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# 2016: Crisis-ridden capitalism will meet with bitter mood of resistance

**Peter Taaffe, Socialist Party general secretary**

In 2015, Greece experienced the historic election victory of the left radical Syriza. This was followed by the massive rejection of austerity in the July referendum with 61% voting 'No', only to be followed by Greek Prime Minister Tsipras' craven capitulation to the 'Troika' (the European Central Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the European Union) representing the selfish possessing classes of Europe.

These stormy events were compressed into just one year!

This is a measure of the sudden changes which have become a feature of current politics, not just in Greece but also in the rest of the Europe and the world.

Similar movements, although not yet on the scale of Greece, have taken place in Spain. In the recent general election there the main two capitalist parties lost 5 million votes between them. Meanwhile, the anti-austerity party Podemos won 20% of the vote.

Portugal saw the election of a 'left' government - led by the 'Socialist' Party, with the Communist Party and the Left Bloc (which emerged from the general election with an impressive 10% of the vote) critically, but correctly, supporting it from the outside.

The roots of this rapid change in events are to be found in the complete failure of capitalism, through its politicians, parties and governments, to overcome the economic failure of its system.

This also explains the organic political and social instability throughout the capitalist world, summed up by the intractable crisis of Syria and the Middle East.

There, only independent, united movements of the working class offer a lasting solution.

This in turn has shaken Europe through the refugee crisis.

## **Illusory recovery**

But, say the capitalist 'experts', there is an economic 'recovery' taking place, which in time will put the system back on its feet.

This 'recovery' is illusory and mostly in the pockets of the bosses. The working class as a whole has not experienced a real recovery in its devastated living standards.

True, there seems to be an impressive improvement in employment in the US. This is to be welcomed in the sense that it boosts workers' confidence because the numbers in the workplaces are greater.

This in turn creates the possibility of a fightback to regain what was lost in the recession/depression since 2007-08.

But millions of working people have not yet escaped from the plunge in their conditions which followed.

When Christine Lagarde, head of the IMF, visited Britain in December, she incredibly gave a clean bill of health to the British economy, George Osborne and the Tory government, and to the future overall prospects of capitalism!

Yet the very next day, the headline in the rich people's paper, the Financial Times, commenting on the richest country in the world, read:

"[A] Fifth of US adults live in or near to poverty... Almost 5.7 million [have] joined the country's lowest income ranks since the global financial crisis...

"The old American dream was to own a home and two cars. The new American dream is to have a job."

Like ink on blotting paper, poverty has inexorably spread to more and more US workers and also to big sections of the middle class.

The Financial Times also commented that in previously prosperous areas like Texas, including Dallas - famed on TV in the past for its glitz and glitter - poverty is evident through growing food queues.

## **Support in US for socialist ideas**

It is not an accident that support in the US for Socialist Alternative, political co-thinkers of the Socialist Party in England and Wales, now has a growing basis in Texas and throughout the US.

This has laid the basis for the spectacular emergence of the Bernie Sanders campaign in the US Democratic Party primary elections.

His call for a "political revolution" against Wall Street has found a big resonance among workers and the middle class, with tens of thousands flocking to his rallies.

However, not just a political but an economic and social revolution is necessary if the lives of the working and middle classes are to be really transformed.

Socialist Alternative helped to lay the basis for the emergence of the Sanders campaign through the second great victory, in November 2015, of Kshama Sawant as a city councillor in Seattle.

Socialist Alternative has given critical support to Sanders' campaign during the primaries but has also called upon him to break from the capitalist Democratic Party, which is firmly in the grip of Wall Street and corporate America, which Sanders himself has so roundly condemned.

He is not likely to succeed in winning the Democratic Party nomination for president.

Hillary Clinton, who now demagogically seeks to separate herself from 'Wall Street', in reality represents the millionaire and billionaire class.

The time is not just ripe, it is rotten ripe in 2016 for the launching of an independent mass radical left party to provide a real alternative to the discredited capitalist US two-party system.

## **Political upheavals**

It is not accidental that the phenomenon of the Sanders campaign follows similar political upheavals in Spain with Podemos and the stunning election of Jeremy Corbyn to the leadership of the Labour Party in Britain, with the biggest majority of any party leader in history.

These reflect the huge and previously subterranean processes which have now burst to the surface,

expressing massive opposition to capitalist austerity from young people and the working class.

Some commentators have described this as 'austerity fatigue'. It is much more than this.

In Britain and elsewhere, there is a bitter mood of resistance to the deterioration in living standards and the prospect of more to come.

A further £10 billion worth of cuts in state expenditure on top of the agonies suffered under the previous coalition government are to be driven through by Osborne over the next four years.

The big butcher, Osborne, wants to franchise out the task of imposing these cuts to the 'little butchers' - and this is the way they will be seen by workers at the receiving end - at local and county council level.

With this will go the odium and unpopularity for doing the dirty work of the Tory government.

This makes it even more urgent that pressure, particularly from trade unions and communities, is put on Labour councils to break with the policy of passing on austerity, to lead them to the adoption of 'no cuts' budgets! Mobilise working people in the manner of the successful resistance in Liverpool in the 1980s!

## **Jeremy Corbyn**

The underlying combative mood, which has existed for years and sometimes decades, in the case of Britain, was just waiting for a catalyst.

Jeremy Corbyn's leadership bid provided this. His victory was unexpected, not least to himself and his immediate circle. It was a spectacular manifestation of the law of unintended consequences.

The right wing of the Labour Party had successfully imposed a system which eliminated the collective voice of the trade unions and gave the right to vote to new 'registered supporters' for the price of a pint of beer!

Taken aback at Jeremy Corbyn's victory, the right does not even pretend to hide its intentions of replacing him.

Young people and workers, both inside and outside the Labour Party, are equally prepared to resist this.

They are demanding measures such as reselection to replace Blairite dinosaurs with new fighting representatives in parliament and in councils. It is not so much a veiled civil war as an open one.

Right-wing Labour supporters have brazenly announced that they already have a thousand of the party's 'richest donors' in their pocket ready to back them, particularly if they split and form a new party.

This scenario is likely to be played out in 2016. It is absolutely essential that the left forces gathered behind Corbyn understand the objective basis which compels the capitalists and their right-wing Labour echoes to ferociously resist what is at this stage a mild programme for change.

## **Counter reforms**

The crisis of 2007-08 changed everything. It illuminated what Marxists have continually argued: that capitalism can no longer afford reforms but is compelled to carry through counter-reforms.

Hence the frontal assault on all the past gains of the working class: in terms of housing - where in some

parts of London rents have increased to five times previous levels; education, including student fees and loans; democratic rights; and wages - including wholesale attacks on the trade unions.

In other words, we have moved away from the period - roughly from 1950 to 1975 - of reforms, when capitalism was able to significantly progress itself, although it was never able to eliminate the ingrained class contradictions.

The capitalists were able to afford a few crumbs from their rich table but now their deep-going economic crisis demands 'sacrifices', counter-reforms, savage cuts, not from those who 'have', but from the poor and the working class.

This is a world phenomenon. The so-called 'underdeveloped' countries, in reality still neo-colonial in character, were promised lasting escape from poverty.

The capitalist economists even invented a new terminology for this, the 'Brics' - Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa - which were promised a glittering future.

But now, they have hit an economic brick wall! The so-called 'emerging' markets are now rapidly 'submerging' because with the slowdown in China, their commodity exports have dramatically fallen and their debts are piling up once more. This in turn has produced political turmoil in Latin America, Asia and Africa.

## **Further economic crisis**

There is worse to come as the outline of the next crisis appears on the horizon. The drop in the Chinese stock exchange in July, which we pointed out at the time would not immediately lead to a world collapse, nevertheless represented the heat lightning flashes of a new future economic storm.

This at a time when capitalism has still not fully recovered from the after-effects of 2007-08, symbolised by the massive debt overhang of \$200 trillion, three times world GDP!

This acts like leaden boots, which lead the capitalists to hold back and stifle production, meaning, as Marx said, that they "betray their historical mission" to develop science, technique and the organisation of labour.

