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Save our NHS

Back doctors' strikes

Zoë Brunswick, medical student

Following a complete refusal to negotiate by Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt, junior doctors will stage their first ever full strike in December.

The ballot results show an overwhelming 98% of those balloted fully support a strike. With a 76% turnout, this amazing result really shows the anger present against the Tories' plans to destroy the National Health Service (NHS). It also shows that the government's attempt to further muzzle the trade unions by raising a strike ballot's voting threshold, can be beaten.

There has been overwhelming public support for the strike. One public poll reported a staggering 95% in favour of doctors taking industrial action and a petition in support of the strike reached almost 95,000 signatures. This result has come after a series of massive demonstrations up and down the country, with 20,000 people attending in London on 17 October.

Public support

An escalating series of strikes begins on 1 December at 8am with emergency care only (similar service to that provided on Christmas Day) for 24 hours. Following this, there are two further full walkouts planned from 8am to 5pm on 8 and 16 December.

The strength of feeling is immense; this is to be the first doctors' strike since 1975 and the first full walkout in NHS history. Already the FBU firefighters' union has written a letter in solidarity with the British Medical Association, stating that members will stand alongside junior doctors on picket lines.

Next

Now we need the other health unions to ballot and strike alongside the junior doctors. After all, over one million NHS workers have been hit with scandalous contract changes. Together we can demand fair pay and an end to the sell-off of the NHS.

A series of coordinated, escalating industrial actions carried out by all unions across the NHS could reverse the horrendous Tory cuts and save the NHS.

Minister and health boss insult strikers

Tory health minister Jeremy Hunt denigrated the junior doctors' action saying it threatens patient lives. NHS England boss Sir Bruce Keogh upped the ante by demanding, in the wake of the Paris attacks, that striking junior doctors would be available to respond "within one hour of a major incident being declared".

What an insult to people who have dedicated their lives to saving people and have always immediately responded to major emergencies; and who have ensured proper patient cover in hospitals during the planned strikes.

And what an insult from a government which intends to remove the safeguards on junior doctors working excessive hours; which has cut permanent nursing staff; and refuses to legally ensure minimum staffing levels on NHS hospital wards.

Bombing won't halt Isis terrorism

Stop the Tories' war on Syria

Janet Gibson, Hull Socialist Party

The Tory government is beating ever louder its war drums, while the mass media churns out pro-war propaganda and presses Labour to follow suit.

David Cameron is determined to join in with the US, France and Russia in bombing Syria. This won't stop Isis, it won't stop the flood of refugees. Instead, it's intended to boost the UK government's prestige abroad!

Who started the bloody wars, occupations, carnage and destruction in the Middle East anyway? And where the hell is that Chilcot report into the 2003 Iraq War?

The West's 'blood for oil' policy, via the illegal Iraq War, toppled Saddam Hussein's tyranny, but only for the country to be ripped apart with sectarian strife and the emergence of Isis.

Reactionary

Isis and its Islamist rivals in Syria have been funded and armed by the pro-West oil-rich reactionary Gulf states. The anti-democratic House of Saud routinely beheads and stones to death its own people. So why did Tory MP Anna Soubry, defend Saudi Arabia on BBC Question Time? Oil and trade deals maybe?

Bombs don't just kill; they destroy infrastructure, homes and basic utilities that support life. Imagine your home, public transport, roads, water and electricity suddenly gone. And when you flee to preserve family life imagine hearing Cameron declare your family to be just part of 'the swarm'?

In the aftermath of the Paris terrorist attacks what did Cameron do? He awarded himself £10 million to kit out an RAF jet to protect himself from Isis first!

Amid swingeing austerity cuts Cameron announced £178 billion worth of military and security expenditure over the next decade. He will not be left behind in the 'blood for oil and prestige' battle. He wants drones, rapid response units and Typhoon jets.

Cameron says "the [capitalist] world is a more dangerous place than five years ago!" He isn't wrong. It's a more dangerous world precisely because Western and Russian governments pursue 'regime change' policies in the Middle East and beyond - to install 'puppet regimes'.

In the meantime arms dealers and super-rich investors amass private profits from the wars and conflicts around the world.

We need a very loud united global movement of socialists, trade unionists, workers, youth, and pensioners to oust all the corrupt rotten governments who chase profits through war and austerity.

"No to war and austerity" should be a worldwide rallying call to fight for publicly owned economies

run and controlled by workers and the public, instead of leaving state power in the hands of a war-mongering elite.

Protest

Don't bomb Syria!

Saturday 28 November

12-2pm Downing Street,

London SW1

and across the UK

Autumn statement: bonanza for the bosses, pain for the people

Paul Callanan

As we go to press, Tory Chancellor George Osborne is due to deliver his autumn budget statement.

The Socialist expects the usual tax cuts and freebies bonanza for big business and the rich. But for working class people, it can only be more misery.

Local councils have already had 40% of their budgets slashed since 2010. Most are preparing for an extra 30% on top of that!

The Labour leader of south London's Greenwich council, Denise Hyland, was recently confronted on the cuts. Danny Hoggan, branch secretary of general union Unite, said if more cuts go through then "in 2020 we won't be talking about saving local services - but resurrecting them."

Weaknesses

The Autumn Statement could lay bare some of the government's weaknesses.

The Tory-controlled House of Lords has already embarrassed it over tax credits. There are suggestions that Osborne will fund a transitional plan by cutting housing benefit - hurting many of the same people.

And under pressure from a potential financial collapse in the NHS, he has had to increase finding by £3.8 billion. But this will mean deeper cuts in other areas.

More worryingly for a prime minister in waiting, the chancellor's economic plans are not delivering his headline promises.

He claims to be creating a "low-tax, high-wage economy". Yet only one in 40 jobs created since the economic crisis began is full-time employed.

Osborne says we need to 'live within our means'. Yet this October was the highest for government

borrowing in six years.

Public spending is actually increasing - but while services fall apart. The Treasury must borrow no more than £15 billion between now and April if it wants to meet Office for Budget Responsibility targets.

And the recovery rate is a namby-pamby 0.5% of GDP.

But austerity was never meant to fix things for us. Austerity is about cutting jobs and services so they can hand the dough back to bosses.

An organised mass movement - linking coordinated strikes with an anti-austerity political alternative - could consign the cutters to history.

Police finally own up to spies' relationships with target women

Lois Austin, Campaign Opposing Police Surveillance

The Metropolitan Police have finally apologised to seven women who undercover officers had intimate relationships with under false pretences.

This is a massive victory. Up until now, police have said they can neither confirm nor deny that relationships actually took place. They have now owned up, apologised and offered an out-of-court settlement.

Environmental activists, trade unionists, socialists and others have been victims. The Campaign Opposing Police Surveillance brings all these people together. It has led the fight for a full public investigation.

Victory

This is our second major victory. Earlier this year, we pressured Tory Home Secretary Theresa May into making the Home Office a core participant in a promised inquiry.

But while the apology is hugely welcome, it does not go far enough.

The Met has said that individual officers, members of the now-rebranded Special Demonstrations Squad, overstepped their remit. The unit liaised with MI5 and was part of political police agency Special Branch, now merged into 'Counter Terrorism Command'.

It was not just a few 'bad apples'. All officers had the same cover story and initiated relationships in the same way. They extricated themselves in the same way: by feigning a mental breakdown.

