called off after management made improved offers, at Wolverhampton the bosses have refused to even meet with union reps to discuss the issues!

One picket commented, "management have forgotten that they were in the same position as us ten or 15 years ago. You have to remember your friends when you go up, or else you won't have any when you go back down."

College lecturers aren't the only ones who have suffered a decade of austerity, and they're not the only ones fighting back.

Lecturers and support staff in higher education, school teachers and civil servants are all in the process of balloting for strikes against pay 'restraint' imposed by public

sector employers on behalf of the Tories.

Wouldn't it be great if these disputes could be linked up into coordinated strike action? That would give a better chance of winning concessions and act as another nail in the coffin of this vicious Tory government.

Wolverhampton Socialist Party

■ Lambeth

Lambeth Socialist Party member, Lisa Bainbridge, said: "Having endured 25% in real-terms pay cuts over the past decade, workers at Lambeth College joined the call for a 5% pay rise. After years of underfunding and overpromises on wages, workers are now stepping up their fight for fair pay."

■ To read about the strike at other campuses see 'Leicester college staff strike against low pay' at socialistparty.org.uk



Bradford



Wolverhampton

University and College Union elections Fight for a left leadership

Sam Morecroft
Yorkshire and Humber UCU executive (personal capacity)

16 further education colleges just took strike action over pay and conditions (see above). In higher education we are fighting to beat the Tories' anti-union laws in the equality and pay ballot.

So the University and College Union (UCU) national executive committee (NEC) elections that opened on 1 February come at a crucial time in our union's history.

The fantastic #ussStrikes over

pensions, along with the subsequent disruption at our democratic Congress last year, have led to a 'democracy commission'. It is developing proposals to give members the power to recall elected representatives and empowering our membership to hold leaders accountable.

It has become clear that the Tories' anti-union laws in the equality and pay ballot. So the University and College Union (UCU) national executive committee (NEC) elections that opened on 1 February come at a crucial time in our union's history.

IBL majority on the NEC and secure a fighting left leadership.

Socialist Party members in UCU strongly recommend support for the UCU Left slate.

Ride roughshod

The IBL clique organised around the general secretary must no longer ride roughshod over the democratic will members or sabotage ballots and campaigns.

UCU Left vice-presidential (VP) candidate Jo McNeill only narrowly lost against incumbent Sally Hunt in the 2017 general secretary election.

There are three candidates for VP;

Jo, for UCU Left; Vicky Blake, an independent left; and Adam Ozanne for IBL. It is unfortunate that the left has not agreed on one candidate to stand against Ozanne for the membership to unite behind. Although this is a single transferable vote election, the danger of splitting the vote and allowing the IBL candidate to win is reduced.

While not part of the organised left in the union, Vicky Blake has a good record of leading strike action, and the Socialist Party encourages support for her as well, perhaps in the form of a second preference vote.

We must fight for a left leadership in our union. This fight must be linked to the struggle for a democratic, fighting UCU that can smash the Tory ballot thresholds and defend post-16 education.

■ For the full UCU Left slate go to 'UCU Elections 2019' at uculeft.org

■ Search 'UCU' at socialistparty.org.uk for more on the 2018 pension strikes, disruption of democracy at the union's conference, and the elections

Civil servants' union PCS Campaign for Chris Baugh for assistant general secretary

Marion Lloyd
PCS national executive committee (personal capacity)

Socialist Party member Chris Baugh won the recent re-run election for the broad left of the civil servants' union PCS - Left Unity (LU) - nomination to be its assistant general secretary (AGS) candidate. Chris won by 181 votes to 163.

Chris should now be the agreed AGS candidate on the Democracy Alliance (Left Unity and PCS Democrats) slate. However, a statement from LU secretary Gordon Rowntree says the PCS Democrats will not accept Chris Baugh, so he will not be the Democracy Alliance candidate.

Chris will be put forward separately as the LU candidate despite LU conference instruction to agree a full joint slate with the Democrats. Even this was only grudgingly conceded by Rowntree.

PCS Democrats' base of support among the union's membership is far smaller than Left Unity's.

Disgracefully, Rowntree seeks to justify the position of Socialist View and the Socialist Workers' Party (SWP), who hold a majority on LU's national committee, by stating that some LU members, including

apparently the SWP, have said they are "not willing to support Chris as AGS".

Whether any individual LU members support Chris or not, he is the elected LU candidate for AGS. LU rules require them to recommend and campaign for all LU agreed candidates.

Chris Baugh has been the elected AGS since 2004, having stood successfully as LU candidate three times. He has an outstanding and unmatched record, over 40 years as a left lay activist and elected senior full-time officer.

Chris has widespread support from lay reps and members.

No contribution

PCS General Secretary Mark Serwotka is backing full-time official Lynn Henderson. Henderson is not a LU member and has made no contribution to building LU or democratising the union.

Over the last 18 months the campaign against Chris, initiated by Mark Serwotka, has failed to impress. The current claim is that Chris does not support the union's national pay campaign. This allegation is a complete lie.

Chris has always been clear: "I will support and fight for the union's national pay campaign, as I have always done." Chris Baugh's only 'crime' has been to call for an open

PCS: RE-ELECT

CHRIS BAUGH

#Chris4AGS



Camden

Traffic wardens' strike is just the ticket

■ Camden

Bosses pay themselves £350 an hour, but can't 'afford' £11.50 for the workers.

On 4 February, Camden Parking Control staff entered a further two weeks of strike action.

It follows three weeks of strike action in 2018 against the private firm, NSL, who run the contract.

NSL refused at one stage to even honour the lower London Living Wage (£10.55) until the union forced Camden Council to intervene to ensure this is the minimum paid on all outsourced contracts.

The Labour council has refused to take action against the firm for breaching its targets during the strike days and incredibly still hands over money for not running the service!

Public sector union Unison members are furious and are demanding that this lucrative contract is

brought back in-house.

Hugo Pierre
Camden Unison (personal capacity)

■ Wandsworth

It's bitterly cold outside but that's no different to a normal working day for Wandsworth parking enforcement officers in GMB union taking the third and fourth days of strike action on 31 January and 1 February also against NSL.

A workforce which has been passed from one contractor to another is striking with two main demands - a proper sick-pay scheme to replace payment at management's discretion, and to return to direct employment by Wandsworth Council.

