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Issue 1069
16-22 January 2020



socialistparty.org.uk

the Socialist

Formerly **Militant**



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Low pay, long hours

BOSSES

RIP US OFF

Organise the fightback now

Ryan Aldred
Secretary, Usdaw union Plymouth and District
General Branch (personal capacity)

Boris Johnson has announced the minimum wage is going up. It's not by nearly enough. And at the same time, the Tories let bosses get away with paying hundreds of thousands of workers below the legal minimum!

Scandalously, nearly one in four workers on the mis-named National 'Living Wage' is underpaid, according to a report by the state's Low Pay Commission. To make matters worse, the figures show a year-on-year increase.

305,000 workers lost out in 2016; 339,000 were underpaid in 2017; and 369,000 were swindled in 2018. Retail, hospitality, cleaning, maintenance and childcare are the worst culprits.

The official figures - damning in their own right - only tell a partial tale. What they don't reflect is the something-for-nothing culture that bosses have come to expect.

Workers are pressured - and often outright bullied, particularly in zero-hour workplaces - into working unpaid overtime, as bosses squeeze every last ounce of profit out of us.

Working through breaks, starting work early to 'get ahead', or staying behind to 'finish up' - all while being off the clock - are illegal. Yet they're commonplace in many industries.

Moreover, in a bid to cut costs, many employers are laying off (or not replacing) staff - while expecting the remaining workforce to pick up the slack by working harder!

It is clear that this government of big business, intent on scrapping workers' rights, cannot be relied upon even to uphold its own laws on these matters. Some employers even create jobs to gain government tax incentives, then keep those workers in poverty with zero and low-hour contracts.

However, it doesn't have to be this way! By joining a union and getting organised in the workplace we can force the bosses back.

Frances O'Grady, general secretary of the Trade Union Congress (TUC), falls far short when she simply says more investment is needed to identify lawbreaking employers. The TUC could take a lead from French workers, and boost workers' confidence with a call to action on low pay and a national demonstration.

Underpaying workers is nothing short of theft. By getting organised in the workplace we can collectively enforce our rights and show the bosses we will not tolerate this injustice.

By having the confidence to make demands, backed by preparedness to demonstrate and strike for better conditions, we can make it clear to the bosses that it's only decent wages, not poverty pay, that will do!

The Socialist Party fights for

- £12-an-hour minimum wage now, without exemptions, as an immediate step towards £15
- Full-time hours for all who want them, with flexibility on workers' terms, not the bosses'
- Trade union action to defend, extend and enforce workers' rights

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The Socialist is written, read, sold and bought by ordinary workers, trade unionists, young people and Socialist Party supporters. We want you to write for the Socialist.

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

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Friday before publication, or Monday morning for urgent news, unless otherwise agreed with the editors.

The Socialist goes to press on a Tuesday night. We publish online on Wednesday and in print on Thursday.

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The Socialist is the weekly newspaper of the Socialist Party, the England and Wales section of the Committee for a Workers' International

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ISSN 1366-9621

Registered as a newspaper
at the Post Office

Printed by Reach Printing Services
Published by Socialist Publications
PO Box 1398, Enfield EN1 9GT

Militant Issue 1: October 1964
The Socialist Issue 1: 7 February 1997

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

LABOUR PARTY LEADERSHIP CONTEST

Fight for a mass anti-austerity, workers' party with a socialist programme

photo Mary Finch



Socialist Party

WHAT WE THINK

The process to elect a new leader of the Labour Party is underway and poses an essential question. What will happen to the potential, opened up by Jeremy Corbyn's unexpected leadership victory in 2015, to win a mass party in the interests of the working class?

The mistaken constant compromises that the Labour leadership made with the Blairites are a central reason for Labour's defeat in the December general election, above all on Brexit. The idea that 'unity' was necessary in order to secure a majority has been proven totally false. The representatives of capitalism in the Labour Party, abetted by the capitalist press, are now doing their utmost to ensure Corbyn's successor takes Labour back to a right-wing party. Five candidates have secured enough nominations from MPs and MEPs to make it to the second stage. Next they have to get the nomination of three affiliated bodies, two of which must be trade unions, or 33 constituency parties. The ballot runs from 21 February to 2 April. Corbyn's election to the leadership led to a civil war in the Labour Party as it became two parties in one: a pro-capitalist, pro-austerity party, based on the vast majority of MPs and councillors, and the potential for an anti-austerity party around the figure of Corbyn himself.

The Blairites' Tory-lite policies meant the implementation of savage austerity without a political challenge. Labour councils cried crocodile tears while they passed on terrible cuts to local communities. The historic loyalty to Labour in its so-called 'red belt' was eroded when Labour was no longer seen as the

party that built homes and created jobs, but instead was the party that sacked, privatised and cut.

Corbyn's election opened up the possibility of changing this - as long as a serious fight was mounted to take on and defeat the Blairites. But in the four and a half years since then, this fight has not been waged.

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Public debate

Nonetheless, an achievement of Corbyn's anti-austerity programme is that the public debate has been forced to say he is abandoning austerity, although in reality anti-working class policies will continue with a vengeance.

The popularity of Corbyn's programme, and the lack of social support for Blairism, is illustrated by the fact that all the right-wing defectors to Change UK and the LibDems lost their seats. Also the Labour leadership right-wing candidates avoid directly linking with Blair - desperate to portray themselves as having working-class and radical roots. So, while Jess Phillips is the arch-

Blairite in the race, with a record of being, in anti-Corbyn columnist Polly Toynbee's words, "most fearless in speaking out against Corbyn" - closely followed by Emily Thornberry, and Lisa Nandy who told the Parliamentary Labour Party hustings "if we do not change course we will die" - it is barrister Sir Keir Starmer who is currently seen as the best bet, the right-wing candidate presenting as a unifier.

He couches his campaign in terms of "not going back" from Corbyn's anti-austerity position, and not "trashing" the last four years, while at the same time not trashing Blair either. He hopes to appeal to a layer of members who might be persuaded that the party needs to move to the 'centre' to be electable. But in reality, moving rightward would return Labour to the road of alienating working-class and young people.

Starmer's campaign video displays his 'left credentials', showing how as a lawyer he has represented strikers, anti-poll tax protesters and environmental campaigners. A video Starmer is less likely to promote is one found by the Skwawkbbox blog, showing him, in July last year, arguing for the return of arch-Blairite Alistair Campbell to the party, and supporting 5% cuts in public services. As Labour's Brexit spokesperson, remainder Starmer continuously undermined Corbyn's position. And he is supported in his leadership bid by Blairite organisations Labour First and Progress.

Rebecca Long-Bailey is seen as the candidate who is most likely to continue Corbynism - though Cor-

byn himself has not given any lead on what should happen or who to vote for, and has declared he won't do so.

The Blairite right wingers who moved might and main to ensure a Corbyn defeat, are now campaigning to prevent Long-Bailey from winning. Former right-wing home secretary, Jack Straw, for example, says it will be a "collective suicide note" if the party selects her. The party, he says, needs a Corbynite successor "like a hole in the head".

"Socialist programme"

Long-Bailey defends Corbyn's "socialist programme", talking about "bold transformative solutions to plunging living standards" and "real wealth and power must be returned to the people". But, unfortunately, her campaign so far is very limited. Her running mate for deputy leader is Angela Raynor, who specifically says she is not a Corbynite, rather than Richard Burgon, the most left of the candidates for deputy - the only one to explicitly support nationalisation.

It doesn't bode well, particularly given the view of many working-class people that Corbyn wasn't strong enough, that on Radio 4's Today programme Long-Bailey allowed herself to be pushed into saying she would be prepared to press the nuclear button. If she can't stand up to an interviewer, people will ask, how will she stand up to the bosses? And her following the other candidates in accepting the right wing Jewish Board of Deputies demands on anti-semitism has caused

uproar in the party.

Long-Bailey argues that the general election loss was because "we struggled to marry our ambitious programme with voters' fundamental lack of trust in politicians. We had no plan to overhaul a broken political system and voters came to see Labour as part of the problem."

But that is not surprising when Labour has not led a struggle. Long-Bailey talks about being part of a "courageous movement" but Labour has not mobilised an active movement of working-class people. The masses of young people enthused by Corbyn in 2015 and 2017 have not been organised nor mobilised. There have been no demonstrations called by the Labour leadership, there have been no 'councils of war' organised with the trade union leaders to plan action.

Council cuts

And, crucially, no call on Labour councils to stop making the cuts. When all people see Labour do is privatise and cut, why would they believe it would end austerity in government?

The answer to that is not to talk about mending a broken political system, but to refuse to carry out cuts and to mount a fight for the money stolen from local councils. If council cuts continue, then the lofty aims to rebuild trust will come to nothing, and cutting Labour councillors should not be surprised if there are socialist, anti-cuts candidates standing against them.

It isn't enough to make general statements about socialism. Even Jess Phillips says she is a socialist. As a minimum it is necessary to maintain and extend the popular policies in Corbyn's manifesto: scrap universal credit and tuition fees, build council houses, scrap the anti-trade union laws, end privatisation and cuts in the NHS, restore benefits and end cruel sanctions, and so on. It is essential not to backtrack on the commitments to na-

tionalisation in Corbyn's manifesto but to strengthen them. Yet so far Long-Bailey hasn't mentioned nationalisation.

