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Workers' action to...

Nationalise steel

- March, strike, occupy

15,000 steel jobs are on the line, but the call to nationalise Tata is growing louder and the political pressure on Cameron to act is building!

In recent days, politicians of all the establishment parties in Cardiff and London are moving their positions, but we have to keep the heat on them. On 2 April hundreds came on a 'Nationalise Tata' demonstration in Port Talbot organised by the trade union rank and file National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN).

On 4 April, NSSN national chair and Socialist Party member Rob Williams spoke at a lobby of the specially recalled Welsh Assembly to discuss the steel crisis:

"We marched around the simple demand that steel be nationalised to keep the furnaces firing in Port Talbot and around the UK. That is the only solution. Not to bribe another vulture capitalist to asset strip the company.

Tata reckon the business is losing £1 million a day. But that's just half what Osborne gave to the super-rich in tax cuts in the budget. It's nothing when you consider the social costs of the steelworks closing.

Assembly members should vote through a motion calling on Westminster to immediately nationalise Tata.

Labour Welsh First Minister Carwyn Jones seems to be coming round to nationalisation, on a temporary basis. But the industry should be permanently nationalised along with the other privatised industries like rail and energy.

We need a real socialist economic strategy. As we protest here, Tata union reps are meeting in London. Let's give them the confidence to take the action that is necessary to keep the furnaces firing, to keep the steelworks going, to keep the communities alive!"

- Editorial on Tata steel: '[Act now - fight for nationalisation](#)'
- Interview with redundant Rotherham steel worker: '[Agenda of misery](#)'
- Communities threatened: '[My hometown lost its soul when the steelworks closed](#)'
- National Shop Stewards Network public meeting: 'Nationalise Tata - keep the furnaces firing!' Wednesday 13 April at 7.30pm, Grand Hotel (opposite train station), Port Talbot, south Wales

Tata steel: Act now - fight for nationalisation

In 2012, a 'Ghost Parade' took place in Ebbw Vale to commemorate a decade since the steelworks had been closed by the then owner Corus. It was an artistic protest at the loss of the plant in what has quickly become a deprived part of the South Wales valleys. Should the remainder of the UK steel industry suffer the same fate over the next few months, there will be a whole list of ghost towns littering places like South and North Wales and Yorkshire.

The jobs of 15,000 steelworkers directly employed by Tata are on the line. But when all those who depend on the plants are included - such as contractors and freight workers on road, rail and sea - three times as many workers could be facing the dole.

This is a national emergency that needs emergency measures.

Even if a buyer is found it will be to asset strip and destroy the steel industry. This cannot be allowed. Action needs to be taken now. Increasing numbers of workers are asking: If the banks could be bailed out - why not steelworkers? The demand for immediate, permanent nationalisation of the industry is rapidly gaining support. The urgent question is how nationalisation can be achieved.

Members of the Socialist Party and supporters of the National Shop Stewards Network should be proud of the role that they have played in popularising the idea of renationalising Tata's UK operations to save the plants and jobs. Until now the N-word has been an unspoken but popular demand. It is now increasingly seen as being needed urgently. This has definitely levered pressure on the Labour and trade union leaders to take up this demand more boldly.

As the days have gone on, Jeremy Corbyn and shadow minister Angela Eagle have been pushed into calling for intervention, even stretching to some form of nationalisation. Unite and the GMB have now explicitly called for it as well. Even Community, faced with Tory business minister Sajid Javid's ruling out of nationalisation, has called for it.

But there has to be a clear call for this step as the platform to build mass action to force the government to act.

As was shown by the incredible social explosion caused by Major's Tory government announcement of the closure of the last remaining collieries in 1992, an event takes on a significance far wider than a particular industry. Then, the full state conspiracy of Thatcher's attack on the NUM in the strike of 1984-85 and the resulting destruction of the mining communities was laid bare. In the space of a couple of months, a huge mass movement developed that totally shocked the Tories. It could have defeated them if the TUC and NUM President Arthur Scargill had used the platform of the massive demonstrations (two in London of ¼ million in the space of five days) to call for a 24-hour general strike.

Two decades earlier, the threatened closure of Upper Clydeside Shipbuilders would have posed the end of shipbuilding in Glasgow. It detonated a mass struggle of a 'work-in', a huge demonstration and effectively a regional half-day general strike of 100,000 workers. The Tory government of Heath was forced to come up with a rescue plan.

In 1971 the Tory government was forced to step in and nationalise Rolls Royce at 24 hours notice.

Similarly now, there is a recognition that a fundamental part of the national economy could be lost, and that part of the country's heritage is disappearing. Cameron is even out of step with parts of the establishment on this. They fear a loss of prestige. The former First Sea Lord and Chief of the Naval Staff complained that all United Nations Security Council countries had major steel plants to support their defence industries.

Even the Daily Mail has asked: "...after Labour bailed out the bankers, are the Tories to be remembered as the party that let our steel industry die?"

National demonstration

This can quickly become a symbol for the reality faced by workers - they can no longer get well paid, permanent jobs that allow them a decent place to live. Instead they face low paid, zero-hour contract work. If Corbyn and the union leaders called a national demonstration demanding nationalisation, it

would have huge potential to put the Tories under pressure. Particularly as junior doctors are striking and teachers are balloting for action against forced academisation.

But if the Tories maintain their refusal to nationalise, workers will have to consider occupying the steel plants to 'up the ante'.

A one-day national protest walkout by Tata UK steelworkers would send a huge signal to Cameron that workers will not let the plants shut.

It has been estimated that Tata's UK steel business is losing up to £1 million a day. This is being used by Cameron to rule out nationalisation and can create the feeling that it is a basket case. But in reality, this is a drop in the ocean for the government, especially when the social costs of closures and mass redundancies are factored in. In just one year the cost of Osborne's recent cut to capital gains tax for the richest 0.3% will be double the annual losses of Tata Steel UK!

And it is nothing compared to the billions stolen from steelworkers' pension funds when British steel was privatised. We demand this money is returned.

The idea of nationalisation, if raised in the context of socialist public ownership and economic planning, could totally transform the situation. We call for Tata's books to be opened and inspected by the unions and the workforce. The redundancies that have already been announced should be stopped. The steel distribution network should also be nationalised and every publicly-financed construction scheme in the UK such as Crossrail, HS2, and power projects, should be supplied with steel from the nationalised steel company.

This would also pose the renationalisation of the railways, which is massively popular and would be another market for publicly-owned steel. Taking the energy companies back into public ownership would deal with the issue about energy prices! There should be no compensation for Tata's bosses or any fat cat investors.

Such a demand and strategy would also be the banner of a mass struggle of steelworkers, their communities and the wider trade union and working-class movement to inflict a political defeat on the divided Tories.

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 31 March 2016 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

My hometown lost its soul when the steelworks closed, but I want a future

Jac Green, Lincoln Socialist Party

I joined the Socialist Party in September 2015, having flirted with the idea of socialism throughout my student days. I was guilty of turning up to only a few demos and protests before deciding to take action and join the party.

I come from a strong working class background; my grandfather was a steelworker and union rep in my hometown of Corby up until his death. In the late 1980s, the steelworks closed, taking with it hundreds of jobs. The town lost its soul.

Growing up in Corby, there was nothing. There was no investment. The town centre was sold to private developers time and time again and the latest attempt at urban regeneration has left several uncompleted projects, empty buildings as monuments to failure.

Virtually every single one of my childhood friends has left Corby and they will not return. There are few jobs to be found and there remains a chronic lack of investment. This is something that is not unique to Corby.

This pattern is being repeated nationwide and the future of me, my friends and millennials across the board is uncertain. Zero-hours contracts offer no job or income security.

How can you pay rent when your job offers no guarantee of hours? How can a zero-hours contract qualify as a job at all?

Workplace conditions are deteriorating and young people are terrified of the consequences if they speak up. This is why it is so important that they have the support of unions where possible. This is why the work of the Socialist Party is crucial: we need to demonstrate that there is a viable, workable alternative to the capitalist system responsible for crushing the hopes and dreams of our generation.

We know that this is possible. We can make our voices heard across schools, colleges, universities and in the workplace.

My generation is full of energy. To borrow from the campaign slogan used by the Anti Austerity Alliance in the recent Irish General Election we're hungry for real change, not spare change.

We're sick of being priced out of the rental market. We're fed up with having to rely on benefits to supplement our wages. We don't want to see our public services slashed, our NHS rapidly eroded through privatisation and any chance of a quality university education systematically stripped away through rising tuition fees.

We want a future and access to the tools to build one. It's our job to fight to give young people the opportunity of a life and not just an existence.

Steel crisis

Bosses and union tops presiding over an "agenda of misery"

A redundant steelworker

I was a steelworker for almost 40 years, after starting out as a 16 year old in 1978.