David Maples
South West London Socialist Party



Wandsworth

HISTORIC STRIKE OF NURSES IN IRELAND

Nearly 40,000 nurses and other health workers in Ireland started a 24-hour strike on 30 January to demand a pay rise. Their union, the Irish Nurses and Midwives Organisation, has more strike days planned in February.

The average nurse has lost thousands of pounds from pay cuts during years of austerity and economic crisis. An INMO member, writing for the Socialist Party Ireland website, emphasised the "difficult and dangerous" working conditions.

Solidarity TD (MP) and Socialist Party member, Paul Murphy, described the "carnival atmosphere"

on the picket lines and "the level of community support" because working-class people's experience of the health service is that it's completely underfunded.

Solidarity TDs, members of the Socialist Party, called on all workers to back the strike, and that they "will take the fight to the government in the Dail (Parliament)."

As well as demanding an end to austerity, privatisation and low and unequal pay, the Socialist Party supports a "fully funded national public health service free at the point of use" and nationalising private hospitals, pharmaceutical and health-care companies.



BACKING FOR THE BIRMINGHAM HOMECARERS

Birmingham's homecare workers could lose up to £4,100 if the Labour council cuts their hours. Over 80 people attended the Trade Union Congress solidarity rally for the striking workers on 29 January.

Birmingham Socialist Party members handed out a bulletin linking

the struggles of the home carers and the Birmingham's bin workers, who are starting strikes against the council soon.

Socialist Party and National Education Union national executive member, Nicky Downes, said: "This is a further attack on those that are

the lowest paid, the hardest workers. Workers who work the longest hours or hours that are socially difficult. It's an attack on all those that rely on these services."

Anthony Downes
Birmingham Central Socialist Party

40 years since the Iranian revolution

LEARNING THE LESSONS FOR TODAY'S NEW WORKING-CLASS STRUGGLES

P Daryaban
Committee for a Workers' International (CWI)

Forty years ago a great revolution against a dictatorial monarchy was in progress in Iran. Recalling those days still inspires us: scenes of comradeship despite the shortages due to long days of nationwide strikes, initiatives by ordinary people to run their communities and workplaces, mass demonstrations, resistance to sometimes brutal repression and the pinnacle of those events - an armed insurrection that overthrew the old regime of the Shah.

However, the revolution did not end up as socialists expected. Like many other revolutions, counter-revolution rose amid blood and fire.

The subsequent seizure of power by the most reactionary section of Iranian society has provided pro-capitalist reformists, monarchists, liberals and so on, with an excuse to condemn not only Iran's 1979 revolution but also to deny the necessity of revolutionary change.

Despite this falsehood, we must mark that revolution and learn from its complicated processes and ultimate defeat.

Dynasty

Iran's modern history is characterised with two great events. First, the 1905-1911 'Constitutional Revolution' which aimed to put an end to the feudal rule of the Qajar dynasty.

After about two decades of political turmoil, the Pahlavi dynasty, which had succeeded the Qajar, destroyed the gains of the revolution and erected an imperialist-backed dictatorship.

World War Two led to the then newly allied Britain and the Soviet Union

moving to remove Reza Shah Pahlavi in August 1941. This was because they saw him as trying to balance between them and Nazi Germany.

In his place his son, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, was declared Shah (King). These events opened up a new phase in Iranian history as workers' and popular movements developed.

This new period saw a movement for the nationalisation of the oil industry, which was then controlled by British imperialism. But a US-UK backed coup in 1953 put an end to this movement and opened the way for the new Shah to impose authoritarian rule.

This defeat was mostly due to the weakness of the National Front led by capitalist-nationalist prime minister Mohammad Mosadeq and the inaction and cowardice of the Tudeh Party's leadership, formed in the 1940s as the successor to the Iranian Communist Party.

The Tudeh Party leadership's full submission to the Stalinist Soviet Union increasingly weakened its appeal.

At the same time, as a result of its programme of allying with what it saw as the 'progressive capitalists' as the next step in developing Iran, it failed to use its mass influence to independently mobilise the working class and poor around a revolutionary socialist programme, and thereby failed to take advantage of that historic chance.

In the years following the 1953 coup, along with excessive repression, the Shah's regime earned huge revenues due to a rise in oil prices. Under US auspices, the regime carried out a land reform, which accelerated an imperialist-dominated capitalist development.

The Shah, who embodied the feudal class, now represented the 'comprador bourgeoisie' (local capitalist class acting as a client of imperialism).

The emergence, from the early 1960s, of elements of a more modern bourgeois-imperialist system led to the bankruptcy of the traditional middle classes as well as organisations of the Shia Muslim clergy.

Frictions

This increased friction between the regime and sections of the clergy, like those around Khomeini - although the regime continued to be on good terms with senior clerics who always served as a barrier to the left and revolution.

Through petrodollars, Iran's GNP (total output plus overseas earnings) growth rate reached about 30% in 1973.

Despite the improvement in living standards for some people, an unprecedented class differentiation developed. A wealthy 20% consumed more than 50% of total goods and ser-

vices in the mid-1970s.

However, the Shah's ambitious plan to modernise the country with the support of imperialist powers (which had assigned him the role of 'policeman' of the Middle East) ended up in a crisis.

The decay of traditional agriculture in the interests of the service sector, and industry to lesser extent, caused a huge migration of the peasantry to the cities. These members of the impoverished peasantry resided as seasonal unskilled workers in slums around large cities.

Months before the beginning of political demonstrations, these people engaged in clashes with gendarmes and municipality officers who tried to destroy their dwellings.

Anger

A large portion of the oil revenues went into services and unproductive activities rather than industries. Furthermore, capitalist development in Iran was highly oil-driven. So a shock in the oil market caused a sharp fall in economic growth.

The economic downturn and the unprecedented gap between the poor and the rich ignited the masses' wrath, but this was only a part of the story. The people viewed the Shah as a puppet of imperialism and believed that the US was plundering Iran with the aid of the regime.

Against this background the revolution started in 1977 with sporadic demonstrations. In 1978, hundreds of people were killed in clashes with the police. The declaration of martial law in large cities did not silence the masses.

General strikes paralysed the regime. More than 100,000 oil industry workers inflicted the heaviest blow on the moribund regime by a strike which cut off Iran's oil exports.