The biggest mistake of all is to not learn the lesson that it is necessary to take on the Blairites. Nowhere does Long-Bailey refer to the right wing undermining Corbyn since day one, undermining the policies throughout the election campaign, refusing to have the radical policies in their leaflets.

Instead, she mirrors Starmer's "ending factionalism and promoting unity" when she says, "we can win again, but first our party must come together. We are strongest when we stand together as a pluralist Labour family."

She intervened in a Twitter exchange, in which a Corbyn-supporter was blaming Blairites for attacking Corbyn, to say: "Four years of attack and hurt within our party from all sides can't continue. We will not survive. Be clear on what we believe but everyone MUST be clear we've got to do it together and do not attack anyone in our party."

But the last four years have demonstrated this is utopian - the only way to achieve unity with the right is to concede to them, and thus betray working-class and young people.

It isn't simply a continuation of Corbynism that is needed - the lessons must be learned. For this leadership election to result in saving what was begun by Corbynism, and the potential it represented, it can no more just be a continuation of the same than it can be a move to the 'centre'. It will require a fight to transform the Labour Party - a re-foundation as a mass anti-austerity, workers' party with a socialist programme.

It needs to draw in trade unionists, anti-cuts campaigners and socialists, and mobilise mass struggle against Tory attacks and for socialist policies. A new mass party is urgently needed, if not achieved by this route, another will be necessary.

photo Rwendland/CC



What should trade union members do?

Before making a nomination, the executive committees of the Labour-affiliated trade unions should question candidates on crucial issues and members should be consulted.

Members should demand discussion, call special meetings, put questions and demands on the candidates, and debate the way forward to build a mass working-class-based party. Trade union members should not be passive observers of this process but should fight to shape it.

- Will the candidates defend and extend the policies in Corbyn's manifesto? Are they committed to Corbyn's nationalisation pledges?
- Where do candidates stand on the union's policies. For example, transport workers will want to know, where do the candidates stand on Driver-Only Operation, or on the £1 billion a year cuts to Transport for London, or on nationalisation of the railways?
- Will the candidates pledge to scrap the anti-trade union laws? Will they join with the RMT to fight Johnson's threats to ban all-out strikes on rail services?
- Crucially, will Labour councils continue to carry out cuts? Or will the Labour leadership finally make it clear that Labour councils should stop the nightmare of cuts to jobs, pay and services, and instead mount a fight to win back the billions stolen by Tory and ConDem governments since 2010? Will they support workers who strike to defend their jobs and pay? Will they withdraw party recognition from those councillors who continue to make cuts?
- Do they support mandatory reelection of parliamentary candidates, enabling members to democratically deselect Blairites? Will they support unions having the right to directly nominate candidates onto party shortlists?

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- Do they support mandatory reelection of parliamentary candidates, enabling members to democratically deselect Blairites? Will they support unions having the right to directly nominate candidates onto party shortlists?

- Trade union struggle for an immediate increase in the minimum wage to £12 an hour without exemptions as a step towards a real living wage of at least £15 an hour. For an annual increase in the minimum wage linked to average earnings. Scrap zero-hour contracts.
- All workers, including part-timers, temps, casual and migrant workers to have trade union rates of pay, employment protection, and sickness and holiday rights from day one of employment.
- An immediate 50% increase in the state retirement pension, as a step towards a living pension.
- Scrap Universal Credit. For the right to decent benefits, education, training, or a job, without compulsion.

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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) which organises across the world. Our demands include...

PUBLIC SERVICES

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

WORK AND INCOME

- Trade union struggle for an immediate increase in the minimum wage to £12 an hour without exemptions as a step towards a real living wage of at least £15 an hour. For an annual increase in the minimum wage linked to average earnings. Scrap zero-hour contracts.
- All workers, including part-timers, temps, casual and migrant workers to have trade union rates of pay, employment protection, and sickness and holiday rights from day one of employment.
- An immediate 50% increase in the state retirement pension, as a step towards a living pension.
- Scrap Universal Credit. For the right to decent benefits, education, training, or a job, without compulsion.

- 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.

Do you agree? Join the fightback!
JOIN THE SOCIALISTS
Visit socialistparty.org.uk/join
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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!

Labour leadership race REVERSE UNISON'S UNDEMOCRATIC NOMINATION OF BLAIRITE STARMER



Unison members need political representatives ready to fight for workers photo Paul Mattsson

Public service union Unison, the largest trade union in the UK, announced it was nominating Keir Starmer for Labour leader on 8 January. There is widespread outrage in the union's ranks. We say the union's ruling body, the national executive committee (NEC), must be recalled to review the decision. **Hugo Pierre**, a member of the Socialist Party and the Unison NEC, spoke to the Socialist (in a personal capacity).

How has Unison endorsed Starmer, an opponent of Corbyn's anti-austerity platform?

I think you have to contrast the decision making that took place in 2015 and 2016, where the union decided to back Jeremy Corbyn. There was a month-long process of consultation throughout the union.

At one point, 20,000 members took part in deciding who Unison should support. Corbyn, with his anti-austerity programme, really hit a nerve with ordinary Unison members, and therefore became the Unison nominee.

This time round, the decision wasn't taken by 20,000 members, but purely by the members on the national Labour link committee.

There's a maximum of 24 members that could be involved, 12 from the NEC and 12 from the regions.

It seems that four committee members did propose there should be a wide consultation. There's a consultation mechanism already in place; they wouldn't have to reinvent the wheel. But they were voted down.

So those few people could decide exactly who they wanted between them. If that had happened in 2015, probably right-winger Andy Burnham would have been nominated, to the mass disquiet of loads of members around the country. And the decision this time is causing a major uproar in our union.

The candidates haven't even fully developed what their programme is. I don't know how the decision for Keir Starmer was taken by the Labour link committee - on what points of principle. And I think on the NEC we won't find out.

We weren't consulted by any of the 12 people we send from the NEC onto the Labour link committee. Even we've been blocked out on the NEC!

This decision affects the whole membership of Unison, and the wider trade union movement. Why was it not put before the NEC?

Unison has a different relationship with the Labour Party than most other unions which are affiliated to it: not every Unison member is affiliated. Because of that, there is a delegation of decisions around policy and leadership to the Labour link committee.

But notwithstanding any criticisms of that, any decisions should still be democratic. By that I mean not just the people showing up in the room and putting their hands up, but making sure it's accountable to the hundreds of thousands of Unison members who pay, through their subscriptions, affiliation fees to the Labour Party.

This decision hasn't done that.

It flies in the face of democracy. It should be reversed, and a proper, accountable decision made. We have got time.

This is a union of 1.4 million members. I would say that for candidates to win our vote, they should be coming to us. We should be able to ask them questions. We should be able to understand what direction they want to take the Labour Party in before we make a decision.

What would be relevant to the ordinary Unison member is what the individual's stance is on things like council cuts, on things like defending the NHS, because healthcare and local government are the two main areas Unison organises.

Also, I think many members would want to know whether they were going to repeal the anti-trade



We shouldn't be providing a free lunch for anybody - we should be drawing up a list of our demands, and making sure that those are their demands

union legislation, which is used to restrict our ability to fight. Where they stand on issues like low pay, which is endemic in our union. On issues like job cuts.

In 2015 and 2016, it was widely agreed - even the general secretary [right-winger Dave Prentis] reluctantly agreed - that Jeremy Corbyn had actively backed most, if not all, of our union policies.

What should the union do now?

I think the national executive committee should hold an emergency meeting. We should ask the candidates to come in. I think the whole executive needs to hear from them. Then our 12 NEC Labour link members should cast their vote based on what we've decided as affiliated members on the NEC.

The regional Labour link representatives should also hold widespread consultation among the affiliated members in their regions, so the regions are giving a steer to the reps they send to the Labour link committee on who to vote for. At least we can be confident then that a decision's been made that we can get around.

Some of us still may not agree with the decision, and then we have to campaign politically. But that's a different scenario to what we've been presented now; what I believe is an entirely undemocratic vote.

You're a local government union rep in Camden, Keir Starmer's constituency. What's your view of how he's helped council workers fight the cuts?

It's almost as if Jeremy Corbyn hadn't been the leader. I think one of the main reasons Jeremy didn't win in 2019 is because working-class areas have had services decimated by Labour councils.

At the moment there's a proposal for the council to cut four nurseries in the borough. But that's been the music of the past ten years.

And to my recollection, since Keir Starmer became an MP in 2015, he's not come to back any of the campaigns against cuts to services. He's not once said to the council, look, we need to change direction, we shouldn't be making cuts.

If councillors refused to make cuts, they could lead mass opposition to what the Tories have been doing, and campaign to win the needed money back. This is a question for everybody standing for Labour leadership - whether it's Keir Starmer or Rebecca Long-Bailey.

And I worry that we won't put pressure on Keir Starmer. I wasn't there, but I've seen some of the photos that were in the press. When Keir got the nomination, he was invited into Unison HQ and wine and dined.

We've got a serious job to do as a union. It's not wining and dining politicians, it's putting them on the spot. Where do you stand as far as our members' jobs, terms and conditions, and the service we provide go?

We shouldn't be providing a free lunch for anybody. We should be drawing up a list of our demands, and making sure that those are their demands.

I'm appealing to ordinary Unison members, and those with positions as well. We've got to look at a way of making sure our union is more democratic - and to push back on what has happened around this nomination.

