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the Socialist

Formerly **Militant**

A strategy to fight local government cuts

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- Local people's budget conferences

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NHS NOT SAFE IN TORY HANDS



Junior doctors on strike in Southampton
photo Nick Chaffey

Support the junior doctors' strikes

Becci Heagney

Who's the bigger threat to the NHS: junior doctors or Jeremy Hunt?

While four days of strike action may inconvenience some people, Hunt and the Tories are responsible for a massive crisis in the health service that will get worse in the years to come - if they get their way.

Many hospitals have been put on "high

alert" during the now annual winter crisis in the NHS. Drastic cutbacks mean that hospitals struggling with patient demand are now the rule rather than the exception. And still the government demands a further £22 billion worth of 'savings' by 2020.

But, according to Jeremy Hunt, it is the doctors we should blame. It's even been revealed that Hunt's officials were involved in the public letter from the NHS chief executive questioning whether doctors would still strike in the event of a terrorist attack - such is the desperation to smear workers in the health service.

It's not working though. 95% of people in

a Guardian poll support the strike. And a letter in the same paper on 9 January from a patient detailed the hard work of junior doctors and nurses even - shock horror! - on a Sunday night. It pointed out the problem is the lack of beds and other resources.

Yet Jeremy Hunt, backed up by the big business press, has the audacity to say that doctors' union the British Medical Association (BMA) is making this a "political opportunity". Doctors have made it clear that this is not just about defending working conditions but a battle to save our NHS.

Last year, the Department of Health spent £1.2 billion bailing out debt-ridden trusts

struggling to pay Private Finance Initiative (PFI) bills. PFI debt should be cancelled and the money used to provide essential jobs and services.

The BMA is taking an important step, now the other health unions need to join them in coordinated strike action. We need a movement that fights for a truly national health service - free at the point of use, fully funded, publicly owned and democratically controlled.

- See pages 8 and 9 for a feature on health workers' conditions
- See page 6 for junior doctors picket line reports

DOCTORS BATTLE BURNOUT AS 100 FULL-UP GP SURGERIES APPLY TO SHUT THEIR DOORS

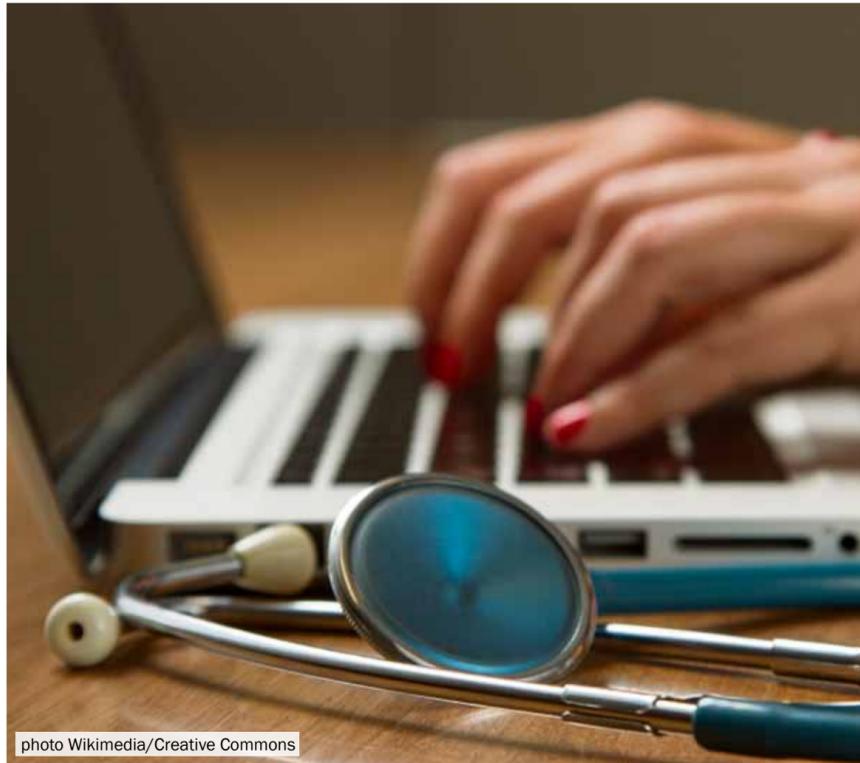


photo Wikimedia/Creative Commons

Jackie Grunsell
 NHS General Practitioner

'GPs are underworked and over-paid' the tabloid headlines would have us believe. So why has doctors' union the British Medical Association (BMA) felt it necessary to call a special conference later this month - specifically to discuss the crisis in general practice?

The fact is that funding for general practice has dropped dramatically.

GPs undertake 90% of patient contact that takes place in the NHS. We are constantly told more services have to be, and are, provided in the community. Yet funding has fallen from 11% of the NHS budget to a historic low of 8.39%.

9,540

National shortfall in GPs, according to the British Medical Association

As well as more work being piled on general practice, there are fewer GPs to do it.

The Royal College of General Practitioners has estimated an extra 9,540 GPs are needed nationally to cope with the demands of a growing and ageing population with more complex health needs. Yet burnout

means a third of GPs say they want to retire in the next five years according to a BMA survey.

And they aren't being replaced. Until 2013 almost all GP trainee vacancies were filled, but in 2104 over one in ten was left empty. Growing numbers of practices are failing to recruit new GPs.

Quality

GPs want to provide safe, high-quality care for patients. The stress of feeling unable to give patients what they need - while fending off a barrage of increased paperwork and tasks not directly related to patient care - has forced 100 practices to apply to NHS England to close their surgeries to any new patients. They feel unable to cope with the existing workload.

Despite this, patients' satisfaction with their GPs remains high in surveys. The quality of care given has not been shown to have fallen - yet. But the situation is unsustainable.

A call for GPs to do what the junior doctors have done, and take industrial action to demand the government increase funding and resources, has to be a central part of the BMA's conference. This is only way we can maintain the standard of care as it is, or ever hope to improve it.

■ Reports from the doctors' strike: page 6. NHS feature: pages 8 and 9

BBC planned live Labour resignation to damage Corbyn

Stephanie Hammond
 Media worker

An editor for the BBC's Daily Politics admitted in a shocking blog post that the resignation of shadow foreign minister Stephen Doughty had been prearranged for television. This cheap act of political theatre aimed to use the state broadcaster to undermine left-wing Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn.

Doughty, the right-wing Labour MP for Cardiff South and Penarth, resigned live on air. This was in response to a timid reshuffling of Jeremy Corbyn's shadow cabinet.

Doughty claimed on the programme that shadow Europe minister Pat McFadden was "singled out"

for sacking - and the only "honourable thing" for Doughty to do was to tender his resignation.

But a now-deleted blog post by Daily Politics output editor Andrew Alexander revealed that the BBC's political editor Laura Kuenssberg (pictured), along with presenter Andrew Neil, had arranged for Doughty to announce his resignation live.

Sacking

Alexander wrote: "When the producers arrived they began putting out texts and calls to Labour MPs we thought were likely to react strongly to the sacking of several shadow ministers for 'disloyalty'."

"I wonder, mused our presenter Andrew Neil, if they would con-

sider doing it live on the show?"

"The question was put to Laura, who thought it was a great idea... Within the hour we heard that Laura had sealed the deal: the shadow foreign minister Stephen Doughty would resign live in the studio."

He went on to write: "We knew his resignation just before PMQs [prime minister's questions] would be a dramatic moment with big political impact."

Impartiality is supposedly the core value of the corporation, whose rules state its news output must be politically 'unbiased'.

Labour filed an official complaint to the BBC, accusing it of arranging and exploiting Doughty's resignation for political impact. The BBC responded by say-

ing it was simply breaking the news.

The national press has relentlessly attacked Jeremy Corbyn from the outset of his election as leader. Whether right-wing or nominally 'left-wing', the mainstream media has been hostile to Corbyn and his grassroots support.

The 1% and their cronies at the head of the mass media and BBC want to defend their privileged lifestyles. They have no answer to the anti-austerity anger which propelled Jeremy Corbyn to head of Labour. So they resort to sensationalism and distraction.

■ For an honest take on the real issues affecting ordinary people, and a strategy to resolve them, subscribe to the Socialist (page 13)



Scheming: political editor Laura Kuenssberg photo Policy Exchange/Creative Commons

Bosses 'earn' year's pay in under a week

Rachael Haines
 Unite union rep (personal capacity)

By the first Tuesday of 2016, chief executives at the UK's top 'FTSE 100' firms were sitting happily on earnings it will take the average full-time worker a year to make.

So-called Fat Cat Tuesday is anything but cute. In fact, it highlights the enormous pay gap between the rich and the rest of us.

£27,645 by late afternoon on 5 January. That is a lot of cream for very few. It's an insult to those of us who work as hard as we do and for as long as we do for such little pay in return.

