

Whether a chaotic 'no-deal' crash out or further delay:

Corbyn must demand general election, defend workers' interests and fight for a socialist Brexit

It has been reported that politicians across Europe are glued to their TV screens watching the disaster movie unfolding in Westminster. "It is better than anything on Netflix", one former Polish president declared. A more common reaction of working-class people in Britain is to turn off the telly in anger and despair at the latest twist in the seemingly never-ending Brexit drama.

It is now a decade since the [MPs expenses scandal](#) erupted. Fury at MPs who represented the interests of the capitalist elite - while dipping their snouts in the expenses trough - has been enormously deepened by what followed: bank bailouts and growing wealth for a few at the top, combined with wage restraint and brutal austerity for the majority.

At root, the working-class [vote for Brexit in 2016 was a cry of rage](#) at the misery of the previous years. Now the farcical deadlock in parliament is once again fuelling a bitter mood of anger at the Westminster politicians. Latest polls show 39% of people blaming the Tory government for the mess, and another 39% blaming all the MPs.

Chaotic Brexit possible

As the Socialist goes to press, Theresa May is flying around Europe, trying to get agreement on an extension to Article 50 until the end of June. If no extension is agreed by Friday and no withdrawal agreement passed, then a chaotic 'no-deal' Brexit would take place.

This would inevitably result in economic dislocation for which the capitalist class would try to make working-class people pay. French President Macron has threatened to offer only a very short extension to 'prepare the markets' for such a scenario.

The workers' movement also urgently needs to prepare. Measures would include the trade unions and Jeremy Corbyn demanding that customs and border staff are given the authority to ensure essential supplies are delivered over luxury goods.

The trade unions should organise to fight to prevent workers being asked to pay for the crisis via unpaid overtime and increased workload. Companies threatening job losses should be made to open their books for inspection by elected trade union representatives and, where necessary, nationalisation under democratic workers' control and management.

While a chaotic Brexit is a real possibility, the majority of the EU's capitalist classes would rather avoid it, with its very disruptive consequences. It is more likely that they will agree to some form of extension, but insist that it is for longer than May is demanding.

She is justifying her short extension by arguing that the negotiations with Labour are likely to lead to a compromise proposal, but reports from both sides of the talks seem to indicate that she is deliberately exaggerating her prospects of success in order to try and keep the show on the road.

The Tory party was once one of the most successful capitalist parties on the planet, capable of long term strategic planning. Now, reflecting the crisis of British capitalism, May is reduced to stumbling from hour to hour - if not minute to minute - with no strategic goal other than preventing the complete implosion of her party for another day.

All her limited options, however, will lead to a further fracturing of the Conservative Party. A deal with Corbyn would outrage swathes of the Tories who, like Boris Johnson, denounce him as a 'Marxist'. So, however, would a longer extension of Article 50.

Accepting a 'no-deal', chaotic Brexit would please the Tory right, but horrify the Remain wing of the party and, more importantly, the vast majority of the capitalist class.

Given the intractable character of the deadlock, a Tory leadership contest followed by a general election, or even a snap election with May still as leader trying to push her deal through, could be on the agenda.

Undermining of enthusiasm

As millions of people across Britain despair at these parliamentary machinations, it feels a very long time since the [snap election of 2017](#). Yet May's difficulties in part stem from her lack of a parliamentary majority as a result of the surge in support for Jeremy Corbyn's Labour in that election. Over 3.5 million more people voted Labour in 2017 than in 2015 - including one million who had previously voted Ukip. They were enthused by Corbyn's election manifesto which they saw as standing for the working-class majority rather than the billionaires.

Unfortunately, that enthusiasm has now dimmed considerably. Corbyn and the left Labour leadership are not conveying a clear message to working-class voters above the parliamentary hubbub of the different strands of capitalist politicians. A central reason for this is their continued mistaken attempts to compromise with the pro-capitalist Blairite wing of Labour.

Corbyn's approach to the talks with May, for example, should have been to forcefully declare his own red lines - demanding the repeal of all anti-trade union legislation and all neoliberal pro-privatisation rules, for example, and refusing to countenance any deal which did not include agreement on these and other pro-working class measures. Instead, Labour sources around the Blairite shadow Brexit secretary Keir Starmer are reporting that they have shown their willingness to compromise by retreating on their opposition to [the EU's pro-privatisation and anti-state aid rules](#).

If a general election takes place, Corbyn will have an opportunity to repeat the 2017 election on a higher level, mobilising the accumulated anger of the majority at the existing order, and sweeping the Tories out of power.

This is not guaranteed, however. Inevitably the Tories would try to portray him as 'betraying the Brexit vote' and this could have an effect on sections of working-class voters. Preventing this is not primarily a question of what 'clever' parliamentary manoeuvres he conducts, but the need to urgently go beyond Westminster and to launch a mass struggle, together with the trade unions, for a general election and the coming to power of a Corbyn-led government with a socialist programme.

Socialist programme

Such a programme could use the [2017 programme as a starting point](#) but would also include, for example, reversing all cuts to council services, scrapping Universal Credit, and a pledge to nationalise Honda Swindon under democratic working-class control, along with any other companies who carry out closures and job cuts in the name of Brexit or otherwise.

This should be combined with nationalisation of the major corporations and banks to take the levers of power out of the hands of the capitalists, who will [inevitably attempt to sabotage a Corbyn government](#).

Linked with a [manifesto for a socialist Brexit](#), this approach would be able to enthuse the working class in Britain - both those who voted leave and remain - and make a very effective call for international solidarity with workers across Europe.

Local government in crisis: councillors can fight cuts!

Tom Baldwin, Socialist Party national committee

Local council services have been battered by austerity. The money councils receive from central government has been cut drastically year-on-year since the Tory-led coalition came to power in 2010. Almost half of councils - 168 - will receive no such funding this year.

Even some Conservatives have warned of the consequences. The chair of the Local Government Association, Tory lord Guy Porter, said: "Even if councils stopped filling in potholes maintaining parks and open spaces, closed all children's centres, libraries, museums, leisure centres, turned off every street light and shut all discretionary bus routes, they still would not have saved enough money to plug this gap by 2020."

Despite these protestations though, councils of all political stripes have dutifully passed on the cuts to local people. The results have been devastating.

One in six women's refuges have closed, leading to 1,000 women and children fleeing domestic abuse being turned away in just six months last year.

Hundreds of libraries have been shut in the last decade. Real-terms spending per person on roads and transport has been slashed by 40%. For housing the figure is a massive 48%.

Even statutory services, which are those the council are legally required to provide, have not escaped the axe.

Adult social care spending has been cut by 10%, meaning that a record one in seven older people now have care needs that are not being met.

Between 2010 and 2015 alone more than half a million council workers lost their jobs.

Hardest hit

Average figures mask the fact that the cuts have fallen far harder on the poorest areas which have the most need.

These are far more likely to be represented by Labour councils. Yet, without exception, they have been complicit in carrying out Tory cuts.

The funding crisis is so severe that it threatens the existence of local government as we know it. Tory-controlled [Northamptonshire council has essentially been bankrupted](#) and was ordered to stop all non-statutory spending. Others could be forced down the same road.

There is a desperate need for the cuts to be reversed and council funding restored.

However, the constant refrain from Labour councillors that we need to wait for a Labour government is used as a cover for their own inaction.

We cannot wait, the human cost of the cuts is too great. Council cuts must be fought in the here and now.

Up and down the country, people have fought valiant campaigns to save council jobs and services. For example, in Bristol mass pressure has saved council tax discounts for 25,000 of the city's poorest households. Meanwhile [plans to close libraries have been repeatedly thwarted](#).

In Birmingham, bin workers in Unite and home care workers in Unison have [repeatedly had to take strike action](#).

These were against job cuts, 'blacklisting' and changes to working conditions resulting in huge loss of pay being proposed by the vicious Blairite council.