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Massive Scottish independence demo marks new stage in struggle



Socialist Party Scotland members on the demo photo Socialist Party Scotland

- Build a mass, working-class movement for a second independence referendum
- Demand an end to all cuts and austerity now!
- Defy the Tories! Call on the Scottish government to organise the referendum

Matt Dobson
Socialist Party Scotland

At least 80,000 marchers packed the rain-soaked streets of Glasgow in a mass Scottish independence demo on Saturday 11 January. The date was set hours after Johnson's victory in December.

This was not just a repeat of the sizeable 'All Under One Banner' marches of the last couple of years. The protest reflected mounting anger at the prospect of another Tory government, and a growing willingness to struggle for independence to end austerity and change society.

The marchers were, more than previously, drawn from working-class communities across Scotland - particularly Glasgow and the west. The young were the last to appear, but came in their thousands and with militancy. Many of them were too young to vote in the first 'IndyRef' in 2014.

They chanted "Tories, Tories, Tories - out, out, out", "Boris Johnson's got to go", and "when Tories say cut back - we say fight back!" Rather than being despondent after the election, the demo indicated a growing mood to fight.

Homemade banners were displayed with the slogan "our right to decide," confronting the arrogance of Tories - but also Blairites like Jess Phillips - who deny Scotland the right to a second independence referendum.

This was a march that showed the growing space to the left of the official leadership of the independence movement, the ruling Scottish National Party (SNP). The SNP naively believes Johnson will cave into accepting its mandate. The SNP won 80% of Scottish MPs on a pledge of delivering 'IndyRef2'.

But the ruling class in Britain will do all it can to oppose a second referendum, fearing the result will mean the break-up of the UK. Under those conditions, a Catalonia-type confrontation is developing that will see mass pressure on the SNP to defy the Tories' refusal to concede the right to self-determination.

What is clear, is that a mass movement for democratic rights is unfolding in Scotland.

Despite the biblical weather, Socialist Party Scotland stalls were busy, with a great response to our slogans. We heard many times: "An independent socialist Scotland? I agree with that, give us one," as we gave out thousands of leaflets.

The argument from nationalists that we should not raise socialism at this stage, but only focus on independence, was weaker this time.

Marchers crowded our stalls to sign petitions - calling for a mass working-class campaign to demand IndyRef2, and on the Scottish government to defy the Tories and organise

a referendum. We linked these demands for democratic rights explicitly with the need to fight all cuts, for public ownership of the economy, and socialist change.

Workers and trade unions are in conflict not just with the Tories, but also the SNP and Labour - over cuts, low pay, attacks on the trade unions, and privatisation. An independent, working-class and trade union-based campaign will need to be built to fight for socialist independence.

Fighting for socialist policies will be crucial to winning a majority for independence as the SNP seeks further in a pro-business direction, narrowing the appeal of independence. And even now, after its catastrophic result, the left in Labour does not seem willing to confront the Blairites and change course.

What is needed is a new mass workers' party in Scotland, fighting for socialist policies to lead the struggle against cuts and capitalism, and for an independent socialist Scotland.

We stand for working-class unity across nations and continents, advocating a voluntary and democratic socialist confederation of Scotland with England, Wales and Ireland, as a step to a socialist Europe.

And like more than 300,000 pro-independence voters in Scotland who voted Leave in 2016, we oppose the bosses' EU. We fight instead for a socialist Europe to end racism, poverty and capitalist exploitation.

■ Anger at SNP cuts in post-demo meeting: read the full report at socialistpartyscotland.org.uk

3 days
Time it takes a FTSE 100 CEO to earn an average worker's annual salary

Fat Cat Monday

The average FTSE 100 boss had 'earned' more on 6 January than the typical worker does in a year. Top chief execs get an average £3.5 million - 117 times the median salary - says the High Pay Centre.

Rail fare rip-off

Rail bosses gave themselves a New Year's gift on 2 January and hiked fares by an average of 2.7%. They protest that they're allowed to raise them by more, and didn't. But they've been hiking fares for years - while wages stagnate. The Trade Union Congress calculates a season ticket from Chelmsford to London costs 16% of the average worker's salary. Equivalent commutes in France cost just 2%.

School strike 'extremism'

Counter-terrorism police targeted school student strikes in a guide circulated last November, the Guardian has discovered. Those who "participate in planned school walkouts" and peaceful protests were listed as prone to "ideological extremism."

After press scrutiny, the police announced the guide was being recalled. But it seems that as far as the capitalist state is concerned, there is little difference between student climate strikers and far-right thugs or Islamist terrorists.

Kids cause poverty?

The Tory leader of Walsall council, Mike Bird, said working-class families suffer food poverty because they have too many kids. Socialist Party general secretary Peter Taaffe answered him on LBC radio. There is huge wealth and plenty of healthy food in the world, but capitalism and austerity mean the poor can't get it.

Now, Tory MP Desmond Swayne has said "the poorest are among the fattest." Claimants just need to learn "how to shop more cost-effectively and healthily" - nothing to do with poverty pay and low benefits then!

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

Rail robbers' rescue

Meanwhile, having run the service into the ground, South Western Railway is warning the state could have to step in. The failed private operator got only 54% of its trains home on time last year.

The East Coast Main Line had to return to the public after collapse, and Northern Rail might too. Nationalisation is very welcome - but the profiteer bosses should be billed for their mess.

Fake apprenticeships

Fake apprenticeships - which earn employers a public funding bonus - account for half of all schemes, reports thinktank EDSK. Many are really just normal jobs, relabelled to get bosses a 10% 'top-up' from the exchequer. There's even an 'apprenticeship' for chief executives!

Capitalism cuts cures

The proportion of NHS consultant doctors participating in research for new cures halved from 7.5% in 2004 to 4.2% in 2017, reports the Academy of Medical Sciences. Austerity means stretched staff don't have the time. Meanwhile, private pharmaceutical firms have cut their research budgets.

Bank jobs binned

HSBC has announced a further 10,000 redundancies, including 1,000 in the UK. Having made off like bandits after crashing the world economy, now the bankers are coming for even more local branches and jobs. You can bet the axe won't fall too hard on the casino capitalists behind the credit crunch.

44%
Reduction in NHS consultants researching new cures, 2004-17



London bus drivers ballot to strike

Exhausted bus drivers in London are planning to strike, demanding that Transport for London (TfL) take action "to tackle chronic levels of fatigue being experienced by bus drivers."

Unite the Union is starting a consultative ballot of over 20,000 members employed as London bus drivers later this month, and if a

yes vote is secured, a full industrial action ballot will then follow.

Some individual bus operators have suggested that the solution is simply about ensuring drivers get more sleep!

But a survey by Loughborough University which was commissioned by TfL, and published last August, discovered that 21% of bus drivers had to 'fight sleepiness' at least two or three times a week and 17% had actually fallen asleep at the wheel at least once in the past year. (See 'Unions must fight to make bus drivers and passengers safe' at socialistparty.org.uk)

We say:

- Reverse the cuts
- Shorter hours
- One pay scale...the best!
- Renationalise our buses now

photo Martin49/CC



Hackney school bus workers win pay increase following strikes

Hackney SEND picket line in 2019 photo Chris Newby



A long-running dispute between Hackney council and school bus staff has been brought to an end after workers secured increased pay and a commitment to make agency roles permanent.

The pay deal came after 38 Unite the Union members, who are drivers and passenger escorts on school buses for children with disabilities, carried out a series of strikes during 2019.

The workers went on strike demanding financial recognition for working split shifts. Such payments were abolished as part of a 'single status' agreement many years back when local authorities attacked pay and conditions in the name of equal

pay - in reality an exercise to level down pay.

Hackney council has agreed to yearly lump sum payments which will be backdated to April 2019 and are linked to annual National Joint Council pay increases for local government staff.

Onay Kasab, Unite regional officer says: "We have achieved an absolutely marvellous victory in Hackney for our passenger special education needs service (SEND) members after having taken strike action. I want to congratulate every single one of those members. Also, I want to say thank you to everybody who supported the campaign throughout 2019.

"There are some very important lessons to learn. The first lesson is absolutely clear - if you take action, then you can win! Our intention now is to spread this campaign right across London and to other local authorities as well. We think we can improve everybody's pay and conditions and this shows it can be done. But the message also is this - it can only be done if we have a militant, fighting union. If you're a member of a union that is prepared to fight back, we can win real improvements in pay and conditions for our members. Congratulations to every one of our members. Congratulations to every one of our members in Hackney."

Northern Ireland: Thousands of nurses continue to strike for better pay

photo Unite the Union, Northern Ireland



Thousands of nurses and healthcare workers in Northern Ireland have been taking part in industrial action since November over pay parity and staffing.

The workers in the Royal College of Nursing (RCN), Unison and Unite trade unions are fighting to be paid the same as their counterparts in England, Scotland and Wales. The RCN argues the real value of nurses' pay in Northern Ireland has fallen by 15% over the past eight years.

Devolved government returned to Northern Ireland on 11 January and new health minister Robin Swann claims he wants to resolve the strike, but workers are rightly saying they want a deal delivered, not just words, before industrial action is ended.

Tory Julian Smith, Northern Ireland secretary in Westminster, claimed that the 12-hour strike on 10 January should have been called off given the restoration of government in Stormont. But he holds powers to intervene and could have done so earlier.

Hundreds of nurses and health care workers staged a picket outside the Department of Health on 10

January.

They argued that they have been told money is there to resolve the matter, and that they need to ensure they get it. They demanded Smith ensures the money is released.

CWI Northern Ireland members say: "The commitments in the current draft Stormont deal provide no assurances to workers that they will actually receive pay equality.