The bosses and their politicians constantly tell us that if we work passionately enough, and with enough commitment and stamina, we will be rewarded with a lifestyle of comfort and security. Fat Cat Tuesday comes as a grim



Totting up photo Chris Brown/Creative Commons

reminder that this just isn't so.

We are creeping back to a kind of Dickensian horror show. The nation's pay gap increases year by year. The bosses' economic system is fuelling inequality and poverty - behind a façade of partnership, "we're all in it together", that no one seriously believes anymore.

Class

The pay gap gets to the very core of what it means and feels like to be working class. Workers and young people are excluded from lifestyles dangled in front of us in adverts and the press.

But there is a solution. Bosses like the FTSE fat cats don't make their money out of thin air. They rely on workers to make the goods and run the services, and then declare themselves and their shareholders the beneficiaries.

Taking these firms into public ownership, and taking the obscene wealth off the fat cat 1%, could mean a decent life for us all.

POWER TRIP



A UK power plant is under European Union (EU) investigation - for daring to partially switch to a potentially lower-carbon fuel.

Drax in North Yorkshire received state subsidy to burn biomass as well as coal. The EU is concerned this gives it an 'unfair advantage' over competing power stations!

The jury's still out as to whether biomass is a genuinely eco-friendly alternative to fossil fuels. See 'Can biomass energy be part of a socialist plan of production?' at socialist-party.org.uk for more.

But if even this half-hearted measure is an unacceptable threat to the supreme rule of the free market, what chance have we got?

The Socialist says: nationalise all the energy firms under democratic workers' control. For a mass programme of investment into green technology and infrastructure.

Burning money

■ Oxfam reports that between the 2010 Copenhagen and 2015 Paris climate conferences, the number of billionaires with interests in fossil fuel rose from 54 to 88. Their combined personal wealth has grown by about half in that time, from over \$200 billion to more than \$300 billion.

New wave quintet Squeeze put the - er - squeeze on David Cameron on the Andrew Marr show on 10 January.

The band changed the lyrics of its November 2015 single 'Cradle to the Grave' to protest against Tory housing policy (read more on page 5). With true-blue

Cameron turning red just feet away, frontman Glenn Tilbrook sang:

"I grew up in council houses Part of what made Britain great There are some here who are hell-bent On the destruction of the welfare state"

Top tweets @Socialist_party

The right-wing media is trying to smear striking medics as super-rich layabouts. The truth is that, while better paid than many, their strike is about defending the NHS as much as rightly protecting their working conditions. Doctors respond.

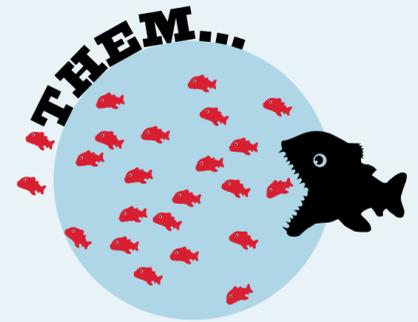
Deepan Sivakumar @d33pan Working 12 days straight - no time for food shopping so treated myself to a meal deal, so decadent #SmearTheDocs

Jacquina @jacquina Junior Doctor, 28, uses THREE bags for life for one week of shopping. Excessive.

Daniel Leopard @DanielLeopard GP reg splashes out on luxury £1,600 exam and spends Sunday revising next to my pants #MoetMedics #SmearTheDocs



Dr Ben White @ProtocolDriven Tea-swilling Shock Doc Wears Live Cat Fur for Breakfast #SmearTheDocs



45%

Share of the national wealth controlled by Britain's 10% richest households - those worth over £1 million

9%

Share owned by the poorest 50% of households, according to Office for National Statistics (ONS) figures released in December 2015



Britain's richest 10% control **five times** as much wealth as the entire bottom half



£225,100

Britain's median household worth, according to the ONS

£2,872,600

Minimum you'll need to qualify as one of Britain's top 1% super-rich households - nearly 13 times the national average

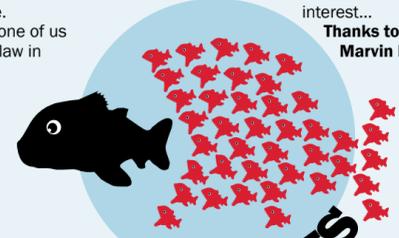
It's one law for them...

A High Court judge has ruled against the Tories' benefits cap. The Hon Mr Justice Collins thought at least part of it unacceptable.

The judge found that failing to exempt carers from the cap unlawfully discriminated against disabled people, in breach of their human rights. Strangely enough, it seems the "strongly worded" judgment has not brought an end to Tory attacks on the most vulnerable.

What if one of us broke the law in relation to the pitiful state benefits we may receive? We could expect to receive the full force of the justice system, knuckle first, right in the kisser.

But if you happen to be a senior politician working to defend the wealth of the super-rich, things are different. It's almost as though toff senior judges and establishment MPs have some common interest...



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

CORBYN MUST LEAD A FIGHT AGAINST THE RIGHT AND FOR AN ANTI-AUSTERITY PROGRAMME



What we think

The Tory press is stoutly defending the 'principled' Labour right-wingers who resigned in protest from Jeremy Corbyn's shadow cabinet. Kevan Jones, Jonathan Reynolds and Stephen Doughty left their positions over the sacking of Pat McFadden and the moving of Maria Eagle from Defence to be replaced by anti-Trident Emily Thornberry. The Financial Times even calls for so-called 'moderates' to "withdraw their labour."

Shadow Attorney General Catherine McKinnell later resigned citing 'concerns over the direction and internal conflict' under Corbyn. Others have raised threats to resign if Corbyn is successful in changing the party's policy on Trident.

The general secretary of the party has spoken out against Corbyn's plans to involve the Labour membership in decision making over the issue. He said that any change in how decisions are made must first be passed through the Autumn conference - too late to impact the position taken at the vote expected in Spring on whether to replace Trident nuclear submarines.

While many on the left will welcome the removal or resignation of right wingers, there will also be frustration that the re-shuffle didn't go much further in striking against the right.

Correctly, after the treachery of the right wing around the Syria vote there was a groundswell in favour of getting rid of the Blairites from the shadow cabinet. This was linked with a mood to fight for mandatory reselection to take them out of Parliament altogether and replace them with Labour candidates who agree with the anti-austerity anti-war agenda that saw Corbyn thrust into the leadership.

Shadow cabinet resignations

In particular, there will be anger that Hilary Benn wasn't removed. It seems that this change was well trailed by members of Jeremy's team but ultimately it appears that they balked at this step under yet another threat from ten or eleven right-wing shadow cabinet members that there would be a 'walkout' if they had pressed ahead.

Allegedly, a deal was done with Benn that he wouldn't publically criticise the leadership's policy positions but he was quick to pronounce that he wouldn't be muzzled!

The right wing have denounced Jeremy Corbyn as a hypocrite for expecting shadow ministers to vote with him, pointing to his voting record from the backbenches. But this isn't an issue about 'loyalty to the leader' or individual 'dissent' but loyalty to the interests of the working class and ever-growing sections of the middle class too.

Jeremy Corbyn, John McDonnell and the small number of principled lefts rightly opposed the pro-market policies of Blair, Brown and Miliband over the last two decades. In contrast, the Blairite rebels have openly collaborated with the Tory class enemies. Benn will never be forgiven after his Syria speech was applauded and cheered by the Tory benches.



After the treachery of the right wing around the Syria vote there was a groundswell in favour of getting rid of the Blairites

Stephen Doughty resigned live on the BBC's Daily Politics conveniently just minutes before Prime Minister's Question Time, where Cameron ridiculed the reshuffle.

Yet once again there is a refusal to take decisive action against the right wing. It is becoming a trend that the new leadership sets out on a decision but prevaricates



photo Paul Mattsson



While the major differences at this stage have been on foreign policy, the underlying cleavage is over austerity

and doesn't fully follow through.

The result is that they antagonise and then embolden the Labour right and their big business backers but frustrate their own supporters. At root it is an unwillingness to face the reality of the situation and draw the necessary conclusions politically and organisationally.

As we have stated in previous articles and is now increasingly being accepted within much of the press, there are two parties fighting within Labour. But while the right wing seems to be doing the fighting, much of Corbyn's team are reluctant to accept the reality. On Newsnight, Dianne Abbott denied that there was a "left-right dichotomy" in the party.

Austerity

While the major differences at this stage have been on foreign policy, the underlying cleavage is over austerity. That is why Corbyn and McDonnell should lead the charge over opposition to the cuts as a means to mobilise their support to defeat the Labour right and transform Labour into an anti-austerity force.