Campaigners have a right to ask why they are having to fight these battles against their local councils, rather than with their support. This is particularly true of Labour with its anti-austerity national leadership.

Councils are not powerless in the face of this onslaught. Mass struggles are the key to defeating austerity. The working class has won nothing in the past without fighting for it.

The opposition we face has rarely been weaker. May's minority government hangs by a thread, paralysed by internal division on Brexit.

Isolated local victories in defence of services can be turned in to a far bigger reversal of cuts if campaigns are linked up in a coordinated series of protests and strikes.

Potential

A small glimpse of the potential for councils to help lead such a struggle was shown in Bristol in 2017 when [over 6,000 joined an anti-cuts demonstration](#) led by Labour Mayor Marvin Rees.

However, his administration had already announced it was to continue cutting, undermining people's faith that he was serious about opposing austerity.

Protests should not be an empty gesture but should be linked to a serious strategy to protect jobs and services.

The Socialist Party has consistently put forward such a strategy. It begins with a clear refusal to implement the cuts.

We stand in the tradition of [the Liverpool Labour council of the 1980s](#). They rejected the Thatcher government's plans for 'managed decline' of the city, refused to implement budgets which did not meet the needs of Liverpudlians and instead mobilised demonstrations and strikes involving tens of thousands.

They were able to win back millions in stolen funding and use it to tear down crumbling tenement blocks and replace them with thousands of good quality council homes.

Jobs and proper apprenticeships were created and council services like nurseries were improved, this is in stark contrast to the record of current Labour councils.

The political lead for that struggle was given by Militant, the forerunner of the Socialist Party.

Today councils have a legal requirement to pass balanced budgets, where all spending is covered. Councillors repeatedly cite this as justification for carrying out cuts.

They falsely claim that any no-cuts budget would be illegal and would result in elected councils being removed, with the government appointing officers to run local authorities instead.

Even if this were true, council leaders should explain why they think their jobs are more important than those of the thousands of people they have made redundant. If vicious cuts continue either way then it makes little difference who is in charge.

By cutting, councils are delivering a double whammy for the Tory government, who get what they want and get Labour to share the blame too.

This undermines Corbyn's popular anti-austerity message and his chances of becoming the next prime minister.

Liverpool city council

The Militant-led Liverpool council used the slogan "It's better to break the law than to break the poor", echoing the struggle of Poplar Council in East London in 1921.

However, it is not necessary to break the law today. No-cuts budgets can be entirely legal.

Councils hold large reserves of money which can be used to fill the gap left by lost government funding.

This means budgets can be legally balanced without the need for cuts. They also have the powers to supplement this by borrowing money cheaply if required.

This would be a short-term measure but would protect jobs and services while buying time for a powerful anti-cuts campaign to be built up.

Opponents accuse us of wanting to fritter away the money councils have saved for a rainy day. But the devastation of vital services unleashed by austerity constitutes a crisis and requires a response.

In fact, most councils have been forced to dip into reserves anyway as they struggle to find the level of cuts being asked of them.

That approach cannot last forever, reserves will be depleted without any means of replacing them, simply storing up more cuts for the future.

It is far better that reserves be used as part of a coherent anti-cuts plan of action. Mass struggles can win back the necessary funding for councils.

There is no accounting trickery alone that can avoid the need to mobilise people and take the fight to the government.

Reserves

[Research from the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition](#) shows the enormous wherewithal that councils have to protect services, if they had the political will to fight.

Between them, the 125 Labour-led councils in England, Scotland and Wales hold around £9.3 billion in general fund reserves and £4.9 billion in other useable reserves.

Their combined spending power of nearly £80 billion is greater than the GDP of nine EU countries! They should be using this clout to become bastions of opposition to Tory rule, not to meekly carry out austerity measures.

Every single Labour council had sufficient reserves to fund a no-cuts budget this year. There is nothing to stop them pooling reserves in a solidarity fund and linking up their struggles to be as effective as possible.

Simply put, [councils do have a choice](#). We need councillors who will choose to fight, not choose to cut.

That's why the Socialist Party will be putting up candidates in the local elections on 2 May - on the ballot paper as Socialist Alternative.

Our members campaign all year round to defend local services and we will be looking to take that approach into council chambers.

If elected, our candidates will take only an average workers' wage to ensure they stay in touch with their working-class constituents.

This is in direct contrast to mayoral wages which can go as high as £80k a year, protecting politicians from the impact of their own decisions and leaving them out of touch.

By raising a clear, anti-cuts strategy we can help give confidence to left Labour candidates to stand against the tide and to oppose cuts in deeds as well as words.

Our stand can also give strength to local campaigners, fighting tooth and nail to protect their services.

The Socialist Party has actively supported such campaigns and will carry on fighting during and after the elections.

We don't just want your votes. If you want councillors who are willing to put their money where their mouth is and fight the cuts, then get in touch and help us campaign.

Organise against climate change, austerity and capitalism

Build a socialist fightback

- Build student unions in schools and colleges to democratically organise our movement. Defend the right to protest
- For urgent, massive investment into safe forms of renewable energy. Massively step up research on green energy, waste reduction and energy saving technologies
- Organise to spread the movement to all the young people effected by climate catastrophe, low pay and austerity. Link up with workers and trade unions
- May and the Tories are incapable of offering us a future. Our movement must organise mass action for a general election now!
- Take our world out of the hands of the 1%. Nationalise energy provision, privatised utilities and public transport under democratic workers' control
- Fight for a democratic and socialist plan of production based on the needs of the people and the environment!

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Only socialism can stop capitalism's plastic problem

Lily Branchett, Derby Socialist Party

Marine plastic pollution costs the world up to £1.9 trillion a year, a report published in the Marine Pollution Bulletin suggests. There is a 1-5% decline in the benefit humans can gain from the ocean.

This study, the first of its kind, assessed the economic and social impact of marine pollution. It shows that the negative impact pollution has is often underestimated.

But what this study does not show, however, is the threat posed to marine life or human health by the eight million tonnes of plastic that enters our oceans every year.

The report makes it clear that the situation cannot continue and something urgent must be done to protect our oceans and reduce pollution. Plastic pollution is one of the biggest environmental threats we face. It can enter the stomachs of marine wildlife, either choking or killing them, or enter the human food chain if swallowed by wildlife that people consume.

Following public outrage on this issue, the government has attempted to grab headlines with small measures to supposedly address the problem. For example, there is a plan to ban single-use plastic straws in the UK.

However, small steps such as this, and governments encouraging individuals to recycle will not be enough to tackle this huge threat. Under capitalism, corporations will always seek the cheapest and most profitable option in production.

Economic environmentalist Nicola Beaumont states: "Recycling a ton of plastic costs us hundreds, against the cost of thousands if we let it into the marine environment."

But big capitalist companies see only short-term profit, and not the big picture. In many cases, it is still cheaper to produce new plastic rather than recycle existing plastic products. In a system that puts profit over people, the capitalists will always prefer this option.

Only 56% of plastic produced is currently recyclable. A democratic, socialist planned economy - where nationalised industries are under workers' control, and production is taken out the hands of the capitalists - could produce sustainable and environmentally safe materials.

The [worldwide climate strikes](#) show that young people understand the massive threat posed to the environment by pollution and climate change. There is an urgent need for mass action to demand change that goes far further than what capitalist governments have proposed so far.

To escalate the climate strike movement, Socialist Students says student unions should be set up in schools and colleges to democratically organise the next steps.

Students on strike can link up with the trade unions, which represent more than six million workers. Through strike action, the working class has the power to bring society to a halt.

To really protect the environment, we need to radically change the system and fight for a socialist transformation of society.

