

Unite the fightback: Coordinated strikes needed

Linda Taaffe, Secretary, National Shop Stewards Network

"We never dreamt of being on a picket line," said a junior doctor addressing a meeting of trade unionists after an exhausting day of strike activities.

Yet doctors were there picketing with audacity - striking for the first time in 40 years - while preparing to do it again.

Their next action has now been suspended as arbitration talks have reportedly progressed - though they'll have to resume planned action in February if no significant concessions are given by the government.

They have had no choice but to fight back - just like tube workers preparing to strike again against the imposition of unsocial shifts through the 'night tube'. And just like thousands of other workers, from teachers to council employees, will need to do too.

Tory ministers are relentless in their ruthlessness. They are trying to take working conditions back, not to the 20th century but to the 19th!

For too long, fat-cat bosses and their Tory political representatives have gotten away with it. And for too long some trade union leaders and right-wing Labour politicians have allowed them to. As a result millions of workers struggle on part-time, unsocial hours, no home life and chronically low pay.

This has forced a new generation of young workers, like the doctors - once considered the bedrock of the middle class - to come into the fray of the workers' movement.

Militant

Professional associations like the British Medical Association are being pushed to be every bit as militant as long-established fighting unions like the RMT.

What an opportunity to link up all the different disputes and groups of workers! But where are the leaders of the Trade Union Congress? Where are the demonstrations bringing together striking workers and all those supporting them, inspiring other workers to intensify their own disputes, and showing the bosses we are one?

It's a real step forward for Labour leaders to come to picket lines. And it was great to hear Jeremy Corbyn say a Labour government under his leadership would repeal Thatcher's anti-union laws and support solidarity strikes.

But it can't stop there. Working people have had enough of waiting. It's time to build for mass, coordinated strike action!

United workers' action can save NHS

As this editorial of the Socialist went to press the British Medical Association (BMA) junior doctors' committee had just called off its planned strike on 26 January, reporting "early progress" in talks. This could be positive if the key demands over the new junior doctors' contract are met and would be proof that striking works.

But if the government backtracks or there are no concessions on the central issues, the planned strike on 10 February should go ahead.

This dispute has again put the future of the NHS centre stage. The health service is under attack like never before. The Tories, linked organically to private for-profit 'healthcare', are driving forward its destruction.

£20 billion of cuts are being made under the guise of NHS 'efficiency savings'. Meanwhile NHS Private Finance Initiative (PFI) payments cost £2 billion a year.

Beyond providing emergency care and ambulances, clinical commissioning groups are now licenced to provide services as they see fit.

The idea is spun that our NHS as it is loved and defended - for all and free at the point of use - is an unaffordable anachronism in the 21st century.

It is the market system that is utterly out of step. For example, the government demands less money is spent on agency staff and then they get rid of nursing bursaries meaning it is harder for nurses-to-be to enter training... increasing the need for agency staff.

Job cuts, pay freezes and poverty pay, zero-hour contracts, insecurity - these conditions are spreading like a virus through the health service.

Readiness to resist and organise among workers - expressed, for example, in the 2014 strike by midwives or by GPs calling a special conference to discuss the crisis in general practice - is rising.

On 12 January there was the first strike action by junior doctors in 40 years. This section of workers has been forced to enact the Hippocratic Oath, broadly interpreted as 'do no harm,' by fighting the government.

In this they have support among the general public. An IpsosMori poll found 66% support for the action, while online polls had over 90% backing the junior doctors.

Jeremy Hunt

The campaign is against Tory Health Minister Jeremy Hunt's plan to impose a contract on junior doctors, a model of management that could then roll out across the service.

If implemented, the contract would mean a cut of up to 30% of junior doctors' income via a major reduction in the number of hours classed as unsocial for which there is extra pay.

Many said they never imagined going on strike but the government's intransigence in negotiations inspired the 98% support for strike by junior doctors.

Attempting to win support for his onslaught, Hunt claims he is fighting for a seven-day service against a workforce stuck in the past. But doctors already provide a seven-day emergency service. A seven-day 'acute' service without increased funding means a cut in existing services.

Junior doctors explain that this contract is about opening the way to the NHS offering non-acute services at the weekend for private patients for profit. It will also open the way for other workers to see their conditions deteriorate.

Since the first strike, Hunt and the government have indicated their preparedness to 'resort to the nuclear option' and impose the contract on junior doctors. Ultimately the Tories represent the capitalist class who drive constantly towards increasing their enormous wealth.

These vultures, in a period where opportunities to profitably invest are limited by the extent of the world economic crisis, see public services and particularly the health service as extremely lucrative. The Tories are legislating to assist them, including by driving down workers' pay.

Emigrate

Many doctors spoke about colleagues who have left the NHS to work under better conditions in Australia, Canada, etc. As pay and conditions have been attacked among nurses, cleaners and other sections of the NHS, there has been a turn by health managers and private companies to recruit workers from overseas on lower wages and worse conditions. The unions must organise and unite workers in defence of the rate for the job across the service to fight this race to the bottom in health.

The Tories are introducing drastic measures to increase the precariousness of migrant workers. For example, under new rules that will hit nurses hard to be introduced in April, non-EU workers who earn less than £35,000 after six years in the UK will be deported.

Victory by the junior doctors would embolden other sections of workers in the NHS and beyond to take action against their multiple grievances on pay, conditions, pensions, and more.

The Tories hope that this struggle can be a 'miners' strike moment' for professional workers who have a new and urgent appetite for struggle - a defeat of a celebrated struggle that undermines the confidence of other workers to fight. But there was nothing preordained about the defeat of the miners.

Solidarity

Like the doctors today, they had enormous support in society and most importantly across the trade union movement. What was lacking was a trade union leadership prepared to recognise

and do what was necessary - organise solidarity action to support the miners' heroic struggle. That mistake must not be repeated.

The Socialist Party is campaigning for a national demonstration to be called in defence of the health service. This would give those workers who beeped their horns in support of the junior doctors, or delivered biscuits to picket lines, the chance to show their solidarity more forcefully.

Local marches, solidarity meetings, lunch time rallies of local trade unionists on any future strike days and inviting BMA speakers to union meetings should all be pursued to this end.

More effective, however, would be other sections of workers, especially those in the NHS, taking the lead from the RMT rail union (which called action for 26 January too) and coordinating action. On picket lines doctors expressed their readiness to support action on nurses' bursaries, for example.

The leaders of the health unions have proved over the last few years that they will have to be pushed hard into leading action. Until victory is assured, every labour movement meeting should debate the demand that trade unions back the doctors to defend the NHS (see model motion above).

Strikes

The anti-union legislation will be used as an excuse for inaction. Militant struggle has been the vital ingredient in the major advances in health services, including the foundation of the NHS.

These struggles were forced to challenge the legal limits of the day on workers' action because they had to show that withholding concessions was not an option for the capitalist class.

A 24-hour strike across health would build on the lesson of the junior doctors' action - that it is workers who are the true and capable defenders of the NHS. Workers and their trade unions would need to democratically decide and plan emergency cover in such an event.

The long fight for health services for all, among other improvements for the working class, was one of the consequences of the process of building a new mass workers' party, the Labour Party.

What a change from the pro-privatisation Blairite years it was to see John McDonnell, Labour's shadow chancellor, visit the doctors' picket lines. As has become the pattern, the following day he faced recriminations in the press, including from shadow health secretary Heidi Alexander who said that party policy was not to support industrial action. When Alexander was deputy mayor of Lewisham, south London 2006-10, she consistently supported PFI and New Labour's other NHS marketisation policies.

To be able to assist health workers in their battle against privatisation and in defence of jobs and services McDonnell and Jeremy Corbyn will have to mobilise their anti-austerity supporters in the Labour Party and beyond to fight the right wing.

Jeremy Corbyn's defence of the right to strike and of solidarity action will inspire many. Linked to that, to mobilise the potential mass movement that is needed to defend the NHS and fight austerity and the austerians, is the need for a clear socialist programme on health as part of a democratic plan for the economy.

That would need to include the nationalisation of the pharmaceutical industry under democratic control and a massive expansion of well-staffed services.

Model resolution for labour movement meetings

Defend the NHS

This [branch/ union/ meeting] welcomes the fantastic action by junior doctors in defence of the NHS. The widespread opposition to privatisation is expressed in their action and the support they received.

But they face a determined enemy in the Tories and the private healthcare companies behind them.

To defend the NHS and ensure victory for the junior doctors will need a mass movement to be built, mobilising the anger and determination which exists but requires a channel.

We propose to:

- Invite local BMA members to address our next meeting
- Contact other unions to organise a local trade union rally at lunchtime on the next BMA strike day to bring together unions in resistance of the Tories
- Call on the [trade union] leadership to coordinate with other health unions in the calling of a national demo
- Look at the potential to co-ordinate widespread industrial action in the NHS alongside any group of health workers under attack, as the junior doctors have been

Water firms' £1.2bn in profit off human need

Laurel Fogarty

By overcharging customers, private water companies in the UK have raked in profits of over £1.2 billion over the last five years.