There was a pattern. They were obviously trained.

At least one of these relationships lasted as long as nine years. One officer had two children with a woman - who only found out 24 years later the father was an undercover spy. And there are still women with outstanding legal claims.

We demand the public inquiry make all documents surrounding these cases open.

And we want heads to roll. We demand to know who was in charge of the Special Demonstrations Squad. We want to know what police commissioners knew about it. We want to know who at the Home Office was responsible for its policy, and what other politicians knew about it.

It is inconceivable that home secretaries such as Labour's Jack Straw had no part in spying on groups such as Youth Against Racism in Europe, active during his tenure in the 1990s.

We call for democratic accountability of communities over policing. The Campaign Opposing Police Surveillance is also asking trade unions, campaign groups, student unions and others to affiliate and join the fight against political policing.

To affiliate, and for details on upcoming protests and lobbies, see

<http://campaignopposingpolicesurveillance.com>

Transgender woman dies after spiteful courts pick male prison

Maddy Steeds, Socialist Party LGBT group

A transgender woman has died after courts sentenced her to 12 months in a male prison. Vicky Thompson was found dead on 13 November at Armley Jail in Leeds.

Despite advancements over recent years in the transgender rights movement, there are still many areas of society that have not advanced enough. Vicky had requested the judge send her to a women's prison - but this request was denied.

Vicky had been terrified of going to a men's prison. Reports say that while inside she experienced harassment due to being transgender. All this contributed to her tragic suicide at only 21 years old.

Earlier in November, sentencing of trans woman Tara Hudson provoked outcry and highlighted the vital need for reforms to recognise trans people's genders. See 'Transgender woman locked up in male prison by senseless courts' at socialistparty.org.uk for our coverage.

Sadly, Vicky's death underlines the urgency of this issue.

Oppression

It was announced during Transgender Awareness Week - underlining the huge oppression trans people still face in society. At least 81 transgender people were murdered this year alone, the majority black or minority ethnic.

Trans people are often hit hard by cuts to services - as well as being more likely to face homelessness.

Campaigning to change transphobic attitudes and rules is essential. But this will only fully succeed by reversing the cuts - and fighting for a socialist society, free from capitalism's endless inequalities and crises.

Antibiotic-resistant diseases warning: profit

system holds back urgent medical research

Scientists have again warned of the rise of antibiotic-resistant bacteria - bringing closer a scenario the media calls "antibiotic apocalypse". Researchers believe doctors prescribing the drugs too often, and blanket use in intensive farming, have accelerated the evolution of resistant strains. But why hasn't medical science developed new treatments? Claire Job, nurse and Socialist Party member, responds.

Drug-resistant infections could kill an extra ten million people every year by 2050. A potential 'post-antibiotic era' is fundamentally due to the profit system.

The bosses knew it was coming. It has been nearly 30 years since the last new class of antibiotics was released.

But capitalists do not have the capacity to plan ahead. Shareholders demand profits today - not health benefits for humankind tomorrow!

Governments blame health professionals and toy with the idea of financial penalties for doctors. But at the heart of the problem is big pharma. It has largely ignored the work of developing new drugs - in favour of medicines that are less costly and more profitable.

We need to remove the profit motive from medical research and development. This means nationalising the pharmaceutical industry under the democratic control of workers and the community.

It is only by eradicating the 'risk to profits' that innovation can truly flourish. Almost all major technological advancements have originated in the public sector.

A democratic plan of research and production could focus the industry on essential work. Public ownership would pool its huge material and intellectual resources, and eliminate the barriers of patents and trade secrets.

Socialist planning is the only way to protect the health of people today and into tomorrow.

Sun whips up racism with lie about Muslim support for terror

Lying Tory 'newspaper' the Sun ran a front page on 23 November condemning "One in five Brit Muslims' sympathy for jihadis". This was a naked attempt to whip up racism after the recent atrocities in Paris.

The unbelievable statistic was based on a small Survation poll - which made no mention of jihad. The poll actually asked whether respondents had "sympathy with young Muslims who leave the UK to join fighters in Syria".

Isis

It did not say whether this meant fighting with groups like Isis or against them. And 'sympathy' for the plight of disenfranchised youth is hardly equivalent to approval for terrorism.

An earlier poll found 14% of the general population has "some" sympathy for young Muslims going to

fight in Syria. In Survation's Muslim survey, 5% expressed "a lot" and 14.5% "some" sympathy - 19.5% (nearly one in five) total. When you take into account normal variations between sample groups, these figures are almost the same.

But Rupert Murdoch's flagship rag doesn't let mere facts get in the way of its political agenda. Defend the rich, divert the blame, divide the workers.

The Socialist Party has long described the Sun's method of journalism as two-pronged: make it simple - and make it up.

#1in5Muslims

Muslim Twitter users overwhelmed the site with ridicule for the Sun's attack.

@muslamichoe

#1in5Muslims get through airport security without getting randomly selected for a search

@muslamichoe

#1in5Muslims refrain from using phrases such as "what a bombshell!" or "that's the bomb!"

@Soul_Dignified

#1in5Muslims get asked if they shower with their hijab on

@shadesofnadia

#1in5Muslims wonders what bacon tastes like

@LiberatedSoul_

#1in5Muslims think Ross and Rachel were on a break

Them & Us

Flatshares v Bond lairs

The rent on an average two-bed London flat could exceed £2,000 a month by 2020 at current rates of increase. That's not much less than the combined gross salaries of two minimum-wage workers.

But while the housing crisis worsens for us, the super-rich live like Bond villains - literally. The secret lair of evil genius Blofeld - baddy in Daniel Craig's latest outing Spectre - is up for sale. With stunning vistas and easy access to Marrakech, the Moroccan bolthole will set you back a mere £2.8 million.

£2,007

Projected average monthly rent for a two-bed flat in London by 2020

£2,773

Projected gross monthly pay for two full-time, minimum-wage workers in 2020

Baron v workers

Simon Wolfson, boss of retail chain Next, complained this month that paying staff a living wage would dent his profits. The Tory peer lashed out at poverty-stricken workers, declaring that £6.70 an hour is "enough to live on".

Unless you're Baron Wolfson of Aspley Guise, of course. Then you need 330 times that. The chief executive, son of Next's former chair, trousered £4.6 million this year.

Cuts v handouts

The Institute of Directors surveyed its members and found 85% want Tory Chancellor George Osborne to keep on cutting. This is no surprise - the Tory nirvana of 'budget surplus' means reduced tax on their mind-blowing profits.

But what about the £93 billion in subsidies and tax breaks the state hands to big business every year? Wouldn't that go some way to closing his £70 billion deficit? Apparently not - businesses are already threatening to 'leave' if Labour left winger Jeremy Corbyn becomes prime minister.

The Socialist says: reverse all cuts. Redirect corporate handout money to jobs and services. And if the bosses don't want to stay, let them go - but nationalise their firms and assets under democratic workers' control.

Socialist change not climate change

The growing threat of climate change and a socialist programme for the environment

Pete Dickenson

The forthcoming climate summit in Paris meets as evidence continues to grow of the threat of global warming, caused by the emissions of greenhouse gases. These are produced by the burning of the fossil fuels; oil, coal and gas. The main greenhouse gas is carbon dioxide, but far more deadly is methane, which has not so far dramatically increased.