A clear position of calling on Labour councils to refuse to pass on any more Tory cuts (particularly as Osborne's new £20 billion wave of local authority austerity is cranked up) would mark a real line in the sand. It would be possible to build a mass movement with local communities and council workforces being devastated by the cuts. It would also give a boost to any Labour councillors who are considering voting against the cuts.

This is what is necessary to break the deadlock in Labour. The right have the overwhelming majority of the Parliamentary Labour Party and will never be reconciled

to a Corbyn and McDonnell-led Labour Party. But their policies are at odds with the outlook of growing sections of the working and middle classes.

Some historical pillars of Tory rule in the past, such as the legal and medical professions, are being eroded by the economic crisis and austerity. Even in the recent past, the idea of unofficial stoppages by solicitors and even barristers and strikes by doctors would have seemed impossible.

These are groups that can and are being won over to the labour and trade union movement and are some of the basis for the anti-austerity mood behind the Corbyn surge.

Desperately, some of the Blairite MPs in seats outside London and the South East are trying to contrast themselves with the 'North London elite' of Corbyn. Yet their pro-austerity ideology has nothing in common with the catastrophe facing working-class people north, south, east or west and can deliver only further misery!

Only by fully adopting a clear anti-cuts programme as the basis for a mass anti-austerity movement can Jeremy Corbyn put clear red water between his leadership and the Labour right.



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SLUMS, SPECULATION, SELL-OFFS AND SARDINES

Tory housing 'u-turn' is woefully inadequate

David Cameron finally seems to have acknowledged the dizzying abyss that free market housing policies have created. Workers are extorted, less and less secure - and squashed like sardines.

Cameron promises action on soggy, down-trodden council estates (see back

page) and the ever-receding bottom rung of the property ladder.

But will his 10,000 new homes really help Britain's 4.4 million private renters? And will any of England's backlog of half a million planned new homes ever actually be built?



photo Paul Mattsson

Cameron's 10,000 new homes won't hide the problem

Beth Sutcliffe
Private tenant

David Cameron has announced that his government will directly commission and possibly build 10,000 new homes. He has spun this massive u-turn as a "radical" plan and a "huge shift in government policy".

But even though this shows some acceptance of anger on housing, the policy is woefully inadequate. It will go nowhere near countering the problems facing most of the population.

Like most people who are living in rented accommodation, I have had to deal with a pervasive mould and damp problem, and completely uncaring landlords and estate agents. Any issue you have is dealt with only after three or more complaints, and then it is 'solved' cheaply and without lasting effect.

And most ridiculously of all, the prices we pay for this service are higher than ever. This leads

476,000 homes in England go unbuilt to save speculators' market

'Mark'
Council planning department worker

New research shows a record 475,647 homes in England have planning permission but are yet to be built. The Local Government Association (LGA), which represents councils to central government, released the figures on 7 January.

Planning applications

Also, according to the LGA, developers are taking longer to complete work on site. It now takes 32 months, on average, from receiving planning permission to building work being completed. This is 12 months longer than in 2007-08.

Meanwhile the construction industry's forecasted annual recruitment need is up 54% from 2013. But there are 10,000 fewer construction qualifications awarded by colleges, apprenticeships and universities.

democratically decided rents. We want quality homes that will be affordable for everyone, not investment opportunities for

Typically, developers and housebuilders blame local planning departments for failing to process quickly enough, and not approving enough applications. This is simply not true.

The number of applications granted permission in 2014-15 was 212,468. This is up from 187,605 in 2007-08, and higher than all previous years. In fact, local authorities approve 90% of all planning applications.

In council workplaces up and down the country, a target-driven culture is becoming the norm. Management applies huge pressure to staff to turn around planning applications more quickly than ever.

Such pressure means that increasingly demoralised and stressed workers become robots. We are focussed only on targets and numbers. We are not able to properly assess developments, to ensure they are well-designed and sustainable.

There are enough properties

millionaires.

To add insult to injury, multi-millionaire Cameron also said he is fearful for the future of his own

built on paper - in unimpeached planning permissions - to solve the housing crisis and provide decent homes for everyone. However, capitalism cannot deliver the houses we need, because building is the domain of big business. Bosses are fixated on short-term profit rather than the long-term needs of the majority.

Profit

Indeed, developers don't want to actually build the houses we need. If they did, Britain's astonishingly overinflated housing market would crash, and their profits would be hit. They would much rather speculate against the value of the land with planning permissions.

The profit motive has gutted efficiency and led to standard design and corner-cutting. A socialist plan would nationalise these big construction companies and developers - under the democratic control of workers and the wider community.

children. He disingenuously claimed he worries they might not make it onto the housing ladder.

JUNIOR DOCTORS WALK OUT ACROSS ENGLAND IN HISTORIC STRIKE

Driven to strike for the first time in 40 years by the government's attack on their contracts, junior doctors were out in force at picket lines right across England on 12 January in their fight for doctors' wellbeing, patient safety and the future of the NHS. Below are extracts of the many reports we received which detail the enthusiasm and confidence of the junior doctors and the support they received from the public. **Reports can be seen in full online at www.socialistparty.org.uk**



Whipps Cross photo Sarah Sachs-Eldridge

Huddersfield Royal Infirmary

Junior doctor Catherine with her eleven-week-old Great Dane puppy Sully on their first picket line said: "I'm striking because hospitals are unsafe anyway so the longer hours that juniors are expected to work will make them even more unsafe."
Dawn Wheelhouse

Lambeth, Kings College and Maudsley hospitals

Three doctors became six, then eight, with more on the way, outside Lambeth hospital in south London. They were happy, welcoming and clearly enjoying their first time on a picket line. The psychiatric facility's BMA rep remarked that the Tory government is "destabilising the NHS" and bought a copy of the Socialist. Outside London's Kings College and Maudsley hospitals, smiling, cheering masses of junior doctors, 50 at least, faced each other. Strikers with handmade placards invoking Aneurin Bevan were joined by nurses and other clinical and support staff. Buses, trucks and ambulances hooted support.
James Ivens

Manchester Royal Infirmary

There was a fantastic turnout

from BMA junior doctors and great support from other unions across the city. Manchester Socialist Party members and Manchester Socialist Students were also warmly welcomed by the doctors on the picket lines. One striking junior doctor told us: "It's great to see such a high level of support from the trade unions, I think we should affiliate to the TUC; we need to work together."
John Neill

Newham University Hospital

One junior doctor at the lively picket line told the Socialist: "The strike is not something we ever wanted to do, but the government have left us no choice by imposing a very unsafe, unfair contract. But we're also very enthusiastic because of the great support from the public and people from other unions and because a 90% vote for action gives us a clear mandate." Rather than have picket lines on the gates like usual strikes, junior doctors at Newham arranged to have a stall and picket line at the hospital entrance which meant they could ask everyone walking into the hospital to take a sticker and sign the petition for which there was huge support.
Scott Jones and Helen Pattison

Peterborough

There was a very confident mood from the 30 to 40 BMA members on the picket line at Bretton Gate. BMA members had come well prepared with lots of food, drinks and a brazier, and the general mood was that if the government wanted to return the country to the 1980s - bring it on!
Steve Cawley

Poole General Hospital

Over 50 junior doctors gathered with their placards and supporters outside Poole General Hospital. The show of solidarity has been amazing with honks of support from every passing ambulance, bus driver and member of the public. Hundreds of members of staff and the public have signed a petition in support of junior doctors and the NHS. A senior healthcare support worker visiting the picket on her break declared that she "may be in work today but inside I'm 100% with the doctors. It's time they started listening to those of us on the frontline."
Clare Blackwell

Queen Elizabeth Hospital, Gateshead

When you're on a picket line and offered a gingerbread man depicting a heart, bowel or bones, you know you're with junior doctors. The mood outside Gateshead's Queen Elizabeth hospital was buoyant. It was clear that the junior doctors have loads of support from other NHS workers. A consultant waded through mud to give them a wave, a GP turned up with a box of doughnuts and nurses finishing their shifts came out with boxes of sweets for them.
Elaine Brunskill

Poole photo Clare Blackwell



Royal Free Hospital

We were welcomed by young determined junior doctors at the Royal Free hospital in north London. We heard an example of the conditions that junior doctors face. Registrars who are on call over the weekend and have to be at the hospital within 20 minutes sleep in sleeping bags on floors of the hospital because they live too far away and the hospital has got rid of all doctors' on site accommodation.
Chris Newby

Royal Liverpool Infirmary

Nusiba Taufik, a first year trainee doctor, told Hugh Caffrey from the Socialist Party why she's on strike: "I'm out here today in support of all the junior doctors around the country, and in support of anyone who is trying to make sure the NHS actually has a future. I'm a new doctor, I've been qualified for six months, and already I'm seeing how bad it is with the cuts, and so that's why I'm out here today."
Sarah Sachs-Eldridge

Royal Stoke University Hospital

Despite torrential rain junior

doctors and supporters started to appear from 8am onwards outside Royal Stoke University hospital. Within 10 minutes there was a picket of around 20 which grew to over 50 by 10am. Members from Unite, CWU, GMB, North Staffs TUC and NSSN Staffordshire were there to support their BMA brothers and sisters.
Andy Bentley

Whipps Cross Hospital

The picket was excellent: young, enthusiastic, energetic and well-organised. Joe Piper who works in paediatrics spoke to me about why he was on strike. He explained that: "we already run a 24/7 NHS for acute services and the NHS is the most efficient way of providing national health care for everyone. I work with a lot with midwives and nurses and they've all been really supportive. If we get rid of the safeguards for longer hours then we're all going to be tired. I know that at the end of a 12 hour shift I'm not as good as at the start. I didn't see this day coming but I think this might well be the start of many more strikes and action to follow."
Sarah Sachs-Eldridge

West Dunbartonshire teachers fightback to defend education

Matt Dobson and Louise Donegan
Socialist Party Scotland

Members of the Scottish teachers' union EIS took strike action at five secondary schools across West Dunbartonshire on 12 January, in defence of education services threatened by the Labour council's "restructuring" of school management.

