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## £4 billion funding black hole

# Bail out the NHS

**Richard Worth**

NHS hospitals may run out of money next year and be unable to pay their staff.

This is the warning from Christopher Smallwood, chair of St George's University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust in south west London. An extra £4 billion a year is needed to keep services running - double the funding gap estimated last year. Otherwise the NHS faces "widespread financial collapse."

According to Smallwood, "since hospitals... take out loans to finance their deficits, their accumulated debt will become so large that many could run out of borrowing capacity and cash. At this point... they can no longer pay wages."

Debt from part-privatised 'private finance initiative' hospitals is costing £2 billion this year - or £3,729 every minute. This would pay the wages of all qualified midwives for two and a half years! Repayments on this debt will escalate to £10 billion a year by 2017.

## Underfunding

The NHS has suffered years of underfunding. Since 2010 budgets have only increased 0.8% a year, while costs have soared by up to 5%.

This shortfall has hit hospitals and patients. Yet Jeremy Hunt, the Tory health secretary, is demanding £22 billion of NHS "efficiency savings" - cuts - by 2020.

Cuts mean staff vacancies are left unfilled and staff-patient ratios worsen. With increasing workloads and less staff, hospitals are already running at full capacity. The onset of winter, however, threatens more demand.

Junior doctors have forced the government back on contract attacks just by threatening strike action. Health unions must build for escalating strikes, coordinated with other unions. This is the lead Roger Bannister would give if elected as general secretary of health and public service union Unison.

The Socialist Party says: reverse all spending cuts and end the private finance initiative. Kick out the private profit vultures, and nationalise all healthcare and pharmaceutical companies under democratic workers' control and management.

## Seattle councillor Kshama Sawant re-elected

# Socialist policies get results!

**Laurel Fogerty, Socialist Party south west London**

Following an electrifying and historic campaign Kshama Sawant, Seattle's first socialist city council

member, was re-elected on 3 November. She campaigned on bold socialist policies - tackling wage theft, enforcing rent controls, providing emergency housing for the homeless, and using a 'millionaires tax' to fund stretched public services.

This unwavering focus on key issues that affect ordinary people secured her re-election with 55.5% of the vote.

With no big business backers, her campaign was funded by small donations from the public totalling nearly \$500,000, with a median donation of just \$50 (£33). This stood in stark contrast to her Democratic Party rival whose campaign was backed by slum landlords, business moguls and even Republican donors.

Support for Kshama was galvanised by the success of her first year in office. Just six months after her election in 2013, Kshama and a mass movement of working class people pushed Seattle City Council to pass an historic \$15 an hour minimum wage throughout the city. This measure is expected to pull some 100,000 low-paid workers out of poverty and add \$2.5 billion to their pay packets over the next ten years.

On the council, Kshama refused to accept budgets that cut or underfunded vital public services. Instead she demanded a 'people's budget' that prioritised working class needs.

This same strategy was used by Militant-supporting socialist councillors in the 1980s who proposed 'needs budgets' in opposition to Margaret Thatcher's swingeing cuts. And this tactic, applied to councils across the UK, will be vital if Jeremy Corbyn's Labour Party is to succeed in opposing Tory austerity.

The victory of Sawant and Socialist Alternative (co-thinkers of the Socialist Party) in Seattle shows that these tactics can win. An unwavering socialist programme focused on the needs of the working class can politicise young workers, energise volunteers and voters, and spark mass movements that can win real victories for ordinary people.

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## Four government departments agree to hack 30% from budgets

**Dave Semple, Public sector worker and union rep**

Four essential government departments have signed up to cuts of around 30% over the next four years.

It is barely a week since parliament's influential Public Accounts Committee derided the government's management of tax collecting and called for major investment.

Now the treasury - plus the local government, environment and transport departments - have signed up to four years of 8% annual cuts. By the end, each will have shed between 28 and 32% of funding, depending on how figures are calculated.

### Ruins

Tory ministers are scrambling over their colleagues - and the ruins of crucial public services - to look like they are helping to cut the deficit. Their reward will be to sit on the committee that slashes departments which haven't agreed cuts before Chancellor George Osborne's end-of-year budget statement.

Key responsibilities like flood defences, monitoring local government planning rules, rail safety and animal welfare in the billion-pound food industry will be hit.

90,000 jobs went under the last Tory-led government. Civil servants, particularly in the Public and Commercial Services union (PCS), are looking around at empty desks and failing services in sullen anger.

Our capacity to fight the cuts remains undiminished - despite vicious Tory attacks on our union. The huge and successful effort by National Gallery staff defending terms and conditions - including 110 days' strike action - proves this.

Workers back a fighting, democratic union. The Tories tried to cripple the PCS by stopping the union collecting membership dues directly from members' pay - effectively ending their membership. But over 145,000 - nearly the total number affected - have signed back up already.

Faced with mild pressure from the Lords on tax credits, the government hurriedly climbed down, delaying those cuts by three years.

A determined coalition of unions could force a much bigger retreat. The Socialist Party is campaigning for unions to call co-ordinated, escalating strikes against this weak and hated government.

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## **Tories open the door to further rises in tuition fees**

**Jonny Dickens, Socialist Students national steering committee**

Just two days after the free education student demonstration on 4 November took place in central London, the government planned more devastating attacks on Higher Education which were outlined in a widely criticised 'green paper'. Perhaps the most significant change is the plan to remove the £9,000 tuition fee cap for top universities.

Of course this is damaging for students who will likely already struggle to pay the current debt for university, but it also means that higher education is at risk of being split up into a two-tier system.

The paper also includes plans for new institutions to allow private bodies to enter universities and influence department and course plans. These changes are further proof that the government wants to treat students like consumers and universities as businesses.

While our protest was not in vain, it is clear that the Tory government is yet to end its attack on students. Students must not allow these plans to go unchallenged. Socialist Students, calls on all activists to put pressure on the National Union of Students and our student unions to organise co-ordinated national student strikes and walkouts.

With a mass movement of students and workers we can build on the momentum of the recent demonstration and bring the government's plans to an immediate halt. We demand grants, not debt. We demand that education should be a right, not a privilege.

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## **Socialist Students to the fore on march for free education**

Socialist Students was an organised, vocal and visible force at the 'Free Education' student

demonstration in London on 4 November and was to the fore in helping mobilise for it.

On the march Socialist Students made our voices heard, shouting out demands to scrap tuition fees, bring back student grants, stop all cuts and privatisation to education and calling for a fully funded education system that's publicly owned and democratically run.

**Richard Shattock, Socialist Party Hatfield**

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## **Day of action**

25 November

called by Socialist Students

Oppose the Tories' 'comprehensive spending review'

Not to cuts

Fight for free education

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## **Fury as India's sectarian austerity leader Modi plans to visit Britain**

**Isai Priya, Tamil Solidarity trade union organiser**

Indian prime minister Narendra Modi, a religious sectarian responsible for brutal austerity, will visit Britain from 12 to 14 November.

Until 2012, Modi was not allowed to enter the UK due to his alleged involvement with massacring Muslims in the Indian state of Gujarat. His Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is built on racist, sexist Hindu nationalism, including atrocities against oppressed castes.

### **Cuts**

Since his election last May, he has presided over budget cuts affecting millions of Indian workers and poor. The BJP is an aggressively neoliberal, pro-big business party.

Sikhs, Muslims, Christians, members of the oppressed Dalit castes, socialists and others have organised protests against his visit.

Hundreds attended a demonstration organised by Kashmir rights activists on 8 November outside the Indian high commission (embassy). There will be another protest outside 10 Downing Street on 12 November, the day Modi is due to arrive.