Every time I put on the news at the moment the talk is all about saving steelworker jobs. But lots have gone already, including mine.

The whole process of laying people off was handled really badly. I was told after Christmas that my last date would be 31 March.

This gave me a window to apply for jobs while still working, but if I left the company I forfeit the opportunity for a 'crossmatch' and a job at another plant. In the end neither happened and I'm now unemployed and looking for work.

Fearful

People are fearful; being out of work is a place you don't want to be. A lot of workers are in their 50s and I'm convinced changes were made to our pensions last year because the company knew this was coming. I'm 54 and could have accessed my pension at 55. I'm not the only person in that situation.

The steelworkers' union, Community, is a poor union. They and their predecessor union have never really fought anything, only gone along with management. Now, Community reps in Port Talbot are saying they don't want nationalisation!

But if steel was nationalised, then the government could use the steel in contracts for rail, wind turbines and other infrastructure projects. A proper plan of nationalisation would keep people in work and create jobs.

Rotherham steelworks has also wasted hundreds of millions of pounds on a restructure, investing in a new mill that was never used.

In the workplaces themselves now there is also a points system for jobs, meaning there is competition between workers for jobs when redundancies come around, the old divide and rule tactic.

Community shouldn't preside over this agenda of misery, we should have walked out together in solidarity. I'm sure things would have been different if we did that instead of placating management.

The company is now run on a target-driven basis. It resembles a sweatshop environment, with workers checked by computer on how much steel they are producing.

But it's still better than a lot of jobs out there. Some jobs I am applying for sound like complete hellholes. Skilled jobs, when they are gone are gone. I feel like I've jumped out of the frying pan into the fire.

- Editorial on Tata steel: ['Act now - fight for nationalisation'](#)

Panama Papers: They're all in it together!

Dave Murray

It has been called the "biggest leak in history": 2.6 terabytes of information, containing 11.5 million files - the client database of Mossack Fonseca, a shady Panamanian law firm - was secretly passed to the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ) roughly a year ago.

What companies like Mossack Fonseca do is allow the global rich to hide their money. Of course when we say hide we mean "steal" and when we say "their" we mean "our", since most of this cash has been generated by fraud, theft, illegal trafficking of drugs, people and weapons, misappropriation of public funds, corruption in public office, tax avoidance and tax evasion.

The anonymous shell companies, foundations and trusts they set up have been likened to "getaway cars" for the high-end criminal. You load up the swag and put your foot down. On second thoughts, drive as slowly as you like - the cops are in on it.

Media focus

The ICIJ started to release the story over the last few days through respectable outlets like the Guardian

and the BBC. What is remarkable, given the wealth of new evidence, is that the focus has been on cases that were already in the public domain.

For example, David Cameron's late father, who set up an offshore trust to hide the family millions from UK tax collectors (widely reported in 2012). Or Syrian dictator Bashar al Assad's bagman, Rami Makhlouf (sanctioned by the EU in 2011).

Another focus has been on people from the Washington book of bad guys such as Vladimir Putin, or various members of the politburo of the Chinese 'Communist' party, all of who, unsurprisingly, have secret hoards of cash.

Is it possible that most of the people implicated in this scandal are 'respectable' business figures and politicians from western 'democracies'? People like Cameron who says that his tax affairs are a "private matter" and who claims to have done nothing illegal? The ICIJ's data would seem to say so - with the UK featuring strongly as a source of dirty money.

While 2,200 children die every day from diarrhoea, an easily treatable illness, \$20 trillion sits anonymously in offshore jurisdictions around the world. Tax avoidance is not a victimless crime.

Unfortunately, while the villains make the rules, it is not a crime at all.

However, the departure of Iceland's prime minister over the scandal shows that mass public pressure can achieve change. It's time to put them all out of business.

See also ['Fighting the great tax robbery'](#)

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- Take the wealth off the super-rich
 - Reverse the cuts to HM Revenue and Customs. Close tax loopholes and enforce collection of avoided taxes. Increase taxes on the super-rich and big business
 - Nationalise the banks and the major corporations under democratic workers' control and management - with compensation only on the basis of proven need
 - Through public ownership of the commanding heights of the economy, democratic socialist planning of industry and services can be introduced to meet the needs of the majority
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TUSC in 'surprise bid' for official exit lead

The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) has launched what the BBC called a "surprise bid" to be the official Leave campaign in June's referendum on European Union (EU) membership.

TUSC is a 100% anti-austerity electoral alliance including transport union RMT and the Socialist Party.

TUSC had been arguing that the Electoral Commission should not choose an official campaign for the Leave side, and had written a formal letter to the Commission setting out its reasons.

But Clive Heemskerk, TUSC's national election agent, explained the Commission replied "saying 'it

would not be appropriate' to meet us.

"So we have put in our own application - and, as the BBC report says, it is a serious one. We believe that the segment of big business interests represented by the reactionary Leave campaigns is already more than 'adequately represented' in the EU debate. Our constituency of working class voters is not.

"The reality is that either of the Vote Leave or 'Grassroots' Out campaigns will be too easily dealt with by the equally big business-dominated 'Britain Stronger in Europe' Remain campaign, because they all operate within the same economic and political framework.

"TUSC, on the other hand, would provide an anti-austerity, anti-racist and socialist campaign. That would offer a far greater challenge to EU supporters than the reactionary Leave campaigns ever could."

Socialist Party member and former Labour MP Dave Nellist, who is now national chair of TUSC, said: "I issue a challenge to Boris Johnson, Michael Gove, Nigel Farage or any other leading figures in the 'Vote Leave' and 'Grassroots Out' organisations.

"Before the Electoral Commission makes its decision on 14 April, let's have a public debate. Who should be the voice of Leave? Trade unionists and socialists - or bankers, Tories and ex-Tories?"

Aaron Banks, the multi-million ex-Tory who funds Ukip and pledged £3.5 million to 'Grassroots' Out, appears in the 'Panama Papers' (see page 16). Do tax avoiders like Banks, who is worth at least £200 million, really represent working class voters?

Read more about the socialist case for voting Leave at www.socialistcase4exit.eu

Don't give taxpayers' money and public resources to the reactionary-led exit groups! Sign the TUSC petition at <http://tiny.cc/EUpetitionTUSC>

TUSC councillor calls on trust to reject new junior doctors contract

A Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) councillor in Warrington, Cheshire, is calling on his local NHS trust not to implement the new junior doctors' contract.

Councillor Kevin Bennett, a member of the Socialist Party, has been to the fore in defending junior doctors in his area, visiting picket lines and building trade union solidarity. As part of this, he wrote an open letter to the chief executive and boards of Warrington and Halton Hospitals Foundation Trust.

The Tory government has threatened to financially punish trusts which do not implement the contract. But a concerted industrial and community campaign could push them back.

We publish an extract from Kevin's letter below.

"I'm writing to you as a borough councillor and trade unionist who was on the doctors' picket line.

None of the 152 foundation trust hospitals in England will be obliged to force their junior doctors to accept the 'deal' this government is threatening to impose, and can instead offer them better terms. Therefore, I am asking you to commit publicly to not implementing Jeremy Hunt's contract.

More than half of the NHS bosses named on a letter advising the government to do "whatever

necessary" to resolve the dispute with junior doctors have said they are against the imposition of the new contracts. Jeremy Hunt's contract is iniquitous, unnecessary and potentially dangerous for patients and staff.

The Department of Health confirmed that foundation trusts, which are semi-independent of NHS control, could not be compelled to introduce the contract. "Foundation trusts are not mandated to bring in the new contract. They can negotiate locally."

A growing number of medical organisations are warning that Hunt's move will worsen the NHS's shortage of medical staff.

You will already have had a letter from the junior doctors' leader, Dr Johann Malawana, which shares all these concerns. Please let me know you will be addressing them by ruling out implementing Jeremy Hunt's contract."

EU begins deporting refugees

The first European Union (EU) boats deporting refugees arrived in Turkey from Greece on 4 April.

Europe's capitalist powers have struck a deal with the viciously authoritarian Erdoğan regime. The EU offloads those fleeing war and terror - caused in part by its own foreign policy - to Turkey. In return, Turkey sends the EU 'legitimate' migrants, and receives billions of euros towards further militarising its borders.

What happens to refugees once Turkey receives them is unclear. What we do know is that Turkey's President Erdoğan is implementing brutal austerity, and responds to dissent with bloody police repression.

The Socialist condemns the deportations, which are only the EU's latest thuggery against refugees. Reverse all cuts - fund homes and jobs for all. Stop attacks on migrants. Vote to leave the bosses' racist, neoliberal EU.

