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# EU referendum: Vote OUT the Tories

**The referendum on 23 June is not just about the EU but is also an opportunity to pass verdict on Cameron and his rotten government.**

**An 'out' vote would strike a mortal blow at the government. It could lead to the calling of a general election and the downfall of the detested Tories from power. So voting 'out' is particularly important.**

In this battle between the pro and anti-EU forces, Cameron has placed his fate at stake and that of other cabinet ministers in the 'in' camp, including George Osborne and Theresa May. Even if they score a victory, if it is narrow their authority would be severely damaged. Also, the massive infighting in their party is tearing it apart, whatever the result.

With the announcement of the referendum, the gloves came off. London Tory mayor Boris Johnson took the 'out' side - a significant rebuff and setback for Cameron. The overwhelming majority of the Tory party's grassroots want 'out', plus around 120 Tory MPs - a number barely short of the 129 reported by the Daily Mirror as wanting to remain in the EU.

It is wrong and a serious mistake for Jeremy Corbyn and Labour to be supporting an 'in' vote that could inadvertently lead to an escape for this Tory government on the ropes. They should reverse course and help to bring down Cameron and Co so a general election can be called.

As the four-month campaign develops, Cameron will pull out all the stops he can - including calling in more support from government leaders across the globe, from the US to China.

Capitalist politicians on both sides of the debate are whipping up fear and threats and this will reach a fever pitch. The spectre of greater vulnerability to terrorism has been raised by ministers Iain Duncan Smith and Michael Gove if EU membership remains and by Cameron in the event of Brexit. But all of them support the bombing of Iraq and Syria which feeds the scourge of terrorism.

Working class people have no shared interests with pro-big business, cuts-inflicting right-wing politicians, whether they are for or against EU membership. While strongly distancing itself from the nationalist, pro-capitalist positions of anti-EU Tories and Ukip, the workers' movement needs its own voice against the EU in this referendum, to oppose the bosses' club that the EU is, and to fight for the interests of ordinary people in Britain and across Europe.

## Capitalists' alarm

With alarm growing among many British capitalists at the prospect of their interests being undermined by Brexit, Cameron desperately pursued last minute concessions in Brussels that could aid a pro-EU vote. But the political posturing there and the very limited deals he gained from the other 27 EU government leaders did little to change the lines of battle.

He gained partial agreement on attacking benefit payments for workers from EU countries working in Britain and claimed that the UK will now have 'special status' in future EU treaties, in addition to the existing opt-outs.

But German chancellor Angela Merkel was reported as warning Cameron that exemptions for Britain in future treaties might never in practise happen.

And French foreign minister Jean-Marc Ayrault reasserted: "There will be no revision of treaties, no veto for the UK over the reinforcement of the eurozone and no calling into question the principle of free movement".

However, the referendum won't be primarily focused on Cameron's deal, but on the EU as a whole. Across Europe, the tensions between the ruling classes are about a lot more than the exemptions sought by the UK government. The 19-country eurozone economy is stagnant, despite low energy prices, a negative interest rate and massive Quantitative Easing by the European Central Bank.

This impasse has led to increased nationalism and division over the extent and distribution of the brutal austerity measures the EU has tried to enforce and more recently over the huge refugee crisis, among other issues. Far from being a vehicle for improved workers' rights, as many Labour Party and trade union leaders in Britain are arguing, the EU is more and more an apparatus for imposing vicious austerity that destroys public services and increases unemployment, as people in countries like Greece, Spain and Portugal bear witness.

EU rules that are of any benefit to ordinary people were adopted chiefly to even out the playing field for big business rather than from an intention to improve lives. This includes the EU's free movement of labour rules - which have helped the bosses to inflict a 'race to the bottom' in wages and conditions, rather than stemming from workers' interests and a raising of living standards across the board.

The by-product benefits serve as a smokescreen, to better hide the fact that EU policies are designed for corporate interests, to counter public ownership of industry and services, trade union collective agreements, regulation and other state interventions.

In essence the EU is an association of the capitalist classes of Europe, based on treaties that reduce barriers to their profit-making and aid their competition with other trading blocs globally.

However, Europe's economies have not been - and will not be - able to overcome the limits of developing capitalist production on the basis of private ownership within nation states; and at the same time they are meeting the intractable obstacle of a world economy suffering everywhere from overcapacity.

## **Corbyn... and the GMB**

Jeremy Corbyn and others on the left were wrong to succumb under pressure from Labour's right wing to the argument that the EU is advantageous for workers and so advocated a vote to stay in it. One of the consequences of that mistake is that his referendum campaigning will be improving the chances of a victory for Cameron and the continuation of Tory austerity.

Also, the trade union leaders are mistaken in looking to provisions from a "social Europe" as a way to counter the anti-union and anti-worker attacks of a right-wing government like Cameron's. A future UK government elected on the anti-austerity programme Corbyn stood on in the Labour leadership election would soon be confronted with the anti-working class character of the EU.

The GMB union sent out a press release declaring its support for remaining in the EU. Its grounds included that corporate exploitation "is completely stoppable. Not by voting to leave the EU, but by demanding a return to [a] vision of a social Europe." But who will this demand be directed at and how will it be achieved? There is virtually no democratic accountability in the EU. Decisions are taken by the European Council - composed of the heads of government of the 28 countries - and the European Commission that is largely appointed rather than elected. The elected European Parliament of 751 MEPs is almost powerless.

Rather than entering into struggle to attempt a futile task of 'democratising' the EU, the attitude of working class people across Europe lies increasingly in the direction of rejecting and escaping from that distant, bureaucratic and unaccountable institution.

As Andrew Rawnsley wrote in last Sunday's Observer, attitudes are now far removed from what they were when government politicians won the 1975 referendum on Europe: "Much of the old deference towards 'authority figures' has evaporated. This is an age of rage characterised by a widespread and deep seated alienation from ... the establishment". He added: "The referendum could be a stick with which to give a satisfying thwack to the backsides of the political elite".

The Financial Times reported that some pro-Europe politicians are debating whether to raise the spectre of a domino effect of Brexit - ie, rapid disintegration of the entire EU - in case it spurs people on to vote for that!

## **Exposing posturing**

The old saying 'lies, damned lies, and statistics', will likely be very apt during the next four months. One early disgrace is the way in which some anti-EU Tories are feigning concern for people hit by austerity. For instance, Gove, who as education secretary was detested by teachers for pushing ahead privatisation and attacks on their pay and conditions, said this week when making his anti-EU case: "Whoever is in government in London cannot support a steel plant through troubled times, cannot build the houses we need where they're needed", and: "The euro has created economic misery for Europe's poorest people".

The only way this kind of monstrous duplicity can be fully exposed and countered is through building an independent, working class based campaign against the capitalist EU and fighting for media coverage of it.

While calling for an 'out' vote, the Socialist Party recognises that for the working class and middle class, Britain being inside or outside the EU is no solution either way. Neither are these choices a solution for any population across Europe.

Only international workers' solidarity with each other's struggles and fighting for a democratic socialist confederation of the continent can create the ground for societies that would transform the lives of the overwhelming majority of people.

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# **Junior doctors: back new strikes**

## **Three 48-hour walkouts**

- Coordinated strikes and demo needed

### **Zoë Brunswick, medical student**

Junior doctors have announced three fresh 48-hour strikes. Tory health secretary Jeremy Hunt's scandalous decision to impose a dangerous new contract on them has already backfired.

The immense anger among junior doctors has translated into an increasing desire to fight back. Calls for escalating industrial action are echoed in emergency meetings of doctors' union BMA across the country.

Johann Malawana, chair of the BMA junior doctors committee, had previously announced that "further industrial action is inevitable" and the union "will consider escalating any action to achieve our aim". The strikes begin at 8am on 9 March, 6 April and 26 April.

## **Support**

Public support remains high. Even hospital CEOs are dropping support for Hunt, with the vast majority stating they do not agree with imposing a new contract.

As it stands, junior doctors have the advantage. BMA members remain unified and determined, but Hunt's unpopular decision to impose the contract has lost him even more support.

However, this attack against doctors is not isolated. It is part of wider, vicious attacks designed to break the NHS and pave the way for privatisation.

For this reason the Socialist Party fully supports pressing the advantage and escalating strike action. But other trade unions need to link up with the BMA to broaden the fight.

Workers across the NHS are facing attacks on pay and conditions. We call for health unions, particularly Unison and Unite, to coordinate industrial action with the BMA to prevent isolation.