Lunch with the queen and a meeting with David Cameron are on his schedule. This is outrageous.

Britain's monarchy and government may welcome right-wing Hindu nationalism. But the ordinary people of Britain and India can only suffer from divisive, anti-worker politics.

We urge all to attend the protest on 12 November. Welcoming alleged war criminals is not something new for the Tories. But let's unite to say this is not happening in our name.

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## **#ModiNotWelcome**

Thursday 12 November, 12pm onwards - outside Downing Street, London SW1A 2AA

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# **Buyers queue overnight for 'affordable' London homes**

**Suzanne Beishon, Shared ownership householder**

The news broke last week that people were queuing overnight to buy studio flats in far-west London for £200,000.

Very few Londoners will have blinked an eye. Because this grim scenario is becoming the norm.

London's house prices are rocketing. Anyone trying to do the impossible - get affordable housing in the capital - is thrown into a bear pit to fight it out for the few remaining scraps.

The studios, converted from old American Airlines offices, start at £199,000. That's for a 28-square-metre 'studio suite'. This rises to £355,000 for a one-bedroom apartment.

Those supposedly lucky enough to make it through the doors and have a chance at one of the 228 flats will have to put down a £2,000 deposit. Then they must pay 20% of the value within ten months. All for homes not set to be completed until 2017.

The grotesque London property market never misses the chance to make a quick buck. This meant the majority queuing were in fact bloated property investors. A few desperate, young first-time buyers were peppered around them.

Meanwhile, in south-east London's Peckham, a pre-fabricated 1950s council-owned bungalow - on 0.6 acres of land - fell prey to a bidding war. It sold for a staggering £950,000.

## **Cram**

Meanwhile young - and not-so-young - renters cram into sheds, box rooms and cupboards in overcrowded, dilapidated flats for sky-high rents.

The Socialist Party fights for rent controls and a mass programme of council house building. Stop the sell-off of social housing stock. Bring unoccupied homes into public ownership.

Take the wealth off the 1% super-rich bosses and landlords - and end the living nightmare of our housing crisis.

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# **School kids must walk hands behind backs to**

# 'inspire' ambition, says head

'John', Teacher

Students at one London primary school are being forced to march with their hands behind their backs.

First as tragedy, then as farce. A neat way of describing the repeated history making its way back into Britain's schools.

St George the Martyr Primary School, Holborn, describes it as the 'university walk'. Children must move with hands clasped behind backs when in corridors between lessons.

## University

Head teacher Angela Abrahams says: "Our recently introduced university walk inspires children to be the best they can be and to 'go shine in the world'" - the school's motto. It's hard to imagine how being compelled to walk like a prisoner raises the sights of four to eleven-year-olds.

Is there research to support the impact this has on the development of children's brains, or their ability to learn? Do well-balanced, successful people all walk with their hands behind their backs?

Michael Reiss, a professor of education, commented: "I'm not at all happy by this being described as 'a university walk'. We want at university autonomous, intelligent, motivated, happy and ambitious people able to determine for themselves the right way to behave."

If we are to motivate students then gimmicky, quick-fix, authoritarian solutions are not the way forward.

Instead, students are motivated by a varied and interesting curriculum, having a voice and a bit of freedom to express themselves. And most importantly, an environment which recognises their identities and needs - not an imposed view of what the 'model student' looks like.

The elitism and rote-learning of the past are invading our schools. The Socialist Party wants to stop them, and brutal education cuts and sell-offs, in their tracks.

Then can we ensure schools meet the needs of students, staff and the wider community. Children will be able to walk around their schools with pride - with or without their hands behind their backs.

## Them & Us

### Benefit sanctions...

Unemployed? Claiming jobseekers' allowance? Desperate to land an interview to prove you're looking for work so you aren't made destitute by benefit sanctions?

Whatever you do, don't attend the interview instead of your job centre appointment. That will get you sanctioned anyway.

This is one of a list of totally senseless benefit sanctions republished by the Independent on 28 October. One claimant lost benefits for missing her signing-on session - because of a job interview.

Another was sanctioned for not completing a work capability assessment. This was because he had a heart attack - in the middle of the assessment.

A successful jobseeker was sanctioned for not looking for work between getting hired and starting the job two weeks later. And many claimants have been punished because they can't afford the fare to job centres or interviews.

## ...corporate welfare

But if you're a top capitalist, it seems that fouling things up actually wins you more welfare.

Britain's super-rich bosses crashed the economy, slash jobs and pay - and are presiding over an extremely weak 'recovery'. To thank them, the Tories hand out £93 billion a year in so-called corporate welfare.

Direct subsidies and grants alone amount to £14.5 billion. This is more than enough to reverse Tory chancellor Osborne's latest £12 billion welfare cuts for workers.

The £93 billion total amounts to over £3,500 per household every year. That could have paid for Osborne's tax credit cuts - temporarily forestalled by the Lords - several times over.

Britain's 20% corporation tax rate is below than the global, EU and OECD averages. And it's half the rate in the United States.

## What we saw

### "We need a proper revolution!"

Wealthy broadcaster and presenter Victoria Coren Mitchell got a rapturous reception from the audience of Question Time on 5 November - saying: "We need a proper revolution!" She reflected working class anger over housing - while Labour and Tory representatives squabbled over who was at fault.

Coren Mitchell also said: "The idea that any young person, unless they are the child of a Russian oligarch, can live in London any more is preposterous. I think what has to happen is all of the young people, all of the workforce, just have to leave London. Work somewhere else.

"The government has to find something to offer people outside of London, to regenerate other parts of the country, and they'll leave. All of these super-wealthy people with their iceberg houses with no nurses, no policemen, no firemen and no-one to clean the house, no-one to deliver the mail to houses."

Coren Mitchell highlights the power of ordinary people and their indispensable role in society. But the low-paid and poor shouldn't be forced to give up and leave cities. A coordinated fightback against this vicious system is what's needed - see our main article (above left).

**Suzanne Beishon**

- You can watch Victoria Coren Mitchell on Question Time at <http://bbc.in/1HvcNhi>

## On me 'ead!

Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn joined protests for a living wage for staff at Arsenal football club on 8 November. The left winger is swimming against the Blairite mainstream in Labour's parliamentary group. But he looked right at home supporting low-paid workers ahead of the team's 1-1 draw with Tottenham Hotspur.

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## **Socialism 2015 weekend: Socialist ideas back on the agenda**

Socialism 2015 was the Socialist Party's best Socialism weekend yet. That is because the discussion was the most focussed, the most serious, and the most crucial.

This relates to the debates in the working class movement being at a higher level. Following the election of Jeremy Corbyn as Labour leader there is an increased willingness and confidence to fight austerity.

Up to 1,000 working class fighters, socialists, trade union militants and young people discussed and debated, hammering out clarification on analysis and tussling with questions of tactics and tasks in the 38 workshops and forums and in the two massive rallies, not to mention in the bars afterwards.

The £30,000 raised in the rally Fighting Fund appeal is an indicator of the readiness of Socialist Party members and supporters to take up the challenges that face us. Socialist Books received over £2,000 from book sales, reflecting the determination to arm ourselves with socialist ideas.

**Sarah Sachs-Eldridge, Socialism 2015 organiser**

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### **Saturday evening rally**

The richest 1% of the world's population owns as much wealth as the poorest 55%. Chairing the Saturday rally of Socialism 2015, Claire Laker-Mansfield, a Socialist Party executive committee member, declared that given facts like this, "we live in an extreme society, run by extremists."

The packed rally listened intently to fighting speakers giving a serious analysis of the current situation. A running theme was, as Claire described it, the "political earthquake" of Jeremy Corbyn's Labour leadership victory and its role in putting the ideas of socialism back on the agenda.