The Socialist will respond in more detail to this latest chapter in the refugee crisis in our next issue

- Read more - ['Refugee crisis: cruel capitalist regimes responsible'](#)
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Housing crisis: London Labour councils purge waiting lists and resort to 'pop-up homes'

Dan Celardi, private tenant

Labour councils in London have sat on their hands as the national housing crisis grips their boroughs. Now they resort to cooking the books and 'pop-up homes' to cover it up.

As part of the 'caring conservative' image David Cameron tries to fashion for himself, he announced at last year's Tory conference: "I don't want you just to have a roof over your head - I want you to have a roof of your own."

His statement has not been matched in deeds. Homelessness has gone up by a third since the Tories

came to power in 2010.

The number of families living in temporary accommodation has risen by over 100%. And young people are being forced to live with our parents, or in squalor, because that is all we can afford on our meagre wages.

Camden council in north London has changed its rules to purge 22,000 households - 80% - off its housing waiting list. One of the rule changes was to allow living and dining rooms to be classified as potential bedrooms when assessing overcrowding.

Lewisham council in south London spent £4.3 million erecting 24 pre-fabricated homes as a temporary step while long-term strategies are developed. Yet with 9,000 on the waiting list, and 540 of those currently staying in B&Bs, this is a far cry from what is needed.

Cosmetic measures will not address the issue. A mass programme of council house building is needed, and rents must be capped to a democratically decided, genuinely affordable level.

Any council taking these demands forward would find a plethora of supporters in their communities - an army of activists, ready to wage a national campaign to take the money from the 1% to solve the housing crisis.

London councils' policy of shunting homeless families out of the city has resulted in child neglect, abuse and death. According to the Independent, authorities moved at least 64,704 families out of the capital between July 2011 and June 2015. The news website reckons that councils don't notify social services in the new area in at least a third of cases.

Them & Us

Panama Papers

The global super-rich and its leading politicians have been caught out dodging tax yet again. Read more on history's biggest data leak - ['Panama Papers: they're all in it together!'](#)

£67 billion

Estimated value of investments held by the family of Chinese premier Xi Jinping in June 2012 according to Bloomberg. The 'Communist' dictator's family has also been implicated in the Panama Papers.

£2,900

Approximate average annual private sector salary in China, 2012, based on International Labor Organization figures.

£1.4 billion

Money linked back to Russian president Vladimir Putin in the Panama Papers.

£4,200

Average annual salary in Russia.

£10 million

2009 Sunday Times Rich List estimation of David Cameron's dad's wealth, reputedly stashed in tax havens. Sure enough, the Cameron family turns up in the Panama Papers.

£26,500

Average annual salary in the UK.

Brokers binge...

Financiers on a night out in London's West End racked up a bill of over £11,000 on Scottish food and drink.

Restaurant Mac & Wild in the capital's exclusive Fitzrovia district played host to City boys who "went all out and got a meal fit for William Wallace". Their feast included ten bottles of Glenrothes 88 Speyside Single Malt.

The Socialist has heard the phrase "one for the road" - but when it comes to super-rich excess, why stop at one? The casino capitalists apparently ordered 100 bottles of whisky to go.

The bill, including over a grand in service charge, came to £11,281.53.

...contractors broke

The Tories' new National 'Living' Wage, which is nothing of the sort, misses out 1.7 million self-employed workers. That's on top of four million workers aged 16 to 24 who aren't eligible.

The Social Market Foundation think tank analysed government statistics to find that 49% of contractors are low-paid on an hourly basis.

Many 'self-employed' workers are actually employees in all but name. Their self-employed status means the bosses don't have to guarantee work, or pay for holidays and sick leave.

NHS facilities to start paying market rents

Some parts of the NHS will now have to pay market-rate rents on their facilities.

Tory chancellor George Osborne has driven through the change at NHS Property Services, which owns around 10% of NHS estate. Bosses claim this is just a redistribution within the NHS, which they will invest in improving buildings. But one expert at property advisers Savills said "NHS England will be out of pocket."

The fact that moving to market rents smoothes any future transition from public to private ownership is

no doubt coincidental.

Only 56% of London ambulances arrived at top-priority 'red' calls within their eight-minute target in February. Staff shortages meant 6,000 fewer hours of patient care during the month.

The London Ambulance Service is already in special measures. The Socialist fights to reverse all cuts and privatisation in the NHS.

Uber and Facebook tax dodge scandal

International taxi firm Uber is registered in a tax haven, a revelation so dazzlingly predictable it's hardly even news.

The corporation shunts profits between various subsidiaries, ending up in Bermuda. Uber's gang-master exploitation of casual 'crowd work' drivers has provoked several unionisation efforts. Black cab drivers in London have gridlocked streets to protest against Uber undercutting fares for skilled work.

Facebook could spend years not paying UK corporation tax, due to £21 million of deferred tax relief. According to the Independent, the social network is structured so it could be liable for as little as £4 million a year. Facebook's quarterly global profits are £1 billion.

Needed: A real living wage - not Cameron's sops

New so-called 'living wage' is fool's gold: demand £10 an hour now for all!

In many town and cities around the country, people greeted the government's new 'living wage' - just £7.20 an hour, only for over-25s - with protests on its 1 April start date.

London

David Cameron tweeted on 1st April that the minimum wage for over 25s is being increased to £7.20 an hour, the new "national living wage", but people we spoke to during our protest outside Downing Street weren't having any of it.

'That's not a living wage', 'Why are under 25s excluded?', 'Is this an April fool's?', were just some of the responses.

That is why we were protesting - because the national living wage isn't enough to live off and it excludes young people.

We protested to make it clear that campaigners, socialists and the bakers' union BFAWU - who participated in the demonstration - stand for a minimum of "£10 now" for all workers.

One group passing by said they had been paid as little as £1.50 an hour in previous jobs. They were interested in joining the bakers' union and supported the call for £10 now.

We were joined by a jester in an Osborne mask because the national living wage really is fool's gold.

Helen Pattison, Youth Fight Austerity London

Cardiff

A clear message was sent to the chancellor and his fellow Tory axe wielders from youth and trade unionists in Cardiff.

That message was: We want a real living wage of £10 an hour for workers of all ages and we want it now! Youth Fight for Jobs held an energetic rally and ran a campaign stall on the living wage.

Members of the public, including many young workers, came to speak to us and support our demonstration while members of the bakers' union, civil servants' union PCS, general union GMB and local government union Unison addressed passers-by and people who had stopped to listen.

We are looking forward enthusiastically to building up momentum for the demand for a real living wage in the coming weeks.

Jaime Davies, BFAWU member

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Library occupied in 'siege' against Lambeth Blairite cutters

James Ivens, Lambeth Socialist Party

Carnegie Library in Lambeth, south London, is under community occupation. The borough's Labour council closed it on 31 March to begin transforming it into yet another gym.

Police have now effectively locked in the protest, which is "turning into a siege". Lambeth's ultra-Blairite administration is refusing to negotiate. One councillor even mocked the community by tweeting pictures of cats on treadmills in response to challenges.

Some library supporters are declaring that, in spite of Jeremy Corbyn's leadership, they will never vote Labour again. This underlines the Socialist Party's consistent warnings that failing to stand up to Blairite cutters will alienate Corbyn's support base.

Private gym company Greenwich Leisure Ltd (GLL) successfully bid to run Carnegie as a "healthy living centre with a self-service neighbourhood library". How is a 'library' supposed to operate without librarians? How many books can you shelve on a treadmill? How can you study in silence next to cross trainers and kettlebells?

At the start of the occupation, activists were defending the site in shifts, and continuing to run services for the community. But police have now sealed off the building. They are not permitting entry or re-entry, although they are allowing occupiers to leave.

Lambeth Socialist Party backs the occupation and has visited the Carnegie to assist. We will continue to do so. But in order for the occupation to win, public sector union Unison must build for further strikes.

There is currently a consultative ballot for industrial action across Lambeth's entire battered and angry council workforce. Such action would be a big step forward. Coordinating with council workers under threat in the neighbouring boroughs of Lewisham, Greenwich and Bromley would increase the impact.

Jeremy Corbyn should intervene in support of Lambeth libraries and all jobs and services. Rather than tolerating Tories in red ties, he could instruct Labour council leaders to set legal no-cuts budgets.

Sadiq Khan, Labour's London mayoral candidate, has so far declined to support the libraries campaign. Khan supporters even tried to cover and remove Carnegie protesters' placards at the Blairite's launch events.

Library campaigners understand the role of Blairite cutters very well. But the leadership of pro-Corbyn campaign group Momentum refuses to fight them. Momentum must immediately stop campaign activity for hated Blairites like Councillor Florence Eshalomi, or public support will continue to decline.

'The library is a complex organism... cutting it off is just barbarism'

Several dozen campaigners, mainly from the local Herne Hill area, met in the Carnegie on 31 March to discuss their campaign. They are members of the community of all ages, and regular library users. When the Carnegie officially closed at 6pm, they refused to leave.