West Dunbartonshire Labour council plans to cut the number of principal teachers it employs leading to the loss of specialist heads of department.

This loss of expertise, as the strike leaflet produced by the local association explains, will lead to one "faculty principal" being responsible for a range of subjects - that can be quite unrelated like PE and home economics - some of which they have no previous knowledge of.

Anger

The local governors association, responding to teacher anger, has campaigned against these proposals culminating in the solid picket lines and strike action.

There is growing awareness among other education workers, the wider community and parents that this "restructuring" is in reality cuts to education and is damaging



Teachers on the picket line photo Matt Dobson

to children's secondary school experience.

The council is coming under severe public pressure. From 13 January, teachers will work-to-rule and there is a mandate for further strike action to come in February, if the council does not change course.

Eva, EIS school rep at Clydebank High School, told the Socialist: "We are determined through this strike action that the council and education services managers get the message after being forced to close the schools to pupils. 88% of us voted for this strike".
After well attended picket lines at

all five schools, hundreds of teachers and supporters packed into Clydebank town hall for a mass meeting.

The gathering was chaired by Jim Halfpenny EIS West Dunbartonshire joint secretary and Socialist Party Scotland member.

Jim read out messages of solidarity and support that had poured in since the strike date was announced.

EIS general secretary Larry Flanagan pointed to both Labour and the SNP's rhetoric over "protecting" education. He contrasted this with the reality of cuts biting and

significantly said local authority unions need to unite and fight together against the latest round of cuts. Socialist Party Scotland believes the fightback by West Dunbartonshire should be taken up by the union on a national level.

The mood in the room was determined, with many focused contributions on how the union can step up its media and parent engagement campaign and make the work-to-rule fully effective. This week's council Labour group meeting will be lobbied by teachers.

Struggle

Jim Halfpenny closed the rally by raising the need to link this strike with the wider struggle against austerity, coming from the Tories and implemented by the Scottish government and councils. Reflecting the fighting spirit, all in the room stood up together, and applauded.

Socialist Party Scotland raised the example of Glasgow and Dundee where local authority unions are campaigning for no-cuts budgets. Trade unions including EIS also urgently need to coordinate industrial action, mass protests at budget setting meetings and a conference to plan a national campaign against the cuts.

SHEFFIELD HOUSING STRIKE



photo Sam Morecroft

Sam Morecroft
Sheffield Socialist Party

On 6 January Sheffield City Council housing workers took strike action against changes to their terms and conditions of employment, including pay cuts of up to £4,000 a year.

The strike came following a work-to-rule which has been in place since mid-December against an imposed restructure which has not been agreed with the workers' union, the GMB. To add insult to injury, some area managers are set to receive pay rises of as much as £9,000 a year as a result of the restructure!

Socialist Party members and Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) supporters came to support the workers at a lunchtime protest outside Sheffield town hall. Around 100 people attended, including members of the public who

stopped by to show support.

We got an enthusiastic response to our petition for Sheffield City Council to adopt a 'No Cuts' budget in 2016.

We are organising a no cuts budget conference jointly with Sheffield trades council and other anti-austerity groups on 13 February.

GMB regional political organiser Pete Davies pointed out in his speech that while GMB is affiliated to the Labour Party, the Labour council in Sheffield has refused to negotiate with the union in this dispute.

He warned that by February, if the council is not prepared to seriously negotiate with the union in this dispute, it could have strikes on its hands in at least three or four different departments, including recycling and waste management.

Housing workers pledged to continue with strikes if their concerns are not addressed.

Energy filled pickets at EDF

A Unite member

Unite members employed as meter operatives in London began five days of strike action on 11 January. Pickets at EDF headquarters in Bexleyheath, Kent formed a determined barrier to block vehicles entering the building, leading to massive traffic congestion.

Angry managers pleaded with pickets to move. When this failed, the company called the police. When they arrived the police entered into debate about the merits of trade union membership and complained that they were not allowed to strike - saying they hoped this changed soon!

Despite the antics of the employer this is a very important dispute. The employer is out to break the union at EDF - which is why Unite will be escalating strike action and campaign activity to ensure a workers victory.

Tracker devices

The strike is in protest at extended weekend and evening working, performance management, failure to stick to agreements, on the spot drug and alcohol checks, increased CRB checks and tracker devices on vehicles. Where these issues are covered by agreements, the employer has said it will rip them up!

Recent talks at Acas broke up when the employer constantly added new controversial items each time an agreement was near

- frustrating not just the Unite negotiators but Acas too. One striker said: "We were prepared to talk but instead of talking the employer came back with ridiculous demands!"

Spirits on the picket line were kept very high by playing cat and mouse with the employer who had assigned managers to follow the pickets - presumably to act as the most obvious bugging devices in the history of espionage.

Once the pickets realised they were being followed, they simply walked around and around the depot - with the manager following!

Unite members are furious at the bogged introduction of the mayor's Night Tube plans and the fact that they have been tied in with a pay deal that has left our members dangling on a string and out of pocket since April last year. RMT supports the principle of a properly worked out Night Tube service introduced through agreement with the unions. But the abject failure to work through the detail has forced us to name a programme of further industrial action." The RMT and other tube unions shut the network down completely in July 2015.

[News in brief]

■ Vasey victory!

The Socialist would like to congratulate victimised CWU (postal workers' union) union rep John Vasey who has been reinstated to his workplace at Wakefield Royal Mail delivery office. John was sacked on 21 August on a charge connected with non-delivery of election material and had been removed from duty on 1 May, and then suspended for three months. On his reinstatement John has said: "This is a great success. I have to give massive praise to the Socialist Party and its intervention and work through NSSN played a very good role in the campaign and is now a respected organisation among Wakefield postal workers." He finished by reiterating support for fellow victimised CWU rep Clive Walder and his reinstatement campaign. There will be more in next week's issue of the Socialist.

■ 24-hour tube strikes

The RMT has announced a new series of strike action on London Underground grades in two separate disputes over pay and night tube and the plans to bulldoze through massive cuts to station staffing numbers. The walkouts are on 27 January, 16 February and 18 February. RMT General Secretary Mick Cash said: "RMT members are furious at the bogged introduction of the mayor's Night Tube plans and the fact that they have been tied in with a pay deal that has left our members dangling on a string and out of pocket since April last year. RMT supports the principle of a properly worked out Night Tube service introduced through agreement with the unions. But the abject failure to work through the detail has forced us to name a programme of further industrial action." The RMT and other tube unions shut the network down completely in July 2015.

■ Libraries walk-out

Lambeth Libraries staff have voted overwhelmingly for strike action to save jobs and keep all ten libraries open. Staff voted 89% to strike against plans to close libraries and cut jobs. Union will now be discussing extended strike action with workers in the borough. This strike vote follows a significant community campaign to keep the libraries open as well as a walk out by staff in December.



Salford photo Becci Heagney

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Cuts, debt and exhaustion

HEALTH WORKERS UNDER ATTACK!

“SHATTERED BUT PROUD”, A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A STUDENT NURSE

A student nurse

It's 5am and my alarms are blaring telling me it's time to get up for another shift. Early starts with late finishes might be the norm as a student nurse but they don't get any easier.

I get up and quickly have a bath before putting on my uniform. Despite the public attacks on the NHS and all the bad press there's always a sense of pride when I clip on my NHS name badge.

Because of poor public transport links I have to leave my flat at half five to get to the hospital for my 7am start. I walk half an hour and catch two buses leaving just about enough time to drop my bag off and have a quick cuppa before shift starts.

I'm currently on placement in accident and emergency.

Just as handover is about to begin the red phone rings which indicates from an ambulance crew that someone who is suffering with potentially life threatening injuries is being brought in. I assist in getting the resuscitation area ready to allow the crew straight in, and just after seven they arrive.

