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Angry about cuts? Worried about privatisation?

Support the NHS? Join the march!

#ItsOurNHS national demo - Saturday 4 March, 12pm, Tavistock Square, London, WC1

Scott Jones

The NHS was founded to provide healthcare for everyone. Yet increasingly, cuts mean NHS services are becoming 'no longer viable' or harder to access. [The BBC reckons](#) two-thirds of hospital services in England are about to be scaled back.

Not surprising when government plans, called [sustainability and transformation plans](#), will result in a massive £22 billion cut in NHS spending over the next five years - about a fifth of the overall NHS budget.

From closures of [A&Es in Yorkshire](#) and [children's heart services in Leicester](#) to health worker pay freezes and unsafe junior doctor contracts, the NHS is really in crisis.

Workers do everything humanly possible to keep the NHS going but there's only so much they can do to stave off the "humanitarian crisis" taking place.

That's why campaigners and workers will unite on 4 March to protest in defence of the NHS. Campaigners who recognise that their threatened local service is one of many and workers who, while fighting for proper pay and conditions, also recognise this is a fight for the very survival of our NHS.

The biggest health union, Unison, is the latest to back the march, succumbing to the huge pressure from its members who are at the coalface. Junior doctors will be on the demo, a year on from their heroic struggle against unsafe conditions.

Join them and join us to tell NHS bosses, NHS-cutting politicians and the privateers that we are going to fight to save our NHS.

We say:

- Join the 4 March demonstration
- No to NHS cuts and the sustainability and transformation plans
- Scrap the private finance initiatives and kick the privateers out of the NHS
- A decent living wage for all NHS staff
- Coordinate national trade union action to defend the NHS

Health cuts responsible for rise in deaths - reverse all austerity now

Ruby Dark, Southwark Socialist Party

Cuts to NHS and social care are the major cause for the rise in mortality rates and excess deaths, research [recently published in the Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine](#) has confirmed.

The statement may seem quite literally, painfully obvious. Yet the Department of Health has rejected the report as tainted by "bias."

However, the evidence is undeniable, with 2015 seeing the highest mortality rate since 2008 following £16.7 billion of cuts since 2009. A&E waiting hours and ambulance response times have also risen as a result of cuts to the NHS.

It is clear that austerity threatens the safety of us all, but particularly the most vulnerable, with the report finding that older people are those most dependent on NHS services. The government cannot adequately guarantee the health of the population after systematically dismantling the NHS and selling it off to private profiteers under PFI schemes.

Emergency services haven't been the only ones to suffer under cuts. I usually have to wait four weeks at least for an appointment at my home GP in Bristol, an experience I'm sure many others will recognise as the norm rather than the exception.

The only way to save the NHS is to reverse the health cuts, scrap PFI debts and bring the health service back under public control. Private companies should not be able to profit from the NHS, and the government should not be able to put the population in danger through inadequate funding. Corbyn's Labour should be calling for this as a minimum.

It is disgraceful that the Tories and Blairites prioritise profit over human lives. This report demonstrates again the sheer inhumanity and danger of capitalist austerity, and it must be fought.

Stop victimising NHS whistleblowers

Nigel Gilbert, Worcester

In Worcestershire, Socialist Party members have played a leading role in a campaign against abuse of NHS staff. ['Betrayed by Their Trust' \(BBTT\)](#) will have its second annual general meeting in February.

Every BBTT complaint meets a brick wall. No abuse is ever admitted by the two trusts we deal with. They are backed up by every bit of the NHS which is supposed to monitor them.

The MPs are not interested. The Wyre Forest Tory MP, Mark Garnier, went so far as to tell BBTT that it would not be right if he could tell a trust what to do. They are beyond democratic control.

The situation in the county is dire. At New Year, two patients died on trollies waiting at Worcester A&E. One had apparently waited 35 hours.

Recruitment across the board is difficult and mental health services are being cut to the bone.

To keep the lid on all this, the two trusts bully and intimidate staff into silence. BBTT deals with the worst cases.

One of these is a whistleblower, [radiographer Ken Hall](#). For two years he tried to expose a backlog of unexamined x-rays and scans. Finally, a report by hospitals regulator CQC in November revealed a backlog of 25,622 such images!

We estimate that perhaps 80 people suffered unnecessary damage, and some may even have died. After being hounded for two years, Ken was struck off by his regulator, the HCPC, on supposedly separate allegations of misconduct.

In our view, the hearing panel did not properly consider the high-pressure context of Ken's victimisation as a whistleblower, correspondence from a senior manager contradicting one of the trust's own allegations, or that Ken's barrister could not attend the hearing date.

NHS trusts should be abolished, along with the entire edifice of unaccountable bureaucrats. They should be replaced by public servants directly accountable to elected bodies. There should also be local assemblies for workers and members of the public with decision-making powers concerning serious issues of policy. Whistleblowers and other abused staff should be able to have their cases heard at these assemblies by their peers.

- More detail at bttwoces.tumblr.com

Dublin: #JobstownNotGuilty

Defend the right to protest - stop this political vendetta!

Neil Cafferky

"We are more akin to a banana republic, and the rotten nature of the Irish state has been exposed." These were the words of TD (MP) and Socialist Party member Ruth Coppinger in the Irish Parliament on 15 February as she rose to question Taoiseach (prime minister) Enda Kenny.

Kenny had every reason for discomfort as his Fine Gael government barely survived a no-confidence vote later that evening. [In all likelihood he'll be forced to resign](#). The government - a minority coalition of Fine Gael and ragbag independents, propped up from the outside by the largest opposition party Fianna Fáil - is on the brink of collapse.

This government crisis was detonated by revelations that imply that Irish police had colluded with state institutions and elements in the media to smear a police whistleblower, [Maurice McCabe](#), with trumped up charges of child sexual abuse. The scandal has convulsed a nation wearily familiar with crimes in high places.

Rotten

Into this combustible mix come the most significant political trials the country has seen in a generation. These trials, just like the current scandal rocking the country, expose the rotten nature of the Irish state.

18 adults who participated in a [sit down protest for two hours in front of the car of deputy prime minister and Labour TD Joan Burton in Jobstown](#) (an area of south west Dublin) in November 2014 have been charged.

Seven defendants who face trial on 24 April are charged with 'false imprisonment'. If found guilty, this charge carries a maximum sentence of life in prison. Later, another eleven protesters will face false imprisonment or related charges.

Three elected representatives will be brought to court in the first trial. Paul Murphy is an MP for South West Dublin. Mick Murphy and Kieran Mahon are councillors. All three are members of the Anti-Austerity Alliance (AAA) and the Socialist Party, the sister party to the Socialist Party in England and Wales.

It seems extraordinary that a run of the mill act of political protest could land the participants in court under the threat of life imprisonment. However, the protest in Jobstown was one episode in a larger movement that inflicted a massive defeat on the political elite and the austerity agenda in Ireland. This was the [movement against a tax on water](#), commonly known as the water charges.

Writing about the history of the poll tax in Britain, the Socialist has pointed out that Thatcher overreached herself by taking on the whole of the working class. Her previous victories had bred an arrogant overconfidence when it came to assessing the true size of the opposition ranged against her.

A similar mistake was made by the Fine Gael/Labour coalition when it introduced water charges in 2014. Previous attempts to introduce water charges in the 1990s had been defeated in a campaign where Socialist Party members played a leading role.

Right from the off there was broad opposition to the charges. However it was the tactic of mass non-payment that was key in turning the water charges into a permanent crisis for the government from the time the movement erupted in the autumn of 2014 through to the general election of February 2016.

Non-payment

Commenting on the non-payment tactic Michael O'Brien, an anti-water charges activist and Socialist Party member, said:

"The position held by the Socialist Party and AAA from the outset, and likewise instinctively understood by many working class people, was that the boycott of the charge was the absolute bedrock for defeating the charges.