Ofwat, the water company regulator, consistently overestimated suppliers' costs when setting price limits, allowing them to trump up water bills. This increase has hit the poorest households hardest.

Water bills now cost up to 5.3% of the annual income of a low-earning household, compared to 2.3% in better off households. In the UK, water prices have risen 40% above inflation since privatisation in 1989. The dire effects of privatising the water supply, one of our most basic human necessities, are clear.

The effects of swingeing funding cuts to municipally run water systems in other parts of the world are also grave. As ordinary people in the UK are overcharged by greedy corporations, ordinary people in Flint, Michigan in the United States are dying.

Lead poisoning, headaches - and an outbreak of Legionnaires' disease that has killed ten members of the public. This happened after an unelected official switched the city's water supply to the polluted Flint River to save money.

Abuses

These abuses highlight the crucial importance of taking the necessities of life into public ownership. They also show the need for democratic planning for the good of society, not corporate profits.

In Ireland, a mass campaign against the attempted introduction of water charges is being led by the Socialist Party. Over 57% of the country has boycotted water bills as elections loom.

When workers mobilise behind clear socialist demands, we can win results.

Political policing: Met spy targeted socialists

Chris Newby, Socialist Party London

The political role of the police - sending undercover officers into democratic socialist organisations - is back in the news.

The Guardian and BBC have reported on 'Carlo Neri', of the 'Special Demonstration Squad', who infiltrated the Socialist Party.

Newsnight on 18 December concentrated on the emotionally abusive relationship 'Carlo' conducted with a woman known as Andrea from 2002. As with many other cases, this happened under false pretences. See socialistparty.org.uk 'Police finally own up to spies' relationships with target women'.

Anti-democratic

It is right that the women who were victims of this horrendous tactic are finally being heard. But at the same time, the mainstream media is playing down the anti-democratic role of the police. Police sent 'Carlo' into the Socialist Party at a time of heightened protest.

The Socialist Party's Dave Nellist was a target of police spying while a Labour MP. He said:

"We do not accept that infiltration, as the Metropolitan Police have implied, is a thing of the past. Surveillance of peaceful protesters has increased dramatically in the recent period. We demand to know what today's 'Carlo Neris' are doing."

'Carlo' was active in the Socialist Party in Hackney, east London from early 2001. At that time, the Hackney branch of local government union Unison was campaigning against cuts and attracting national publicity. Socialist Party members were playing leading roles in this.

He was also a steward on various anti-racist demonstrations. And in July 2001, he joined us on the anti-G8 protests in Genova, Italy.

Socialist Party member Lois Austin, a core participant in the Pitchford Inquiry into political policing, said:

"There was no purpose to infiltrating us. Far from being secretive we publicly advertised our events. The police could have read our leaflets and newspapers, or attended our public meetings, to find out what was going on."

The trade union and labour movement should organise a democratic, public inquiry into police infiltration. Police must be made democratically accountable to workers and the community.

Read our full statement at socialistparty.org.uk, 'Police infiltration of the Socialist Party'

Trident debate: socialist programme needed

Rob Williams

Just a month after the furore over the Syria bombing vote, Jeremy Corbyn is facing a new challenge as the debate about renewing Trident hots up. Cameron is expected to bring a vote as early as the spring.

However, an article in the New Statesman ('How worried should Jeremy Corbyn be about Len McCluskey?') raises that this time, as well as the Labour right, he will be met with opposition from some of the leaders of the affiliated unions -notably Unite and the GMB who have members in naval shipyards and the submarine bases.

The soon to be retired GMB general secretary Paul Kenny told the World at One on BBC Radio 4: "If anybody thinks that unions like the GMB are going to go quietly into the night while tens of thousands of our members' jobs are literally swanned away by rhetoric then they've got another shock coming."

Trade unions

The GMB under Kenny's leadership didn't nominate a candidate in the Labour leader contest.

But Unite did call for its members to support Jeremy Corbyn and committed resources both in terms of personnel and finance to the amount of over £110,000. Unison's Dave Prentis has also been quick to criticise Corbyn, saying: "Divisive rows over Trident or shoot to kill are distractions no one needs."

Many members of all three unions will be furious that their union is associated with another attack on Corbyn, particularly one that could be very serious to Jeremy's position, while they are far less vocal and public in calling for a serious fight against council cuts, for example.

Already right-wingers are calling for a 'free vote' on Trident renewal, opening up the prospect of a repeat of the treachery over Syria which saw 66 Labour MPs vote against Corbyn and for the bombing.

Some of these Blairite MPs are attempting to falsely contrast themselves with the Corbynistas by setting out their credentials as being in the 'real world'.

Class position

That's why it is essential that Corbyn has a class position on Trident, which is used by British capitalism to justify its place in the world imperialist elite.

In an interview on the Andrew Marr show, though he correctly emphasised the importance of defending jobs, Corbyn also floated the idea that the submarines could continue without nuclear weapons.

This will only confuse workers. It is similar to the position taken by Michael Foot in the Falklands War of supporting the dispatch of the taskforce but not its use!

Corbyn should stand for a refusal to renew Trident (at an immediate estimated cost of £35 billion to a lifetime of £100 billion).

But this has to be posed as part of an anti-austerity programme that refuses to implement any more cuts and stands for investment in the NHS, public services and education. Making a stand against Trident would do away with the £30 billion funding gap in the NHS at a stroke.

But it would have to go much further. A socialist programme would also involve the nationalisation of the arms companies as part of a rational plan of production that would include protecting jobs and the full re-training of the workers in the bases and shipyards and the arms industry generally.

Jobs

The workers themselves should be central to devising such a programme, just as the Lucas Aerospace shop stewards did in the mid-1970s when faced with closures and mass redundancies.

Jeremy has said in the past that part of any savings would be used to prevent any redundancies and loss of pay. This must be really spelt out now.

This would lift the sights of these workers and their communities who are now concerned that refusing to renew Trident would be a catastrophe for them and their families.

The affiliated unions should be at the forefront of a campaign that strikes a blow against the British capitalist establishment and their supporters in all parties but also ensures a real sustainable future for the workforce.

Stop Trident demo

27 February, central London

Housing crisis reaches level of 1960s, half struggle with rent

Bob Severn, private tenant, Birmingham

Imagine that you live in a terraced house on a street that has, at one end, an airport and, at the other, a large factory. One day you get an email from your landlord that the rent is to increase 25%. This price hike, you are told, is actually a "discount" - as it is slightly below the "market rate".

But millions of people don't need to imagine such landlord generosity, as this tale is just one example of the real-life misery caused by Britain's housing crisis.

Shelter has found that 53% of private renters are struggling to pay the rent. The housing charity says that the homes crisis has reached 1960s levels.

50 years ago around one fifth of households were privately rented. This was reduced to one tenth by 1990. Now it's back to a fifth.

Affordable

Shelter says 250,000 homes need to be built a year - twice the supposed current rate - half of which should be "affordable".

Less than 10,000 social homes were built in the last financial year. Even those aren't necessarily affordable as housing associations can charge 80% of rocketing private rates. At the same time, 64,710 households are living in temporary accommodation.

The government says it is "determined to create a bigger, better private rented sector". This is Tory spin for increasing the massive subsidies and tax breaks they give to private landlords and builders from the public purse.

We don't need a bigger gang of landlords filling their back pockets! We need rent caps instead of benefit caps, combined with a massive council house building and renovation programme.

200,000 council homes face axe

Tessa Warrington, private tenant, Leicester

Almost 200,000 council homes will go by 2020 if the Tory housing bill passes through parliament. It would force councils to sell one in every eight council properties through the 'right to buy' scheme.

Over five million people are waiting for social housing in Britain. Since 2010 when the Tory-led Coalition came to power, housebuilding has plummeted - while rents and property prices have sky-rocketed. There is a critical shortage of genuinely affordable homes, and homelessness is rising exponentially as a result.

Thatcher's government brought in right to buy in the 1980s. A third of ex-council homes are now owned by private landlords - in London a sickening 50%.

Scandalously, Charles Gow, the multimillionaire son of the very minister who introduced right to buy, is now a buy-to-let landlord. He owns scores of former council flats.

The idea of really affordable housing is a joke in London. Desperate tenants pay extortionate rents.

Boosting right to buy will only make this worse, with homes selling to overseas investors and buy-to-let landlords rather than those in housing need. The 200,000 homes sold will do nothing to plug the five-million-home gap.

Mortgage

Today's generation of low-paid and zero-hour contract workers cannot even begin to think about taking on a mortgage. Those who benefit are Cameron's rich chums.

What we need is to immediately stop all sell-offs, and begin an intensive program of building decent accommodation that is publicly owned, with democratically decided, genuinely affordable rents.

Civil service: £1bn on consultants while cleaners on minimum wage

Dave Semple, PCS union rep (personal capacity)

A National Audit Office report contains further proof that austerity is working out fine for the bosses.