First job

Unfortunately the patient has been receiving CPR for nearly an hour and a half and the doctor, in agreement with everyone else, calls for a stop to the CPR and announces the patient's death. My first job of the day is to prepare the patient for the mortuary. It's just gone 8am.

Me and my mentor are working in the ambulance triage area. This involves taking a handover from the ambulance crew and performing an initial assessment before a patient can be seen by the doctor. This is very fast paced - because of targets and staffing levels it's pretty much in-out.

Over the course of the next couple of hours there are a

couple of elderly patients who are confused as to why they're in hospital. It breaks my heart to see them left on a stretcher in the corridor waiting for a cubicle to be seen by a doctor but there are only so many rooms and only so many doctors to see everyone.

Its 11am and I get a 15 minute break to quickly chuck some toast and a drink down my neck before going back out.

As a student I observe and assist the nurses and care assistants. It still amazes me at how efficient they are as a team, as the afternoon progresses this is put to the test.

Overcrowding

There are only two triage rooms and the screen indicates six ambulance crews incoming. We try and see everyone as quickly as possible but some are waiting for over half an hour. Luckily they are very understanding but it must be difficult for patients, knowing they're coming into hospital and not being seen quickly. We all wish we could do more but we're only human.

It gets to 4pm in no time, with us hardly having had a chance to breathe, and I take my dinner break. I didn't have time to prepare food so I rush to the canteen to get some chips and a drink before going back on shift.

The final two and a half hours are similar to the rest of the day, busy. I continue to take notes and at about 6.30pm I get the chance to question my mentor about a few terms and ailments.

I clock off at 7.15pm to catch my bus, I'm shattered but proud. I feel like I've made a positive difference today and that feeling pushes any sense of tiredness to the back of your head.

I get home just after eight and run a bath, grab some food and try and unwind. I fall asleep at about ten on the sofa and have to force myself to bed, knowing I've got to be up at 5am to do it all again.

Jon Dale

Like a tower tottering on the edge of land washed away by the floods, the NHS in England is staring at a massive, growing funding gap. By 2020 this will be £22 billion a year. That's £387 for each of us, £890 for the average sized household.

This could mean higher tax, new charges for health care, cuts in health workers' pay, cuts in the current service equivalent to 18%, or a combination of all of these.

Alternatively, we need a life-and-death struggle to oust this government and replace it with one committed to maintaining a national service free to all at the point of use.

The NHS deficit is rapidly worsening. More trusts are falling into debt. Debts are getting bigger.

According to the National Audit Office, 25 trusts were in deficit in 2012/13 but in September 2015 181 trusts reported deficits - 57% more than six months earlier.

The British Medical Association found 34% of newly qualified GPs stated they had 'high' or 'very high' work-related stress

Health workers are suffering under the strain. Staff shortages in hospitals, GP surgeries, ambulance and community services mean more work falling on their shoulders.

Working through breaks and after the shift ends, lifting patients without enough support as there's no time to wait, noticing a patient in bed needing a urine bottle but getting several other urgent jobs on the way and arriving too late - these are daily experiences.

A 2012 NHS staff survey found only 30% felt there were enough staff for them to do their jobs properly.

Sickness

It's not surprising sickness among NHS workers is high. The £2.4 billion cost of sick leave is equivalent to about 2.5% of the total NHS budget. Back pain and mental illness are the two biggest causes of sickness absence.

Ward and department leaders are given impossible targets to achieve on their budgets by senior management. They are under huge pressure to make staff work harder and cut sickness absence.

This increases stress levels and can lead to a culture of bullying,



photo Paul Mattsson



photo Mark Best

Student nurses march to oppose bursary cut

Mark Best

Over 1,000 student nurses, NHS workers and members of the public marched through central London to protest the government's plans to cut student nurses' bursaries.

With chants of "bursary or bust" and "1,2,3,4 we won't be the working poor" the protest was a lively show of just how vital the bursary is to students and nurses to train the next generation. In speeches the student organisers made calls to fight back against the Tories' plans to destroy the NHS in its current form.

This fight needs to be united and positive steps were made linking the student nurses' struggle to the junior doctors who are engaging in ongoing strike action. The call was made for student nurses to walk out in solidarity with the junior doctors whenever they strike. Speakers included Unite general secretary Len McCluskey, RCN general secretary Janet Davies and the BMA junior doctors organiser.

The following is an extract of a statement sent to the demonstration by Unison NEC members Jacqui Berry, a nurse, and Hugo Pierre, a local government worker, who could not attend.

"We offer our full support to student nurses and other health professionals for your justified fight to defend your student bursary from abolition by this government that knows only one value. The value of the pound.

"It's clear they don't value nurses - students or qualified nurses. But when our hospitals have to pay the price for nursing shortages by recruiting and employing agency staff at way over the odds, they don't have to pay.

"Your bursaries are the pay that you get for working to gain the experience that will save lives.

"As socialists on the Unison NEC, we will do all we can to support you in this battle to defend your bursaries. You can count on our support for any action you want our union to take to help you beat this government and join your struggle with the struggles of other health workers to defend their pay and conditions."

medical devices - from artificial joints to syringes - and the NHS probably pays out another £2 billion a year in profits.

NHS England expenditure on medicines in 2014-15 was £15.5 billion, up 7.8% from 2013-14 and up 19.4% from 2010-11.

Then there are privatised services rapidly taking over contracts, the cost of administering the market between trusts and clinical commissioning groups, staff agencies and many other profiteers leeching off the NHS.

Democratic socialist planning of a publically owned and run NHS with the full funding needed would end the real threat it now faces to its existence.

The Socialist Party calls for:

- Abolish the Health and Social Care Act - no cuts, closures or privatisation
- Support health workers - united action by all health unions to defend our NHS
- Scrap the Private Finance Initiative and cancel the debt
- Nationalise pharmaceutical companies and all private health providers
- Investment not cuts - for a well-funded NHS, free at the point of use
- Free education and training and living grants for all

Despite all the bad press there's always a sense of pride when I clip on my NHS name badge



sanctioned at director level. A quarter of staff reported to the NHS 2012 Staff Survey they had experienced bullying, harassment or abuse from their line manager or other colleagues. That proportion is now almost certainly higher.

The number of NHS staff reporting work-related stress rose from 30% in 2011 to 38% in 2012. It was highest among ambulance (46%) and mental health (42%) staff

Much is written about the cost of absenteeism to the NHS. Sickness absence policies increasingly crack down hard on health workers unfortunate enough to be ill or injured - even when this is the result of their work. This increases stress

Working through breaks, lifting patients without enough support - these are daily experiences

and anxiety.

The cost of 'presenteeism' though is less researched and publicised. Two thirds of NHS staff admitted to coming to work when unwell in 2012. The cost of staff dragging themselves into work even when they are unwell increases absenteeism and decreases patient satisfaction. Research in 2015 showed the cost of presenteeism to the whole economy is twice that of absenteeism.

Healthier trusts?

Simon Stevens, NHS chief executive, has a plan to improve health workers' health. He told NHS trusts to provide health checks, yoga and Zumba classes while at work, as well as physiotherapy and talking therapy sessions and healthier food.

Many trusts already offer physiotherapy and talking therapy sessions but these are being hit by budget cuts. Yoga and Zumba sessions are pointless if staff have no time for proper breaks to attend. How many will stay after working 12 or 13 hour shifts? Better food would be welcome,

but privatised catering services often shut cafes outside peak hours leaving sandwiches, ready-made meals and a microwave for night and weekend shifts.

Tory Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt may think junior doctors should work to 10pm and weekends for standard pay but private hospital caterers like Compass and Serco don't provide a full service at these times.

More staff would improve workers' health. This requires more to be trained, but the training budget is being cut. Abolishing student nurse bursaries is one aspect of this.

41,112 NHS staff took sick leave for anxiety, stress and depression in 2014, up from 20,207 in 2010

One reason why the Tories want seven-day working of non-emergency services is that it would mean more

work could be carried out with fewer hospital facilities.

Stevens also wants to shift more health care out of hospitals into the community. This would prepare for more hospital closures with profit-making companies taking over more community care, paying staff minimum wages.

Real solutions

Being ill at home rather than in hospital would be many people's preference - if there was adequate community care. But community care has been hit hard after years of cuts with an 8% real terms fall in gross spending by councils on adult social services from 2009-10 to 2014-15 during which the need for care has increased.

Cancelling all NHS Private Finance Initiative (PFI) payments would save £2 billion a year.