"Even if we achieved on all the other important tactics like the national marches and meter protests, which only involved a minority of people (the more active layer), we needed to gear everything towards convincing additional hundreds of thousands to not pay the charge."

The importance of the non-payment campaign was underlined when Paul Murphy won a [stunning byelection victory in the parliamentary seat of Dublin South West in October 2014](#). Irish nationalist party Sinn Fein was widely believed to be a shoe-in for victory until AAA activists turned the by-election into a referendum on non-payment.

Sinn Fein's lukewarm support for non-payment led voters to back Paul, the candidate who put non-payment at the centre of his campaign. The victory had a profound impact on the calculations of the main bourgeois parties in southern Ireland, as even commentators in the mainstream media admit.

Writing in the Irish Examiner, Gerard Howlin commented: "The political pivot on which swings the eventual outcome of talks to facilitate government formation between Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil (after the inconclusive outcome of the 2016 general election) is that Dublin South West byelection result. Then, a very small party, with a single TD in Joe Higgins, moved the entire political dialogue on water sharply left."

The water charges dominated discussion on the doorstep during the 2016 general election. Water charges have become such political kryptonite that they have been shelved for the time being. Although there can be no complacency that the battle is over, this is still a significant victory for working people and the tactic of mass organisation to overturn unpopular policies.

From the outset the anti-water charges movement was met with intense hostility from the political and media establishment. The owner of Ireland's largest media group Denis O'Brien is also the owner of the company GMC/Sierra contracted by the government to install water meters. Unsurprisingly newspapers and radio stations owned by O'Brien fiercely attacked protesters and the AAA particularly.

Communities organising to prevent the installation of water meters, often in the face of brutal treatment by police and private security firms hired by GMC/Sierra was likened to a complete breakdown in "law and order". One Fine Gael MP breathlessly compared the protesters at Jobstown to Isis!

A more sinister response from the state to the anti-water charges movement was seen with the revelations surrounding 'Operation Mizen'. It emerged that police engaged in surveillance of anti-water charges activists. In essence, working class people taking part in mass civil disobedience are now viewed as criminals.

The Jobstown protesters are not the only people to feel the long arm of the state for opposing water charges. Between November 2014 and October 2015 there have been 188 arrests in relation to water protests.

The prosecution of the Jobstown protesters has little to do with "law and order". In fact it is the right to protest and engage in civil disobedience that is under attack. One Jobstown protester has already been convicted.

The young man, 17 at the time of his trial last year, was tried in a youth court. The case was decided by a judge, not a jury. The prosecution's chief witnesses were Joan Burton and a police inspector.

Their evidence amounted to stating that protesters were asked to end a sit down protest but refused to do so. Hardly an unusual state of affairs for protesters hoping to make their point by staying in one place!

Criminalise protest

The logic of this decision is virtually any form of protest that detains a person for any length of time could be construed as 'false imprisonment'. Impromptu demonstrations that delay traffic, or picket lines that refuse access to deliveries could now be liable to criminal prosecution.

A second strand to the Jobstown trial is an attempt to delegitimise the left. If any of the public representatives were convicted they would be removed from office and barred from running in elections for ten years.

The cutting edge of the anti-water charges movement was widely perceived to be the socialist left. In the general election the AAA, alongside People Before Profit, won six MPs.

In a country historically dominated by two right-wing parties (Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael) many in the establishment are nervous that there could be a repeat of what happened in southern Europe where previously 'fringe' parties were catapulted to national prominence under the impact of endless years of austerity.

The Jobstown trials are part of an ongoing narrative that tries to frame the socialist left as a 'sinister fringe' which is 'alien' to Ireland's political tradition.

The Jobstown trial has been met with a vigorous campaign organised by the AAA and the local community under the banner #JobstownNotGuilty. The campaign has gained international support from such figures as Noam Chomsky, the French presidential candidate Jean-Luc Melenchon and numerous MPs and MEPs from across Europe.

In Britain, actor Ricky Tomlinson and RMT transport union president Sean Hoyle have given their support to the campaign.

The Socialist asks all its readers to do everything they can to raise support for #JobstownNotGuilty in their trade unions, community, and with public representatives.

- Add your name to a [letter of protest against this attack](#) on the right to protest - by emailing your name and address to nlcafferky@yahoo.com
- Raise this issue in your union branch. See below for a model motion.
- Like the Jobstown Not Guilty Facebook page

**And send messages of protest against the verdict and demanding that all charges dropped to: info@justice.ie
Or letters to: Department of Justice and Equality, 51 St Stephen's Green, Dublin 2, D02 HK52**

Model motion for trade union branches

In 2016 working people in the Republic of Ireland built a mass campaign of non-payment and direct action to defeat the imposition of a tax on water. This charge was a first step towards the privatisation of water.

On 21 October 2016, [a 17-year-old was found guilty of false imprisonment](#) in the Children's Court in the Republic of Ireland.

He was 15 at the time of the 'false imprisonment', which consisted of participating in a protest against water charges and austerity on 15 November 2014, which resulted in Joan Burton's (the then Deputy Prime Minister) car being delayed for 2.5 hours in Jobstown in Tallaght in the Republic of Ireland.

There was no allegation or charge against him of any violence. He was recognised by the judge as having led a "blameless life".

However, the judge found him guilty of false imprisonment and listed the following factors which led him to that conclusion: He sat in front of a car and encouraged others to do so; He participated in a slow march; He momentarily stood in Joan Burton's way and asked to talk to her; He used a megaphone to chant "No way, we won't pay."

This branch believes that:

It is clear that he was protesting, not kidnapping.

Although he was given a 'conditional discharge', meaning that he will not face imprisonment if of good behaviour for nine months, the important fact is that he was found guilty of false imprisonment because of participating in a protest.

The verdict prepares the way for convictions and imprisonment of 18 adult defendants next year, and a dramatic broadening of the definition of false imprisonment to include many forms of protest.

Striking workers could find their picket lines classed as 'false imprisonment', as could any protesters who engage in a slow march or sit-down protest.

In England, Wales and Northern Ireland a system of law similar to that in the Republic operates. There is a danger that a successful prosecution of the Jobstown defendants could lead to similar tactics being used against protesters here.

The first trial of adults starts on April 24 with a group of seven defendants charged with 'false imprisonment'.

One of those is Paul Murphy, an MP for the Anti-Austerity Alliance. If jailed for more than six months, he will be removed as an MP and the people of Dublin South West (which includes Jobstown) will be denied the democratic choice they made.

This branch resolves to:

- Condemn the conviction of the 17-year-old protester of 'false imprisonment'.
- Recognise that "an injury to one is an injury to all" and this conviction is a threat to everybody's democratic right to protest and to effective trade unionism.
- Call for all charges to be dropped against all the Jobstown protesters immediately.
- Agree to send a message of solidarity and a donation of _____ to the #JobstownNotGuilty campaign and to publicise and support activities supporting the campaign.

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 21 February 2017 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

Leicester Unison no-cuts budget call

Michael Barker, Unison shop steward (personal capacity)

Leicester is a city dominated by Labour, with a Lib-Dem/Tory opposition group composed of just two councillors. However, like all other Labour councils up and down the country, they have been busy passing on Tory cuts with gusto (and crocodile tears).

In the latest phase of cuts the axe is being swung down upon welfare, youth and mental health services. This is not to mention the closure of the last remaining council-run elderly care home, with has been accompanied by the sacking of 48 carers.

The council is also presently in the process of slashing £6 million from the wages of council workers. The recommended medicine for council employees is to accept three days unpaid leave over Christmas, say goodbye to hard-won sick pay and redundancy entitlements, and the loss of premium payments for unsocial working hours.

Unison members reject outright this latest attack on their pay and conditions, and now, for the first time ever, Unison's city branch has demanded that our Labour council do everything in its power to investigate setting a legal 'no-cuts' budget.

The union recognises that setting such a budget would safeguard the pay and conditions of Unison members, but also prevent the ongoing degradation of local services.

