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Jeremy Corbyn: Thousands rally to anti-austerity appeal

Steve Score

Jeremy Corbyn's nomination for Labour leadership has transformed the contest. In contrast to the three varieties of Blairite 'austerity lite' on offer, he has captured a mood.

Large numbers of people young and old, many from outside the party, have been inspired by the anti-austerity message. This parallels the anti-austerity mood that developed around the Scottish independence referendum and the surge for the Scottish National Party, as well as the million people who voted Green in the general election.

Polls indicate that Jeremy Corbyn is currently in the lead. He got the most nominations from Constituency Labour Parties and also from a number of trade unions including the biggest two - Unison and Unite. Of course to nominate an anti-austerity candidate is good and reflects the pressure from below. In the case of Dave Prentis, general secretary of Unison, the coming union leadership contest and the need to adopt a left pose undoubtedly played a role! But nominating Corbyn is not enough on its own. We also need to fight austerity before the next general election, with the unions taking the lead and organising coordinated strike action.

The Labour leadership election ends on 10 September and the right wing and media are already stepping up "project fear" trying to sway the vote, saying Labour would be unelectable under Jeremy Corbyn. Labour shadow chancellor, Chris Leslie had the cheek to claim Corbyn's economic programme would hit the poor. This comes after decades of the austerity policies Leslie supports, from all three main establishment parties, which have devastated the living standards of the poorest! He says a Corbyn led party "would not be the one he joined."

This raises the question - what will happen if Corbyn wins? He would begin as a prisoner of the right wing dominated Parliamentary Labour Party. Unfortunately he has said he would include even Blairites in his shadow cabinet. But they would move to oust him as soon as they could. The Socialist Party has called on him to organise against this by calling a conference of trade unions and supporters- both inside and outside the Labour Party to build a base for a socialist ideas. We would want to participate in that and encourage supporters of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) to do the same.

It is also possible that the right could be ejected from or leave the party - implicit in some of the comments such as Leslie's. This would transform the situation; the potential for a new anti-austerity alternative could be created.

If Corbyn loses the election, the need for that anti - austerity working class alternative remains. If he called for the creation of such an alternative outside the Labour Party it would gain significant support, as his campaign has shown. The Socialist Party is continuing to support and build TUSC as a step towards creating a new mass working class party. The route from which that will develop is as yet undecided, but the anger of young and working class people will find a way to gain its voice.

For more analysis of the Corbyn campaign, see the Socialist 865 and www.socialistparty.org.uk

Tumultuous applause for anti-austerity clarion call

Tony Mulhearn, Liverpool Socialist Party and Labour Councillor 1983-87

The Adelphi hotel had not seen the enormous rivers of people pouring through its doors for decades. This was the biggest political rally Liverpool has seen since the days when the socialist council fought Thatcher's attack on the city between 1983 and 1987.

Twelve hundred people crammed into the main hall with a further 600-700 locked out and listening in adjacent areas.

The composition of this rally made nonsense of Neil Kinnock's attempt to undermine the legitimacy of Corbyn's campaign. Kinnock, writing in the Observer, declared that Militant or Daily Telegraph infiltrators with 'malign' intentions were supporting Jeremy Corbyn.

This is insulting as well as wildly inaccurate, a stance not unusual for his lordship.

The rally was crammed with men, women and children from all walks of life. Some were political veterans, but hundreds had clearly never been to a political event nor were members of a political party, as shown by the number of newcomers who asked questions about Jeremy Corbyn's policies.

Young students outraged at the debts they faced, people on zero-hour contracts, local activists appalled at local library closures, people on rates of pay so low they had to be subsidised by the taxpayer, NHS workers worried about the service and ever-lasting wage freeze. They all perceived Jeremy Corbyn as a tribune who would represent them.

Jeremy Corbyn's wide-ranging speech included pledges to re-establish the NHS as fully publicly-owned, free at the point of use; renationalisation of rail and the post office; ending the public sector wage freeze; free education from cradle to grave; cancellation of Trident; repeal of the anti-trade union laws.

After decades of attacks on working class wages and social support, and on the trade unions, with no serious political opposition, this was language which received tumultuous applause.

The enthusiasm, energy and dynamism which were on display were a reminder of the power of the campaign led by the Liverpool 47 councillors in the 1980s.

Jeremy has provided a rallying point for all those who have seen stand-ards driven down while the hedge fund managers, bankers and other assorted financial spivs who caused the economic crisis and who bankroll the Tory Party have seen their fortunes increase spectacularly.

The volume of passion poured out in support of his clear anti-austerity clarion call was akin to a dam bursting under pressure from a boiling cauldron of anger felt by millions of working class people.

The message was clear: No more austerity from either the Bullingdon boys or Labour MPs masquerading as representatives of the working class while accepting the Tory spending cap.

Any mention of 'Blairism' was received with a loud noise of disgust.

A striking feature of the event is that it could not be described in any way as a Labour Party rally. This was a rally to support policies fundamentally different to those of New Labour.

The character of Labour is summed up by Labour's shadow chancellor Chris Leslie. After losing his parliamentary seat in 2005, he became the director of the New Local Government Network, which was described by the Local Government Chronicle as a "Blairite think-tank".

He was originally elected to Parliament in 1997 on the anti-Tory surge from which Blair profited. He has an impeccable record of supporting Labour's austerity-lite stance.

He has declared he would not serve in a Corbyn-led cabinet as a Corbyn-led party would be "a very different political party" from the one he joined.

This encapsulates the degeneration of Labour into a haven of those who seek political careerism rather than people with

a commitment to representing the working class.

The right wing and its media will do everything they can to sabotage the election and deprive Jeremy Corbyn of victory.

Whatever the outcome, the process has begun in the weeks and months which lie ahead for the building of a new mass party of the working class.

While maintaining its independent stance, the Socialist Party stands ready to assist in that objective.

'Rock star' reception in Camden

Helen Pattison, East London Socialist Party

"This isn't a rock concert" left wing writer Owen Jones exclaimed, obviously excited by the prospect of a queue that trailed round the block. When was the last time a politician in England had to speak to a packed rally of 1300, two overflow rooms and a crowd of 500 people stuck outside?

Waiting in the queue people were excited but measured, discussing what they would do in different possible outcomes of the election. Some were there to be convinced to pay their £3. Some would join the Labour Party if he won. Some still wouldn't but would vote for Labour again. People were upbeat and excited to hear Corbyn speak.

Former London Mayor Ken Livingston went through parts of Corbyn's manifesto. Quantitative easing (QE) under Brown and Cameron meant they created money that went to the bankers. But QE that doesn't go to the bankers, but on useful things instead, is apparently an 'un-electable' policy. He said we could get the money for schools, homes, jobs and transport from unpaid taxes of the rich.

The speeches were inspiring but they weren't about the rotten system of capitalism or fighting for an alternative. No one mentioned socialism.

Haringey Councillor and Unison branch secretary, Emine Ibrahim, admitted she had voted for cuts. With the current Labour leadership against them, she said councillors didn't feel able to challenge the devastating reductions in council budgets. With Corbyn as leader and the party behind them, councillors would now have the confidence to make legal challenges against the government.

But why not take the fight to the government anyway and oppose cuts now? A legal challenge isn't enough; councillors should build a campaign involving local people and unions around no cuts budgets.

Corbyn closing the rally to a standing ovation said that his candidacy was the opportunity for real debate about what kind of politics ordinary people in the country wanted to hear. His conclusion was clear - Labour lost the general election because they didn't offer enough. The people in that rally were after something different.