Helen Pattison, from London Youth Fight Austerity, pointed out that establishment politicians and their press can't understand why young people have flocked to the rallies of "grey haired socialist" Jeremy Corbyn and similarly Bernie Sanders' presidential campaign in the US.

But she explained that it's not the age of the figures involved but how the ideas they put forward resonate and relate to the real experience of young people. "When I'm asked why I'm a socialist I say 'capitalism has only ever let me down'."

Chris Baugh, assistant general secretary of the PCS civil servants' union, began by explaining the key role played by Militant, forerunner of the Socialist Party, in the mass struggles against the Thatcher government. The leadership of Militant in the struggle of Liverpool City Council and the movement against the poll tax is a big part of why there is such an attack on 'Trotskyists' by the Labour right-wing now, just as there was at the time.



Chris spoke about the Tories' anti-union laws and the need for sustained, coordinated trade union action. "They attack the trade unions because they fear the enormous latent strength - which is a fact every union serious about a fight should recognise."

Suzanne Muna, a member of the Socialist Party and of the executive of Unite the Union, explained the potential role of socialists in the trade unions. "It can feel like you're a lone voice, but sometimes one voice is enough." She recounted the debate that had taken place in Unite about who to back in the Labour leadership election.

Suzanne and other Socialist Party members had been lobbying for Unite to disaffiliate from the Labour Party in order to back candidates standing against attacks on members' jobs and conditions by Labour politicians. "We didn't get disaffiliation but the campaign bore different fruit" she said, in acting as a lever on the leadership of the union to back Jeremy Corbyn rather than Andy Burnham.

A very good finance appeal took place at the meeting, introduced by London Socialist Party regional secretary Paula Mitchell. Earlier in the meeting Claire had read out a statement of solidarity from recently re-elected socialist Seattle City Councillor Kshama Sawant and the meeting rapturously returned solidarity and congratulations to Kshama and her party, Socialist Alternative.

Paula reported that Socialist Alternative had raised a fantastic \$500,000 for the election campaign from thousands of working class supporters. She said: "There is a different tradition in the US of donating money to political parties, but we all need to set ourselves the task of creating new traditions here."

Other international developments formed another dominant theme of the rally. Jawad Ahmad, Pakistani singer and activist in the International Youth and Workers Movement, described his own journey towards socialist ideas.

He said he saw the suffering and inequality around him and looked for a reason. "I read all sorts of books but it wasn't until I started interacting with the working class that I found the answer."

He finished by saying: "In the words of Shakespeare, 'to be, or not to be - a socialist - that is the question ... I hope and believe humanity's answer will be yes.'"

Paul Murphy, Anti-Austerity Alliance TD (MP) for Dublin South West and member of the Socialist Party (CWI Ireland) described the outrageous action being taken against protesters involved in the mass movement against water charges in Ireland. Paul is one of 18 activists being prosecuted for 'false imprisonment' (a charge with the maximum sentence of life in prison) of the deputy prime minister - who is a Labour Party member - by conducting a sit-down protest which delayed her car by two hours.

This is part of a whole host of examples of political policing which have exposed to the majority of working class people the potential role of the police and state to protect the interests of the rich. But as Paul said, the Anti-Austerity Alliance and the Socialist Party will use the trial to put austerity and the lies of the Irish Labour Party on trial. "Instead of jailing our ideas, they will give us an unprecedented platform for those ideas."

The final speaker was Socialist Party general secretary Peter Taaffe, who brought the discussion back to the debates that are taking place about Jeremy Corbyn's victory, the way forward and socialists' role in that.

Peter said: "We are prepared to join the Labour Party. But are Jeremy Corbyn and others prepared to confront the right?" Serious preparation for such a confrontation is what is necessary but as he pointed out: "While the right are preparing for civil war, the left talk about peaceful coexistence."

Peter called for the Labour Party to return to its roots as a federal organisation. "If Stella Creasy can be a member of the Co-op Party and in the Labour Party, what is the problem with the Socialist Party being incorporated?"

Peter argued that it's vital for socialists to be honest about what needs to be done to make Corbyn's challenge a success and ensure that the programme he has raised is carried through. Summing up the mood of the rally, and in many ways the whole weekend, he appealed: "Let us grab all opportunities with both hands."

**Sarah Wrack**

*[NB, the members of trade union executives mentioned above were speaking in a personal capacity]*

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## Organise, strike, resist

Socialism 2015 took place in historic times. The new political situation has given activists renewed confidence and this was reflected in the closing rally.

Every statement emphasised the need to support and defend Jeremy Corbyn from the dagger-throwing right wingers in the Labour Party, who are out to smash him and the ideas of socialism.

As Hannah Sell, deputy general secretary of the Socialist Party, said: "The best form of assistance to Corbyn is not simply cheerleading - that would be a dereliction of duty." Socialists must offer a warning that no compromise will reconcile the Labour right to Corbynism, as well as a strategy and programme for Corbyn's success.

Dave Nellist, chair of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition said that we must put demands on every Labour councillor who is prepared to vote for a cuts budget, to get behind the anti-austerity policies of their leader and refuse to implement Tory cuts. Those individuals who oppose Corbyn's anti-austerity call should be challenged in every way possible - including, if necessary, electorally.

Socialist Party member Roger Bannister made this point when outlining his campaign in the Unison general secretary election: "I don't mind having a fund that gives money to Corbyn, but money should only go to those candidates who back the union, our policies and our members ... not a penny to those councillors who vote for the same austerity policies as the Tories and Lib Dems."

These sentiments were echoed by Peter Pinkney, president of the RMT transport union, who reported that the RMT would continue to support candidates against Labour right wingers and cuts-imposing councillors.

Peter roused the audience by calling for a mass movement against the government's trade union bill and re-affirmed his union's support for a 24-hour general strike. To rapturous applause, he said: "We need to go back to our workplaces, unions and trades councils, and demand a general strike."

A warning to the movement came from Andreas Payiatsos from Xekinima (CWI Greece) when outlining the capitulation of the Syriza party. He emphasised the need to have a clear socialist programme that understands the nature of capitalism and the ruling class.

The rally laid out the tasks for the time ahead - to get out there and build a movement with the strength to defeat this government and the ideas to change the world.

**Dan Celardi**

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This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 10 November 2015 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

# USA: Kshama Sawant re-elected

## Seattle's political revolution continues

At the time of writing, 55.47% of voters (15,054) in Seattle's District 3 have chosen Kshama Sawant of Socialist Alternative (US co-thinkers of the Socialist Party) to serve another four years on the City Council. Her Republican backed Democratic challenger, Pamela Banks, received 44.31% - 12,024 votes (the final vote will be certified on 24 November).

### Patrick Ayers, Socialist Alternative, Seattle

Not only can socialists get elected, we can get re-elected. In Seattle's Capitol Hill neighbourhood tonight (3 November), hundreds of campaign supporters are celebrating at our election night party. People arrived confident due to Kshama's outstanding work in the council and our ferocious ground game.

The night before, Socialist Alternative member and Boeing IAM machinist Jeremy Prickett addressed volunteers gathered for the last door knocking effort of the campaign: "Brothers and sisters it's a privilege for us to be here today because for so long politics has been out of the hands of working people. Socialist Alternative and Kshama Sawant are changing that."

Against a powerful establishment opposition, along with their echo chamber of vitriolic anti-Kshama attacks and their exorbitant bank accounts, we knocked on 90,000 doors and made 170,000 phone calls.

We talked to thousands of people about affordable housing, inequality, taxing the rich, and working class politics. It was an unprecedented grassroots effort for local Seattle politics.