The civil service is shedding hundreds of thousands of jobs - needed to pay unemployment benefit and collect tax. Meanwhile, 47 consultants were paid more than £1,000 a day as part of a £1.3 billion splurge on consultants and temporary staff by the Tories.

Many will be from huge firms such as Deloitte, KPMG and PwC. While soaking up huge contracts to 'advise' senior civil servants, they were condemned last year in Parliament for being part of a "tax avoidance industry".

In contrast, many cleaners working for the civil service are paid the minimum wage.

Campaigns

Ongoing campaigns fought by public sector union PCS have seen breakthroughs in individual departments. The Department for Work and Pensions now pays a "living wage". And in November 2015, the Department for Education conceded a pay rise of up to 23% for low-paid staff.

However, employers are still determined to hold wages down. Last October, outsourcing giant Interserve threatened disciplinary action against its cleaners at the Foreign Office for campaigning against low pay. The whole point of the Tories' Trade Union Bill is to restrict our ability to strike - in order to support the profits of these huge corporations.

Socialist Party members in different unions played a crucial role in getting the Trade Union Congress to officially demand £10 an hour as the minimum wage.

A strike campaign by all unions representing the lowest paid could turn this into a reality. Especially if tied to anti-austerity candidates running on this platform in local and national elections.

Outrageous attacks on Corbyn for 'sexism'

Policies are what matter for working class women

Hannah Sell

The attempts of the Blairites to undermine Jeremy Corbyn know no bounds. One of their latest ruses has been to accuse Corbyn and his supporters of sexism.

In a piece for Newsnight putting the view of the Blairite women MPs Jess Phillips, Labour MP for Birmingham Yardley, accused female Corbyn supporters of accepting "low level non-violent misogyny" from Jeremy Corbyn.

The only justification given for this slur was that the winners of the Labour leadership and deputy leadership contests - Jeremy Corbyn and Tom Watson - are both men. Phillips completely ignores the inconvenient fact that Corbyn's front bench is the first that has been majority women.

Accountability

Phillip's smear is not merely designed to undermine Jeremy Corbyn's leadership, but also to try and prevent right-wing Labour MPs from being held democratically accountable to Labour Party members and their constituents.

The Newsnight piece pointed out that boundary changes are going to reduce the number of parliamentary seats and lead to competition between Labour MPs for those that remain.

For the many that have been enraged by their Labour MPs voting for the bombing of Syria or failing to oppose Tory cuts this will be an opportunity to campaign for the selection of an MP who represents their views.

According to Dawn Butler MP, chair of the Women's Parliamentary Labour Party, however, female Labour MPs must automatically keep their seats, regardless of their voting record in parliament!

The hundreds of thousands of people who have been enthused by Jeremy Corbyn's election on an anti-austerity platform will know better than to listen to this nonsense.

Far more women voted for Jeremy Corbyn than for either of the women candidates for Labour leadership. One Yougov poll of voters in the leadership contest in August found that 61% of women polled were planning to vote for Corbyn compared to 19% for Yvette Cooper and a measly 4% for ultra-Blairite Liz Kendall.

They understood that a £10 an hour minimum wage, free education, nationalisation of the railways and the other policies Corbyn stood on would improve the lives of millions of women, whereas the austerity-lite mantra of Labour's right would only make women's lives harder.

In the same Newsnight piece Harriet Harman outrageously declared that: "women's rights are never going to be taken forward by men; only Labour women can do that."

It is vital that the anti-austerity movement and workers' movement do all they can to ensure as many women as possible play leading roles. However, it is not someone's gender which decides whether they are playing a positive role in fighting for women's rights.

The 1945 Labour government only had a woeful three women in its ranks yet there is no doubt that it did more than any other Labour government to improve the lives of all working class people, but especially women. The establishment of the NHS and the mass building of council housing alone transformed the lives of millions.

Contrast that to Britain's first and only female prime minister, Maggie Thatcher, who set out to destroy all the gains made by working class women and men over the previous decades.

It is a sign of desperation that right-wing Labour MPs are attempting to use the false charge of sexism to try and divert attention from the unpopularity of their ideas.

Women anti-austerity activists need to make sure they do not succeed and fight for a Labour Party which stands in the interests of working class women.

Them & Us

62 people own half the world

Yes, you read that right. 62 billionaires now own 50% of all humanity's wealth - as much as the poorest 3.6 billion people combined.

Poverty charity Oxfam's latest study, 'An economy for the 1%', finds the wealth of this poorest half has fallen 41% in five years. That's a loss of \$1 trillion dollars since 2010.

These 62 billionaires - the 0.000000008% - could all fit on one coach. The half of human creation they control might need a few trailers, however.

Take the wealth off the super-rich. The Socialist fights for a society for the billions, not the billionaires.

Extortionate housing...

David Cameron is suddenly concerned about the housing crisis his government has created. His solution is developments like south London's 'Wimbledon View'.

Starting at £685,000, you need a household income of £67,000 a year to buy a two-bedroom shared-ownership flat.

So that will exclude even two junior doctors if Hunt has his way. And this scheme is built on former NHS land, which could have provided affordable housing for all health workers.

'Daisy', London housing worker

...housing extortioner?

Meanwhile, the same David Cameron has possibly earned a cool half a million in private rent since becoming prime minister.

The Daily Mirror reports he rents out his fancy Notting Hill home to private tenants. If he charges the same as a similar nearby property, he'll have raked in over £508,000 between May 2010 and today.

This is the same David Cameron who said he worries his children won't be able to buy a house. The Socialist can only assume he meant a second house, to rent out to those stupid enough not to have been born into a family of landlords.

What We Saw

#SportsDirectShame

Newcastle United fans unfurled a huge banner in protest at their club's exploitative owner on 12 January.

Activists with the National Shop Stewards Network and general union Unite targeted notorious zero-hours tyrant Mike Ashley. His Sports Direct retail firm forces workhouse-like conditions on its poverty-pay staff.

The banner appeared just before half time, and the match with Man United resulted in a 3-3 draw.

The Socialist says: scrap zero-hour contracts! Full-time hours for all who want them - with flexibility on workers' terms, not the bosses'. For a £10 an hour minimum wage now with no exceptions.

1986 Wapping strike - Defeat of the print unions

Workers' struggle undermined by bankrupt union leadership

On 24 January 1986 print unions went on strike at the News International titles. Press baron Rupert Murdoch was determined to break the unions' 100% membership ('closed shop') by sacking 6,000 print workers and using scab labour. His confidence came from having the support of the bosses' Thatcher government and its anti-union laws, backed by the full force of the police and judiciary. In contrast, the national trade union leaders were unprepared and timid, leading to the collapse of the strike on 5 February 1987. Peter Jarvis (above) - Socialist Party member and at the time a trade union activist on the London Region committee of the National Graphical Association (NGA) - reflects on this historic strike.

Although it was a battle fought a generation ago, its lessons are just as relevant for our movement today.

Before the strike the print unions, in some areas, had control over hiring. This was a form of workers' control and a powerful weapon in industrial negotiations.

Being a shop steward, called an FoC/MoC (Father/Mother of the Chapel), gave you a sense of the unions' power. Any member applying for a vacancy would introduce themselves first to the FoC and produce a card from the union. Only then would they go and talk to the management. If the employers wanted to reject the member's application they had to explain their reasons to the union.

The press barons hated our power to stop the presses - a form of workers' oversight. For example, during the 1984-85 miners' strike, the Sun wanted to portray Arthur Scargill doing a Nazi salute under the headline 'Mine Fuhrer'. It appeared with the picture missing.

No wonder the likes of Murdoch wanted an end to the influence of print workers.

On 23 January 1986, the print unions voted by 82% for strike action. On the same day, Murdoch announced massive job cuts with no unions or union members at Wapping. At the weekend, the News of the World and the Sunday Times were printed by scab labour at the new Wapping plant, in east London.

These scabs had been provided with the connivance of the leaders of another trade union, the electricians' union, EETPU.

News of the EETPU's scabbing role was leaking out. Scabs were being trained to replace the print workers but our union leaders did nothing.

The battle against the newspaper barons came as no surprise. The Militant (now the Socialist) wrote: "The whole trade union movement must be prepared to rally behind the print unions in the battle to defend the closed shop. Defeat will represent a setback for every trade unionist" (August 1985).

Later: "A campaign of explanation to the rank and file of the dangers if the introduction of technology is on the bosses' terms must be waged.

"This must then be followed up with mass membership meetings. The message must be made clear to every employer who attacks even an individual union member that standing behind them is the full force of the print unions" (October 1985).

Unfortunately, none of this was done. Murdoch's plan for the move to Wapping was well known. But instead of preparing, all the union leaders tried to get an agreement with Murdoch at the expense of other unions' members. They should have formulated a common approach, rather than following their self-interest.

It was suggested that action should start before Christmas, thereby undermining Murdoch's most profitable period. Instead our leaders called for 'reasonableness'. They believed in their ability to negotiate a settlement. No one else did!