The fifteen warmest years in history have occurred since 1998, 2014 being the hottest, with 2015 looking set to break that record. The main scientific body that monitors climate change is the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), whose most recent assessment reports gave more proof of the looming danger.

The IPCC is predicting heatwaves in southern Europe, droughts in Australia, sea level rises,

acidification of oceans and shifts of weather systems and rainfall patterns.

A significant change from the previous assessment report in 2007 is that sea levels are now predicted to rise by 1 metre by 2100, almost double the previous estimate. Other scientific studies put the sea rise at 2 metres. Either way, the result will be disastrous for hundreds of millions of inhabitants of low lying coastal regions, such as in Bangladesh.

Sea level rise

The IPCC says the sea level rise is partly linked to the speed of the melting arctic ice cap, which is unprecedented for at least the past 1,450 years and sea ice could disappear in summer by 2050. Even more worrying is the prediction that 80% of the permafrost in the polar regions could have melted by then.

Huge quantities of the deadly greenhouse gas methane are trapped in permafrost and will be released as it melts, which could create a so-called tipping point, beyond which warming could become uncontrollable.

This outcome is not included in the assessment report because of timing uncertainties, as the IPCC sees them, but the potential danger is real nevertheless.

The main cause of the changes in climate is the rise in the concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere to 400 parts per million, that is linked to human action (ie capitalism). The IPCC is now 95% certain that this is the case, up from 90% in the previous assessment report. To avoid the worst effects of global warming, the carbon concentration must be kept to below 450 parts per million, climate science is saying. On present trends this level will be reached in 25 years, and the IPCC sees little chance of it being avoided.

Since 1998 there has been an apparent leveling off in global temperatures and this is reflected in the assessment report. The predictions of a temperature increase have been slightly reduced at the bottom end, to 1.5 Celsius minimum rise, from 2 Celsius in the previous report.

This is welcome, but does it change the overall picture of climate change danger? Not at all, according to the IPCC climate scientists. The general trends are clear and unequivocal. In fact, although measured atmospheric surface temperatures may have temporarily stopped rising, deep ocean temperature rise never ceased.

Basing themselves on recent improved understanding of deep ocean behaviour, some climate scientists have claimed that the temperature measurements that have been taken up until now may prove to have been an underestimate.

Emissions

There have also always been other factors that determine global temperatures, such as solar activity and the prevalence of volcanoes, whose ash blocks heat from the sun. These can temporarily hide the effect of greenhouse gas emissions.

There could now be signs that the temperature leveling off is unfortunately ending, if indeed it ever happened. Regardless of this, 2014 was the warmest year ever and 2015 looks set to surpass it. The predicted return of El Nino, the Pacific Ocean warm current that was linked to very rapid warming in the 1990s, has occurred. Despite the caution of the IPCC, the mortal danger of global warming remains and urgent, decisive action is needed to tackle it.

The main industrial powers began talking about the danger of global warming more than 25 years ago

in the run up to the 1992 Earth Summit at Rio. Since then greenhouse gas emissions have continued to balloon, not prevented by halfhearted, failed initiatives, such as the Kyoto treaty.

At the root of the problem is the capitalist profit system, in particular the rivalry between the main imperialist powers which has prevented any meaningful international agreement.

The Stern report on climate change, initiated by the last Labour government, but never implemented, said that 1% of economic output would need to be spent over 40 years to tackle global warming.

Further, Stern pointed out that this was a tiny amount compared to the potential cost of climate change if nothing meaningful was done.

This cut no ice though with the ruling classes of the world, who have shown time and again that any action that threatens short term profits, even to a limited extent, is unacceptable.

Despite the likely claims of a breakthrough by the organisers, the Paris summit will not provide any answers to the environmental threat faced by the world. Countries have been asked to come up with pledges of future cuts in emissions, but any pledge will be voluntary, their extent and time scale for implementation being completely up to each country.

The technology exists to switch from polluting sources of energy to renewables, such as wind, wave and solar power. No scientific breakthrough is needed, just a political programme to rapidly switch over to green energy, which must address the reasons previous attempts have failed.

The capitalists will fight ferociously against such a programme, because it threatens their profits, but workers need not fear its effects on employment. Research sponsored by a group of trade unions has shown that one million jobs could be created with such an approach.

Markets

Since competitive markets degrade the environment, a green programme can only be made a reality by nationalising the main industries that dominate our economy.

Also, since climate change is global, ultimately a programme of public ownership must include at least the 147 multinational firms whose networks control 40% of the world economy.

This requires a new way of organising production and society. Democratic planning is not only a viable alternative to the 'hidden hand' of the capitalist market system, it has huge inherent advantages for saving energy. For example, it would avoid duplication of resources, planned obsolescence and the energy-wasteful booms and slumps inherent in capitalism.

A priority in a socialist programme for the environment must be the nationalisation of the energy and transport industries. This will lay the basis for a switch to renewables and the expansion of public transport.

Another crucial aspect in the move to a carbon neutral world will be to decrease the energy use needed in the production of all manufactured goods, services and housing.

The 400,000 strong demonstration in New York in September 2014, the biggest ever on a green issue, shows the potential to mobilise a movement on the environment.

One reason for this is that it is clear that the capitalists have virtually given up on serious measures to address global warming.

To the very limited extent that the ruling classes are still looking for answers, some are turning to

nuclear power. But nuclear power is far from being a green alternative to fossil fuels, the 2011 Fukushima disaster in Japan was just the latest incident showing the dangers of this technology.

Potentially even more frightening than nuclear is the increasing interest by capitalist opinion formers in 'geo-engineering'. An example of this is seeding the atmosphere to recreate the effects of a volcanic eruption.

It's long been known that volcanic ash reduces global temperatures, but the effects of simulating this are largely unknown. One scientific study has found that it could result in famine and drought.

'Present trends'

The latest report by the IPCC says that on 'present trends' it will not be possible to prevent the global temperature rising by more than 2 Celsius, above which it could spiral out of control.

This is a historic indictment of capitalism and also indicates the urgency of taking decisive measures, so that 'present trends' are broken.

The election of Jeremy Corbyn as Labour Party leader has put socialist ideas back on the agenda. His and John McDonnell's promise of more interventionism is welcome if it produces real steps forward to address climate change. The more intervention there is, the more likely it will be to have an effect.

But John's vision of a very gradual, step by step, approach to transforming society fails to recognise the urgency for radical action to tackle global warming. Ultimately, piecemeal measures within the framework of capitalism will run up against the logic of the system, where profit comes first.

A rapid, root and branch transformation of society on socialist lines is what is needed to tackle the environmental threat facing us.

The Socialist Party calls for:

- Rapid conversion to the use of renewable energy sources: wind, wave and solar power. In Britain, off-shore wind farms should be given priority, in order to minimise impact on local communities
- A big expansion of public transport facilities, with fare subsidies; to encourage quick switches from private transportation
- Development of the rail system, so that short and medium haul air travel can be reduced and then replaced
- Conversion of the car industry to renewable sources of power. Electric and hydrogen powered vehicles are on the market now, but need to be affordable and an infrastructure has to be constructed so their use is possible
- A massive programme of energy saving measures implemented, including new homes to be made carbon neutral
- Step up research on green energy, for example on how to make long distance energy transmission more efficient
- Public ownership of the energy generating and transport industries; and the top banks and companies that dominate the economy
- A democratic socialist plan of production based on the interests of the overwhelming majority of people, and in a way that safeguards the environment

£257 billion

According to the Overseas Development Institute, G20 nations are responsible for £257 billion a year in subsidies for fossil fuel production. Despite pledging in 2009 to phase them out

Editorial of the Socialist

Bombing Syria won't stop Isis

For workers' unity against war, terrorism and racism

Tory Chancellor George Osborne argued spuriously on the Andrew Marr TV show that if Parliament doesn't authorise the bombing of Isis in Syria, it would be a "publicity coup" for Isis. In this kind of way, stepping up the military onslaught is presented as the only option. But as British missiles won't decisively change the scale of those already raining down on Isis from the US, French and Russian air forces, why the fervour of Osborne, Cameron and Co?