A People's Assembly march for health, jobs, homes and education is due in April, but the situation is urgent. The Socialist Party demands health unions and the Trade Union Congress call an emergency demonstration in March to support the junior doctors and defend the NHS.

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## **Trident: thousands to march - scrap all nukes!**

**Tom Baldwin**

Thousands are due to demand that Trident nuclear weapons be scrapped, taking to the streets on 27 February.

The government wants to renew Trident - at an estimated cost of £100 billion over its lifetime. The Tories are splurging on weapons of mass destruction while cutting vital public services to the bone. They say there 'isn't any money' for them.

Trident is a criminal waste of money, enough to hire 150,000 nurses and teachers.

Far from being a necessary investment in our security, nukes are a costly white elephant. In the best case scenario, the weapons will simply sit at the bottom of the ocean for years. The alternative does not bear thinking about: they have the potential to kill millions.

Trident does not make us any more secure. It is a Cold War throwback, at a time when the greatest threat comes from terrorist groups, not opposing blocs of world powers. Despite all the bluster about Britain's 'independent' nuclear deterrent, the programme can't work without US support.

Most people oppose Trident renewal, yet all the major parties back it. A majority of Labour members support Corbyn's position of nuclear disarmament. But he faces a fight with the right wing to make it party policy.

Unions like Unite, which organises Trident workers, favour renewal because of the jobs.

Those workers should be reemployed on science and engineering projects, such as clean energy, where their skills will benefit society.

Nuclear arms are not the hot topic they once were, but plans for renewal put them back in the spotlight. Any movement against them must link up with the anti-austerity movement and trade unions: for jobs and services, not genocidal vanity projects.

# Butterfields tenants demand action against evictions at Labour estate agent awards

**Charlie Hendren, Waltham Forest Socialist Party**

Tenants facing sell-off and eviction in east London demanded action from their Labour council at a nauseating Labour-organised estate agent awards ceremony on 20 February.

Walthamstow Housing's "Heroes and Horrors" public meeting was hosted by local Blairite MP Stella Creasy. I say "public meeting", but simply being a resident didn't give you the right to know in advance where it was held! This info was only supplied once I had emailed my details.

Organisers disguised this as a way to ascertain turnout. In reality, Creasy put in place a vetting system to try to exclude dissenting voices - an attack on the labour movement's democratic tradition of open meetings.

The entire meeting had the sickening glossiness of a bizarre gameshow. In the midst of a devastating housing crisis, estate agents took home awards either venerating or weakly condemning their behaviour.

It seems all Creasy can do for constituents is hope estate agents and landlords behave 'kindly' - lest they receive one of these pieces of coloured paper.

## Investment

Labour mayoral candidate Sadiq Khan also addressed us. He began and ended his short speech by saying "London is the best city in the world." But neither Khan nor Creasy mentioned investment in council housing which is central to solving the housing crisis.

The meeting's saving grace was the stand from Butterfields estate tenants. Their 'charity' landlord has sold their homes from under them, and they now face eviction and misery.

Spokesperson Sylvia (pictured left) gave a clear and powerful account of their situation. She demanded action from the council, suggesting a compulsory purchase order. Tenants could then pay rent to the council.

Over a dozen tenants went to the front with Sylvia, a united show of strength from working class people organising to save their homes.

Councillors joined the standing ovation. But it is one thing to stand up in a meeting - we demand the council stands up in action.

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# Children take over Cardiff County Hall in protest at cuts

**Ross Saunders**

It was like a Viking raid. Over 40 people - mostly children and teenagers - stormed into County Hall in

Cardiff and occupied the foyer in protest at council plans to cut back funding for their play centre.

Cardiff's Labour-run council has twice tried to shut the facility in Grangetown, along with the other six play centres in Cardiff, but supporters have fought a determined, gruelling three-year campaign that has so far saved the facilities.

Ophelia, 14, who was protesting in County Hall, said: "If they shut the play centre down we'll be on the streets. There's nothing to do in Grange and we'll get into trouble. The council should keep it open."

One parent pointed out that Grangetown is surrounded by expensive hotels, posh shops and restaurants and luxury leisure facilities along the nearby Cardiff Bay coast but ordinary working class families can't afford to go to any of them.

The latest plans would see council control of Grangetown play centre ended and the building handed over to a third party, putting funding and the activities at risk. Already the council is saying that staff will only be paid to run three play sessions a week in the building, not the current five, and sessions will be shorter.

Police were called to evict the children from County Hall, but not before protesters had forced a promise from Andrew Gregory, a senior manager at the council, to meet them immediately at their centre. He and other council managers tried to present the council's plans as an improvement but campaigners weren't fooled.

The council is sitting on a cash pile of £47 million in reserves and has the power to carefully borrow tens of millions more to fund services in the short term. It should spend that cash in the short term and campaign for more funding from the Welsh Assembly and the government, to replace it.

Cardiff Against The Cuts is calling for the council to take that road at the protest it is organising at the council's budget-setting meeting on Thursday 25th February from 3.30pm at City Hall. The cuts to play centres are part of council plans to make £36 million of cuts this year.

By passing on cuts rather than fighting them, councils like Cardiff have let down the communities they should be representing. But the Welsh Assembly is also to blame. If Assembly members took a stand against cuts they could coordinate the resistance of councils, health boards, fire authorities and other public sector organisations under them to effectively end austerity - first in Wales, and then, as the example spread across the border, in England and the rest of the UK as well. This vicious Tory government wouldn't survive a campaign of opposition like that, just as Margaret Thatcher couldn't survive the Anti-Poll Tax movement. We need representatives fighting on that programme in the Welsh Assembly elections this year.

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

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## 'Benefit tourism' twaddle

The Tories have admitted they have no evidence to suggest workers from other countries come to Britain to claim benefits.

So-called 'benefit tourism' was central to Cameron's efforts to win more powers to attack migrants from the European Union (EU). A written answer to a question in the House of Lords, snuck out over Christmas, admits the fabrication.

Most EU nationals claiming welfare are in work. Like many workers in the UK, they rely on benefits to subsidise their bosses' poverty wages.

EU treaties require privatisation of public services and marketisation which undermines pay. Leaving would deal a big blow to the capitalist establishment. It would also remove a major stumbling block for future left governments fighting poverty wages for workers of every nationality.

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## **Cameron, Cameron, meal snatcher**

The government is closing a fund which helps remote primary schools feed children.

The fund was previously worth over £3,000 each for nearly 3,000 schools too small to benefit from bulk food discounts. From March, struggling primaries will have to find the money elsewhere or possibly stop serving free hot meals.

Proper nutrition is essential to physical development and learning ability. Thatcher ended free milk for kids during her tenure, leading to her rhyming "milk snatcher" nickname. Now Cameron wants to finish the job.

The Socialist fights every cut to education. Fund free, nutritious, hot meals for all children throughout their school years.

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## **Them & Us**

### **Gamblers' remorse...**

"Crack cocaine" betting machines are making bookies £34 million every week.

'Fixed-odds betting terminals' seem designed to foster gambling dependency, and accept stakes of up to £100. Addicts can lose thousands in a few short hours.

The high-street menace even apparently contributed to the recent death of a 27-year-old carpenter by suicide.

While bookies make nearly a grand a day on each machine, vulnerable people face ruin. Bookies and payday loan sharks disfigure working class communities like mange.

Both Tory and Labour MPs have accepted gifts and hospitality from gambling lobbyists. Deregulation was the result. London's Tory mayoral candidate Zac Goldsmith and arch-Blairite Chuka Umunna have both taken bookies' donations.

### **...remorseless gamblers**

But it's not just the bookkeepers who are minting it from gambling misery. Britain's bankers continue to go unpunished for wrecking the economy.

The 2007 credit crunch which sparked the Great Recession came from decades of 'speculation' - legalised economic gambling. It wiped £666 billion off Britain's economy in just two years. We still have not recovered to pre-crisis levels.

Workers gamble their wages and face penury for them and their families. Senior bankers gamble the world economy and face - bonuses!

Nationalise the banks and big business under the democratic control and management of workers and customers. Jobs and services - not bankers' bonuses.