## New politics

As Jeremy's words above suggest, for many people, this campaign was about far more than re-electing Kshama. It was about building a whole new kind of politics that fights unapologetically for working families, and not corporations. It was about showing what is possible if working people get organised.

In the age of unlimited corporate election spending following the 2010 Supreme Court's Citizens United decision and in a year when corporations in Seattle spent five times more than ever before on City Council elections, we shattered fundraising records for a council race and defeated corporate cash.

We raised nearly \$500,000 from almost 3,500 individual donors. Our median donation was merely \$50 and more people donated to our campaign from Seattle and our district than for any other candidate running for City Council across the city.

Like Bernie Sanders' campaign [a declared socialist seeking nomination as the Democratic Party presidential candidate] - which also refuses corporate money and raised \$28 million in three months - Kshama's campaign is a demonstration of the huge potential for independent working class politics in the US.

"The degree to which [Kshama Sawant] blows everyone out of the water in some funding categories, and her ability to rely on many small donors, is this election's clearest sign that the old guard is being shaken" - Crosscut.com

## **Movement**

Nobody in Seattle has caused more headaches for the political establishment over the past two years than Kshama Sawant. "I wear the badge of socialist with honour" she declared in her January 2014 inauguration speech after upsetting a 13 year incumbent.

She promised at that time: "There will be no backroom deals with corporations or their political servants. There will be no rotten sell-out of the people I represent."

And Kshama delivered. Her office became a centre for working class resistance, helping tenants, workers, people of colour, LGBTQ people, immigrants and indigenous people. Kshama pushed the political debate in Seattle to the left.

Nevertheless, she was blocked many times by a conservative majority on the council that was tied by a thousand threads to the corporate establishment. But Kshama never relented in her unapologetic fight for the interests of working people, explaining again and again that what could be won inside city hall largely depended on the strength of movements outside - and actively doing everything she could to help build those movements.

This same spirit imbued the election campaign. While we knew we were in a strong position - with a visible sea of red posters and yard signs blanketing the district - we nonetheless took nothing for granted given the way democracy is warped by capitalism, where cash buys votes and the corporate media narrows and distorts the discussion.

Instead, we relied on building up our own independent force that could reach thousands of voters by activating working and young people to talk with thousands of people on their doorsteps.

When \$60,000 was dumped into our opponent's campaign by three different corporate PACs [Political Action Committees - fundraising bodies] in the last weeks of the election, our grassroots movement was prepared. Within days, we were able to get a leaflet to thousands of doors across the district alerting voters to the flood of PAC money. And when our opponent sent two negative attack mailers in the last week, we again got another leaflet out to thousands of doors exposing the dishonesty of the attacks.

## **Lessons**

As the first elected socialist in Seattle in a century, Kshama's re-election campaign took on far more significance than the average local election. Al Jazeera media called it one of seven elections in the whole US to watch this year.

The campaign took place against the national background of surging support for Bernie Sanders' campaign and his call for "a political revolution against the billionaire class".

Undoubtedly, the experience of the last two years in Seattle has provided a wealth of lessons for socialists and working people everywhere. Kshama would be the first to say that what has made the key difference in Seattle has been the existence of an organised socialist movement and Socialist Alternative in particular.

We have provided key political support to Kshama to help navigate the pressures of elected office and movement building. Together, we were able to give a successful lead and turn the growing anger at inequality, skyrocketing rent, and out-of-touch establishment politicians into a movement that relies on its own strength, its own organisations, and its own resources.

The opportunities to build the socialist movement across the US are only getting bigger. Capitalism has

completely failed working families. People are fed up with the corporate establishment and there is a growing interest in socialist ideas reflected in the intense interest when Bernie Sanders explained why he considers himself a democratic socialist in the debate with Hillary Clinton.

The movement for a \$15 an hour minimum wage has won a number of key victories around the country, students are beginning to fight back against student debt, and a whole new generation of young activists has been activated by Black Lives Matter. The world is changing and there has never been a better time to join the socialists.

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## 'Socialist politics are here to stay'

**Kshama sent the following message of solidarity to the main rally at the Socialist Party's Socialism 2015 event (reports pages 8&9)**

Sisters, brothers, comrades...

It gives me great pleasure to bring you all warm, comradely greetings from Socialist Alternative in the United States.

Earlier this week in Seattle, we succeeded in winning my re-election as a Socialist Alternative city council member. This is an historic achievement for workers in Seattle and throughout America. A veritable army of 600 working class volunteers and 30 unions defeated the combined forces of big business and the political establishment that cravenly serves corporate interests.

My opponent was financially backed by millionaire executives of corporations like Microsoft, Amazon.com, Alaska Airlines; by every business that fought against our historic \$15 an hour movement last year; by every anti-union business entity, such as the Washington Restaurant Association and the Hotel Association; and by giant city developers who are making profits hand over fist as working people get pushed out of the city due to skyrocketing rents. My opponent's campaign was fully backed by Republicans and 'big money' Democrats.

In contrast, we ran an unapologetically anti-corporate, pro-working class campaign that did not take a dime from corporate interests, but was funded only by ordinary working people and by the labour movement.

The monumental scale of our grassroots campaign is a testament to the hunger of the American working class for a bold and clear alternative to the bankrupt politics of both the Democratic and Republican Party establishments.

It also reflects how Socialist Alternative has earned the confidence of Seattle's working people, by using our position on the City Council to relentlessly push for their interests and everyone who is marginalised by the system.

In our two years on the Council, we not only won the \$15 wage, we also successfully fought against public housing rent hikes, won millions for human services in the city budget, actively assisted the recent historic and successful teachers' strike, and replaced Columbus Day with a citywide Indigenous People's Day.

We have shown that the election of a socialist in a major US city was not a flash in the pan, but that socialist politics are here to stay in Seattle. We have given a genuine socialist expression to the deep discontent and anger of working people at income, racial and gender inequality. We are doing this by campaigning for rent control, fighting the slumlords, and demanding that big developers and the rich are taxed to pay for affordable housing and mass transit.

Our success comes at the same time that there is a growing enthusiasm at the campaign of Bernie Sanders standing as a socialist for the presidency of the United States. His call for a political revolution against the billionaire class, while also refusing any corporate cash, has opened up a new space for a discussion about socialist ideas, albeit unfortunately within the context of a race in the corporate-dominated Democratic Party.

The remarkable victory of Jeremy Corbyn for the leadership of the Labour Party shows that the dissatisfaction with corporate-sponsored capitalist politicians is a global phenomenon and provides new opportunities for socialists everywhere to provide a real alternative to capitalism and its attacks on working people.

The Committee for a Workers' International is uniquely placed to provide a clear analysis and programme. Socialist Alternative in the United States looks forward with you in the UK to the victories of our comrades in the Irish elections as they defy state repression fighting the hated water tax.

I wish you every success with Socialism 2015 and with the wider struggle against Tory austerity and pro-capitalist Blairism.

Solidarity!

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## Featured letter: 'British values'

# UK trade props up Kazakh dictatorship

Mike Whale, Secretary, Campaign Kazakhstan

Following the much-publicised and criticised recent visit of Chinese leader Xi Jinping, the British government is greeting Kazakhstan's leader Nursultan Nazarbayev.

Nazarbayev, like Xi, has no regard for human rights. Opponents of his regime are ruthlessly dealt with. He is a dictator in all but name as only tame opposition parties are allowed to contest elections.

Those who claim that the way to democratise countries like Kazakhstan is to do business with them should look at the facts.