The answer lies in Osborne's comment that a defeat for the government over air strikes would send "a terrible message about Britain's role in the world" - ie it would mean a loss of prestige internationally for the British ruling class.

They are also exploiting fears and aiming a message at their domestic audience: to appear to be acting to defend people from terrorism. After the Paris atrocities, not having any real answers on how similar attacks can be avoided in Britain, their mission is to contribute to the 'shock and awe' in the skies over Syria. "Britain has never been a country that stands on the sidelines and allows others to defend us", was Osborne's hype.

In addition, they want to counter any negative effects on the British economy of the Paris attacks - there was a fall in the number of people out shopping and visiting tourist attractions following the attacks.

To uphold the interests of big business and bolster 'confidence', the government tries to create an illusion of safety through declaring a new offensive, plus allocating extra funding to 'security' measures.

With the background of this propaganda and accompanying barrage in the media - declaring that bombing Isis is the only route to providing security - a recent ORB poll for the Independent showed 71% support for air strikes on Isis in Syria, up from 67% in July. A small majority even said that ground troops should be sent into Syria against Isis.

However, the poll also showed that 64% believe that Britain would be safer from terrorist attack if the Blair government hadn't been to war on Iraq and Afghanistan. Likewise, extending Britain's military action now from Iraq to Syria will make terrorist attacks on British targets more likely in the coming weeks and months.

Mary Dejevsky, in a column in the Guardian, reminded readers that just before the Paris attacks the UK foreign affairs select committee had published a report opposing military intervention in Syria. She commented: "In some ways the arguments are even more compelling now. It should not be cowardice to suggest that these include the greater risk of attacks at home".

Foreign military interventions by western governments also increase the risk of attacks on western targets abroad, as was indicated in the terrorist attack last week in the Radisson Blu hotel in Bamako, Mali. This atrocity was not unrelated to French imperialism's history of interventions in Mali and

elsewhere in north Africa.

Futility of air strikes

In any case, while bombarding Isis can weaken it, it cannot remove it completely. The US-led coalition has conducted 8,000 air strikes on Isis in just over a year but this hasn't dislodged Isis from most of its territory.

Even a ground invasion wouldn't destroy it totally, as the failure to wipe out the Taliban in Afghanistan has shown. As has previously happened, forces like Isis could mutate into another jihadist organisation. And ground forces would open up the prospect of becoming embroiled for a long time with no ultimate success, as the wars on Iraq and Afghanistan demonstrated - which is why none of the imperialist powers are proposing this regarding Syria at present.

In the aerial assaults the bombs are inevitably also hitting the civilian population. Their terrible plight will lead to more anger among Sunnis across the Middle East towards the intervening powers and more recruits for the jihadist organisations. Raqqa is being particularly hit, a city of 350,000 people, whom Isis tries to prevent from fleeing.

Also, degrading Isis militarily will do nothing to counter its ideology or standing in the eyes of those it attracts.

On the contrary, a layer of Muslim youth worldwide can gain the impression that it is in the frontline of resistance against the imperialist powers and has 'victim status'.

Many youth who have travelled to join Isis have been motivated not primarily by ideology but by viewing it as the most successful jihadist organisation against the Assad regime's mass terror and destruction.

Both the bombing of Isis and the attacks on civil liberties in Europe - which will impact particularly on Muslims - will increase anger and alienation in a layer of Muslim youth and continue to draw a small minority of them towards the likes of Isis.

Hypocrisy

The capitalist powers intervening against Isis all have dissenting voices. For instance, right-wing former French prime minister Dominique de Villepin voiced opposition when he said that by bombing Isis "we legitimise their claim to be at war... we shouldn't fall into the trap of outbidding them".

Nevertheless, the hypocrisy of western governments knows no bounds. Isis itself is a product of the military brutality that was meted out to Sunnis during the US-led occupation of Iraq.

The friends of western imperialism in the Middle East include the autocratic Gulf elites and Turkey's regime - all of which have had involvement in backing Sunni militias in Syria and Iraq to counter the Iran-influenced Shia axis.

The regular atrocities committed in the Middle East by many of those militias - and by Shia sectarian forces - are given relatively little attention by the western powers. But when jihadists commit terrorist acts on western soil or against westerners elsewhere in the world it is another matter.

Meanwhile, while Muslims in the Middle East suffer greatly at the hands of Isis and other reactionary forces, the constant blaming of Muslim communities in the right wing media in Britain helped to fuel a 300% rise in attacks on Muslims in this country in the week following the Paris attacks - especially on women.

Civil liberties

In addition, Muslims, and also refugees, are among the worst hit by the increased 'security' measures imposed in reaction to the terrorist attacks.

In France, President Hollande has again stolen the clothes of the right in his extension of a State of Emergency to last three months. This encompasses repressive measures that include powers for the army in civilian spaces, permitting the police to enter and search homes without a warrant and powers to block internet and social media.

Also ominous is his banning of public gatherings, including two planned demonstrations against climate change and the election rallies for December's regional elections.

Recent polls in France show majorities in favour of these measures. But the questions are posed in a biased way; typical was one that asked if people supported: "measures to restrict liberty of individuals to preserve the liberty of all".

In Belgium too, a raft of 'emergency' measures was announced, including that suspected jihadists returning from Iraq and Syria will be automatically imprisoned and converts to 'radical Islam' can be tagged. Brussels was virtually shut down for several days, with all schools, universities, metro lines and shopping centres closed.

On the borders of Europe's 26-country Schengen zone extra entry checks have been imposed. These won't stop determined terrorists, but will spell delays for everyone entering, result in particular victimisation of Muslims, and an even more disastrous situation for refugees escaping wars.

In Britain billions more pounds are being given to the armed forces and intelligence services, which will be at the expense of public services, and plans are being made for a greater military presence on the streets in the event of threats.

Understandably, measures that would really stop terrorism would be very popular. However, none of these changes will do that and they will all reduce civil liberties and can in the future be used against workers' struggles on workplace or political issues.

The police in these countries already had abundant powers to arrest anyone suspected of crime. From a right-wing standpoint even the Times argued that the "central problem thrown up by the Paris attacks was not so much the paucity of police powers as the failure and neglect of institutions in spotting looming peril" and warned against measures that would be "eroding freedom".

Corbyn and Labour

Jeremy Corbyn has expressed opposition to bombing Syria. But one difficulty he has is that he has criticised the idea of military intervention taking place without backing from the United Nations.

Previously, regarding war on Iraq or Assad in Syria, anti-war politicians could cite the need for UN backing in the knowledge that it would be vetoed by Russia and China.