Faced with mounting, determined opposition and amid signs of fissures in the state machine, especially the conscript army, the weakening Shah fled the country in early 1979. The revolution reached its pinnacle in February with a two-day armed insurrection that put an end to the monarchy.

In the last weeks of the monarchy the militancy of the masses grew. This alarmed both imperialism and Khomeini. People demanded: 'Leaders! Arm us!' But, Khomeini's aides were in covert negotiations with US officials and the army generals. Just a few days before the armed insurrection, Khomeini said he had not ordered a jihad (holy war) and desired a peaceful transfer of power.

Western imperialist countries, which were no longer able to keep the Shah in power, preferred a compromise and the formation of a government composed of Khomeini and his



An armed insurrection on 10 and 11 February 1979 created a situation of 'dual power'

followers, as well as the remnants of the monarchy, especially the army.

However, the tempo of events in a revolutionary situation was so high that nobody could either predict or prevent people's moves. On 10 and 11 February 1979, clashes between pro-revolution junior officers and monarchists in a barracks ignited the armed insurrection.

The Fadayeen left organisation held a large demonstration a day before in Tehran University that enabled it to organise its supporters rapidly to engage in the insurrection, capturing radio, TV and police stations. However, because many Iranians had illusions in Khomeini, the ultimate winner was him not the left.

The two-day armed uprising had huge impacts on the military and bureaucratic machine of the former regime and paralysed it. In the vacuum created by the insurrection, Khomeini and capitalist factions started to modify the old machine in their own interests.

Alongside the weakened state, revolutionary organs - councils and committees - mushroomed all over the country and 'dual power' emerged.

Power and purges

Khomeini and his clique initially had to move carefully to curtail and then crush the revolution. Two years after the revolution, the new regime began crushing it, using false slogans that they were 'protecting the revolution'.

A wave of executions and arrests of political activists, dissolution of people's councils and committees, and the imposition of a regime of terror, left almost nothing of the revolution's gains by the mid-1980s.

The Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988) also helped Khomeini to more brutally crush opposition under the false banner of national unity and defending the revolution.

Based on the dominant 'anti-imperialist' discourse of those years, many on the left were disoriented when

Khomeini's regime continued its confrontation with the Western powers, despite an expectation that it would soon turn into an ally of imperialism.

This confusion caused a major part of the revolutionary left in the Fadayeen organisation to join the Tudeh Party. The Tudeh had supported the Islamic regime from the beginning and shamelessly cheered the repression of the opposition, until it too was brutally crushed in 1982-83.

This policy led to sacrificing the immediate demands of the working class for illusory "non-capitalist development" under Khomeini's reactionary regime and, ultimately, to collaboration around 1981 with the regime's purge.

The Iranian revolution taught a historic lesson: that socialists cannot select their allies on the basis of 'my enemy's enemy is my friend'. The rise of the reactionary political Islam in recent decades is a proof of this.

As the experience of the Bolshevik revolution in October 1917 showed,

only a clear policy based on correct understanding of the concrete development of the revolution, explaining and winning support for a clear programme, and emphasis on the political independence of the working class from pro-capitalist forces, can guarantee the victory of the working class.

Based on its faulty understanding of the situation, the 'revolutionary' left - which expected a new revolutionary wave to rise - failed to secure an organised retreat after the Islamic regime started its huge crackdown in 1981, leaving rank-and-file members vulnerable to brutal repression.

New revolutionary wave

Forty years later, a new revolutionary tide is rising in Iran. Iranian workers have been in the lead of the protests that started in November 2017. Significantly many of the demands that have arisen are not just economic and social but

political - including the right to form independent workers' organisations, for re-nationalisation of privatised companies and for some form of workers' control.

Under the repressive theocratic regime, workers are battling to form



Forces in the 1979 revolution

■ Khomeini and the clerical organisation that supported him. Khomeini was almost unknown until a few months before the revolution but had an influence on the middle and upper-layers of the traditional petty-bourgeoisie (merchants, rich farmers, etc), and had developed links with the bazaar. Previously, the regime's incessant campaign against the left, for which it found religion a good tool, provided the mullahs with an opportunity to expand their networks.

■ Iranian middle bourgeoisie organised in nationalist and liberal-religious parties such as the National Front and the Freedom Movement. In many ways the left reformism embodied in the Tudeh Party (formerly the Iranian Communist Party) could be classified under this category.

■ The revolutionary left was largely represented by two urban guerrilla parties, Fadayeen and Mojahedin (originally a radical petty-bourgeois party with a Marxist interpretation of Islam, whose majority subscribed to Marxism in 1975). These parties had a great influence mainly among university students and intellectuals. As they emerged from their clandestine activity and approached the masses they won a considerable support among workers, teachers, women and young people.

Solidarity with Iranian workers today

The current Iranian regime has re-arrested Esmail Bakhshi, the representative of the Haft-Tapeh sugar cane agro-industry workers, and activist Sepideh Qolian.

The Haft-Tapeh workers have frequently suffered delays and non-payment of their wages since the privatisation of the factory and on 5 November 2018 they went on strike. Security forces arrested Esmail Bakhshi and Sepideh Qolian. Under

mounting public pressure, including international condemnation, and the continuation of workers' protests, the regime freed them after one month's detention.

In early January Bakhshi and Qolian spoke out on their torture in prison. On 21 January, the regime arrested Bakhshi and Qolian again. We are unaware of their situation in prison since then.

■ Full report on socialistworld.net



Ayatollah Khomeini returns to Iran from exile photo sajed.ir/CC

their own organisations for economic and political activities. But as in 1979, there also exist forces with the potential to hijack this new revolutionary wave - pro-imperialist monarchists, liberals, reformists, bourgeois nationalists and so on.

Under these critical circumstances we must learn the lessons of the 1979

■ Full article on socialistworld.net



The Shah was forced to flee the country



photo Nick Chaffey

Southampton by-election: Socialist Party no-cuts stand finds doorstep support

■ Vote Sue Atkins in Coxford to continue Keith Morrell's anti-cuts struggle

Jane Ward
Southampton Socialist Party

It has been a busy week campaigning in Coxford ward in Southampton. Workers and residents need a councillor who will continue former councillor Keith Morrell's anti-cuts stand in the 14 March by-election.