- Get your copy of 'Against climate, austerity and capitalism: Build a socialist fightback', produced by young Socialist Party members, at the 12 April climate protests
- Go to socialiststudents.org.uk for more on the climate strikes
- Read '[Plastic waste - capitalism's Frankenstein monster: Only socialist planning on an international scale can protect the environment](#)'
- 'Planning for the Planet: How Socialism Could Save the Environment' is available for £10 plus postage at leftbooks.co.uk or half-price as an e-book

Algeria: Bouteflika is finished but the Algerian revolution is not!

Amar Benhamouche, Gauche Révolutionnaire (CWI France)

Bouteflika, the hated president of Algeria is gone! But the Algerian people are by no means giving up their struggle.

This is despite the way the regime is constantly taunting the demonstrators, trying to frighten them and spread false information to tarnish the image of the movement. But it is because the regime is afraid.

The protests are everywhere - in the universities where struggle committees have been set up and where the strike has restarted after the return from spring holidays; in the factories where strikes have been breaking out; in the towns and villages where women, teachers, lawyers, doctors and journalists and [the whole of society is mobilising to express the desire for real change](#).

The massive Friday demonstrations are still just as massive - from Algiers to Oran, from Annaba to Constantine or Bejaia.

The uprising has gathered momentum in every section of society and in every age category - men and women, young and old, workers and the unemployed.

The regime is desperately searching for a way to hang on to power or at least to find a safe exit to avoid the worst of scenarios.

It hasn't stopped thinking about this since the beginning of this massive opposition movement.

The regime has played many cards, including now forcing puppet-president Abdelaziz Bouteflika to resign on 2 April.

He was pushed into this by the army and its top general Gaid Salah. The Algerian military establishment, which has orchestrated every coup since independence in 1962, is trying to get power back into its hands.

A council which includes key figures in the regime has been nominated and charged with overseeing a 90-day official period before the coming presidential election, determined not to allow power to fall into the hands of the people.

The force of the revolutionary movement in Algeria is similar to that of the first weeks of [revolutionary struggle in Egypt and in Tunisia during the Arab Spring](#), when all the provocations aimed at dividing the struggle were pushed back by the determination of the masses.

Growing movement

The movement can and must grow. The parties of the pseudo opposition are discussing behind the backs of the people, including with former leaders of the Islamic party which sustained the terrorist groups of the 1990s. Workers' representatives must entertain no idea of entering into such coalitions.

The autonomous trade union federation, which is relatively small, but which organises certain trade unions that are independent of the regime, has called for a general strike against the interim Bedoui government for 10 April.

There is a need for the rank-and-file unions of the major federation, the UGTA, some of whom have already agreed to support the movement, to also call for action and for the regime to be chased out - and for action against all the companies in which so many 'little Bouteflikas' reign.

Struggle committees must develop everywhere - from the universities to the factories, in the neighbourhoods and the villages - and discuss all the demands.

These include improved conditions of work - equality for all - women and men, and so on. Representatives should be elected to go to coordinating committees at all levels up to national level.

The clique in power and the different clans at the heart of the army have been sharing out Algeria's wealth in cahoots with the multinationals and the imperialists.

There will be no democracy in Algeria as long as these robbers at the service of capitalism hang on to power.

Only a government of the working class and youth, coming out of the revolutionary movement, could realise the desire of an Algeria that is democratic and free, where people have equality and where the natural resources and the workplaces are in public ownership - not in the hands of business men who enrich themselves off the backs of the people.

Run by working people, this would allow real development of the country and the regions and would provide employment for all.

This is the real socialism that the current revolutionary movement could build if it holds to its aim of getting rid of the whole regime.

China: police state in Xinjiang under global spotlight

chinaworker.info (CWI China)

There is a new-found indignation from the US and other governments over China's repression of its Muslim minorities.

After decades of silence, governments in Washington, Berlin, London, Ottawa and elsewhere have woken up to the brutal repression against China's ten million Uighur Muslims in the far west region of Xinjiang.

Reports, denied by the Chinese dictatorship, of up to two million Uighurs interned in prison camps as part of a "deradicalisation" campaign by the Chinese authorities have been condemned.

Officials from the Trump administration (which infamously tried to ban travellers from seven Muslim-majority countries from traveling to the US) have recently threatened sanctions, such as travel bans and the freezing of bank assets.

US vice-president Mike Pence, who has emerged as the Trump administration's foremost 'China-basher', has accused the Chinese regime of trying to "strangle Uighur culture and stamp out the Muslim faith" alongside other issues such as economic "cheating" and using "debt trap diplomacy" through its huge 'Belt and Road Initiative'.

The latter items reveal more clearly US capitalism's real agenda - which is not to improve the conditions of the Uighurs, or other oppressed peoples, but to push back in every possible way against China's growing economic and geopolitical muscle.

Pressure

This pressure is clearly having an effect in Beijing against the background of [Trump's trade war](#) and a parallel tech war aimed at excluding Chinese telecom giant Huawei from Western markets.

At the recent twin sessions of China's rubber stamp parliament, the NPC and its advisory body, the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, a senior Xinjiang official announced that the camps, described as "vocational schools", would be phased out once they have outlived their usefulness.

Few people believe this statement, which is just an attempt to throw dust in the eyes of media and foreign diplomats.

In another attempt to blunt the US-led Xinjiang offensive, China invited representatives of European governments based in Beijing to join an inspection tour of Xinjiang.

US officials immediately blasted this offer and warned the tour would be "highly choreographed and chaperoned".

Socialists condemn the Chinese regime's large-scale repression in Xinjiang and support full democratic rights for the Uighurs and other nationalities in respect of language, culture, religion and political freedoms.

This, in our opinion, can only be won through mass struggle that links up with the working class throughout China and beyond its borders, aiming to overthrow capitalism and authoritarianism with a socialist alternative.

But we warn there should be no trust in, or support for, Western capitalist governments that have only recently taken up the plight of the Uighurs, Tibetans, Hong Kongers and other minorities under Chinese rule.

This is all political camouflage for an increasingly ruthless strategic struggle against the Chinese regime for economic and geopolitical advantage.

The repression is a stark warning to the workers' movement in China, and the left, of the repressive trajectory of the dictatorship under Xi Jinping.

Xinjiang, half the size of India, is China's main energy-producing region and a launch pad for Xi's Belt and Road Initiative into Central Asia and the Middle East.

It is also the regime's number one testing ground for repression, combining a full-scale military crackdown with the latest hi-tech surveillance and monitoring systems.

During the Mao era there were some progressive policies, including an increase in educational resources for non-Han ethnic groups like the Turkic-speaking Uighurs.

But today, Uighurs and other Muslims are treated as second-class citizens and openly discriminated against.

This was long the case in the labour market and education system, but now their lifestyle, culture and religious customs are the target of a severe crackdown in the name of fighting terrorism, despite the fact that freedom of religion is written into China's constitution.

Fasting, refusing alcohol, "abnormal" beards, going to the mosque other than on a Friday, are all branded as "extremist behaviour" by the authorities. 29 "extreme Islamic" names are banned for newborn children, including Mohammed.

Decades of suppression

For decades, and especially since ethnic riots in 2009, Xinjiang has seen numerous campaigns launched from Beijing, with the aim of suppressing nationalism, and more recently terrorism and 'religious extremism'.

Xinjiang's security budget has increased ten-fold from 2007 to 2017. Since 2016, this process has gone into overdrive with the appointment of hardline Communist Party leader Chen Quanguo to run the territory.

More than 7,000 'convenience' police stations have been built across Xinjiang to support a 'grid-management system' of surveillance and control, with cities divided into squares encompassing around 500 people, each served by a police station.

Including low-paid auxiliary officers, police numbers have exploded since Chen took control. Last year alone, an additional 32,000 police officers were recruited.

Chen, whose previous posting was Tibet, was sent to pacify Xinjiang. But these policies will reap a whirlwind of hatred and resentment towards the Chinese state.

This will enormously complicate Beijing's Belt and Road initiative plan, in which Muslim-majority countries make up 40%, and will of course be exploited by US imperialism and right-wing politicians in other countries.