However, Isis's recent bringing down of a Russian plane and killing of a Chinese hostage shifted the attitude of those two governments. So the UN security council unanimously supported a French resolution calling for "all necessary means" against terrorist attacks, which is being taken as tacit backing for air strikes by many British MPs.

The UN is not an independent body arbitrating disputes between nations. It is primarily dominated by the big powers and acts in their interests. After all, the US-led Korean War (1952-53) was fought under the UN flag; and cruel sanctions against Iraq in the 1990s were carried out under UN auspices - which

led to up to half a million deaths.

Also, faced with threats of resignations and disunity from within his shadow cabinet, Corbyn is unfortunately heading towards allowing Labour MPs a free vote on the issue of bombing Syria, despite previously saying he would apply the whip.

A free vote is almost certain to give Cameron a majority. John McDonnell contributed to this likely climbdown by saying publicly that Labour MPs should have a free vote.

This is yet another consequence of Corbyn and McDonnell placing 'party unity' - ie allowing the right-wing to call the shots - above boldly taking steps to transform their party in a leftward direction.

Corbyn will face issue after issue on which the Labour right will seek to force him back. To keep the support that thrust him into the leadership position and to build on it, he needs to stand firm and use that support to bolster his position and push forward a process of building a mass pro-working class force.

Right-wing Islamist ideology only gains some traction in today's crisis-ridden capitalist societies because of the absence of democratically run mass parties based on working class unity and interests.

The building of such parties is the only route to removing the causes of terrorism and war, through clearly putting forward a socialist alternative to capitalism.

Dictatorship's methods still reign in 'democratic' Chile

Police torture 15-year-old socialist

Reporters from Socialismo Revolucionario (the Socialist Party's sister party in Chile)

Social and political convulsions characterise the last decade in Chile. The heroic student movement has been at the forefront, organising periodic mass demonstrations, occupations and strikes. This is part of a wave of radicalisation and struggle as Chile's post-dictatorship 'democratic' system moves into crisis.

The legacy of that brutal dictatorship continues. While formally extinct, the "transition" to so-called democracy left intact the dictatorship's state machine - and even constitution! This has been highlighted by brutal state repression and torture against protestors, including members of Socialismo Revolucionario.

One particular recent case involved TC, a 15-year-old member. For the crime of carrying a 'suspicious bag' - a school bag - he and a friend were arrested. Once hauled into the police van, he was brutally beaten by multiple police officers.

Beating

During this beating, police employed a notorious torture technique called 'the telephone'. This involves punching the victim in both ears at the same time, causing them to lose balance and consciousness.

When the van arrived at the station, TC's injuries were recorded officially. However, he was then suspended in the air and carried violently by the throat down flights of stairs, cutting off his breathing.

Our tortured comrade reported that, throughout his ordeal, his abusers shouted again and again that this was the result of protesting and he had better stay home in future.

Members and supporters of Socialismo Revolucionario acted immediately. The progressive parents' and guardians' organisation Opam, launched by our members, demanded and won an audience with the chief of the supreme court within 24 hours.

This one incident is symptomatic of the wider problem of state torture and repression. Torture is not even a crime in Chile, and allegations of police abuse are dealt with in secretive military courts which encourage impunity.

There have also been widespread reports of security forces sexually harassing and abusing young women on protests. And while the focus has been on student demonstrations, workers' organisations and indigenous peoples are subject to the same attacks - and worse.

Struggle

Socialismo Revolucionario argues that only mass struggle can end this injustice. Such a struggle must demand:

- An end to repression and torture
- Dismantling of the dictatorship's repressive forces
- Tearing up of Pinochet's dictatorial constitution, to be replaced with a new, democratic constituent assembly representing workers and the poor
- Democratic community control of security forces

We link the struggle for these democratic demands with the struggle against capitalism, which props up this repressive regime to defend its profits. We fight for socialist change.

Socialismo Revolucionario and Opam are discussing with students', women's and indigenous peoples' organisations - to launch a significant anti-repression, anti-torture campaign.

Socialists internationally will have a key role to play in supporting this.

Myanmar: electoral defeat for the military, renewed class struggle ahead

Keith Dickinson

The National League for Democracy (NLD) in Myanmar (formerly Burma) has won a huge victory. The liberal opposition party took 80% of the vote in parliamentary elections.

This shows the tenacity and courage of Myanmar's people in the cities, towns and countryside. It comes after 50 years of repressive military rule.

In 1988, a heroic month-long uprising lacked the necessary leadership to overthrow the army, which viciously put it down. It was this movement which threw up the beginnings of the NLD and gave prominence to Aung San Suu Kyi, its leader. She has suffered prison and house arrest for most of the years since then, with other leaders arrested, tortured and killed.

The ruling Union Solidarity Development Party (USDP) candidates are chosen by, and include, mainly

army people - either retired or serving officers in suits. The electoral commissioner is an army officer and before the election openly expressed his wish for a USDP victory.

All soldiers were ordered to vote for the USDP. Their votes came into polling stations in advance and in blocks, swinging the majority in some places. In many parts of the country, no polls took place at all. This makes the NLD victory all the more impressive.

Today, there remains some scepticism as to whether the NLD will be allowed to take over. The old parliament will only finish its term at the end of January. The generals still control the main levers of power in Myanmar.

When, once before, in elections in 1990, the NLD had a landslide victory, the generals refused to hand over. They also blatantly barred Suu Kyi from becoming head of state. The president is arbitrarily not allowed to have foreign relatives - she has two English sons.

The military has said it will not stand in the way of Suu Kyi taking over, although she cannot become president. For her part, she has declared she will be "above" the president.

Generals

Myanmar's generals have their own interests, which coincide with those of the major capitalist powers. They have their fingers, if not their whole hands, in much of the country's commerce.

Major world leaders including Barack Obama have visited the military regime to shore up support for big multinationals. Companies like Pepsi and Coca Cola have considered building factories in Myanmar, provoking student boycotts in the US. Trade unions were officially illegal from 1962 until 2011.

The country also has strategic significance for imperialist powers, near to some of the world's busiest shipping lanes. China is pressing for an Indian Ocean military port.

The main slogan of the NLD was "time for change". This, along with the mood of the people, has worried the generals.

President Thein Sein exclaimed: "What more change do you want? If you want more, go for communism. No one wants communism do they?"

There is a justification for their fears. Suu Kyi's father, Aung San, was general secretary of the Burmese Communist Party. He led the guerrilla struggles for independence against British, then Japanese, imperialism.

In the first general election after independence all eleven parties claimed to be socialist. In 1962, even a coup d'etat - ousting pro-capitalist leader U Nu - had a certain popularity.

It was carried through by Ne Win, whose party became the only one legally permitted. Reflecting the mood in the country at that time, and the influence of the still-developing Stalinist planned economies, it was called the Burma Socialist Programme Party.

Earlier this year, garment and factory workers in Yangon, Myanmar's largest city, struck over pay. This followed leaders of the country's trade union federation being allowed back from exile in 2012. Previously, workers' leaders faced imprisonment or death - and could again.

Trade unionists still face police violence and legal repression. But these walkouts, and reports of growing trade union membership, point to a growing appetite for working class struggle.

International capitalism will exert huge pressure to keep Myanmar safe for their system. Aung San Suu Kyi gives no reason to believe she will not oblige.