Nationalising the pharmaceutical industry could save £3 billion a year of profits, and enable research to be done to meet patients' - not shareholders' - needs. Add sums spent on

A CLEAR STRATEGY TO DEFEAT THE TORY CUTS

Since 2010 local government spending has been slashed by 40%. Countless essential services have been cut to the bone. Tory chancellor George Osborne, in his Autumn Statement, announced a new round of savagery in 2016 with a massive 8.8% (£2.6 billion) cut in

the government grant to local councils. Osborne can rely upon local councils, including those run by Labour, to implement these cuts. But as the following articles explain there is a clear and practical socialist alternative.

Stoke-on-Trent's council uses reserves



photo Paul Mattsson

Andy Bentley

The coalition of City Independents and Tories now running Stoke-on-Trent city council plans to do what Labour refused to do during all the years it had previously been in control.

The coalition is using £15.5 million of reserves to stop further cuts in 2016-17 instead of carrying on with Labour's cuts, which have totalled £150 million since 2011.

Labour leader Mohammed Pervez and numerous Labour councillors have told Stoke Socialist Party and Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition election candidates every year that it's not possible to use reserves to stave off cuts!

Tory deputy council leader Abi Brown said: "By using our reserves next year, it will give ourselves a bit of time to do things properly. The government has been quite clear in saying that councils can use their reserves as opposed to slashing services" (Sentinel 14/12/2015).

If Tories and the City Independents can use reserves then never again should Labour councillors be allowed to get away with saying 'we have to carry out cuts, we have no choice'. Council tax bills are also set to be frozen.

But, while using reserves to stop further cuts in 2016-17 is a step

forward and will be welcomed by a majority of people across the city, on its own it will not stop the Tory government's remorseless drive to reduce year-on-year the amount of money it provides to local councils.

Councillor's choice

Neither should we mistake what is meant by the City Independent/Tory council statement that using reserves will "give ourselves a bit of time to do things properly". This effectively means 'balancing the books' by cuts at a later stage. Using reserves to stave off immediate cuts is a tactic which the Socialist Party has consistently campaigned for over many years.

But we have also argued that this 'breathing space' should be used to build a serious campaign to demand that the government provides sufficient funds to ensure that jobs and services can be maintained and improved. In other words, a 'people's budget' based on people's needs.

We don't expect that the present council will do this but Labour councillors (still the largest single party) should put forward an alternative budget for 2016-17 - which includes the use of reserves to ensure that no cuts are carried out. It should also include the launch of a campaign, involving the city's residents, to agree a people's budget based on our needs and financed by central government.



The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) is an electoral alliance involving the RMT transport union, the Socialist Party, other socialist group and leading members of trade unions.

Visit the TUSC website www.tusc.org.uk

Councillors must resist

Naomi Byron
Tower Hamlets Socialist Party

Lord Porter, Tory chair of the Local Government Association, says that "even if councils stopped filling in potholes, maintaining parks, closed all children's centres, libraries, museums, leisure centres and turned off every street light, they will not have saved enough money to plug the financial black hole they face by 2020."

It's ironic that Tory councillors are starting to openly criticise cuts to local government as Labour administrations, like Tower Hamlets in east London, are keeping on cutting essential services.

Poorest bear brunt

Yet again it's the poorest and most vulnerable that will bear the brunt of these cuts if they go ahead. These cuts include: charging for social care, shutting libraries on Sundays, scrapping bursaries for undergraduates and new teachers, cuts to children's centres and early



'Even if councils stopped filling in potholes, maintaining parks, closed all children's centres, libraries, museums, leisure centres and turned off every street light, they will not have saved enough money to plug the financial black hole they face by 2020'
Lord Porter, Tory chair of the Local Government Association

Socialism Today

The Socialist Party's magazine

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- **Special edition: Socialism or ecological catastrophe**
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years services... the list goes on.

Cuts to school trips and school crossings are some of the most cowardly proposals.

Mayor John Biggs says that these services won't go as schools can fund them instead. But how many teachers or essential repairs would the schools have to cut in order to keep them?

To add insult to injury Biggs is proposing a 4% increase in council tax alongside the cuts. This is causing real anger.

The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) is campaigning for a no-cuts alternative 'people's budget'. We are working with the Tower Hamlets Independent Group of councillors, as well as local trade unionists and anti-cuts campaigners, to build resistance to the proposed cuts.

Jeremy Corbyn

TUSC opposes all cuts. This chimes with council workers, local residents and anti-cuts campaigners. Just as Jeremy Corbyn is vilified in the media but has mass support for his pro-working-class, anti-austerity message, we believe it is possible to build a real mass movement against cuts, linking Tower Hamlets up with other cities drawing up alternative budgets.

The only way councillors can stop the huge Tory cuts is to mobilise a mass campaign of the council workforce, local residents and anti-cuts campaigners.

The best way to unite the maximum number of people against government cuts is to refuse to implement them. Those who say we should pick one cut over another as 'realistic' are being divisive.

Council housing, the welfare state and the NHS would never have existed without the courage of



photo Paul Mattsson

people like the Poplar councillors in east London in the 1920s declaring that they would do what is

necessary, not what the media and other politicians told them was 'realistic'.

Southampton people's budget meeting

Bo Matthews
Save Bitterne Walk-in Centre

On Saturday 9 January Southampton TUSC (Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition) held a public meeting to support a council budget that meets the genuine needs of the people who live and work in the city.

Before the meeting residents chatted over tea and coffee and had photos taken of them holding signs with messages they had written telling the council what they would like them to do for the people.

Sue Atkins, TUSC, chaired the meeting and explained that

throughout December we had been out on the streets asking local people what they would like from the Labour council and encouraging them to complete our budget consultation forms.

Sue then invited the audience to have their say on how they feel about local issues. Topics ranged from cuts to elderly social care provision, the local housing crisis, child poverty in the city, to the closure of five of the city's libraries.

Sean Hoyle, the new RMT transport union president, promised solidarity from the TUSC affiliated union over backing the 'people's budget'

He also said establishment politicians are there to convince 51% of the population that they can have whatever they like in life as the other 49% will pay for it!

Betrayal

Southampton councillor Keith Morrell (who rebelled from Labour over cuts) also spoke. He talked about how people want accountability and a principled stand from their representatives on the local council - instead of doing whatever the government tells them to do.

People don't expect betrayal from those that they voted into a position on the council.

Keith said Southampton Labour council and other councils around the country should stand together and demand that the government return the funding stolen from us.

The Labour Party, including its councillors, should get behind Jeremy Corbyn's, anti-austerity call, on which he was decisively elected Labour leader. We should demand that Labour candidates support the People's Budget. But, Keith doesn't believe that this will happen and Labour could lose in May's local elections. The consequence will be a Tory council in charge of our city.

Nick Chaffey, TUSC, closed

the meeting saying that the council should utilise its reserves as a temporary tactic to protect our services. He said TUSC is 100% behind councils opposing the cuts and will stand with Labour councillors that oppose them, but we will not support those who accept them.

The meeting agreed to call a demonstration against the cuts on Saturday 6 February, 12noon outside West Quay, Southampton and to lobby the council on Wednesday 10 February, 1.15pm, Civic Centre, Southampton.



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

Guinea pigs

The New Year release of cabinet papers from 30 years ago is not the first time Oliver Letwin has been exposed as one of the most right-wing of Thatcher's 'advisers'. Last year it was over the poll tax. As reported in the Guardian (30 December 2014), cabinet ministers like Nigel Lawson and Douglas Hurd voiced opposition to Thatcher's flat-rate tax, foreseeing mass resistance to such a harsh attack on working people.



Tory right-winger, Oliver Letwin photo Wikimedia/Creative Commons

But 29-year-old policy adviser Letwin pushed for Thatcher's flagship local government policy - initially known as the 'residence charge' - to be tried out in Scotland first. This confirmed the charge, the paper said, that Thatcher treated people there as "guinea pigs". Pushing ahead on that option was Thatcher's gravest mistake. 18 million people refused to pay, backed up and organised by the anti-poll tax unions. Militant, forerunner of the Socialist, was to the fore. The defeat of the poll tax spelled her downfall.

Who knows what next year will reveal?

Clare Doyle
Hackney, north London

Poll tax provocateurs

I was reading some of the information released about Thatcher's government, and wondered if anything has ever been found proving the poll tax riot (1990) was set up.

In the national steel strike (1980) we experienced people turning up at peaceful picket lines and causing trouble. We all felt it was being set up to discredit the strike.

My neighbours were part of a coachload of people who went to London for the anti-poll tax march. Half the coach was filled with pensioners. Les and Edna said they parked the coach and joined the march and it was all very friendly.

But later as they walked, they heard chanting and shouts. On one side of the road the police parted ranks and about 100 'yobs', as Edna called them, came out of a side street.

After that the mood changed completely and people became worried, so about half of their group decided to return to their coach - but they were stopped. The police line at the back of the march refused to let them leave the march.

Les and Edna were pensioners, there were people with pushchairs and kids - surely letting people go away from any trouble was a good idea? They were forced down the road until they couldn't move. People were crying. 'Shameful' is the term they used to describe how they were treated.