Support

The local trades council has already thrown its support behind Unison's fighting proposal, and all Leicester's Labour councillors have been emailed by both Unison and the GMB to see if they can help.

In the meantime, the trades council has resolved to contact local Labour councillors and union branches to request their official backing for the 'no-cuts' proposal and organise a public meeting to discuss the fightback.

Now let's see if our city's Labour councillors are prepared to work alongside Leicester's trade unions and community groups to resist Tory austerity!

Bristol: Hundreds march against millions of pounds of council cuts

The [Bristol and District Anti-Cuts Alliance](#) (Badaca) has written a letter to every councillor in Bristol calling on them to vote against the £101 million cuts budget being proposed by mayor Marvin Rees. Councillors met to vote on the budget on Tuesday 21 February, as the Socialist goes to press.

200 people marched through Bristol on 18 February in the run-up to the meeting. The demonstration was called by Badaca in defence of jobs and services in the city. Protesters called on the mayor and councillors to reject the cuts budget and join a campaign to force the government to return the funding they have slashed.

Speakers addressed the crowd from Bristol Trades Council, several local union branches and from specific campaigns to protect libraries and transport.

Socialist Party member Tom Baldwin, speaking for Badaca said: "These cuts take out over £200 for every single person in the city. But they won't be distributed evenly. Despite claims to protect the most vulnerable, they will inevitably be hit the hardest.

Bastions of resistance

"Councillors will have a chance to show which side they're on. They can vote to further decimate services in this city or to stand with the people of Bristol and vote against the cuts.

"Councils like ours should be bastions of resistance to the Tory government, not accomplices in their war against the working class."

A petition with hundreds of signatures against the cuts was presented by Badaca to the council meeting with the following demands:

- Stop these cuts. Use reserves and borrowing powers to protect services
- End the outsourcing and privatisation of services. No to volunteers replacing paid workers

- Build a mass campaign to reverse Tory austerity and to win back the money stolen from the city. The campaign should involve the trade unions and service users in Bristol and link up with other Labour councils
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Tower Hamlets anti-cuts budget lobby

Tower Hamlets Socialist Party

Tower Hamlets council plans to vote through cuts in its budget of £58 million on 22 February. Labour Party mayor John Biggs essentially thinks there's no other option but to implement the Tory government cuts.

However, the council has reserves of £71.5 million. It is entirely possible for the council to legally refuse to make a single cut this budget year. This can give the council the time to build the campaign needed to take on the Tory government.

Socialist Party members have been active in the borough speaking and campaigning against the cuts and against the idea that they are 'inevitable' or 'responsible'. We say there is another option - build a mass campaign to win back the funding taken from local government. This was the tactic successfully used by the Poplar councillors in the 1920s and [Liverpool council in the 1980s](#).

We will be joining other local campaigners and activists to protest the lobby of the council on 22 February at 6pm at Tower Hamlets Town Hall to shout a big "no" to cuts to our local services.

We are also planning a meeting at 7.30pm on 30 March (contact towerhamlets.sp@gmail.com for more) to discuss how to further the campaign and how to plan a strategy to defeat the cuts in our local council.

For a detailed guide on how to set a no cuts budget see tusc.org.uk/txt/355.pdf

30% of people on inadequate incomes in UK

Karen Seymour, Welfare rights adviser

19 million people in the UK - nearly 30% of the population - live below the 'minimum income standard' (MIS) and "are just about managing at best," according to [a recent report by the poverty think-tank Joseph Rowntree Foundation](#).

Theresa May and her government would do well to read it.

The MIS is based on public perception of decent living standards, as calculated by Loughborough University. Four million more people are now in this category than were before the 2007-8 financial crisis.

And in 2014-15, 11 million earned less than 75% of MIS - up from 9.1 million in 2008-9 - and were therefore at serious risk of plunging into poverty.

As a welfare rights adviser, I have helped people who are in low-paid, irregular work, and who have to resort to local food banks. Even with tax credits, or, more accurately, subsidies for employers who will not pay their workers wages they can live on, a family income may still not be enough to make ends meet.

This smashes the Tory myth that work pays. The new, hideously complicated 'universal credit' payments will still mean employers are let off paying decent wages!

The report also estimates that by 2020 the cost of living is likely to be 10% higher than before the crash. With the government hell-bent on carrying on its austerity agenda forever if we let it, our living standards will be eroded even more.

The rich will carry on just fine. We are angry and have had enough. A campaign must be built against these relentless attacks.

Corbyn and the trade union leaders must campaign for a £10 an hour minimum wage with no exemptions, an end to zero-hour contracts and precarious employment, proper terms and conditions in work, and liveable benefits for all.

Workers don't want to be 'just about managing'. We create the wealth - we should be rewarded properly for it!

Stop the student loan sell-off - scrap all fees

Mary Finch, King's College London Socialist Students

The Tories are once again [trying to privatise student debt](#).

If the plans go ahead, students could be facing a debt crisis on an unprecedented scale. It's unlikely the Tories plan on stopping privatisation at historic debt.

Along with the attacks in the Higher Education Bill, a precedent will be set for mass privatisation and marketisation of education. The government has already relieved itself of responsibility for maintenance grants.

[Their first attempt in 2014](#), which would have sold off all pre-1998 loans, failed. The current proposal is to sell off all pre-2012 student debt.

In both instances, the proposals were justified by arguing that selling off student debt to the private sector increases government income from loans.

For a start, student debt is an exclusionary and inefficient way to fund education. Nationalising the banks and top corporations could pay for free education at all levels for everyone who wants it, and a lot more besides.

But even in the context of the loan system, the Tories' claims are utterly false. Privatising the debt would mean a lump sum, not the steady income the government currently collects. Only the Tories' big business friends would benefit.

The vast majority of students - like myself - took out their undergraduate loans on the promise that we wouldn't have to pay them back until we were earning at least a certain (modest) income.

Many students will soon have postgraduate debt added to that as well. The loans for masters and PhD courses introduced last year are the only route into postgraduate education for most students.

Rising tuition fees and living costs have recently meant dropping numbers of applications for university. But it's possible that, in the short term, this new level of access to postgraduate education will mean many students - often desperate to get an edge in a low-wage, insecure jobs market - increasing their debt even further.

That means some could have up to £71,000 of debt, not including interest. That same insecure and low-paid work means there's no way most can pay it back.

The Socialist Party says no to the sell-off. Scrap all student debts and fees, and restore maintenance grants, to make education truly accessible to all.

Argos fails to pay staff minimum wage - taxman cuts fine in half!

- Nationalise poverty payers
- £10 an hour now

Tom Costello, Lancashire Socialist Party

Retail giant Argos has recently been caught red-handed paying 37,000 workers less than the national minimum wage.

Following an investigation by HM Revenue and Customs, [the retailer has been made to pay back £2.4 million](#) in unpaid wages after they made workers attend staff briefings and carry out security checks out of paid hours.

Chief executive John Rogers has come out to provide an explanation for this, saying that "unexpected things do come up as we get to grips with the business."

We should all laugh at such a poor excuse. But the fact that Argos has been profiting off millions of pounds in unpaid labour is not the only travesty here.

What is truly despicable is the paltry fine imposed on Argos's parent company, Sainsbury's. While they were at first going to be made to pay £1.5 million, the taxman has cut the fine almost in half - to just £800,000 - for prompt payment.

This is while Sainsbury's group, in 2013-14 alone, had a total income of £435 million after tax! True, it posted a one-off loss last year, its first in a decade - but of less than half this figure. It really shows us whose side HM Revenue and Customs is on.

Stories such as this are unsettlingly common, and they all demonstrate that, no matter what, capitalists will always look for a new way to steal and to exploit.

Why has Labour not acknowledged this? Surely a Labour Party that takes on thieving big business giants could win unparalleled levels of support among working people.

It is because of stories like this that the Socialist Party calls for business giants like Sainsbury's to be nationalised and placed under democratic workers' control and management.

What we saw

Spare change?