The council plans to shut four of the ten libraries in this deprived and densely populated inner-city borough. The Minet Library in Myatt's Fields near Brixton closed the same day.

Laura Swaffield, chair of 'The Library Campaign' charity, said the police cordon means the situation is "turning into a siege". The occupation has attracted national media attention, including from the BBC and a front page of the Financial Times.

Libraries are not just about books. The Carnegie is an essential quiet workspace for revising school students. During my visit on 1 April, one young woman was poring over Latin GCSE notes. The local chess club used to meet in the facility. Organisers were even running a kids' music session in the library's garden.

Placards reading "words not weights" adorned the Carnegie's gates, next to trade union and political banners.

One occupier said to me: "The library is a complex organism, the way it interacts with all different parts of the community. Cutting it off is just barbarism."

Embarrassing for Khan

It seems clear that Sadiq Khan sees the campaign as an embarrassment. Another occupier told me that "flatlining support" for Khan would really send a message to Labour cutters.

Florence Eshalomi, who is helping to drive through the cuts, is the local Labour candidate for the Greater London Authority. Eshalomi - a sitting borough councillor - is reportedly an executive committee member of Tony Blair's 'Progress' faction.

Placards in the occupation read "Shame on you Eshalomi". Protesters have chalked the ground outside the library with angry slogans, including "we will never vote Labour again". But the leaders of

Lambeth Momentum continue to blithely support Eshalomi and Khan.

At its last meeting on 16 March, Lambeth Momentum agreed to picket a fundraiser for Eshalomi. A right-wing mole in the group leaked this decision to the Times, which ran a sensationalist attack on the group.

Published on 18 March, the story included a denial from Momentum nationally, and insistence that Momentum backs Tory-lite Labour 'moderates'. Only a week later, activists received an email from Lambeth Momentum organising a canvassing session for Eshalomi!

Falling turnout at the group's meetings is due in part to leaders' failure to stand up for anti-austerity politics.

Cats on treadmills

Meanwhile, high-handed Labour councillors ignore counter-proposals and sneer at campaigners.

According to local news website Brixton Buzz, a senior council employee in charge of libraries presented alternative funding plans that could keep all ten Lambeth libraries open. Councillors refused to consider it.

Councillor Alex Bigham actually tweeted photos of cats on treadmills in response to requests to debate the closure plans. And Councillor Matt Bennett attacked locked-in occupiers for sharing a bottle of wine during a housing crisis. His own council's policies - selling off council homes, planning to bulldoze estates like Cressingham Gardens - are exacerbating this.

Lambeth Unison released documents in October that suggest links between a councillor and GLL. Councillor Jane Edbrooke delayed her proposals on the library service, allegedly to give GLL time to prepare a takeover bid. It seems the firm had previously sent staff members to closed workshops meant for community consultation on the libraries.

Occupation holding fast

In less than a week, the occupation has had a tumultuous response. National and international solidarity has poured in as workers everywhere grow sick of capitalist politicians' attacks on jobs and services for working class people.

During the occupation's first night, protesters saw off police who said they had received a 999 call from a staff member in the building who 'felt threatened'. The only threat to library workers comes from Lambeth council, not occupiers. Campaigners eventually persuaded police to leave after a union rep called all the workers out of the building. Officers were not allowed to enter the occupation.

For now, the occupation is holding fast. Police are not even allowing children to visit parents in the building. The council is seeking an injunction, but at the time of writing has not succeeded. Coordinated industrial action, combined with strong solidarity support for the occupation, could lead to victory.

- Send messages of support to lambethlibrariescampaign@gmail.com
- Occupiers have appealed for fresh fruit and veg in particular
- Report of the last Lambeth libraries strike: ['Librarians walk out over cuts and privatisation'](#)

Public meeting: South London fights back!

Organised by South London NSSN (part of the National Shop Stewards Network)

Wednesday 13 April 2016, 7.30pm

Karibu Centre, 7 Gresham Road, London SW9 7PH

- With speakers from the campaign against library closures; teachers balloting for strike action; junior doctors fighting an imposed contract; and more.

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 4 April 2016 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

Save Pent Valley school demonstration demands a council u-turn

Dave Semple

A hundred demonstrators staged a loud, colourful march through Folkestone on Saturday 2nd April against the threatened closure of Pent Valley secondary school. The closure is being driven by Tory-controlled Kent County Council (KCC) and is the latest in a series of school closures across Kent.

Closing Pent Valley would result in higher class sizes in an area that expects to have rising registers over the next few years. It would force students to attend schools like Folkestone Academy, which is not accountable to parents and is already underfunded.

Kent County Council has reserves of £80 million which the trade union-backed Save Pent Valley campaign is calling on the council to use, to keep the school open and to fund education properly. Campaigners expect the elected councillors to do what the community wants: oppose cuts and fight for extra funds.

Significantly, on the same day that a small group of racists had organised a protest against immigration in Dover, Folkestone's Nepalese community joined parents, teachers, students and trade unionists to fight to defend their local school.

The organisation of the march was a classic example of what's possible when unions swing into action. Socialist Party members in Unison and Unite arranged for the printing of thousands of leaflets that parents and students ensured were distributed to Pent Valley and surrounding schools.

Rallying outside the school gates, the big question was, what should our next step be?

Teachers, support staff and students wield the most power. A determined union campaign, which utilises the massive support of the local community and which seeks to give confidence to workers at the school, that resistance is possible, is crucial. One NUT member present at the rally promised she would be taking this demand back to the Folkestone NUT branch.

Students from the school spoke at the rally. Despite the refusal of time off, some attended last month's protest in Maidstone, outside KCC headquarters, during a council meeting. Campaigners spoke at school assemblies and students have been discussing a sit-down protest in the playground of the school to make their opposition known.

A successful ballot for strike action by teachers and support staff, coordinated with a student strike and a further community protest, would apply critical pressure to KCC at a time when its sham consultation is being challenged in court by the Save Pent Valley campaign.

Confidence has already been lifted by the NUT announcing its determination to strike against the government's plan to force all schools to become academies. Now is the time to call for united action at Pent Valley between the three major unions.

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Butterfields tenants and supporters 'walk the walk'

by **Waltham Forest Socialist Party members**

"We have been treated like garbage. We are not garbage," said Daniel, one of the tenants from the Butterfields estate in Walthamstow, east London. He was speaking at a 'walk-the-walk' event on 2 April organised by the campaign against evictions on the estate.

60 residents, local campaigners and supporters marched loudly and proudly through Walthamstow. We appealed for the community to support the 63 families facing eviction after their homes were sold by their previous landlord, the Glasspool Trust charity.

The new landlord, private developers Butterfields E17 Ltd, wants them out so it can sell for a quick profit. But the tenants are determinedly still in their homes, despite the 'notices to quit' for many having expired in the week before this pavement walk.

Speakers emphasised that this walk was designed to galvanise support and get ready to defend the tenants in whatever way is necessary, including physically resisting bailiffs if it comes to that. To this end we collected details of supporters to add to a phone tree and money in case needed for legal fees.

Socialist Party members have been working with tenants to help organise the campaign. We raised that the council has responsibility to ensure these residents stay in their homes, as well as the need for rent control and a mass programme of council house building. We sold 27 copies of the Socialist.

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Fighting fund target smashed, again!

Ken Douglas, Socialist Party national treasurer

Socialist Party members raised a record £36,281 in the first three months of 2016 - smashing the target, getting to 145%.

The fighting fund plays a vital part in sustaining the Socialist Party's finances. We aim to reach a

minimum of 120% of the overall annual target of £100,000 to ensure that we have the finance necessary to maintain our campaigning.

Our members and supporters have taken up the challenge, holding all sorts of fundraising events, as well as raising fighting fund on the regular campaign stalls.

The year got off to a great start in Carlisle, where despite the flooding, the branch raised £175 at their now traditional Burns Night public event.

Nottingham branch shot to the top of the charts when Jean Thorpe raised a fantastic £440 in sponsorship for a ten kilometre run. Mansfield branch raised over £70 with the sale of badges commemorating the miners' strike.

The leak lifting the lid on offshore tax-havens (see back page) shows that the rich care for nothing but their own wealth. In stark contrast the Socialist Party is working to build a socialist alternative where ordinary people democratically control all the wealth that is produced for the benefit of the whole of society.

We ask for donations in the course of our campaigning to help with that struggle.

Socialist Party members have been out consistently campaigning in support of the junior doctors, calling for the nationalisation of the steel industry and throughout England and Wales against cuts and closures caused by Cameron and Osborne's ruinous austerity.

And now we aim to make the next quarter as successful as the last.