Because of what they call 'risk aversion', they are not investing the surplus extracted from the labour of the working class back into creating productive opportunities in terms of jobs. Instead, they are piling up massive cash piles which have grown by \$57 trillion since 2007!

Capitalist governments have attempted to overcome economic stagnation through lower interest rates and the printing of money - quantitative easing.

But this has not worked sufficiently to offset mass unemployment or the prospect of a new crisis.

Moreover, they have run out of answers: "The world economy is like an ocean liner without lifeboats", wrote Stephen King of HSBC bank.

All their 'ammunition' - zero interest rates and quantitative easing on a vast scale - has been used up already.

Faced with a crisis, they will no doubt again resort to the printing press, as they did in the aftermath of 2008, to avoid an outright depression. But this will only prepare the ground for further crises.

## **Socialist alternative is essential**

What conclusion should working people draw from this? Capitalism offers no long-term solution to the problems of working people.

At best, it can stagger from crisis to crisis, to a limited amelioration in the conditions of the poor and working class, and then to another crisis.

Indeed, it is not just one crisis but a chain of crises - economic, political, environmental - which is the new 'normal' of world capitalism.

The world can only be rescued from new catastrophes by the replacement of this destructive, outmoded system by democratic, liberating socialism.

However, to achieve this, new mass parties with a clear programme linked to the day-to-day struggles of working people, with the vision of socialism at their heart, are necessary.

The victory of Corbyn represented a big potential for realising this in Britain. It did not, unfortunately, represent a clear-cut break.

Indeed, this movement, as we pointed out, contained within it two parties: one, the discredited Blairites, who could be easily swept into the rubbish heap of history; and the other a new party in the process of formation, based upon the mass desire for change around the figure of Corbyn.

However, his victory is not completely assured. Some of the Corbynistas, for instance in the leadership of the misnamed 'Momentum' - which is threatening to become 'Stagnation', have a completely false perspective.

They wish to postpone all real struggle until after the next general election in 2020.

This in a period that is likely to be one of the stormiest in recent British history, with a clamour from the ranks of the labour movement and the working class for decisive action to resist and defeat the Tory government.

Weakness invites aggression! Momentum's leaders imagine that if they capitulate to the right, abandon reselection of MPs, mollifying them with sweet words, this will in some way insulate Corbyn against criticism from these quarters and prevent moves for his overthrow.

The right can only reconcile themselves to Corbyn if he retreats completely, politically and organisationally - becoming a political puppet in effect - which could result in his support ebbing away. But even then that might not meet their test of 'electability' and he could be replaced.

He is in a no-win situation - with the capitalists, their press and their faithful representatives within the labour movement, the Blairite right, conducting a relentless campaign of lies and misrepresentation.

If he wins an election, it is despite him and his programme. If he loses, it is down to him and his programme!

A complete cleavage - a split - in the Labour Party is not to be ruled out. Indeed, a former editor of the pro-Labour Daily Mirror, Roy Greenslade, wrote in the Guardian:

"The Labour Party no longer makes any sense in its current form ... The Labour Party has shown amazing resilience through its 115-year history. The broad church has survived any number of past crises.

"But, as with all parties of the left, it cannot sustain itself much longer. It is now on the brink of complete disintegration."

And the evidence for this? Greenslade writes:

"John Mann MP was quoted in the Sunday Telegraph warning Corbyn not to allow deselection of his colleagues because it would create a civil war.

"Does he think there isn't a war already?... Labour grandees are aiming to crush Momentum by calling on 'former big benefactors' to create a 'war chest' ready to mount a challenge to Corbyn in the future."

In other words, irreconcilable forces confront one another. One is located in capitalism and everything it stands for: war, savage cuts imposed on working people, etc.

The other is radical, anti-austerity and instinctively looking towards a break with all the rotten Blairite policies of the past.

The Momentum leadership, who themselves are under attack from Tom Watson and others for being a 'party within a party', reply to this not with defiance and a programme of resistance but by their own little witch-hunt.

How much further to the right indeed they are than the left of the 1980s who, initially at least, opposed bans and proscriptions against Militant and others.

They understood that those attacks were just the opening shots in the campaign by the right to eliminate all vestiges of a working class, socialist programme.

They believed in answering political opponents through democratic discussion and debate.

This is still the real traditions of the left and particularly of the new generation who are moving into political struggle because they have seen the stultifying effects on them which capitalism now represents.

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## **No retreat on resisting council cuts!**

**Jeremy Corbyn and his supporters must fight back against the pressure from Labour's right wing to collude in a new round of savage cuts to local council services and jobs, argues Socialist Party executive committee member Clive Heemskerk.**

A week before Christmas, on the last day of parliamentary business in 2015, the Communities and Local Government Secretary Greg Clark announced the 2016-17 local finance settlement, listing the exact amount of national funding each council will receive for the next financial year.

This filled out the details, at least for the coming year, of George Osborne's plan revealed in the November comprehensive spending review for a further four years of draconian austerity for local public services.

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

Labour's shadow local government secretary Jon Trickett agreed the situation was "bleak" for councils and "is only set to get worse".

So it was doubly disappointing for those who hoped Jeremy Corbyn's Labour leadership victory opened up a new opportunity to resist austerity that, on the same day as the local finance settlement was announced, Corbyn issued a joint letter with Trickett and the shadow chancellor John McDonnell that, whatever its intentions were, will have the effect of undermining the anti-cuts struggle in the months ahead.

## **Interpretation of letter**

The letter, sent to the leaders of council Labour groups, did not instruct councillors to respond to the Tories' cuts in government funding by setting budgets in February and March to further slash local jobs and services. But that was how it was eagerly interpreted by the capitalist media, with a Guardian strapline proclaiming: "Re-run of 1980s defiance over cuts is ruled out".

Labour councillors across the country followed suit, using the letter to say that their approach of passing on the Tory cuts had been endorsed by Jeremy and John.

One graphic example was Manchester, a city where all 96 councillors are Labour. Local groups of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC), which the Socialist Party plays a leading role in, have been sending letters to Labour councillors since Jeremy Corbyn's victory asking for a discussion on how council cuts could now be resisted.

The Manchester TUSC letter was sent in October but it was only after the Labour group leader Richard Leese had received the circular from Jeremy Corbyn that he replied, quoting selected paragraphs from it. There are no Tories on Manchester council but Labour councillors will blame them nonetheless for the cuts they will vote through, 96 to nil!

Unfortunately, every service cut, bedroom tax eviction made or worker sacked by a Labour-controlled council will now be justified by councillors referring to the Corbyn and McDonnell letter.

This has been made possible because the letter misleadingly conflates the issue of not setting a budget at all - which would be open to immediate legal challenge - with the legal requirement that councillors have to set a 'balanced budget'.

## **Legal budgets**

Complying with Tory laws is not the highest duty. Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell are on record, rightly, as backing workers prepared to defy the anti-union laws.

The 1921 Poplar councillors fought under the banner, 'It's better to break the law than break the poor,' echoed by the Liverpool and Lambeth councillors in the 1980s. But in fact a no-cuts budget could meet the legal requirement to be 'balanced'.

This was the case with the alternative budgets that have been presented by TUSC-supporting councillors in Southampton, Hull and Leicester, and the example they were based on, the budget moved by the two Lewisham Socialist Party councillors, Ian Page and Chris Flood, in 2008.

The details differed but the budgets were 'balanced' by drawing on the councils' reserves, using the borrowing powers that councils have, and 'creative accountancy'. In fact they were models of the "innovative ways of making progress" that councils still have the powers to implement and which are praised in the Corbyn and McDonnell letter.

In each case they were legal budgets, unorthodox and not recommended by the councils' Chief Finance Officers, but budgets which could have been passed if the majority of Labour councillors had found the will to fight the cuts.

But they would only have bought time for the individual council, preventing cuts for a year or two. They could only ever be a first step in a national campaign to force the government to properly fund local public services. The possibility for that is what is being undermined by Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell's letter, unless they clarify their position to make it clear they still oppose Labour councils sacking workers and cutting services.

## Potential power of councils

A combined campaign of Labour councils refusing to implement the cuts could defeat the government. If the total gross spending of the 100-plus Labour-controlled councils in Britain was counted as a 'gross domestic product' (GDP), they would be the eighteenth biggest country in the EU! How can it be credibly argued that they 'have no power' to resist the Tories?