The unions showed disunity while Murdoch plotted. The Tories' anti-trade union laws were planned for such a battle with the print unions - including the sequestration (confiscation) of union funds which was used with success during the Stockport Messenger dispute* in 1983.

Demands

The strike started on 24 January 1986 and in the issue dated the same day, Militant's front page headline proclaimed, 'Fort Murdoch - Strike for union rights'. The article outlined our programme:

■ **A united fight by all print unions**

- **For a complete shutdown of Fleet Street**
- **All-Fleet Street union rank-and-file FoC and MoC committee to run the strike**
- **24-hour print strike**
- **Conferences of FoCs and MoCs throughout the trade to discuss the strike**
- **If any union is fined or its funds sequestrated by the courts an immediate print strike to be called**
- **Trade Union Congress (TUC) to mobilise maximum support including industrial action**
- **Expel the EETPU immediately from the TUC unless they stop their strike-breaking role**
- **Defend the closed shop**
- **No redundancies**
- **Maintain manning levels**
- **Nationalisation of the press facilities under workers' control and management**

Re-reading the demands 30 years later, the strategy still makes as much sense to me now as then.

The demand for a complete shutdown of Fleet Street was crucial for victory. Restricting the battle to the News International workers meant appeals for solidarity would be difficult. It was a fight to save the jobs in Fleet Street, therefore, it needed to be spread to other newspapers first. Other workers are reluctant to support action if those with most to lose are still working.

However, the idea was stonewalled. First it was 'impractical'. The union tops had an alternative answer - a boycott of the scab papers. A correct tactic but alone it would never work. The tops believed in it so much that it was relaunched a number of times and in the end its failure was one of the reasons for calling off the strike.

Another problem was that the TUC and the union tops were preaching the class collaboration policy of 'new realism'. 'Wait for the return of a Labour government' was the message. Eventually, we got a New Labour government and the same anti-trade unions laws remain on the statute books.

In July 1986 the TUC, desperate to resolve the dispute, sent the 'scab master general' Eric Hammond - general secretary of the EETPU - off to Los Angeles to discuss with Murdoch. Nothing came of it, apart from that Murdoch was emboldened. The print workers needed solidarity.

Solidarity action would make the unions fall foul of the employment laws and lead to the sequestration of our funds. Sogat's (the largest union involved) funds and all its resources were sequestrated within days of the strike because their wider membership took solidarity action.

What was the response of Sogat? They 'purged their contempt' (ie agreed to abide by the law) and things went back to normal. Without solidarity the unions had no effective strategy. Sequestration was inevitable, so why no counter-plan? Later, it was used to distance members from their press colleagues.

By March, Militant raised the call for a one-day strike of Fleet Street. The argument against was that it would give the Murdoch titles a free run as they would be the only papers on the streets. We suggested a Saturday night for the strike with all newspaper workers picketing Wapping for the whole night. Murdoch's papers would never have got out.

Eventually the TUC supported a mass picket and the turnout stopped the papers but they ended it at midnight and as the numbers dwindled the papers escaped. The lesson was that large numbers of pickets could stop the papers and stop the police violence.

Repression

One demand that did not appear on our original list was the call for an inquiry into police violence.

As soon as the pickets became serious, the police tactics became clear - to ensure that the papers were distributed at any cost. But the violence of the police was something I had never experienced. The mounted police rode at a group of marchers which included children. Away from the main roads and cameras, attacks against individuals were as vicious as anything I had ever seen. Once they were caught by a TV crew but their solution was simple - smash the camera!

Our NGA chapel moved a motion calling for an inquiry into the police brutality, which was duly passed at regional level. But there was little response.

The leaders had no other strategy to offer. They just sued for peace. This was rejected by Murdoch time and time again and eventually the print leaders walked away.

What made the leaders' lack of strategy puzzling was that three years earlier the NGA fought against the Stockport Messenger where similar tactics were employed by management, especially sequestration.

Although Militant had a strategy that would have given a better chance for victory, unfortunately, we never had the forces to enact it. The idea of an all-Fleet Street strike was rejected by some on the left, especially the Communist Party who had influence in some Sogat branches.

The most important lesson of the dispute was that without a clear strategy and bold leadership, the struggle against the press barons, backed by Tory laws, could not be won.

Today, a new generation is facing attacks from a Tory government hell-bent on placing further restraints on trade union power. The question which must be asked: 'Are today's union leaders up to the task?'

- The NGA strike at the Stockport Messenger, owned by Eddie Shah, was to stop the company breaking the industry-wide closed shop. In July 1983, six NGA members

took strike action and were sacked. Paramilitary style policing was used against mass picketing. Shah successfully used the 1980 and 1982 Employment Acts to stop a union work boycott and secondary picketing at its other plants in Bury and Warrington. When the NGA ignored court injunctions, it faced heavy fines and sequestration of funds.

Police violence at Wapping

The following letter was published in Militant.

"On Saturday 15 February the London Young Socialists organised a march from Tower Hill to Wapping. The march was peaceful and good natured until the police moved in.

When the march tried to picket the plant the police charged in, knocking anyone in their way to the ground.

Snatch squads were sent in to frighten the pickets off... I saw police kicking, pushing, swearing, punching and pulling people's hair.

I was arrested. After I had been fingerprinted, photographed, searched and locked in a cell on my own for one and a half hours I was allowed to go.

I am a teenage girl who does not live in London and it was one o'clock in the morning."

Many people were arrested on the picket line. But as Militant reported, police harassment went further:

"On 13 August two police officers arrived at the home of Peter Jarvis, London NGA member and Militant supporter, and arrested him. Peter was held in custody for ten hours. This was an act of gross political victimisation".

As a result of mass pressure he was released by the police.

Peter had been named in an injunction by TNT, the firm used by Murdoch for distributing his newspapers. Without a shred of evidence the injunction restrained Peter and five other union members from "encouraging", "participating in" or in any way "facilitating" any 'unlawful gathering' outside TNT premises.

Solidarity Action

Jim Brookshaw (AUEW FoC - the Times) wrote the following in Militant.

"Rallies and demos are being used to increase the pressure at Wapping. But the necessity for wider action in Fleet Street and the general trade will become unavoidable.

From that we can make an appeal to the rest of the labour movement for solidarity action and force the TUC to organise a national day of industrial action. That's the certain way to make Murdoch retreat.

Such a call would receive wider support than any of our trade union leaders suspect."

Costs of the strike

"The year-long fight put up by the sacked printers had shown the lengths to which the bosses' state would go to defend their interests. More than 120,000 police days were given over to the struggle to defend 'law and order'.

£14 million had been spent on the policing bill... There had been 1,462 arrests on the picket line and one death.

Murdoch in effect doubled his profits to £2 million a week by the use of scabs."

Rise of Militant, chapter 31

Rise of Militant, by Peter Taaffe

£11, Available from Left Books, PO Box 24697, London E11 1YD

020 8988 8789 www.leftbooks.co.uk

bookshop@socialistparty.org.uk

Tower Hamlets People's Budget meeting success

Naomi Byron

At a buzzing 'people's budget' meeting in Tower Hamlets, east London, 70 people voted to oppose the proposed cuts to Tower Hamlets council services. The meeting had been called by Tower Hamlets Independent councillors and the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC).

TUSC and Socialist Party representatives argued for councillors to move a no-cuts alternative budget. If passed by the council, this would stave off cuts this year and give time to build a mass campaign and link up with other councils in a national movement to defeat Tory austerity. The meeting voted unanimously to continue to discuss this possibility.

Hugo Pierre, local resident and Socialist Party member, pointed out that the Alpha Grove community centre, where the meeting took place, was scheduled for closure 21 years ago. It was saved by a campaign which included a conference of community organisations that drew up a 'People's Budget for the Isle of Dogs' (the area of the borough where the meeting took place) to present to the council.

Local residents and service users were joined by trade unionists. We heard from a local resident and carer who has launched a petition against the cuts, including the particularly heartless closure of the incontinence laundry service. How outrageous it is that people will now be expected to take heavily soiled items down to the laundrette.

Amanda Bentham, a local teacher and NUT member, described how cuts to children's services and youth services, including the child and adolescent mental health services, will place a massive burden on schools. And schools themselves are facing big cuts.

The meeting was encouraged by the news that Tower Hamlets Labour mayor John Biggs has decided that several planned cuts now won't go ahead.

Councillor Oliur Rahman, leader of the Tower Hamlets Independent Group, said:

"Tower Hamlets Independent Group is pleased that we have already forced the mayor into a U-turn on the closure of libraries on Sundays and his proposed dismantling of Mayfield House which supports the Somali women and the elderly in the community.

"The first budget proposals by mayor John Biggs, under his Blairite-dominated administration, will not only hurt residents and their loved ones but will hit them hard in their pockets with a 4% increase in council tax. We will continue to fight hard and stand up for the residents of Tower Hamlets."

Pete Dickenson from the local Socialist Party said that after the mass support for Corbyn both inside and outside the Labour Party, people might have expected Labour councillors to stand up against Tory cuts. Yet to the shame of those Labour councillors it is Tory councillors who are making more noise about cuts to local government!