**£34,000,000**

Amount bookies pry from gamblers at "crack cocaine" fixed-odds betting terminals every week - nearly a grand a week per machine

**£666 billion**

Amount casino banksters wiped off Britain's GDP in just two years when they caused the 2007-08 global financial crisis

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## **Tower Hamlets to take anti-cuts fight into the council chamber**

### **Tower Hamlets Socialist Party**

Tower Hamlets Independent Group councillors will move an amendment to the east London borough's cuts budget on 24 February.

This follows a second 'people's budget' meeting where 50 people discussed how best to fight the cuts proposed by Labour mayor John Biggs.

The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) and Tower Hamlets Independent Group have been working together. We have invited residents, campaigners and council workers to say how the cuts will affect them, and what should be in a people's budget for the borough.

There was determination to oppose these devastating cuts from everyone who spoke.

Hugo Pierre from Tower Hamlets TUSC explained that a detailed examination of the council's financial position has identified £70 million reserves. These could be used, alongside borrowing powers, to avoid cuts outright.

This would give time to help organise a national movement, linking in with other councils, which could force the government to retreat. Councillors who oppose cuts could act as a beacon, giving confidence to anti-cuts councillors around the country.

In a rousing contribution, Councillor Mahbub Alam declared: "The youth is the future of our country. University bursaries are being cut. Very recently Tower Hamlets came top ten in the country for education.

"You want to put Tower Hamlets 20 to 30 years behind? If this was done by an Independent mayor, as God is my witness I would be standing right here and saying the same."

Abhab Miah, secretary of the Stifford Centre that hosted the meeting, spoke about cuts to school crossing patrols. "If the schools have to provide the school crossing patrols [instead of the council],



that will mean cuts in the schools."

Councillor Muhammad Ansar Mustaqim and local resident Abutayer Chowdhury said the cuts to community organisations and services for young people were so severe they could lead to increased anti-social behaviour.

Pete Dickenson from Tower Hamlets Socialist Party pointed to the success of the campaign of the Liverpool Council in the 1980s, which forced major concessions from the Thatcher government.

Councillor Oli Rahman, the leader of the Tower Hamlets Independent Group, concluded the meeting with a determined speech. He said plans to cut services for young people and the elderly have to be opposed.

"On Wednesday we will put an amendment to the budget. It says not to increase the council tax or cut the laundry service, or free homecare for the elderly."

A lobby of the budget meeting will present two anti-cuts petitions to the council, including TUSC's call for a no-cuts budget: 24 February at 6pm, Town Hall, Mulberry Place, London E14 2BG.

Socialist Party public meeting: How Liverpool fought the cuts. 25 February at 7.30pm, Oxford House, Derbyshire Street, London E2 6HG (nearest tube Bethnal Green)

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## Leeds sets up people's budget campaign

**Iain Dalton, Youth Fight for Jobs Yorkshire**

Anti-cuts activists have established the Leeds People's Budget Campaign to present a no-cuts amendment to next year's council budget.

Campaign group Youth Fight for Jobs and the local Community branch of general union Unite hosted the launch conference on 20 February. It brought together campaigners including those fighting fire service cuts, the bedroom tax, and cuts to English as a second or other language (Esol) classes.

In the council's last statement of finances, Leeds' usable reserves stood at over £390 million, an increase of £65 million in the last year. Why not use this to delay cuts and build a campaign?

An Esol campaigner pointed out their campaigning had stopped further funding cuts.

Several council workers commented on their efforts to discuss no-cuts budgets in their union branch. One remarked that although the figures for reserves are printed in black and white in the council's own documents, they were referred to as "fanciful" in branch discussions!

Undoubtedly, five years of council unions nationally failing to take a lead in fighting austerity has ground down activists throughout the union. Not responding to redundancies or attacks on pay and conditions is to "negate the whole purpose of a trade union".

The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition has lobbied the council over establishing a not-for-profit letting agency to tackle rip-off landlords and estate agents. The council is now watering this down to what it calls an "ethical lettings agency" which would only cover some landlords. But it does show that, under pressure, councils can intervene on housing.

# Leeds Labour 'anti-austerity' meeting: jam tomorrow

Tanis Belsham-Wray, Leeds Socialist Party

Leeds Labour Party's "Fighting Austerity, Investment Not Cuts" meeting on 18 February seemed quite positive. Until the question of 'people's budgets' came out.

Over 50 residents and Labour activists attended the Chapel Allerton ward public event. Fabian Hamilton, the local MP, condemned what are apparently 60% cuts to Leeds City Council's funding.

He spoke about building 250,000 council homes as well as investment in transport and education. It was also a breath of fresh air to hear an MP speak against Trident and call for a clampdown on pro-nuke MPs such as Hilary Benn.

We questioned if Labour councillors could explore setting a no-cuts budget, or even look at starting to build council housing before 2020. The answer was a straight no. Hamilton repeated the falsehood that to do so is against the law, and that we can do nothing at all about it.

I thought I was going to a meeting on fighting austerity now. But just as it was before the last general election, we heard the same old argument of waiting until 2020.

Labour needs a real fighting strategy, not just "wait for the elections". It needs to stand up against the Tories, build up local anti-cuts groups, start refusing to implement the cuts and mobilise people behind a campaign to win the money back. This would exert real pressure on the Tories to concede extra funding.

I have been stuck with austerity, low wages and poor job prospects since I was 17. I don't want to wait until I'm 27 just to be let down yet again.

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## Unison at a crossroads

Neil Cafferky

Industrially and politically Britain's largest public sector union is under siege from the Tories' relentless austerity agenda.

Internally, the union is mired in scandal. A leaked recording from the Greater London region led to allegations of interference into the recent general secretary election by senior paid employees of the union in favour of the incumbent, Dave Prentis.

Unison employees are forbidden in the union's rule book to campaign in elections unless it is in their spare time. Further leaks of emails, allegedly from assistant general secretary Cliff Williams, appear to show campaigning on behalf of Dave Prentis by employees of the union outside of the Greater London region.

### Democracy

These revelations have raised serious questions about the integrity of Unison's democratic procedures.

Despite Dave Prentis's recent victory in the general secretary election, is it still possible there can be change at the top of the union?

Opposition to the Prentis group has been growing over a number of years in the union. The group suffered its first serious reverse with the defeat of the witch-hunt of four Socialist Party members on trumped up charges of racism.

Out of the anti-witch-hunt campaign came 'Reclaim the Union' (RtU). RtU is a loose alliance of left groups and activists that agreed to stand under a common banner for elections.

An important organising principle of RtU is the 'consensus method' - where candidates' election slates can only be put together if all parties are in agreement.

This has been vital in keeping together an often fractious left. It also acts as an example to other forces in the union who might not have been traditionally aligned to the left. It can help to reassure them that they would not be railroaded into anything that they did not agree with, should they look to cooperate with the left in the future.

Under the RtU banner the left made steady, if unspectacular, progress in elections. However, the most significant change in the direction of the union came from within the Prentis camp.

Following an underwhelming pay deal in 2014 a layer of activists began to move into open opposition to Prentis and the union's leadership. This came to a head following the disastrous local government pay campaign for 2015-16.

## **Pay**

Manchester branch initiated a successful move for a special recall conference on the pay offer. Against the recommendation of Prentis loyalists, conference voted for a supplementary pay claim in 2016. It was the most serious reversal for the union leadership in years.

In parallel to the pay dispute there was a realignment of the Local Government Service Group Executive (SGE). Former supporters of Prentis, supported by the left, now had a majority over Prentis loyalists.

Last month, on the initiative of Socialist Party members, the SGE voted to back the call for councils to implement a legal 'no cuts' budget. The current local government SGE is a model of what Unison as a whole could become, where different groups in the union work together to put forward a fighting programme.

The general secretary election in late 2015 presented the best opportunity in 20 years to bring about change in the union. Unfortunately a series of short sighted mistakes meant this opportunity was not grasped.

Heather Wakefield's decision to run for general secretary was a significant moment in the battle to change the union leadership.

Her candidacy represented a serious split in the leadership of Unison. Her background as head of local government and as a former Prentis supporter meant she would probably gain more votes from members tired of the Prentis regime but not yet ready to back a candidate coming from the longstanding left.

As the only female candidate in the race she would also be a powerful draw in a union of 80% women members.

## **No-cuts budgets**

Socialist Party members in Unison have had differences with Heather Wakefield in the past over issues like industrial action and the witch-hunt. We continue to have differences over the question of 'no cuts' budgets for councils.

However, for the reasons given above it was felt at the time that she was potentially a major threat to Dave Prentis. If she were the sole candidate facing Prentis then it might be possible to defeat him.