Birmingham

An overflow meeting of 200 had to be organised for Jeremy Corbyn's meeting in Birmingham. 800 people from all sections of the working class enthusiastically heard Jeremy make the case for bold anti-austerity policies and lambast the austerity consensus for blaming migrants and those at the bottom of the social ladder for the problems they're facing.

It was a breath of fresh air to hear a Labour politician put forward pro-working class solutions to our problems and calling for a crash house building programme, an increase in Corporation Tax to pay for free education for all university

students and an end to the 'race to the bottom'.

Clive Walder, Birmingham Socialist Party

London

A rally for Diane Abbot's campaign to be Labour's London Mayoral candidate would not usually whip up huge amounts of enthusiasm, but something was different this time: One of the speakers was Jeremy Corbyn.

It was packed to the gills by 800 mainly young people. It was clear who they came to hear: Corbyn, arriving late from another meeting, was met with a standing ovation from the hall as he entered.

Platform speakers at the rally made no mention of the kind of movement we needed to beat the Tories. It seems that the only offer was to elect Jeremy and then beat the Tories in 2020. Socialist Party members were unable to get in to speak. We would have argued that we can't afford wait until 2020, we should be putting pressure on the union leaders for a 24-hour general strike to kick start the movement.

Jeremy Corbyn said that, win or lose, "we would meet again" after the vote to carry the movement on. We would wholeheartedly welcome such a move. Especially if it included all left organisations and trade unions.

When asked who was a Labour Party member, only around 50% of the room raised their hands. This shows that the current movement to get Corbyn elected is one that has come from outside the Labour Party.

Paul Callanan, London Socialist Party

Leicester

"Dare we hope?" aptly summed up the mood of the 300 strong meeting to hear Jeremy Corbyn's socialist leadership campaign. I was speaking with Mary Higgins, a left wing Labour Party member of old, at the biggest gathering of socialists that Leicester has seen in a while.

Spirits were lifted as people listened to Jeremy's criticism of Labour's disastrous austerity lite election campaign and strength was gained by seeing so many looking for a socialist alternative to New Labour.

Two Socialist Party members asked questions from the floor and Jeremy's response was lengthy and fraternal.

Heather Rawling, Leicester Socialist Party

Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition

Elections 2016 conference

26 September

Stop NHS cuts

Health trusts told: 'don't fill posts'

Dave Carr

The Tory government claims that NHS spending is protected from its multi-billion pound cuts in public services. However, so-called 'efficiency savings' (ie cuts) of around £30 billion are being pushed through health trusts.

Monitor - the NHS regulator - has now told 46 health trusts in 'deficit' that their spending plans are "unaffordable" and that only 'essential' posts should be staffed. In other words, make more cuts!

David Cameron's insistence on the NHS providing a full service 24/7, without investing extra resources, will only compound the pressures on underpaid and overworked health staff.

Acute nursing shortages are already having a devastating effect on NHS patient care by forcing the closure of wards and beds in hospitals.

Barts health trust (the largest in the country), for example, has been forced to close two theatres and two catheter labs at its new Heart Centre and axe 15% of hospital beds at the Smithfield site after admitting to a shortfall of 120 nurses.

Overall, Barts, which runs five east London hospitals, has nearly 1,200 vacancies - one in five of its nurses and midwives.

This situation is a result of a £93 million deficit caused by a rip-off Private Finance Initiative (PFI) contract to redevelop the Royal London Hospital.

This privatisation measure is costing Barts £2 million a week to service, draining it of vitally needed resources.

At the same time the PFI contract has, so far, made the private companies involved £150 million in profit.

PFI was introduced by the Tories but then rapidly expanded by Labour.

The establishment parties can't be trusted to defend our vital health services. All of them have undermined the NHS while private companies benefit.

It's time to kick out these vultures and rebuild the NHS as a fully funded and democratically run health service.

Abolish the House of Lords!

Clive Walder

The sex-and-drugs scandal and subsequent resignation from the House of Lords by Baron Sewel of Gilcomstoun merely re-confirms that Britain's political elite is rotten and out of touch with the real world.

Sewel paid more money for a prostitute for one night than many families have in spare cash for a month! He owns a £1.2 million house in Aberdeen, and while most people who rent privately are struggling to keep up with the rent, he lives in a 'rent protected' flat in Pimlico, central London.

Sewel's behaviour is seemingly endemic and an indication of the arrogance of the upper reaches of British politics.

The House of Lords is a undemocratic feudal relic, consisting of 670 life peers who mainly got there by pleasing the

government that appointed them.

It also has 87 hereditary peers (nearly all men), who were born with platinum spoons in their mouths, and 26 Church of England bishops (no other religion is represented).

Its members can claim £300 a day (more than 46 hours at the minimum wage) just for 'attending'. It is long overdue for abolition.

A 2015 study found that of 303 people nominated for peerages in the period 2005-14, 211 were former senior figures within politics (including former MPs).

Of the remaining 92 appointments, 27 had made significant donations to political parties. This shows how seats in the Lords can be bought.

Legislation

In theory, anyone can apply to become a crossbench peer. But no doubt the Appointments Commission (which recommends new peers) would reject anyone who had any notions of changing society.

The Tories may no longer have a numerical majority but supporters of capitalism maintain a monopoly of members of the 'Upper House'. Although the government plans to appoint more Tory peers.

Defenders of the House of Lords say that it has a vital role in scrutinising and amending legislation and 'holding the government to account'.

It is true that the government is regularly defeated in the Lords, but its main role in amending legislation is to warn the government that they are in danger of 'overstepping the mark' or provoking social unrest.

It is dangerous to believe that capitalist bodies such as the House of Lords can be a vehicle for social progress or that it wouldn't use the same powers to sabotage socialist legislation passed in the House of Commons.

The House of Lords is part of the capitalists' armoury that protects the profit system and, consequently, needs abolishing.

However, this on its own isn't enough as every other capitalist country operates without such a medieval relic. We need elected workers' representatives in parliament. But for fundamental social change to come about we also need independent working class movements outside parliament.

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

Undercover police spying inquiry

Campaigners demand full disclosure of state surveillance

Lois Austin

On Tuesday 28 July Lord Justice Pitchford opened the inquiry that will examine how undercover police officers spied on political campaigners and the public since 1968.

This comes hot on the heels of the latest revelation that some of Britain's largest trade unions such as Unison, CWU and Ucat were also spied on by the now infamous police Special Demonstration Squad (SDS).

It was the whistleblower Peter Francis, an ex-policeman working for the SDS, who first shone a light on the extent of the spying of secret police units. Francis infiltrated Youth Against Racism in Europe (YRE) in the 1990s which was set up by supporters of Militant, now the Socialist Party.

Reference

The terms of reference of the inquiry are broader than anticipated. Pitchford when opening the inquiry said it "will examine any evidence of the targeting of individuals for their political views or participation in social justice campaigns".

The inquiry will also compel witnesses to give evidence and make recommendations for future conduct of undercover units.

But there are important features to the work of these undercover spies which will not be looked at, such as the international dimension (we know for example that Peter Francis attended a YRE international camp in Germany while his spy master was staying in a nearby hotel), and the work of state spies in the private sector.

The Socialist Party, alongside the Campaign Opposing Police Surveillance (COPS), the Blacklist Support Group, the Spies Out of Lives campaign, and others, will campaign to get the inquiry to probe every aspect of political policing, which is at the heart of the issue.

This inquiry will give an opportunity to expose the extent of political policing and step up campaigns for the right to organise and protest, free from state interference.