The idea of running our own public consultation on what should go in a people's budget went down really well. We handed round the Southampton TUSC people's budget consultation leaflet as an example of what we could do. Several residents liked it so much that they filled them in then and there. Written comments included: "no cuts!!", "£10/hour living wage", "affordable elderly care", and "affordable housing".

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 18 January 2016 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in *The Socialist*.

Carmarthenshire Unison campaigns against council cuts

A Unison member

Carmarthenshire County Unison members lobbied the Plaid-led council on 12 January along with other campaigners such as Save Our Parks and Playgrounds. We were protesting against cuts to adult community education, asset transfers of parks and sports fields, and the proposed outsourcing of leisure centres and theatres.

As Plaid councillors walked past the lobby they were reminded of the promises they made when they were in opposition to the then Labour-led council. At that time they called on the council to use £6-£7 million of its reserves to mitigate against the worst of the cuts. They also supported Unison's campaign for a living wage etc. All we hear now is the sound of silence!

Carmarthenshire County Unison produced a no-cuts budget for the previous administration. We have called on Plaid - who claim to be an anti-austerity party - to implement our budget. It would prevent cuts for three years while they build a campaign with other councils and trade unions to stop the cuts.

Plaid-led Carmarthenshire County Council is making £40 million cuts over three years, yet they have £120 million in reserves.

Plaid councillors blame the Labour Welsh Assembly Government for passing on Tory cuts and that is true but wasn't it Plaid that voted for the Labour budget in the Welsh Assembly?

We will not let Plaid get away with dodging responsibility for their actions or lack of action. They have a choice - fight and vote against cuts or do the Tories' dirty work for them as they have done to date.

Our members are looking to councillors to fight the cuts. All they see is a game of musical chairs where Plaid replaces Labour in coalition with the so called Independents (Tories in all but name) and vice-versa. But they are all a coalition of the willing when it comes to cuts.

Carmarthenshire County Unison was the only local government branch in Wales to produce a no-cuts budget. We will continue to fight all cuts and fight to get councillors that will stand shoulder to shoulder with us in voting against cuts.

Unite the Union local government committee votes for no-cuts budgets

Council cuts can be fought

Paul Kershaw, Chair of Unite branch LE1111

The national committee for local government (Nisc) of Unite the Union has called on Labour councils to set 'no-cuts' budgets. This is an important development, building on Unite's long standing opposition to all cuts.

Potholes

Responding to Osborne's spending plans last autumn, even the Tory chair of the Local Government Association, Lord Porter, 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".

The motion passed by the Nisc says that its position will now be:

- To call on Labour Councils to set legal no cuts budgets, use reserves, capitalise eligible general fund expenditure and borrow prudentially to generate resources so that no Labour council need make cuts. These are short term measures to buy time to build a national campaign
- That the financial measures must be combined with a national campaign, linking councils, trade unions and communities in a fight against the Tories' austerity programme
- To call on the union's political officers/department to prepare a strategy to take the points in this motion forward

58 Labour councils face elections in May, they hold around £4.5 billion in general fund reserves and another £1.36 billion in housing revenue account and capital receipt reserves and this does not include the vast reserves held by Labour-controlled councils in London (not facing election this year).

There is no legal impediment to them pooling reserves to ensure they can all set no-cuts budgets. Many authorities planning to implement vicious cuts this year have sufficient reserves to avoid cuts individually - cutting is a political choice.

Enormous

Such is the depth of planned cuts that even a Tory/Independent coalition administration in Stoke on Trent is using £15.5 million of reserves to stop further cuts in 2016-17. Although they are, of course, not likely to build a campaign against Tory cuts!

Ironically the previous Labour administration had claimed that this was not possible and instead forced through £150 million in cuts.

The enormous support for Jeremy Corbyn's election campaign and the growth in membership since then show the potential for a campaigning, anti-austerity Labour Party. We would encourage Labour councillors to protect services and build on the new support that the party has attracted.

- v This article is an edited version of one from the Unite housing workers' branch website

Preparing a no-cuts people's budget

A Unite organiser

The new TUSC briefing pack on preparing a 'people's budget' is unquestionably the most important document available for all those who genuinely wish to fight against local government cuts. Unless radical action is taken right now, we will soon no longer be talking about saving council services, but about rebuilding them.

The information contained in the pack blows away the myth that 'nothing can be done', 'there is no money' or that 'councillors have no choice'.

It's not a matter of being hamstrung by the law as many councillors would have people believe, it's a matter of political will. What has been desperately missing from trade unions which have a policy that opposes austerity is an up-to-date strategy to put to councils.

2020

It's very easy to simply say that the cuts are awful and to correctly lay the blame at the feet of the Conservative government; and to follow this up by saying that the answer is to vote in a Labour government in 2020. But this leaves open the question of what happens before then.

During the Labour leadership election, Jeremy Corbyn highlighted the potential that councils have to resist austerity. At that time he called for councils to stand together against government cuts. Corbyn and his chancellor, John McDonnell, cannot now retreat from this call.

Over February and March local authorities will be agreeing budgets that will have a devastating impact on people's lives. Now is the time for all those genuinely opposed to austerity to put that opposition into action.

This is why the information contained in the TUSC briefing is so important - because it shows how this can be done.

There are those who have opposed no-cuts budgets on the grounds that they are illegal and that if passed, the government would simply take over and make worse cuts. The same people argue that instead Labour councils must stay within the law so they can mitigate the impact of cuts.

The TUSC proposals smash this argument apart and show it for what it is - a very red herring.

It is possible to propose and set a legal, no-cuts, balanced budget. This is done through a combination of using reserves and borrowing powers - which could keep a balanced budget without cuts for two years.

Local authorities have huge amounts of money sitting in reserves. In Labour-controlled Greenwich, for example, the figure is in excess of £320 million. In Tory Bromley, the councillors voted to use reserves to buy a holiday home on the Isle of Wight!!

Councils in England control budgets totalling £114 billion pounds and, as the TUSC document points out, that's a powerful starting point from which to organise a fightback against relentless Tory austerity.

Powers

The Tories brought in legislation meaning that local authorities now have powers to allow people's budgets. And beyond this, we cannot allow the debate to come down to good and bad cuts or mitigating attacks on workers. There can be no more talk of making cuts with a heavy heart.

Liverpool City councillors in the 1980s, led by supporters of Militant (predecessor of the Socialist), took on the government in far tougher circumstances.

Despite the viciousness of the Thatcher government and the more difficult legal circumstances, those councillors won £60 million for the people of Liverpool. They built council homes and created jobs.

Councillors do not face the same legal and financial punishment today - but must show the same courage and determination in light of the unprecedented attack on local government services.

■ **Download the briefing from www.tusc.org.uk**

Momentum and democracy in Hackney and beyond

Hackney Socialist Party

In Hackney, around 50 people - from left organisations, the Labour Party and some individuals - attended the first two meetings of the local Momentum group. They were attracted by the aspiration of Momentum to be "a mass movement for real progressive change" and to "bring together individuals and groups in our communities and workplaces to campaign and organise on the issues that matter to us".

Momentum's national organisers have also stated that Momentum will be "independent of the Labour Party's leadership. It will work with everyone who supports Jeremy's aim of creating a more fair, equal and democratic society."

For his anti-austerity and anti-war battle against Labour's right wing, clearly Jeremy Corbyn needs a strong, organised base of support. As most of his supporters are outside the Labour

Party, Momentum has the task of mobilising and involving the maximum possible support outside of Labour as well as inside.

However, the unelected Momentum HQ declared that Momentum office holders must be Labour Party members and only Labour members can participate in decision-making in Momentum groups.

These attempted directions - issued before Momentum has a democratically agreed structure and rules - were questioned by a number of participants in Hackney Momentum.

Broad?

The first Hackney meeting adopted among its objectives, to "work on building up a broad membership". Where is the democracy if only the Labour Party members in that broad membership can help run the group and make decisions? The interim organisers of Hackney Momentum issued an online form for people wishing to be involved, that as well as asking for declaration of current membership of other political parties, wanted prior memberships declared too!

The right-wing press scream about the 'hard left' entering Momentum to 'manipulate' it on issues like reselection and fighting austerity, a tirade that is frightening Momentum's organisers.

But in reality no one in groups like Hackney Momentum is trying to circumnavigate democratic procedures and votes - on the contrary, Socialist Party members and others are calling for democracy and all want to help strengthen Jeremy Corbyn's position.

The fear of the right is the echo that socialist ideas are gaining among the thousands who are interested in getting involved in actively supporting Corbyn's message.

Momentum's HQ has also said that participants in Momentum must commit to supporting Labour candidates in elections, whatever their policies. To set this condition on trade unionists and local communities who are being hit by massive cuts from Labour councils like Hackney's will only weaken Momentum, which was created to back up one wing of two irreconcilable wings in Labour - that of the left.