Many have been saddened to hear of Keith's resignation. He and fellow independent anti-cuts councillor Don Thomas are held in high regard by many of their constituents.

They have addressed and solved many problems for local residents. They have repeatedly shown that if you fight, you can win.

They have worked with campaigning groups to save local amenities and services such as Oaklands swimming pool, Lordshill library and Coxford bus routes which were all under threat.

On the doorstep we have been promoting the anti-cuts candidate, Socialist Party member Sue Atkins. There are many people we have spoken to this week who are completely disillusioned by both the

main parties.

They can see little difference between them as they are both wielding the axe against jobs and services. As one man said to me: "We are being charged more council tax but seeing everything cut."

We have had a very positive response from a lot of people, particularly those who supported Keith and Don. They are pleased to see that in Sue they have a candidate who will carry on the anti-cuts work started by Keith and Don.

Sue is involved in local campaigns, such as fair funding for schools, and saving the last two council-run care homes in Southampton. Like Keith and Don, she has fought for the council to set a legal no-cuts budget and build a union-led fightback to demand the return of funding stolen by the government.

It is by meeting people on the doorstep that we have been able to make them aware of Sue's campaign and increase her promised vote. For me, it has underlined the importance and effectiveness of the Socialist Party's canvassing work during this by-election.

VICTORY! UNION AND COMMUNITY CAMPAIGN REVERSES WALLASEY FIRE CUTS

Mick Roberts
Fire Brigades Union member

The small town of Wallasey, on the Wirral, tucked away in a corner of the North West, is very much the same as any other small town, ordinary and unassuming.

But when the local fire authority tried to force through Tory cuts to the fire service by announcing its plan to remove night-time fire cover from Wallasey Fire Station, despite having £30 million in its reserves, this small town fought back.

The local Wirral Socialist Party began the campaign straight away, petitioning each week on stalls around the town centre, gaining signatures and support from the local community. They were soon joined in the fight by the local Wirral Trade Union Council, and the local branch of the Fire Brigades Union (FBU).

By June or July, tens of thousands of local residents had signed petitions online and on stalls manned by Socialist Party and FBU members. Leaflets and posters were printed off and displayed in windows of local shops.

On 14 August a public meeting at a local venue, Alfie's bar, was packed out with local residents from all walks of life, avidly showing their support and voicing their anger at the cuts. The outcome of the meeting was a march around the town centre on 1 September.

Word that the pace of the campaign was gathering soon reached the fire authority, which in its panic brought forward the proposed cuts from January 2019 to 10 September 2018, further angering both the FBU and residents.

A meeting was called between the fire authority, FBU representatives



photo Editor5807/CC

and Liverpool mayor Joe Anderson. The authority decided to put the cuts back to January 2019. In the meantime it promised to look into alternative proposals to keep the fire station permanently open.

Despite this, Chief Fire Officer Phil Garrigan ignored the agreement and pressed ahead with his proposed changes. He posted long-serving, whole-time firefighters from Wallasey to other stations, and replaced them with non-unionised firefighters prepared to work unagreed and unrecognised working patterns.

The public demonstration went ahead as planned on 1 September with hundreds turning up, old and young, to show their support. Speakers from the FBU and the Socialist Party were among those

rallying the crowd.

The campaign continued to tick over through rest of the year, ensuring Wallasey Fire Station maintained its night-time cover, albeit temporarily. Then, on 24 January, after sustained pressure from an alliance of the trade unions and general public, the fire authority axed its plans to reduce fire cover!

It further announced plans to begin reversing the cuts: increasing the number of operational firefighters from 620 to 642, and fire appliances from 26 to 30, using the reserve budget it had all along. This secured a notable victory for the working class of Wallasey.

■ "It's not the size of the dog in the fight that counts, but the size of the fight in the dog" - read the full story at socialistparty.org.uk

North West Socialist Party conference in good spirits for building in 2019

The Socialist Party's North West region held a very successful conference on Saturday 2 February, with nearly 50 members attending from across the region.

Rob Williams from the party's executive committee introduced a useful debate on the current political situation in Britain, which focussed on Brexit and the trade unions.

The afternoon's workshops on recruitment, local elections, trade



unions, and finance were all well-attended. Regional reports were well-received, and the regional officers were re-elected unanimously.

The enthusiasm of members for building the party was shown not only in the financial appeal, which raised very nearly £1,000, but also in that we ran out of copies of the guide to being a branch organiser! More have been ordered, and we are in good spirits for building the party in the region in 2019.

Sheffield tree campaigners' legal win: lessons for trade unionists and environmentalists

Mark James
Secretary, Unite the Union South Yorkshire Community branch (personal capacity)

The Independent Office for Police Conduct has ruled that seven Sheffield Trees Action Group campaigners were wrongly arrested in 2016 and 2017.

In an out-of-court settlement, South Yorkshire Police agreed to pay a total of £24,300 to the seven activists in compensation. But the case leaves many questions unanswered.

Campaigners are now calling for an inquiry into how the tree-felling dispute was policed, and whether there was collusion between South Yorkshire Police, the private contractor Amey, and Labour-run Sheffield City Council.

Paul Brooke, co-chair of Sheffield Trees Action Group, reports that an "audit trail" connects senior council

officers to Amey discussing "powers on the ground" to arrest protesters. Paul has called on Julie Dore, leader of Sheffield City Council, to explain "why she felt it appropriate to use an anti-trade union law" to shut down protest.

There are lessons for militants engaged in environmental movements. In Sheffield there were informal links between protesters and the trade unions. But these links need to be far more robust so there is solidarity between workers and protesters, rather than conflict.

Such links would have undermined the right wing of Sheffield Labour Party, which claimed the trees protesters were at best a diversion from fighting privatisation and austerity, and at worst were merely protecting their 'privileges'!

Direct action and the beginnings of dissent within the local Labour Party forced the council to pause the fellings. After extensive talks in

the autumn, many healthy trees are now being saved on the streets of Sheffield.

The movement has led to constructive relationships between tree protesters and tree workers. Tree workers are currently working hard to save the remaining street trees using engineering solutions that both Amey and the council had previously denied were affordable or even possible.

Sheffield's incumbent Labour councillors should apologise for their actions and accept the need for a public inquiry - which should be independently led by the trade unions along with the community campaign.