Fiddling finance capital in the dock

The trial and conviction of former UBS and Citigroup trader, Tom Hayes, has revealed the huge scale of the 2012 Libor rate fixing scandal perpetrated by the major banks.

Many of these banks are also facing another tranche of hefty fines for fixing the Forex - the foreign exchange currency rates - for at least a decade.

Hayes appears to be the fall guy, taking the rap for banks who have been fined by UK and US authorities over the scandal. And while another eleven traders await trial, none of the banks' top fat cats have been charged.

Libor stands for the London Inter-Bank Offered Rate. It is an average interest rate calculated through submissions of interest rates by major banks in London.

The Libor prices the loans made to either building societies or commercial loans to small companies.

In attempting to fix the Libor rate, the banks rigged the market in its favour, making bigger profits.

It's clear that even when news of the scandal first surfaced the banks' traders continued their crooked dealings. The chances are that new dodgy dealings involving finance capital will be exposed in the coming years.

But while the Tory government will use Hayes' 14-year conviction as evidence of its 'get tough' approach to the banks, it ignores the only meaningful course of action to prevent these money grubbing parasites re-offending, ie the nationalisation of the banks, under democratic workers' control and management.

Rent hikes make housing unaffordable

Between June 2014 and 2015, average private rents in Britain increased by 2.5%, according to the Office for National Statistics (ONS). The biggest price hike of 3.8% was in London, with Scotland experiencing a 2.1% rise.

Meanwhile, the flatshare website Sparerroom.co.uk found that rent in every London postcode is now "unaffordable" for those workers on the 'living wage' of £9.15 an hour.

Sparerroom's survey found that incomes of those on the London living wage, after tax, amounts to £293 a week. Yet the average weekly room rent in the last year rose by 6% (higher than the ONS figure) to £164.31, ie 56% of disposable income.

Astonishingly, published research shows that a renter in Camden Town, working in Liverpool Street, would be £403 a month better off if they moved to Madrid and commuted back!

One adverse effect on public services of the lack of affordable housing in London has been a 66% rise in the number of ambulance workers leaving the service over the last three years.

The number of both private and council tenants with rent arrears is also growing as a result of rent hikes and the 'bedroom tax'. A National Debtline spokesperson said: "We have seen the proportion of clients seeking help with rent arrears double from 6% in 2007 to nearly 13% in 2014."

The housing crisis is a toxic mix of unregulated private rents, council housing sell-offs (now extended to housing associations), the bedroom tax, and the lowest number of houses both public and private being built since the 1920s.

Even the Tory leader of Westminster council reckons that newly built council homes in regeneration schemes are likely to be sold off by boroughs because their location makes them 'too valuable'.

However, this government, which represents the super-rich, refuses to reinstate rent controls, invest in council housing, and end the price speculation in land and property by 'investors' (which include properties bought by money laundering criminals and sanctions-avoiding oligarchs, etc, using front companies).

Them & Us

Suggestions box

Millionaire Tory chancellor George Osborne is asking public sector workers about 'how to do more with less'. The idiom "be careful what you wish for" springs to mind!

But aside from inviting a list of unprintable adjectives from workers set to suffer another five years of pay cuts, some suggestions may include: rent controls to cut housing benefits, higher wages to offset tax credits, ending the £27 billion annual subsidy to private landlords, ending the billions in 'corporate welfare' payments, and more besides.

Everything must go

It's the sale of the century. Tory Chancellor George Osborne's fire sale of £32 billion worth of publicly owned assets this year will eclipse Thatcher and Major's privatisation binges of the 1980s and 1990s.

As previously pointed out in the Socialist, the Tory government intends to sell-off part of its stake in the bailed out RBS as well as its remaining 30% share of Royal Mail. The latter was privatised on the cheap under the last Tory-led coalition government by Lib Dem minister Vince Cable, losing the taxpayer an estimated £1 billion plus as rich investors cashed in.

Speculators' paradise

It's boom time in central London for property investors as buyers spent £1.8 billion on land in the second quarter of 2015. This represents a 118% increase on last year.

But while office space being built in central London rose by 24% between October 2014 and March 2015, only 18,260 new homes were built in the whole of the capital last year despite London's population growing by 52,000 households each year.

University deterrence

Up to £9,000 a year university tuition fees and the government's budget announcement to axe maintenance grants next year and replace them with loans will deter students from low income households. Currently students from families whose income is below £25,000 a year can get a full annual grant of £3,387.

The Sutton Trust estimates that the budget changes will mean that students from low-income families could accumulate loans of about £53,000 for a three-year course - which many students will see as unaffordable. This is particularly the case given that the Sutton Trust had previously estimated, before the latest budget changes, that 45% of loans are unlikely to be recouped due to low wages of many graduates.

Down the tube

Mayor Boris Johnson and Transport for London (TfL) are closing ticket offices in order to make savings. This 'public spirited' measure doesn't appear to extend to TfL's underground modernisation programme. The outsourced upgrade of signalling for tube lines is expected to be delivered four years late and at double the cost.

Human tragedy of Calais crisis

Tories have no solutions

Sarah Sachs-Eldridge

Despite weeks of scaremongering headlines and reports about the desperate people encamped at Calais, David Cameron still found a way to escalate the anti-immigrant bile. He described the estimated 3,000 asylum seekers and migrants camped at Calais as a "swarm of people".

This was a deliberate attempt to whip up some workers' fears over the scale of immigration in order to falsely lay the blame for austerity at the door of migrants and asylum seekers.

It is preparation for the Tories' plan to viciously ratchet up their cuts and their repressive and racist measures. But it also triggered an angry response and even a mini-swarm of articles that gave some facts on the situation.

The figures grant a glimpse of the human tragedy that exists. Since the start of June, ten people have died on the roads around Calais. A pregnant woman miscarried in her attempt to get on a lorry to Britain. There are 629 children alone in Kent needing support and care.

Context

The false impression created that Britain is the main destination for migrants fleeing to Europe was also put in context. Last year France received 62,735 asylum applications, more than double the number in Britain. There were 626,000 asylum applications in the EU last year and 25,000 in Britain.

These people are mainly fleeing the horrendous situations such as in Afghanistan and Iraq. About one in five people seeking asylum in Europe have fled the war and chaos of Syria. But it is a tiny proportion of the people forced to leave their homes and lives in Syria. There are over two million registered refugees in Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt and Iraq.

A number of writers exposed the appalling paucity of provision in Britain against the myth that there is a 'soft touch' approach here. Accommodation is provided for people who are seeking asylum - but this is either in a detention centre or in a room: not a house.

Asylum seekers are denied benefits while their applications are being processed and they are not allowed to work. Single adults receive £36.95 a week! Since the latest budget there has been a cut of up to 30% in the money paid to families.

The Tories have stepped up their divisive and racist measures. They want to remove the paltry financial support for those whose application for asylum has been rejected, condemning thousands of families to starvation.

Immigration bill

Extra sniffer dogs and 100 more guards will be sent to Calais. Home Secretary Theresa May has ramped up the racist immigration bill with measures requiring landlords in England to carry out "right to rent" checks on each tenant's immigration status before allowing them to move in. They will be free to evict those denied asylum without having to get a court order.

This is a racists' charter in the midst of a housing crisis already massively loaded towards Rachmanite money-grubbing landlords. A 2013 survey of 750 adults by the Runnymede Trust found 29% of black people seeking private housing had experienced discrimination - compared to 1% of white respondents. Outrageously Labour has backed this legalisation of a modern strain on a 'no blacks, no Irish' policy.