## Shot

In 2011, 70 oil workers protesting in Zhanaozen were shot by police. Survivors of the massacre have struggled to find work or get proper medical care. Instead of expressing remorse, Nazarbayev promoted the local mayor and gave the courts powers to jail union leaders.

Tony Blair has been paid millions by Nazarbayev for "consultancy". He should be ashamed that lawyers like Vadim Kuramasov, who have defended Nazarbayev's opponents, continue to be arrested and jailed on trumped-up charges.

Aron Atabek, a renowned poet, remains in prison after protesting against the destruction of workers' homes. Workers trying to organise independent trade unions face victimisation, harassment and often worse.

While the living standards of ordinary Kazakh people fall, Nazarbayev has amassed a fortune. He is one of the richest men in the world - having sold off Kazakh oil, gas, and mineral companies to US,

Russian, Chinese and British capitalists.

British business may profit from closer ties with Kazakhstan. But it will be on the back of further repression and increased poverty for Kazakh workers.

By welcoming Nazarbayev and continuing to support trade with Kazakhstan, the British government is propping up a dictatorship. Is this what Cameron and Osborne mean when they talk about promoting "British values"?

A version of this letter also appeared in the Guardian on 3 November

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## **Right wing steps up civil war in Labour Party**

# **Unions should keep independence to lead fight to defend Corbyn**

The civil war in Labour took a further step into the open on 8 November when Labour's shadow defence spokesperson, Maria Eagle, supported an outrageous attack on Jeremy Corbyn by the chief of the defence staff of the armed forces.

Sir Nicholas Houghton used a Remembrance Day TV interview to say that Corbyn's support for unilateral nuclear disarmament should not be "translated into power". Instead of denouncing this attack, Eagle said the general "was within his rights to express his doubts" about her party leader becoming prime minister.

This attack followed the scandalous suspension from Labour Party membership on 6 November of Jeremy Corbyn's head of policy, Andrew Fisher. This clearly shows that the right-wing Blairite party machine is not only still intact after Jeremy's election victory but is now moving to assert its control. The charge is that Fisher tweeted support for non-Labour candidates in the general election, even welcoming the defeat of pro-austerity former shadow chancellor Ed Balls.

But the hypocrisy is striking. There has been no disciplinary action taken against Frank Field. He called for any right-wing MPs who might be de-selected in the future to resign their seats, force by-elections and stand again as independents, in which he would support them! Field like some other right-wingers, 'leant' their votes to Corbyn when they arrogantly miscalculated that he would be routed in the leadership election.

In a similar vein, applications to join Labour have been refused from those who have stood as anti-cuts candidates in elections. This has included former Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) candidates such as Kingsley Abrams, who was thrown out of the Lambeth council Labour group because he wouldn't vote for cuts in 2011. Jeremy Corbyn and Kingsley's own local Labour MP wanted him to re-join, but he has been barred. Yet the Blairites welcomed the Tory MP Shaun Woodward not just into New Labour in 1999 with a safe seat but into the cabinet!

## **Debate**

Inevitably, there must be a debate on how best to challenge the developing Blairite attack. Corbyn has to take on the Blairites by basing himself on those who rallied to support his anti-cuts message. He should reverse his refusal to push for mandatory re-selection of MPs and should go further to open up the Labour Party to all socialist, anti-austerity forces by voting to give the opportunity for parties like

ourselves to affiliate, as the Co-operative Party is now.

This debate is a live one in the unions as well and they must play a central role in defeating the right-wing assault on Corbyn by the capitalist establishment and their allies in the Labour Party.

The leadership of the FBU firefighters' union is bringing a motion to re-affiliate to Labour to its special conference on 27 November. The FBU voted to disaffiliate in 2004 as a direct consequence of the national dispute on pay in 2002-3 against Blair's Labour government who used the army's Green Goddesses to try and break the strike. The then FBU assistant general secretary told the conference that FBU strikers had been called, "criminals, wreckers, fascists and even worse".

The leadership of the union argue that not to re-affiliate to Labour is to 'stand on the side-lines' of the fight to defend Jeremy Corbyn. But non-affiliated unions, including the FBU, have not been 'on the side-lines' over the last six months.

The FBU was one of the first unions to come out in support of Jeremy Corbyn's leadership bid. Moreover, they donated £5,000 to Jeremy's campaign fund, with only four unions giving more. In fact, the second biggest donor was another non-affiliated union, the RMT transport workers' union, one of the core constituent organisations of TUSC. And when Jeremy stood on the FBU's fire engine outside the monster election rally in Camden to address those who couldn't get in the venue, he didn't ask if the FBU were affiliated!

Like many FBU members, we believe that while this debate is legitimate, to vote on re-affiliation at this moment is premature. The conference should instead be launching a thorough consultation at all levels of the union that should report to the annual conference next May. This should be used to draw up a list of demands that can be put to the Labour leadership to extract an absolute commitment to refuse to implement the cuts alongside a democratic transformation of Labour.

We think that this should include convincing Corbyn to reverse his refusal to support the mandatory reselection of MPs on the mistaken premise of trying to placate the Blairites. It is clear from the latest attacks that, reflecting the interests of Britain's capitalist establishment, they will not be reconciled to Jeremy's leadership.

But democratisation should go further and needs to be connected to fighting the cuts. Labour needs to return to the past position when councillors were accountable to local Labour Party members, who through borough or district party committees, decided the council elections manifesto. Now we have an unaccountable caste of councillors, who are generously paid if they are in the cabinet. No wonder only a handful have voted against implementing Tory cuts.

This is a concrete issue for FBU members, who have already faced 7,000 job losses in the fire service since 2010. In Leicestershire, some Labour councillors holding the deciding vote on the fire authority, have signalled their intention to support further brutal cuts. Just days before the special conference, the union is lobbying the Labour-led West Midlands Fire Authority because they are voting for cuts.

Isn't it better to have this negotiation with the Labour leadership before affiliating? Afterwards, it will be far more difficult given the anti-union constitutional set-up that has been inherited by Corbyn and the limited role that the FBU will be able to play given its size.

## **Which Labour?**

In a similar vein, by affiliating, the FBU's fee - which could be over £50,000 a year - would go to the same party machine that is now acting against Andrew Fisher and is debarring anti-austerity applicants. In fact, it would be easier for unions such as the FBU and RMT to ensure that their money goes directly to 'Jeremy Corbyn's Labour Party' - as opposed to 'Austerity Labour' - by not affiliating. They could finance organisers from Corbyn's office or, for example, convene a conference of those Labour



councillors on fire authorities who do want to resist the new round of cuts.

They could also continue to give financial support to MPs and councillors that support Jeremy's anti-austerity policies. In the general election the RMT donated £10,000 from its national political fund to TUSC candidates (and £7,000 to the Green MP Caroline Lucas), but also donated £93,000 to Labour candidates who had declared support for the union's policies.

At this stage, the FBU should maintain its ability to act independently to support the anti-austerity struggle inside and outside Labour. This is in effect what the leadership is proposing it does in Scotland by not affiliating its Scottish members because of the anger that still exists to Labour after its role in the 'No - Better Together' alliance with the Tories and Lib Dems in the independence referendum.

It's not clear if this would be allowed within Labour. It certainly would cause a crisis if the FBU in Scotland wanted to support non-Labour candidates - the reason for the expulsion of the RMT in 2004.

The almost daily attacks on Corbyn show how serious the threat to his position is. What is urgently needed is a 'council of war'. This should include left wing-led unions like the FBU, the RMT, the PCS and others, along with serious socialist organisations inside and outside Labour. It must discuss how a real campaign could be mounted to take on the Blairites in the Parliamentary Labour Party and the councils and transform Labour into a real anti-austerity party.