Workforce

Myanmar has a workforce of over 30 million people, two-fifths of them between the ages of 15 and 29. 70% work on the land, many in logging and mining. Even under the dictatorship, there have been important struggles over trade union and human rights, as well as armed struggles by persecuted ethnic minorities.

Trade unions and parties that have been persecuted and forced underground in the years of dictatorial rule will come to the surface and other new ones will undoubtedly develop.

It is urgent that Myanmar's workers and poor people build strong, independent trade unions and political struggles. Only a socialist programme can take on international business interests, and end poverty and repression.

TUCG anti-austerity meeting report

Trade Union Momentum launched to organise to defend Corbyn

Neil Cafferky

Over 700 gathered at Westminster Central Hall on 21 November to attend the Trade Union Coordinating Group (TUCG) meeting titled: 'After the Corbyn victory, build the fight against austerity'.

The TUCG was set up by now shadow chancellor John McDonnell alongside several left unions such as the RMT, FBU, PCS, CWU, BFAWU and POA. The initiative of the TUCG in calling the meeting was significant.

In the past few months the largely inert response of the TUC towards the Tory anti-trade union bill has created a vacuum that the TUCG has stepped into, organising protests and lobbies with the assistance of organisations like the National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN).

With this meeting the TUCG has taken the battle onto the political plane by organising a conference in support of Jeremy Corbyn.

Significantly, recognising that the struggle to defend Jeremy Corbyn needs organised trade union support, Matt Wrack (general secretary of the FBU firefighters' union) and Mark Serwotka (general secretary of the PCS civil servants' union) used the event to announce the setting up of a trade union Momentum.

Anti-union bill

The opening session discussed fighting austerity. Inevitably much of the discussion focused on the threat of the Tory anti-trade union bill.

Speaking from the chair POA prison officers' union general secretary Steve Gillan reminded the audience his union defies the law every time they go on strike. CWU general secretary Dave Ward

injected a note of urgency about the bill. He said all six million TUC members should be getting a letter to their homes informing them of a day of action against the anti-trade union bill.

The middle session with John McDonnell and former Greek finance minister Yiannis Varoufakis speaking attracted the most attention, clearly demonstrated when about half the meeting left straight after Varoufakis finished speaking. He was given a hero's welcome by the audience.

Varoufakis has gained a certain anti-austerity authority in the minds of many people from his initial stance towards the Troika in the early days of the first Syriza government. The fact that he presided over a catastrophic defeat for the anti-austerity platform Syriza was first elected to does not as yet seem to have dented his appeal to some, at least outside Greece.

EU referendum

While skillfully exposing the failure of austerity policies to lead the capitalist economy out of the Great Recession, he admitted that his alternative proposals to boost demand were not aimed at replacing capitalism but saving it.

Asked about the upcoming European referendum he warned the audience "You cannot escape from Europe. You must stay in and help us democratise it". Evidently, Varoufakis is asking British workers to give a vote of confidence to the anti-democratic institutions of the EU that were instrumental in crushing the aspiration of Greek workers to exit austerity earlier this year.

John McDonnell warned that George Osborne's economic policy is in chaos. British manufacturing is likely to go into recession later in the year while the deficit continues to climb higher. He reported that many local councils are now at breaking point. Rob Williams, NSSN chair, asked from the floor if Labour councils would come together to defy the cuts imposed by Tory central government.

John said he intended to call a national conference of councils to campaign against the cuts from central government. This conference would be open to campaigning organisations. This could be good step forward for the anti-cuts movement.

Council cuts

However on the question of councils refusing to implement cuts he appeared to equivocate, citing the fear that council officials could intervene if elected councillors stood up to the government.

This stance was in stark contrast to John's earlier praise of the direct action, civil disobedience campaigns of Disabled People Against Cuts or his endorsement of illegal strike action by trade unions that might fall foul of the anti-trade union bill.

If disabled people and trade unionists can defy the government what could elected councillors backed by a mass campaign and the considerable powers and assets of a local council achieve?

The final session was on building the alternative. With the recent attacks on Corbyn from the Labour right wing still fresh in the press, much of the discussion focussed on defending his leadership.

Matt Wrack labelled the most vociferous anti-Corbyn Labour MPs as 'enemies'. Alongside Mark Serwotka he called for a trade union Momentum with the aim to "organise, organise, organise."

If it recognises that the battle cannot be restricted to the channels prescribed by the Labour Party rule book, but mobilises forces of struggle inside and outside the Labour Party, a trade union-led organisation like this could play a central role in the events ahead.

Lambeth library workers' wildcat strike to save the service

Laurence Maples, Lambeth Socialist Party

Library workers in Lambeth, south London, shocked Labour's cuts councillors with a lightning strike on 18 November. The 100% solid unofficial walkout closed all ten of the borough's libraries ahead of that evening's council meeting to discuss the cuts.

The libraries are under attack from a New Labour council. They want to close five of the ten libraries and sell them off to become private gyms. Lambeth's library workers and local residents are up in arms about this and there has been a big campaign including a local demonstration of 600 people.

Lambeth Unison is balloting for strike action, so in order to head this off the council has started ordering library workers to take books off the shelves in an attempt to shut the libraries down before workers can fully respond.

In response, the workers walked out as a reminder to the council of their power. This was followed up by an angry lobby of the council meeting in the evening, demanding that the council keep the libraries open.

Unfortunately, workers reported that the leadership of Unison, their trade union, did not support the action. The Socialist Party urges Unison leaders to follow the example of general union Unite in not repudiating unofficial actions by members defending themselves against attacks.

Cuts

Library workers and campaigners have pointed out that even within the framework of the cuts that the council wrongly claim it has to make, it is possible to keep the libraries open.

It is plainly untrue that they are forced into this by the government - they are committed to privatisation. An escalating campaign of strike action will be necessary to save the libraries.

The workers will have huge support from service users and the local community, as shown by the reaction to pickets during the strike.

Library workers and campaigners have also discussed the possibility of occupations to save the libraries at public meetings. This could decisively block the council from sending in the asset strippers.

To sustain such an occupation the workers and Unison, with all the resources it has, will have to be at the heart of it.

Unison general secretary election

"I'm voting for Roger because I believe we need change in our union"

There has been widespread support for Roger Bannister in his campaign to be elected Unison general

secretary, with Unison members leafleting workplaces and explaining why they are voting for him. We have received this from Matt, a Unison member from Stoke working in the NHS:

"I'm voting for Roger because I believe that we need fundamental change in our union. I fully believe that Roger could be to Unison what Jeremy Corbyn is to Labour. We are facing unprecedented attacks on our NHS and local government services, where has the leadership been from our union? My girlfriend has worked for HMRC for three years and has taken more strike action in that space of time than I have in nine years of working in the NHS."

"I am told time and time again by branch and regional officials that our members won't strike, I say you reap what you sow. If junior doctors can go on strike for three days, so can nursing and auxiliary staff. It's time we took the fight to the government. We need a national strategy on how to fight austerity related cuts, I believe that Roger is the man with that plan."

Meanwhile, others have been angered by current Unison general secretary Dave Prentis who, despite backing Jeremy Corbyn for Labour leader, has now criticised him by saying things could not "get any worse", proving the need for a new, socialist Unison general secretary on a workers' wage in touch with members.

If you are a Unison member and agree that Unison needs a fighting strategy to beat the cuts and win victories for members, we urge you to vote for Roger Bannister.

Ballot papers are out now and voting closes 4 December.