None of these measures will transform the situation. They will result in more poverty and desperation for the men, women and children who manage to get to Britain. And more deaths and injuries in Calais. A medical centre set up in the camp is treating people who have repeatedly attempted to scale razor wire fences - not out of choice but desperation.

Solidarity

The weekend's investigations into Calais also reported signs of solidarity. Local teachers are volunteering to teach French at the camp's school. In Britain there is also evidence of sympathy for those suffering the effects of war and capitalist crisis evidenced in the huge amounts donated to charity appeals.

In March, reports of the arrest of 20 year old Jimmy Thoronka, Sierra Leone's top 100-metre sprinter who overstayed his visa fearing the ebola crisis at home, inspired a flood of donations and offers of support and help.

At the same time in Austerity Britain there is an understandable fear that public services are over-stretched. A housing crisis is raging. Cuts to benefits and sky-high rents mean that over 50,000 families have been moved out of London by councils in the past three years. The Tories' hope the focus on asylum seekers and migrants will shift the blame off their failed housing policies and vicious austerity measures.

Fighting programme

But there is not a shortage of resources. Councils in England are sitting on enough brownfield land to build one million decent council homes.

The 'big four' property developers are sitting on enough land to immediately build 1.4 million homes. But knowing these facts - like those about the Calais situation - are not enough. We need organisations with a programme that fights for housing rights for all.

Why could that land and the biggest vultures in the construction industry not be nationalised, with compensation paid to current owners only on the basis of genuine need? Socialists would then build high quality council homes on an environmentally sustainable basis.

We defend the right of all working class people to a decent home and oppose evictions. That means building a mass campaign to fight for rent control and for investment in council housing.

Such a movement will need a political voice that can unite all those suffering under austerity and racism including defending the rights of asylum seekers.

The Socialist Party opposes all racist immigration laws and demands the shutting down of the detention centre prisons. The blame-game bandwagon can start to be stopped by the labour movement building an independent workers' political voice.

Personal care budgets: more choice for service users?

'Personal budgets' for disabled and older people became a reality last year. Supposedly they give service users more choice over their own care. But what is their real effect? Adrian Picton investigates.

So what is a personal budget?

Well, previously local councils would directly provide or commission services such as home care, day care and residential care. They would assess each individual to determine which services they need. Now, the assessment instead entitles you to money to cover your needs.

A personal budget can be made up of direct payments, credit for council-run or commissioned services, or a combination. In theory, this gives a person more say over what they receive, even if they choose to let the council manage it for them.

Having this sort of choice and control about how care needs are met is something the disabled people's movement has fought for over years. The principle is therefore welcome.

The problem is, however, that these changes have come in at a time when local authority finances are being squeezed. Behind the rhetoric of 'choice' and 'control' and 'needs-led services', the reality is that services are being turned into cash cows - or destroyed.

There have been several changes in the eligibility criteria for assessment over the last few years. Charges for care services have been increased, or introduced where they were previously free.

Councils have used the whole 'personalisation' agenda to sell off, reduce or cease altogether their own home care, day care and residential services. This has led to hundreds of redundancies, and reductions in hours, pay and conditions.

It is important that disabled and older people can choose who provides the services they need. But it does not follow that everyone will want to stop receiving them from their local council.

For example, disabled people should ultimately be included in mainstream activities wherever possible. But you can't close a day centre and expect someone who has attended for many years, who has friends there, to simply adjust.

In many cases, day centre closures have led to increased burdens on family carers. Most are women who do this work unpaid. They no longer get a day to themselves to get other jobs done - or just to have some 'me time'.

And in general, older people prefer traditional home care services. They don't want to be bothered with employing their own carers.

The move away from council-run home care means it is provided by private agencies. They pay less, train less and have far worse terms and conditions for staff. This means high turnover. In turn, this means service users have to deal with constant changes of carers coming into their home. Continuity of care is extremely important to older people.

Personal budgets should give people more choice, not tell them they can no longer use a traditional service. By removing such services, councils are actually restricting choice.

Councils which have completely removed in-house services could face further problems. If an agency can't fulfil its commitments, or the relationship between a service user and their personal assistant breaks down, the council ultimately has the duty of care.

The Socialist Party says that greater control over your own care is important, but not enough. We also need full funding for care services. Instead, the demands of disabled people have been stole, and personal budgets have become a clever excuse for cuts and privatisation.

Local authorities should reopen closed services, and bring private services back in house. They should set a 'needs budget' at council level to cover the full cost of all services. This could buy time to mobilise a campaign of trade unionists and service users to win the necessary funding back from central government.

Then personal budgets could give disabled and older people real choice and control.

Where did personal budgets come from?

The concept was introduced in the New Labour government's White Paper "Our Health, Our Care, Our Say" published in January 2006. A handful of local authorities then set up pilots.

Personal budgets were later rolled out across England, and made effectively mandatory through performance targets set by Westminster. Finally, the last Tory-Liberal Coalition government's 2014 Care Act came into force this April, placing a legal duty on councils to provide them for all service users.

Personal budgets are frequently confused with direct payments. Direct payments have been around since the late 1990s. They are a weekly payment for needs such as employing your own carers, or going out for social activities. Part or all of a personal budget can be paid as a direct payment.

Hiroshima - 70 years on

Can a future nuclear conflict be avoided?

Geoff Jones and Kate Jones

Seventy years ago, on 6 August 1945, a single bomb dropped by a US bomber on the Japanese city of Hiroshima killed between 90,000 and 166,000 men, women and children. Half died immediately, the rest later from burns, radiation poisoning and other injuries. The world had changed forever. The atomic era had begun.

The idea of a bomb of this awesome power had sprung from the new physics of the 1930s. Between 1939 and 1945 British and American physicists worked feverishly at Los Alamos, New Mexico, to build such a bomb in the mistaken belief that the Nazis were doing the same thing and might succeed first.

But the defeat of Nazi Germany in May 1945 gave work on the bomb a new focus - the war against Japan, which had already cost the USA 100,000 lives.

The dropping of the bomb on Hiroshima, followed a few days later by a second bomb at Nagasaki, brought Japanese surrender - but at the cost of up to 250,000 lives in the two cities.

Why were the bombs used? The official reason was to avoid a million casualties in a bloody invasion of Japan. But there was a second likely motive for the bombing of the strategically unimportant city of Nagasaki. The great fear of US capitalism was the threat of 'communism' as embodied by the Soviet Union.

The power of the Soviet Red Army sweeping across Europe, coupled with revolutionary movements springing up in France, Italy and Greece sent shivers down the spines of capitalists. The bombs were a deterrent to what they saw as Soviet expansion.

In fact, after 1945, some US strategists recommended a 'pre-emptive' nuclear attack on the Soviet Union before they got atomic weapons. But in 1949 the Soviet Union tested its own nuclear weapon. The UK joined the 'nuclear club' in 1952.

The very name Hiroshima - the single plane with its murderous payload, the mushroom cloud, the ruined city, horrifically burned bodies, disfigured survivors, radiation sickness and nuclear fallout - has become a symbol for the ultimate power of modern warfare.

'Deterrence'

Hiroshima triggered huge anti-war movements. In Britain in the 1960s, CND (the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament) mobilised demonstrations of hundreds of thousands, and raised public awareness about the futility of 'nuclear deterrence', the dangers of radiation and of nuclear waste.

Today in Britain, both Tories and Labour are wedded to the 'upgrading' of the nuclear arsenal. Both agree to replace ageing Trident nuclear missile submarines at a cost which the Ministry of Defence puts at £20 billion but which opponents reckon would be nearer to £100 billion. These sums are far bigger than Osborne's latest welfare cuts.