- Can you help with fundraising ideas or by making a donation at www.socialistparty.org.uk/main/donate or by calling 020 8988 8777

Save BIS Sheffield

Northern Powerhouse or Northern poorhouse?

Marion Lloyd, PCS union group President in Department for Business, Innovation and Skills

It is clear that the attempts by this Tory government to drive a coach and horses through all the gains we have won have no bounds. Latest is the complete decimation of the civil service through their so called "estates strategy" which could see more than 600 government buildings close throughout the UK.

This will not only see thousands of civil service workers made redundant, but the impact on the delivery of key services and on local communities will be of a magnitude never before experienced.

What this means in the Department for Business Innovation and Skills (BIS), the alleged department for growth, is "efficiency" savings of 40% and a reduction in premises from 86 to six. The impact would be devastating.

Tip of the iceberg

Across BIS we have already had the withdrawal of funding from the UK Commission for Employment and Skills, based in Rotherham, the privatisation of the Green Investment Bank, the announcement of the privatisation of Land Registry (see below) and the closing down of the National Weights and

Measurements Regulations Office.

We know this is just the tip of the iceberg.

But probably as shocking was the announcement from the department that 300 policy jobs are set to be moved to London if senior management in BIS have their way.

On 28 January, management told staff in Sheffield that the office would be closed and all policy jobs would move to London. This will result in the loss of 250 jobs in Sheffield. This announcement alone gives nonsense to the Tories' Northern Powerhouse rhetoric.

Moving hundreds of jobs to London will have a devastating impact on the local economy and communities. In Sheffield an already poor city will become poorer. These plans must be stopped.

PCS BIS group leapt immediately into action and less than 24 hours later we had questions being asked in parliament, local and national press coverage and had enlisted the support of local MPs, local councillors, unions and the press. We have worked tirelessly to build a campaign around a clear set of demands including no compulsory redundancies and no office closures without union agreement. This has included linking up with PCS branches across the city and contacting other unions.

Industrial muscle

Central to the campaign is the industrial muscle of civil service workers. Within a couple of weeks we achieved three key changes from the employer.

Their decision suddenly became a proposal, they added a two month extension to their consultation period and conceded that the movement of work from non-Sheffield locations into London had a more relaxed timeline.

However this is not enough. We are determined to keep our office open. We have agreed to ballot for industrial action if management don't agree to withdraw their proposals.

The Socialist Party fully supports PCS members fighting this attack. Reverse all cuts - for investment in decent jobs for all, throughout the country.

- Join the Powerhouse or Poorhouse demonstration march and rally to #SaveBISSheffield! Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell MP and PCS general secretary Mark Serwotka will be speaking at the rally, plus other local and regional speakers. Assemble at 12pm at Devonshire Green, Sheffield, S3 7SW ending with a rally at 1pm at City Hall, S1 2JA

Land Registry workers ready to fight privatisation

Dave Lunn, PCS union rep

At 5pm on the evening before parliament recessed for Easter, plans to consult on the proposed privatisation of Land Registry were sneakily released by George Osborne's office.

This comes less than two years after previous plans for privatisation by the Con-Dem government were defeated by a mass campaign led by the PCS union.

A 38 Degrees petition received over 100,000 signatures followed by two days of strike action, with many members getting active for the first time. This forced the government to retreat.

We knew though that a Tory majority government would come after us again.

Rationale

This time their rationale for privatisation has changed - from supporting digitisation of Land Registry services to raising a capital receipt for paying down debt and supporting the government's infrastructure programme.

Having considered their flimsy case, it's clear this is less about raising money for the public good and is more about transferring profitable public assets to their big city mates, with the liability retained by government. In effect nationalising the risk and privatising the profit.

We are ready for them, however, and are currently putting together a submission in response to the consultation document which rebuts their arguments and puts forward an alternative that is in the interest of our members, customers and wider society.

We will follow this up with campaigning with customers and industrial action if required.

Workers and campaigners fight council lies to save library

A member of Unite the Union

Unite members in the Socialist Party-led Greenwich branch defending the mobile library from closure held an open air story time on the steps of the town hall on 30 March. The council claim that a library is within walking distance of every school, which is not true.

They say the mobile library issues 22,000 books to children every year. Also not true - but only because this has now gone up to over 30,000! The council said that they would not close libraries - also untrue, because the mobile is a library! The clue is in the title "mobile library"!

Unite Libraries convenor and Socialist Party member Sara Kasab read passages from Matilda - all about her first visit to a library, emphasising the importance of libraries to a child's formative years.

The council responded saying they will make a final decision in May. Consequently, the campaign will escalate over April and in the lead up to the May meeting behind the slogan: "no if's no but's, no library service cuts"!

- South London fights back! National Shop Stewards Network public meeting, 13 April at 7.30pm, Karibu Centre, 7 Gresham Road, Brixton SW9 7PH
-

Transport union RMT protests against new Northern Rail franchise plans

Iain Dalton, Leeds Socialist Party

"We're skimming profit from the entire Deutsche Bahn and ensuring that it is anchored in our budget - that way we can make sure it is invested in the rail network here in Germany."

This was a quote from a German transport ministry spokesperson featured on RMT leaflets as Deutsche Bahn subsidiary Arriva, took over the Northern Rail franchise. The new franchise includes significant cutbacks including plans to remove guards from trains by introducing driver-only operation on 50% of services.

Socialist Party and Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition members joined members of the RMT union protesting against this at Leeds station on 1 April. Many remarked on the irony that we'd been campaigning for the franchise to be re-nationalised, but the only nationalisation the Tory government seems to approve is to other state rail operators.

The RMT had invited Jeremy Corbyn to support the protests, and featured a supportive letter from him on their website which stated: "We fully support your campaign to oppose driver-only operation on Northern and cuts to station staff and rail ticket offices. That's because Labour want what passengers and rail workers want."

But while that may be Jeremy's view, it's certainly not the view of Labour councillors, who through a shadowy body they set up, Rail North, actually co-sponsored the government's proposals.

Workplace news in brief

Academies action

As figures emerge estimating that turning all state schools into academies will face a £1.1 billion funding shortfall. George Osborne unveiled plans to turn 16,800 state schools into academies in the budget. But figures obtained by Labour from a parliamentary question suggest each transformation from school to academy costs £66,000 on average adding up to over £1 billion.

Teachers and junior doctors are in discussions about joint action against the government. NUT conference at Easter received a letter of support from Yannis Gourtsoyannis of the British Medical Association's junior doctors' committee after the teachers' union voted to back a ballot on strike action over the government's academies plan.

Refuse revolt

96 gross misconduct disciplinarys in the last year - that's the scale of management bullying and intimidation that forced Sheffield's bin workers to take strike action for the first time in 17 years on 1 April. Over 100 Veolia refuse workers were on the picket line from 6am to demand an end to the regime of fear that has workers with 20-30 years' experience frightened about getting hauled in on any pretext. Management has been using CCTV cameras, not for health and safety as the union agreed, but as "spies in the cab".

Driver for 17 years Paul Cox said, "Management treat us like dirt. One told us: 'I don't like Sheffield and I don't like bin-men!' They didn't think we would strike, well they started this and now we're going to finish it. If it's not sorted then next time we should stay out for a week."

Alistair Tice

Stop the slop

Salford Royal Hospital is officially an "outstanding" hospital. Its CEO, Sir David Dalton, is David Cameron's favourite. So we shouldn't be surprised to see privatisation rearing its ugly head here. Currently patient food is prepared in the hospital kitchen. The trust wants to close the kitchen and outsource food preparation. Patients - and the trust itself - will forever be at the mercy of outside contractors. Hospital workers in Unison are determined to thwart these plans and have organised a lively 'Stop the Slop' campaign with an online petition, postcards and public meetings.

Paul Gerrard

TUSC election challenge 2016

Getting the anti-austerity struggle onto the ballot paper

The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC), in which the Socialist Party is a key component, has stood candidates on a clear no-cuts platform since its formation in 2010. But won't standing this time undermine Jeremy Corbyn's aim to change Labour into an anti-austerity party? Socialist Party executive committee member Clive Heemskerk looks at the arguments.

With nominations about to close TUSC is likely to have well over 300 candidates in the English local council elections on 5 May, including candidates for the mayoral contests in Bristol and Liverpool. In addition there are three regional lists of TUSC candidates in the Welsh Assembly elections and six Scottish TUSC constituency candidates for the Scottish Parliament.

With the election last summer of Jeremy Corbyn as Labour Party leader the political situation has changed since TUSC was formed in 2010. It was co-founded by the late Bob Crow as a coalition involving the RMT transport workers' union, the Socialist Party and other socialist organisations, individual leading trade unionists, and working class community campaigners.

Labour MPs

Although the forces of capitalism organised within the Labour Party are heavily entrenched, dominating the Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP) and council Labour groups in particular, the battle between them and the anti-austerity forces that crystallised around Jeremy's leadership campaign has still not reached its conclusion.