Momentum is holding a national committee meeting on 6 February to further develop its structure and rules. It has reported that two representatives from each affiliating trade union will be on the committee - some recognition, at least, of the crucial role of the unions in defeating austerity.

26 other delegates to the committee will be elected only by the organisers of local Momentum groups, not by all the participants.

A further 12 will be representatives from "existing Labour movement organisations" approved for inclusion by the present unelected national leaders. They are also inviting some people from 'under-represented groups in society' - again with no suggestion of democratic election.

This, unfortunately, isn't the way to build a democratic, inclusive, broad, labour movement organisation.

However, reports from around the country suggest that many Momentum participants are questioning these developments, with the result that some groups may decide to organise on a democratic basis and argue for the national bodies to do likewise.

Angry Labour meeting puts councillors under fire

Nancy Taaffe

My friend phoned me recently to say that he'd been to a Labour Party constituency meeting. There were about 200 people there. Before the meeting started Labour councillors had put a copy on every seat of the letter Corbyn and McDonnell wrote to council leaders saying they must set legal budgets.

The meeting discussed the devastating cuts being proposed in the town. There were members from local authority unions, as well as other trade unionists.

The meeting lambasted the councillors as they justified their decision. Members expressed despair at the devastation that would ensue if the budget was cut like that.

To no avail. The councillors kept on saying there was no choice. The trade unionists asked for support as they would have no alternative but to strike against the cuts. Right wingers said they would be striking against Corbyn's Labour Party, and shouldn't be supported.

The Labour councillors constantly referred to the letter on people's seats, saying to the new joiners 'the leader of the Labour Party believes, like us, we have no alternative.' The resolution to support the local authority trade unions campaign was voted down.

In the pub afterwards many trade unionists sat miserably over their pints. They knew they would have to defend their members' jobs, pay and conditions, and the services in the communities where they live which their own families use.

Corbyn and McDonnell can still make a stand and call for Labour councils to set no-cuts budgets.

- Names and places have been omitted to protect those involved from witch-hunts in the Labour Party
-

Gateshead carers oppose respite centre closures

Elaine Brunskill, Socialist Part Northern region

For years Gateshead's Labour councillors have boasted they would always protect frontline services for the most vulnerable. That claim is now being shredded as the council looks to close or privatise the Marquis Way and Blaydon Lodge respite centres for disabled adults.

Outside Gateshead Civic Centre, carers of disabled adults, including parents and grandparents, made a phenomenal amount of noise at the protest to save these services. Clerical staff were twitching at office blinds to see what was going on. After about half an hour we were invited inside so council workers could hear our views.

Sleep

The officers listened intently as carers gave numerous examples of their concerns over the council's plans. Parents described bad experiences in the past with private respite provision, largely due to understaffing and high turnover.

In contrast, Blaydon Lodge and Marquis Way were described as "amazing and unique facilities". The same with Grove House, the equivalent children's centre, which is also under threat. It was clear that the staff at these centres are very highly regarded.

These centres mean that for one or two days a month, carers can have time off. When asked what they do with this time nearly all of them replied "catch up with sleep!"

During the course of the meeting, carers highlighted the report in the last Socialist - in Stoke-on-Trent, Tories and independents are using council reserves to fund services. If the Tories can do it, why can't Labour?

On the protest, there was anger that Gateshead Council has recently spent £45,000 revamping the offices of council leader Mick Henry and his cabinet. The feeling was that services for disabled people were more important than swanky offices for bosses.

Celebrating socialist pioneer Eleanor Marx's 160th birthday

Marianne Murray, University of the Arts London Socialist Students

Eleanor Marx would have been 160 on 16 January this year. On that Saturday, socialists from London and further afield made a pilgrimage to Sydenham, her historic south London home, to commemorate the pioneering socialist, feminist and internationalist.

The event included insights from Rachel Holmes, author of the terrific 'Eleanor Marx: A Life'. There was music from political theatre company Townsend Productions, fresh from a vibrant performance of socialist classic 'The Ragged-Trousered Philanthropists'.

Hannah Sell, deputy general secretary of the Socialist Party, brought Eleanor's politics into the present day. She compared the workers Eleanor helped unionise - such as the dockers and women factory workers - to the mass of often young, non-unionised workers in the private sector today. Many sit on zero-hour contracts, waiting for a shift - just as the dockers once lined up to be picked by the bosses.

As well as her political life, Rachel Holmes spoke of Eleanor's contribution to culture. She made the first English translation of the seminal realist novel 'Madame Bovary', and was a great champion of realist playwright Henrik Ibsen.

Eleanor did not just fight for women in the workplace and in politics - as in her still important essay 'The Woman Question: from a Socialist Perspective'. But she also challenged the expectations and limits placed on women's behaviour in the 19th century.

Socialist feminism

She rejected the narrow feminism of women in the ruling class, which sought only to win rights for those at the top. She worked tirelessly for socialist feminism. To truly liberate all women; to enable working class women to unionise; to win women the right to education.

She saw the need for socialism, an end to the rule of the 1%, if divisions of gender are to ever be fully overcome.

Eleanor Marx never accepted the limits placed on her - as a woman, or as the poor daughter of a Jewish immigrant under constant surveillance. Her father, Karl Marx, was wanted by several capitalist governments.

Sadly, those around her did not always meet her high standards of personal and political radicalism. In something of a spoiler to her biography, Rachel outlined the very real possibility that Eleanor did not die by suicide. In fact, she may have been murdered by her long-time partner Edward Aveling at just 43 years of age.

Eleanor was an advocate of free love, and a counter-force to reactionary ideas of women being owned in marriage and shackled to family duties. Family friend Friedrich Engels was no doubt a big influence on this outlook. But she was nonetheless victimised by Aveling, despite her friends' and comrades' best efforts to protect her.

However, her tragic death in no way takes away from her astonishing legacy. She was a founder of the Socialist League and three trade unions; a master of polemic; but more importantly, a tireless activist, and a champion of the arts.

The event ended with an emotionally charged performance by Townsend, which brought the radical songs of Eleanor's time to life. Actors included an excerpt of her famous speech:

"I am speaking this afternoon not only as a trade unionist, but as a socialist. Socialists believe that the eight hours' day is the first and most immediate step to be taken, and we aim at a time

when there will no longer be one class supporting two others, but the unemployed both at the top and at the bottom of society will be got rid of. This is not the end but only the beginning of the struggle."

To this day, most of us still do not have an eight-hour working day. This, and so many other issues Eleanor fought for, are now up to us to fight for - and we can win.

- vRachel Holmes' book 'Eleanor Marx: A Life' is available for £12.99 from Left Books

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 19 January 2016 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

Letters to the Socialist

Cologne sex attacks show need to fight sexism and racism

An article in the last Socialist responded to the mass and seemingly coordinated sexual assaults on women in Cologne ([Sexual assaults in Cologne exploited by racist establishment and far right](#)).

It explained how the racist media and politicians have opportunistically exploited these crimes to attack migrants and refugees - despite no attackers having as yet been identified.

The article also said "the race supremacists are hypocritically denigrating the victims again as 'our women violated' by Arabs". This statement is true as far as it goes, but I think it's deeper and more profound than just "denigrating" these particular victims.

A centuries-old aspect of Western racism has been the myth that darker-skinned men prey on white women. This partly explains why, in their coverage of the recent Rotherham grooming scandal, so many journalists and politicians lapsed into hysterical 'multiculturalism gone mad' accounts.

Not a shred of evidence existed for this. In fact, the vast majority of perpetrators of child sex abuse and exploitation are white.

But we also need to acknowledge that much of the power of this racist narrative arises from sexism and patriarchy. Women's bodies are seen not as our own, but as belonging to society as a whole. Hence the outrage among so many men (and some women) when "our" women are violated.

Women's bodies belong to ourselves - no one else. The Cologne story shows the battle for our sexual and physical autonomy still has a long way to go.

It also points to the fact that the fight for women's liberation, and for the eradication of racism, needs to be part of the larger, socialist struggle to transform society as a whole.

Kim Hendry, Lambeth

Reshuffle rubbish

Earlier this month, Jeremy Corbyn yet again indulged his inner dictator by ruthlessly dispatching two fawns from his shadow cabinet and daubing their blood on the walls of his constituency office.

Screaming maniacally at the media gathered outside his home, he waved his crown of ethically sourced toucan feathers to indicate his infallibility, and urinated over a pentagram made of the bones of dead omnivores adorning his front garden to reassert his leadership credentials.

He explained, while carrying aloft a half-birch tree, half-dolphin hybrid he called "son", that he was celebrating a successful reshuffle and wished to be left alone.

If this sounds unfamiliar, it's because it only happened in the minds and on the sketchpads of cartoonists holed up in the offices of the Sun, Express and Telegraph.

Rudi Abdallah, Waltham Forest, east London

Brum budget

The leader of Birmingham City Council has finally stopped referring to "illegal budgets" in consultation meetings. It may have had something to do with me telling him there was no such thing as an illegal budget.