And they must urgently make a start on fighting Tory cuts and privatisation, including by setting a no-cuts budget - or step aside for candidates who will...

■ Some justice - but no truth: read the full story at socialistparty.org.uk



photo Sheffield Tree Action Groups



The threatened St John's Library, Worcester photo Philip Halling/St John's Library, Worcester/CC

WORCESTERSHIRE: SAVE THE LIBRARIES, REVERSE ALL THE CUTS

Sean McCauley
Worcester Socialist Party

Worcestershire's Tory county council wants to close nine community libraries, and sack workers and reduce opening hours in at least six others. We say no! Enough is enough!

The decade of decimation has seen the council slash its services by £168 million, making over 2,000 council workers redundant. Countless other jobs and services have been "outsourced" - privatised at knockdown rates, with little protection for workers transferred to profit-hungry private sector companies.

No more cuts! They admit they want to axe another £17 million this year, but the real scale of "savings" will reach £23 million by 2020.

That means 200 more job losses, £1 million cuts to library services resulting in jobs going and reductions in opening hours. It means the closure of four residential children's homes, and cuts to bus service funding. It means more misery for council workers and those who depend on their services.

Elect anti-cuts councillors! We don't want to elect councillors to sack workers and close libraries. We want to elect them to fight for our services and create jobs.

The money is there! Councillors have lied to us for years, telling us there is no more money.

But what we need for services is being used to boost the profits of greedy 'private finance initiative'

(PFI) partners. They siphoned off over £90 million of public money during the fiasco that is the Hartlebury incinerator, with £12.6 million still earmarked to bankroll the deal.

And these private sector "partners" stand to benefit to the tune of £221 million for the rebuilding of Bromsgrove schools. This is using the same PFI scheme which is so corrupt even the Tory chancellor, Philip Hammond, has said government will no longer use similar schemes in future.

All PFI deals should be scrapped now! And if the private sector "partners" demand compensation or try to activate penalty clauses, let's bring them into public ownership, with no compensation to fat cats, under the local democratic control of workers and service users.

Plan a no-cuts budget! End the chaos and plan for what workers and communities truly need. We could start by using the £2 million reserves the council is refusing to touch. We could use 'prudential borrowing' powers as councils have always done.

All this to buy time to build a mass campaign in Worcestershire to end austerity, reverse the 2,000 job cuts, and secure proper funding for all our services from this weak and wobbly Tory government. If councillors aren't prepared to do that, they should resign to let in candidates who are.

■ Save St John's Library - public meeting: Tuesday 12 February, 7-9pm, Room 3, St John's Library, Glebe Close, Worcester WR2 5AX

Film: Vice

Dick Cheney - a cold and calculating opportunist



Christian Bale plays right-wing former US Vice President Dick Cheney photo Annapurna Pictures

Pete Watson
Nottingham Socialist Party

“So?” is Dick Cheney’s response to the fact that two-thirds of Americans said the 2003 Iraq war was not worth fighting. ‘Vice’ closes with this.

A graphic account of an authoritarian big business representative whose decisions are felt today

Christian Bale plays Cheney as a cold and calculating opportunist. It is a film that documents Cheney’s rise to power as vice president in an entertaining and sometimes darkly humorous way. The film is sometimes too light-hearted for the horrifying subject matter.

Cheney starts as an intern at the White House. He becomes chief of staff and defence secretary to Republican presidents. In 2001 he becomes vice president to President George W Bush. In this role he exercises unprecedented power.

Vice portrays George W Bush as a political lightweight who passes power to Cheney, who follows the incredible doctrine of the “unitary executive”. This states that under the US constitution, the president’s actions are always legal! Cheney extends his right-wing big business agenda over all major matters of US home and foreign policy.

Prior to this Cheney becomes chief executive of Halliburton, a

giant oil and gas corporation. On his election he becomes part of Bush’s Energy Task Force, which includes big oil and gas interests. The film shows him having meetings with oil executives and dividing up Iraq for oil exploitation in preparation for occupation at some future date.

While the 9/11 attacks on New York’s World Trade Centre were an horrific event for many Americans, Cheney saw it as an opportunity.

The film shows him prompting, pushing and distorting facts to promote the idea that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction and sponsored terrorism.

He continued to press the lie that Saddam Hussein was linked to al-Qa’ida. His willing ally is defence secretary ‘hawk’ Donald Rumsfeld. This was the pretext for the invasion of Iraq in 2003.

Cheney plays up the presence in

Iraq of a small terrorist group led by al-Zarqawi to prove Iraq’s guilt. The notoriety gained through this free publicity allowed al-Zarqawi to head Islamic State following the fall of Saddam.

The film is effective in demonstrating the consequences of Cheney’s decisions. When he and Rumsfeld make decisions in a light-hearted way, the film keeps shifting to graphic scenes of the blowing up of Afghan villages, the torturing of suspects, and Guantanamo Bay prison.

I’m sure there is also some ‘Hollywood history’ in some of the dialogue. But it is still a graphic account of an authoritarian big business representative whose decisions are felt today in the Middle East and the world.

22 million emails went missing during the Bush-Cheney era and Cheney’s office refused to pass information to people investigating the Enron energy company corruption scandal. So perhaps the real truth may never come out.

The weakness of the film is that it does not show the wider opposition to Bush and Cheney’s rule. The film concentrates only on the power politics in the White House. Nevertheless, it shows how little democracy there is in the ‘Land of the Free’. Only socialist change can guarantee that.



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

Venezuela - a weapon for the Tories

The Venezuelan catastrophe is being weaponised by the usual anti-Corbyn cabal who falsely describe it as another failed socialist experiment.

It is not socialism that has failed. Had socialism been carried through in Venezuela at the height of the mass movement following the failed coup against Chávez in 2002, the outcome could have been different.

Chávez defeated the coup and received support from the mass of Venezuelans and implemented reforms in their interests. But his failure to nationalise the banks, and other key sectors meant the capitalists could sabotage Chávez’s programme.

In addition, democratic control and participation of the working class in running society were absent. Chávez developed a personality cult with himself as the supreme policy maker.

Current president Maduro is a grotesque imitation of Chávez and,

despite his pompous declarations about ‘socialism’ and ‘revolution’, his policy consists of using the state and ruling party apparatus to manage capitalism.