If there was to be a three or four-way battle for votes then Prentis would be the inevitable victor. For that reason Socialist Party members began to open up a dialogue to see if a single anti-Prentis candidate could be agreed.

This was widely derided by supporters of the other left candidate, John Burgess. Completely misunderstanding the significance of Wakefield's candidacy they argued she was no different to Prentis and would only take votes from him, allowing a left candidate to come through the middle and win.

On the initiative of Socialist Party member Roger Bannister a meeting was held on 14 October with Heather Wakefield and John Burgess. This was in the period after the close of nominations (9 October) but before the closing date to withdraw a candidacy (16 October).

Roger Bannister offered to withdraw if a single anti-Prentis candidate could be achieved.

After an hour of discussion John Burgess announced he had no intention of withdrawing as he had no mandate to do so from his supporters. He then declared that Roger Bannister and Heather Wakefield were welcome to support his campaign and left the meeting.

In the end John Burgess came last with Heather Wakefield coming second, taking votes off all three candidates (see box), but with Roger Bannister receiving a very good 16,853 votes (12.6%).

The question marks that hang over the general secretary election will have damaging effects for Unison as long as Dave Prentis is in charge. They will hamper the union's ability to wage an industrial and political campaign to defend its members from the Tories' austerity agenda.

So far, the right wing press has paid little attention to the scandal. That will quickly change if the union finds itself in a confrontation with the employers.

This poses the question of what to do next for all those seeking change in Unison? In the view of the Socialist Party this begins with a coming together of all anti-Prentis forces in the union with the supporters of Heather Wakefield playing a prominent role.

While there may not be full agreement on every point of programme, there exists enough agreement on issues like democracy in the union and the need for Unison to play a more high-profile role in the fight against austerity for there to be the beginnings of a discussion on how to change the union.

There is an urgent need for all anti-Prentis forces in the union to meet together, possibly at national conference (21-24 June), and begin to hammer out a broader coalition to change the direction of the union.

Socialist Party members in Unison stand ready to do whatever is needed to make this coalition a reality.

## **Election scandal**

The general secretary election scandal has generated two investigations; an internal one headed up by assistant general secretary (AGS) Roger McKenzie, and another 'external' investigation by the Electoral Reform Society (ERS). There are a number of complaints before the Trade Union Certification Officer.

The ERS report is now available on the union's website. It concluded there were some valid complaints. However, citing the low vote for Prentis in the London region and the margin of his victory, it concluded this did not have a decisive effect on the outcome of the election and therefore there were no grounds to rerun the election.

## **Anti-Prentis candidate**

It is worth noting in passing that if a single anti-Prentis candidate could have been achieved then Prentis' victory (if he had won at all) would have been narrower, possibly making a refusal to rerun the election harder to justify.

The ERS report also said it could find no evidence that Dave Prentis had any knowledge of the actions of Unison staff in regards to rule breaking.

Superficially, Dave Prentis seems to have been cleared by the ERS. Nonetheless, the ERS report leaves many questions unanswered.

In total the ERS received 157 complaints, 31 of which were deemed 'valid' while 40 were deemed 'invalid'.

In 86 complaints the ERS made no findings at all, citing the fact they were currently under an internal investigation headed up by AGS Roger McKenzie. 83 of these complaints relate to the leaked recording of staff in the Greater London Region that appears to show them organising to win nominations for Dave Prentis' campaign.

The investigation by McKenzie has been complicated by the leaked emails from his fellow AGS Cliff Williams. (Unison has five unelected assistant general secretaries. Their diligent work allows Dave Prentis time to pursue other non-general secretary functions like his paid non-executive directorship of the Bank of England.)

The leaked emails, if they prove to be authentic, seem to indicate AGS Williams directing operations for the campaign to re-elect Dave Prentis, known as 'Team Dave'. One prominent 'Team Dave' member included in the email chain is none other than AGS Roger McKenzie!

The emails contain campaigning advice for Team Dave, including the eyebrow-raising suggestion: "It may be that in some circumstances you may be able to help to 'circumvent' hostile branches by covertly working with sympathetic employer contacts."

Another interesting revelation from the emails is the presence of Mark Ferguson in the email chain. Ferguson was the campaign manager for Blairite candidate Liz Kendall during her bid for leadership of the Labour Party. He has since been given a prominent job in Unison's policy department.

## **Jeremy Corbyn**

During the Labour leadership election Prentis loudly supported the bid of Jeremy Corbyn, a campaign that was popular among Unison members. What are they to make of a key Kendall supporter's involvement in Dave Prentis's campaign? What effect will this have on Dave Prentis' support for Jeremy Corbyn's anti-austerity politics?

## **Unison general secretary election - declared on 17 December 2015**

Roger Bannister - 16,853 (12.6%)

John Burgess - 15,573 (11.6%)

Dave Prentis - 66,155 (49.4%)

Heather Wakefield - 35,433 (26.4%)

## **Socialist Party programme for a fighting and democratic Unison**

- The election of all senior full time officials of the union, including the assistant general secretaries
- Elected officials to take no more than the average wage of a Unison member
- An end to undemocratic interference into branch democracy by full time officials
- To lead a fight in defence of local government and the NHS through a programme of national coordinated action against cuts and privatisation
- Support the junior doctors. For a meeting of all health unions to discuss coordinated strike action across the NHS. For a national demonstration in defence of the NHS
- For a national campaign in defence of DOCAS (the system by which union subs are deducted from members' wages)

## **Unison bureaucracy unmasked:**

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## **Hong Kong: new year riot**

### **Police violence must be condemned**

**Socialist Action (CWI, Hong Kong) eyewitness report**

Brutal policing caused a riot in the downtown district of Mong Kok on the first night of the Chinese New Year, 8 February.

Protesters had gathered to defend street food hawkers from a high-profile raid by law enforcement agencies. Police arrested at least 54 people during the clashes and more arrests are planned. Media reports say the number of injured could exceed 120.

These events have been nicknamed the 'Fishball Revolution' - influenced by the mass pro-democracy 'Umbrella Revolution' of 2014 (Mong Kok's main road was one of three sites occupied for almost three months in 2014).

Street food hawkers (selling snacks like fishballs) have been one of the traditions of the Chinese New Year celebrations in Hong Kong, and the government had always tolerated them. However, last year the government started to clamp down on these "illegal hawkers", which triggered mass anger.

At 10pm on New Year's Day, crowds gathered in Mong Kok as officers of the Food and Hygiene Department were issuing fines to street hawkers. By 11pm, police arrived and attacked the protesters with pepper spray and batons.

Protesters were throwing objects at the police when suddenly a policeman fired two warning shots into the air and pointed his gun at the people, which triggered further violent clashes. Police rules do not allow firing warning shots into the air.

Socialist Action condemns the police violence and demands an independent public enquiry into the police actions of 8-9 February.

## **Police revenge**

These events were like a reprise of the 'Umbrella Revolution'; police pepper sprayed the crowd and many protesters were also beaten up and lying in blood.

At 4am, a group of masked protesters started to dig up bricks from the road and pull down traffic signs. They also stopped nearby journalists and people from taking any photos.

The protesters then threw bricks at the police and smashed the windows of police cars. The police responded by throwing bricks too. Demonstrators gathered in Shantung Street and Sai Yeung Choi Street and some set fire to rubbish bins.

It is possible the New Year riots were partly instigated by pro-government thugs hidden among the people. However, one thing that is certain - the riots have gained the support of a layer of people, especially youth, being seen as a way to take revenge on the police.

The failure of the Umbrella Revolution was due to its too limited programme and refusal to call for solidarity protests beyond Hong Kong, especially inside China which is the decisive battlefield for the Chinese dictatorship. For a layer of youth, however, this failure has been misconstrued.

They reject the so-called 'peaceful and rational' strategy of the capitalist democratic opposition leaders (pan-democrats), but oversimplify this into the need for 'violence' rather than seeing that a revolutionary programme is the key.

## **Democratic struggle**

Without a political alternative, and without the ability for mass protests to escalate in a strong and organised way, some radical youths have turned to rioting. This is particularly the case with some 'nativist' groups (a peculiar mix of far-right and racist ideas with pro-independence sentiment).

Only 20 or so members of nativist groups were present during the clashes but the mainstream media has consciously overstated their role in preparation for a government propaganda offensive against

"Hong Kong independence forces", and to scare people from taking part in democratic struggles.