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## **STOP PRESS: CWU rep sacked**

Clive Walder, a longstanding Socialist Party member in the CWU had an appeal against unfair dismissal rejected by British Telecom on 9 November, confirming his sacking after 38 years of service. Clive is chair of the CWU Birmingham, Black Country & Worcester branch and is a leading lay rep of the union.

Clive worked in a BT call centre and was dismissed after an aggressive customer reported him to management just 33 seconds into a phone call. The decision was made without taking stress into account despite the local CWU branch reporting that 7% of staff at the call centre leave their jobs each month, some walking out mid shift. Management took the decision without consulting any medical advice or taking into account any mitigation.

A campaign will be launched protesting the sacking and campaigning for his reinstatement, supported by the Socialist Party and the National Shop Stewards Network.

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## **Hull council in aggressive attack on trade unions**

**Mike Whale, Chair, Hull City Council trade unions**

An example of some of the difficulties that Jeremy Corbyn faces in dealing with the right-wing in the Labour Party emerged last week at the East Hull Constituency members meeting.

Trade unionists representing the Hull City Council workforce tried to move a resolution condemning the decision by Labour councillors to halve the facility time available for trade unions in the council.

The officers of the CLP ruled the resolution out of order, despite the fact that North Hull CLP had

discussed and passed the same resolution a week earlier!

The majority of Labour Party members will be horrified that Hull Labour Council is attacking the trade unions while the Parliamentary Labour Party is trying to stop the Tory trade union bill and also the attempt to interfere in the internal workings of the trade unions.

When a council makes redundancies it issues a '188' notice. In the case of the Hull council convenors, it recognises that the union convenors are elected democratically and suggests ways the unions themselves could manage the redundancy process!

## **Notice**

The 188 notice states that: "The process to be followed, milestones and timelines will form part of the consultation with you and the staff involved.

"The trade unions are invited to propose the method for this and it is anticipated that this may include the need for an election, the mechanism of which would be subject to consultation upholding the principles contained within the council's Ring Fencing and Selection Guidance and associated policies and practices."

"There will be a requirement for one of the holders of the two remaining convenor posts to be elected as the staff side secretary in accordance with the IR framework."

Thinking they have the right to tie an internal trade union election to council policy flies in the face of independent trade unionism. If this goes through, it sets a precedent and gives a green light to employers everywhere to interfere in how local trade unions operate.

## **Facility time**

The 188 notice also calls for voluntary redundancy. This too is an attack on the trade unions as a whole. A trade union convenor uses the time on behalf of his or her members. It is not an individual convenor's right to give up facility time owned by the trade union.

It is vital that trade unionists discuss this and pressure their leaders to intervene. Jeremy Corbyn should use his position to pressure the Labour leaders in Hull to reverse this position. With growing opposition from the workforce, we can stop these plans.

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# **Step up the fight for trade union rights**

**Rob Williams, National Shop Stewards Network national chair**

As we go to press, the Tories' anti-trade union bill is having its third and final reading in the House of Commons. If it passes, it will then go to the House of Lords and could be law as early as January or even December.

But if the Tories do win the vote, the fight against the bill must really be stepped up. Cameron will fully expect the Lords to accept the bill but their rebellion over tax credits was a reminder that even this undemocratic anti-working class institution can be forced under pressure to defy the government.

We have to prepare for these vicious proposals becoming law and the best way to do that is for the unions to immediately launch a real mass mobilisation over the next few months as the bill passes through the second chamber.

## Emergency congress

There should be an emergency TUC congress called, just as there was in early 1971 when the Tory government of Edward Heath brought in their Industrial Relations Bill, which provoked the original 'Kill the Bill' campaign. Any such congress should be widened out to union executives and thousands of shop stewards and reps, who will be in the firing line of the new laws.

Such a congress should discuss how the unions resist the new anti-union laws.

What would happen if a union was fined if it took action despite not quite reaching the new higher undemocratic voting thresholds? Or if a shop steward was arrested under the 'picket supervisor' section? Any such action should be the trigger for mass solidarity action and mass pickets.

In 1972, five London dockers who were imprisoned in Pentonville prison were freed after mass walkouts that rapidly built to general strike proportions forcing the government to 'discover' the official solicitor, virtually unknown up to that point, to release them.

## Miners' strike

In the summer of 1984, the Labour Party Young Socialists led by Militant supporters (now Socialist Party) left their national summer camp in the Forest of Dean to surround the South Wales National Union of Mineworkers HQ in Pontypridd when the union was threatened with sequestration of their funds.

But the ground has to be prepared. It will be necessary to build pressure from the rank and file of the unions. That's why local #KillTheBill committees have to be built in every area through trades councils, union branches, shop stewards committees, anti-cuts groups and organisations such as the National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN).

The left unions have to step into the vacuum to also pressure the TUC and the big unions.

It is therefore extremely welcome that the Trade Union Co-ordinating Group (TUCG) of left unions called the protest outside Parliament on the evening of 10 November.

The NSSN is working closely with the TUCG, which include the likes of civil servants union PCS, transport union RMT, firefighters union FBU, POA who represent prison officers and the BFAWU bakers' union.

## Austerity

The TUCG has also called a rally on 21 November in London billed as: 'After Corbyn's victory, build the fight against austerity'.

It will be essential to connect the trade union bill with the continuing vicious cuts, to explain why the Tories are pressing ahead with their attacks on the unions and why they have to be defeated.

That's why the day of Osborne's Autumn Statement should be a national day of action against the cuts and the bill.

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# Huge support for socialist in Northern Ireland union election

**Kevin Henry, Belfast Socialist Party (CWI Ireland)**

The last six weeks have seen one of the most high profile trade union elections in Northern Ireland for decades. The election was for general secretary of public sector union Nipsa, the largest union in Northern Ireland. Socialist Party member Patrick Mulholland stood as the broad left candidate in the election against the candidate of the Nipsa establishment, Alison Millar.

Alison Millar's campaign had the support of the majority officials in Nipsa and the resources that come with it. It did not stop a tirade of vile sectarian abuse being waged at Patrick and his supporters which should be condemned by all in the trade union movement.

The victory of the Millar campaign would also have no doubt been welcomed by the main political parties in Northern Ireland. For example, Jim McVeigh, the leader of Sinn Fein on Belfast City Council, and Nelson McCausland, former Democratic Unionist Party minister at Stormont, both warned of the danger of the left in Nipsa winning the general secretary position. Their parties dominate the ruling Assembly executive, which will decide on making huge cuts that will affect Nipsa members.

Patrick's campaign distributed tens of thousands of leaflets to hundreds of workplaces. It waged a high profile campaign which provoked discussion among people outside of Nipsa, about what type of trade union movement we need. Patrick's campaign focused on the policies and programme necessary to make a difference to Nipsa members.

He committed to only taking a worker's wage if elected and ensuring the trade union movement develops a real strategy to fight cuts. As general secretary he would have implemented decisions of Nipsa conference including advocating a democratic socialist alternative to austerity.

## **Movement**

Patrick had the opportunity to speak at hustings and meetings across the country to put forward ideas that could transform the trade union movement and the fight against austerity.

Patrick gained an impressive 44% of the vote, with 4,958 votes. The Nipsa broad left, many of who are members of the Socialist Party, still has a majority on the general council in Nipsa and will be stronger in every area of the union in the turbulent years to come.

Socialists should now use this strength to build a movement against cuts, oppose attempts to link with sectarian parties and build a left-wing alternative in Northern Ireland.

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# **Workers dig in for fight over job threat**

## **A JCB worker**

News that up to 290 JCB permanent shop floor workers could be made redundant was leaked to media sources on 4 November before the workers themselves were informed.