But it’s Venezuelans who should hold him to account, not Jeremy Hunt (the butcher of the NHS), Trump, or Brazil’s Bolsonaro - who rushed to recognise the unelected Guaidó as ‘interim president’.

With breath-taking hypocrisy, they condemn the Maduro government while selling arms to the most blood-thirsty dictators on the planet. This, while unleashing another outrageous smear against Jeremy Corbyn.

The labour movement needs to mobilise to defend Corbyn, demand a general election in Britain, and emphatically reject the charge that the crisis in Venezuela is a consequence of socialism.

Tony Mulhearn, Liverpool

Featured letter:

Computer failures and crumbling buildings: a day in the life of a probation worker

There has been a massive computer failure in the Ministry of Justice. This comes as no surprise to those that work for the organisation.

The failure has affected the operation of the courts, causing trials to be stopped or postponed because barristers and solicitors have not been able to access vital emails and other important information.

However, the problem is much more widespread. I work for the National Probation Service and our computers have been going down for several days at a time, meaning that important information about offenders that can affect their welfare, staff health and safety, and the protection of the public, has not been shared.

The problems began in spring 2018 when a new computer system was installed. From the very beginning it was clear that not enough capacity had been built into the network. Access was difficult to impossible during the day but easier during a nightshift. Recently, we have been without computers for several days at a time.

There has been a 40% cut in the funding of the justice system and outsourcing and privatisation of the

provision of IT services, and building maintenance. No doubt cost-cutting has led to the current crisis. Staff are already struggling to deal with everyday maintenance problems that rely on private contractors often travelling over 100 miles to fix sometimes minor problems.

Residents in my hostel are down to sharing one shower as the others have been out of order for months, including one that was leaking into electric appliances in the kitchen below! Toilets remain blocked for days. Staff paggers connected to their personal alarms only work intermittently... I could go on.

Parts of the probation service have been privatised. We should demand that a future Labour government fully funds the criminal justice system and brings back into the public sector all aspects of the service.

In that way, the buildings and fabric of the service could be maintained properly and the whole of the service could be planned to properly serve the needs of all those involved so that public protection is not compromised.

Unison member in the National Probation Service

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

Socialism Today

The Socialist Party’s magazine - February issue

- The latest UN climate change summit failure
- Socialism and a workers’ EU exit

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If you agree with what you read in the Socialist, consider making a donation to the Socialist Party’s fighting fund:

- pay by card on 020 8988 8777 or socialistparty.org.uk/donate

	£ target	£ received	January-March 2019	Deadline: 3 April 2019
Wales	2,300	1,626		71%
Northern	750	319	43%	
East Midlands	1,850	696	38%	
South West	1,800	564	31%	
Yorkshire	3,300	881	27%	
North West	2,100	528	25%	
West Midlands	2,600	573	22%	
Southern	1,600	297	19%	
Eastern	1,200	181	15%	
London	6,100	571	9%	
South East	750	28	4%	
Other	5,650	318	6%	
TOTAL	30,000	6,582	22%	

Socialist Party building fund

As regular readers of the Socialist will know, the Socialist Party is currently under threat of eviction from our national headquarters.

We have had a presence in London since the early 1960s

and have been at our current premises for over 17 years.

We believe that it is essential that our HQ remains based in the capital city, therefore we have launched a building appeal for a new premises.

We do not have any rich backers. Our branches are based in working class communities, among workers, students and young people who have been hammered by

austerity, debt and low pay. But our members and supporters have been prepared to make a sacrifice to ensure that we have the funds we need.

Together we have smashed through £188,000 in pledges - an enormous achievement. But we believe there is the potential to go beyond that.

We are looking for a building to buy or rent in London, where rents are high, and large enough

properties to buy are over a million pounds.

Your donation, however big or small, will make a difference. Be part of something bigger - donate to the Socialist Party building fund and know that

you’re part of fighting for a better world.

You can make a donation at socialistparty.org.uk/donate and include ‘building fund’ in the comments



Theatre: Ballad of Johnny Longstaff

The remarkable story of a working-class militant



The Young’uns performing the Ballad of Johnny Longstaff photo theyounguns.co.uk

Harry Gammon
Hull Socialist Party

Three times BBC Radio 2 folk award winners, The Young’uns began their Ballad of Johnny Longstaff tour at Hull University on 28 January and Hull Socialist Party branch was there to see it.

This was modern folk theatre at its best. Sean Cooney, the main songwriter, has a wonderful knack of writing songs around themes and people that have been forgotten. Sean, Michael Hughes and David Eagle are all from Stockton. The working-class history of the north eastern town permeates and finds a nest in the wonderful song writing that The Young’uns are so well-known for.

The Ballad of Johnny Longstaff is the story of one man’s adventure from begging on the streets in the north of England to fighting against fascism in the Spanish Civil War, taking in the Hunger Marches and the Battle of Cable Street, in the 1930s.

In Hull, the working class fought British fascist leader Oswald Mosley in the Battle of Corporation Fields. Stockton had its own battle to kick Mosley out.

Johnny Longstaff witnessed some momentous events and we hear his journey through these songs. Also, through the archives of the Imperial War Museum, we hear him talking and taking us along with him. It’s some ride!

We witnessed 16 especially composed songs, spoken word, striking imagery and Johnny’s voice to tell a remarkable story oozing with relevance to today.

We follow Johnny’s footsteps through his political class awakenings in London sleeping on the streets, being reprimanded for knocking a small bottle of perfume over while working in a hotel, and having six weeks wages docked for it!

Onto the Kinder Pass mass trespass march and his experiences of fighting fascists at Cable Street. It was here he realised whose side the

police were on. The show is poignant, informative, emotional, and in places humorous.

Some of the songs have new words to the melodies of the socialist ‘Internationale’ and ‘Ay Carmela’ - both sung with passion during the Spanish Civil War by members of the British Battalion.

Johnny fought at the Battle of the Ebro, Brunete and the horrendous battle to take The Pimple (Hill 481), where many of his friends were killed.

He saw connections between the poverty in Spain and that of his homeland. He was a working-class comrade in the forefront of our collective working-class history.

It’s a must see show; you will not be disappointed.