This is Tory Cambridge student Ronald Coyne trying to burn a £20 note in front of a homeless man.

[The appalling incident found its way onto YouTube.](#) It led Cambridge University Conservative Association to expel Coyne from membership.

Forcing people onto the streets through job cuts, poverty pay and bloodsucking rent hikes is totally acceptable, of course.

#SaveOurNHS

There was a frightening incident on Walthamstow market while the Socialist Party was doing its usual Saturday campaign stall recently.

A man collapsed opposite where we were selling the Socialist - we think he had a diabetic fit. His daughter and wife were screaming and people gathered round to help and to call an ambulance.

The man came to eventually, but the ambulance never came. His daughter told me that he had been told to go home and call 111!

There was a time when an ambulance would have turned up quickly, even if the situation turned out to be a non-emergency. More than ever we need to encourage people to come on the [demonstration on 4 March](#) and to fight to defend our health service.

Nancy Taaffe, via Facebook

Train robbery

A court has awarded greedy bosses at Arriva Trains Wales £616.30 from a pregnant women - [for not buying a £2.30 rail ticket](#). Lauren Bolt explained that the ticket machine was broken.

No to punitive fines and outrageous ticket prices. Nationalise transport under the democratic control of workers and passengers.

Refugee solidarity

Premier League star Dejan Lovren [has lent his support to refugees escaping war](#). The Liverpool centre-back was himself a child refugee after his family fled Bosnia.

"When I see what's happening today I just remember my thing, my family and how people don't want you in their country. I understand people want to protect themselves, but people don't have homes.

"It's not their fault; they're fighting for their lives just to save their kids."

The Socialist Party fights for an end to austerity, and mass investment in jobs, homes and services for all - those already here, as well as those chased across the planet by bombs.

May Day greetings

Help fund the best workers' newspaper in England and Wales by placing a May Day greeting in the Socialist

- For prices and to place your greeting: socialistparty.org.uk/mayday
 - For queries and resources, email jamesivens@socialistparty.org.uk
 - 25% discount for payments made by 5pm on 31 March 2017
 - Final deadline for payments and greetings: 12 April
-

February revolution 1917 - what lessons for today?

23 February 1917 (8 March in today's calendar) marked the beginning of the socialist revolution in Russia, which sparked a revolutionary wave that would travel around the world.

In the Socialist in 2007, Socialist Party general secretary Peter Taaffe analysed the lessons of February for the working class today and how the leadership of the Bolshevik party, particularly Lenin and Trotsky, was decisive in ensuring the victory of the revolution in October.

This retains its full validity for today and so we are reproducing extracts here, with some additions in answer to capitalist historians.

Simon Sebag Montefiore has led the pro-capitalist charge against the Russian revolution. [In the Evening Standard he asserted that it opened a chapter of bloodshed and suffering](#). However, weighed on the scales of history, the Russian revolution was immeasurably less bloody than the mass slaughter of World War One which the revolution ended, with its mountain of five million killed and wounded. He has nothing to say about this!

A hundred years ago the working class of Russia, led by the immortal workers of what is now St Petersburg, rose in a revolution that overthrew the 1,000-year dictatorial rule of the Tsar. This began a process of revolution and counter-revolution over the next nine months, which - in October 1917 - resulted in the first democratic working class, socialist revolution in history.

The February revolution stands between the first Russian revolution of 1905-1907 and the third and conclusive revolution of October 1917. The representatives of big business today and their hirelings in the media and universities, the superficial professors of 'history', either ignore this great event or seek to prove that February was the 'real' Russian revolution which 'went off the rails' and ended in the 'putsch' of October 1917.

Of course, Britain today is not Russia of 1917 - an economically and culturally deprived society, with the working class a minority in a sea of peasants. Yet, under the impact of a serious economic crisis, a social rupture - revolution - can develop in the most 'advanced' as well as the most backward societies.

The economic upheaval in the world capitalist economy in 2007-08 led to [revolution in the Middle East](#), with the toppling of at least four dictators

in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen. This was echoed, for example, in the [protest movement in Wisconsin](#) against budget cuts, where the Egyptian flag was flown.

2007-08 was a harbinger of a more disturbed economic and social situation for world capitalism, which could produce, in a different form, the conditions of Russia 100 years ago.

Bolsheviks

One of the most vital lessons of the February revolution and its aftermath is that, had the leaders of the most conscious workers' party at that stage, the Bolsheviks, pursued the policies of the workers' leaders today, no Russian revolution would have taken place.

In 1917, Russia was passing through the greatest social crisis in its history. If there had been no Bolshevik party, led by Lenin and Trotsky, the colossal revolutionary energy of the workers and the peasants would have been fruitlessly spent in sporadic explosions.

The class struggle is the prime mover in history but it needs a correct programme, a firm party, and a trustworthy and courageous leadership ready to go to the end in the struggle against capitalism and landlordism, as happened in Russia.

The honour of beginning the revolution fell to the working class women of St Petersburg. On 22 February, the major plant of the city, the Putilov factory, announced a great strike. In the city at this stage there were roughly 390,000 factory workers, employed in huge industrial units such as the Putilov factory.

Approximately one-third of these workers were women. On 23 February, the women textile workers, without prior agreement from any party, went on strike in several factories, which led to mass demonstrations in the city. This opened the floodgates of revolution, which unfolded over the next five days.

Role of the working class

One of the unmistakable features of a revolution is the direct intervention of the mass of the working class and the poor - usually discontented but forced into submission by capitalism in 'normal' periods - in determining their own fate.

In the testing of wills between the working class and tsarism on the streets of Petrograd (St Petersburg), the repressive state apparatus of landlordism and capitalism dissolved in the heat of the revolution. This was marked by the coming over to the side of the workers, or a certain 'neutrality,' of the formerly most brutal tsarist forces, such as the Cossacks.

The February revolution was achieved, largely from below, by workers and soldiers - many of them peasants under arms. But they were not conscious of their own power. Many times in history, the working masses have overthrown a regime but have not enjoyed the fruits of their victory because they have not recognised their role.

Therefore, in Russia, power fell into the hands of a coalition of capitalist liberals, Mensheviks (the original minority in the Russian workers' movement to the Bolsheviks' majority) and the Social Revolutionaries, a party of the middle class of the towns and the rural areas.

This government was similar to what became known later as the 'popular front', which derailed the [Spanish revolution of 1931-37](#) and was employed by the Stalinists in France and elsewhere.

The February revolution was, in effect, the beginning of the socialist revolution in Russia and worldwide. But only Lenin, the leader of the Bolsheviks, in exile in Switzerland, and Trotsky exiled in New York, recognised this. Even the Bolshevik leadership in Petrograd, while they did not enter the government (which would have been unacceptable to the ranks of the Bolshevik party and the working class of the city), nevertheless gave support to the coalition government from the outside.

Provisional government

Initially, the Petrograd workers and the rank-and-file Bolsheviks were hostile to the coalition, which had gathered power into its hands. But from the middle of March, under the influence of Kamenev, a leader of the Bolsheviks, and Stalin, who had arrived from exile, the Bolshevik party swung decisively to the right.

Stalin wrote: "The Provisional Government must be supported because..." This is very similar to the position of many leaders of workers' parties today, some formally on the left.

Lenin telegraphed from Switzerland to the Bolshevik leaders in Petrograd: "Our tactic; absolute lack of confidence; no support to the new government; suspect Kerensky especially; arming of the working class the sole guarantee; immediate elections to the Petrograd Duma; no rapprochement with other parties." Then he pointedly declared: "The least support for the Provisional Government is a betrayal."

What would he have said of those workers' leaders today in Spain and other countries in Europe who have advocated and entered capitalist coalitions, serving as ministers and embracing the neoliberal programme?

Lenin was against the slightest support for capitalist parties and governments. When he arrived at the Finland station in Petrograd in April 1917, a young naval commander, speaking in the name of the service, "expressed the hope that Lenin might become a member of the Provisional Government."