Follow the campaign at:

@Roger4UNISON

www.facebook.com/roger4gensec

<http://roger4gensec.wordpress.com>

Note: the Unison members mentioned are speaking in a personal capacity

Steelworkers demand government action to Save Our Steel

Hundreds of steelworkers from across all the steelmaking heartlands of Britain - Wales, Scotland and the north of England - took to the streets of Sheffield on 21 November to demand government action to save the steel industry.

Angry steelworkers and their families descended on South Yorkshire carrying banners on the Save Our Steel march in a colourful and noisy protest.

Thousands of job cuts have been announced in Teesside and Scunthorpe with unions and workers expecting more to come.

TUC general secretary Frances O'Grady said: "The crisis in British steel isn't over. One in six steelworkers face losing their jobs. Britain desperately needs a long-term industrial plan, but ministers have refused to commit to one."

"The closure of factories will devastate surrounding communities and cause jobs losses throughout the supply chain. The chancellor's 'Northern Powerhouse' has to be more than a slogan for a party conference."

Rob Middlemiss, chair of the Multi Union Tata Steel at Skinningrove in North Yorkshire, took part in the rally and said the scale of job losses would be devastating for communities.

"For every steelworker that loses their job, two or three more people lose it in the supply chain," he said. "If there's 30,000 people left in steel, we're talking 100,000 affected, so the economy in those areas is going to be decimated."

Nationalisation

The Socialist Party has campaigned all along for the steel trade unions and Jeremy Corbyn to demand nationalisation of the steel industry as the only way to save jobs now and secure the future for the steel industry. And the call for nationalisation is growing.

The unions shouldn't wait for any more job losses. They should set a date for a one day strike across the industry and appeal to workers in manufacturing and support industries to show solidarity.

And they should demand nationalisation of the steel industry now.

Firefighters rally to defend pay and conditions

Socialist Party members in the Fire Brigades Union

Over 200 firefighters from across the West Midlands demonstrated outside the Labour controlled West Midlands Fire Service Authority board meeting on 23 November to protest against the proposed draconian attacks to terms, conditions and jobs.

The authority is attempting to drive down pay by forcing staff to work overtime at flat rate pay, undermining members' terms and conditions of employment. Even though there is a national agreement with the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) that members must be paid at time and a half.

And now, not satisfied with that, they are asking for volunteers to work additional shifts.

The intention of the brigade is to run one of the largest metropolitan fire brigades in the country on 1,000 firefighters which is unsustainable and will rely on the goodwill of firefighters to return to duty on their days off to cover staffing shortfalls.

Labour affiliation

This comes at a very ironic time, as the leadership of the FBU are campaigning for re-affiliation to the Labour Party.

West Midlands FBU members question why we should give our money to a Labour Party whose local councillors are bringing down the axe on firefighters' terms and conditions.

FBU general secretary Matt Wrack addressed the rally as did Dave Nellist from Coventry Socialist Party and national chair of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) who spoke from the platform on top of a fire engine.

He put forward a fighting strategy to defeat austerity and the need to for a socialist way forward.

There were big cheers when Dave called on Jeremy Corbyn and Labour councillors to organise to fight the cuts locally and made clear TUSC will stand against those who don't.

Dave has also suggested: "Labour councillors should be resisting the Tories' austerity - how about an emergency national meeting of Labour councillors on fire authorities to set out how much is needed to maintain decent fire services, then decide how to campaign to force George Osborne to fully fund essential services?"

Two FBU reps from Essex spoke next, and made the point that the attacks in the West Mids are almost identical to the ones their members are facing in Essex by their Tory controlled authority. Fire service cuts are having an impact across the country (see page 11).

West Midlands FBU Brigade secretary, Steve Price-Hunt ended the protest with a rallying call to arms making clear that firefighters will take whatever action is needed to defend our jobs, conditions and the safety of the general public.

Solidarity with sacked BT worker

As already reported in the Socialist, Clive Walder, a longstanding Socialist Party member in the Communication Workers' Union (CWU) has had an appeal against unfair dismissal rejected by British Telecom, confirming his sacking after 38 years of service. This is a message of solidarity to Clive from William Jarrett, North East National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN):

"I've watched with great concern the situation of your sacking from BT. As a Socialist Party comrade, NSSN comrade, and fellow trade unionist, I am alarmed that these companies are emboldened to act in this cavalier manner. Your situation has been discussed in Newcastle branch and several comrades have terminated their contracts with BT as a result, citing your situation as justification. I will continue to monitor the news, and will plan an NSSN picket of BT's local regional call centre. We're with you, brother."

Clive is chair of the CWU Birmingham, Black Country & Worcester branch and is a leading lay rep of the union. Clive, the NSSN and the Socialist encourage supporters to email messages of support to Clive at cliverwalder@hotmail.com and organise solidarity action.

Protest demands reinstatement of John Vasey

Supporters of the National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) protested on 23 November outside the final appeal hearing of sacked CWU postal union rep John Vasey.

The NSSN believes that John, a long standing trade union activist, is being victimised for his union activities on spurious charges.

While the appeal process has been ongoing, John has received support from his union general secretary Dave Ward, and both local trades councils in Wakefield and Leeds.

Workers in the Wakefield delivery office, where John works, held a meeting last month and indicatively voted to take strike action if he is not reinstated.

Kevin Pattison, Yorkshire NSSN convenor said: "We demand an end to this victimisation of a long standing trade unionist. The NSSN calls for John's immediate reinstatement and offers our full support to any action that John and his colleagues need to take to secure that."

Messages of protest to Jon Millidge, Royal Mail Group HR Director, c/o Tallents House, South Gyle Crescent, Edinburgh, EH12 9PB.

Workplace news in brief

Art attack

Following a public meeting attended by 200 parents and supporters, NUT members at Alfreton Grange Arts College in Derbyshire are taking eleven further days of strike action. College management plans to increase the number of teaching periods from 25 to 43, thereby ensuring shorter break times and leading to a longer school day. It is a question of quantity rather quality, leading to poorer educational outcomes. The college management is also looking for academy status. Previous action was reported in issue 875 of the Socialist and the new dates include 1,2 and 3 December plus 8, 9, 10 December the following week. Picket lines start at 9am.

Whovian invasion

Time Lords, cyborgs and stars from Dr Who joined together under the Love it or Lose it banner to offer their support to the BBC. Peter Davison, former Doctor Who, joined fellow actors Bertie Carvel and Sophie Aldred, Whovians in costume, June Hudson, the woman responsible for Tom Baker's iconic scarf and members of the NUJ, Bectu, Equity, Musicians' Union and Writers' Guild outside the BBC's headquarters in London. They were campaigning as the corporation's future is put under threat as it faces charter renewal. John Whittingdale, culture secretary, is challenging the size and scope of the BBC and whether popular programmes such as Doctor Who, Strictly Come Dancing and the Great British Bake Off should be left to commercial broadcasters. They voiced fears that the backdoor deal between BBC management and the Treasury for the corporation to take on the payment of free licence fees for over 75s, will have a severe impact on the BBC's budget.

Diagnosis: angry

In a turnout of 76.2%, junior doctors have voted overwhelmingly for industrial action after the government's threat to impose a new junior doctor contract in England from August next year. Following a ballot of more than 37,000 junior doctors in England, more than 99% have voted in favour of industrial action short of a strike, and 98% for full strike action, demonstrating the strength of feeling among the profession. The strikes are scheduled to take place on 1, 8 and 16 December. See page 1 for more.