The mass incarceration and indoctrination campaign ("transformation through education") has led to hundreds of thousands of Uighurs and other Muslims being held in camps.

Viewing foreign websites, receiving phone calls from abroad, praying regularly, or growing a beard, are all 'suspicious activities' that could result in detention. The construction of new camps has surged since early 2017.

Inmates are made to participate in drills and self-criticism sessions, watch propaganda videos and sing patriotic songs especially praising Xi Jinping.

Those who denounce religion, their own family and friends or fellow inmates, are rewarded, while the less cooperative are punished.

Rather than create 'stability', the construction of an unprecedented racist police state in Xinjiang amounts to a political time bomb. But the fightback needs a strategy and programme to go forward.

The methods of terrorism, which may have attracted a small minority of desperate Uighur youth in the past, have been shown to be a dead end.

These methods have always and everywhere handed a propaganda gift to oppressive regimes, allowing them to increase repression and sow confusion among the mass of the working class - the only force that can achieve real change.

The struggle of oppressed minorities also needs a strategy to win the solidarity of the working class and youth of the dominant ethnic group, who also suffer extreme exploitation, a precarious economic existence, and the crushing of democratic rights.

Socialists stress the need to oppose racism and religious persecution by building a united movement of workers and youth of all ethnic groups against capitalism and authoritarian rule.

- [See full article at socialistworld.net](http://socialistworld.net)
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'Brexishambles': we're sick of it!

Boot out the Tories - end austerity

Caroline Vincent, Leicester Socialist Party

Theresa May's 'Brexishambles' keeps rolling on. And we're sick of it!

How many more extensions can she possibly request from Brussels? How many times can she present new versions of a dismal, anti-working-class, bosses' Brexit deal for a parliamentary vote?

Could the Tories be more split, splintered, weak and wobbly? How on earth are they still in government, and is there a way out of this mess?

We're not just sick of Brexit chaos. We're sick of suffering years of austerity, increasing inequality and poverty.

Some in the Labour Party - particularly the Blairite right - are pointing to the idea of a 'People's Vote', or second referendum, as the solution.

But we say a real people's vote would be a general election. A Corbyn-led government, if elected with bold socialist policies, could point a way out of this mayhem on the basis of an end to austerity.

He should be loudly voicing this call, mobilising working-class people behind it, and linking up with the trade unions to build a mass movement to kick the Tories out.

If elected, a Corbyn-led government should seek to re-open the Brexit negotiations - with the central aim of defending and advancing the interests of workers, not the capitalists.

This would mean appealing to working-class people across the continent also engaged in the struggle against austerity. It would mean posing an alternative to the EU bosses' club - a new collaboration of the peoples of Europe, on a socialist basis.

Because membership of the EU hasn't stopped our living standards being brutally ground down in the past ten years. Who cares what colour your passport is when you can only dream of being able to afford to go on holiday?

Homelessness has risen dramatically. Public services have been cut to the bone. Young people are facing worse prospects than their parents.

Universal Credit has brought misery to benefit claimants, forcing people into debt, rent arrears and hunger.

Precarious jobs, zero-hour contracts, and poverty pay mean that many workers rely on food banks. Shockingly, one-third of children from working families are living in poverty.

The NHS is understaffed and underfunded, stretched to breaking point as a result of years of cuts and privatisation.

We want a way out of the mess! We want secure jobs, an end to zero-hour contracts. We want wages and benefits that we can live on - a minimum wage of £10 an hour as a step towards a real living wage.

We want affordable housing - a mass council house building programme is urgently needed. We want an end to privatisation in the NHS, and for our health to be put before profits.

We want a fightback! We need socialist change. [Kick out the Tories and end this shambles now!](#)

Budget deficits. Cancer service privatisation. Vacant posts. 100,000 outsourced. And victories!

Stop Tory NHS destruction

Lucy Nuttall, Hull Socialist Party

The NHS is suffering an unprecedented crisis, under the pressure of government cutbacks.

The Tory policy, until recently, of limiting the NHS to annual budget rises of just 1% since 2010 - while private PFI debts have rocketed, and despite an increasing elderly population requiring care - has pushed many hospitals into financial meltdown.

King's College hospital trust in London has reported an annual deficit between £180 and £191 million. "The biggest overspend in NHS history", according to the Guardian. The NHS as a whole had a £960 million deficit in 2018.

Is it any coincidence that among the backdrop of a failing NHS, life expectancy has stopped increasing, with many working-class areas even showing a decrease?

The real reason the NHS is failing is because profit-hungry Tories refuse to provide adequate funding, continue to privatise, and make the recruitment of enough staff impossible.

There are 39,148 vacant nursing posts in the UK, thanks to the introduction of tuition fees and scrapping of bursaries for student nurses.

Opposition

However, in response to these cuts, all around the country, inspiring campaigns continue to fight. In Oxford, huge public opposition and a 10,000-strong petition has put a temporary stopgap in plans to privatise cancer scanning services.

Even Oxford NHS bosses have warned privatisation could mean an 'inferior service'. This truly could be a matter of life or death.

NHS privatisation doesn't just affect patients, but staff too. 100,000 low-paid cleaners, porters, catering staff [and security guards](#) - employed by private contractors in hospitals, and therefore not entitled to NHS wages - are suffering from an increasing pay divide compared to their public sector colleagues.

This has been successfully fought against at Liverpool Women's Hospital. In a heroic strike, low-paid, privately employed workers won the same minimum wage paid to NHS employees, as well as the same rates for unsociable hours, overtime and weekends.

The [creation of the NHS was an immense victory](#) for the entire working class. It needs to be fought for, defended, and built upon - not just by health unions, but by the trade union movement as a whole.

We need mass demonstrations, building support for coordinated strike action, to kick out the Tories and reverse public sector cuts.

The Socialist Party fights for a reversal of all cuts and privatisation. A minimum wage of at least £10 an hour and a trade union struggle to win a real living wage. And a fully funded, publicly owned, democratically run, free NHS, accessible to all.

The fundamental truth is that under capitalism - a system based upon the ruling elites' pursuit of profit at any cost, even at the expense of human lives - we will never have a truly fair society. We need to fight for a socialist society that is run in the interests of everyone, not just a tiny rich minority.

Gender pay gap widening: trade union struggle needed to win decent pay for all

Karen Seymour, Mansfield Socialist Party

From 6 April, companies with more than 250 employees are required to disclose their gender pay gap.

The BBC reports that among the large firms with the biggest increases in pay gaps were garage chain Kwik Fit, car retailer Inchcape, and Interserve FS, part of Interserve Group, which leaches off the public sector.

Some companies have failed to respond to the government's request for this data. It is a sign of how seriously, or not, the Tories take the issue that there is no definitive list of companies required to file figures!

Every sector pays men more on average, from construction to manufacturing.

It isn't just businesses that are failing to do anything about gender pay. The Guardian reports that in some civil service departments, the problem is getting worse!

Paying women less than men for the same work has been against the law since the 1970 Equal Pay Act.

Of course, the biggest pay gap is between bosses and workers. FTSE 100 chiefs earn 133 times more than the average UK worker.

And the gap is increasing. Iain Conn, chief executive of Centrica that owns British Gas, just got a 44% pay rise to £2.4 million.

What the Socialist Party demands is that trade unions take a lead in fighting for public investment in well-paid jobs for all, with trade union rights for every worker.

Public sector union Unison led a [48-hour strike of 8,000 women council workers](#) in Glasgow that won £500 million, which had been stolen in unequal pay deals. 600 mainly male refuse workers took unofficial strike action in support of them.

The soaring cost of childcare also disproportionately affects women. It's a scandal that some families pay out more in childcare costs than they do in mortgage repayments!

Many childcare providers have struggled to provide promised free childcare due to insufficient government subsidy. Some providers have gone out of business.

The Socialist Party calls for high-quality, publicly funded, free or affordable childcare for all.