This is, of course, a step forward. But he continues to dismiss the idea of a legal no-cuts budget using prudential borrowing and reserves to buy time to build a campaign to win the funding back. This despite Stoke-on-Trent Council using £15.5 million of reserves to prevent further cuts, freeze council tax and reduce council house rents. And it isn't even a Labour council!

Birmingham Council continues to argue its finance officer wouldn't sign-off the budget, and the government would send commissioners to carry out even bigger cuts. So who does run Birmingham Council, elected members or unelected officers?

Clive Walder, Birmingham

Nationalise Tata to save steel jobs!

Alec Thraves, Socialist Party Wales

Wales is the latest country of the UK to feel the wind of the ongoing butchering of jobs from Tata Steel UK.

Tata steel has announced 1,050 more jobs are to be lost in its UK plants including 750 at the Port Talbot steelworks, the largest plant in the UK.

6,300 are employed directly by Tata across Wales but thousands more are indirectly affected as contractors, suppliers, local traders, etc.

Stephen Kinnock, the local Labour MP, believes job losses are necessary to try to stop Tata closing the plant completely. 'It's time for hard choices' is his rallying call, depressingly similar to his father's 'support' for the miners in South Wales!

Militant mood

However, the mood on the streets of Port Talbot was far more militant, determined and enthusiastic towards the Socialist Party's demand for nationalisation of Tata as the only guarantee of saving these well paid jobs and securing the future of the steel industry.

'We are already on our knees in Port Talbot and a blow like this would make us a ghost town' was the reaction of one local shop keeper, reflecting the knock on effect it would have.

A young, redundant contactor from the steel works said that he now has to travel hundreds of miles a week to his new job because 'there is nothing left in this area'!

Those who were unsurprisingly cynical about the prospect of a Tory government or even the Welsh Labour government nationalising steel were reminded that the Heath Tory government in the 1970s was forced into nationalising Rolls Royce to save that icon of British manufacturing industry. And more recently the Welsh Labour government effectively nationalised Cardiff International Airport when it bought it out for £52 million in 2013.

Welsh steel workers will correctly demand the same action from the Welsh government to protect the far more important steel industry and the local communities that depend on it.

Port Talbot town centre with its grim, rundown, depressing appearance reflects the demise of mining, the contraction of steelworkers' jobs from a peak of 12,500 to just a few thousand now and a Labour-controlled council which is the most enthusiastic in Wales for cutting jobs and services.

A campaign for the socialist nationalisation of steel would inspire steel workers and residents alike and offer hope to those consistently let down by right-wing local politicians and trade union leaders.

Extract from a Socialist Party Wales press release 18.01.16

A Facebook page calling for the nationalisation of Tata in order to stop the job losses at Port Talbot and other sites has attracted over 2,500 "likes" in a single day.

<https://www.facebook.com/NationaliseTATA/>

The page was set up by Socialist Party Wales members and calls for the "Socialist nationalisation" of Tata, with Welsh sites being run jointly by local workers, the unions and the Assembly government.

The Socialist Party has called a protest in support of nationalisation at 12pm this Saturday 23rd January on Station Road in Port Talbot.

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 18 January 2016 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

Reinstatement victory for John Vasey

John Vasey, CWU unit rep, Wakefield delivery office (personal capacity)

When I was dismissed over the issue of not completing my delivery I was taken by surprise.

The dismissal came after being removed from my duty and suspended for three months (on 1 May 2015) Like everyone around me at Wakefield delivery office, I never thought the matter would go any further than that. Big mistake, I should have prepared for the worst.

Long haul

It turned out to be a long haul - eight months! However, I appealed against my dismissal to the national appeals panel (part of a procedure dealing with the conduct of CWU unit reps).

Changes in the delivery office had been ongoing for months while this was unfolding and as far as members were concerned, it was these changes and my opposition to the removal of paid hours that was the reason for my sacking. Not the issue over completing my delivery.

Despite CWU members at the office being very much under the cosh they still gave me tremendous support.

This was largely kept alive by the National Shop Stewards' Network (NSSN) and the Socialist Party who launched into the campaign from the word go - acting as a line of communication between members and the campaign.

A very important boost came in Brighton! At the NSSN rally at TUC Congress on 13 September 2015, CWU General Secretary Dave Ward publicly backed my fight to be reinstated, which brought national backing. Dave has built a reputation of backing CWU workplace reps when they are under fire and I am grateful for it.

Back in Wakefield the momentum continued with a CWU members' motion passed in favour of industrial action. The issues were opposition to delivery office changes and for my reinstatement.

But the processing of this motion became painfully slow. The NSSN and Socialist Party responded by rallying members, which avoided demoralisation. CWU members had not lost their fighting spirit!

Gratitude

More gratitude must go to Wakefield Trades Council, Leeds Trades Council and Ashton-under-Lyne CWU works committee who added their backing. There were some salt of the earth trade unionists at those meetings.

Other messages of support I've had are too numerous to list but were greatly appreciated. I was disappointed however, by Wakefield Constituency Labour Party who did not even reply to my appeal for support.

In the end, my case finally went to the national appeals panel, at Leeds Mail Centre, in November 2015. Of course there were NSSN and Socialist Party members protesting with placards outside which was inspiring!

The decision took seven weeks to come through and I was reinstated with attached conditions but that can't dent the victory.

My CWU representative at the hearing did an excellent job and the CWU member on the three person panel was also decisive.

Thank you all!

Tube workers to strike again to defend jobs and conditions

Tube worker

Members of London Underground (LU) unions the RMT, Aslef and TSSA will take strike action on 26-27 January and again on 16-17 February and 18-19 February in an ongoing dispute over the imposition of all night running. The fourth tube union Unite has suspended its action for further talks.

As plans stand, workers could end up working more nights and weekends than at present. As the unions keep pointing out to management's spokespeople in the media, tube workers already work shifts around the clock and at weekends but the new plans could seriously erode what work/life balance tube workers currently manage to achieve.

Job cuts

The picture at stations is even more serious. 838 jobs are being cut yet the media continues to trot out the tired old lies that more staff will be available to help passengers at stations. LU's own roster documents prove that many stations will have as many as half their current positions abolished.

On top of a reduction in numbers, a new grading system is being imposed which forces individuals to take on new responsibilities with no increase in pay. This will mean cutting the rate for the job by between £5,000 and £7,000.

Previous strikes forced LU to back down from launching night services last October and attempts to impose pay cuts for existing staff. They also won a limit on how far staff can be moved from current work locations.

However, LU has failed to honour commitments it gave to maintain weekends off work and has, at the last moment, made new demands to renegotiate agreements that protect job numbers and promotion opportunities in the future.

Tube unions are demanding that LU stop the imposition of rosters and working arrangements that breach current agreements. Talks are ongoing at Acas and could yet produce further movement from LU although it looks likely that strikes will go ahead.

Unity in the dispute is welcomed by members of all four LU unions. But the resistance of tube workers is limited by divisions between the unions.

RMT has fought a valiant battle but has been held back by unilateral decisions to withdraw from action by other unions at key points in the disputes.

Even an alliance of all four tube unions would face a massive battle to reverse current cuts to the tube. A £4 billion cuts programme has been imposed on LU by central government via the mayor of London. Now the government is demanding a further 40% spending cut by LU over four years.

Demand

These new cuts would abolish government support for day to day operations which is an unprecedented demand. Metro systems in New York and Paris still receive grants well in excess of the support currently given to LU.

It is therefore all the more essential that unions representing London busworkers are brought into discussions on resistance to these funding cuts.

Pushing back government austerity must not be left to the tube unions. If the TUC refuses to build this resistance then individual unions must make alliances and strike together.

As RMT executive member John Reid comments "we need strong and decisive action which will bring London to a standstill, to fight against austerity and for the future of one of the most powerful sections of the organised working class in London."

Shop workers lobby council against Sunday opening

Iain Dalton, Usdaw Leeds private trades branch vice-chair (personal capacity)

On 13 January, a deputation from the Leeds Private Trades branch of the shop workers' union Usdaw lobbied Leeds City Council, calling on them to oppose the government's deregulation of Sunday trading.

The government proposes to hand powers limiting the length of Sunday trading (currently six hours for larger stores) to local councils.

This could create a postcode lottery of terms and conditions. The process erodes Sunday premiums and places even more pressure on shop workers' right to opt out of Sunday working.

The Parliamentary Labour Party, led by Jeremy Corbyn, opposes these proposals and the threat of the SNP opposing it, alongside Tory rebels, meant the government temporarily shelved the plans.

However, the passing of legislation to block Scottish MPs voting on English laws as well as the Lib-Dems coming out in support means when the proposals are inevitably re-tabled they are much more likely to pass.

But if Labour councils pledge to refuse to use the powers, the whole bill could be scuppered. While a number of smaller councils have passed a model Usdaw resolution opposing the changes, many of the biggest councils so far have not.

Indeed, Manchester council, which is 100% Labour controlled, has even commissioned research into the economic benefits of extending Sunday trading!