Featured letter - 'Tory trash'

Tory MP made me sick with tax credit cut lies

Lee Crick, East Kent Socialist Party

I have spoken to other members of my Socialist Party branch and they agree that my recent efforts to oppose the tax credit cuts could do with some exposure in our paper.

It all started about a month ago when I wrote to my local paper informing them of my concerns about the tax credit cuts. I didn't actually think they would bother with publishing what I had to say, but they did. And with that satisfying feeling of being heard and acknowledged, my next step was to write to my local MP.

With the help of campaign website 38 Degrees I sent him an email containing my concerns. A week later I received a reply. My MP told me the Conservatives cannot see how families will be affected, and it's the fault of workers we are in the mess of free hand-outs.

'Up yours'

I basically felt like the contents of the email was a giant 'up yours'. But it wasn't until I got to the very bottom that I realised the email was all lies. They were talking to me as if I was a complete idiot.

It said at the end of the email that the reason they have to implement these welfare cuts is because they want to concentrate spending on hospitals, schools and transport. More like concentrate on privatising them!

It made me sick to my stomach knowing this person was trying to feed me a load of Tory trash. I mean, either they are completely and utterly deluded, or they know they are telling me lies. I think - I know - it's the latter.

Continue the fight.

Transgender access to healthcare is worsened by cuts

Michael Johnson, Socialist Party LGBT group

NHS staff, including one trust chief executive, called in September for a full debate on access to healthcare for transgender people. Discussion is a step forward - but nowhere near enough.

Trans people are those whose gender does not match the sex they were assigned at birth. They typically wait at least a year to access gender identity services. In some parts of the country, they can wait up to five years!

Gender identity services have been difficult to access since their introduction.

They are not consistently provided. This leads to trans people having to travel the country to access specialist counselling or gender reassignment surgery.

Referrals are hard to get, due to outdated or incomplete procedures and poor knowledge of trans issues in the NHS at large. But with mass cuts to all areas of the NHS, specialist services are even harder hit.

Establishment politicians' agenda for mass privatisation of the NHS makes this worse still. Private health firms see gender identity services as a potential cash cow.

Bullying

This situation has a huge impact on trans people. Nearly half of trans adults report experiencing bullying at work, especially around the time of their transition. Trans people are at huge risk of suicide: over 59% under 26 have considered it at some point.

Mainstream LGBT rights groups, such as Stonewall, have slowly started to recognise the fight for trans equality. But a significant proportion of trans people have not needed to wait for any lead. In fact, calls for this debate might not have occurred without strong campaigning from trans activists.

However, the fight for fair provision of trans healthcare needs to go further than just a debate. To effectively defend trans rights to proper healthcare access means uniting with trade unions and campaign groups.

By reversing the cuts, kicking out the profit vultures and making the NHS democratically accountable, we can end discrimination against trans people in healthcare.

Waltham Forest march demands homes for all

Linda Taaffe, Waltham Forest Socialist Party

"At last," sighed one woman coming out of a shop as she was surprised by lively demonstrators, "somebody's doing something!" This was a typical remark of workers the length of Walthamstow high street as our 'Homes for All' march weaved its way to the market square.

Upwards of 150 gathered to express outrage at the terrible housing crisis affecting thousands in our borough - as well as across London. Young or old, single people or families, low wage or professional wage, longstanding residents or recent migrants, all are facing a grim future of sky-high rents and insecurity.

Housing Action, a campaigning arm of the local trades council, whose banner led the procession, decided enough is enough. Having been involved with stopping forced private evictions and supporting council tenants, we decided it was time for trade unionists and housing activists to join forces.

Rent control

The campaign fire truck organised by the Fire Brigades Union, and percussion group Rhythms of the City, supported by a donation from the local National Union of Teachers (NUT) branch, led the way. It was noisy, visually impressive and colourful with union banners like Unite housing branch and campaigns like John Walsh and Fred Wigg towers who face 'regeneration'.

Youngsters sang out chants: "The rents on the homes go up and up, up and up" to the tune of the wheels on the bus.

Nancy Taaffe, a former candidate for the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition whose main policy in the local elections was rent control, gave it large from the mic on the fire truck (a childhood dream!). She explained why we were protesting, and urged all to get involved to stop evictions and press the Labour council to introduce a rent cap.

At the rally campaigners and speakers from various groups like the Socialist Party, the Socialist Workers Party, the Greens, NUT activists and some Corbynistas gave a flavour of what is happening locally and how they are fighting back.

Council homes

George Galloway was in the square by chance promoting his mayoral campaign and agreed to climb the fire truck to speak. He described how millions of homes have been transferred from the public to the private sector since Thatcher.

The march got a fantastic response as we strolled through the borough. Almost 70 people bought copies of the Socialist.

At the next Housing Action meeting we will seriously discuss the next steps. We are determined that talk will be a guide to action - to defend homes, stop social cleansing and to fight for truly affordable rents with security of tenure. The march was only a start!

Fire cuts cost lives

Andrew Walton, Leicester Socialist Party

Leicester is facing some of the most severe cuts to the fire service in the country. You might be forgiven for thinking that we live under a Tory council, but Labour mayor and vice-chair of the local fire authority, Sir Peter Soulsby, is pushing these cuts through.

A sham "consultation" exercise is currently being carried out to axe fire services by £1.5 million a year. This represents a one-third reduction in firefighters and the closure of two local fire stations including the busiest in the city.

Response times would double and the fire service wouldn't be able to provide effective emergency response in the case of a large fire, meaning lives will be lost if these cuts go through. On 14 November Leicester Socialist Party helped organise a lively protest against cuts which was attended by leading Fire Brigades Union representatives locally.

We handed over petitions and pointed out that service cuts are not necessary and would cost lives. In the short term, Leicester City Council has £56 million in reserves, which could be used to keep services going, while building a campaign to fight the cuts.

But the only party putting forward an unequivocal no-cuts budget is the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC).

Barbara Potter and Wayne Naylor, ex-Labour councillors now backed by TUSC, called on the public to pressure their councillors to vote against cuts. Barbara pointed out: "Where are they then?" - referring to the 51 Labour councillors who didn't turn up to the demonstration.

The rally must be the start of a mass campaign, uniting trade unions and local people to save our services. We also need councillors to refuse to carry through Tory cuts and privatisation.

London and Lincoln's fire engines were handed over to Asset Company, who three years ago sold them on to a private equity firm for £2! We call for public services to be run under democratic, public ownership and control.

Save Dorothy Lucy centre

Delia Hazrati, Secretary, Unite Community Kent

Protesters demanded a rethink on the threatened closure of four respite and day care centres in Kent. £80 million of cuts are coming and there has been an online consultation requesting suggestions on what to cut!

I spoke to Sue Black, a service user who said: "my mum goes there four days a week. When she has been left on her own she falls. They promised to offer an alternative but there has been no answer to what we will do without the centre. They will be left indoors to rot! Shame on you Kent County Council for picking on the old and vulnerable."

The protest was organised by Unite, Unison and other trade unions as well as a coming together of the Socialist Party, Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, Momentum and the South East Kent trades council. We are holding a public meeting on 26 November in Maidston to continue this fight.

<http://www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/21786>