We say open the books of big business, to find out where the wealth created by workers is really going! Public ownership, under democratic workers' control and management, is the strongest foundation for tackling gender pay and all other workplace issues.

We need to replace failed capitalism with a democratic socialist plan to provide for all. Only then can equality be assured.

- 'It doesn't have to be like this: Women and the struggle for socialism' just £6 plus postage [at leftbooks.co.uk](http://leftbooks.co.uk)

Them & us

Worried about socialism?

The chief executive of the USA's biggest bank, JP Morgan, has attacked socialism.

Jamie Dimon was paid \$31 million in 2018. Forbes magazine estimates his wealth at \$1.3 billion.

Dimon doesn't mind bank bailouts - socialism for the rich. JP Morgan got \$25 billion during the 2008 financial crash.

Fellow billionaire Ray Dalio is worried about capitalism's wealth inequality. He described it as "an existential risk for the US." No wonder they're worried about socialism.

Bills, bills and more bills

The cost of UK benefits, not including pensioners, is £100 billion. Most of this is spent on in-work benefits.

The government tried to save £1.2 billion forcing people who couldn't work off benefits. The former chair of the work and pensions committee, a wheelchair user, said the Tories were "tightening these descriptors to make sure fewer people get the benefit."

However, the National Audit Office say the government has failed to lower the number of disabled people out of work.

Meanwhile, for ten million workers in the UK the cost of contributing to their auto-enrolled pensions is increasing. And if you can't afford the rise, the bosses will stop paying in too. Council tax, prescription

charges, TV licence, gas, electricity, and water bills are also going up.

The cost-of-living hikes should be immediately frozen. And we need a trade union struggle for wages and benefits that genuinely reflect the cost of living - starting with a £10-an-hour minimum wage and a 50% rise in the state pension.

The utility giants should be nationalised with workers' control. And let's open the books, to see what these companies can really afford.

No money for art courses, but plenty for art pieces

Cambridge University leads the way as the university that spends the most on works of art - £1.6 million in 2018. But, in February, the elitist club of top universities - the Russell Group - were pleading poverty and promising cuts to arts courses if tuition fees were lowered.

The Socialist Party fights for free, publicly funded education for all. This should include full funding for arts and humanities, and access to such courses for working-class young people, not just sons and daughters of the rich.

- See ['Top unis threaten cuts if tuition fees fall'](#)

Agency austerity

Local councils are pursuing austerity, privatisation and in 2017-2018 gave £335 million to private companies for agency social workers.

The Socialist Party says councils should refuse to pass on Tory cuts, pass no-cuts budgets, and bring privatised and agency workers back in-house.

PCS union: vote Yes for action, back socialists in the union elections!

Marion Lloyd, PCS national executive committee (personal capacity)

Socialist Party member Chris Baugh is standing for re-election as assistant general secretary (AGS) of civil service union PCS. He is the candidate of the union's broad left group, Left Unity.

Socialist Party members Marion Lloyd and Dave Semple are also standing for re-election to the PCS national executive committee (NEC).

Ballot papers for these elections will be sent out on 16 April. Voting closes on 9 May.

Nominations for AGS and the 2019-20 NEC indicate continued support for the current Left Unity (Democracy Alliance) PCS leadership. Chris received 85 nominations from PCS branches - more than the two other candidates combined.

We must now work to turn these nominations into votes. The period ahead is vital for preparations for these elections.

- Branch committees should meet to agree recommendations to members - Chris Baugh for AGS, and for the Democracy Alliance slate
- Branches should prepare plans for leafleting their own members, and adjacent branches where there is no Left Unity presence

- Branch membership records should be prepared and arrangements made for reps to contact members when the ballot starts, to encourage them to use their vote, and to vote for Chris Baugh as AGS and the Democracy Alliance slate

The Easter break will eat away at the time available to prepare for the ballot. Preparations should start now if they haven't already.

It is crucial that we [elect a leadership prepared to stand up to the many challenges we face](#). Re-electing Chris Baugh as AGS is vital to ensure the strongest team possible to fight the Tories and the attacks PCS members face.

Immediate among these challenges is the [campaign for the union's pay demands](#), of a fully funded 10% increase (or at least £2,400), with a return to central bargaining. A statutory ballot for action to support these demands started on 18 March and ends on 29 April.

A Yes vote for our claim and support for action will enormously strengthen our position in negotiations with the government. But let's not kid ourselves - talk alone is not likely to move the government.

We need a serious and militant programme of strike action, centred on escalating national strikes and supplemented with action targeted in departments that can hurt the Tory government.

This would also give members the confidence to fight attacks on the compensation scheme, on our pension rights, and against office closures and job cuts - like the [strike taking place to save Ealing tax office](#).

The NEC must immediately develop and implement plans for strikes and other actions on a scale that will force the government to take our demands seriously.

The Tory government hangs by a thread. A huge Yes vote and a serious programme of strikes and other action can force them to pay up.

- Vote yes in the pay ballot
- Vote Chris Baugh for AGS
- Vote Democracy Alliance for the national executive committee

PCS members at the HM Revenue and Customs tax office in Ealing, west London, are on strike again from 10 to 12 April. We express full solidarity and will see them on the picket lines. Report to follow in the next Socialist.

National Education Union conference 2019

NEU: organise for the key battles to come

James Kerr, NEU Lewisham branch (personal capacity)

The national delegate conference of the National Education Union (NEU) will take place in Liverpool on 15-18 April. It is the first of its kind after the amalgamation of the National Union of Teachers and the Association of Teachers and Lecturers.

The combined union becomes the fourth biggest in the Trade Union Congress, and the largest education union in Europe. It has huge potential to command an authoritative position in the education sector. But only if that latent power is harnessed and unleashed with a clear strategy to win, something that has been lacking from our leadership in the past period.

Education is in a deep crisis. Funding cuts have decimated schools. Teacher workload continues to drive thousands out of the profession. And the testing culture is fuelling a mental health crisis among both young

people and school workers, with increasing pressure because of performance-related pay.

In the ten years I've worked in London schools, I've never seen the levels of mental distress anywhere near where they are currently. A national fightback is urgently needed.

[Last year's NEU conference \(NUT section\)](#) passed an amendment moved by Socialist Party teachers to commit to a campaign of industrial action - for a 5% pay rise for all, an end to performance-related pay, and a limit to teacher working hours.

But the September meeting of the union's executive voted to limit the demand for a pay increase to only those on higher pay bands, leaving younger teachers no better off, and to shift the focus to a broader campaign on funding. We need to learn the lessons from that tactical decision, and make sure what's agreed by conference is taken forward this year.

The 2019 conference will provide opportunities for action on pay. There will be discussions to begin to develop policy around workload, against primary-age testing, on curriculum and pedagogy, and more.

Socialist Party teachers will be moving important amendments on teacher pay and support for [school students taking action on climate change](#). We will be speaking on many other motions.

Delegates will hear from Jeremy Corbyn, and will be keen to hear clearer positions against privately run 'academies', on a national education service, and anti-trade union legislation.

Teachers all over the world are rising up against similar pressures. We need to ensure that our new union is ready to lead us forward. A full report of conference will follow in a future issue of the Socialist.

Swindon workers discuss action to save Honda jobs

Tom Baldwin, South West Socialist Party organiser

Honda union rep Donald McDougall advised workers not to look to 'the union' to save them: the union is made of its members, and it's the members who need to stand together in action to save their jobs.

A meeting on 4 April called by the National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) followed the [demonstration to save Honda jobs in Swindon](#). The meeting was addressed by Unite union shop steward Donald, and NSSN chair Rob Williams.

We discussed the way forward for the Honda campaign and how other workers could support it. All those in attendance agreed the demonstration had been a good start, raising the confidence of workers in the plant and helping build support from others in the town.

Honda plans to close its Swindon factory in 2021, with the loss of 3,500 direct jobs and up to 15,000 in the supply chain. Donald explained that - although the plant is still profitable - the company is unwilling to put in the necessary investment.