"As we all know, promises from the Tories mean little and the reality is that health workers and patients are being used as a bargaining chip by the governments. The entire situation is a disgraceful reflection of the duplicity and callousness that marks what is considered to be mainstream politics."

Get all the latest union news...

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PCS: TIME TO REBUILD THE LEFT

photo Senan



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

A meeting called in the name of the PCS Broad Left Network takes place in Manchester on 18 January. The main business will be to agree a programme and candidates to contest the 2020 elections in the PCS civil servants' union.

Following on from the tremendous support for Marion Lloyd in the recent PCS general secretary election - with over 9,000 votes - this meeting marks a further crucial step in the rebuilding of the left in PCS.

Rebuilding the left is necessary because PCS Left Unity is no longer playing the role of a fighting rank-and-file organisation in the union.

In last year's assistant general secretary election, the incumbent and agreed Left Unity candidate was opposed in the election by leading Left Unity members - including general secretary Mark Serwotka. Organised within a group inside Left Unity calling itself Socialist View, they and the Socialist Workers Party opposed incumbent Chris Baugh, breaking the rules of Left Unity by supporting a non Left Unity candidate.

Attacks

Furthermore, in Left Unity now, differences on policy questions are seized on and used as an excuse for personal and political attacks - leading in 2019 to a purge from Left Unity slates of left activists who disagreed with Socialist View. This is a turn away from the inclusive history of Left Unity.

For example, tactical differences on how best to win a statutory strike ballot on pay, which PCS failed to do twice, were turned by Serwotka and his supporters into issues of principle and attacks on those who disa-

greed with them.

In the recent period, the Serwotka-supporting majority have weaponised differences and debate, something entirely alien to the traditions of Left Unity and its Broad Left predecessor.

These are just a few examples which reveal huge differences in how we see the role of a Broad Left and how Mark Serwotka and his supporters see it. Instead of left pressure on the leadership, they increasingly see it as a passive mouthpiece in the service of the leadership.

Instead of acting as an independent left force to develop a programme and fight for it in PCS, Serwotka and his supporters envisage Left Unity acting as a mere support group, as an auxiliary to the union.

We don't agree this is the function of a trade union broad left. It must instead be a constant and critical force with full democratic rights and a militant programme that can attract the best reps and members if it is to continually renew itself and the union.

Marion Lloyd's election campaign has given confidence to many union activists to voice concerns about Left Unity and the direction of the union. A new layer of militant activists have grouped themselves around the new Broad Left Network which played a key role in Marion's campaign.

An open discussion on the left is necessary now to bring together socialists within the union to hammer out the fighting programme that is necessary and to put forward a leadership that will carry out this programme.

We encourage all socialists in PCS to come to the Broad Left Network meeting in Manchester on Saturday 18 January. Join the Broad Left Network and support the campaign to rebuild the left in PCS.

■ Broad Left Network meeting: 11am 18 January at the Britannia Hotel, Portland Street, Manchester, M1 3LA

Westex Carpet strike reaches two month mark

Iain Dalton
West Yorkshire Socialist Party organiser

Members of Unite the Union at the Westex Carpets factory in Cleckheaton, west Yorkshire, are about to reach the two month mark in their ongoing dispute over pay.

The strike began on 20 November after workers rejected a minimal pay rise which was then withdrawn by the company. It has since refused further dialogue.

Dave, shop steward at the factory told us: "The company are sourcing yarn from an outside company to bypass a large part of the production process, and have now started

to employ staff to fill in the gaps left by the members on strike.

"This, however, has not diminished the resolve of the workers on strike and we remain resolute in our goal of seeking a fair and just pay increase."

The wider trade union movement must be mobilised in support of the strikers. One way of increasing the profile of the dispute would be to organise a march and rally in support of them.

In the meantime, trade unionists should keep donations coming into the strike fund:

- Account name: TGWU
- Account number: 20175407
- Sort code: 60/83/01
- Reference: Westex Strike Fund

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Picket line on 14 January photo Bradford Socialist Party



Union lawyer arrested on security guards' picket line

The United Voices of the World (UWW) union, whose members are striking for 48 hours at St George's Hospital, University of London, are taking legal action after its lawyer was arrested on the picket line.

Police also threatened the 25 workers, security guards employed by contractor Noonan, who are paid less and suffer worse working conditions than directly employed staff at the university.

The union is also demanding equal treatment over pay, holidays and pensions.

On 13 January police attended the picket line and attempted to remove the strikers from NHS grounds, arresting Franck Magennis, the head of UWW's legal department.

UWW say: "This could set a dangerous precedent for the erosion of workers' rights if left unchallenged."

SUSTAINABLE FOOD PRODUCTION AND THE NEED FOR SOCIALISM

Millions of predominately young people around the world protested in 2019 at the lack of governmental action to halt global warming which is leading to catastrophic climate change. A major contributory factor in global warming is deforestation - largely driven by profit-seeking agribusiness. And related to deforestation, are the pressing issues of soil erosion and environmental degradation.

One-third of topsoil has already gone and according to the United Nations the planet's remaining topsoil will be exhausted in 60 years' time. How then will an estimated 10 billion people be fed?

Socialist Party member **Dana Mirov** suggests a sustainable alternative to food production under capitalism.

Recently, in horror, the world watched the burning of the Amazon rainforest. Thousands of fires engulfed primeval forests that are considered the 'lungs of the planet'. It was widely acknowledged that the responsibility lay with the needs of industrial agriculture. And rightly, millions of people around the world wondered how it made sense to kill the planet that sustains us, in order to feed us.

The Brazilian far-right president Bolsonaro, under whose watch the destruction of the Amazon rainforest has been dramatically accelerated, in full ideological agreement with the US administration, is pushing for more intensification of agriculture.

But that doesn't mean that the environmental destruction caused by agriculture is anything new. On the contrary, it has been going on for a very long time as the problem is inherent in the capitalist mode of food production.

Metabolic rift

Karl Marx addressed this issue in the 19th century. He coined a term "metabolic rift", by which he meant an unrepairable rupture in natural cycles and processes caused by capitalism. With its insatiable pursuit of profit, capitalism inevitably puts increasing pressure on ecological systems. Marx's idea of the metabolic rift specifically addressed capitalist agriculture and a rupture in the natural soil nutrient cycle, caused by relentless demands and abuse of soil.

Today the problem of environmental degradation has reached such catastrophic levels that has led to the changes in the planet's climate. The industrial food system is responsible for around 50% of all greenhouse gas emissions (according to Grain, a small non-profit). This includes everything from food production, to processing, packaging, distribution and waste disposal. Just agriculture, including deforestation and land use change, is responsible for around 25% of emissions.

It is clear that the capitalist model of agriculture and the food industry as a whole will have to be transformed fundamentally to bring it to sustainable levels.

Arable industrial agriculture is seen in single crops (monocultures) grown over huge areas. Monocultures are

extremely susceptible to diseases and predators, so tonnes of chemicals are sprayed over the plants both as a cure and a prevention.

Chemicals don't just kill predators but also beneficial insects that otherwise would feed on predators. Soil microbe life like bacteria and fungi, that naturally make the soil fertile, also suffer. With the loss of soil fertility, farmers are forced to use artificial fertilisers, which further destroy soil life.

This chemical treadmill has been unstoppable for many decades following World War Two - when the chemical industry persuaded western capitalist governments of the necessity of chemical agriculture for 'feeding the world'.

In fact, they were just looking for a market for their products used in the war that were now obsolete. This was the essence of the so-called Green Revolution, introduced both in the west and, through imperialist policies, imposed on many other parts of the world.

It transformed the way food was produced worldwide, from small scale, low-input, labour-intensive but more ecological and more farmer-controlled farming, to labour-reducing but corporate-controlled, high-

input and unecological methods.

The reduction of labour needed to work the land went hand-in-hand with land grabs and the transformation of rural populations into an urban working class, or simply their displacement into city slums - a very similar process to enclosures and clearances in Britain a few centuries earlier.

Green Revolution

The Green Revolution increased food production worldwide, but to what end and at what cost? Under capitalism food is produced as a commodity, not to satisfy one of the most essential human needs.

Increased production didn't stop people going hungry; the two are thoroughly unrelated in the capitalist economic model. In fact, it left many rural communities that previously relied on subsistence farming without a secure supply of food, for the first time.

At the same time, rising agribusiness was raking in huge profits, both through sales of chemicals and its monopoly over food production. More food was produced but more food was also wasted. If capitalists can't make a profit, they will throw the food away rather than feed the hungry. Today a quarter of all food produced goes to waste. So much for 'feeding the world'.

The cost of the Green Revolution is huge, not to agribusiness but to ordinary people whose food has been made unhealthy (fruits and vegetables have become less nutritious and processed foods high in trans fats, salt and sugar, etc) and the environment destroyed.

Increased levels of CO2 in the atmosphere is also depleting plants of nutrients, and at the same time increasing sugars and carbohydrates, turning the plants into junk food. This article is too short to go into the details, but this can serve as an indication of the interconnectedness of natural processes that are yet to be fully taken into account when assessing modern illnesses.

Because of the chemical treadmill there are ever stronger chemicals produced as the previous ones cease to be effective against weeds and pests. Companies like Monsanto (now owned by Bayer) produce patented genetically modified (GM) herbicide resistant crops.