George Osborne was forced to retreat after a rebellion in the House of Lords, making him claim he had found an extra £27 billion in the public finances to enable him, among other things, to drop his proposed cuts to tax credits. The Lords were stretching their 'legal powers' to overturn a government finance measure. Arguably, in fact, more so than Labour councils would be stretching their powers if they 'interpreted' those they do have in order not to make the cuts.

The issue for Labour councillors, which is what Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell should be stressing, is one of political choice, a determination not to carry out the capitalists' demands for austerity.

But over 90% of Labour councillors did not support Jeremy Corbyn for leader. In his latest appeal for a 'moderate fightback' the New Labour architect Peter Mandelson identified "Labour's legions in local government [as] a bigger force for sense in the party than at any time in the recent past". They are the bulwark of the counter-revolution against Jeremy Corbyn's leadership.

What is needed is the type of campaign that was mobilised to secure Jeremy Corbyn's victory, this time to take on the organised forces in the Labour Party defending the capitalist establishment, not seeking 'unity' around their pro-austerity agenda.

Party members and supporters were polled over whether or not Labour should support air strikes on Syria. Why should there not be another poll of party members - and trade unionists and local council service users facing cuts - to ask if they want to see Labour councillors implementing the cuts or resisting them?

The Socialist Party is arguing within TUSC for local groups to systematically take up the approach to Labour councillors in the run up to the council budget-making meetings in February and March to see if they are prepared to fight the cuts, as some will be. But we also fully support the position adopted by the TUSC conference in September that any politician who votes for cuts cannot expect to have a free run at the ballot box, "no matter what party label they wear". There can be no compromise on cuts.

- Read a full account of the record of Lewisham's two Socialist Party councillors, Ian Page and Chris Flood, including the 2008 alternative budget, at [www.socialistparty.org.uk/txt/132.pdf](http://www.socialistparty.org.uk/txt/132.pdf)
- The TUSC model letter to Labour councillors is available at [www.tusc.org.uk/txt/348.pdf](http://www.tusc.org.uk/txt/348.pdf)

## What is the legal position?

Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell's letter says: "councils must set a balanced budget under the



Local Government Act 1992. If this does not happen... then the council's Section 151 Officer is required to issue the council with a notice under Section 114 of the 1988 Local Government Act. Councillors are then required to take all the necessary actions in order to bring the budget back into balance.

"Failing to do so can lead to complaints against councillors under the Code of Conduct, judicial review of the council and, most significantly, government intervention by the Secretary of State".

This is an accurate summary of the legal position. But even just from a legal viewpoint it actually shows that the Tories do not have the draconian powers they are usually portrayed as having by Labour councillors seeking to excuse their refusal to fight.

Where, for example, is the power of surcharge, which timorous Labour councillors still raise and which actually was inflicted on the Liverpool and Lambeth councillors in the 1980s? As TUSC has consistently explained, it was abolished in the 2000 Local Government Act.

And equally there is no prospect of imprisonment, as the Poplar councillors were faced with in 1921. Instead today's rebels would have to confront... the councillors' code of conduct!

And even that sanction is no longer as potent as it was. Breaches of the code of conduct used to be dealt with under the Standards Board regime, which could lead to a councillor being disqualified from office for a maximum of five years. But the Standards Board was abolished by the Con-Dem's 2011 Localism Act, in a cost-cutting purge of 'quangos'. Now a complaint would have to be considered by the council itself "in any way the authority sees fit" - hardly a fearsome block to a Labour council committed to resisting the cuts.

The purge of quangos also saw the end of the Audit Commission, the body that had previously appointed District Auditors with the power to seek a judicial review of council budgets. Councils are now moving to a position similar to NHS Trusts who appoint their own auditor.

Significantly, despite almost two-thirds of English NHS Trusts predicting that they will end this financial year in deficit, the accountancy companies seeking to retain their audit contracts have issued no 'public interest reports' against them.

And lastly, there is the spectre of "government intervention by the Secretary of State," with the reserve powers to appoint commissioners to take over particular council functions. These were used most recently, in February last year, after a report found Rotherham council to be 'not fit to handle child sexual exploitation'.

Winning public support for commissioners to intervene in the Rotherham scandal is one thing. But deploying commissioners to take over Labour councils, backed by the Leader of the Opposition and mobilising popular support in a national campaign against the cuts, is another matter entirely.

No Labour councillor can credibly say 'we have no choice' but to implement the cuts. They do.

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## **Fight the flood of cuts**

**Tom Baldwin**

Parts of northern England, north Wales and Scotland were hit by severe flooding over the holidays, leaving many families wondering how to rebuild their lives.

Yet this was not simply a natural disaster. Government cuts to flood defences made the problem worse.

In 2014, following months of flooding, Prime Minister Cameron said lessons would be learnt, and yet the cuts continued. Now, he is cynically trying to generate good headlines by pledging £40 million, while cutting a further £115 million this year.

Once again the Tories are sticking rigidly to their austerity agenda in the face of all the facts.

Austerity means robbing from ordinary people to give to big business and the super-rich. This course is demanded by the capitalist system which always puts profits first.

## Cuts

It's not just flooding where this is being felt. Local councils have had their funding cut by 40%, with more to come.

Even the Conservative councillor who heads the Local Government Association has warned: "If councils stopped filling in potholes, maintaining parks, closed all children's centres, libraries, museums, leisure centres and turned off every street light they will not have saved enough money to plug the financial black hole they face by 2020."

This shocking prospect cannot be allowed to become reality. The election of Jeremy Corbyn as Labour leader shows there is an appetite to fight austerity. But we can't wait until 2020 to do this; the waters of cuts and privatisation are rising now.

The example of junior doctors, who have announced a series of strike dates, should be an inspiration to all those facing attacks from this government. The more we can stand and fight together, the stronger we'll be.

The struggle against austerity needs to put a socialist alternative, where it would be the working class which owns and democratically controls the wealth we produce and not a tiny super-rich minority who feel they can dictate to the rest of us.

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## NHS workers under attack

# Support junior doctors' and student nurses' action

**Matt Whale, student nurse**

The attack launched on student nurse bursaries underlines the continued campaign the Tories are conducting against our NHS. NHS spending is at its lowest as a percentage of GDP since 1951, and the treasury is demanding a further £22 billion worth of cuts by 2020.

There is a huge shortage of nurses within the NHS. The current shortage is already over 20,000 and is likely to increase. The logical solution to this would be to invest in student nurse places and increase the funding to cover the shortfall. Some 37,000 applicants have been unsuccessful in their efforts to get

onto a nursing a course. Demand is there for places on courses, yet the government is cutting the £1.2 billion bursary for the training of the next generation of nurses, midwives and other healthcare professionals.

The government is claiming this will allow for a lifting of the block on recruitment as costs will be kept down. But the reality is people will be unable to afford to train to be a nurse. There may be more places but what's the point if people can't afford to take them up?

The NHS is one the greatest victories the British working class has ever won. The Tories hated it from its inception and are determined to destroy it. Nye Bevan famously said that the NHS will last as long as there are folk left with faith to fight for it.

The fantastic fight by the junior doctors and the huge public support for their struggle shows people will still fight to defend the NHS. Junior doctors are being forced once again to name strike days as the government attacks their terms and conditions and risks the safety of patients. The other health unions should join forces with the BMA and launch a national campaign to defend the NHS.

Join the student nurses' demonstration on 9 January at 12pm, St Thomas' Hospital, London and support the junior doctors' strike action on 12 January.

## **The Socialist Party calls for:**

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

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# **Another black man shot dead by the police in London**

**Paula Mitchell**

Twenty eight year old Jermaine Baker was shot on 11 December during an alleged attempt to spring two convicts from a prison van in Wood Green, north London. He was sitting in a car and friends say he was asleep.

The police killing of Mark Duggan in 2011 sparked riots. It would appear that the police on this occasion are trying to avoid a similar result, holding a community meeting and starting a homicide investigation.

At the big community meeting the police were called "murderers" and "liars". Anger was also directed at the press for the racist lies spread about Tottenham, where the Baker family lives.