The loyal and skilled workers in Swindon will be the ones to pay the price for this decision. Donald described the knock-on effect of how losing well-paid Honda jobs would push down other wages locally.

One of those attending the meeting was a shop steward at a component manufacturing plant in Oxford which supplies Honda, indicating how far and wide the effects of the factory's closure would be felt.

Rob gave the example of [factory occupations by Visteon workers](#) ten years ago, which had won tens of millions of pounds for workers from parent company Ford. He said that industrial action may be necessary, alongside the 'leverage' campaign that Unite is planning to put pressure on the company. For example, action may be needed to stop machinery being removed from the factory floor.

Donald described how the stewards had built the union at Honda from scratch, and the victories they had won in the past. This included the [reinstatement of factory convener Paddy Brennan](#) who had been facing dismissal on trumped-up charges.

The meeting once again reflected that there is a willingness to fight. Nothing is guaranteed, and the plant can still be saved.

NSSN 2019 conference

Saturday 6 July 11am-4.30pm

Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1R 4RL

shopstewards.net

Southampton Hospital security workers strike against unsafe work

Nick Chaffey, Southern Socialist Party secretary

Southampton General Hospital security staff, employed by outsourcer Mitie and organised by general union Unite, struck on 8 April in a dispute over safety.

The workers lack sufficient 'personal protective equipment' (PPE). For months they have sustained serious injuries, and found no support from either the hospital trust or Mitie.

Exposing the reality of privatisation, trust bosses say it is not their responsibility, and Mitie bosses say the contract bid doesn't cover the costs of PPE. So it's the workers who pay for NHS cuts and private profits.

On top of this, Mitie workers get lower wages and worse sick cover. With 11,000 workers at Southampton General Hospital, security staff are asking: why can't the 20 of them be employed directly by the trust, on NHS pay and conditions?

Mitie makes handsome profits that could ensure its workers are safe and properly equipped, but won't. Fat-cat bosses have got rich on the back of public sector sell-offs under both Tory and Blairite governments.

The outsourcing of public services to private monopolies is facing a crisis after [the collapse of Carillion](#) and similar problems at Interserve.

No wonder these workers are demanding the renationalisation of their jobs. And no wonder Jeremy Corbyn's call to fully fund the NHS, stop outsourcing and expand public ownership gets so much support.

With millions experiencing the effects of privatisation, this strike shows the way forward in how to restore decent pay and working conditions.

This is not the first picket line at Southampton General Hospital. In recent years, cleaners, junior doctors, midwives and radiographers have all struck.

A united campaign of health workers, backed by patients and the wider trade union movement, can be a decisive part of the movement needed for an immediate general election, an end to austerity, and a Corbyn-led government to start restoring the NHS and trade union rights.

- Messages of support to scott.kemp@unitetheunion.org
-

Support the Glasgow Airport pay and pensions strike

Socialist Party Scotland

Unite union members at Glasgow Airport are to strike for 24 hours from 4am on 16 April to 4am on 17 April. Hundreds of airport workers voted 95% for industrial action, on a 75% turnout.

There is further action planned over the spring and summer. Socialist Party Scotland gives full solidarity and support.

Correctly there is a programme of strike action and an overtime ban up until October to respond to massive attacks by bosses at owner AGS Airports.

A paltry 1.8% pay 'rise' offer, really representing a cut, is combined with the closure of the final-salary pension scheme.

Workers at Aberdeen Airport, also owned by AGS, are being balloted over attacks on pensions and pay. Unite should coordinate the action, and look at involving AGS workers at Southampton Airport.

AGS bosses clearly want a 'race to the bottom' in pay and conditions. We fight for a socialist alternative, where the top 150 companies and banks, along with key infrastructure such as aviation, are brought into public ownership under democratic management by the working class...

- Read the full story at socialistpartyscotland.org.uk

London Overground cleaners strike for better pay

Socialist Party members supported low-paid workers employed by private company Vinci on the London Overground. Members of transport union RMT struck on 5 April - fighting for the London Living Wage and more, because even that is not enough!

Leicester Socialist Party appeal letter: sign up to a no-cuts budget position

Socialist Party mayoral candidate in Leicester, Steve Score, has written to candidates in the council and mayoral election on 2 May to ask if they would be prepared to support a no-cuts budget. The letter shows how this is possible. Every Socialist Party candidate supports it. We believe there are also some left Labour candidates who agree with it, we hope they will they publicly support it.

Around 40 Socialist Party candidates are contesting this year's council elections in England under the electoral name of Socialist Alternative.

Dear candidate,

The government has drastically slashed the funding it gives to councils. Leicester City Council's figures show a decrease in government grants from £289 million in 2010 to £171million in 2019. This is at a time when social care costs have risen significantly. Leicester's Labour council and executive mayor have complied with these cuts.

With more cuts planned by the council it will mean a [62% cut in services](#) over ten years (excluding social care).

This cannot go on! These cuts have particularly hit the most vulnerable. When homelessness is rocketing, hostels and homelessness services have been cut and council house building has been almost non-existent.

When there has been a dramatic rise in people being forced to go to foodbanks, often because of cuts in benefits, welfare rights services are being cut. Cuts have been made to youth services, children's centres, voluntary services, libraries, community centres and many other services.

We believe there has to be resistance. It is [possible to set a legal no-cuts budget](#), using reserves and prudential borrowing powers.

The council has a "managed reserves strategy" which has effectively meant cutting spending by more than necessary to balance the budget in previous years in order to partially reduce the level of cuts in later years. Under current plans this will be gone by 2020.

But it also has "earmarked reserves" of £166 million. Of these some £35 million is "ringfenced" for purposes such as health and education spending. But some of the remaining £131 million could be used to prevent cuts while maintaining a balanced budget.

Clearly this strategy can only be temporary. What is key is that it would buy time in order to build a massive campaign to force extra funding from the government. If the council led a campaign that went to the people of Leicester to ask their support to defend local services, and went to the council workforce to ask for their support to defend jobs and conditions, a huge groundswell could be created.

The [campaign to save the Glenfield Children's Heart Centre](#) was successful because it had massive support and got the active involvement of large numbers of people. Imagine the impact of a campaign led by the council which was able to link up with other councils around the county in a similar position.

Walthamstow: end the school funding crisis

Waltham Forest Socialist Party

Over 40 teachers, school support staff, parents and campaigners attended a public meeting on 1 April called by Waltham Forest Trade Union Council as a response to education cuts in the borough.

Opening the meeting, its secretary Linda Taaffe explained that while the meeting was instigated because of threatened redundancies at Henry Maynard School in Walthamstow, this is part of a national crisis which has seen £5.4 billion cut from schools budgets since 2015.

On the platform were local trade union secretaries Janet Walker (public-sector union Unison) and Steve White (National Education Union). The NEU has held a positive indicative ballot against the school's proposals.

Steve said any campaign must not follow what has happened in some schools elsewhere where teachers have volunteered to take pay cuts in an attempt to save jobs.

He also pointed to the scandal of academy schools, including in Waltham Forest, where money has been siphoned off to the benefit of senior teachers and their families.

After contributions from the floor - including from teaching assistants whose jobs are under threat - Linda summed up and proposed launching a campaign against school budget cuts.

She proposed that the trade union council reassembles after the April school holidays to discuss the plans, including encouraging all school workers to join an active union.

It was then that staff and parents at Henry Maynard began to raise ideas to put pressure on the school head, including organising a parents' meeting with the head teacher to express their concerns.

Cuts in other schools came to light - like a four day week, and posts not being replaced when people leave, and eight teachers and eight teaching assistants threatened in another big school.

Concerned parents in Maynard School have now set up regular communication to organise to stop the cuts; and it was agreed to produce a leaflet for the parents and organise a further meeting.

The next day, Unite mid-day assistants in another school expressed their wish to get involved in the campaign.