This was treated with scorn by Lenin who turned his back on the coalition dignitaries and addressed the workers who had come to greet him, with the words: "The Russian Revolution achieved by you has opened a new epoch. Long live the world socialist revolution!"

Independent policy

Pro-capitalist labour leaders, such as in Germany where the Social Democrats are in government with the capitalist Christian Democrats, argue that this is the only 'progressive' option. They have tried to bolster this with the argument that they would be a 'check on the right'.

There is absolutely nothing new in these arguments; Stalin and Kamenev in 1917 supported the post-February coalition government 'critically' with very similar arguments. This was directly contrary to the position adopted by Lenin and Trotsky in 1917.

Lenin's policy led, nine months later, to the October revolution and the 'ten days that shook the world' - the reverberations of October among the working class internationally.

Unlike the workers' leaders today who are seduced and corrupted by the lure of easy popularity and ministerial careers, Lenin was not afraid of being in a minority. The Bolsheviks had 1% or 2% share of the vote in the soviets in February, and only 4% by the time he arrived in April.

But a revolution like February is usually made by a courageous and conscious minority with the broad support of the mass of workers. Once it is triumphant this broad mass enters the political arena.

In February 1917, following the example of the 1905-07 revolution, they created their own independent class organisation in the form of soviets - workers, soldiers and peasants' councils. In fact, a 'double sovereignty' was created in Russia in February 1917 that lasted right up to the October revolution.

This 'dual power,' or elements of it, is visible in all revolutionary upheavals. The 'government' still retains state forces but it is challenged by the independent power and organisation of the working class.

Revolutionary programme

The Bolsheviks earned the undying hatred of the capitalists and all those parties who wanted to remain within the framework of the system.

The entire press, including the papers of the Mensheviks and the Social Revolutionaries, carried on a vicious campaign against the Bolsheviks, just as the British media and press did against the miners in 1984-85, against [the Liverpool Militants in their heroic struggle of 1983-87](#) or today against Jeremy Corbyn.

Thousands of tons of newsprint were filled with reports that the Bolsheviks were linked to the tsarist police, that they received carloads of gold from Germany, that Lenin was a German spy, etc. In the first months after the February revolution, this abuse even affected the masses, with sailors and soldiers threatening to bayonet Lenin and other Bolshevik leaders on sight.

However, the Bolsheviks, under the direction of Lenin, ignored the 'parliamentary babblers' and directed all their attention to the mass of the working class and, in particular, to the most oppressed tens of millions who were moving to the left in disillusionment with the 'official' coalition soviet parties.

It was this, the constant stressing of the independent approach of the working class and its organisations, which led to the growth of the Bolsheviks. The contrast between Lenin and the Bolsheviks, and the leaders and ex-leaders of the workers' organisations today, could not be clearer.

Preparation

Of course, this was in a period of revolution, which is not the case in most countries of the world today. However, the preparation for such a situation is carried out in the period before such sharp and abrupt changes actually take place. This is the role of a far-sighted Marxist leadership and organisation.

The Russian workers succeeded not by 'piecemeal' policies between February and October. In fact, the gains of the February revolution were systematically undermined because the government coalition refused to break with landlordism and capitalism.

It took the experience of the next nine months, together with the agitation and work of the Bolsheviks, to convince the Russian workers of the need for an abrupt overturn - a social revolution - which then took place in October 1917.

The great events of February 1917 are not dead history. We pay tribute to the courageous working class of Petrograd in this great social overturn by learning the real lessons of these events for today.

Aslef members reject Southern deal - now for coordinated action with the RMT to fight to win

Rob Williams, Socialist Party industrial organiser

Train drivers in the trade union Aslef have delivered a tremendous answer of working-class solidarity that will astound Southern Rail management and the Tory government but also their own union leadership and that of the TUC. Despite the recommendation by Aslef leaders to accept the deal to end their dispute, drivers have [rejected it by 54%-46%](#) after a 72% turnout.

When the massive propaganda from the right-wing media is taken into account, as well as the fact that the talks were brokered by the TUC, this is welcome and decisive defiance to [driver only operations \(DOO\)](#). It also amounts to a censure to the Aslef leadership for being party to talks without the RMT rail union, whose guards and station staff have taken 28 days of strike action in a dispute that is a blatant attack on one of the most militant unions in the country.

The strike action by both unions had put management on the rack and should have been the basis for an agreement that threw out DOO, rather than a 'deal' that had so many holes in. It would have put drivers in the firing line in any future accidents and would have effectively imposed a settlement on the RMT, without a seat at the real talks.

The result is a vindication of the approach of the RMT, which correctly argued for joint talks, first at Acas and then at the TUC. But the TUC leadership have played a shameful role and should account for their actions at the next TUC general council and to an even a bigger audience. They are already sitting on a resolution that was moved by the RMT at last September's TUC congress to call a special conference against the Trade Union Act, which comes into operation on 1 March. It will include new undemocratic ballot thresholds that would mean rail workers face huge obstacles in getting legal strikes.

But this vote by Aslef members shows once and for all that if workers act together, nothing is insurmountable.

Aslef leader Mick Whelan has said: "We understand and support the decision arrived at democratically by our members and will now work to deliver a resolution in line with their expectations." But Aslef members will now expect immediate talks with the RMT to discuss coordinated action and no separate talks. [RMT members have called a 24-hour strike on 22 February](#). If the rail unions act together, they can secure a famous victory for themselves and a safe service for the travelling public.

An Aslef member writes:

Aslef members around the country will be celebrating the decision of members employed by Southern to reject the deal over Driver Only Operation.

Many issues are raised in this dispute. The basis of opposing DOO is that train drivers already have enough to do.

We are constantly looking at safe working, speed, track conditions, obstacles on the track, low adhesion, where to shut off power, where to apply the brake, being alert to track workers, areas of potential trespass and suicide risk, indications of train faults and reporting these, customer safety approaching stations, contacting the signaller and the guard.

Then when a train terminates and we change ends for the return journey, we respond to questions, speak to platform staff, check that we have not breached safety rules when running late. That is enough, we neither need nor want to do the work of other grades.

Southern challenged all four ballots held by Aslef in this dispute, at the High Court. In the first three cases Southern won.

We know that their lawyers were given carte blanche to seek ways to undermine the dispute. Twenty lawyers worked full-time to frustrate our democratic vote. The legal bill passed to Aslef is over £600,000.

In the fourth case, Southern lost, they had apparently argued that a strike would breach freedom of movement rules under the European Union. They said this applied because they are partly French-owned.

As an Aslef member who recognises that unity among railworkers is vital to defeat the bosses' plans, I condemn the actions of the TUC leadership. It has gone along with the managements' divide and rule approach. Those who claim to be talking on our behalf must be accountable to us. The TUC General Secretary is not.

I heard a Tory MP on the radio suggesting the deal be tweaked to resolve the dispute. There can be no tweaking of Aslef policy which is abundantly clear - no extension of DOO. This dispute must be settled on that basis.

Aslef members know that if we lose on Southern, success elsewhere will be more difficult, there are similar battles coming elsewhere. With a determined fight, we will win.

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 16 February 2017 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

Tata pension deal: 'Gun to the head' offer accepted

Alec Thraves, Socialist Party Wales

Tata steelworkers have reluctantly [accepted a 'gun to the head' pension deal](#) which will end their final salary pension scheme and see it being replaced by an inferior defined contribution pension scheme.

Union leaders, Tata management, MPs, AMs and the Welsh government all repeated endlessly to the workforce: accept this deal or see the plant close.

Union leaders have attempted to justify their recommendation to accept the deal by portraying the changes as going from 'a gold-plated pension to a silver-plated pension'.

Unfortunately, this huge concession by the workforce still provides no guarantees for the jobs of Tata workers across the UK and particularly for the 4,000 workers in Port Talbot who now have to rely on Tata's so-called commitments to invest in the plant.