## **Smears**

The police and press like to get the smears in first. Papers like the Mail automatically called Jermaine Baker a gangster but actually the police have no evidence he had gang links. The police have arrested a different person for possession of what turned out to be an imitation gun found at the scene.

Tottenham MP David Lammy is expressing anger in his interviews to the press, but the reality is he himself was the brunt of it at the meeting, as the local community feel nothing has changed.

One family member said to the press: "Some people think nothing has changed, or things have got worse. It's like the police shoot first and ask questions later."

Promises of police wearing body cameras were made in 2011 but the officers concerned were not wearing them.

There is a long list of deaths of black people at the hands of the police in London. Campaigning for the victims and fighting against police racism and brutality - and for democratic community control over policing - will continue to be a necessity.

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## 'Discos and drugs'

Sitting cabinet minister Oliver Letwin has been exposed for his racist advice to the Thatcher administration.

The Tory policy chief, then an aide, blamed black people for riots sparked by brutal police repression. "Lower-class, unemployed white people lived for years in appalling slums without a breakdown of public order."

Letwin even dismissed the idea of creating black capitalists, saying they would "set up in the disco and drug trade."

The National Archives recently published the confidential 1985 memo under the thirty-year rule.

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## UK's private rail fares six times public rates

**Dan Smart**

Workers in Britain spend six times as much of their salaries on privatised rail fares as Europeans who use publicly owned services, a new study has shown.

Research by trade union campaign Action for Rail has found UK passengers spend a whopping 13% of their pay packet on travel. Compare this with 2% in Italy, 3% in Spain, 4% in Germany and 10% in France.

The £375.90 monthly season ticket from Chelmsford to London would cost just £37 for the same 29-mile distance in Rome, where rail is publicly owned.

### Rip-off

Prices have been rising above inflation for more than a decade. The latest annual 'rail rip-off day' increased fares by a further 1.1%. Mick Cash, general secretary of transport union RMT, said people in Britain would "awake to another kick in the teeth from the greedy private train companies."

It is no surprise, then, that an overwhelming 62% of the population think that fares are exorbitant and support renationalisation of the railways.

Action for Rail estimates that, by taking rail franchises and their vast profits back into public ownership, passengers and taxpayers could save £1.5 billion over the next five years.

We could also use part of these resources to solve overcrowding and ageing infrastructure.

Jeremy Corbyn has pledged to take railways back into public ownership - but only as contracts expire. This will take years, prolonging the misery and risking leaving the job half done.

Corbyn should take up the Socialist Party's demand: renationalise all public transport immediately, with compensation paid only on the basis of proven need.

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## **Birmingham Labour to axe at least 1,200 jobs in £165m cuts onslaught**

### **TUSC seeks joint campaign with Momentum**

**Clive Walder, Birmingham Socialist Party**

Birmingham's Labour council has drafted budget cuts of £90 million in the next financial year and £75 million in the year after. The 9 December announcement came on top of the £560 million cut since Cameron came to power.

1,218 jobs will go in 2016-17, and an unspecified number the following year. Council workers' terms and conditions are also under attack.

The new council leader, John Clancy, talks more left than his predecessor, the unpopular and arrogant Sir Albert Bore. But he has proposed exactly the same budget as Bore would have.

The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC), which includes the Socialist Party, stood candidates against Labour's cuts councillors last year and before. Clancy's budget shows the battle against the cuts requires more than just a change of leader - as do the Blairites Jeremy Corbyn faces in parliament.

TUSC would like to work with Momentum, the pro-Corbyn group, to build the largest possible anti-cuts movement in Birmingham.

### **Campaign**

We will be writing to all Labour candidates to propose a broad, united campaign.

We will back any Labour candidate who pledges to stand with us against the cuts. But we are also prepared to stand against those who support cuts.

Community libraries, school crossing patrols, housing management, youth services and the Connexions careers service will likely be reduced to skeleton staffs. Some will be handed over to private profiteers.

The council proposes to add half an hour on the working week, stop paying sick pay for the first three days, and halve overall sick pay entitlement. Subsistence for those away on business will be stopped

and night duty payments reduced. And staff will have to pay for their own annual Disclosure and Barring Service (formerly CRB) checks.

The Birmingham branch of Unison, the largest local government union, is committed to campaigning against these horrific cuts. But it will be necessary for all council unions to come together and build support for industrial action if the council doesn't back down.

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## **UK wage growth will be lowest since 1920s**

**Dave Semple, PCS union rep (personal capacity)**

Chancellor George Osborne's pet austerity apologists at the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) have released figures predicting wage growth of just 6.2% over the decade to 2020. This is less than half the 12.7% growth from 2000 to 2010.

Since 2010, growth in prices (inflation) has outstripped wage growth even using the lower estimate represented by the 'consumer price index'.

OBR figures reveal that only from 1900 to 1910 and from 1920 to 1930 was wage growth lower, at 1.8% and 1.5%. These were decades of serious attacks on the union movement.

The 1901 Taff Vale judgment allowed bosses to sue unions for loss of earnings during strikes. The 1927 Trades Dispute Act banned sympathy strikes and mass picketing, and restricted unions' political funds to members specifically opting in.

Parallels with the 2015-16 Trade Union Bill are clear.

### **Timidity**

It is the timidity of union leaders which encourages attacks both on workers' rights and on wages.

In October 2014, the Trade Union Congress (TUC) staged the "Britain Needs a Pay Rise" march. Turnout was high and angry. Behind the rhetoric, however, the TUC and right-wing leaders of the major unions opposed calls for concerted strike action over pay.

There is a clear thirst to fight for more. Public sector union PCS organised monthly "pay day e-actions" in late 2015, including 5,000 emails from individual members to one civil service boss. The recent rock-solid strike action by train workers against Arriva in Wales shows this too.

Decisive, coordinated, escalating action on pay would inspire millions of workers to take on the anti-union laws, and rally the un-unionised majority. This is what the Socialist Party campaigns for.

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## **NHS England chiefs block hospitals from publicising emergencies**

Are you a senior manager in NHS England? Struggling because your overstretched hospitals are declaring 'black alerts' and 'major incidents'? Not willing to risk your baronial salary to stand against government cuts?

Why not: stop your hospitals declaring emergencies!

Health chiefs' new rules mean hospitals must prevent admissions, cancel routine operations, and even cancel some urgent operations, before they can announce top-level overcrowding status. Even then, all the surrounding trusts must be at 'red alert' first.

Problem solved!

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## What we saw: Sadiq Khan's promises on London transport

Our news editor was leafleted by Labour right-winger Sadiq Khan's election team on his way in to work. Khan is standing for London mayor, and transport is a centrepiece of his campaign.

Commuting in the capital is extortionate. So what exactly does he propose?

"Freeze all tube and bus fares for four years."

This is better than hiking them further. But Khan's own material points out that the cost of travelling from zones one to three has zoomed up by £2,076 since Boris Johnson took power. Why not reverse the hikes, and end the misery rather than maintaining it?

"Fund this freeze through TfL [Transport for London] efficiency savings and reserves."

Ah, "efficiency savings" - the flimsy old euphemism for cuts. Sack the staff, knacker the infrastructure, sell the assets.

Temporarily spending reserves, on the other hand, can make sense. But that's if - like the Socialist Party - you have a strategy to win the money back from central government. Khan doesn't seem to.

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## Them & Us

### Gravy for MPs...

MPs have awarded themselves even cheaper posh meals.

A three-course meal at the Commons' subsidised restaurant used to set members back £15. The average cost of serving each MP was £78.07.

Last year, the parliamentary expenses watchdog stopped MPs' dinner allowance for when debates run late - also £15. Clearly it considered the subsidy excessive.

In response, MPs on the Commons Administration Committee have lowered the price for three courses to £11.50.

Smoked halibut with slow-poached duck egg. Gressingham duck with sweet potato fondant and crisoy kale. Salt-baked celeriac with pea velouté. All for less than the price of a medium ham and pineapple from Domino's - if you're an MP, of course.

## ...peanuts for us

No such luck for workers.

According to the Office for National Statistics, basic foodstuffs may have actually risen in price last year.