The Trident submarines are based in Scotland, and the Scottish National Party's call for their removal has popular support. The prospect of a future independent Scotland has put the question of Trident and its possible relocation, on the agenda.

But the idea of an 'independent British nuclear deterrent' is a relic of its days as an imperial power. It is neither independent, nor a deterrent!

The missiles could only be fired with the agreement of the US military. But in any case, who do they deter? They did not deter the Argentine military dictatorship from invading the Falklands (nobody suggested 'nuking' Buenos Aires!).

Is nuclear war still a threat? There are an estimated 16,000 nuclear weapons in the world, over 90% held by USA and Russia, but also by the UK, France, India, Pakistan, Israel and, lately, North Korea. This is more than enough to wipe out most of the human race (and most other life too).

Despite a recent ratcheting up of super-power tensions over Ukraine, nuclear war between America and Russia is highly unlikely. And while Israel might threaten a strike against Iran's nuclear facilities, to actually fire a nuclear missile would be suicidal.

But a nuclear 'accident' remains possible, as does the use of radioactive nuclear material to make a highly destructive 'dirty bomb'. Moreover, the takeover of a country like Pakistan, which has nuclear weapons, by forces such as the

Taliban or Isis, would create new dangers.

It could not be ruled out that under conditions of crisis, unstable warring regimes could spark a nuclear exchange.

And 'peaceful' nuclear power plants around the world have highly destructive fuel and waste which could be used to make weapons. Such material has certainly gone missing from a defunct nuclear reactor in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and in some of the former Soviet republics.

Even in Britain, it is not clear how and where nuclear waste is stored and how safe it is. How much more precarious is the situation in countries in the throes of civil war?

Disarmament

Nuclear weapons cannot be uninvented. They exist, the knowledge to make them exists, and no amount of pledges to disarm by world capitalism would prevent them being made again in future.

The only guarantee that such weapons will never be made, or used, is a socialist world. The working class of all continents, working together to build a better world for all, will decide democratically that nuclear power, if it is used at all, is only ever used for peaceful purposes.

The best legacy of Hiroshima would be a future of peace and plenty, where production is planned for the benefit of all of humankind, and where war of any kind is a thing of the past.

Nuclear weapons currently in existence

- Russia 7500
- USA 7100
- France 300
- China 250
- UK 215
- Pakistan 100-120
- India 90-110
- Israel 80
- N Korea 10

Source: International Campaign Against Nuclear Weapons

China at a turning point

Stock market crash has shaken the image of a 'strong' regime

Vincent Kolo, www.chinaworker.info

"The big news here isn't about the Chinese economy; it's about China's leaders. Forget everything you've heard about their brilliance and foresightedness. Judging by their current flailing, they have no clue what they're doing."

This is the blunt verdict of Paul Krugman, the Nobel Prize winning economist, on China's stock market crash and the Chinese regime's attempts to contain it. A staggering \$4 trillion has been wiped off share values since the middle of June, as the stock markets in Shanghai and Shenzhen have fallen by 30 percent.

The attitude of many capitalist commentators was - as Krugman points out - that the dictatorship of China's misnamed 'Communist' party (CCP) were 'brilliant' economic managers who through clever use of state intervention and seemingly unlimited financial resources could always pull a rabbit out of the hat whenever economic problems demanded it. In the past few weeks this faith in the CCP has been shaken to its core. Especially as the stock market continues to disobey 'party orders', the CCP leaders are cast in the role of King Canute, who famously ordered the waves to turn back only to get splashed.

Workers' savings lost

The regime's failure, so far, to stop the stock market rout, despite spending a staggering \$800 billion in the past month on buying shares and other rescue measures. This has also struck like a bomb blast for many people inside China, especially the more than 60 million small traders who have been coaxed into the stock market over the past year.

"My father has lost 90 percent of his savings," says Yu, a member of the CWI in China (the sister organisation of the Socialist Party which is banned in China). "He and his workmates, who work in a car components factory, decided to buy shares in March this year," he says. "Everyone in China is discussing the stock market. The government controlled media encouraged ordinary people to invest in shares, predicting the stock market (Shanghai Composite Index: SCI) was heading for 10,000. My father and his workmates have suffered big losses and feel foolish for believing the government."

'State bull market'

In fact, the SCI surged to 5,200 points on 12 June, up from 2,000 in July 2014 (a rise of 150 percent). But now it's sunk back to 3,500 points. This was a state manipulated 'bull market' or financial boom, fuelled not just by a frenzied media campaign but also by debt. It was known as the 'state bull run' and even as 'Xi Jinping's bull market' - after China's president.

The market crash is a calamity for the CCP dictatorship, leading to a series of policy zigzags and missteps that even its state media monopoly cannot fully hide. This also has political repercussions as the case of Yu's father illustrates.

One reason why the government inflated a stock market bubble was to stimulate a 'wealth effect' among the urban middle classes and better-off sections of the working class, to tie these layers into supporting the dictatorship and also to boost consumer spending as the economy slows to its weakest growth rate in 25 years.

China's Putin

The CCP regime has many reasons to fear these developments. It has kept itself in power through a combination of rapid economic growth and state repression. Arrests, censorship and hi-tech surveillance have all increased markedly since Xi Jinping took office in late 2012, alongside increasing nationalism and the projection of Xi as a 'strong man' on the global stage.

Partly modelling himself on Russia's Vladimir Putin, Xi has moved to concentrate more power in his own hands. Not only over the military, police and party-state machine but also over economic policy, which is not usually in the president's ambit. This has been achieved by waging the most intense elite-level power struggle for decades under the guise of an anti-corruption purge.

Xi, whose family are worth \$376 million - which is three times the wealth of Britain's super-rich cabinet - is a representative of China's 'princelings'. These are the offspring of veteran CCP leaders who over the past two decades have acquired enormous wealth and power over key sectors of the economy.

Xi's strategy is to fortify the CCP's dictatorial apparatus while implementing more neo-liberal capitalist policies to 'normalise' and entrench the economic power of the princelings. But his shift away from the 'collective dictatorship' model of the past can seriously backfire, with Xi being personally held responsible for every setback - as the current

stock market crisis shows.

Xi's policies are not a question of 'style' but are determined by a deepening crisis within the regime and a growing fear of revolutionary tremors. Strikes by workers - mostly to demand unpaid wages or compensation when factories close - have tripled in the past 12 months. Especially in the southern manufacturing heartland of Guangdong, workers' struggles have become more organised and structured, and this has enabled some industrial battles to last longer or to resume when employers or authorities break their promises.

The regime's fears were reinforced by the mass democracy movement in Hong Kong last year, the 'Umbrella Revolution', which at different stages involved 1.2 million people (almost one in six of the city's population). Similar mass protests engulfed Taiwan, which China claims as its territory, and Macau. Turmoil on the edges of Xi's realm is a foretaste of what can happen inside China in the next period.

This is an edited version of an article that originally appeared on www.chinaworker.info

Kill the bill!

Join the National Shop Stewards Network lobby of the TUC

Why I'm going

Scott Jones, member of shop workers' union Usdaw (personal capacity)

It's clear that trade unions instil fear and panic in the ranks of the Tories. The organised working class still holds power in its hands. Why else would the government attempt to tighten the noose further on workers' ability to defend themselves, and fight the bosses for better working lives?

We have some of the most restrictive trade union laws in Europe. Thatcher first made the attacks in the 1980s, and they were retained under 13 years of Labour. The current government wants even more vicious legislation.

Hypocrisy

One of the new measures requires some workplaces to have 40% of members (whether they vote or not) in favour to be allowed to strike. This is complete hypocrisy from a government elected by 24% of those eligible to vote.