The TUSC national steering committee has taken into account the new opportunities that 'Corbynism' represents for re-building socialist working class political representation. There are no TUSC candidates standing against Labour councillors who have voted against cuts in the council chamber or new, Corbynista candidates who have made a pledge to do so.

But over 90% of Britain's 7,000 Labour councillors did not support Jeremy Corbyn for leader and still

continue to vote to slash local public services. They are the candidates which TUSC is standing against.

But won't the pro-capitalist Labour right, with their PLP majority, use any sign from the May elections to move against Corbyn? Isn't it better, the argument goes, even from some who sympathise with TUSC, to not stand candidates this time? To not take on the Labour right in the hope that Jeremy won't be challenged before the next general election in 2020, or earlier as the Tories begin to implode?

These are questions that have to be addressed as the TUSC 2016 election challenge gets under way.

What is clear is that Labour is still not an anti-austerity party in practice. Despite Jeremy Corbyn's leadership victory on an anti-cuts platform, six months later every Labour-led council has voted for further cuts to local public services.

Jobs lost

An early survey by the GMB union of the first 52 councils to set budgets identified a total of 25,165 planned job losses - with 22,128 being made by Labour-controlled councils. More job losses have been announced since then and, although there is not a national picture available yet, Labour councils will sack at least a similar number of workers this year as the number of those who face losing their jobs from the crisis in the steel industry.

And the slaughter has been, as Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell says about austerity generally, a matter of 'political choice'. Just the 58 Labour-led councils with elections this year had combined useable reserves going into this year's budget-making meetings of £4.5 billion.

If these had been pooled, and supplemented by using councils' borrowing powers, no Labour council would have needed to make cuts this year, giving time to prepare a national confrontation with the Tories for more funding for local councils.

The mass anti-austerity sentiment revealed by Jeremy Corbyn's leadership campaign still needs an electoral expression - because in the vast majority of cases it will not be the 'Labour' candidate that provides one on 5 May.

But won't standing TUSC candidates, even just against austerity Labour councillors, provide the excuse for the right to move against Jeremy's leadership? The truth is that whatever Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell may do to try and accommodate the right, Britain's capitalist establishment, who the Labour right represent, are not reconciled with their leadership.

The Blairite Guardian columnist Martin Kettle made the point that John McDonnell's plan for steel, "in which nationalisation would be strictly temporary to help stabilise Tata assets before selling them off", is far weaker than the Labour right's proposals for nationalisation in the 1960s.

But conceding to even the limited programme of 'Corbynomics' would be perceived as a victory by the working class, whetting their appetite and building confidence for a broader struggle, including support for clearer socialist ideas. So the Labour right will not be appeased.

Another example was the Corbyn and McDonnell letter on legal budgets sent to Labour council groups in December which, whatever its intentions were, was seized on by Labour councillors to justify passing on the Tory cuts (see 'No retreat on resisting council cuts' at socialistparty.org.uk).

But council workers have heard their anti-austerity phrases and, in January, the national bodies for council workers in both the Unison and Unite unions agreed policy calling for Labour councils to set no-cuts budgets by using their reserves and borrowing powers as a first step to a national campaign - the policy that TUSC candidates will put on the ballot paper in May.

The majority of Labour candidates, on the other hand, see winning in 2016 as a chance to be in place until 2020 and to use their public positions to organise against Corbyn and the anti-austerity movement.

And if there was a Corbyn-led Labour government, such figures would play a similar role to those Pasok officials and public representatives who joined Syriza as it overtook the Greek equivalents of New Labour, but who were then to the fore in pushing for it to accept austerity. Why should we meekly go out and canvass support for those who will use their positions won to do everything to defeat us?

At a recent PLP meeting Jeremy Corbyn refused to answer questions from the right on what he would consider to be a 'good result' in May's elections - and rightly so. An opinion poll for Sunday's Observer showed a sharp rise in disapproval of David Cameron, and the Tories just one point ahead of Labour. But the last time the English council seats were contested, in 2012, Labour was on 38%, seven points ahead.

In Scotland Labour is not guaranteed to win second place over the Tories. Whatever the results on 5 May the right will interpret them for their own purposes.

Tories in disarray

But there is no clause in Labour's constitution that says the results in May should trigger a leadership contest - it would just be a pretext. Jeremy Corbyn and his supporters need to go on the offensive, including stating boldly that a party of struggle with fewer MPs but a fighting socialist programme, would have a bigger impact in defence of the working class than a party with a couple of hundred MPs but which accepts the policies demanded by capitalism.

The Tories are in disarray, forced to retreat on proposed cuts to tax credits and disability benefits and with a real prospect of rupture over the EU referendum. So why should right-wing Labour councillors not be put under pressure to resist their demands for austerity, by Jeremy Corbyn and his supporters in the Labour Party and TUSC candidates at the ballot box?

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

The right wing will move against Jeremy Corbyn - it is not a case of if but when - and the important question is how can the anti-austerity movement that was mobilised by his leadership victory avoid being dissipated in May's elections but be organised for the battles to come.

The simple message of TUSC's election campaign, that politicians who vote for cuts cannot be allowed a free run at the ballot box, is part of that struggle.

- 58 Labour councils have £4.5 billion in reserves that would make cuts obsolete

Good showing for TUSC in Dundee by-election

The Scottish Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) scored a decent result in the Dundee council Maryfield ward by-election held on 31 March.

The seat was retained by the Scottish National Party (SNP) with 1,383 votes, a 49.5% share. This was well ahead of Labour whose vote fell from 1,251 (36%) in the 2012 council elections, the last time the seat was contested, to 634 this time (22.7%).

The TUSC candidate, Stuart Fairweather, won 142 votes (5.1%), coming in fourth ahead of the Greens, the Liberal Democrats and Ukip, who all have a higher profile in the establishment media than TUSC.

What was also significant was the preference choices that were made, which voters have in Scottish council elections with the single-transferable vote proportional representation system. TUSC was in third place among those who cast a second preference vote, with 14.7%, just 4% behind Labour. This shows the underlying support that exists for a 100% anti-austerity and socialist alternative to the SNP in the city.

Scottish TUSC is standing six constituency candidates in May's Scottish Parliament elections and planning a big challenge in next year's council elections.

TUSC challenging Ukip in Wales

TUSC is standing candidates for the regional list seats in the Welsh Assembly in three of the five regions - South Wales West, South Wales Central, and South Wales East.

In the 2011 assembly elections Labour won 23 of the 24 constituency seats within these regions and so, under the additional member proportional representation system, did not win any regional list seats and is unlikely to do so this year. The danger is that Ukip will win regional seats including South Wales East with the former Tory MP Mark Reckless.

Under the electoral system each elector has two votes, and a key part of the TUSC campaign will be to emphasise that Ukip can't be stopped by voting Labour in the regional list ballot. Welsh Labour has played its own part in bolstering Ukip by dutifully carrying out all the cuts to public spending demanded of it by the Tory UK government, including very unpopular closures of hospital units across Wales.

The South Wales West TUSC list is headed by the former RMT executive member Owen Herbert while young fast food worker and bakers' union member Jaime Davies will take on Mark Reckless in South Wales East.

Mayor of Salford - TUSC blocked from standing against cutter

All applications to be a TUSC candidate are submitted for approval to the national steering committee where decisions have to be agreed by consensus. No applications have been approved where there is evidence that the Labour candidate is prepared to fight for a no-cuts position.

But some claims of 'Corbynism' have been dubious at best. Against the Socialist Party's call for an anti-austerity challenge, the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) blocked a prospective TUSC candidate, Matt Kilsby (a Unison local government branch chair), from standing for the mayor of Salford. The Labour candidate, Paul Dennett, was the election agent for the pro-Corbyn local MP, Rebecca Long-Bailey.

But Dennett is also a current assistant mayor, who voted for £22 million of cuts at February's budget-making meeting. By this decision, the SWP has put itself up to take responsibility for Dennett's future actions, including a looming battle with the council unions on facility time.

Bernie Sanders campaign an opportunity to build a new party of the 99%

Tony Saunois, Secretary, Committee for a Workers' International

The US presidential election campaign represents a turning point in the country and the struggles of the working class and all those exploited by capitalism.

The two party political system is now disintegrating. US society is gripped by a mass politicisation and rejection of, or mass opposition to, the established political parties and their leadership.

26% of the electorate are registered Republicans and 30% Democrats. Yet the largest group registered are 'independents' - 43%. This indicates some of the potential support for a new party.

Both capitalist parties - Republicans and Democrats - are riven by division and upheaval. The emergence of the right-wing, racist, reactionary populist, Donald Trump, signifies a loss of control of the Republican Party by the ruling class. At the same time there is a massive struggle under way to win the Democratic Party nomination, as millions have rallied to support "Democratic Socialist" Bernie Sanders' challenge to the pro-Wall Street, Hilary Clinton.