A new method of measuring food price changes found the cost of 500g of dry spaghetti had leapt up by nearly a fifth. And forget grating any cheddar on top - one kilo added 15% in price.

The agency measured the average cost increase for goods monitored in the trial system as 8%. That's some way above official inflation figures, hovering around zero.

If MPs can vote on what their food costs, why shouldn't the rest of us?

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## Floods, climate change and capitalism

The Tory government has blamed climate change for the floods which have devastated northern England and parts of Scotland.

However, these extreme weather events were entirely predictable. In fact, cabinet ministers were advised just days before storm Desmond hit Cumbria that such floods would occur and that current flood defences were inadequate because of spending cuts.

However, Prime Minister David Cameron ignored these concerns in order to pursue his austerity agenda. Consequently, thousands of homes, shops and businesses have been ruined, costing billions of pounds.

The Tories - having been severely criticised in 2013, when in coalition, for cuts to the Environment Agency's flood defence budget - have attempted to parry renewed criticism by pledging an extra £40 million spending - a fraction of the cuts made since 2010.

Moreover, a 40% reduction in council funding by the government over the last five years has also resulted in abandoned flood defence schemes and a lack of maintenance of existing defences.

Clearly, measures to protect communities against the effects of climate change require a fight to defeat government austerity cuts.

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## The Socialist Party's action plan on flooding

**Immediately following the floods Carlisle Socialist Party sent a letter to the local newspaper, extracts of which we carry below.**

Dear Editor,

Carlisle Socialist Party met to draw up the following action plan.

Firstly, our demand for Labour councillors to refuse to implement Osborne's cuts to vital local services in February has become more necessary. The planned cuts to 2,000 Cumbrian jobs and services, be it fire and rescue, care homes, road maintenance, etc, must obviously now be scrapped.



Secondly, Cameron's 27% annual cut to flood defence funding (directly responsible for the flooding of Kendal) must be reversed.

Thirdly, not only do flood walls need to be improved urgently, but the man-made decisions to build on flood plains and to deforest the fells, which caused the rainwater to rush downhill so quickly and spill over the artificially narrowed waterways on lower ground, must be changed.

Instead of subsidising unsustainable hill grazing, the fells should be reforested to hold rainwater longer, with hill farmers offered alternative employment.

Fourthly, the privatised utility infrastructure needs to be renationalised, under the control not only of the workforce but also with elected, accountable representatives of local communities, to make sure they serve those communities and not absentee shareholders' profits.

If United Utilities had released water from already full Thirlmere ahead of the predicted deluge, Keswick wouldn't have been so badly flooded. Electricity substations finally need adequate, overdue flood defences.

Fifthly, there is now the accommodation crisis of the flood victims. Carlisle city council should requisition the 1,586 identified empty properties to house the homeless. Rents should be paid at a market rate by the insurance companies, with low social rents from those who couldn't afford cover.

Last but not least, we need leadership to tackle climate change. If the selfish interests of big oil, big construction and the privatised energy suppliers get in the way, then they must be taken into public ownership.

Big prestige projects like Trident, Heathrow and HS2 should be scrapped to provide public investment funds for the environment and one million green jobs.

**Brent Kennedy, Carlisle Socialist Party**

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## **Profit system exacerbates flooding**

**Iain Dalton, Leeds**

The flooding over Christmas has been some of the worst in recent memory. Fingers are rightly being pointed to the cuts the Tory government has made to flood defence spending, as well as to the emergency services.

Spending was cut by 8% - around £540 million since 2011 - including planned defences around Leeds and York. Yet back in 2009 the Environment Agency was asking for an extra £500 million over 25 years to deal with the effects of climate change, a request rejected by the then Labour government.

The flooding crisis is also being intensified by capitalism's thirst for profit. Between 2001 and 2011 around 200,000 new homes were built on flood plains.

Another linked issue is agricultural policy. The clearing of uplands for sheep grazing has reduced its capacity to absorb water.

A study cited by George Monbiot in the Guardian suggests that the infiltration rate of rainwater is 67 times higher under trees than sheep pasture. Yet the EU Common Agricultural Policy gives farmers subsidies for clearing 'unproductive' land.

The same is the case with owners of grouse moors, who drain and burn blanket bog and moorland heather which holds back water. These landowners do so to maximise profit from grouse hunting. They also receive subsidies from the government to do so.

This mismanagement of UK peat bogs is also contributing 3.7 million tonnes of CO2 emissions per year, adding to global warming and thereby increasing the risk of extreme weather events such as flooding.

While further flood defences will undoubtedly be welcomed by those ruined by flooding, if our environment is continually degraded they will only offer a temporary relief.

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## Tories' hypocritical green policies pledge

David Cameron correctly identified global warming for the type of extreme weather events causing floods and droughts around the world.

But the response of the Tory government has not been a drive to switch to renewable energy supplies and other green policies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

On the contrary, it was revealed just before December's Paris climate change summit that the UK government has increased its fossil fuel subsidies to 'big energy' despite pledging to phase them out.

Notwithstanding the vast profits made by big energy, the government gives UK production subsidies of £5.9 billion to major fossil fuel companies operating in the country and a further £3.7 billion to subsidise fossil fuel production overseas.

Earlier in 2015 Chancellor George Osborne gave new tax breaks for North Sea oil and gas production costing a further £1.7 billion by 2020.

In his Autumn Statement Osborne slashed millions from the domestic energy efficiency scheme for householders, having previously ended subsidies to renewable energy companies.

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## Reader's letter

### Renationalise the water industry

Why is no one stating the bleeding obvious over responsibility for the unprecedented floods?

Before the water industry was privatised, water boards were responsible for seeing that rivers were regularly maintained.

But when water was privatised, these elected officials were replaced with a lot of venture capitalists (or 'Spivs') from the City, who, expecting to make a profit, found that you can't actually run a public utility at a profit unless you dump some expensive, but vital, functions - like maintenance.

Water must be renationalised immediately, without compensation for the fat cats who have had enough out of us already. If anyone owes anybody compensation, it's the fat cats who owe us!

**Keith J Ackermann**

## Spain: elections mark shift to left

# No government majority as Podemos partially recovers

**Socialismo Revolucionario (CWI in Spain) reporters**

The elections on 20 December registered a fundamental change in the political situation and composition of the parliament. This change has been building, through mass mobilisations and social movements over the past years, and was also reflected in the local elections in May, when "popular unity" candidates won in Barcelona, Madrid and other cities.

The most important aspect of the change reflected in these elections is the breaking of the two-party system, which lost over five million votes between the conservative PP (Popular Party) and ex-social democratic PSOE (Socialist Workers' Party).

The PP lost over 3.6 million votes and its parliamentary majority, while PSOE had its lowest vote since the end of the Franco dictatorship in 1978.

However, two new parties erupted into parliament, including the right-wing populist Ciudadanos but especially Podemos - which won over 20% of the vote and will have 69 seats, together with allies, in the parliament. Despite its recent turn towards 'moderation', Podemos stood as an anti-austerity force and was seen as anti-establishment.

The PP, which won 123 seats, still emerged as the biggest party, with a margin of 1.7 million votes over second-placed PSOE. This is despite the strong decline which the PP has suffered during its term in government, due to its savage cuts in health and education, mass long-term unemployment and precarious labour reforms, growing poverty and inequality, etc.

The recent anaemic growth and the fact that unemployment is no longer growing (though new jobs are miserably precarious) may have served to boost the PP's result. However, its overall result was still disastrous.

Ciudadanos made a strong entry to the parliament for a new national party but achieved well below its expectations. It damaged itself by making political blunders - crucially promising to support the formation of a PP government - in the last stages of the campaign.

## Podemos

The most important change in the political situation is of course the entry of Podemos into the national parliament, with over five million votes in its first general election. Skilful performances in TV debates by its leader Pablo Iglesias - as well as the strong intervention of key social movement leaders - all contributed to Podemos's success. In the end, Podemos was only about 340,000 votes behind PSOE.

In Catalonia, the "Podem en Comu" list - supported by Podemos and the United Left and others - was the biggest party, in an historic victory. This comes only three months after the Podemos-backed list had poor results in the Catalan elections.