It was made clear in Osborne's budget, billions of pounds of cuts are on their way. The government intends to stifle opposition by weakening the ability of the organised working class to fight.

But workers won't take this onslaught lying down. There have been many strikes and protests since the election. The most magnificent is the ongoing action on the tube. Unions completely shut down the capital in July and are set to do so again now.

If these strikes and protests were co-ordinated into a colossal movement against the anti-union laws and cuts, they couldn't be implemented. That would threaten the ability of the Tories to govern at all.

General strike

The Trades Union Congress (TUC) still has in its armoury the 2012 decision to investigate organising a general strike. Now is the time to use it. That is what I, and other trade unionists, will call on it to do when the National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) lobbies TUC congress, its big annual policy meeting.

I will be marching on behalf of thousands of shop workers and Usdaw members who were attacked in the budget and want to fight back. I will also be marching to call on the TUC, the official representatives of our class, to fight along with us in this escalation of the Tories' war on workers.

Come to the NSSF lobby - tell the TUC it's time to demonstrate and strike together!

- Email us at info@shopstewards.net if you want to attend

www.shopstewards.net

NSSF public rally and lobby of TUC Congress in Brighton

Speakers to include:

- Mark Serwotka, PCS general secretary
- Mick Cash, RMT general secretary

1pm Sunday 13 September

Charlotte Room in the Grand Hotel, 97-99 King's Rd BN1 2FW

(next to the Brighton Conference Centre)

Update posted on 7th August:

The strike is going indefinite from next Tuesday August 11th.

The PCS writes:

The action is being escalated because the gallery has brought forward the announcement of the appointment of private security firm Securitas to manage the visitor-facing and security services on a 5-year contract reportedly worth £40million expected to be signed on Monday 10 August.

We view this announcement, which the gallery has brought forward, as a deliberately inflammatory move by management.

About 300 gallery assistants who guard paintings and answer visitors' questions will be affected. They will no longer be employed by the gallery and instead work for Securitas.

Previously posted article:

National Gallery strike: All-out art action

Rob Williams, Chair, National Shop Stewards Network

The long-running strike at London's National Gallery, against guest services privatisation and union rep victimisation, is about to make a step change. Members of public service union PCS were due to begin all-out action on 17 August - but this could be brought forward.

PCS members at the gallery have taken over 50 days of action since February. Now they have voted by an overwhelming margin to strike for a further four days - ahead of indefinite action. Under management's disputed plans, up to 300 gallery assistants and security staff face outsourcing.

17 August is the day new director Gabriele Finaldi takes up his post from the outgoing Nicholas Penny. Finaldi has said he plans to avoid official business until the end of September - fat chance with the strike happening!

Securitas

Workers and supporters held a 'farewell party' outside Penny's official leaving function on 30 July. In a step that can only be seen as provocative, one of Penny's last decisions was to announce private company Securitas as winner of the contract - worth £40 million over five years. So much for genuine negotiations!

Staff have also had to deal with one of their reps, Candy Udwin, being suspended at the very beginning of the dispute. Candy was later sacked and is awaiting the outcome of her appeal. This is despite winning 'interim relief' from an employment tribunal judge, indicating she is likely to win any subsequent tribunal.

Management talks about 'value for money' to justify outsourcing jobs. But it has no qualms about wasting cash if it means trying to break the union. None of this gives staff any confidence that jobs, terms and conditions will be protected after sell-off.

Solidarity

The National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) and the Socialist Party have been consistent in backing the dispute over the last six months. Candy spoke at NSSN conference on 4 July, and saluted the network's solidarity work. The NSSN gave a donation from conference's bucket collection to the strikers.

There has been tremendous support for the strike. Gallery visitors and the arts world have been disgusted at the treatment of workers at a 'national treasure'.

There is an increasing number of disputes in the sector, from last year's victory at the Ritzy Picturehouse to the recent strike at the National Museum of Wales. Brutal management methods are becoming the norm.

All trade unionists should visit the picket lines, and step up fundraising to ensure strikers have the best possible financial support. The workers and their union need every assistance in this bold fight against National Gallery privatisers and union-busters.

- Please send donations to sort code 08-60-01, account number 20169002. Cheques to PCS Culture Media and Sport Association, c/o PCS North West Region, Jack Jones House, 1 Islington, Liverpool L3 8EG

Rail shutdowns step up

Second tube strike, 72-hour Great Western walkout

As we go to press, London Underground's four unions are readying a second industrial wallop for Tory mayor Boris Johnson. RMT, Aslef, TSSA and Unite have rejected management's latest "rehash" of destructive plans for night service, staff restructuring and pay.

Meanwhile, rail workers on First Great Western, also organised by the RMT, are preparing for bank holiday strikes. Bosses want to scrap conductors, close buffet cars and attack engineering jobs and conditions.

Two leading RMT members comment on the strikes.

John Reid, a Socialist Party member on the RMT's ruling council of executives, spoke to the Socialist. "All four unions are united as London is brought to a standstill. The strike is due to London Underground management's intransigence over jobs, work-life balance, forced unsocial hours and ripping up agreements."

Mick Cash, RMT general secretary, said the introduction of night tubes was being rushed and would not be safe on the current schedule. He called for bosses to suspend plans, and slammed their failure to negotiate. "Our members have made it clear that the latest offer from London Underground is merely a rehash of the previous package."

On First Great Western, Mick said: "The fact remains that if it is good enough for East Coast, using the same trains, to meet the very basic assurances sought by this trade union - then it is good enough for First Great Western as well."

First Great Western rail, connecting London to Wales and the West Country, faces several actions. Most staff will strike for 24 hours on 23 August and 72 hours from 29 to 31 August. Maintenance workers will instead down tools for 24 hours on 29 and 31 August, and work to rule from 23 to 30 August.

The 24-hour tube shutdown on 5 to 6 August follows an earlier all-union walkout from 8 to 9 July. This was the first combined stoppage - and first to close the entire network - in over a decade.

National Museums Wales strike against pay cut

PCS members at all seven sites of National Museums Wales took strike action last Saturday, 1st August, in protest at management's plans to remove the premium payments for staff working at weekends.

All 'front of house' staff have to work some weekends and the removal of these unsocial hours payments could mean a 15% cut in the take-home pay of the lowest paid employees.

Hannah Lawson, a PCS rep at Swansea's Waterfront Museum, spoke to Alec Thraves on the Swansea picket line before attending a PCS rally outside the National Museum in Cardiff:

"The 80% vote in favour of strike action and 90% in favour of action 'short of strike' shows the anger amongst our members here in Swansea and across Wales. We can't afford to take a pay cut and we are determined to keep our weekend premium!"

A large, lunchtime rally confirmed that determination, with PCS members in attendance from across all parts of Wales.

Speakers were applauded loudly when passing on their support and solidarity to the strikers, including Socialist Party Wales members Dave Warren and Katrine Williams.

Dave brought greetings from PCS members in DVLA who are fighting a similar battle with management and have a 90% mandate for strike action if negotiations fail.

Katrine, representing the DWP in Wales, called for further support for PCS against the government attacks on the union from the rest of the trade union movement.

She urged the rally participants to attend the NSSN lobby of the TUC in Brighton on 13th September to demand action against the Tory anti-trade union bill and to start preparing for coordinated action and a 24-hour general strike!

This first day of strike action will have brought home to the public not just the attacks on the wages of low-paid museum staff but also the threat to the educational and cultural facilities that they provide.