Socialists support the right of self-defence of protests and groups in struggle, but this must be disciplined and organised, preferably through democratic workers' organisations.

Riots are never an effective way to fight against the establishment - as they do not threaten the regime but give it an excuse to reinforce its repressive machine. Socialists stand for organised mass struggles around a clear revolutionary programme to defeat dictatorial capitalism. Only this can channel the mass anger into a force to shatter the dictatorship.

Full article on [www.chinaworker.info](http://www.chinaworker.info)

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## International news in brief

### Video: A Marxist view of Modi's Hindutva

Peter Taaffe discusses with Jagadish Chandra, New Socialist Alternative (CWI in India). The interview provides analysis of the present situation in India from an internationalist perspective.

Since the advent of Modi to power in 2014, BJP reactionaries have let loose a reign of terror through their multi-pronged organisation. What response must the left counter with?

Watch the video [www.socialistworld.net](http://www.socialistworld.net)

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### Ireland: General election final push

An Anti Austerity Alliance (AAA) canvassing team (above) in the Irish general election. The election takes place on 26 February. The next issue of the Socialist will carry a full analysis of the results, including how Socialist Party Ireland members fared, as part of the AAA. A brief report will be posted on the CWI website soon after the results are published.

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### Turkey: CWI national conference

Members of Sosyalist Alternatif (CWI, Turkey) at their first national conference. The meeting took place at a challenging time for Marxists, with the country bitterly polarised under Erdogan's authoritarian rule and the spill over from Syria's war.

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## Victory for striking EDF energy workers

**A Unite member**

Unite members at EDF Energy working in metering services have won major concessions in a long running dispute over pay and conditions.

The priority for staff covered by long standing agreements is the issue of increased evening and weekend working. The employers have now agreed that this will apply to volunteers only and those not



covered by the agreements.

In addition, the employer has dropped proposals to fit tracker devices in vehicles and to introduce random drug and alcohol testing.

## **Solid pickets**

This shift by the employers followed five days of strike action, with solid pickets as well as protest action which effectively blocked the entrance to the main HQ building at Bexleyheath, Kent, as reported in issue 884 of the Socialist.

The big lesson is that well planned, strategic strike action works. The union pulled out workers whose role is to fit 'smart meters' - something that the company is under pressure to complete or face fines.

Workers turned out in large numbers to picket and demonstrate on every day of the strike. In a sign of things to come, the company called out the police when the campaign blocked the entrance to the building and caused traffic congestion. On the first day, the police simply asked that the protest stop, which it did.

On the second day, the police turned up and threatened mass arrests. On the third day, they turned up with several vehicles looking to make arrests - no protests had been planned for the third day!

Unite is now preparing for battles on a number of fronts with EDF. The company is proposing to reduce revenue protection staff by 50% - while millions of pounds in stolen electricity is not recovered from landlords or business.

This policy decision means that even when theft is discovered EDF writes off the stolen electricity. Meanwhile, there are over 49,000 avoidable deaths each year from fuel poverty and bills continue to be far too high.

The union is also preparing its pay claim for 2016. The victory by metering staff has set an example and shows how these campaigns can also be fought and won.

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## **Pensions strike by water workers in Warrington**

**Andy Ford, Warrington Socialist Party**

United Utilities, a company with revenues of £1,700 million and profits of £664.3 million in the last year, is attacking its workers' pensions. The company paid a dividend of 37p per share to its backers in the City but now claims it cannot afford decent pensions for the staff who generate those revenues.

Members of the GMB general union gathered to picket and protest outside the company's Warrington headquarters. The pickets were watched by a handful of company 'marshals' from just inside the perimeter.

GMB steward Steve explained that the company has served notice that it wishes to close the 'defined benefit' pension scheme, and replace it with an inferior 'defined contribution' system.

"The difference is that under defined benefits you know what you're going to get, and the company plugs any gaps, but under defined contribution you know what you pay but not what you'll get, and the risk is put on the employee.

"The company is not responsible for any shortfalls. Up till last year the company was reporting that the scheme was doing OK, now they say they can't cover the future costs".

United Utilities says that it values its employees as 'stakeholders'. But figures obtained by GMB show that in the last year it distributed £259 million in dividends to shareholders, but is now fighting over £15 million for the pension scheme.

## **Equal?**

Obviously where the 'stakeholders' are concerned some are more equal than others!

The three year revaluation of the scheme is due this year. GMB is demanding that the full accounts are opened for inspection.

But United Utilities is only willing to share some of the figures and even then only for 'validation' by the union, not proper consultation.

So workers have been left with little choice. 90% voted for industrial action with 82% backing full strike action.

The GMB represents workers in process control, water collection and treatment and repair and maintenance - the heart of the business.

It looks like the company and their shareholders are not going to have it all their own way.

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# **Fresh round of strikes against fresh round of cuts**

**Greg Collier, Oxford Socialist Party**

"We're here today for a day of strike action to say to this local authority it's not good enough. We're a very rich country, tax a few more of the super-rich", said Unite branch officer David Ricketts as Oxford County Council workers from Unite the union took strike action on 16 February.

The action was against plans to make further cuts of more than £50 million to local services and strikers were accompanied by dozens of supporters from around the county showing solidarity.

This fresh round of cuts would result in the closure of 44 children's centres and seven early intervention centres across Oxfordshire, including David Cameron's own constituency of Witney where members of his family have opposed cuts.

The workers of Oxford County Council want to protect vital community services and more than 400 jobs that are at risk.

As increasing waves of cuts are passed, more people are beginning to stand up against attacks on ordinary people.

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# **Stress, abuse and longer hours for bus drivers**

# trying to make 'headway'

## A London bus driver

Bus drivers in London are being made to suffer for a system that is not fit for purpose.

Until recently buses in London ran using a 'time card', the idea being that the bus would arrive at certain points along the route at the designated time.

The only force working against that happening was, of course, traffic. London is becoming the most congested city in the world and getting buses to run to a timetable takes a lot of juggling.

Recently Transport for London (TfL) has removed the time cards and buses now run using 'headway' meters.

Headway meters in the driver's cab show the distance between their bus and the one in front. The idea is that each driver keeps the same distance from the bus in front. The only problem with this is our old friend 'traffic'.

Now if a bus is held up, then every bus behind it has to slow down, sometimes to a complete stop to maintain headway. Passengers complain as they want to get to work but the bus is at a standstill, sometimes on an empty road or at a bus stop for up to five minutes.

This is paving the way for drivers to be abused and assaulted as more and more passengers are getting upset.

The headway system is also inaccurate and drivers could, according to the meter, be ten minutes behind the bus in front but turn a corner to find they are right behind it.

The radio in the cab then chirps into life with an irate controller threatening to put the driver on report for being too early.

## Breaks

Even with little traffic drivers are held back by controllers as the headway needs to be correct.

Hours are getting longer, lunch breaks are getting shorter and finish times getting later and later. Drivers are taking more and more verbal abuse by controllers for simply trying to do the job with a system that does not work.

Some garages are having meetings soon to discuss what we intend to do about it. We will no doubt put in grievances about the situation but some will be calling for industrial action.

If TfL and the bus companies do not want to listen then this will be the only course of action left open to us.

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# Workers unite to fight pay attack in Leicester

## Alex Morgan, Leicester Socialist Party

Over 300 workers for 'food giant' Samworth Brothers packed a meeting in Leicester on 12 February

over threats to their pay and to hear the response of food workers' union BFAWU. The company is one of the largest employers in the city, with 5,000 workers across nine sites.

Nationwide anger felt at the increasing normalisation of poverty pay has forced the government into introducing a 'living wage' of £7.20 an hour from April 2016. As it is, £7.20 an hour is still a long way off a decent standard of living.

However, the response of companies like Samworth Brothers is to take this wage increase back from workers by axing pay enhancements.

## **Dismissal**

They want to scrap all overtime and unsocial hours' payments in return for a 2% pay rise. Staff have reportedly been told that they face dismissal if they do not agree to the new contracts.

The changes could see workers suffer net losses of thousands of pounds. As a result, around 300 Samworth workers joined BFAWU in a single week.

The meeting was mainly composed of workers who had not yet joined the union. While there were many questions about what could be done to fight the changes, the overriding feeling from those present was anger at the cynical actions by their employer.