These GM crop seeds are sold under licence to farmers who use the associated herbicide and cannot store



'Don't blame me!' - imported grain-feed for livestock is accelerating deforestation (pictured below) photo LewisClarke/CC



the seeds for the next season. Brazilian farmers recently lost a \$7.7 billion lawsuit against Monsanto over royalty payments.

As well as weeds developing resistance these powerful herbicides can drift afield, devastating other crops. Some herbicides contain chemicals similar to the notorious defoliant Agent Orange used by the US army in the Vietnam war.

Various studies show that topsoil is so depleted due to chemical usage and heavy tilling that there are only 60

prevention and cure. The vast majority of antibiotic use today actually comes from factory farms.

The antibiotic residue ends up in waterways and eventually in household water systems, as indeed is also true of agricultural chemicals, contributing to antibiotic resistance and overexposure to pesticides (many studies now show widespread pesticide presence in human urine in all countries tested).

Monocultures and factory farms also heavily rely on fossil fuels - pesticides themselves are oil derivatives. The burning of the Amazon will make even more land available for monoculture crops, which will mainly be used as animal feed in factory farms, for meat that will be sold in our supermarkets.

It is little wonder that repulsion over the meat industry leads some people to argue for avoidance of animal products altogether as a way of saving the environment. This argument has become very powerful but it is nevertheless misleading in several aspects.

Intensive farming

First, as this article argues, it is not agriculture as such but industrial agriculture that is the problem. This relates to both arable and animal farming. Humans have kept animals for thousands of years with little impact on the planet's climate. The problem has arisen with the industrialisation of animal farming.

If the meat industry is one of the contributors to climate change, which is not under doubt, it only points to the scale and method of capitalist meat production.

Small scale and free range is not only unproblematic but is actually extremely useful for soil restoration. Grass-fed animals provide high-quality natural fertiliser. Their manure feeds the microbe soil life which regenerates the soil by returning nutrients to it.

A lot has been made about methane emissions too. However, there are studies that show that grass-fed animals produce 70% less methane than factory-farmed, grain-fed animals.

As in small-scale animal husbandry there are by definition far fewer animals than in factory farming, the methane emissions in such a system is negligible. As was the case before the introduction of intensive factory farming.

Some in the anti-meat lobby miss the point by addressing the consequences of intensive production instead of the cause, which is capitalism itself.

By concentrating on meat production instead of the method of production, ie on what is produced rather than how it's produced, it fails to address the real factor responsible for environmental degradation. It therefore deflects the search for solutions, with possible dire consequences.

If a plant-based diet relies on



photo Paul Mattsson

equally intensive growing methods, it will be equally damaging to the environment. On the other hand, if it doesn't rely on high fossil fuel based inputs, but rather on agri-ecological methods, then there is no reason not to have meat produced in the same way.

Diet

Strident anti-meat advocates also deflect from the method of struggle. Instead of directing the struggle towards the capitalist system, looking to the organised working class as instrumental in this task, it concentrates on individual 'lifestyle choices' which in reality are not real choices nor can they be effective in achieving results.

Working-class people often do not have the luxury to follow dietary trends. Meat is cheap and readily available - there is no real choice there if you are pressed for money and time. But neither will individual dietary choices ever come close to tackling problems that are essentially systemic in nature. The best they can do is create a niche market within the capitalist economy, for those who can afford it.

There is no question, however, that our diets will have to change quite dramatically, to include far less meat but also far less chemically produced and processed foods. This will have to be the result of conscious political decisions to transform food production.

However, it is quite impossible that any such decisions will be made by capitalist governments whose role is to protect and advance the interests of big business. This is why the struggle for socialism is both necessary and urgent. It is inseparably connected with the struggle to save the environment.

We need to take democratic charge of the food system and transform it to promote health while looking after the environment. Nationalisation of the food industry is a necessary first step in achieving this.

Providing land workers with land, who would rebuild biodiversity and put nutrients back in the soil, while growing food as a service to society rather than to corporate shareholders, would go towards enhancing healthy diets as well as attempting to heal the rift in the nature's metabolism.

TV Review

Apocalypse Cow



George Monbiot photo Channel4

Environmental journalist and campaigner George Monbiot recently narrated a thought-provoking documentary on Channel 4 - Apocalypse Cow - in which he argues that the current agribusiness model is unsustainable and that there has to be a complete revolution in farming practices.

Monbiot points out that in the UK, for example, most land is used to produce meat products which destroy carbon-absorbing trees and pollute the land and rivers. Moreover, the use of imported animal foodstuffs from palm oil and soya plantations is encouraging the continual destruction of rainforests, thereby adding to global warming.

He argues that if the current rate of soil erosion and degradation is maintained then a collapse of food production is likely in 60 years' time.

So what's the solution to this doomsday scenario? While being a committed vegan, Monbiot doesn't overly rant against meat eaters. He suggests switching the £26,000 average annual government subsidy from UK livestock producers to farmers who would instead rewild their farms - returning the countryside to a more natural state, and thereby restoring the eco-system.

But hang on, what are people supposed to eat?

Firstly, he visits a farmer in Glamorgan growing organic vegetables who doesn't import fertilisers but instead uses a combination of weeds and wood chippings to enrich the soil. The uncultivated patches also attract aphid eating insects, thereby acting as a natural pest-control system. Monbiot claims that crop yields are on a par with conventional farms.

Cultured meat

Next, he visits a Welsh livestock farmer who, having witnessed the destructive impact of agribusiness on the Amazon rainforest, is developing laboratory cultured meat. If scaled up to industrial levels, this would very rapidly remove the need for cows. (Presumably dairy products such as milk, butter, cheese, etc, would be synthesised from plant material).

However, the meat cell cultures would still require the input of plant material. But even here there's a solution.

Monbiot jets off to Helsinki (having apologised for taking a flight) and visits a start-up where scientists have created foodstuffs (similar to whey protein) from bacteria and water - literally out of air! The electricity needed for this process can be generated by renewable non-fossil fuels.

Monbiot's arguments (despite his sanctimonious tone) are compelling, but there's a rub. With a few exceptions, agribusiness will continue along its self-destructive path as long as the capitalist system reaps handsome profits and as long as governments continue to support this system.

In other words, system change requires socialist change - not that Monbiot advances this. Instead, he gives the example of an 'enlightened landowning billionaire' in Scotland who is removing deer and rewilding the land, and a small rewilded area of farmland in the Netherlands which the government purchased for use as a floodplain. Clearly, this isn't going to affect the trajectory of food production globally. For that to happen we need international socialism.

Dave Carr



photo Paul Mattsson

Young people who voted for Corbyn's manifesto will now ask... HOW CAN WE WIN THOSE IDEAS?

Theo Sharieff
Socialist Students
national organiser

It's no surprise whatsoever that millions of young people voted for Jeremy Corbyn in the December general election. Despite Labour's defeat at the hands of Blairite sabotage against Corbyn in Parliament, the media, and the council chamber, Labour overwhelmingly got by and far the largest youth vote compared to other parties.

56% of 18 to 24 year olds voted for Corbyn's programme, as well as 54% of 24 to 29 year olds. The Tories got 21% and 23% in the same respective age categories.

Although this was slightly down from 2017 - when 62% of 20 to 24 year olds voted Labour - the youth still overwhelmingly went to Corbyn. In seats kept by Labour, the youth population was on average 1.5 times higher. 1.4 million under 25s registered to vote, 36% more than in 2017.

Young workers and students have suffered under Tory cuts. Resolution Foundation research found that the living standards of millennials are on the decline in most measurements.

Half of today's young people believe that we will have worse living standards compared to their parents. Only 22% think we will do better.

The young people who voted for Corbyn's manifesto will now ask - what are the next steps necessary to win those ideas?

Unbearable

Life for millions of young people has been unbearable under the last decade of Tory rule and will continue to be so long as they're in government. That Corbyn didn't win will no doubt leave young workers and students feeling disappointed, if not extremely worried, about what their future will look like under a Boris Johnson government.

Despite the Tory victory, the idea of an alternative to the misery of capitalist driven austerity will not simply disappear back to where it came from, in fact it can grow.

The genie is well and truly out of the bottle. This is especially true for millions of young people whose lives have been blighted by austerity.

As we enter 2020, it is more vital than ever that young people get organised to fight against Tory austerity in workplaces (see front page), in schools, colleges and universities, and in local communities.

Whatever happens in the Labour leadership contest (see pages 2-4), young people and students desperately need a party which is rooted in



photo Socialist Students

and takes its cues from the working class. A mass party of workers and youth that will fight for our interests against the big business bosses and their capitalist system.

Socialist Students is calling for a 'council of war' on the university campuses - to bring together students, activists, uni workers and unions to discuss how to resist further Tory attacks to our education and our democratic right to organise and protest on campus. This should include University and College Union (UCU) - which is discussing taking further strike action in the new

year - and Unison.

The National Union of Students (NUS) leadership should now begin organising for a mass student demonstration, linked to mass student and workers' meetings on campuses.

These local meetings should be organised by student unions - and the campus trade unions too. They should discuss and plan the tactics of building for a national protest, linked to a programme of refounding and democratising NUS.

If you want to help in the fight against the Tories, then join with us.



No free ride for the airline bosses

NATIONALISE FLYBE NOW!

Scott Jones

Airline Flybe - which provides domestic flights in the UK - is in trouble. The airline connects about eight million passengers a year from airports in the UK's major cities to isolated communities in the Channel Islands, Isle of Man, Cornwall and also Europe.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson has suggested cutting air passenger duty on domestic flights as part of a plan to save the airline from collapse. By applying the move to the whole industry, the government would avoid breaching EU state aid rules.