At a National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) meeting in Port Talbot in January, one ex-steelworker said that the £1 billion planned investment over the next ten years was dependant on Tata turning over £200 million profit a year, which is widely regarded as impossible with the rundown state of the plant.

A pledge to 'seek to avoid compulsory redundancies over the next five years' was also met with widespread cynicism.

And the deal doesn't prevent the danger of the 130,000 British Steel pension scheme members potentially entering the pension protection fund as part of the arrangement, resulting in at least a 10% cut to members' benefits. This threat was played up by all those promoting the deal, including the pension trustees, if the offer wasn't accepted.

Tata off-loading liabilities

One of the main motivations for ending the final salary pension scheme is to make a sale more attractive to possible buyers such as Krupp Thyssen, who will now not be responsible for the liability of the pension scheme.

What is to stop Tata selling the business and then putting the pension scheme into the pension protection fund? Scandalously this may be legal even though Tata would still be a profitable car business, although conveniently in a different division. This should be a warning to its Jaguar/Land Rover workers and pensioners - better to fight now together with the steelworkers.

One Port Talbot shop steward commenting on the 74% result in favour of the deal, said:

"All of the people I work with claim to have voted No to the proposals put to us in the ballot. Some feel that there's some kind of conspiracy going on, others just feel that so much pressure was put on the workforce by the management and unions that it pushed through the Yes vote.

It was only 3-4 weeks ago that we were told by the unions that they felt that due to the feedback they had been getting from union members, it was going to be a definite No vote. It was after this that 100 or so 'reps' met and decided that they needed to unanimously recommend a Yes vote.

Since then we have been warned that a No vote would result in the insolvency of Tata and the loss of our jobs. Most people I work with feel utterly betrayed by the unions".

Many workers will be hoping for the best but also need to prepare for the worst. This battle is unfortunately just beginning. [Confidence in Tata is at rock bottom](#) and understandably so.

The only real alternative to protect the long term future of the plant was the demand taken up by the Socialist Party, the NSSN, and some in the workforce, for the nationalisation of Tata steel under democratic workers' control and management. That would ensure investment, job security and a plan of production that can never be attained through multinational companies such as Tata, whose only concern is profitability at the expense of the workforce. That's what this grubby 'realistic' deal represents.

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 17 February 2017 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

Unison Women's Conference

Socialist Party members attended the Unison Women's conference in Brighton on 16-18 February, selling a dozen copies of the Socialist paper. Mia Hollsing, a national executive candidate for Wales, spoke calling for nationalisation of public transport to ensure safe travel for women and all passengers. Mia is standing as part of the Unison Action slate in the elections, a group of candidates standing for a national, coordinated response by Unison against cuts, privatisation, pay freezes, attacks on terms and conditions and to defend our NHS.

Workplace news in brief

Show culture some love

On Valentine's Day artists, actors, those working in the culture sector and supporters took part in a walking tour around London as part of the '[Show Culture Some Love](#)' campaign. The protest visited cultural institutions facing cuts from Tory austerity but also venues who pay poverty wages and offer poor working conditions and contracts. Cinemas were a high priority with the wave of unionisation and strikes at Picturehouse cinemas. The national gallery was visited too, which was the scene of a protracted struggle against victimisation and outsourcing.

At every venue we heard from a group of poets who visit pickets and bring solidarity and support through their poetry.

Helen Pattison

Night tube trouble

The RMT tube union is [balloting night tube drivers for strike action](#) over working conditions and overtime pay. The night tube is only six months old and the agreement covering night tube drivers has been called "blatantly discriminatory" by RMT general secretary Mick Cash. Promotion and overtime pay do not apply until after the driver has exceeded 35 hours in a week. This prevents overtime being paid if there is late finish to the service because of earlier disruption. The result of the ballot will be declared on 14 March.

Socialism not Trumpism: Thousands more protest and plan to walkout

Parliament debate 20 February - Thousands more, once again, take to the street against Trump

London

Thousands of people [filled Parliament Square on 20 February to protest once again the government's plans to roll out the red carpet for Donald Trump](#) with an official state visit to the UK.

Anger at May's sycophantic approach to the US president had been compounded by the dismissive response sent to the almost two million people who signed the petition opposing Trump's invitation.

The crowd included lots of school students attending their first protest. Demonstrators were eager to discuss the next steps for the campaign in Britain, as well as the struggle to defeat Trump in the US. Unfortunately, those in the leadership of the protest failed to offer a clear way forward.

Nevertheless, the idea raised by Socialist Students of organising walkouts and mass protests on 'Day X', if and when Trump comes to Britain, got an enthusiastic response from the many students who attended. Pledge sheets for students to sign up to participate in the walkout were rapidly filled up, with students volunteering to help organise the campaign in their schools, colleges and universities.

Claire Laker-Mansfield, Socialist Students national organiser

Swansea

Following a march of over 400 people just weeks ago, a similar number gathered at a protest called and organised in part by Socialist Students, in the centre of Swansea to protest Trump and his administration's policies. They also wanted to put pressure on our MPs not to give him a warm welcome.

The crowd was vibrant, angry, loud and diverse. Many we spoke to were first-time protesters - school students, young families, immigrants and refugees. They told us that they are scared, angry and that something needs to be done.

I spoke to the crowd, calling for unity in action, for an ongoing struggle against Trump and May, against racism and division and ultimately the capitalist system that allows them to flourish, and relies on them to survive.

I also linked the scapegoating of immigrants and refugees to the ongoing battle against austerity and urged those present to join the fight against a £61 million budget cut this year in the city.

Socialist Party leaflets, placards and copies of the Socialist, as well as our new anti-trump badges were in high demand. After a wide range of speakers it was clear that those present were going away planning to continue to build the forces against Trump, against May and the Tories and against capitalism.

Gareth Bromhall, Swansea Socialist Students and Socialist Students national steering committee

Cardiff

Hundreds of people, including many young people of all backgrounds willing to stand up to Trump's racist, xenophobic, anti-working class agenda gathered at the protest in Cardiff. This included a number of school and university students enthusiastic about the idea of continuing the resistance and very willing to walk out on 'Day X'!

Joao Félix, Cardiff West Socialist Party

Newcastle

A clear class approach to the movement to resist Trumpism was offered by Socialist Party members at the Newcastle rally. We prominently placed our campaign stall near the metro entrance, sharing many discussions with people from very diverse backgrounds, stressing the necessity of a socialist alternative to Trumpism.

We sold many copies of the Socialist, and six people expressed an interest in joining the Socialist Party.

William Jarrett, Newcastle Socialist Party

Glasgow

250 attended the protest in Glasgow. Socialist Party Scotland sold 25 copies of the Socialist and there was lots of interest in our idea of walking out against Trump.

Matt Dobson from the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) spoke from the platform and called for walkouts and solidarity with [Jobstown Not Guilty](#).

Day X: build student walkouts when Trump comes to UK

What you can do:

- Text 'join' plus your name and school/college/uni to 07749379010
- Organise a meeting in your school/college/uni to start organising
- Use a 'pledge sheet' to collect names of people who are willing to walk out
- Create a WhatsApp group for people who want to take part
- Invite people to a 'Day X walkout' Facebook event
- Get in touch with Socialist Students for leaflets and posters - socialiststudents.org.uk

A world to win - give us the resources!

Ken Douglas, Socialist Party national treasurer

Members of the Socialist Party throughout England and Wales will be attending our upcoming congress to discuss political developments both in Britain and across the world.

It's a critical time to do so. The Tories are under pressure over the crisis in the health service. Trump's election has provoked mass protests among workers and young people worldwide. Railworkers have won significant victories on the Tube and [rejected the rotten Southern Rail deal](#).

Corrupt, capitalist politicians are using austerity to further enrich themselves and their big business backers. Trump isn't even bothering with politicians; he's just packed his cabinet with the richest business tycoons in the US.

That's why we link the fight against cuts to building a socialist movement. Our programme sets out the way forward for the working class - and we show in practice how we can win.