At root, these developments reflect a massive class polarisation which has opened up. It is reflected in the enormous inequality which has opened like a chasm ripping society apart.

Following the application of 'Reaganomics' (the neoliberal policies of 1980s president, Ronald Reagan), the richest 1% saw their income increase by a staggering 270% while the rest remained stagnant or declined. If wealth distribution was the same today as in the 1970s the bottom 20% would each be \$11,000 a year better off!

Among young people in particular there is a revolt against the "system" and thirst to listen to socialist ideas as an alternative to the still powerful but decaying US imperialism. The Wall Street Post carried an article entitled: "Our socialist youth: Why millennials are embracing a bad old term... This week, we're talking about the rise of socialism".

The bold intervention of the CWI co-thinkers, Socialist Alternative, (especially the victory of Kshama Sawant in the Seattle council elections), has been one factor which has contributed to developments around the Sanders campaign, and assisted in putting the issue of socialism on the table for debate in the election.

The capitalist press and media have downplayed, ignored or attacked Sanders' campaign. However, over five million people have donated to his campaign. Following his landslide wins in Washington, Alaska and Hawaii he raised a further \$4 million in two days!

Machine

His results in the primaries on 16 March are an indication of his growing support. In Illinois, which includes Chicago he went from being 20 points behind to lose by only a few percentage points! In Chicago he polled 45.5% of the vote despite having the entire rotten Democratic Party machine pitted against him.

In Chicago a bitter struggle is taking place against the hated Democratic Mayor, Rahm Emanuel, Obama's former Chief of Staff. Emanuel, who endorsed Clinton in the primary, is carrying out vicious attacks involving the sacking of teachers and closure of public schools. The militant teachers' union,

the CTU, called a strike on 1 April, joined by fast food workers demanding a minimum wage of \$15 an hour.

In state after state, mass rallies of thousands - even tens of thousands - have taken place. One of the most recent was in Seattle - attended by 20,000 people - called at two days' notice! It was also addressed by Socialist Alternative member and councillor Kshama Sawant, who called for 'a new party of the 99%'.

Yet the undemocratic nature of the Democratic primaries and Democratic Party means that it is still unlikely Sanders will win a majority of the elected delegates.

The Democratic Party has hundreds of 'super delegates' - former and current senators, governors, presidents, party officials and others - who are mainly defenders of the ruling class and whose votes can act as a veto on Clinton's behalf.

In reality it is not a party with individual membership but an electoral machine with no democratic check or accountability.

In Arizona there is a major upheaval following Clinton's victory as it has emerged that tens of thousands of people were prevented from voting due to lack of sufficient polling stations, ballot papers and people being wrongly registered. There is a demand for a re-run of the election. But the election system is designed to block the type of revolt that is currently taking place.

Despite the fact that the un-democratic primary system and super delegates are likely to prevail and endorse Clinton, the party convention in July is set to be a battleground. This will pose the crucial question of what next for Bernie should Clinton, as is most likely, secure the nomination.

The CWI and Socialist Alternative have argued that it was a mistake for him not to run as an independent and use the campaign as the basis to build a new party of the 99% and the working class that will fight Wall Street and the ruling class.

Nonetheless, Socialist Alternative launched the 'Movement for Bernie' to try and assist those drawn to this movement to reach the conclusion of the need to build a new party and for Bernie to run independently if blocked by the Democratic Party.

What should Bernie do if he loses the convention? Urgently call a national assembly of Sanders supporters and those who want to fight to defend all workers' interests, against racism and build a new political alternative to the capitalist Republicans and Democrats and the ruling class they represent. This could lay the basis to harness the movement his campaign has unleashed and debate the next step to take the struggle forward.

If blocked at the Democratic convention his struggle should continue and he should stand as an independent or on the Green Party ticket in the November Presidential elections.

This is the way to ensure the mass movement that has developed is taken further forward and the next stage of the struggle prepared for. From this the basis could be laid to build a new party from this movement.

At the outset of his campaign Bernie declared that if defeated for the Democratic nomination he would endorse Clinton. This would risk dissipating the mass movement aroused in this struggle.

While it is entirely understandable that Bernie and many of his supporters want to defeat the right-wing Republicans and especially a racist populist like Trump or Cruz, endorsing Clinton is not the way to do this.

Anti-Trump vote

Firstly, it is far from certain that Clinton would be able to defeat them, such is the mistrust in her. All recent opinion polls show that the candidate most likely to beat both Trump and Cruz is Bernie Sanders.

The real fear of a big layer that standing independently could "split the anti-Trump vote" could be answered, if there was a real threat of the racist Trump winning, by Bernie standing in most states, but not in the tightly fought swing states. This would allow him to fight in the majority of other states and forge together the forces for a new party.

Standing as an independent and using this campaign to lay the basis for building a new party would ensure that a weapon is forged for the US working people to use in the struggles that will erupt under either a Clinton or Republican administration and future elections to the House of Representatives and Senate two years later.

Recently Bernie has been more conditional about endorsing Clinton. He in effect placed conditions on her saying she needed to support a programme of: Medicare for all, a single-payer healthcare system, a \$15 hourly minimum wage; rebuilding of crumbling infrastructure, action on climate change, free tuition at colleges and universities, a tax on Wall Street speculation and an ending of all corporate loopholes.

This reflects the dynamic of the campaign and pressure from the new fresh forces supporting him. At the same time he wrongly raised the idea of transforming the capitalist Democratic Party rather than building a new party.

As the CWI has pointed out previously the formation of new workers' parties rarely takes place in a pure form, especially where conscious socialists or Marxists are not at the head of the process.

These upheavals in the USA have crucial lessons for the international workers' movement and are an anticipation of the developments that will rock other countries. They will have a big impact on the international workers' movement as they are unfolding in the world's largest imperialist power.

The CWI and Socialist Alternative are actively involved and participating in these struggles, assisting workers and to youth draw the conclusion that a new independent party of working people is necessary and taking the steps needed to help build it.

International news in brief

420 attend 'Socialism Days' in Germany

Against a background of growing polarisation and unease in Germany 420 people from eleven countries were in Berlin for Sozialistische Alternative's (SAV - sister section of the Socialist Party in Germany) 'congress against war, racism and capitalism'. New young members in particular put their stamp on the three rallies, 30 workshops and more. A special collection raised €2,000 for Xekinima (CWI Greece) and Socialist Alternatif (CWI Turkey). 100 year-old Theodor Bergmann, who has been fighting against fascism, Stalinism and capitalism for almost 90 years, received a standing ovation. Frankfurt taxi driver Alexander said, "Wow! Full of energy and ideas."

Belgium: Anti-racists arrested while far right demonstrates

Eleven members of Linkse Socialistische Partij/Parti Socialiste de Lutte (CWI in Belgium) were arrested on 2 April. The previous weekend 400 hooligans led by far-right fascists were escorted by police to disrupt mourners of the Brussels terrorist attacks. This time hundreds of anti-racists turned out to guarantee the far right were opposed, but the police arrested dozens of anti-fascists, including members of LSP/PSL. See 'Scandal in Brussels' at www.socialistworld.net

Homelessness holding kids back, says teacher

A delegate at the National Union of Teachers conference

In March, I sat with one of my students as he described with glee that he had moved into a new home. He showed me photographs of his new home, and talked about how he could now fly his remote-control helicopter in his living room.

A month ago he was a completely different child.

He lived in one room with his family in a hostel. A hostel that provided nothing: not enough beds, no cooking facilities, and washing facilities that were shared among many families. Every day he arrived late as he had to travel across the city to school.

Incredibly hard

Despite the conditions he has been living in, he always smiles. But he has found it incredibly hard to cope with school. Learning has not been important as his priorities have been led by basic needs.

In the past month, since being rehoused, he has made more progress than he made in the previous six months. He has started to speak more confidently, and read and write.

As teachers, we know that if children are living in poverty and deprivation, it will adversely affect their mental health and in turn their learning. In this data-driven education system, this is one thing that can be measured.

But we are told this is irrelevant, and all children in primary school should be working at the same level. It's crazy.

There is an increasing number of children in exactly the same position in my school. In Labour-run Coventry, in the last year, 290 homes were repossessed. The Citizens' Advice Bureau has recorded a 100% rise in enquiries on homelessness.

Many of these will have been from families with school-age children. The main reasons for this, according to Citizens' Advice, are the changes to benefits and benefit sanctions. Many cannot pay rent or mortgages to stay in their homes.

Highlight

We need to highlight homelessness in the same way as we have highlighted the use of food banks in Coventry.