Remaining UK dates:
8 February - Middlesbrough Town Hall and 9 February - Purcell Room, Southbank Centre, London

Music available on CD - theyounguns.co.uk



photo Andrew Shiva/CC

Christopher Carroll
Socialist Alternative,
US co-thinkers of the Socialist Party

After a six-day strike, the United Teachers Los Angeles (UTLA) union ratified a new contract with the Los Angeles Unified School District in California on 22 January.

This was the latest strike in the nationwide teachers' revolt that began in West Virginia (pictured) last March and spread to a series of other states. The movement is encouraging workers in other industries to stand up, and can be the beginning of rebuilding a fighting labour movement in the United States.

The Los Angeles teachers' picket lines were solid and well-attended throughout the strike, and were joined by working-class parents and students who supported the strike overwhelmingly. The union held mass, exuberant rallies on an almost daily basis.

The new agreement received the support of 81% of union members. It secured several tangible gains for the teachers.

An increase in support staff - nurses, counsellors, and librarians - with various phase-ins of up to three years. Less standardised testing. A 6% raise. A reduction in class sizes.

And the elimination of the hated "Section 1.5," which the district had previously used to declare an emergency and disregard all class size caps.

This is a victory for teachers and the broader working class. A UTLA loss would have been a victory for the discredited education "reformers" and their plan to privatise and dismantle public education, not only in Los Angeles but across the country.

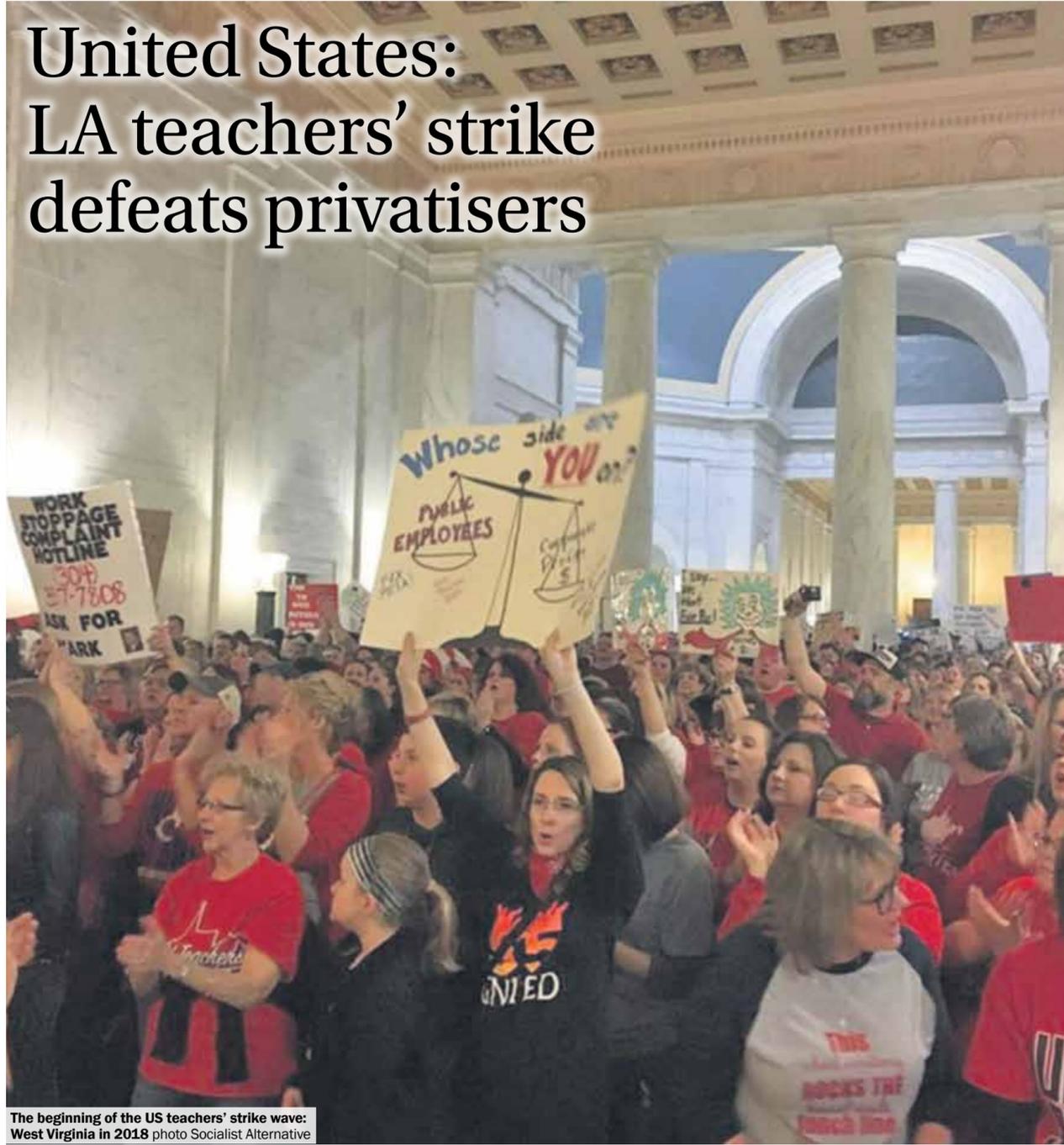
Privatisation
The strike has now placed ending the corporate privatisation of schools firmly on the agenda of the Los Angeles working class.

A call to fully fund education, and for a state-wide moratorium on further 'charter' schools [privately run state schools, like Britain's 'academies'], must be taken up by the unions. They should build on the momentum of this historic strike and continue mobilising toward more decisive victories.

The agreement puts the school district and mayor's office on record to "jointly advocate for increased county and state funding" for education. However, we know that lobbying will not be enough to fund LA and California public education.

The first battle was won. But the well-funded forces behind the drive to destroy public education through privatisation and starving it of resources will not give up easily.

Winning will require escalating state-wide and national action. It



The beginning of the US teachers' strike wave: West Virginia in 2018 photo Socialist Alternative



This is a victory for teachers and the broader working class

should also be connected to the housing struggle and the fight for 'single-payer healthcare' [universal healthcare funded by taxes] in California.

To win fully funded public education and stop privatisation and charterisation, a California-wide movement is needed. Teachers' unions should organise for a state-wide, one-day teachers' strike, that could be called as part of a national day of action for funding public schools.