Podemos was also the leading party in the Basque country, and came second in Galicia and Valencia - both traditional fortresses of the PP - where it also stood in alliance with other left forces.

The results show that Podemos won its best results in lists where a genuine uniting of forces, including the left and workers' organisations, took place.

It underlines what Socialismo Revolucionario has consistently argued: that a united candidature, based on the social movements and all genuine left forces - including the United Left, (which stood as "Popular Unity" and won almost a million votes) - could really have fought to win the elections.

Building such unity now, in a democratic, non-sectarian struggle against austerity, is an urgent need of the hour.

The United Left/Popular Unity (IU-UP) result was also significant. Its campaign was mostly based on a solidly left-wing programme, including the nationalisation of bailed-out banks, renationalisation of the energy companies to end fuel poverty and invest in renewable energy, etc.

In general, the elections showed a shift to the left in society, reflecting the class struggle in the last period. This must now be built on, in struggle against the austerity of whatever new government is formed.

## **Prospects**

It will probably be weeks before a new government is formed. New elections will be called if no candidate for prime minister wins a vote in parliament. Any minority government will be inherently unstable with less chance of completing its term.

Despite the pressure which PSOE is coming under to support, or at least not oppose, a new PP government even at the cost of losing more support, it is more probable that PSOE will try to form an alternative government. This may involve Podemos and Popular Unity supporting the formation of such a government.

While such a move - aimed at kicking out PP from power - may be correct, it is essential that the left parties retain their independence from such an 'alternative' government and avoid forming a coalition or giving stable political support.

The most important way to get concessions from a minority government - be it PSOE or PP - is in struggle on the streets and in workplaces. New elections could see the real left make even further gains, especially if a genuinely united movement is built. This would allow a real left government to be fought for.

## **Socialism**

A programme for such a government would start with the cancellation of the anti-worker 'labour reforms' of the PP and PSOE, the reversal of the cuts to the public sector, scrapping of anti-democratic laws, reversal of privatisations and an end to austerity measures.

However, the experience of Syriza in Greece and of some local governments in Spain has shown the limits for a reformist government to act within the capitalist system if it is not willing to take bold socialist measures to break with the capitalist austerity agenda.

Additional measures would be necessary to change the fundamental orientation of the economy - taking it out of the capitalists' hands, through measures such as the nationalisation of the banks under democratic control, and taking the key sectors of the economy into public, democratic ownership.

A left government would also enshrine the right to self-determination of all nations in the Spanish state, and guarantee an immediate, free and legally binding referendum on Catalan independence.

# Trade union action needed to defeat attack on student nurses

## Unison health workers

The government's 2015 Autumn Statement announced that it intends to end the payment of student bursaries for nursing, midwifery and allied health professional students - as proposed by the Council of Deans of Health - from 1 September 2017. This has been met with anger and alarm.

This attack would end the payment of the tuition fees by Health Education England to the universities and end the maintenance bursary and potentially the placement support funding.

## Education

Unison, the largest health union, Unite and student nurses are opposing these attacks, which undermine opportunities for accessing health education for many potential students.

If implemented, once it applies to all student groups, the saving to the government would be £1.2 billion a year.

From September 2017, the NHS bursary for training nurses, midwives and allied students will end and they will have to pay tuition fees. Students will be able to apply for a loan to cover tuition fees and a maintenance loan. The fees are likely to be the same as for other students, ie at least £9,000 a year.

It is not fully clear how the current placement funding will be distributed and there is a possibility that universities will ask students to fund their placements.

Preliminary Unison forecasts, based on the continuation of pay restraint and the use of tuition fees and loans from 2017, estimate that a student graduating in 2020 will face debts of £51,600 and a starting salary of £22,799.

Staff could be paying this debt off for 30 years! Unison held a survey which found that 90% of current nurses wouldn't have been able to complete training without a bursary.

Clearly this prospect will deter many from taking up these careers in the NHS. In particular this could have a devastating impact in nursing where the average age of students is 28 and half have childcare or other caring responsibilities.

The news of the attack was met by a demonstration outside the Department of Health on 2 December. The protest attracted 500 students, healthcare professionals and members of the public from all over the UK.

Since then over 148,000 people have signed the Keep the NHS Bursary petition and there is a student-organised national demonstration in London on 9 January. This is followed by a debate in the House of Commons on 11 January.

## Dispute

Healthcare workers, students and members of the public must unite to resist yet another attack on the NHS, this coming at the same time as other cuts and privatisation as well as the junior doctors' strike over their contract dispute.

The Tories are out to destroy our health service but health workers, unions and the public must fight together to save it. Striking together to defeat these attacks must be a part of the campaign.

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## **Nationalise rail now! Rail workers strike around the country**

**Socialist Party reporters**

Aslef and RMT union members at Arriva Trains Wales walked out for 24 hours on 4 January with all its services cancelled, over terms and conditions. Some services on the morning of 5 January were also disrupted, with the strike causing chaos as many returned to work after the Christmas break.

The pay demands of the dispute have been accepted, but Aslef has said Arriva is trying to "railroad through" changes to terms and conditions.

Arriva has threatened that staff would be expected to work beyond an agreed maximum nine and a half hours working day except for "special circumstances".

Aslef is concerned that staff could be required to regularly work over that time due to the frequency of such circumstances including engineering works and special events like ferrying fans to big sporting events.

RMT general secretary Mick Cash said: "RMT salutes our driver members on Arriva Trains Wales who are standing rock solid, shoulder to shoulder with Aslef colleagues. This strike is about basic workplace justice and decent working conditions and it is down to the company to recognise the anger amongst the workforce."

An indefinite train driver overtime ban is also currently in force which exposed the reliance on drivers working overtime and low staffing levels on Christmas Eve when a staff shortage led to cancellations and delays.

Meanwhile, RMT members took further strike action on 4 January against the downgrading of the roles of Northern Rail customer relations staff based in Leeds. By dropping two bandings, new starters will earn a staggering £5,000 a year less.

### **Franchise**

Local RMT activists had also asked the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) to bring a stall with our petition over the wider cuts planned in the new Northern Rail franchise.

Another rail union, TSSA, recently highlighted that millions of pounds in profit from Britain's foreign-run railways is being sent to help run transport systems overseas - including German-owned Arriva Trains Wales and Northern Rail which is 50% owned by the Dutch state railway company.

The strike action coincided with an Action for Rail day of protest against the latest fare rises. 58% of the public want rail renationalisation and the Socialist Party fights to make the public sentiment for nationalised transport a reality - with compensation paid only on the basis of proven need.

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## **Steel: public ownership needed as private**

# buyers threaten pay and pensions

**Matt Dobson, Socialist Party Scotland**

According to press reports, the SNP Scottish government will provide a £195,000 short term subsidy package in early 2016, to threatened Lanarkshire Tata steel plants in Motherwell and Clydebridge.

This will pay short time working (65% pay) to those who remain employed at the two plants, but only a minority of jobs will be saved - around 75 staff in Lanarkshire already lost their jobs before Christmas.

The SNP government continues to orientate its taskforce towards finding a private buyer rather than using the option of nationalisation.

This is despite not being able to find a buyer during the period of consultation since Tata Steel announced the closure of the plants in October.

## Taskforce

Head of the taskforce, SNP minister Fergus Ewing, has stated: "It is critical for any new commercial operator intending on restarting production at Motherwell and Clydebridge to be able to get the mothballed plants quickly up and running again after a period of inactivity."

While the immediate threat of redundancy has been removed for some Tata staff, it will not be lost on the workforce and wider community that the SNP government is presiding over job losses and a significant pay cut for the remaining workforce.

All this in the hope a private buyer will be found - instead of securing all the jobs and maintaining terms and conditions of the workforce and the plants as an industrial asset, through taking the plants under public ownership.

It appears Tata may have found a buyer, US firm Greybull Capital, for the long product division at Scunthorpe.

However, this will mean the majority of the threatened 1,200 redundancies will still take place even if the sale is completed. Also it seems Greybull is not willing to buy the Lanarkshire plants despite the efforts of Fergus Ewing.

Socialist Party Scotland has consistently warned from the beginning of the steel crisis that there was a risk of private buyers immediately threatening the hard won terms and conditions of the workforce.