This is as a result of plummeting global sales of construction equipment and follows the axing of 700 shop floor agency workers since June this year along with 400 staff redundancies.

Many at JCB are saying that this situation is as bad as 2008 when the world economy crashed and thousands of JCB workers were made redundant as a result. Despite this JCB still made a profit of £29 million and has never made a loss since its inception in 1945.

## Profit

This April JCB announced its second best annual profit margin of over £300 million. From this Tory donor Lord Bamford was paid a dividend of £60 million at the same time as the staff redundancies.

Lord Anthony Bamford and family, who own JCB, are the second richest people in the West Midlands with a stash of £3.1 billion, they come 29th in the Times rich list nationally.

JCB workers are angry that these cuts are taking place when it is obvious that Lord Bamford is drowning in money. The GMB who represent shop floor workers have responded to this situation as they did in 2008 by concession bargaining, proposing ideas that will lead to a deterioration of existing terms and conditions in the hope that this will reduce the number of redundancies.

In 2008 at the suggestion of the GMB, shop floor workers voted to go on reduced hours for six months with a resultant pay cut, believing this would prevent redundancies. It turned out that hundreds more workers were made redundant after this agreement, meaning workers are now saying they will not fall for it again.

## Redundancies

These redundancies can be fought. The GMB should link up with other struggles such as the steel workers who are demonstrating against job cuts and public sector workers like the junior doctors.

There is no need for redundancies. Last week's issue of the Socialist put forward the socialist case for nationalisation of the steel industry outlining the demand for steel in building the infrastructure projects which would also need the machines that are built at JCB.

The call for nationalisation among steel workers has received an overwhelming response. This should be the central demand of the GMB at JCB as the only solution to prevent redundancies.

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# Workplace news in brief

## Fight goes further

There were picket lines at colleges up and down the country on 10 November as further education lecturers in the University and College Union (UCU) took strike action over pay. Staff are angry that the employers' representatives, the Association of Colleges, recommended a pay freeze, despite staff suffering a real-terms pay cut of 17.1% in the last five years. Three-quarters (74%) of UCU members who voted, backed strike action after the employers rejected the joint trade unions' pay claim of £1 an hour extra for staff. There were large rallies in Birmingham and London.

## Open Uni walkout

Open University (OU) staff have voted to strike for the first time ever over up to 500 job losses and the closure of seven offices. Regional centres in Birmingham, Bristol, Cambridge, Gateshead, Leeds, London and Oxford are to shut and members will also strike at OU offices in Belfast, Cardiff, Edinburgh, Milton Keynes, Manchester and Nottingham. UCU said managers were alone in thinking the plans were a good idea. Pauline Collins, of the UCU, said: "The only people who still seem to think that axing 500 jobs and closing down seven regional Open University centres is a good idea are the

senior managers. The academic body at the university rejected the plans at its senate meeting and now the staff have given an overwhelming mandate for strike action for the first time in its history."

## Academy action

Teachers at the John Roan academy school in Greenwich, South London, took strike action on 10 November over unsustainable workloads. The majority of the school's 53 staff members of the National Union of Teachers voted for strike action and formed a lively picket line of the morning of the strike. See more in next week's issue.

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# Can biomass energy be part of a socialist plan of production?

Recently, the Socialist (Issue 876) carried an article by Kate and Geoff Jones criticising the UK government's mega-expensive deal with a Chinese state company and energy multinational EDF to build a new nuclear power plant at Hinkley Point, Somerset.

The final paragraph said: "As socialists, we say no to expensive and risky nuclear! We call for the nationalisation of the big energy companies, and for a national energy plan, including a programme of public investment in low-carbon energy production - solar, wind, tidal, geothermal and biomass..."

A reader criticised the idea of using biomass energy production which we publish below, along with a reply from Kate Jones.

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## No alternative

Thank you for continuing to expose the cons that are being perpetrated on the people of this country and beyond.

Unfortunately you appear to have been conned, by repeating the claim (the Socialist 876) that biomass incineration is low-carbon.

This is the same claim made by the UK government. The opposite is true and evidenced in the case of Drax power station and the Derbyshire biomass incineration plant, among others.

Using Department of Energy and Climate Change's own recently published biomass carbon calculator, it can be shown that a significant proportion of wood that Drax burns results in up to three times more carbon emissions than the equivalent generation from burning coal (see <http://www.biofuelwatch.org.uk/axedrax-campaign/#2> ).

In Derbyshire, in the ninth most polluted and deprived ward of Osmaston in Derby (according to the Environment Agency) a polluting, high-carbon biomass plant is being built, which will create over 4.3 million tonnes of carbon dioxide over its 20 year lifespan. This is admitted by the developers themselves - Energos.

This plant will also cause breaches of nitrogen dioxide limits, which in the city of Derby is the cause of two Air Quality Management Areas being designated, in which people are breathing substandard air (evidence on <http://www.foe.co.uk/groups/derby/news> ).

**Dorothy Skrytek, Derby**

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## **Green or not?**

A question has been raised about the status of biomass as a low-carbon, renewable fuel. As one of the authors of the article on nuclear power and the alternatives, I welcome this contribution to the debate.

Yes, biomass as used in power stations like Drax is no doubt a polluting fuel, but I believe it does have a place in a low-carbon energy 'mix' as part of a socialist plan for energy.

As the report Zero Carbon Britain (Centre for Alternate Technology, 2013) points out, biomass provides storable energy which can be used to create biogas and synthetic liquid biofuels, or for direct heating for buildings rather than being burnt to generate electricity.

Plants take in carbon dioxide from the air as they grow, which is emitted when they are burnt, making their use as fuels in effect carbon neutral. The use of otherwise edible crops, or of land suitable for food production, to produce biomass is unlikely to be part of a democratic socialist plan for energy.

However, the planting of trees for short rotation coppicing, on land unsuitable or impractical for food production, could produce a regular supply of fuel (while at the same time playing a role in flood prevention).

Other sources of biomass are the woody waste from food crops or timber production, or fast growing grasses such as miscanthus.

Rather than the criterion being profitability, as now, a socialist plan for energy would look at the specific impact on communities and the wider environment of any possible energy sources being proposed.

**Kate Jones, Socialist Party Wales**

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## **Comment: Assassin's Creed Syndicate**

# **Revolutionary themes in games show we live in volatile times**

**Iain Dalton**

The latest instalment of the popular Assassin's Creed video game series takes us to London in 1868, towards the end of the industrial revolution.

The creators have populated it with a slew of historical figures including Charles Dickens, Charles Darwin - and somewhat more surprisingly, Karl Marx.

Fortunately, Marx doesn't get the same hatchet job Maximilien Robespierre received in the game's French Revolution instalment. He is shown to be passionate about defending the rights and interests of the working class.

At the time, Marx was a leading figure in the International Working Men's Association, or First International, alongside many of Britain's leading trade unionists. As you play, you overhear workers talking about striking against inhumane conditions.

Yet the makers go too far - perhaps trying to correct for the bloodthirsty image they gave Robespierre. While Marx is correctly shown to oppose individual terroristic acts, the game gives him almost pacifistic views.

## **Commune**

Only a few years after the game is set, Marx and the First International were staunchly defending the Paris Commune. Armed workers "stormed heaven" to take power for the first time, albeit only for a few months.

Numerous themes of revolution and mass struggles in recent entertainment show the politically volatile nature of the period we are living in.

Hopefully, Marx's cameo in this game will encourage more people to seek out his real ideas.