Statement from PCS rep Hannah Lawson:

The 80% vote in favour of a strike, from over 56% of our membership, shows the strength of feeling of our membership over these cuts.

Our members are already among the lowest paid not only within the museum but also across the civil service and Welsh public sector as a whole.

The unsociable hours pay for weekends is a contracted part of their pay, it has been for decades. Many people have mortgages based on this income, and others are telling reps that they don't know how they will pay their rent if these cuts go through.

Due to their low pay most members are already reliant on Working Tax Credits which as we all know have recently been slashed in Osborne's 'welfare' budget, and this financial hit on top of that will push many over the edge of penury.

As a union, we have put forward eight counter-proposals to protect the very poorest, only one of which has been incorporated into their offer.

The museum's management and the Welsh Assembly have made a lot of promises about improving child poverty through culture, yet here they are penalising their own poorest workers and their families while highly paid directors take no cuts at all, and in some cases we believe have bonuses as well.

Add to that simultaneous attacks on members' pensions, redundancy rates and terms and conditions and you see a workforce that has reached breaking point. We really hope that the involvement of ACAS will bring something new to the negotiating table, but we will not be withdrawing our industrial action until we have received a new offer, having spent our last series of strikes being told that management were in no way thinking of removing these payments, yet here we are this summer!

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 3 August 2015 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

Traffic wardens strike for sick pay

Chris Newby, London Socialist Party

With union banners waving, traffic wardens in Hackney, east London, began day one of a 48-hour walkout on 3 August. Members of general union Unite working for APCOA Parking are striking for proper sick pay and a decent raise.

For all these workers, this is the first strike they have ever been on. Sick pay is a critical issue for parking inspectors. Many have to work ten hours a day, out in all weathers, with only a one-hour break. They also suffer frequent abuse and assaults. Currently, they are paid only the statutory minimum.

Strikers are also angry at Hackney council, which gave the contract to APCOA Parking. Hackney is a Living Wage employer, yet workers are not getting a decent pay rise.

As a result of the union's determined stand, membership has reached over 90% of directly employed staff and up to 20% of agency workers. In the ballot, 100% voted to walk out. Still management completely underestimated workers' determination, thinking only a few would strike.

Solid

Yet the stoppage is solid. Over 20 pickets were in a very determined mood, and running a very lively picket line. Even an agency worker who could face losing their job as a result of coming out was on the picket. This worker bought two copies of the Socialist.

One manager, normally all smiles, had a face like thunder when he saw the size of the line.

Socialist Party members visiting the picket line got a very warm response. All pickets took a leaflet for the National Shop Stewards Network lobby of TUC congress on 13 September.

Workplace news in brief

Unison elections

Rank and file socialist Roger Bannister is to stand for general secretary of public service union Unison. The Socialist urges all Unison branches to nominate him for the position. Roger stands for a nationally coordinated fight by all public sector unions to stop cuts, privatisation and attacks on workers' pay and union rights. Not a penny more of union members' money to go to any MP or councillor voting to attack our members' jobs, wages and services.

Gunstones victory

Stop press - victory for bakery workers at Gunstones in North East Derbyshire ahead of planned 6 August strike by bakers' union BFAWU. Check #Gunstones on Twitter for latest.

High security

Members of prison staff union POA at Ashworth high-security psychiatric hospital are voting on possible strike action. The union is balloting from 5 to 19 August after bosses sacked two members. More details when available at socialistparty.org.uk.

Return of Phoenix

A second Unite rep was sacked by electrical contractor Phoenix at a central London site on 31 July. Last issue, we reported on a protest in Canary Wharf after Phoenix sacked a newly elected steward for general union Unite. Graham Boxall had requested subcontracted workers move to direct employment, as set out in union agreements. The protest got Graham reinstated - but Phoenix is threatening to sue over the demo! See shopstewards.net for updates on the latest sacking.

Manchester Uni

The University of Manchester is threatening 219 jobs, and wants to privatise services including IT. The joint unions have been sidelined and treated with contempt. Lecturers' union UCU is mobilising mass meetings for action, and calling on management to withdraw attacks and negotiate meaningfully. Socialist Party members in the campus unions, and members of Socialist Students, support striking to head off attacks.

A University of Manchester UCU member

Lancashire unions public meeting

Fighting the anti-union laws

Organised by Lancashire and District RMT

Thursday 20 August

7.15 to 9.15pm

Banqueting Suite, 2nd floor,

Lancaster Town Hall

Speakers include

- Cat Smith, MP
 - Carolyn Jones, Institute of Employment Rights
 - Peter Billington, Lancashire Association of TUCs
 - Plus rank-and-file union speakers
-

Behind the elegant walls

The city of Bath, a popular tourist attraction, returned a big Tory majority at the general election. But behind the elegant surface of Bath's Georgian walls is a workforce that is ready to be politicised.

Many workers, often living below the minimum wage, cram into small rooms and are financially bled by private landlords. Homelessness has also risen while many local working class families are forced to leave because of high property prices and rents.

The growing tourist industry has made the hotel sector into one of the most lucrative areas of business development, promoted by the city council. A big percentage of the workforce is employed in the hotel service sector. Most are paid the minimum wage, some less; others work zero-hour contracts or even get no contract at all. Many hotel workers receive no sick pay.

Some owners adopt illegal practices by stealth, making workers accept by threatening job losses (with no employer reference on dismissal). Many worry that retirement will bring them little or no pension - this makes employees work significantly past their 'official' retirement age.

Most hotel workers are not at present members of unions. One woman working in housekeeping told me: "I can't afford to pay the membership but even if I did I'd lose my job, for being seen as a trouble-maker".

The Socialist Party's role in aiding workers in their fight for justice could be crucial. Many low-paid workers are ready to struggle and would feel the benefit of talking with others in similar situations who understand their plight.

Kit Jenkins, Bath

Campaigning to end the housing crisis

There is a severe crisis in housing. Low pay and sky-high rents mean those in private accommodation spend over half their income paying the rent. For many young people buying a house, or even leaving their parents' home, is an impossible dream. Insufficient council housing and inflated house prices force people looking for somewhere to live into private rented accommodation.

But still the government and councils prove themselves unwilling to implement rent control and build social housing. Examples of what can be done to fight back have been shown in Spain and the United States.

In Spain, the election of a left-wing mayor in Madrid, where tens of thousands of families are losing their homes, has led to moves to protect housing. Manuela Carmena has recently overturned eviction orders for 70 families living in social housing and safeguarded more than 2,000 similar rental contracts.

Meanwhile, on 20 July in Seattle over 1,000 attended a lively debate on rent control. Socialist council member Kshama Sawant (a member of Socialist Alternative, co-thinkers of the Socialist Party in the US) argued for rent controls that would help working and poor people afford rent in the city and stop sudden hikes. Kshama said: "A \$15 an hour minimum wage seemed impossible, now it's a reality and rent controls can be too."

We demand our elected representatives do the same to sort out our housing crisis and a series of grassroots campaigns have caught people's imagination - like the New Era residents campaign in Hackney, London (see previous reports in the Socialist).

Cardiff housing action campaign

Ross Saunders, Cardiff Socialist Party

Campaigners in Cardiff, 'the London of Wales', are getting organised to tackle the rent rip-off and fight for an end to the housing crisis.

At a packed meeting called by the Socialist Party, campaigners raged against out-of-control rents - and no wonder. Rents rose by 5.6% last year - far more than house prices, inflation or wages. Councils have reported a massive increase in demand for homelessness services in Wales, and those who manage to hang onto their homes find they have to sacrifice other essentials to keep the landlord at bay.