But it's not enough to have the correct ideas, we need resources. Our fighting fund has recently helped pay for a more modern and more efficient press - essential for the continued production of the thousands of leaflets, posters and pamphlets that ensure our ideas and programme are read on every protest, demo or strike.

Eight super-rich individuals now own more wealth than half the world's population. But it is the billions who have the power to get rid of the rich for good. This is the lesson that resonates down through the 100 years since the Russian revolution when the working class, with the support of the peasants, overthrew the mighty Tsar and then fought off the 21 armies of the world powers which tried to kill off the nascent workers' state.

That's why we will be having an appeal at our congress, asking our members and supporters if they can make a financial sacrifice to help build the Socialist Party. Can you make a donation of five, ten, £50, £100, or more? We can promise you that every penny will be spent on our struggle to change the world.

Socialist Party regional conference reports

West Midlands

78 members of the Socialist Party from across the West Midlands met in Birmingham on 18 February for a fantastic regional conference. The turnout and contributions reflected the growing strength and influence of the party across the region.

Hannah Sell, deputy general secretary, introduced the main political perspectives discussion that covered issues including Brexit, Jeremy Corbyn and the future of the Labour Party, the eruption of the movement against Trump, and the battle of the RMT against Southern Rail.

Sarah Wrack, editor of the Socialist, introduced an inspiring party building session. She highlighted the many opportunities to build socialist forces in the coming months.

Delegates reported on the development of our work in new areas and smaller towns, while a number of younger comrades highlighted the successful work in the youth and student field. The important role of the Socialist in building the party was also emphasised.

Commissions on populism, women and the Russian revolution, and the work of Izquierda Revolucionaria in Spain followed in the afternoon.

The conference finished with an inspiring report of the work of the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI - to which the Socialist Party is affiliated).

Over £1,800 was raised in the fighting fund collection, with one unemployed comrade donating £200.

A further £116 was raised in sales from an older comrade's donated book collection and over £150 from cake and badge sales!

Lenny Shail

East Midlands

"Well attended, interesting discussions and confident mood" was the description by one participant in the East Midlands regional conference held in Nottingham on 19 February.

Rob Williams from the Socialist Party executive committee was the first speaker in the morning discussion, the key themes of which were the volatility in political processes developing in Britain and the potential for working class struggles to develop.

A fighting fund appeal was made by Tom Hunt, a nurse and member of Mansfield branch, who explained how he was drawn to our party after experiencing the erosion of the health service under Labour and Tory governments. £320 was collected to add to the £60 raised by a raffle and selling food.

In the afternoon we broke into practical workshops followed by a session to discuss how we would build the party in our region in the next year.

This included the key role we have played in struggles, such as the 'save Glenfield Children's Heart Centre' campaign.

We rounded off an inspiring day with a reminder that we are part of a worldwide socialist movement with a brief report on the work of the CWI.

Steve Score

Yorkshire

Over 50 delegates attended our regional conference in Leeds on 19 February, and left regenerated on how to build the party.

General secretary Peter Taaffe started the day's discussion by speaking on world perspectives. On the USA he pointed to the lack of enthusiasm for both Clinton and Trump among American voters, with no real candidate to speak for the 99%.

Closer to home, Peter likened Europe to a "lake of petrol", with just a single match needed to ignite the flames of working class revolt. In this country, that match could be the NHS crisis.

Later, regional secretary Alistair Tice introduced a session on growing the party in Yorkshire, and opened the floor to discussing recruitment, integrating new members and selling the Socialist.

Peter closed the day with an update on the exciting merger of the two socialist international organisations - the CWI and Izquierda Revolucionaria in Spain and its affiliates.

A fighting fund appeal raised over £800, a fantastic achievement, and a contradiction to those that think that Yorkshire folk are tight with their money!

Matthew Hirst and Michaela Bower

Obituary: John Pickett - 1954-2017

Alison Hill

John Pickett, Socialist Party comrade and postal worker, has died very suddenly at the age of 63. I first met John in the early 1980s, just after he returned to Portsmouth after being at college in Stoke.

He and his brother Chris played a vital role in reinvigorating Militant (the Socialist Party's predecessor) in Portsmouth and paving the way for a victorious [battle against the Tory poll tax](#). He spoke at many public meetings, building the mass movement which destroyed Thatcher's political career.

John had an encyclopaedic knowledge of the Marxist classics and his contributions at branch meetings and discussion groups were invaluable. He always had a fresh and interesting way of explaining Marxist ideas. He recently wrote '[A Movement of Our Own](#)' about the early Labour Party, which is a gem of clarity and information.

John had many interests. He taught himself to play the piano after watching a TV masterclass. These were the days before You Tube so he had to get a bloke down the pub to show him the correct fingering!

He was an excellent chess player and was a member of the Royal Mail national team. He went to Hungary for an international competition.

He was fascinated by science, cricket and music of all kinds. He was modest and unassuming but an absolute stalwart of Marxism. He will be sorely missed.

Nick Chaffey adds:

John sold the Militant and its successor, the Socialist, to his workmates and sympathisers every week for decades. Active in the Communications Workers' Union he was a long standing delegate to Portsmouth TUC.

In 2009 John, along with the Portsmouth SP, actively supported the Vestas factory workers' occupation on the Isle of Wight, making regular visits to their evening rallies after a long day at work.

In the same year he took part in successful discussions with Portsmouth RMT transport union to build support for the left 'No2EU-Yes2Democracy' platform in the EU elections.

He also stood as a Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition candidate on several occasions in Fratton Ward, strengthening support for the idea of a new workers' party and our ties to the RMT.

Just recently he was pleased to bring his CWU rep from work to the Socialist Party branch to join in discussing Brexit, Corbyn and the fight for socialism.

- John's funeral is on 8 March at 10.15am at Portchester Crematorium, PO16 8NE

Wallasey Labour Party remains suspended despite collapse of allegations

The allegations of homophobic abuse, bullying and intimidation levelled by Angela Eagle and her anonymous and cowardly supporters against Wallasey constituency Labour party (CLP) have now collapsed due to the fact that there was absolutely no credible evidence. This comes on the back of a recent freedom of information request to Merseyside police which confirmed that the so called brickgate scandal was reported before Eagle had even announced her leadership challenge to Jeremy Corbyn. Despite this Wallasey CLP remains suspended and some Labour members are still currently under investigation by the Labour party machine.

Angela Eagle was presented by Labour party regional office as a candidate in 1992 and was not selected by local members. The full results of that selection meeting were never released to local members. Events of recent months have made it crystal clear that there is no prospect of compromise with the Blairites who control the Labour party machine. If and when Wallasey CLP is reinstated, moves should be made to instigate

a trigger ballot to enable the removal of Eagle and a candidate selected by the local party of their choosing. Eagle and her cronies have now been exposed and completely discredited. Another real scandal here is that there has been no mention of this within the local or national press. Back in June they were all falling over themselves to blame Corbyn's supporters.

Mark Hazlehurst, Wirral Socialist Party

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 14 February 2017 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

Worried about fake news? Start with Labour councils' budget lies

Robin Clapp, Socialist Party South West region

'Fake news' is in the headlines - and while Trump is the most obvious purveyor of what used to simply be called 'lies', the method is alive and well among Bristol's Labour councillors and mayor.

The Labour-controlled council is poised to unveil a budget that cuts another £101 million from essential services, reducing front-line provision to a brittle-boned skeletal state.

Libraries will close, £1 million will be taken from the 'local crisis and prevention fund', subsidies will be slashed further for buses, all local 'citizen service points' for council services will be closed, charges will rise for dementia care, and all but the most essential road maintenance will be stopped.

Cuts

Mayor Marvin Rees has taken to print bemoaning the scale of the cuts by blaming his independent predecessor for not chopping quickly enough during his four-year term. Rees complains that his foot dragging now necessitates Bristol playing catch-up with other local authorities.

So far, so predictable. But what's this? The Labour Party out on the streets distributing a leaflet headlined 'Fighting back - Labour opposing Tory cuts'!