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# **Save steel jobs**

## **Campaign for socialist nationalisation**

**Matt Dobson, Socialist Party Scotland**

In driving rain, over 300 steelworkers, their families, trade unionists and supporters from the wider community, marched through Motherwell from the Dalzell plant to the site of the old Ravenscraig steelworks on 7 November.

They were joined by local public sector workers, also facing job cuts, and Glasgow shipyard workers. Marchers were applauded by shoppers and people in passing cars.

Socialist Party Scotland has been campaigning across the West of Scotland demanding the Scottish National Party (SNP) government steps in to nationalise the plants.

Over 1,500 people have signed our petition. 45 copies of the Socialist were sold on the demo, making a total of 500 in the last fortnight.

Ross Clark, Community trade union convenor for the affected plants, spoke at the rally and to the Socialist: "We cannot allow what happened with Ravenscraig to happen here. People have united here on this demonstration and we need to push the taskforce and both governments to consider all options."

Labour MSP John Pentland called for nationalisation and public ownership of the plants to be considered, linked to guarantees by the Scottish government of procurement contracts. John raised the example of the SNP government's state intervention to save Prestwick airport.

This demand, if taken up by the trade unions in a mass campaign, could put serious pressure on the Scottish government - which has yet to find its preferred option of a private buyer, but has not ruled out nationalisation.

We have also raised that there needs to be an emergency trade union response bringing together all



industry shop stewards in a national meeting to formulate a strategy of mass action including discussion of tactics of industrial action and occupations to defend jobs and workplaces.

Steelworkers are already on short time working and there is limited time. But still time exists for the trade union to mobilise mass support from the working class to bring pressure on the Scottish government and the remaining taskforce summits. Action should be linked with workers and the community in Scunthorpe.

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## Jeremy Corbyn visits Leeds Uni

**Iain Dalton**

Several hundred students crammed into the Great Hall at Leeds University on 29 October to hear newly elected Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn speak.

Rather than any of the inspiring demands he raised during his election campaign - for free education, a £10 an hour minimum wage and others - Labour Students asked him to speak on the more mundane topic of voter registration. This reflects the right-wing and electoralist composition of Leeds Labour Students who backed Liz Kendall and seemed none too sympathetic to Corbyn when queuing outside.

While the right to vote is important, what you do with it is more so. Corbyn understood this far more than those who invited him, and indeed made it the focus of his speech.

Corbyn began by addressing the focus of the meeting, but quickly moved on to point out that while winning a majority Labour government was important to him, how they frame the debate in the here and now is vital too. He pointed to some of the U-turns the government has been forced into. For example the reversal by the House of Lords over the government's plans to cut working tax credit.

His central message was that campaigning works, and if we are to change anything it has to be on that basis. Campaigning has the potential to force the government to retreat and can prepare the basis for a subsequent government taking more radical action in the future.

Yet also evident in his speech was some of the pressure that Corbyn is coming under from the right of his own party. For example, during his speech he supported the national student demonstration that took place on 4 November. However, at no point did he mention that it had been called as a 'Free Education' demo.

Corbyn's election has been welcomed by Socialist Students as putting socialist ideas back into the mainstream and offering hope for an alternative to many.

However, one of the key tasks for socialists is to go out and build support on the ground for ideas like free education, as Socialist Students has done in Leeds with a successful demonstration recently (see issue 876).

This will both aid Corbyn in his fight against the right of his own party, but also help prepare the way for a wider acceptance of socialist ideas in society.

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## Southampton council: cutters or Corbynistas?

**Nick Chaffey, Southampton Socialist Party**

Southampton council meets on 18 November in the next round of council budget consultations. Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) supporters will be lobbying the council to defend jobs and services and back Jeremy Corbyn's call to stop cuts.

Services currently under threat include six libraries in the city. Just £250,000 would keep them open and protect librarians' jobs. NHS walk-in services in Bitterne have recently closed after a five-year long TUSC campaign. Just £120,000 would fund the nursing staff to re-open services there.

While these essential services suffer, Southampton council has found £2 million to complete its corporate arts centre project, now home to a new Nandos restaurant.

Councillors make choices, why can't we find the money for the libraries and walk-in services?

Over £90 million cuts have been carried through since 2010 in Southampton, devastating jobs and services.

Elected in 2012, Labour has continued voting though Tory cuts and losing council seats along the way, while anti-cuts councillors Keith Morrell and Don Thomas have been re-elected with huge majorities.

The election of Jeremy Corbyn has boosted support for the anti-austerity movement. He spoke in Southampton to close to a thousand people who cheered his call to end council cuts.

To build support for such a stand TUSC is organising a Southampton People's Budget conference to identify what the city needs and how we can fight for it.

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## **Derby school support staff: fight against pay cuts continues**

A noisy and angry demonstration by 350 people outside Derby City Council offices on 4 November was well supported by the public.

The demonstration was in defence of school support staff who are threatened with proposed changes in pay and conditions by the Labour controlled council. Many staff stand to lose up to 25% of their pay and some will lose even more.

### **Petition**

The protest was organised by Unison and follows an initial well-attended demonstration last month which was organised by the staff themselves, largely through Facebook (see issue 873). An online petition has received over 5,000 signatures in three weeks.

Among the many banners on display was one which read; "Thank you Derby City Council for making us feel useless". The cuts will badly affect many women and low-paid workers.

Derby City Council claims that the situation has arisen from a national equality pay review in local government and that while 30% will suffer pay reductions, around half the support staff should see pay increases. These figures are disputed by the workers and their trade union, Unison.

The city council is about to enter the second year of a severe cuts programme of £69 million. Their excuse is the usual one of being forced by the Tory government to continue to carry out these brutal austerity measures.

## Determined

Ironically, council leader Ranjit Banwait pledged his vote and support for Jeremy Corbyn in the Labour leadership election at a Corbyn campaign meeting in August!

The workers are angry and determined, and it is time for Unison to organise action to fight the proposed cuts and privatisations.

**Ian Hunter, Derby Socialist Party**

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## Fight now on to save disabled respite centre

**Norman Hall, South Tyne and Wear Socialist Party**

An angry protest took place prior to the cabinet meeting of Gateshead Labour Council on 3 November at very short notice.

On the agenda was the privatisation or closure of Grove House, a respite centre for mentally and physically disabled children between eight and 18 years of age, among the most vulnerable members of society.

Around 30 people, predominantly parents of Grove House users, made their opposition clear.

There was disbelief that the Labour council could threaten a service that is a lifeline for families in Gateshead. Parents pointed out that, as care of their disabled children is so demanding, it is only during respite that they could spend quality time with their other children.

## Outrage

Following the protest, in a BBC interview council leader Mick Henry said: "We have a situation where people like those at Grove House, a small number of the population, a very, very important part of the population, but are actually taking over 50% of the budget.

"Unfortunately, when you ask people they're more concerned about grass cutting and street cleaning, and understandably so."

Councillor Henry's statement has caused outrage. It is beyond belief that so many people can be insulted in so few sentences. The disabled kids who are compared to grass cutting and street cleaning, the families accused of eating up 50% of the budget and the people of Gateshead as a whole.

And how much will the closure of Grove House save? A meagre £280,000, bearing in mind £45,000 has been spent on refurb of offices for the council leader and cabinet.

The proposal is now under consultation but no option is ever available to call on the council to refuse to implement cuts and use their reserves of £77 million to protect services such as Grove House.

Jeremy Corbyn's anti-austerity call is in danger of being undermined by the actions and attitudes of Labour councillors such as Mick Henry.

The fight to save Grove House is now on. Sign the petition online at: [www.change.org/p/councillor-henry-gateshead-council-leader-save-grove-house](http://www.change.org/p/councillor-henry-gateshead-council-leader-save-grove-house)

<http://www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/21720>