I would love to hear evidence that the disruption and violence was down to Thatcher. Who were these 'yobs' who appeared from nowhere with ease and changed the atmosphere from peaceful protest to riot?

Fred Beach,
Forest of Dean

Book review - Victor: An Unfinished Song

Victor Jara's revolutionary life, poetry and politics



Victor Jara mural, Chile photo Wikimedia/Creative Commons

Pete McNally

A friend died recently and I was encouraged to take some of his many political books. One I found was Victor: An Unfinished Song by Joan Jara, published by Jonathan Cape in 1983. It tells the story of the years before General Pinochet's coup in Chile in 1973.

Joan, a British ballet dancer, first married another Chilean, then divorced and came to know the songwriter and poet Victor Jara. In Chile in the 1960s and early 1970s they live the political struggle to change society.

Victor is now internationally known. He has travelled throughout Latin America collecting folk sounds and musical instruments which would otherwise have been lost.



'Everyone understands that we are fighting for our lives, but we don't seem to know by what means, with what weapons' Joan Jara

In these travels he mixes mostly with his own kind: the poorest, those with least. He is a poet, musician, actor, theatre director and Communist Party member. When possible, both he and Joan supported trade union struggles.

Victor had been to the Soviet Union. He had dedicated an album of songs to the people of Vietnam who were fighting US imperialism. And he had met with Che Guevara in Cuba after the revolution there.

In September 1970, Salvador Allende is the presidential candidate for the left-wing electoral alliance Popular Unity. He wins 36.3% of the vote, against 34.9% for the right-wing candidate and 27.4% for the Christian Democrat. Despite the right's attempts to prevent it, Chile's congress confirms Allende as president.

Untouched

In the next few years, Allende introduces major reforms in favour of the working class. More than half of the economy, however, remains owned by the capitalist class, with US imperialism behind it. Also, the state machine - the unelected heads of the civil service and judiciary, and the armed bodies of men who defend them - is left untouched.

The signs that there can be no "co-habitation" between left and right are all there. Bosses organise informal sabotage of Allende's economy. There is a failed military coup attempt; secret stockpiling of weapons; demands for new powers for the military to search workplaces.

Just three years of Popular Unity proved too much for the capitalists.

Joan admits that "everyone understands that we are fighting for our lives, but we don't seem to know by what means, with what weapons." She recalls "the sense of a terrible threat hanging over us for which we were completely unprepared

especially as it never seemed clear what form the danger would take."



Before he died, in captivity, already injured, Victor Jara wrote a last poem, his unfinished song. When the workers of Chile and the world put an end to poverty, hunger and inequality, they will finish that song

The Communist Party, despite widespread support, had failed to understand and prepare for the coming, inevitable showdown.

The coup of 11 September 1973 was planned in detail and carried out without pity. Thousands died. Victor is recognised, arrested, tortured and killed.

Her British passport allows Joan to escape; thousands of other leftists flee to Europe. The UK government, far from being "against fascism" recognises the new military dictatorship at the earliest opportunity.

Before he died, in captivity, already injured, Victor Jara wrote a last poem, his unfinished song. When the workers of Chile and the world put an end to poverty, hunger and inequality, they will finish that song.



photo Steve Gardiner

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

“WE HOPE TO INSPIRE PEOPLE TO GO OUT AND SPREAD THEIR PASSION FOR THE SOCIALIST”



photo Senan

Corinthia Ward
 Birmingham Central Socialist Party

Socialist Party members in Birmingham have recently been focusing on campaigning on the Socialist. This has resulted in an increase in sales over a short space of time. Members suggested various ideas on how our branch could achieve this and hopefully our points may help other branches around the country!

The first task was to check that all members in the branch had signed up to receive the paper by subscription and if not ask if they can - by emphasising the importance of supporting the Socialist.

Our own media

With mainstream media being controlled by the right-wing establishment and information being cherry picked to support capitalist interests, it is imperative, now more than ever, to support and actively promote a publication which is in the

interests of the working class.

Birmingham members are also now more consciously ensuring they carry papers at all times. So, if in conversation with someone at home, work or in general daily life, interest is shown by the other person, a member is able to sell them a paper straight away. Not only does this help with the sales but it also helps spread our ideas to a wider audience.

Another great opportunity for increased sales is through our campaigning stalls.

At branch meetings we are reminding members to push paper sales and especially not to be afraid of asking for the solidarity price of £2 - if you don't ask you won't get! This has significantly helped recently with our latest Saturday stall selling 15 papers.

Lastly, we are arranging a meeting specifically to discuss the history of the paper and its importance to the party. By remembering the role the paper has played in defending working people and the 99%, we hope to inspire people to go out and spread their passion for the Socialist.

Report: Socialist Party national women's meeting



photo Paul Mattsson

Tessa Warrington
 Leicester Socialist Party

On 9 January around 40 members from across the country travelled to London to attend the Socialist Party's annual national women's meeting. It's an event I always eagerly anticipate, and this year was no exception.

The discussion kicked off with an excellent first session on Jeremy Corbyn and looked at what fresh political developments may mean for women in 2016.

George Osborne's proposed £10 billion of budget cuts will hit women hardest as they struggle disproportionately with rising childcare costs, domestic violence and low pay.

Next, there was an important discussion on the role women workers played in the rise of 'New Unionism' in the 1880s. That period saw the fight for a broader trade union movement that organised women and unskilled workers for the first time.

The key dispute that ignited that struggle was the London matchgirls strike in 1888, who despite being the most down-trodden group of work-

ers were able to score a great victory.

These developments were the foundations of the modern trade union movement today and ultimately lead to the formation of the Labour Party, then a political voice for the working class - something we vitally need today.

The final session covered current trends and ideas in the women's movement, such as identity politics and intersectionality, which focus on the different forms of oppression in society and how they interact.

United struggle

Reflectively, the meeting itself did not just represent women but also members of ethnic minorities and the LGBT and disabled communities.

Socialist Party members, like the rest of the population, do not fit neatly into boxes but face a variety of oppressions created by the capitalist system.

We discussed how as socialists we do not allow ourselves to be divided by those differences. Instead we are united in our shared need to break the chains of oppression and understand that it is only by the whole of the working class standing together that we can achieve this.

Eleanor Marx: A Life of struggle, solidarity and socialism



Celebrate the 160th anniversary of the birth of Eleanor Marx who played a pivotal role in the development of the trade union movement, the birth of the Labour Party and as a tireless fighter for working class people, especially women, all over the globe. The event will include speeches from Rachel Holmes, Author of Eleanor Marx: A life (Radio 4 book of the week) and Hannah Sell, deputy general secretary of the Socialist Party. Performances by Townsend Productions and an exhibition of photographs entitled 'Women in struggle'. All the family welcome. Refreshments available.

Hosted by Lewisham Socialist Party on 16 January from 2pm at Venner Road Hall, Lewisham, South London, SE26 5EQ



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SEXUAL ASSAULTS IN COLOGNE EXPLOITED BY THE RACIST ESTABLISHMENT AND FAR-RIGHT

Sue Powell* and Sozialistische Alternative reporters, Germany

The shocking attacks on scores of women in Cologne, where up to 1,000 North African or 'Arab-looking' men were said to be on the rampage, brought the inevitable baying from the far right and a backlash from the establishment media and politicians. As so often happens, where political capital can be made, the victims have become almost secondary.

These terrifying attacks should not be dismissed: Cologne police took statements on assaults from over 500 women - many of whom were subjected to terrifying sexual attacks. But the ensuing media outcry and political debate has not been about this sexist violence.

It is unlikely that the real truth will prevail, which is why Sozialistische Alternative (SAV - CWI, Germany) is demanding an independent inquiry.

Far-right groups

Ultra-right groups and violent racists have attempted to seize the initiative, exploiting popular fears. Last Sunday (10 January) far-right gangs in Cologne attacked foreigners, including Pakistanis, Syrians and a group of Africans. Police arrested hundreds of far-right thugs rampaging through Leipzig.



An anti-asylum seeker demo in Cologne called by the xenophobic Pegida movement attracted around 1,500 people, mostly neo-Nazi hooligans. A counter-demo organised by the Left mobilised 4,000 people. Many racist arson attacks on asylum seekers' hostels are going unreported in the media.

Right-wing nationalists like the Alternative for Germany party (AFD),

who currently are around 10% in opinion polls) and Pegida, who organised some alarmingly big racist marches in 2015, quickly blamed Chancellor Merkel's apparently 'soft' approach to the refugee crisis and almost gleefully claimed vindication of their opposition to the borders being opened (albeit temporarily) last summer.