Reading through this astonishingly brazen attempt to massage the facts, the leaflet finishes with a flourish by pinching the slogan of those who really fight back: "They say cut back. We say fight back."

If only this were true. In a corner of the leaflet, in tiny print, is the real position of our heroic mayor: "We have to balance our budget or we get taken over and the budget is balanced for us."

Not only factually untrue, but a capitulation to the idea that an effective fightback is impossible.

Several Green councillors have written to the Bristol and District Anti-Cuts Alliance professing their determination to vote against this budget, joining some Lib Dems who have opportunistically added their voices to the chorus of condemnation against such destructiveness.

But Labour councillors intend to line up behind the mayor, making a mockery of their professed anti-austerity stance. By your actions will you be judged, not by your glossy leaflets!

No doubt many Labour Party members feel deeply embarrassed by their council leaders' hypocrisy and double-speak. Several have spoken to us expressing their refusal to hand out this lying leaflet. And as the real battle against local government cuts hots up around the city, they no doubt will join with us in really fighting back.

The fake news peddlers who were responsible for writing such untruths about their real intentions will find the hot breath of Bristolians on their necks over the next stormy months. That we can say with truthful certainty.

Organise to reverse 28% rise in violence against retail workers

Leon Wheddon, Wirral Socialist Party

News that violence against shop workers has gone up by 28% in a year will come as no surprise to those who've worked in the industry. The British Retail Consortium reports that half of retail workers have been verbally abused, and over 8% assaulted.

With cuts to staffing levels, an increase in automation and increases in zero-hour contracts, many workers are alone and vulnerable at work. Some, often themselves desperate as a result of austerity, know this and use it as an opportunity to commit robberies. Hardened criminals can also take advantage, meaning more assaults, safe in the knowledge they stand little chance of being caught and prosecuted.

Shop-floor staff bear the brunt of everything as they are often the only visible person for a customer to vent on.

A staff member will be set unrealistic targets and threatened by managers determined to ring every ounce of profit from some of the most vulnerable and low-paid workers in Britain.

Often this happens in the so-called 'big four' supermarkets where 'the customer is always right' even if they are violent. We subsidise these multibillion-pound companies through tax credits to their poorly paid workers.

The Socialist Party says no to zero-hour contracts and exploitative conditions. We demand an end to bag and locker searches, of having to stand by unpaid while this indignity happens. We demand a minimum wage of £10 an hour regardless of age or employment status.

Everyone should have the right to work with dignity and without fear of abuse.

The Socialist Inbox

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.

FA foul

"We are making progress, albeit slowly. I intend to see that we continue to make progress." This is what Denis Howell MP said about the English Football Association (FA) in 1968.

And coincidentally, it's the year the FA still operates in. In fact, it could have been said by one of the MPs who [passed a vote of no confidence in the FA on 9 February](#) due to lack of reform.

The FA council, which runs the game, is mostly male, overwhelmingly old, and almost exclusively white. It makes the House of Lords look youthful and diverse by comparison.

Oxford and Cambridge universities get a place on the council each - the same representation as fans and players, who also just get one each. The PFA players' union gets no voice at all!

Not surprising then that despite a quarter of professional players being black, they rarely progress into management; the Asian community is barely represented in football at all; and women get so little funding.

Most of the English FA council are club bosses too, and despite Wales doing better at Euro 2016, [the Welsh FA chief in 2012 said football must be "run by businesspeople."](#) But what about those who love and know the sport and will be around long after the businessmen have moved on: the fans and players?

Football clubs and governing bodies should be democratically run under community ownership. They should be non-profit, with the election of all officials and coaches, subject to recall at any time.

Scott Jones, Loughton

Welfare win

A small victory in the courts recently against the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). I had been turned down at several stages for ESA (the very basic disability benefit).

At my tribunal hearing in central London, I was successful in disproving the conclusion of the 'work capability assessment' and had my opportunity to tell the judge (a semi-retired doctor) what was wrong with the whole disability benefits system.

I saw 'I, Daniel Blake' at a community cinema screening recently, and spoke passionately in the debate afterward, about my experiences and the political nature of this evil trick system they have invented. I highlighted the media demonisation of benefit claimants, especially the ill and disabled in programmes such as 'Benefits Street'.

I reminded the Labour do-gooders there that my Labour MP, Neil Coyle, had abstained on the vote for the Welfare 'Reform' Bill.

I said I wanted to see the DWP at my tribunal - to look them in the eye. But no representative was sent along. I am sure they will try and get me back, but it was a win on the day of my tribunal. Don't give up and get support before these ordeals - Disabled People Against Cuts is a great resource.

Gary Kandinsky, Southwark, south London

Brexit bust-up

[Derek Hatton's criticism of Jeremy Corbyn's proposed support for triggering Brexit](#) (Financial Times, 1 February) is off the mark. Corbyn is reflecting the majority Leave vote, which I supported on the basis that the EU is a pro-capitalist, pro-austerity institution.

Derek will remember that the Socialist Party campaigned for a socialist Brexit because EU directives oppose public ownership and enshrine privatisation. I remain implacably opposed to May's 'red, white and blue Brexit' as an attempt to offer more of the same.

Corbyn had the choice of voting against Brexit, thus ignoring the wish of the majority, or voting for it while demanding the interests of the working class be protected. Correctly, although imperfectly, he chose to do this.

Some Labour MPs are justifying their criticism of Corbyn by quoting the majority Remain vote in their own constituencies. It's a pity they didn't reflect the views of constituents when poll after poll showed support for the public ownership of rail, energy, and the whole of the NHS.

In or out of the EU the working class will still be faced with the most savage attack on the trade unions and social provision for a hundred years. That's why I will continue to support Corbyn, albeit with the call for him to go further in transforming Labour into a fighting, socialist party.

Tony Mulhearn, Liverpool

Web series review: Cooked - "How capitalism ruined eating"

Iain Dalton, Leeds Socialist Party

The title 'Cooked' doesn't exactly sound like essential political viewing. But in this adaptation of Michael Pollan's 2013 bestselling book of the same title, the author examines the contribution of cooking to human development and progress.

Still not sold on it? What makes Pollan far more insightful than many food writers is that he recognises the pressures on working people's time and energy, blaming these rather than individuals for poor eating habits.

In one episode, he comments on the impact of bread as a staple food, and how when prices soar, people - quite naturally - revolt against going hungry. He points to the role of this in relation to the French revolution and the Arab Spring.

The four-part series is broken down like the book into looking at the 'four elements' - fire, water, air and earth.

The first episode begins with Pollan drawing the same conclusion as Marx's co-philosopher Friedrich Engels in his essay ['The part played by labour in the transition from ape to man'](#). The discovery of fire, and its use to cook foods, especially meat, played a significant evolutionary role, limiting the amount of time our distant ancestors spent chewing, and opening up new possibilities for what they could consume.

Old and new

The first episode deals with open-fire cooking as the most basic form, subsequent episodes deal with pot cooking - only possible after the invention of pottery - baking, and fermentation.

Pollan is particularly critical of the modern food-processing system, pointing the blame at techniques big business has used to cut costs, which also drive nutrition out of food. He sees the development of fortified bread and other such foods as a farcical attempt to reinstate these nutrients.

As he comments: "This is how capitalism works. It creates a problem, and rather than fix it, it creates a new business around that problem."

Pollan's weakness is that he doesn't go beyond this criticism of prevailing society, into a class analysis that points towards an alternative way of running things.

Socialists in particular have always stood for a reduction in the working week without loss of pay by sharing out the work, and the implementation of new technology to ease lives. This, combined with a network of

affordable canteens and restaurants, would mean people could - like Pollan suggests is optimal - choose to cook for pleasure, rather than necessity.

Cooked is definitely recommended, as is the book the series is based upon, and [Pollan's 2011 book 'The Omnivore's Dilemma'](#).

- ['Cooked' is available on Netflix](#)
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<http://www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/24680>