Among the speakers were BFAWU general secretary Ronnie Draper and former Leicester Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) councillor Wayne Naylor.

## **Fightback**

The example was given of the unionised Samworth Brothers site in Manchester where workers have fought off similar attacks. The call from Leicester workers was for an organised fightback against the proposals.

A long standing Samworth worker, who had been campaigning for unionisation for years, made an impassioned plea for unity and received a great response. Afterwards, queues of workers jostled to take union join forms for themselves and their colleagues.

The local Socialist Party and TUSC branches already work closely with BFAWU, supporting its campaigns for the living wage and against zero-hour contracts. We are continuing to offer solidarity and help in organising their campaign against this blatant assault on the pay of low-waged workers.

Ultimately this struggle must also be linked to the need for a real living wage of £10 an hour and the fighting unionisation of workplaces that is necessary to achieve this.

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# **Workplace news in brief**

## **Education walkout**

On 24 February, lecturers' union UCU and Unison will take joint strike action across England in the further education sector for the first time in a huge step forward in a sector - where pay, terms and conditions have been savaged in recent years. The unions' pay claim, which amounts to just £1 an hour extra for further education workers, has been rejected by the employers. UCU members have been balloted for action and voted overwhelmingly in favour, with 74% voting to take action. Unison

members backed industrial action with 66% in favour. There will be reports of the strike in next week's issue of the Socialist.

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## Indy closure

Following news that the Independent newspaper will cease to produce print versions of its daily and Sunday papers the Independent's NUJ chapel (branch) has passed a motion condemning the decision. Around 100 jobs could be lost and the chapel has resolved to fight the jobs cuts and "rejects the fact there has been no opportunity to consider alternative strategies. Decisions have been taken behind closed doors leaving staff to pick up the pieces." The Socialist backs this decision and calls on the Independent to open the books to the NUJ and its workers. The Financial Times chapel has also voted to support journalists at the Independent.

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## 'Pay the rate' protest

As part of a lengthy campaign by construction workers to force two contractors Interserve and BWV to adopt industry collective agreements, protests at two sites have been called. Both major contractors have declined to enter the agreements which guarantee minimum standard rates of pay. General unions Unite and GMB, alongside building union Ucat, have also demanded that all employees working on the sites should be directly employed. The protests are both at 6.30am on 1 March in South Wales at Margham, Heol Caer Bont, SA13 2NR, and in Yorkshire at Templeborough, Sheffield Road, Rotherham, S60 1AD.

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## 60 years ago...

# Khrushchev: the Stalinist who denounced Stalin

Dave Carr

At the 20th conference of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union on 25 February 1956, first secretary Nikita Khrushchev denounced the dictatorial crimes of Joseph Stalin (who had died in 1953). However, as the revolutionary events of that year showed, in denouncing Stalin, Khrushchev hadn't rejected Stalinism.

Following the defeat of the Nazis in World War Two the Soviet Red Army occupied eastern Europe. Gradually, through a series of 'popular front' governments and by an iron grip on the army, police and judiciary, Stalinist regimes - mirror images of the Soviet Union - were installed.

Living conditions were severe. War reparations saw factories stripped of machinery and removed to the Soviet Union. A harsh labour system involving piece-work and high production targets under a dictatorial management (known as 'Stakhanovism') was rigidly enforced. Thousands of worker-militants were expelled from Communist Parties (CP) as Stalin's police apparatus purged society of any potential political opponents.

The followers of Russian revolutionary Leon Trotsky (an implacable opponent of Stalinism) explained that although the occupation of eastern Europe had temporarily strengthened Stalin's regime, the dead hand of the bureaucracy would inevitably conflict with the functioning of the planned economy - which required the 'oxygen' of workers' democracy.

This contradiction would provoke a clash between the working class and the bureaucracy. So, the demand for workers' democracy could only be realised through a 'political revolution'.

Within 40 years of Khrushchev's speech Stalinism in eastern Europe collapsed. But in the absence of genuine mass revolutionary parties this resulted in the restoration of capitalism instead of workers' democracy.

The first workers' uprising had already occurred in East Germany in June 1953 but was brutally crushed by Russian tanks.

The next expression of a political revolution occurred in Hungary in October-November 1956 (although a brief strike wave in Poland had earlier that year taken on the character of an uprising). The Hungarian events derived from the perceived political thaw in relations between the Soviet leaders and the Hungarian CP leaders following Khrushchev's speech.

Starting with the stirrings of dissent among intellectuals (the 'Petofi circle') and students, splits in the ruling Communist Party opened up channels for working class opposition to move along. By October a political revolution was in full swing. Quickly, the workers embraced Lenin's 1919 democratic programme against bureaucratisation.

## Uprising

In the capital, Budapest, workers' councils ie soviets, were established which included the election of officials with the right of recall. Maximums were placed on wages, the standing army was replaced by workers' militias and freedom of expression, except for capitalist counter-revolutionaries, was established. To implement this, two general strikes and two uprisings were conducted by the working class throughout Hungary.

The occupying Soviet troops became infected with this revolutionary mood and were hastily withdrawn, only for more reliable troops to return later.

Khrushchev, having earlier denounced Stalin, resorted to the same brutal methods to crush the revolution. This resulted in splits and defections from the mass Communist Parties in the West.

Khrushchev had survived and the repressive system staggered on for several more decades but the workers' revolution of 1956 showed that the writing was on the wall for Stalinism.

A version of this article previously appeared in the Socialist, see [www.socialistparty.org.uk](http://www.socialistparty.org.uk)

## Theatre review: Iphigenia in Splott

# One-woman tragedy's fiery call for revolution

**Linda Taaffe**

Tremendous. That is the only way to describe Gary Owens' one-woman play "Iphigenia in Splott", directed by Rachel O'Riordan and starring Sophie Melville as Effie.

Effie is a hoody. This young woman provocatively stares life in the face in the desolation that has become South Wales. Closures of facilities, cuts to basic services, drink, drugs and isolation.

Once the heartland of engineering, mining and steel production, the Welsh working class had

established a powerful trade union movement where community ties were steadfast. Now the bosses have created an industrial desert where all workers suffer.

Sophie captivates her audience with a powerful performance full of physical strength, movement and intense emotion. Any actor could speak those words of defiance, but Sophie grew up in Swansea and has lived these experiences in her own community. Her portrayal of Effie reveals the depth of her own feelings and experiences.

Effie is a desolate character, but she is not going to let that get her down. Then one night she meets the man of her dreams.

Her life is turned around. She rejoices. Not that she is in love, seeing pink roses everywhere. Rather she says: "I am not alone" - a powerful sentiment. Horizons open up, only to be followed by acute disappointment - dumped and pregnant.

## Tragedy

The final part of the play is a harrowing tragedy about the birth of her baby in an underfunded NHS with overworked professionals.

This spirited young performer even tweeted Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt inviting him to come see "what the NHS means to the majority". Sophie not only hails from Swansea, but grew up in a family where socialist ideas were discussed. Her grandfather, Alec Thraves, is a long-standing organiser of the Socialist Party.

Effie, in final exasperation, muses: "It seems it's always places like this and people like us who have to take it when the time for cutting comes." But she goes on to defiantly pose the crucial question facing the whole working class today. "And I wonder just how long we are gonna have to take it... And I wonder what is gonna happen when we can't take it anymore?"

Many critics, including the Socialist Party's Kate Jones in an earlier review, have rightly interpreted this as a call to revolution. The audience jumped to its feet.

Let's hope playwrights like Gary Owen will produce more plays for actors like Sophie Melville on current social themes. But perhaps also go further and write about how to change the whole rotten system. There would be a ready audience for this kind of theatre - not just in south Wales, but everywhere.

- Iphigenia in Splott is touring nationally until 16 April 2016. See venues and times here: <http://tiny.cc/splott>

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This short performance has just closed to the highest acclamation at the National Theatre on London's South Bank. It premiered in Cardiff in July 2015, when Kate Jones's review kindled interest for Socialist readers. The play then went to Edinburgh where Sophie Melville won the Stage award for acting excellence. It now goes on tour around the country.

The work's title is a clever twist on the eighteenth-century opera "Iphigenia on Taurus". This was in turn based on the character of Iphigenia, whose life was offered up to save her people in a famous play by the ancient Greek dramatist Euripedes.

Since then the name Iphigenia has become synonymous with sacrifice. In this play Iphigenia becomes Effie, and Taurus becomes Splott, a working class district of Cardiff.