If a lively campaign can be organised along similar lines to the trade union council's housing campaign - which played an important role in the [victory of the Butterfields tenants in Walthamstow](#) - then we will have a real chance of building a serious fight to stop cuts in the borough, as part of a wider national campaign to force the government to bail out schools not bankers.

Reject the rotten NUS 'reforms' - build a mass, fighting student union

Socialist Students

The National Union of Students (NUS) is on the brink of bankruptcy. The responsibility for this catastrophic situation clearly lies with years of successive right-wing NUS leaderships - which have pushed through undemocratic reforms, concentrating power in the hands of unaccountable and inept leaders.

Instead of leading student struggles, they have used the NUS as a springboard into political careers in pro-big business parties.

They have failed to fight for student interests - including when fees were introduced in 1997 by Blair's Labour government, and again when fees were trebled in 2010 by the Tory-Lib Dem Coalition.

More recently, they failed to mobilise the massive student support for Corbyn's 2017 election manifesto (which included the pledge to abolish tuition fees) into a movement against a crisis-ridden Tory government.

Governance reviews, pushed through undemocratically by the NUS bureaucracy, deliberately sidelined the active involvement of its million-strong membership and converted NUS into little more than a charity or think tank that lobbies politicians.

At [last year's April NUS conference](#) it was an unaccountable board of trustees which presented a misleading report stating it had 'no concerns' about the financial state of NUS!

In response to the financial crisis, the Turnaround Board produced a consultative 'White Paper' on how to reform the NUS.

Sham consultation

But how was this so-called 'consultation' undertaken? The leadership of the NUS allowed student unions to submit their official responses without any involvement or democratic discussion whatsoever with students themselves - just responses from student union presidents or CEOs!

The results of this sham consultation are laid bare in the reform motion presented to this year's conference, as well as a new set of articles and rules for the NUS.

It's impossible here to deal with every proposal. But what's clear is that the last vestiges of control by ordinary students over NUS's political direction are to be removed.

That's why Socialist Students rejects all proposals put forward by the current leadership, including the cut in funding to liberation campaigns and current full-time officers.

However, [the NUS financial crisis is real](#). That's why we call for the opening of the NUS books to the democratic oversight of students and elected NUS officials and hence, potential solutions to the crisis.

A crucial step towards this would be the organisation of general emergency meetings on campuses. From these could come an extraordinary national conference to discuss the way out of this crisis.

We fight for a refounded NUS as a democratic, accountable organisation that puts centre stage free education and student grants, affordable student housing, the fight against cuts and marketisation, and the struggle to kick out the Tories.

If the NUS 'reforms' do go through then it's very doubtful that the NUS will be an organisation which can lead on these issues.

Socialist Students stands for a student movement which links up with workers in the fight for a society based on peoples' needs, not the profits of big business - a socialist society.

Leicester NHS Trust and the brutal reality of cuts

Tom Barker, Leicester Socialist Party

Around 80 people attended a politically charged Save Our NHS Leicestershire public meeting on 6 April to discuss the planned reorganisation of Leicester's hospitals.

Speaking at the meeting was Sally Ruane, a local health policy academic and NHS campaigner, and Mark Wightman, the Director of Communications and Strategy for the local NHS Trust.

But the speakers were not the main attraction. For about an hour, the audience bombarded the Trust's representative with story after emotional story about the devastating effects of NHS cuts and the woeful level of care in the community.

Save Our NHS Leicestershire is concerned that the [Trust's plans do not include an increase in the number of beds](#), even though local hospitals currently face a crisis because of lack of capacity.

Only recently, the Leicester Mercury carried a front-page article about a 94-year-old Leicester resident who was shoved from hospital to home, and back to hospital again 13 times in the last ten weeks of his life, apparently in an effort to free up beds in acute hospitals.

The audience was clear: the crisis in the NHS has already put an unbearable strain on families.

The Trust's spokesperson was slick. But in summing up he was forced to admit that the biggest risk in the Trust's plan was that community services would not be able to make up for a standstill in the number of beds.

Save Our NHS Leicestershire is fighting for an NHS that is fit for purpose. We are campaigning to expose the inadequacies of the local Trust's plans and to build a movement capable of forcing more money from this weak government.

Socialist Party members, who are a part of the campaign, call for all cuts and privatisation in the health service to be reversed. We demand a fully funded, socialist NHS, run democratically by workers and service users. Giant pharmaceutical companies and big corporations in the supply chain should also be nationalised, under democratic workers' control, in order to prevent the NHS being bled to death by big business.

Social cleansing continues in Southwark

Bill Mullins and Arti Dillon

Divine Rescue, a homelessness charity, is being evicted from its council-owned premises on the Aylesbury estate in Southwark, south London.

The charity, which caters for up to 150 homeless and desperately impoverished families a day, has been told to hand back the keys for the Thurlow Lodge community hall.

Voluntary workers for the charity told us the Labour council has been trying to get rid of them for years.

Two years ago they were prepared to take the council to court, but with the threat of £60,000 court costs hanging over their heads they were forced to sign an agreement to leave the premises.

The council claimed that there had been instances of anti-social behaviour from the clients of the charity but these have been strenuously denied. Southwark council's plans to 'regenerate' the Aylesbury estate have been vigorously opposed by both tenants and other groups in the area.

The council wants to knock down thousands of homes and let developers move in to build private homes for sale and rent, with a token number of social rented homes.

The neighbouring Heygate estate, which had over 900 council homes, [has been demolished](#) and now it is overwhelmingly private - with less than 50 council homes. Many of these properties are investments, not homes for the thousands 'lucky' enough to be on the housing list.

The council has said it will now offer Divine Rescue a further short period of time to find new premises. They had promised to help the charity find alternative premises before, but all they did was to send a few links to local shops and commercial properties, mostly well outside what the charity can afford.

We will encourage local trade unions to campaign to keep the charity running while fighting the benefit cuts, low wages and unaffordable rents which are driving more and more people to food banks and soup kitchens.

There are plans to have further public activities in the borough, including public meetings.

- Messages of support to catherine.mson@drescue.org
-

Newcastle anti-fascist demo

Socialist Party reporters

On 6 April, Muslim women bravely staged a sit-down protest against the police who wanted them to vacate the Monument in Newcastle so that a motley band of a few fascists could hold their hate protest in the city centre. Socialist Party members, alongside others, stood four-square with them.

Newcastle's Muslim community has been under attack from the far right. One of the women told us she is often spat at, and has had her hijab pulled off.

In the north east local mosques and education centres have also been ransacked and graffitied.

Shamefully, the police harangued these women and those supporting them. Eventually, using a megaphone, the police read out section 14 of the 1986 Public Order Act in order to forcibly move us.

Unfortunately, amidst all this the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), under the banner of 'Stand Up to Racism', took the decision to immediately evacuate the Monument so the far right could occupy the space.

This was done without any consultation with other forces there, including the Muslim women, and meant the counter-demo was divided.

Also, the area where the police eventually corralled everyone was vulnerable to attacks from the far right as it was next to one of the many entrances to the Metro station.

How to deal with aggressive policing in such situations, with open threats of arrest, is an issue that needs to be discussed.

But when the SWP was approached by one of our female members who disagreed with their stance, she was met with a tirade of abuse.

The women from the Muslim community were courageous. We need to ensure that in future the iconic landmark of the Monument is not allowed to be taken over by the far right.

This will require the wider labour and [trade union movement to start to take the threat of the far right seriously](#) and organise accordingly.

South Yorkshire Freedom Riders - still battling on

Sharron Milsom, Sheffield Central Socialist Party

South Yorkshire Freedom Riders held rallies on 1 April marking [five years of our struggle for the full restoration of travel pass rights](#).

Pensioners and disabled people started with a rally at Barnsley Interchange before setting off on a 50-minute bus ride to Sheffield.