He said it was "not for government" to step in and save companies that run into trouble.

But government stepping in and nationalising Flybe and other companies to save jobs and services is exactly what it should be doing! And the government should ignore the EU's state aid rules to do so.

Boris has claimed that, in his opinion, Brexit means the UK won't be bound by the anti-nationalisa-

tion rules anymore. So let's get nationalisation done!

The reality is that Boris doesn't want to leave his big business mates who own Flybe out of pocket. Flybe is owned by Virgin and its consortium partners Stobart Air, plus US investment firm Cyrus Capital.

They bought the airline less than a year ago amid much fanfare and promises of a £100-million investment. Where is this money now?

Flybe should be taken out of the hands of the profit makers who can't be trusted with our jobs and services - and government subsidies which some routes receive! It should be run under democratic workers' control and management as part of an integrated, expanded transport system including affordable rail services - a democratically planned system that could save jobs, connections to remote areas of the UK as well as reducing carbon emissions.

Virgin and co should not be given a free ride and tax cuts should not be used to bail out Flybe. Nationalisation is the answer.

Lois Austin
East London Socialist Party

Over 100 Newham, east London residents and market traders crowded into a church hall on Green Street to hear Labour Mayor Rokhsana Fiaz explain plans to 'regenerate' Queen's Market. The fear though, of all at the meeting, was that what we will actually get is gentrification.

The market is a stone's throw from the new development of expensive flats built on West Ham's old Boleyn football ground. We don't want another Rathbone street market, nearby in Canning Town, where the market is reduced to a handful of stalls surrounded by flats and restaurants locals can't afford.

Land grab

Newham is already victim to the big business land grab happening all over London. The traders, their stalls and the vital service of providing decent cheap food must stay.

The mayor let slip that there will be £45.3 million cuts in the borough, and that the future of the elderly sheltered accommodation, Hamara Ghar, opposite the market, is up for 'consultation'. Some of the residents were in the room. They said: 'we are here, you have consulted us and we are telling you we don't want to go anywhere!'

Socialist Party members responded to all this by saying, Newham is already on its knees. There are people sleeping in the parks and children living in basements and



photo Matt Brown/CC

garages. Where will your axe fall, because this borough cannot take another blow?

The mayor - elected 20 months ago on a ticket of standing up for Newham and being different from her arch-Blairite predecessor Robin Wales - said: 'Newham council will not break the law; we have to set a legal budget.'

She blamed the old administration for failing to put up council tax, and made it clear she will. The audience responded by saying we don't want that either.

The current tranche of Labour councillors have been in power for 20 months. They have done a few good things, like employ 43 youth workers more than any other borough.

But there is no big visible improvement in living conditions. In

fact things have got worse.

The mayor and council were given no grace by locals at the meeting. Gentrification of Queen's Market and closure of Hamara Ghar will be fought if they attempt it.

We warned the mayor that we will be protesting against her just like we did with Robin Wales. The mayor told us she was different from the old administration, she said she was a fighter.

If that is the case, then set a no-cuts budget. Socialist Party members will fight for that.

- Save Hamara Ghar and Queen's Market
- No to gentrification
- Give working-class people democratic control of our communities

London PROTESTERS RETURN TO OPPOSE MIDDLE EAST WAR

Lily Douglas
Stoke Socialist Party

On 11 January, Stop the War called a second demonstration in central London after the recent attacks in Iraq and Iran. While it was not a huge turnout, the march was an opportunity to talk to young people about the workers' action needed to stop war, and socialist ideas to end capitalism.

It was good to see young people join the march and their determination to fight against the Johnson and Trump governments. A team of



photo London Socialist Party

Socialist Party members took part, including new members.

One brand new Socialist Party member said she was encouraged by the loud chanting and lively mood. She noticed the amount of support we got from young people and how many members of the public stopped to chat to us about socialism and our stance around events in the USA.

Overall, despite the fact it was only a small march, we managed to make an impact. The front page of the Socialist paper read: "Climate change. Poverty. War. Capitalism must go. Fight for socialism." We

sold 40 copies.

And we met at least five people who wanted to know more about joining the Socialist Party. This is on top of 33 people who bought a Socialist paper and dozen who wanted to join the Socialist Party at the previous Saturday's anti-war protest.

- Check out the latest socialist analysis on Iran page 14

- Search 'Trump attacks Iran: London protest - We need workers' action against war and austerity' at socialistparty.org.uk for a report of the previous week's protest

Cladding scandal: Government steps up defence of landlords

The government stands accused of "systemic failure" to uphold building regulations and keep residents safe from fire.

Over 100 angry leaseholders told the Tory minister for housing that their homes have been rendered dangerously unsafe and of zero value, at an all-party parliamentary group meeting on cladding reform for leaseholders and common holders.

The cladding scandal has heightened the demand for the abolition of leasehold, so that residents can own their homes and can make their own decisions.



In blocks of flats this is called commonhold. The growth of leasehold ownership - half of all properties sold in the capital - means even more insecurity for tenants.

Pete Mason
East London Socialist Party

Socialist Party national committee meeting

The Socialist Party held a very important National Committee on 11-12 January, the first since the general election.

The meeting was against the background of an increasingly unstable world situation and global workers' uprisings.

We discussed the reasons behind the Tory victory in the election, the Labour leadership contest (see pages 2-4) and what is likely to happen under a Johnson government.

We need to be battle-ready for the attacks on the working class coming from the Tories. And so we had a special session on our work in the

trade unions.

There was a session on building the Socialist Party. There has been an upturn in people joining the party since Johnson's victory.

And we agreed campaigns to increase the sales and subscriptions of the Socialist, the fighting fund and membership subs too, so we have the resources to put forward a fighting socialist strategy.

Socialist Party branches should arrange now to get a report from national committee members.

We also made a plan for the Socialist Party's national congress on 29 February and 1 March.

Nottingham Youth protest against Barclays £64 million fossil-fuel investments



photo Clare Wilkins

20 young people protested outside Barclays bank in Nottingham on 11 January. Eleven pension fund shareholders are putting the first ever climate resolution to Barclay's annual general meeting, calling on the bank to phase out investment in fossil-fuel projects and companies.

Since 2015, Barclays has invested £64 million in fossil-fuel initiatives,

including tar sands oil projects in Canada, causing devastation to First Nation lands and communities.

It is not just Barclays but the capitalist system that has caused, and will not solve, the climate crisis. We need socialist change to end climate change.

Clare Wilkins
Nottingham Socialist Party

WE NEED SOCIALISTS IN LONDON'S CITY HALL



photo London Socialist Party

A socialist mayor could spearhead the fight to stop the Tories

London Socialist Party statement

London mayor Sadiq Khan has joined the front ranks of the right-wing Labour Blairites attacking Jeremy Corbyn's policies. Who will fight for those policies in May's London elections if Sadiq Khan goes unchallenged by socialists and trade unionists?

Sadiq Khan has not actively fought austerity in any shape or form. He has not used his powers to fight for council housing and he has not supported workers fighting to improve their lives in the various strikes across London.

Billionaire's mayor

He is known as 'the property developers' man, as well as saying things like "London needs more billionaires". We don't, we need socialist policies that will make London work for the people who work and live there.

London is seen as 'Labour', but so was Scotland, so was the north of England. The same conditions - the housing crisis, the struggle on poverty pay, etc, exist here and the same potential for disillusionment is here. It is the failure to fight by right-wing councils and Blairites that is responsible for undermining support for Labour, not the fight for socialist policies.

Housing crisis

London faces an historic housing crisis with an estimated need for 800,000 extra homes. There are record levels of street homelessness and families in temporary accommodation. 170,000 people are homeless in London, and almost 9,000 sleep rough - three and a half times what it was in 2005.

House prices are unaffordable and people have to pay up to 70% of their income in private rents. Tens of thousands of families have been forced out of London and many more suffer overcrowding.

Yet Sadiq Khan's London plan involves building high density blocks of expensive flats at transport hubs and town centres around London, with a general aim of only 30%

'affordable' homes, handing public land over to private property developers.

There will only be 116,000 "affordable" starts by 2022, and "private developers will continue to build most of London's new homes".

We say:

- An immediate moratorium on 'social cleansing' schemes. Stop the demolition
- No to Sadiq Khan's London plan
- In place of handing public land to private developers to build blocks of expensive flats, build council houses on social rent, with secure tenancies, and take over empty speculative property
- 100% council housing on public land
- Set a London rent cap

Council cuts

London councils have lost 50% of their funding, losing libraries, nurseries, social care, jobs and pay.

We say:

- Not one more cut passed down from central government by the GLA. Enough is enough!

Fire service cuts

Boris Johnson closed ten fire stations, cut 14 engines and 552 firefighters. Sadiq Khan has not reinstated them.

We say:

- Reopen fire stations and reinstate the fire engines and jobs cut by Boris Johnson

Low pay

Still over 700,000 workers are paid less than the London Living Wage in London, and only 19 out of 33 London councils are London Living Wage employers.

The London Living Wage has risen to £10.75 an hour but that doesn't take people up to a decent minimum income - four in ten Londoners don't reach the Minimum Income Standard - that's 3.6 million people.