The terror experienced by young women wanting to see in the New Year with their friends is being cynically used to fuel the increasing tensions over refugees

Criticism also came from Merkel's own Christian Democratic Union (CDU) party: "Urgently needed: reduction of influx, secure borders, intensifying of deportations and meaningful justice," tweeted one CDU MP.

'Culture clash'

Before a single culprit was identified there was talk of the "clash of cultures", a "wholly macho culture" and "people living in the Middle Ages" and the finger pointed at the Muslim refugees who arrived over the last five months.

There are many reasons to feel this is unlikely: the attackers were said to be drunk, threw firecrackers (a widespread German tradition) and they knew the best areas to target. All of this displays a good degree of 'assimilation' into western 'culture'.

According to observers it was an apparently coordinated attack. It would not be unusual for gangs of the city's pickpockets to target big gatherings, but the figure of 1,000 attackers has been refuted.

A more likely figure is under 200, possibly many from North Africa, not refugees from Syria or Iraq.

In fact, once infringement of residency and asylum laws are eliminated (which might include visiting a family member in a different area),



A section of the anti-Pegida demo in Cologne

non-German residents are generally less likely to commit crime than Germans. So it is inexcusable that a Green Party mayor Boris Palmer should again be calling for tougher asylum laws, arguing that "petty criminals going through the refugee process feel there's practically nothing to fear from German law".

He, like the Minister for Home Affairs Thomas de Maizière (CDU), has raised the possibility of deportations - including changing the law to allow repatriation to countries where the life of the refugee is at risk.

Thus the terror experienced by young women wanting to see in the New Year with their friends is being cynically used to fuel the increasing tensions over refugees.

Police response

The police have been criticised for their abject failure to stop the attacks or arrest assailants. The city's police chief was forced into early retirement over his handling of the assaults. One spokesperson admitted "perhaps they downplayed reports of a slap on the bum!"

Cologne mayor Reker has announced security would be stepped up for the "crazy days" of next month's carnival, but she played into the hands of the racists

by adding: "We will also have to explain our carnival better to people from other cultures".

But visitors to the Rhineland carnivals or the Munich Oktober beer festival will know that drunken loutish behaviour is not uncommon. There were over 2,000 police interventions reported at the last beer festival and one multiple rape.

Countless young women have been sexually harassed at festivals, discos and places frequented by drunken young men. Often the 'law and order brigade' are the first to blame rape victims for being drunk and 'provocative'.

In this case the race supremacists are hypocritically denigrating the victims again as "our women violated" by Arabs. Women should be able to feel safe in public spaces. Racism and sexism are twin evils - and we need to fight both of them.

Before the Cologne violence the migration issue was already causing tension, with a rise in racist attacks and marches. Now it has spiralled to another level, furthering polarisation and escalating violence.

The left, particularly Die Linke (the Left party), has to act to explain what happened in Cologne and bring together the women's movement, anti-racist movement and trade unions to explain and educate on the questions of sexism and racism. This must be in conjunction with organising against racist violence and building a movement to cut across a rise in right-wing nationalism.

*Sue, a Socialist Party member in Gloucestershire, worked with refugees in Germany and was an SAV member for over 20 years



The Committee for a Workers' International (CWI) is the socialist international organisation to which the Socialist Party is affiliated. The CWI is organised in 45 countries and works to unite the working class and oppressed peoples against global capitalism and to fight for a socialist world. www.socialistworld.net

Saudi Arabia mass executions Tories back despots

Simon Carter

The recent execution of 47 prisoners by Saudi Arabia's rulers has been widely condemned as barbaric. These killings have also ratcheted up tensions with the oil-rich state's main regional political rival - Iran.

The latter's regime has issued warnings over the killing of Shia cleric Sheikh Nimr Baqr al-Nimr, a prominent political opponent of the Saudi Arabian Sunni regime.

Saudi's ruling clique, which executed 151 people last year (mostly for non-violent drugs offences), has said the executions were of "terrorists". But the country's repressive judicial system is notorious for witch-hunting the regime's critics, especially among its Shia minority community.

Iran on its part is equally notorious for its regular executions of political opponents since the country's 1979 revolution.

The two regional powers were already in conflict, with their proxy wars being fought in Syria and Yemen.

Since the executions the Saudi Arabian embassy in Tehran, Iran, has been firebombed, while Tehran has accused Saudi Arabia of "intentionally" bombing its embassy in the Yemen capital, Sanaa.

This deepening antagonism has polarised the region's ruling classes.

Cameron

Despite the feudal-rulers of Saudi Arabia having one of the worst human rights records of any country on the planet, UK Tory Prime Minister David Cameron remained tight-lipped in condemning the latest spate of executions.

The Foreign Office merely expressed "concern". Foreign Secretary Philip Hammond suggested there was little point condemning the executions, since it wouldn't change the minds of Saudi's rulers.

One year ago Cameron, along with a host of other Western 'democratic' leaders, jetted off to Saudi Arabia to attend the funeral to the country's absolute monarch King Abdullah and endorse the succession of his half-brother Prince Salman to the throne.



For Cameron, lucrative trade deals and geo-political interests come ahead of concerns about human rights

The Tory government's reluctance to criticise the House of Saud has a lot to do with lucrative arms and other trades deals with Britain, as well as Saudi Arabia's vast oil reserves.



Partly it is the fear of widening internal dissent that lays behind the recent mass executions and the regime's clampdown on 'terrorism'

The regime is also a key regional power broker, vital to western governments' geo-political interests in the Middle East.

Last October, on Channel 4 news, David Cameron repeatedly refused to answer questions on Britain's se-

cret security pact with Saudi Arabia (which saw both countries elected to the United Nations Human Rights Council).

Cameron eventually conceded that the British government "has a relationship with Saudi Arabia" which means "we receive from them important intelligence and security information".

Cameron also admitted that he personally had not intervened in the widely publicised case of 17-year-old Ali Mohammed al-Nimr (nephew of Sheikh Nimr Baqr al-Nimr), arrested during the Arab Spring protests three years ago and who faces execution.

Economy

Saudi Arabia is dependent for 90% of its revenues on oil sales. However, the collapse in world oil prices has resulted in the country's budget deficit ballooning to an enormous 15% of GDP last year, gouging \$100 billion of its \$650 billion of foreign reserves.

In turn, this has prompted spending cuts and hikes in petrol, electricity and water prices.

A combination of cutting subsidies and increasing taxes on the population can only deepen discontent within the kingdom.

Undoubtedly it is the fear of widening internal dissent that in part lays behind the recent mass executions and the regime's clampdown on 'terrorism'.

The executions also reflect Saudi leaders' anger at the western powers' rapprochement with Iran over its nuclear programme - forgetting that it has been the continual support of the West that has kept the House of Saud in power.



What we stand for

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

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

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

Our demands include:

PUBLIC SERVICES

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

Abolish university tuition fees now and introduce a living grant. No to academies and 'free schools'!

WORK AND INCOME

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

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

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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.

NEW MASS WORKERS' PARTY

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

SOCIALISM AND INTERNATIONALISM

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

Join the fightback! Join the Socialists!

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CAMERON'S HOUSING CON



For a mass programme of council house building

Sam Morecroft
Sheffield

Writing in the Sunday Times on 10 January, Cameron claimed he will end gang culture, drug abuse and poverty - by demolishing sink estates and building new, 'affordable' houses.

Sound too good to be true? Well, that's because it is. Cameron has announced

plans to demolish around 100 decrepit tower block estates in some of the most deprived areas in the country. But he is not doing so to build publicly owned social housing available for rent. He is subsidising private developers to build homes to buy on public land - no doubt mostly luxury flats.

How on earth are people living on some of Britain's most deprived housing estates meant to afford that? Clearly this is just another attempt to push working class communities out of the areas in which they live, and sell off

council housing and land to the private sector.

To add insult to injury, former Tory minister Michael Heseltine will oversee the scheme. Papers like the Times and the Metro claim he is the man for the job because he supposedly oversaw the regeneration of Liverpool in the 1980s!

Liverpool council

It wasn't Heseltine or the Thatcher government that sorted out Liverpool's slums. It was Militant, forerunner of the Socialist Party, which led Liverpool council. We stood up

to Thatcher's austerity, tore down run-down housing blocks and built 5,000 high-quality council houses.

That's how you defeat poverty - by fighting the cuts to provide publicly owned social housing which people can afford to rent. Not by selling off land to the private sector!

Gang culture, drug abuse and other social ills are not caused by concrete tower blocks, but by poverty. They are the sad but avoidable outcome for communities trapped between low-waged, insecure work and long-

term unemployment.

Yes, we should knock down ageing tower blocks where they can't be brought up to standard through renovation. But they need to be replaced by high-quality, publicly owned social housing available at genuinely affordable rents.

If Jeremy Corbyn's Labour Party would commit to that, it would get a fantastic response from working class communities! It's crucial that we organise to stop the sell-off of council land - and fight for decent homes for all.