This has happened already with the unions accepting short time working and news that Greybull wants immediate "reform" - the scrapping of the final-salary pension scheme and to introduce changes to overtime pay and bonuses at Scunthorpe - as a condition of buying the plant.

In May 2015, Tata were forced to back down from these very measures by an overwhelming vote for industrial action by the workforce.

The steel trade unions must fight every attempt to undermine these terms and conditions, but Paul McBean, the chairman of the works multi-union committee on 5 January said: "By law Greybull will have to offer us a new pension scheme. But we cannot expect them to contribute to the British Steel Pension Scheme as Tata Steel have done." This resignation to losing the pension scheme is unacceptable.

They would be in a lot stronger position to avoid these attacks if they had taken a fighting approach from the start, mobilising the workforce and the wider community for a mass campaign for nationalisation.

## Meeting

Trade unions at all Tata plants, and in the steel industry beyond, should convene an emergency meeting of shop stewards to organise a mass campaign drawing in support from communities for nationalisation.

The trade unions cannot rely on taskforces involving the bosses who have mismanaged the industry, to protect their interests.

A discussion needs to take place among shop stewards and steel workers about tactics, including occupations and industrial action to force the issue of nationalisation and a fightback to protect terms and conditions.

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# Condescending Tories savage Yorkshire fire service

**Iain Dalton, Socialist Party Yorkshire**

"The idea that you go from a fire engine with five firefighters on to a van with just two is just madness."

Steve Howley, FBU brigade secretary, summed up the impact of proposed cuts at a protest of 100 firefighters, supporters and Socialist Party members outside a North Yorkshire Fire Authority meeting on 9 December.

The protest was in opposition to cuts across the county (as reported in issue 881).

The Tory-led fire authority wants to replace one of the two fully equipped fire engines at five stations with so-called Tactical Response Vehicles (TRVs).

Although the chief fire officer advocating the cuts at the meeting showed pictures of something which looks like a smaller fire engine, in reality they haven't tendered for them yet and North Yorkshire could still end up with van-like TRVs as in West Yorkshire.

## First response

However, in West Yorkshire these are used as a supplement to existing fire engines. But North Yorkshire Fire Authority wants to make them the first response vehicle crewed by whole-time firefighters and have the full fire engines crewed with only part-time retained firefighters. This could significantly lengthen response times.

At some points the authority meeting was a farce. One Tory councillor repeatedly asked the same question showing he had no understanding of how these cuts would impact his area.

Matt Wrack, FBU general secretary, was there to support the protest. Outside he gave a powerful speech, in particular highlighting how climate change will increase devastating events such as the flooding which has affected areas in North Yorkshire.



Yet inside the meeting he was refused permission to speak by the Tory chair of the authority who arrogantly kept stating, "This is my meeting, I'm the chair", before making condescending references to his time as a former policeman.

85% of responses to the consultation oppose the changes. With this dismissed as being due to fear-mongering by the FBU, a serious discussion on the devastating impact of these cuts was unlikely!

A further review of fire service resources in York is due soon and the Socialist Party and the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) in North Yorkshire will be continuing our campaign alongside the FBU against the implementation of these savage cuts.

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## **Workplace news in brief**

### **POA special conference**

In 2013 at a special delegates conference, the Prison Officers Association (POA) voted in favour of "efficiency benchmarking" - a cost saving exercise that promised to keep the prison service in public ownership, which was proposed by the National Offender Management Service. The union voted in favour, on the understanding that any savings would not impact the safety of its members. Since then there has been a dramatic increase in violence on staff and staff numbers have been cut to dangerous levels. Many prison inspections since the introduction of benchmarking have criticised staffing levels and highlighted how increasingly unsafe prisons have become for both inmates and workers. On 14 January POA members will convene again at a special delegates conference to debate and vote on the withdrawal from benchmarking. The conference was called by the Wormwood Scrubs branch. It would seem that there is a huge appetite for this debate among POA members.

**A POA member**

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### **Junior docs strike back**

Junior doctors are to carry out their threat to strike after three weeks of talks with NHS bosses and the government failed to resolve the contract row. England's 45,000 junior doctors are to stage their first walkout in 40 years on 12 January, after suspending previous action in December 2015. They will only provide emergency cover in hospitals. A further 24-hour walkout will take place on 28 January with a full withdrawal of labour between 8am and 5pm on 10 February.

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### **Kill the Bill meeting**

Transport workers' union the RMT in Lancashire has organised a public meeting against the anti-trade union laws on 27 January. The meeting will take place at Friends Meeting House in Lancaster at 7pm with speakers including Tony Mulhearn, former Liverpool councillor and Socialist Party member; Steve Hedley, RMT assistant general secretary; Terry Renshaw, one of the Shrewsbury pickets. The aim of the meeting is to build a serious and committed campaign against the laws which are likely to be in force by March 2016.

**Steve Metcalfe, RMT**

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## TV review: Jessica Jones

# Dark comic book fantasy throws light on abusive relationships

**Ben Robinson**

This is the latest production from Marvel, one of the homes of spandex-clad superheroes and villains. But in many ways, Jessica Jones is the complete opposite of the fantasy and explosion they normally purvey with such aplomb.

Jessica is a struggling private eye living in Hell's Kitchen, a traditionally working-class New York neighbourhood. The series charts her coping with an abusive relationship with Kilgrave, a man with the power to convince anyone to do what he wants.

Played with real menace by David Tennant, Kilgrave is a vicious murderer and arch-manipulator. He takes advantage of Jessica's body, mind and powers to further his own ends.

Jessica has super-strength, but eschews the idea of being a superhero. Instead of primary colours and spandex, we are introduced to her character as she goes about the muted, decaying shades of Hell's Kitchen in a hoodie and jeans, earning her living by photographing love cheats for divorce cases.

The camera framing of Jessica deliberately sections her off from others, mirroring the isolation she feels as she struggles with Kilgrave's impact on her life.

## Hero

But Jessica's mental resilience mirrors her powers. She frequently gives as good as she gets, and stands on a par with her antagonists.

The show uses the tropes of superhero fantasy to tell a story of domestic abuse, and its shattering impact on those at the receiving end.

Admittedly, the use of hero 'powers' to explain away these characters cuts out some of the emotional turmoil and results in the occasional misstep. But it also means the show can raise very important issues in a new and different way, to an audience that wouldn't necessarily watch a more hard-hitting straight drama.

The addition of an 'ordinary' lead female character to Marvel's output, surrounded by a majority-female cast, is a welcome rebalancing. She is a relatable character in a universe created for escape.

Jessica Jones is compelling viewing, and as her battles with Kilgrave progress towards the series climax you'll be at the edge of your seat, shouting at the TV and watching through the gaps in your fingers.

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**Helen Pattison**

Jessica Jones is a superhuman private investigator with a drinking problem - who has taken Netflix audiences by storm.

The intertwined stories of her different clients are gripping enough. But there is also a darker theme of abuse told through the series.

As the show goes on, it becomes apparent this is a story about sexual assault and abusive relationships. Damaged but still standing, when Jessica's abuser comes back to town she isn't willing to stand by while other women face the same fate.

It's a brilliant story tackling these issues in a different way, with characters that really push boundaries.

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## Featured letter: school student fights back

# "I chose to be involved in politics, Michael Crick"

**Last month, a television crew barged into a meeting in an east London cafe. Walthamstow Socialist Party had organised the discussion with a group of school students interested in campaigning against bombing Syria. The journalist behind it, Michael Crick, has a long record of attacking the Socialist Party, and its predecessor, Militant. Crick, and detractors on social media, sought to intimidate, patronise and denigrate those involved. Nancy Douglas, 15, was one of the students there.**

I chose to be involved in politics.

I chose to be involved because even at my age I can see the destruction being caused around me and the complete disregard for anyone who isn't white or rich.

I chose to be involved in politics because the government we have today doesn't stand for the people, they stand for themselves and their own profits.

I chose to be involved in politics because I saw a left-wing alternative that stands for the right thing and provides a contrast to the hypocritical politicians we know today.

I chose to be involved in politics because current politicians are making decisions for my future that I can't have a say in.