Our deputation had a good response from Labour councillors, as well as a Green Party councillor who was a former Usdaw member. We even had the council leader speak to us.

Whether this is translated into opposing the proposals and pledging not to use powers to increase Sunday trading hours, we will wait to see.

For Usdaw members, these proposals will be a key test for Labour councillors. Council workers have been banging heads with local councillors over cuts affecting their jobs for years.

As the Tories devolution proposals progress, more groups of workers will come into collision with councillors who are not prepared to stick their necks out to defend workers' interests.

Workplace news in brief

Prison cuts

On 14 January, prison officers' union the POA held a special delegate conference in Daventry called for by the Wormwood Scrubs branch, as reported in issue 883 of the Socialist. The conference was asked to debate the impact of "efficiency benchmarking", associated cuts in staffing and the subsequent increase in violence on POA members. And also to instruct the employer that unless staffing levels were increased the POA would ballot it's members for industrial action up to and including strike action.

There was a passionate debate with the unanimous feeling that competition benchmarking and the associated cuts were unacceptable. The POA executive committee appealed to conference stating that, although they felt this cause was principled and the sentiment was correct, the legalities and complexities involved in balloting prison officers for strike action would make the motion unachievable. The motion was narrowly rejected by way of card vote and by a majority of 3%. Although the motion was rejected it clearly brings this topic firmly back on the POA's agenda.

A POA member

Kick out blacklisting

Socialist Party members joined a blacklisted Liverpool football fans protest against Carillion at the televised Liverpool v Man Utd match on 17 January. Fans who have been blacklisted by construction companies for being members of a trade union or raising concerns about safety on building sites protested against the use of Carillion to build the new stand at Anfield. Blacklist Support Group linked up with the Hillsborough Justice Campaign and the Merseyside Construction Committee. Undercover police have conspired to infiltrate both trade unions and the grieving Hillsborough families and their campaigns.

Steps toward setting up Trade Union Momentum

PCS's executive has endorsed continued discussions about Trade Union Momentum and in an article on the Socialist Party website, John McNally, the PCS vice-president (personal capacity) writes: "The key strategic aim for Trade Union Momentum is to build an anti-austerity force capable of defeating cuts and privatisation." Read the full article at: www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/21970

USA: Fight the billionaire class!

This is an edited version of Seattle socialist councillor Kshama Sawant's alternative 'State of the Union' speech, following Barack Obama's address to Congress.

See www.socialistalternative.org for full version

"Sisters and Brothers, Obama's final 'State of the Union' speech was filled with optimism for the future of the United States. I share this confidence, but for very different reasons.

My confidence is based not on big corporations or the prosperity of Wall Street and its billionaires.

It is based instead on the immense potential power of American workers, of the 99%, to fight for a better society against the billionaire class, whose limitless greed threatens our society and our planet.

I have hope because of the Black Lives Matter movement, which has broken the silence on systemic racism, mass incarceration, and police brutality.

I am optimistic because of the courage shown by fast food and low-wage workers striking for a \$15 minimum wage, who are winning in dozens of cities and states.

By the tens of thousands of dreamers, young undocumented immigrants, who are standing up, insisting that this is their country and are demanding full democratic rights.

By the incredible groundswell of support for Bernie Sanders and his call for a 'political revolution' against the billionaire class.

By the courageous activists who stood up against the Keystone XL pipeline and won!

Under Obama's two terms in office the Wall Street barons - who crashed the global economy and were rescued with our money - have not only walked away free, but have taken the lion's share of the recovery.

Super-rich bigots

America's 20 wealthiest people - a group that could fit comfortably in one luxury jet - now own more wealth than 152 million Americans.

These same billionaires are bankrolling the political establishment of both major parties. Congress isn't regulating Wall Street. It's Wall Street that controls Congress.

This past year, the bigotry and arrogance of billionaire Donald Trump has dominated coverage of the US presidential race.

We must stand up to, and organise in the streets, against the Republican right wing's racist, sexist, and anti-worker agenda.

We need to offer a clear alternative to defend the rights of working people, the interests of the 99%.

That means we must also oppose Hillary Clinton - warmonger and 'Walmart candidate' for the Democratic Party.

Alternative

Bernie Sanders is giving voice to the enormous desire for progressive change.

Many of Bernie's supporters are excited to support a self-described democratic socialist candidate.

A socialist society would put people before profits, the environment before big oil. The resources of the major corporations would be taken into democratic public ownership, rationally planned for the needs of society as a whole.

I am not a Democrat, but I would welcome it if Bernie Sanders were to win the Democratic nomination, as this would be a major blow to the political establishment and to corporate politics.

But Sanders will face huge obstacles in the undemocratic Democratic primaries, which are tilted towards Hillary Clinton.

Defeating Clinton and the Wall Street interests behind her will require Sanders' supporters to build a massive new grassroots political force capable of waging a fierce battle against the Democratic Party machine at every level of American politics.

Effectively, this means building a new left political party out of Sanders' campaign that can continue to organise and fight beyond the elections.

It is time for something new. The 99% needs its own political party that unambiguously fights for our needs.

We need to build a tool to fight back against the billionaire class - to save humanity and our planet from the failed system of capitalism - and to fight for a socialist world. Solidarity!"

China: Financial turmoil spreads fear across global markets

Per-Åke Westerlund, with additional reporting by Vincent Kolo

Global financial markets started 2016 with a bang! A reprise of last summer's chaotic falls on China's stock markets triggered panic selling of shares, commodities and currencies around the world.

The first six trading days for China's Shanghai and Shenzhen markets saw the total value of the market shrink by 15%, a loss of \$1 trillion. Worldwide, \$4 trillion was wiped from stock markets as fears spread.

Does this set the tone for the world economy in 2016? The capitalist George Soros is among those predicting another financial crisis like that of 2008.

China is the world's second largest economy and biggest trading nation. The sharp slowdown that started two years ago in the Chinese economy has already brought profound crises to several countries that depend on commodity trade with China.

While stock markets offer only a limited guide to processes in the real economy, and China's stock market is widely dismissed as a 'casino' (although that could be said of all of them), the fresh outbreak of financial panic is rooted in real problems.

The world economy has achieved only the most fragile of 'recoveries' from the deep crisis of 2008, while its imbalances have become more extreme.

The Chinese economy, now the epicentre of global instability, is experiencing a much sharper and more complicated downturn than its leaders have publicly acknowledged.

Commodities slump

The Chinese economy's slower growth has been the main factor behind drastically lower commodity prices. Of the 46 commodities monitored by the World Bank, the price of 42 of them is now at the lowest level since the early 1980s. Oil prices are continuing to fall, even as tensions in the Middle East are rising,

Falling oil revenues have pushed many oil producing countries into recession, stoking political unrest from Saudi Arabia to Venezuela.

China's debt burden - particularly in the corporate sector and local governments - is now consuming almost all new credit in the economy just to keep it rolling over.

China is therefore becoming a bigger and more unstable version of Japan, in the sense that large parts of the Chinese economy are now 'zombified' and can only produce more debt, rather than offering profitable investment opportunities.

This also explains the rush by the moneyed elite to get their capital out. Credit ratings agency Fitch puts capital flight from China since the second quarter of 2014 at the staggering level of \$1 trillion.

There are already clear signs of a loss of control, which is another factor unnerving global markets. We saw this with last summer's comedy of errors: a botched devaluation and misfiring market rescue policies.

Now we see the same thing with the decision to abandon - after just four days - the 'circuit breakers' that were supposed to make the stock market less volatile.

Although it is too early to say whether Soros's prediction of a financial crisis in the short-term will materialise, the risks have undoubtedly increased during the first weeks of 2016. Politicians and capitalists have no answer to capitalism's crises and this includes the dictatorship in Beijing.

See www.socialistworld.net for full version

Northern Ireland: Defy anti-abortion laws

Socialist Party reporters

Campaign group Fight4Equality has described the prosecution of a young women for accessing abortion pills as "ludicrous" and said that a movement must be built to "render anti-choice laws unenforceable and put the political establishment under huge pressure," pointing to the abortion pill train action which openly defied the law.

Campaign spokesperson Courtney Robinson said:

"A matter of weeks ago, Belfast High Court recognised that Northern Ireland's archaic abortion laws contravene women's basic human rights.

"It is ludicrous that there are now two women being dragged through the same court system for accessing what are regarded by the World Health Organisation as essential medicines in order to carry out medical terminations. We demand Justice Minister David Ford take immediate action to end the criminalisation of these women.

"We shouldn't hold our breath for meaningful change coming from Stormont if the politicians are left to their own devices. All the main parties are opposed to the right to choose.

"However, the experience in the South shows that a mass movement can render anti-choice laws unenforceable and put the political establishment under huge pressure.

"Our sister organisation in the South, ROSA, organised the abortion pill train which saw these same drugs openly transported from Belfast to Dublin and taken by women in public in defiance of the law.

"At no point did the state seek to intervene as they feared the reaction it would provoke. That is the kind of bold campaigning approach which we require."