We say:

- End poverty pay - set £15 an hour as the London Living Wage and campaign for it to be the minimum wage
- End zero-hour contracts in all Greater London Authority jobs and call on all London councils to do the same

Transport cuts

Sadiq Khan is passing on Department of Transport cuts to the tune of £1 billion a year.

Tube ticket offices were closed by Boris Johnson and not reopened by Khan.

We say:

- Re-open tube ticket offices
- Cut fares
- Immediately end and reverse the devastating Transport for London cuts passed on by Sadiq Khan

In May 2020 the Greater London Authority, made up of the London mayor and Greater London Assembly, is up for election. The mayor is elected on a first and second preference basis, and the assembly through a form of proportional representation.

We believe it is vital that there is a stand for socialist policies.

We are prepared to stand socialist candidates but we want to work with any other forces - trade unionists, socialists and anti-austerity campaigners, inside and outside the Labour Party - to ensure these policies are fought for in this election, and help refound a party in the interests of working-class and young people.



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



Climate change. Capitalism is the problem - not the solution photo Paul Mattsson

Climate strikes

2020 is the year that will bring the UN Climate Change summit to the UK. But will the world's rulers be able to come up with a solution?

The same conference in 2019 famously agreed nothing, with the two major economies of US and China failing to commit to improving their targets for reducing emissions.

2019 was a year when collective understanding of the scale of climate change moved closer to reality. But capitalist governments and corporations are incapable in acting with the urgency required.

Just as they cry crocodile tears about global poverty but continue to ruthlessly exploit workers and the poor, they continue to ruthlessly exploit the earth too.

Some capitalists and capitalist commentators do, however, understand the long term consequences of climate change on their ability to make money.

The Bank of England has launched a "climate stress-test" for companies to

monitor the effects on their business.

The solution will not be arrived at by discussion groups of capitalists, bound by their unrelenting drive for profits. Solving climate change calls for a plan for the economy, where investment by the state in green technologies can far outstrip any token gestures from the capitalists.

But to make the change required it is vital to be able to harness the vast amount of wealth in society held by a tiny number of corporations. This is why we call for the nationalisation of the top 150 monopolies and the banking system under democratic workers' control and management.

Drawing up a plan to save the environment requires the democratic input of workers who drive the economy and production. It also requires workers to struggle for it. The development of workers joining climate strikes points in the direction of what is necessary in the next decade.

Josh Asker
Southampton

Services mugged

Two young people tried to mug me on my way home. I immediately knocked on the nearest house for assistance. The kind person there straightaway drove me home. He said that this isn't the first incident. That young people, that are hard to find a foster home for, had just been dumped at the address I walked past.

Right-wing politicians try to say there won't be consequences if they make spending cuts. They've been saying it for decades and it's a lie.

Romford is a Tory council, and the provision of services is shocking. But it's exactly the same in Blairite Labour councils. There is a consequence to cuts. From flammable cladding on Grenfell, to no homes, or jobs, or youth services for young people.

All I want is a safe, happy life for me, my partner and son. And all socialists want is a safe environment, with decent jobs, and well-funded services for millions of working-class people.

Ian Pattison
East London

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



Gosh! Is that a job? photo NorthernIrelandOffice/CC

Dynastic blues

Poor Prince Harry indeed! Remember when he boasted about obliterating Afghans - carrying on a long royal heritage of fronting imperialist invasions - from his helicopter? Or the time he thought it was amusing to dress up as a Nazi?

He's a scion of a privileged, bigoted ruling dynasty who has now fallen out with the rest of them.

Niall Mulholland
East London

Annus horribilus2

Harry and Meghan's attempt at adapting to a 'modern monarchy' has inadvertently lobbed a hand-grenade into the House of Windsor.

Not least because it further exposes the privileged, publicly funded sumptuous lifestyles of these feudal relics.

Coming in the wake of Prince Andrew's disastrous PR interview on BBC Newsnight, it's good to see Her Maj experiencing another annus horribilus - something

that we commoners experience every year under her reign.

Simon Carter
Newham

Trendsetters

I've no problem with Harry and Meghan pulling out of the royal family, I just hope it's the start of a trend!

Roger Bannister
Liverpool



Who and where now for the Corbynistas? photo Paul Mattsson

Long-Bailey in retreat

Rebecca Long-Bailey announced that she has accepted the ten "pledges" demanded by the Jewish Board of Deputies. These include giving a monopoly of "antisemitism training" to the so-called "Jewish Labour Movement" (a body which refused to campaign for Labour at the last election), outsourcing disciplinary procedures - including the expulsion of members - to an outside body independent of control of the party membership, and expelling members who campaign to support those unjustly expelled.

This capitulation on anti-semitism is bad. But far worse is that she was capable of such a capitulation. A socialist prime minister will have to stand up to Trump and his nuclear arsenal, stand up to the IMF, stand up to the CIA, MI6, the permanent civil service, the press barons, the corporations and the capitalist class at home and abroad.

Syriza was crushed by the IMF and the ECB who pulled the plug on the Greek economy. In Chile, the Popular

Unity government was crushed by a CIA led coup which massacred thousands of socialists.

Long-Bailey capitulated to the Jewish Board of Deputies, a committee of minor community nobodies who don't even have a pea-shooter between them.

Socialist ideas are utterly useless if you are not prepared to fight for them.

Annon Yizhak
north London

Mandatory reselection

Whoever comes out on top, if Labour's leaders aren't committed to reintroducing mandatory reselection then the party is just going to recede back to Blairite control and a return to the liberal pro-establishment politics that working-class people have had enough of.

Michael Hirst, Hull

No cuts test

"If a left-wing candidate is to pick up the mantle laid down by Corbyn and build on it, it's essential they don't retreat from any of his pledges on

nationalisation, workers' rights, housing, abolition of student fees and all the other urgently needed steps in the manifesto he spearheaded" (the Socialist, 9 January).

They will also need to show a commitment to transforming the party by building support for the selection of fighting socialist MPs and councillors - who are willing to take on the Tories - and ensure Labour councils join the resistance and refuse to carry out further Tory cuts!

Nick Chaffey
Southampton

Front and back stabbers

Labour leadership candidate Jess Phillips once said: "I would knife Jeremy Corbyn in the front, not the back." It's important to remember this quote.

A careerist at heart, her policies will be a return of Labour trying to convince big business that they'll manage British capitalism better than the Tories and continuing austerity.

Manny Dominguez
Bradford

RENEWED PROTESTS SHAKE IRANIAN LEADERS

- Mass opposition can end the regime
- Build a socialist movement to end the rule of the elite, poverty and capitalism



photo Khamenei.ir/CC

Robert Bechert
Committee for a Workers' International (CWI)

A wave of anger over what is seen as the regime's lying and incompetence - after the tragic downing of a Ukrainian passenger jet - has sparked off a third round of mass protests in Iran in just over three years.

In a matter of days, the widespread 'national unity' produced by Trump's assassination of general Suleimani has been rapidly undermined.

The realisation that the regime had lied to the population triggered the protests. Officials claimed that both President Rouhani and the religious leaders did not know that Iranian missiles brought down the Ukrainian airplane until the evening of 10 January.

But on 11 January, when General Amir Ali Hajizadeh, commander of the Revolutionary Guards' Aerospace Force, publicly admitted its role in the "unintentional" strike, he also said that he had informed officials about it on 8 January.

The protests that immediately developed had radical, anti-regime, slogans like "death to the liars", "down with the dictator". "They are lying that our enemy is America, our enemy is right here". "Guards; you are the dictator; you are our Isis" and "we don't want the Islamic republic".

Even though the size of these protests was small, they marked a significant political development. Last November saw the rapid growth of large nationwide protests sparked off by a rise in fuel prices.

Even the state-backed news media reported demonstrations, road blockades and attacks on buildings in 100 cities and towns. These had a wider geographical spread than the previous wave of workers' demonstrations and strikes, often on the questions of wages, in November 2017 and continued into early 2018.

Recent years in Iran have seen clear signs of a continued development of independent

workers' organisations and student opposition, including campus socialist groupings. Significantly, this is despite continuing repression and state violence.

Last November's protests were met with vicious repression, hundreds were killed, possibly well over a 1,000, while thousands were injured and arrested. In the last few years there have been continual arrests, trials and imprisonments of trade unionists, worker activists and student socialists.

But this has not permanently stopped new protests developing. For years now the regime has been openly divided and these divisions are deepening in the face of increasing popular opposition, economic crisis and Trump's threats.

It is quite possible that the shooting down of this plane will heighten these divisions and be used in the ongoing factional struggle within the ruling elite. Both these tensions and the growing oppositional mood could even be reflected though the heavily controlled parliamentary elections due to be held on 21 February.

Western hypocrisy

Right now the competing imperialist powers are seeking both to limit the repercussions of Suleimani's assassination and take advantage of the airplane's shooting down.

But this is not being done to help the mass of the Iranian people. A recent statement issued by some students at the Amir Kabir University warned that Iranians are "surrounded by evil from every direction" and called for a "policy that will not rush into the arms of imperialism due to... fear of despotism".

Clearly this is a call to reject the demagoguery of Trump and the US administration. Despite Trump's claims to Iranians that he has "stood with you" he, like all capitalist rulers, is no principled defender of democratic rights. Trump is quite happy dancing and trading with the autocratic Saudi rulers.

At the same time as claiming to support the protesters in Iran, Trump published a fawning tribute to the recently deceased Omani



Today's protests succeed last November's mass protests and the earlier 2017-18 workers' strikes (above) photo Armin Karami/CC

ruler Sultan Qaboos, saying he had "brought peace and prosperity to his country and was a friend to all".