I chose to be involved in politics because the youth of today aren't fairly represented.

I chose to be involved in politics because by the next election I will be the one holding the ballot paper, making a decision for my future and choosing the MP I feel fit to do this.

I chose to be in politics because of my future.

I chose to be involved in politics because we are the future.

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## Letters

### Do you have something to say?

Send your news, views and criticism in not more than 150 words to Socialist Postbox, PO Box 24697, London E11 1YD, phone 020 8988 8771 or email [editors@socialistparty.org.uk](mailto:editors@socialistparty.org.uk).

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

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## **Bullying Straw man**

This is a real Labour Party bullying story that not many people have heard of nationally.

Some of its victims were long-standing party members, holding key officer positions within the constituency, including our conference delegate. These victims included a teacher, a probation officer, a lawyer, a lecturer and a junior manager.

They were subjected to two years of vile and unsubstantiated abuse. Some were accused of illegal acts, threatening behaviour, theft of party funds, drug use - and of being paedophiles.

But all these charges were found to be completely without foundation. Public apologies had to be issued by two national newspapers and the local MP.

However, the twist in this story is that those victims, totally innocent of all these scurrilous accusations, were expelled from their local party! In addition, 30 years later, the local MP had to give a public apology for his repetition of some of these baseless lies.

Could it be that these facts never made the headlines because those subject to the abuse were left-wing Militant supporters? Is it a coincidence that the MP behind these false allegations was none other than the Right Honourable - but totally discredited - former foreign secretary and home office minister Jack Straw?

**Peter Harris, one of the six expelled**

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## **Darling Brown-noses**

I don't know if you have seen this news about Alistair Darling, former Labour chancellor, going onto the board of Morgan Stanley.

Morgan Stanley is one of the world's largest financial institutions. It is one of those major banks responsible for the 2008 financial crash. It has a history of corruption and fraud too.

Gordon Brown has joined the board of another financial giant. He was over the moon about how wonderful the City of London finance houses were, and resisted any attempts to regulate them before the crash of 2008.

This says everything about New Labour. They supported capitalism and capitalism has given them their reward.

**Pete Watson, Nottingham**

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# A 'People's Budget' to defeat cruel cuts

**Naomi Byron, Tower Hamlets Socialist Party**

The list of council cuts in Tower Hamlets seems tailor made to hit the worst off and most vulnerable. In one of the youngest boroughs in the country, with overcrowding that even the council admits has gone back to the level of the 1930s, Mayor John Biggs is proposing to cut £200,000 from child and adolescent mental health services.

Even crueler is the 'saving' of £41,000 (a drop in the ocean by council budget standards) by scrapping the free laundry incontinence service.

Some cuts, such as scrapping free homecare for the elderly, are political cuts aimed at the previous administration who had managed to keep that, making Tower Hamlets the only council in the country still to offer it.

## **Unnecessary**

None of these cuts are necessary. Tower Hamlets Council has a funding shortfall of £31 million this year, and general reserves of £71 million inherited from the previous administration in June 2015.

The Labour council is in an ideal position to use some of these reserves to fight the cuts. But they seem intent instead on doing the dirty work of the Tories.

The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) is arguing for no-cuts budgets to be put forward, using borrowing and reserves, as part of building a mass campaign to defend jobs and services and end local government cuts.

In Tower Hamlets, TUSC and the Tower Hamlets Independent Group of councillors are holding a joint meeting against the cuts, asking local residents, trade unionists and campaigners to help draw up an alternative 'People's Budget' for Tower Hamlets.

Come along, bring friends, neighbours and colleagues and help us build the fight to stop the cuts. The meeting is at 7pm on 14 January at the Alpha Grove Community Centre E14 8LH.

Southampton Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition is also hosting a meeting to create a People's Budget as Southampton faces over £90 million of local government cuts. Speakers include Sean Hoyle, RMT national president; Keith Morrell, Southampton Councillors Against Cuts and Sue Atkins, Save Bitterne Walk-In. The Southampton People's Budget takes place on Saturday 9 January, 2pm in the Meon Suite, James Matthews Building, Guildhall Square, Southampton.

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## **Save the NHS**

## **Stop the closure of Calderstones hospital!**

**Dave Beale**

On Saturday 12th December, workers and trade unions at Lancashire's Calderstones hospital organised an impressive rally in support of the NHS and to oppose the hospital's closure.

In spite of torrential rain, there was tremendous support from hospital workers, Unison, Unite, GMB and Blackburn Trades Union Council, as well as many in the local community and other workers. Following the rally, led by a piper they marched with banners and placards through the village of Whalley, where the hospital is located.

Calderstones' proposed closure is part of a three-year government national plan to increase so-called 'care in the community'. It will mean 223 adults - many with severe learning disabilities, and 95% of whom have been detained under the Mental Health Act - will be pushed out into other, woefully under-funded care. The quality of this care will be completely inadequate and will probably be for just a few hours a day instead of the 24-hour, seven days a week that most of these adults need.

The Unison branch secretary said:

"Service users who are under a forensic mental health section will be difficult to find adequate community care for. In addition, there are service users who, at any time post discharge, end up back through the criminal justice system or living on the streets.

"Service users under a forensic section have a range of offending behaviours including murder, manslaughter, rape and sexual offences, committed against adults or children. Moving these individuals into the community could have devastating consequences."

As he explained: "The work is challenging and staff regularly are required to deal with physical violence, self-harm and suicide risks."

If it wasn't for Calderstones - the only specialist NHS hospital of its kind in the country - many of these adults would, quite wrongly, end up in prison. Over 1,000 full-time equivalent jobs at Calderstones are also under threat!

The case of the privately-run Winterbourne View hospital in Gloucestershire - now closed - is being used very cynically by the government and its allies to push for closure of Calderstones.

At Winterbourne View, patients suffered appalling treatment, with some staff going to prison as a result. But there is absolutely no justified comparison here with Calderstones. As the Unison branch secretary states, Calderstones is entirely different and is a high quality, NHS hospital: "The private owners of Winterbourne View were condemned by a judge for running it 'with a view to profit and with a scandalous lack of regard to the interests of its residents and staff'."

The truth is also that by closing Calderstones, some of the poorly funded 'care in the community' provision for the 200 adults will probably be through privately-owned care companies - and the risk of another Winterbourne View disaster could actually increase!

The planned closure of Calderstones is a brutal, cost-cutting initiative, with total disregard for the adults in its care, the consequences for the community or for the workforce. The government's plan for Calderstones epitomises its war on the NHS.

As one of the staff said: "We all know about the government's quite disgraceful treatment of vulnerable old people. It now wants to do the same to all of the most vulnerable sections of the community, including here at Calderstones." The campaign to stop its closure deserves the fullest possible support.

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This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 16 December 2015 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

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# 2015 marks best fighting fund total this century!

**Ken Douglas, Socialist Party national treasurer**

Last year, Socialist Party members smashed all 21st century records for raising fighting fund! Following a record Socialism 2015 appeal, our members and supporters have donated and raised over £39,000 in the final quarter of the year.

This means that the total for the whole of 2015 is also a record-breaking one - over £123,000.

This is the highest total since the millennium and is a huge achievement. The Socialist Party has no rich backers and relies solely on the donations and support of ordinary working-class people.

## Vital

Our members have worked hard and made great sacrifices to achieve this total because we know how vital these funds are to help finance our campaigning.

Branches worked tirelessly right up to Christmas on campaigning stalls, with Wirral branch raising over £700 in the last three weeks. Christmas parties were also good fundraising opportunities.

Lambeth branch raised £50 raffling a hamper, Llanelli raised £60 with a Christmas quiz and Chesterfield branch has raised nearly £200 with their 2016 calendar commemorating workers' struggles.

As the articles in this paper make clear, 2016 is going to be a year of struggle.

The Socialist Party will be in the forefront of the fight against the millionaire Tories' cuts to our jobs and services and for a party that represents the interests of the working class.

We appeal to all our members and supporters to make 2016 another record year for the fighting fund and if you support our ideas, can you help with a regular or one-off donation?

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## Eleanor Marx: celebrate a life of struggle, solidarity and socialism

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

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

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<http://www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/21959>