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# Letters

## Do you have something to say?

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

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

Views of letter writers do not necessarily match those of the Socialist Party.

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## Heseltine's hyperbole

What planet does Tory Lord Heseltine occupy when in the opulent surroundings of London's Mansion House he tells an audience of business leaders that Liverpool is one of the "leading lights" of the "Northern Powerhouse"? (Quoted in the Liverpool Echo, 18 February 2016.)

Bloated with the self-satisfaction befitting a 'freeman of the city' - gifted by Labour's Mayor Anderson - he declared: "Liverpool has a real opportunity to shape its own destiny and it will be important to set clear priorities for investment for it to really thrive".

Just who stands to thrive?

The same Echo reports: "Liverpool NHS jobs face the axe because of community health funding cuts. Up to 30 NHS staff in Liverpool could lose their jobs as services including exercise classes for dementia patients face the axe." This adds to the £340 million already slashed from social provision.

This shows the glaring contrast between the Tories' mendacious hyperbole and the reality of life for thousands of the city's people whose lives are damaged.

Words aren't enough. The council should declare "enough is enough" and take any measures necessary to protect our people.

**Tony Mulhearn, Liverpool**

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## Nurses narked

An article was recently published in the Socialist relating to the demise of mental health care in the NHS. (See [socialistparty.org.uk](http://socialistparty.org.uk), 'Mental health: system in crisis'.)

A paragraph mentioned agency staff not daring to speak out on issues as they can find themselves out of a job. All nurses must speak out about poor care. I am a general nurse, employed full time on an NHS contract.

Nursing has been a choice of occupation for hard-working working class girls or grammar school mavericks. There will be fewer nurses from working class backgrounds, as they need support during their training and the entrance grades become unattainable. This is class war.



The agencies are reinforcing the road to privatisation. This government would rather throw money at agencies like Thornbury, whose boss is a Tory donor.

**Sandra Smith, staff nurse**

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## **Con crime con**

I remember that the Tories always used to brag about being the party of 'law and order'.

My sister works as a witness care officer for Sussex Police. Her job is to ensure that police witnesses attend court to give evidence at trial.

She often has to listen to very harrowing stories from domestic violence and rape victims. It can be traumatic and rewarding at the same time.

As a result of the Tory government's continued obsession with austerity, a third of those jobs are to go. This is after they have 'cut costs' by combining some back-office functions with neighbouring Surrey Police.

While the government can find limitless money for wars, or efforts to keep refugees out, thereby keeping the racist pot boiling as a diversion from the damage they are causing to people's lives, they can't find the money to protect ordinary people from crime.

**Clive Walder, Birmingham**

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## **Huddersfield: save our A&E!**

- Join the demonstration: 11.30am, 27 February, St Georges Square

**Mike Forster, Huddersfield Socialist Party**

The community-led campaign against the closure of the A&E at Huddersfield Royal Infirmary (HRI) has mushroomed into a massive people's protest movement. At least ten local groups have been set up.

The work is being coordinated by a steering committee of people who have mostly not been involved in campaigns before. Thousands of signatures have been collected. The roadshow meetings of the phoney 14 week consultation will be mobbed by local people.

The demonstration in Huddersfield on 27 February will be the biggest protest in the town in the post-war period.

Only five weeks ago the local Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) launched a consultation with the recommended option to downgrade HRI and to relocate its A&E to nearby Halifax. This would mean only one A&E department serving a diverse and scattered community of 750,000 people!

## **Fatalities**

The proposal will result in a huge increase of fatalities. Those travelling to the A&E would have to cross the busiest Northern motorway, the M62, which is constantly clogged with traffic.

The CCG has had to admit that it does not have the funds to keep both A&E departments open. It has chosen to prioritise the Halifax hospital because of its huge and escalating PFI (Private Finance Initiative) debt.

The CCG cannot extricate itself from this crippling contract - which will end up costing £774 million, despite the fact that the cost of building the hospital was £64 million! The CCG will sacrifice lives to pay off an immoral and unjustified debt to private companies.

The Socialist Party locally has thrown all its weight and resources behind the campaign. As well as helping to organise key events, we are also taking responsibility for mobilising youth anger at the proposal by organising activities at the university and colleges. Our members on the steering committee continue to play a crucial role in directing the work of the campaign.

## **We continue to call for:**

- No closure of either A&E department
- Cancel the PFI debt
- A publicly owned and fully funded NHS at every level
- Coordinated industrial action to halt cuts and privatisation in the NHS

## **Momentum must "take the fight to the right"!**

**James Ivens, Lambeth Socialist Party**

Lambeth Momentum's leadership is on a rightward trajectory, but some younger members are still looking for a serious fightback.

Corbyn supporters in the south London borough debated their core policies and membership structures on 17 February. Unfortunately, the meeting agreed to campaign unconditionally for Blairite candidates.

Socialist Party members opposed a motion calling simply for a Labour government and Labour representatives at all levels. We argued this should be a Labour government and representatives based on an anti-austerity programme.

We also challenged a motion on the group's structure excluding members of parties which stand against Labour. Such groups will still be allowed at meetings.

But how is Momentum to approach council workers and service users facing extinction-level cuts? How can we ask them to vote for Tories in red ties?

Millions are waiting to see which way Labour will jump. We need to take the fight to the right, or lose them.

Some in the meeting spoke against us, invoking the Telegraph branding Momentum as 'Militant 2.0'.

We explained that far from Militant, Momentum risks becoming 'Miliband 2.0' - allegedly anti-austerity, but in practice a tool for the Blairites. In truth, attacks by the discredited Tory press will improve our standing among workers and young people.

A session on how to support right-wing London mayoral candidate Sadiq Khan also turned into a debate after we spoke. Why not use Momentum's potential activist base as a bargaining chip to lobby Khan on Momentum policy?

We did not win most of the attendees to these ideas. But a silent minority of young people, new to politics, listened intently. One bought the Socialist. We will be back.

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## **Join the London lobbies: call on councillors not to vote for cuts!**

- Camden: 29 February
- Hackney: 2 March
- Waltham Forest: 3 March

See [www.socialistparty.org.uk](http://www.socialistparty.org.uk) as more lobby dates are added!

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## **Gateshead: reprieve for respite centre**

### **Norman Hall**

On Saturday 20 February over 200 people took to the streets in Gateshead in a lively protest march over the latest round of cuts proposed in the Labour council's budget plans.

This was followed by a rally outside the Civic Centre at which campaigners Melanie Cornwell and Paul Watson from the Save Grove House Campaign spoke.

They announced that Cabinet papers released the day before show that the council is to back down over the closure of Grove House - a respite centre for children and a respite and day centre for adults, all with serious disabilities.

### **Victory**

This decision represents a marvellous victory for the affected families and their supporters who have campaigned tirelessly against the proposals.

They had no doubts that without the campaign, which was very loud, public and embarrassing for the council, these vital facilities would now be facing privatisation or closure.

Melanie made the point that "we learned yesterday that cuts to these services will not go ahead this year which is fantastic news. But so many families already under immense pressure have had to endure almost four months of worry, uncertainty and additional stress."

She went on to say: "This is a Labour-controlled council, everything about cuts that affect the most vulnerable and needy go against what the Labour Party stands for.

"We have urged councillors to follow the pledge made in a party political broadcast recently by Jeremy Corbyn to defend the communities and services they rely on and to work with other local authorities to put the pressure on government to force them to live up to their responsibilities and protect vulnerable people."

However, the justified celebrations were tempered by the fact that other proposals, such as the closure of two children's homes, the charging of disabled youth aged 16 to 18 for transport to school and the move to three-weekly bin collections, are still to go ahead.

Also, the climbdown over the respite centres is only a promise to keep them open another year.

## Reserves

Campaigners were frequently told the council could not use reserves to keep these services running but that is exactly what has happened.

Unfortunately, the reserves are being used, not to launch a struggle to get more funding from the government, but only to allow the council time to "remodel" the services.

If the council thinks that this sop is going to keep the families and their supporters quiet, they have another thing coming - starting with lobbies of the forthcoming Cabinet and full council meetings.

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# Save Derbyshire children's centres

## Chesterfield Socialist Party

The Labour-controlled county council has announced that 32 of Derbyshire's 51 children's centres are to close this year, with up to 200 redundancies - their most vicious assault on workers yet in the £157 million cuts they're making.

This attack will have devastating effects.