Yet Oman is a country that even the CIA officially describes as an "absolute monarchy", like Saudi Arabia, ie with no elections and few democratic rights. Is this the model Trump wants for Iran?

Now Trump and his supporters are trying to unload onto the Iranian regime all the responsibility for this tragedy. But it is Trump's policies - Suleimani's assassination, the threat to destroy 52 Iranian targets against the background of his "maximum pressure" sanctions - which have heated up the situation.

Even on the question of Iran admitting responsibility for bringing down the Ukrainian plane, Tehran's three-day delay cannot be compared with the four years that the US government took to admit that it shot down an Iranian passenger plane in 1988.

Last year saw mass movements and revolutions in Algeria, Iraq,

Lebanon and Sudan. These showed the potential force of the working class and poor to change society.

The challenge now is to build upon these struggles and continue the steps already being taken to build trade unions and create democratic organisations of working people, youth and the poor.

Socialism

Such organisations can both give leadership to the struggle against the regime and also be the basis for a government that breaks the power of the ruling class and breaks with both imperialism and capitalism, thereby creating the basis for a genuinely socialist transformation of society.

Significantly in Iran a group of workers at the Haft Tappeh Agro-Industry Company, in oil-rich Khuzestan province, issued a statement announcing their intention to join the latest protests.

This workforce has been building a genuine trade union and played a key

role in previous protests, especially in November 2018 with demands for the renationalisation of their privatised workplace and its management by a "workers' council... based on collective decision-making".

The Amir Kabir University students' statement was clearly moving in this direction, denouncing the economic policies that have created "a whole host of neglected groups, alongside a group of privileged, rich and corrupt individuals".

While not clearly calling for a socialist break with capitalism, they wrote about "the need for social and political democracy".

Such is the situation in North Africa and the Middle East that a revolution in Iran would have a rapid international impact. A movement in Iran, based around the working class and with a socialist programme, could be a catalyst in building the forces for socialist change as the only way to break out of the cycle of wars and repression and liberate the vast majority.

France Strike wave over pensions - Macron government in retreat



Civil servants march through Paris against the government's attacks on pensions photo Jeanne Menjoulet/CC

Clare Doyle
Committee for a Workers' International (CWI)

After the biggest and most widespread strikes and demonstrations last week in the current fight over pension rights in France, Prime Minister, Édouard Philippe, announced the suspension of the government's proposal to increase the pension age from 62 to 64.

This is a climb-down, and one which undoubtedly wounds the prestige of the country's president, Emmanuel Macron, who has tried to stand aside from the fray. Half-way through his term of office, Macron's approval ratings remain at around one-third of the population while support for the strikers reaches two-thirds!



Gauche Revolutionnaire is calling for a workers' government photo GR

As more and more layers of the working population have joined the movement, the leaders of the most militant union federations the Confédération Générale du Travail (CGT), the Force Ouvrière (FO) and other smaller union organisations are not prepared to accept a partial victory.

The government is proposing a standing conference to discuss how to balance the financing of the pensions system by 2027 - inevitably at the expense of the working population.

Laurent Berger, leader of the moderate Confédération Française Démocratique du Travail (CFDT) has said it is prepared to participate in this - a process supposed to present results by the end of April. "There's no catch!" says the prime minister!

Strikes

But that's not the feeling of the hundreds of thousands who are still striking and marching.

Wednesday 15 January to Friday 17 January are named as further strike days with the CGT leader, Philippe Martinez, calling on all workers and young people to send a clear message that nothing less than the withdrawal of all attacks on the pension system will be accepted.

These plans include a repeat of last Saturday's demonstrations (11 January) with mass turnouts in towns and cities around France. They mobilised large numbers of protesters not involved in action on strike days as well as Yellow Jacket activists, still fighting against the Macron government for a better deal.

The country's pension rights affect working people in every walk of

life and the attempt to curtail them unites them all.

The current, powerful movement in France has involved some of the most unlikely strikers, from ballet-dancers to barristers.

In a number of places, electricity workers have cut off power to government and other establishments and thrown the switches to off-peak rates for supplying working-class households!

Pensions

The pension system in France is regarded as 'generous' by French bosses and press commentators abroad.

But it is the result of decades, if not centuries, of struggle by the heroic French working class. It formed part of the reforms gained by revolutionary struggles during the sit-in strikes of 1936 and 1968, and was fought over in the victorious public sector battles of 1995.

Workers already finance the pension funds from their own income; why should they pay any more? If there is going to be a shortfall as the population ages, why can't the bosses pay out of their ever-growing (and lightly taxed) profits?

In the past year, the top companies in France have paid out record dividends. One of the placards on a demonstration last week read: "France - 6th world economic power. No retirement (pay)! No (social) care! Where is the money???"

The struggle over pensions, successfully maintained now for more than five weeks, has pushed Macron and his government onto the back foot. Political parties of all stripes have begun to focus on the municipal elections of next March and it is widely known that

the prime minister is aiming to go back to his old position as mayor of Le Havre. This would mean a major reshuffle in the prime minister's team as some of the ruling En Marche officials leave with him.

The wave of protests against the current regime has not developed into an all-out general strike like that of May 1968, and is unlikely to this time round. But the CWI in France, Gauche Révolutionnaire (GR), has tirelessly called for the generalisation of the strike.

GR campaigns for decisions to be taken through discussion at mass meetings in the workplaces, the election of committees of struggle, and linking up representatives of workers at local, regional and national level. It spells out a socialist programme and the need for a workers' government.

Heads must roll!

GR has also been the most consistent in demanding that Emmanuel Macron must go.

On one demonstration, a retired rail-worker displayed a hardening of the mood. He told a reporter "Heads must roll!". Although this is France, he obviously did not mean in a literal sense!

If anything, the 'concession' on the pension age will increase the demonstrators' appetite for a complete victory. Nevertheless, a temporary truce may be declared by the union leaders.

It has been made clear, through a massive show of strength, that 'reforms' will not be accepted, such as the abolition of early retirement from strenuous jobs or increased pension contributions from employees. But it is becoming hard for the

transport workers of the SNCF national rail network, the Paris underground services (RATP - state-owned transport operator) and RER - commuter rapid transport system and on the buses.

Most of them have been on strike the longest, and have had little or no pay. A strike fund which has collected well over €3 million from 50,000 contributors shows the level of support for the struggle, but cannot cover the wages of all strikers over any great length of time.

The leaders of the striking workers are confident that, if the action is called off now, it does not mean the fight is over. With a clear strategy and programme for the struggle, the mighty strength of the French working class can be mobilised with renewed determination for a fight to the finish.

The Philippe/Macron government should be under no illusion that the battle is over. The pension reform bill has to go through various levels of discussion before being put to parliament. Even if a pause is called in the generalised strike movement, skirmishes and partial strikes can break out at almost a moment's notice.

On the other hand, Macron could decide to use special emergency powers, as he did in 2018 with the attacks on labour rights, and impose the plan for 'rationalising' pensions by decree.

However, 16 January will see a new peak in the strike, with a blockade by port workers for example. Railworkers have also voted to continue the strike, and there is a growing mobilisation of school students and students. The battle will continue, and possibly with a new huge confrontation ahead.



The Committee for a Workers' International (CWI) is the world socialist organisation which the Socialist Party is affiliated to. The CWI is organised in many countries and works to unite the working class and oppressed peoples against capitalism and to fight for a socialist world.
socialistworld.net

A&Es in meltdown

BUILD FOR STRIKES TO SAVE NHS

Northern Ireland nurses show the way

Jon Dale

Secretary, Unite union
Nottinghamshire Health Branch

It's an emergency! In November, none of England's 118 major accident and emergency departments met their targets - the first time ever. In December the situation got worse.

Most hospitals in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland also failed to treat and admit, transfer or discharge 95% of patients within four hours. The sickest patients needing admission are most likely to wait for beds to become free while lying on trolleys in corridors or waiting areas.

This leads to queueing ambulances outside. Over 80,000 ambulance patients - one in six - waited at least 30 minutes before they could be handed to A&E staff during this winter's first five weeks. Ambulance response times after 999 calls are up as a result.

So far, winter has been mild. Icy conditions immediately send casualty numbers soaring as people fall, have road accidents or arrive in hypothermia.

The never-ending list of statistics describes an NHS buckling under the strain. Every figure represents people suffering.

Stress and sickness

Knowing this human cost puts massive strain on health workers. Decisions must be made fast. There's no time to comfort and reassure sick patients and their families when the queue stretches out the door.

Staff stagger home exhausted and it's hard to switch off. 'Was I right to do this? Should I have checked that?' No wonder sickness levels are up. 200,000 nurses have left the profession since 2011. Johnson claims he's going to persuade some to stay and others to return!

Nurses and ambulance staff in Northern Ireland are showing how to fight low pay and unsafe staffing levels. 20,000 were on strike on 8 January, including 9,500 Royal College of Nursing members - the RCN's first strike in 103 years (see page 6).

Huge public support for their action helped drive politicians from sectarian and pro-big business parties to re-form a power-sharing government after three years' stalemate.

Unions should organise now to defend all health workers and the services they provide. An emergency conference calling an emergency national demonstration, building for national strike action, is needed. These should be the first steps to defeat Tory privatisation plans and reverse years of austerity.



photo Paul Mattsson

ISSN 1366-9621



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