The publication of the numbers of our children and families living with constant transience and homelessness should shame this government in exactly the same way.

We need to fight the cuts locally, whoever they are carried out by. Cuts that are removing homelessness

support services - the last line of support for many families.

We need to shame the landlords that are profiting from this situation, and evicting our families. Shame the banks that are repossessing homes.

We need to defend those who face eviction.

We need to demand that all our children have a right to safety, to a home and to an education that is not fractured because of Tory or Blairite policy.

Stop divisive attacks on pensioners' cash

Tony Mulhearn, public sector union PCS, Merseyside Retired and Associate Members' association

Iain Duncan Smith's resignation from the Department for Work and Pensions opened up another malevolent attack on pensioners.

His letter included the salvo: "I believe the cuts would have been even fairer to younger families and people of working age if we had been willing to reduce some of the benefits given to better-off pensioners..."

Veteran Blairite MP Frank Field and assorted journalists have trailed the idea that pensioners are 'privileged'. "If pensioners get more, then someone has to foot the bill" and "pensioners now have a bigger share of the wealth that under-45s" are a couple of the media's latest shots. Field says: "The so-called triple lock on state pensions is paid for by squeezing the real incomes of working people."

These people see the banker-induced crisis as a zero-sum game. Every slice of the cake can only be allocated by taking from another. Even then, it must stay within the spending cap determined by this most mendacious government.

Ignored are the billions of pounds in tax dodged by the fat cats who bankroll the Tory party. And the £350 billion of 'quantitative easing' gifted to the banks. And the billions paid out in bankers' bonuses.

British pensioners are among the lowest-paid in western Europe. We receive - if private and state pensions are combined - 38% of our average wages. This figure falls dramatically for workers without a private pension.

Contrast

In contrast, the level in Holland and Austria is 90%, and in Spain and Italy 80% of average wages.

The Tories are wracking their tiny brains for a way to create an anti-pensioner climate. This attempt to set generation against generation should be stamped on now.

Now is the time for the Trade Union Congress to join with the National Pensioners Convention to prepare a massive campaign of opposition to attacks on pensioners, workers and young people. This campaign should initiate mass, coordinate industrial action, building towards a 24-hour general strike.

That could start to force this shambles of a government to retreat.

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.

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.

Women's wages

There can't be many people who believe the government's pledge to "make work pay", but the Tory MEPs' record on gender pay inequality should dispel any illusions. Last July, Cameron announced plans to "end the gender pay gap in a generation" and force larger employers to publish information about their bonuses for men and women. In October all 14 Conservative members present at a debate in the European Parliament voted against a mandatory pay audit forcing big companies to disclose their gender pay gap.

Sue Powell, Gloucester

Primary problems

The Tories' gerrymandering and introduction of individual voter registration are attempts to steal our election, just like the establishment is trying to stop Bernie Sanders in the US.

The Democratic primaries are rigged; the super-delegate system is rigged. The movement, like a wave, could lift Sanders and deliver him to the White House if he breaks free of the chains of the Democratic Party.

Nancy Taaffe, Waltham Forest

Brum budget

After cutting £565 million from services since 2010, Birmingham City Council has come to the conclusion it can no longer be regarded as the natural provider of services.

The papers accompanying this year's cuts budget bluntly describe the role the council sees itself playing in the future. "Our role, with other civic and civil leaders, is to agree the vision for Birmingham and, with them, lead the city as a joint enterprise. It is not to run the city."

They see the council being transformed from an all-purpose provider to a 'signposting' body, pointing to the private or voluntary sector to deliver fewer services and jobs.

Birmingham is the template of future local government if the Tories get their way. The possibility of

the vast majority, if not all, local services being delivered by private or voluntary sectors is opening without even the slightest resistance by Labour councils.

This makes the actions of the Momentum leadership - moving towards excluding Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) supporters and Socialist Party members from active involvement in strategy - even more damaging. In the absence of a concrete agreement between TUSC and Momentum to fight these cuts, TUSC has no choice but to stand our own candidates to defend public services.

Clive Walder, Birmingham

Dole disgrace

A woman giving birth was sanctioned for missing a job centre appointment.

On top of weekly - not fortnightly - sign-on days, I have to get a train. I have been ordered to catch a train to another town to do a placement in a charity shop for a month, and sign on with paperwork. Any deviation is a sanction, USA style.

Mike Marx, Southampton

EU? Pee-yew!

Liz Kendall believes that people who are as yet undecided on how to vote on the EU will be "more likely to listen to employers like Rolls-Royce and Toyota, both of whom have come out to say we should remain."

She continued, "my job is to make sure those voices are heard, because I think they will be the most convincing for the public."

Surely it doesn't take a genius, let alone a socialist, to realise that Rolls-Royce are hardly the best arbiters to decide the fate of British workers. Just last year, Rolls-Royce employees, who are members of general union Unite, set up an industrial action fund to defend jobs at the company after continuing attacks upon their livelihoods.

Unite national officer Ian Waddell said: "Our members have shown great loyalty in building up Rolls-Royce, but are feeling increasingly betrayed by the company's continued refusal to give assurances on jobs and guarantees over redundancies." This is nothing less than a kick in the face of their workers, especially considering "the company's order book and profit levels".

Newspaper headlines like "Rolls-Royce faces new questions in Brazil corruption investigation" (Guardian, 1 January) should hardly inspire Kendall with the confidence to let them decide on our membership of the EU.

And I wonder what Kendall makes of the New York Times article "Toyota is fined \$1.2 billion for concealing safety defects" (19 March 2014)?

The working class has no faith in the ultra-Blairite nonsense of Liz Kendall, who received a derisory 4.5% of the Labour vote in last year's leadership showdown.

Michael Barker, Leicester

'Red' Reading?

I went along to Reading Council's budget-setting meeting on 23 February. £21 million was slashed by a united Labour-Tory council. All 41 Labour councillors supported the bloodbath, including several supposed Corbyn supporters.

I approached a 'left' councillor and asked him if he was going to fight these cuts, and he told he could not because Corbyn does not support fighting the cuts!

The only votes against came from the three Green councillors, and in fairness they made very good points about building a campaign against cuts.

This Labour council is a disgrace and offers no hope for local residents that are vulnerable. When I look back at the struggles by Labour councils in the past, like Liverpool and Lambeth, it makes me feel sick looking at this bunch of salaried civil servants who owe no allegiance to their voters.

I warned recently that Labour witch-hunters would first deal with the Socialist Party and TUSC supporters, and then turn on Momentum as a whole. Well, they have. Jill Mountford, a member of Momentum's ruling committee, has been expelled by the sinister sounding 'Compliance Committee'. Apparently many more are to follow.

Even the membership of Matt Wrack, general secretary of the Fire Brigades Union, was questioned, because of historical links with Militant (forerunner of the Socialist Party). Being 'well-behaved left wingers' will not save you from the wrath of the witch-hunters. Only a united front of the left, inside and outside the Labour Party, can defeat the Blairites and Tories.

Terry Pearce, Reading

History mystery

After finishing my night shift, I went to the shops to get some groceries. On my way back, I saw a ceremony to unveil a blue plaque commemorating Labour prime minister Harold Wilson's 100th birthday outside his old school, Wirral Grammar, in Merseyside.

I stopped off to take a look and, a few minutes later, sixth form politics students gathered around. Local Labour MP Alison McGovern came out with the headteacher and others. She explained who Harold Wilson was and said: "I could talk about the politics of his time, but I won't."

You'd have thought a current Labour MP would have been eager to talk politics to politics students. But this is the same Alison McGovern who recently resigned from Jeremy Corbyn's team, not finding his policies to her taste. The same Alison McGovern who is a prominent member of 'Progress', the right-wing capitalist Labour group founded by arch-Blairite Lord Mandelson.

Progress has its own journal, meetings, officers, and conferences. It almost constitutes a party in itself. Would that be like the "party within a party" that Militant, forerunner of the Socialist Party, was when in Labour?

That was the very excuse Neil Kinnock used to expel Militant supporters. If your organisation is a socialist tendency, you get expelled. But it's okay for a capitalist tendency to carry on.

I can, of course, understand why she wouldn't want to "talk about the politics of his time". That was the

time when the Labour Party was, at its base, a workers' party - albeit with a pro-capitalist leadership. A time when workers, through their trade unions, still had a powerful voice and influence in the party - not so any more.

One spokesperson for the event told Radio Merseyside that Wilson had "resisted US pressure to join the Vietnam War." But, as far as I remember, Wilson "resisted" only because it was strongly opposed by the unions, who used their influence to force his hand.

This is exactly why the likes of McGovern, and her fellow Blairite MPs, oppose Corbyn's leadership - and anyone on the left. They know that if working class people get the facts about political history, the game will be up.

Chris Robinson, Wirral

<http://www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/22553>