A report 'Early Intervention: The Next Steps' was written for the government in 2011 by Graham Allen MP.

"For some families in Derbyshire who experience child poverty having access to children's centre services in these vital years of life will have a significant impact on their positive life chances."

## Critical

"Children's centre services support parents in the critical early years of a child's life providing a foundation for positive emotional and physical development and in achieving good levels of educational development for successful outcomes in the future."

For every £1 spent on early intervention, a saving of £10 is accrued later. These cuts are not only a brutal attack on the poorest in society, they are a false economy.

Yet the council hides behind the 'we have been left with no real choice' argument. In a written response to a constituent who raised issues about the cuts, the children's services cabinet member ignored a question as to why reserves couldn't be used but went on to state:

"I can categorically confirm... the government would, without hesitation, instruct commissioners to take control of the council and cut faster and deeper."

## Council unions

This ignores what campaigners are arguing for - a coordinated campaign across all Labour councils, setting no-cuts budgets (which are not illegal), pooling and using reserves in the interim and involving council unions and local communities. Commissioners couldn't take over every council!

It is also misleading to state this would automatically lead to 'faster and deeper' cuts. Labour councils are complying with the government's cuts; they are already cutting as fast and as deep as the

government is demanding!

Derbyshire Unison is launching a campaign against the closures and will be joined by anti-cuts campaigners throughout the county.

These closures and job losses are not inevitable and will be fought.

Of course there is enormous anger at the Tory government but when local politicians refuse to stand up for their constituents, they are seen as accomplices.

## **"Nothing we can do"**

It is time Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell stopped echoing the 'nothing we can do' to fight council cuts mantra.

We invite them to join with ordinary people in fighting austerity. Very soon they would realise that there is very much something we can do!

An online petition is available at [www.thepetitionsite.com/en-gb/388/755/635/save-derbyshires-childrens-centres](http://www.thepetitionsite.com/en-gb/388/755/635/save-derbyshires-childrens-centres) and a mass meeting of children's centre members is to be held.

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## **Wakefield: no fracking, no cuts**

Wakefield and Pontefract Socialist Party members teamed up with Frack Free Wakefield District to lobby Wakefield district councillors before a full council meeting. The council was scheduled to debate housing and fracking.

The result was that the council voted overwhelmingly in favour of a motion, which we have been calling for, to oppose fracking and call on central government to withdraw licences issued for the Wakefield district.

We also took the opportunity to lobby councillors on setting a 'no cuts' budget prior to their budget meeting next month.

**John Sibbald**

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## **Cumbria cuts - the grim reaper**

'Cuts kill!' is a slogan raised as a warning by the movement against austerity in recent years. Is this exaggerated? Unfortunately not. Dozens of reports confirm this grim warning.

And make no mistake, the recent decision by Labour Cumbria county councillors to carry out £25 million cuts to vital public services, particularly social care, will result in more unnecessary deaths in Cumbria.

### **Stakes**

Those are the stakes. Never mind destroying the jobs and livelihoods of 2,000 families.

But there was opposition to these cuts - from Socialist Party and Unison activists. The local News & Star carried a report of our lobby of councillors and of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition statement to the council meeting.

This was the only organised public opposition to the council budget cuts in Cumbria.

In the sixth year of ever-worsening austerity attacks, why was there no mass mobilisation of the trade unions, anti-cuts groups and the left?

And what role are the 'Corbynistas' playing on the council?

Jeremy Corbyn has said cuts are not an economic necessity but a political choice. We will continue to fight the cuts.

**Carlisle Socialist Party**

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## **Campaign to save Pent Valley continues**

Kent County Council has let slip any veil of democratic accountability to the people of Cheriton, Kent. Its education committee supported the proposal by the director of education, Patrick Leeson, to close Pent Valley School, despite huge public opposition.

Parents and students, including many members of the Nepalese community in Cheriton filled a 49 seater coach to lobby Kent County councillors who are members of the education cabinet.

We are campaigning against the threat by Kent County Council to close our local authority run secondary school as reported in last week's issue. Claire, who is one of the mums, prepared a brief presentation in opposition to the threat to close the school but despite an understanding that she would be allowed to speak briefly was refused permission by the chair of the committee!

A supporter of the campaign, despite repeated demands from the chair to shut up, said that the committee were discourteous and impolite in refusing to allow Claire speakers' rights. He demanded the council use their reserves as a loan to keep our school open.

We believe that as part of the campaign there may be grounds for a legal challenge to the procedure. The campaign continues!

**Eric Segal, East Kent Socialist Party**

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## **Socialist Party regional conference reports: Wales and North West**

### **Wales**

The children of Grangetown in Cardiff set the scene for this year's Socialist Party Wales conference on 21 February. Two days before, they occupied county hall against cuts to their play centre (see page 3), making it clear what kind of year 2016 will be!

The day started with a discussion introduced by Socialist Party general secretary Peter Taaffe on the tumultuous events around the world.

Such events have shaken Wales in the last year too. This includes the terrible blow to the steelworks in Port Talbot, as well as more brutal cuts to public services carried out without a whiff of opposition by Labour in the Welsh Assembly and all parties running councils in Wales.

Socialist Party Wales members have worked hard to build support among steelworkers and the wider community for the socialist nationalisation of steel to stop job losses.

Looking ahead, members discussed how this year's Welsh Assembly elections will be the first test for Labour since Jeremy Corbyn was elected leader. Opponents of Labour's current leadership still dominate the party in Wales, with catastrophic results.

First Minister Carwyn Jones has presided over a reduction of 2,000 NHS beds in the last five years for example. Jones is getting his excuses ready for Labour's likely losses, implying the blame lies with Corbyn and the "infighting" his victory has caused.

Conference heard how Socialist Students is now represented in the majority of universities in Wales, with easily the biggest left campaigning presence on campus.

We're getting a friendly reaction from supporters of Corbyn who have joined Labour.

But we also heard how Socialist Party members have been excluded by the old Labour left from taking part in discussions about forming a united front to defend Corbyn. Welsh Labour Grassroots recently refused to let our members even enter the room to a meeting they organised.

With Welsh Labour's leadership ignoring the anti-austerity message sent by Corbyn's victory, the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) in Wales is discussing standing candidates in the regional lists in the Assembly elections, in order to explain that the Welsh Assembly could open the possibility to end austerity in Wales.

Members donated over £600 in the fighting fund appeal to ensure we have the resources to fund this campaign and to continue building the revolutionary socialist party the working class needs.

**Ross Saunders, Socialist Party Wales**

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## **North West**

The Socialist Party North West regional conference on 20 February drew members from across the region to discuss perspectives and plans, including the re-election of Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) councillor Kevin Bennett in May.

The enthusiasm generated was shown in the fighting fund collection which raised over £420. Conference adopted a £4,000 target for our election fund appeal in the region, and promptly raised £730 in pledges for it!

Rob Williams, Socialist Party industrial organiser, introduced the session on Britain. This debated the prospects of political crises for the main parties around the elections and the EU referendum and workers' struggles including the junior doctors' dispute. All of this was discussed against the backdrop of a weakening world economy.

Jackie Grunsell, regional treasurer, introduced the session on finance. Subscriptions have increased by

£800 in the last year, with plans to hit a £4,000 monthly income by December.

Fighting fund is regularly exceeding 200% of our national target and the region should hit its target for subscriptions to the Socialist by the end of 2016.

Jackie explained why we're aiming for a £4,000 regional election fund - we have to secure the re-election of Kevin Bennett, fight two mayoral elections, and the North West has more council seats up for election than other regions.

In a session on the elections, Kevin Bennett explained how TUSC is fighting for re-election in Warrington with press work, stalls, local petitions, leafleting and canvassing. Meanwhile, Labour's local establishment is in disarray with councillors publicly attacking each other.

In May's elections, TUSC will be the only 100% anti-cuts force putting forward policies in line with the public who want re-nationalisation, higher wages and affordable housing. "It's crucial we keep a strong TUSC presence," concluded Kevin.

John Neill explained some practical lessons from the general election campaigns by our sister party in Ireland. This set the stage for our final session, a report about the work of the CWI (the international organisation the Socialist Party is affiliated to).

The situation is not simple, in Britain or internationally. But clear Marxist ideas and a determined attitude to fighting for socialism underpin the growth of our ideas and organisation going forwards.

**Hugh Caffrey, North West Socialist Party secretary**

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<http://www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/22285>