Campaign launch

Campaigners in Wales have launched the Housing Action campaign group to end the housing crisis, starting with a demand that the Welsh Assembly introduces rent controls and scraps rip-off agency fees.

Peter Alan, which boasts that it is the biggest letting agent in Wales, charges nearly £450 in agency fees for a three-person house-share. That's before renewal fees, where tenants are asked to pay hundreds of pounds just so the agency will print off a new contract. Even at the end of the contract, there is often a struggle to try to get the deposit back. To end this rip-off the Welsh Assembly should abolish upfront fees for tenants completely, as the Scottish government has been forced to do.

Go further

But we must go further. Agencies could add the costs onto the monthly rents, which are already ballooning. Prices that are out of control in the private sector are also having an impact in social housing too, with many housing associations pushing to be allowed to charge so-called 'affordable' rents - up to 80% of market value. Already, some people are

being turned down for a tenancy by some housing associations for being too poor, according to campaigning charity Shelter Cymru.

Since the meeting campaigners have printed stickers to 'amend' the 'To Let' signs of the biggest agencies and are starting a fortnight of protests at 12pm, 8 August outside Peter Alan on Crwys Road in Cathays. Most importantly, however, is the decision by Housing Action campaigners to call for a Wales March for Homes in October.

Lively but angry housing meeting in Tower Hamlets

Amalia, Tower Hamlets Socialist Party

One Housing Group (OHG), a housing association which now owns former council estates on the Isle of Dogs, is trying to push through their plan to demolish and redevelop the estates as soon as possible. This, without any guarantees that current residents will return to the estates after the completion of the refurbishment. In fact, only 30% of the new properties will be available for 'affordable' housing!

Social cleansing

Tower Hamlets Socialist Party held a meeting in the area on 27 July to bring together the residents and local activists in order to hold OHG to account and stop social cleansing in our borough.

Around 40 people attended the very vibrant meeting. Paul Kershaw, chair of Unite the union housing workers' branch and Claire Laker-Mansfield, who campaigned alongside the New Era residents in Hackney, introduced the discussion.

There was applause when one resident said "OHG are not interested in the people living here, only how much money they can make. We must all fight together." After the discussion ended, someone was heard saying "OHG is very good at building a community because everyone hates them!"

Protect tenants

The meeting agreed to launch a campaign against OHG's plans and protect the interests of the estates' tenants.

The recent news that Tower Hamlets Labour Group has called for the immediate suspension of OHG shows what a powerful impact a residents' campaign can have. We think that the campaign has achieved a first victory but we must continue. Our demands are that the council sacks OHG, any redevelopment plans must have agreement of tenants and leaseholders and that the estates should be returned to the council.

Waltham Forest

Waltham Forest Trades Council recently initiated a housing activists' network in the east London borough, pulling together trade unions, anti-eviction campaigners, residents fighting regeneration and young people organising against rocketing rents.

The first meeting agreed to continue coordinating and to work towards a local demonstration.

See www.walthamforesttusc.com for more information and to get involved.

Sarah Wrack, Waltham Forest Socialist Party

The Socialist Party demands:

- Rent control now! Democratic rent councils to decide fair levels in each area
 - A mass programme of council house building and renovation to meet demand
 - Hands off our homes! Bring all ex-council housing association stock and housing services back in-house
 - Housing benefits that reflect the real cost of renting
 - Councils should use their compulsory purchase powers on long term empty properties and use them as council housing
 - A new mass workers' party to fight for affordable housing for all. Support TUSC candidates in elections to fight for these policies
 - Nationalise the banks and biggest corporations. For a democratic socialist society that puts the needs of the majority, including decent, affordable housing, before the profits of the tiny minority
-

Lincoln demonstrators defy far-right threats

Nick Parker, Lincoln Socialist Party

"We're bringing 500 on Saturday and we're going to batter you."

This was one of the threats made by far-right supporters who turned up to an anti-fascist rally in Lincoln on 25 July. The English Defence League (EDL) activists wanted to intimidate the mainly young people in attendance at the event, organised by the Lincoln Against Racism and Fascism campaign.

The rally went ahead successfully, with excellent speeches, a wide-ranging discussion, and a finance appeal that raised enough money to purchase a new banner for the group.

The counter-demonstration to the EDL rally was also a success. Once again, the turnout, over 100, was overwhelmingly made up of young people and trade unionists, with supporters also having travelled from Nottingham, Chesterfield, Grimsby, Corby and Cambridgeshire to show solidarity.

Unsurprisingly, supporters of the EDL continued to attempt to intimidate demonstrators, turning up at the assembly point, along the route of the march, and at the rallying point itself.

Rally

The rally had an open mic which included speakers from the Socialist Party and the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC), explaining why we oppose racism and the far-right in their city. Many speakers had never addressed a demonstration before.

Lincoln Against Racism and Fascism, originally founded by the Socialist Party, has an excellent track record of organising against the far-right in Lincoln dating back to 2006. This democratic campaign backed by local trade unions has organised demonstrations, public meetings, rallies and street activity like leafleting and stalls.

The Socialist Party in Lincolnshire, alongside Lincoln TUSC, will continue to fight racism, fight austerity and fight capitalism, and put the case forward for a democratic socialist society in which racist prejudice is consigned to the dustbin of history.

TUSC lobbies 'Labstainer'

On 24 July Tower Hamlets TUSC supporters gathered outside the surgery of Jim Fitzpatrick, the Labour Party MP for Poplar and Limehouse. We protested at the fact that he abstained on the welfare bill, condemning poor working families and young people to further welfare cuts.

We held our banner calling for rent controls, council homes to be built and a £10 an hour minimum wage. We also had placards explaining how the new welfare bill will affect young people's housing benefit and tax credits. We asked Jim Fitzpatrick how he intends to vote in relation to the new anti-union bill.

Hugo Pierre, who stood for TUSC in Poplar and Limehouse in the general election, attended the lobby, saying: "Jim Fitzpatrick and the other abstaining Labour MPs told us in the election they were campaigning to protect the poor and vulnerable. Where are they now? Tower Hamlets is one of the poorest boroughs in the country, we don't need abstainers, we need fighters!"

Tower Hamlets Socialist Party

Thousands gather at Leeds Pride

Thousands gathered in Leeds on 2nd August for Leeds' annual LGBT Pride march celebrating the LGBT community's progress towards equality.

However, echoing the increasing commercialisation we've seen at other Prides up and down the country, this year Leeds Pride organisers promoted big businesses like Sainsbury's bank (which just last year faced protests for homophobic treatment of customers) over their actual politics affecting the LGBT community.

In light of this, Socialist Party members from across Yorkshire gathered to campaign for the de-commercialisation of Pride and the building of a mass movement of LGBT people and the working class against austerity. This received a fantastic response from the attendees with a significant number of people asking us for more information about getting involved in further campaigning.

We also joined with groups like Lesbians & Gays Support the Miners (LGSM) and Keep Our NHS Public in the Pride march, leading chants against homophobia and austerity and making sure anti-austerity politics are on the agenda at Pride.

Michael Johnson, Leeds Socialist Party

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 3 August 2015 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

Socialist Party Summer Camp

August Bank Holiday Weekend

5pm Friday 28 August to

1pm Monday 31 August

Westmill Farm, Ware, Herts, SG12 0ES

For full details and prices see www.socialistparty.org.uk/SummerCamp

or search 'Socialist Party Summer Camp 2015' on Facebook

Please send cheques to Socialist Party, PO Box 24697, London E11 1YD and for credit card bookings call Alison Hill on 020 8988 8777

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