The California Democratic Party has enjoyed a super-majority at the state and Los Angeles County levels for years. It is the Democrats themselves who have overseen and implemented the starvation and

privatisation of public schools. It is not credible to expect them to suddenly reverse course and deliver proper funding for public schools.

Both in California and nationally, the leadership of the Democratic Party is beholden to the interests of the corporations and Wall Street, not to the interests of working people. To fight for quality public education, 'Medicare for All' [universal healthcare], and other working-class interests, working people need a party of our own that has no ties to the billionaires.

The LA teachers' strike shows that workers have enormous power in the economy and on the streets. We can collectively build massive

France: 'gilets jaunes' backed by mass strike action



CGT union members protesting in France, October 2018 photo Patrick Janicek/CC

Clare Doyle
Committee for a Workers' International

The 'gilets jaunes' (yellow vests) movement in France is by no means over. Saturday 2 February saw 'Act 13' of the series of weekend demonstrations, swelled by anger at the blinding by rubber bullets of gilets jaunes protesters including a prominent member of the movement, Jerome Rodriguez.

The 'great debate' around France, launched by the hated President Macron, has been a damp squib - especially as he himself ruled out discussion of reintroducing a wealth tax.

"At the beginning of this new year," writes Leila Massaoudi of Gauche Révolutionnaire, the Socialist Party's sister party in France, "movements have been launched on the same model as the 'yellow vests' on the internet or 'the streets. Discontented lawyers, the 'red pens' movement in education and the 'pink vest' childminders."

There have been a number of initiatives. These include an "assembly of local assemblies" in Commercy, eastern France; the launching of two lists for the European elections; the idea of a national referendum; and talk of a gilets jaunes political party.

Tuesday 5 February was a major day of demonstrations and

strikes in Paris and across France, called by the main trade unions, including the CGT federation, supporting the demands of the gilets jaunes. More details will follow in coming issues of the Socialist.

The gilets jaunes have enthusiastically greeted the entry into the fray of the organised working class.

Some of the smaller rank-and-file unions are in favour of continuing the strikes indefinitely. This is unlikely at this stage, but cannot be ruled out if the huge anger that exists in French society is not quelled.

Gauche Révolutionnaire stresses the need to discuss widely - in the unions, in our social and political organisations, and in the left - the case for a determined struggle. For wage increases, the indexation of prices, and also nationalisation of major industries under the democratic control and management of workers and service users.



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.

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. Scrap zero-hour contracts.
- All workers, including part-timers, temps, casual and migrant workers to have trade union rates of pay, employment protection, and sickness and holiday rights from day one of employment.
- An immediate 50% increase in the state retirement pension, as a step towards a living pension.
- 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.

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!

Sweden: dock strikes test new government

■ Dock workers in Sweden are striking for their trade union rights. The employers have closed down their union offices and stopped recognising elected representatives of their main union.

The employers have already won support from the government to limit the right to strike - in a country with the lowest numbers of strikes of all OECD countries! Now they want that law to be introduced earlier, to end the present strike. They have also answered the strikes with lock-outs.

The struggle takes place in the context of a new Social Democrat-Green government, backed by junior right-wing parties, pressing for a sharp increase in neoliberal attacks. This includes public sector cuts, deregulating rents - and degrading employment protection laws.



photo Dennis Jarvis/CC

United States: strike ends federal shutdown

■ Unofficial action by airport workers has forced Donald Trump to end the longest unpaid 'furlough' of government employees in history. Air traffic controllers and security staff had increasingly not attended work, threatening the vital commercial flow of air transport.

The president of flight attendants' union AFA, Sara Nelson, called her members out in support. A couple of weeks earlier, Nelson had even raised the need for a general strike.

Within hours, Trump had conceded a temporary budget - without funding for his infamous wall - to prevent the strike spreading. Although he is hemmed in on all sides, the big business Democratic opposition could still negotiate a deal which includes divisive attacks on migrants.

As the victorious LA teachers show - strikes get results. US unions should seize the initiative and press their members' demands now, while the administration is on the back foot.

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CASH-STARVED HEALTH SERVICE RIPPED OFF BY BIG PHARMA

FUND OUR NHS NOW!



Andrew Bromhall

NHS Nurse and Swansea and West Wales Socialist Party

The NHS has been priced out of buying a life-saving drug by pharmaceutical company Vertex. The cystic fibrosis drug, which can extend the life of children, costs £105,000 a year - a price which the NHS says is "unaffordable".

At present, despite requests from the NHS, the big pharma company has refused to make it available at a lower price.

The company made a whopping £2.5 billion from sales of the drug in 2017. But they didn't even pay for the research to develop it. It was

discovered in the first place thanks to money donated through a cystic fibrosis charity.

Campaigners have called on the government to use a legal provision called 'crown use' under which the state can override a patent in the national interest. This was used in the 1960s in Britain in order to provide cheaper 'generic' versions of antibiotics. It is thought that if this was carried out the cost of the drug could be reduced to about £5,000 per patient a year.

Such a move would of course be welcome. But this case exposes the parasitic role of the big pharmaceutical companies - determined to profit out of illness. We call for the nationalisation of these companies - with democratic workers' control of management. That way we could ensure patients' needs are put first - not

the demands of profit.

As well as the necessary drugs the NHS also isn't providing the basics. The doctors' union the BMA has found that two out of five NHS trusts and health boards do not give out sanitary products to patients who need them. Or only in an emergency.

The BMA has said that tampons and pads are a basic need and should be available to patients. It appears that in some hospitals razors and shaving foam are given out for free but sanitary products were not.

The BMA asked 223 NHS providers about their policy of supplying sanitary products. Of those who responded, 104 said they did supply them. 25 said they did not supply them at all and 54 stated that they only supplied them in emergencies or in small amounts. Some

hospitals do not even sell sanitary products!

The NHS is failing to deliver the care and provision that patients need because of a lack of cash while at the same time being underfunded by the government and ripped off by pharmaceutical and other private companies.

A mass struggle with health workers and their unions in the lead is urgently needed to defend the NHS.

We need a properly funded and resourced NHS under democratic workers' control, free for all users. Nationalise big pharma, kick out all private contractors and end all NHS cuts and underfunding!

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