Over 70 rallied at Sheffield station including local trade unionists and members of the public, both old and young.

In 2014, our free local train travel in South and West Yorkshire was removed entirely and our rights to free bus travel restricted.

After holding several 'freedom rides' - catching trains en masse and refusing to pay - South Yorkshire's councils backed down.

Disabled pass holders won all rights back but pensioners only gained partial concessions.

Pensioners can catch a train for half-fare within South Yorkshire but a train to West Yorkshire is charged full-fare.

So, Sheffield to Leeds return, once free, is now £12. We have continued the fight to have all rights restored.

The concessionary fares budget has been hugely underspent every year since 2014 - meaning that the lost concessions could have been paid for several times over!

Yet with the Labour councils continuing to carry out Tory cuts, this unspent money has gone to shore up reserves.

London, Manchester, Merseyside and the West Midlands all have free local train travel for the elderly. This should be extended across the country.

We're also fighting for a bus network that meets people's needs. Cuts in the network have left some Barnsley villages with no service at all.

The Sheffield bus network was cut by 10% in 2015, with further cuts to many routes since. Buses that ran once every ten minutes are now hourly.

Workers often can't get a bus to work. People with mobility difficulties are having to pay for taxis to get to the doctors and local shops. Travel pass rights are no use if there is no bus!

We need a big expansion of public transport, with more routes and higher frequency, together with low fares. And for public transport, including trains, to be taken into public ownership, under democratic workers' control and management.

Gateshead FC crisis: save our Heed!

Peter Robson, North Tyneside Socialist Party

At the home match of Gateshead Football Club on 6 April, fans - including away supporters from visiting Ebbsfleet United - protested outside Gateshead FC stadium over the existential crisis facing the club. The club faces mounting debts and has seen its squad reduced to just 16 players.

Ebbsfleet supporters know only too well about the financial problems of clubs playing in the National League, having suffered a similar crisis this season.

'Gateshead Soul' had been set up by supporters to not only raise awareness of the club's plight but to actually save it from extinction.

Fans' anger has been directed at the club's financial adviser Joe Cala, who is believed to be pulling the strings. Cala didn't show his face at the match on 6 April.

Former Rochdale owner Chris Dunphy has agreed in principle to take over the club but the necessary paperwork has reportedly not been signed off by current Gateshead FC owner Dr Ranjan Varghese.

As ownership of the club has failed to be resolved, players and staff have been left unpaid. Players have also been locked out of the stadium, unable to train and only allowed in on match days!

If we allow these 'gangsters' to continue to 'slash and burn' our cultural heritage where does it stop? Socialist Party members have suggested Gateshead Soul organise a protest in the town centre and have also raised the possibility of fans' ownership of the club.

- 'Reclaim the Game' by John Reid - a socialist programme for football - [available from leftbooks.co.uk](http://leftbooks.co.uk)
-

Health Campaigns Together annual general meeting success

The Health Campaigns Together (HCT) Annual General Meeting began with a victory. After seven long years, both Charing Cross and Ealing hospitals have been kept open.

But there were no illusions among local campaigners who spoke. There are more cuts coming down the line threatening other local services.

Labour shadow health secretary, Jonathan Ashworth, also addressed the meeting. The NHS now has 100,000 staff vacancies, has lost 1,000 GPs since 2015, and 200,000 nurses have quit since 2011.

Jonathan Ashworth called for the repeal of the Tory Health and Social Care Act, which has paved the way for privatisation, renationalisation of the NHS, an end to PFI and the restoration of the nurses' bursary. He

pledged to plough more money into the NHS, starting with an immediate injection of £7 billion, and an end to the social care crisis.

A series of questions were put to Ashworth, which exposed the inadequacy of council funding for social care and the legal complications of scrapping PFI, which he was unable to fully answer.

It is clear that, in the event of a Jeremy Corbyn government, the workers' movement will have to pressure the front bench to stick to these manifesto commitments and to address the serious underfunding of the NHS.

HCT's profile was enhanced by their role in coordinating the [historic 2017 march and demonstration in London](#), attended by 250,000 people. HCT now has 140 union and campaign group affiliations, including 62 trade union bodies.

A number of national and regional conferences are planned with the support of NHS unions. HCT will go to union conferences to attract more support and affiliations.

New officers were elected for the next year, including Socialist Party member Mike Forster, as chair of HCT. Around 40 delegates attended the meeting and ten delegates bought copies of the Socialist.

- A socialist programme for the health service: read '[NHS at 70: a fight for our lives!](#)'
-

Low pay, long hours, isolation - a taxi driver speaks out

A Bristol taxi driver

I'm writing this because I'm angry. We are constantly told that things are pretty good, or not so bad at least. Everyone from Theresa May and right-wing Labour representatives to the media keep on telling us this.

Anyway, the reality of my life is very different. I don't believe I'm special. I believe that millions of people are in the same boat as me, one way or another.

For the last 28 years, I've worked as a taxi driver. Back when I started it was a bit rough. You'd have to have a "punch up" now and then, because a taxi driver was a target for aggro and muggers.

I have been stabbed twice and had a colleague who was killed. Even so, you could earn a decent living, though it was never true that we were having it "bang off."

Now I'm self-employed, but not part of the middle class. There used to be a vague idea that if you bought your own car you were some kind of step up.

However, especially these days, you soon realise you have to pay for everything yourself - insurance, public liability, service and repairs, and so on.

Then before you've even paid it off, the car's likely to be nearing the end of its life, because of all the mileage we do.

We are workers, but with no employment rights - and we pay our company for the right to work!

Anyway, over the last 20 years, our situation has dramatically worsened. We are in a race to the bottom.

It seems like everybody and their dog is driving taxis these days, and most of the small companies have been swallowed up or shut down. Now it's all corporate work, and us drivers are expendable. If you can't earn your living, tough.

The bosses have used technology to work against us. Uber, Ola and other inventions make our lives harder, and increasingly we feel like an atomised workforce.

Most of us work off an app and just sit in the car waiting for a job in the gig economy. There's no "hello, hello" on the radio any longer. No human voice directing us to jobs.

If you've ridden in an Uber cab, think how the driver can make any money out of the fare - when it's so cheap, and Uber takes 28%. My expenses are £2,000 a month, and that's not unusual.

Our company does a majority of account or contract work rather than cash rides these days. The trouble is, the cut they pay us drivers is the same as 25 years ago!

They keep a bigger and bigger share of what you're earning. So what can I do? Just work longer and longer hours.

At one time, the Trade Union Congress had a campaign for the 35-hour week. Well, today the figures show that, on average, an Uber driver has to work 35 hours a week just to break even, and this is getting worse by the day.

That's 35 hours just to cover your expenses. Then to make any money you just keep racking up the hours. I've known two drivers who fell asleep at the wheel and drove off the motorway.

So now all I do is work, every day, as many hours as I can, to support myself and my partner who isn't able to work.

Yet still I'm falling further and further in debt. If I get ill, I honestly don't know what will become of us.

This is the precarious reality for millions. This is my reality. So we desperately need a proper union, and more than that, a real Labour Party that will stand up and fight to change society - all the way.

Don't let them tell us there's 'no money' for anything positive. I heard on the cab radio that one bloke who was a big Tory Brexiteer has bugged off to reside in Monaco to avoid a seven-figure tax bill, and don't tell me he wasn't fiddling his tax beforehand like all the rich and powerful do.

There's plenty of wealth, it's just that we can't get our hands on it for useful purposes, and to end poverty wages and conditions.

I'm sure that in a socialist society most taxi drivers could do so much more with our lives. Let's get rid of capitalism.

TV: Traitors

Cold War cloak and daggers as capitalist powers spy on allies

Derek McMillan, Brighton Socialist Party

'Traitors' on Channel Four is a first-class post-war drama. The period detail is impeccable and the story is presented in a fine dramatic way.

At the end of World War Two, US imperialism calculated that the British Empire was a spent force and the US could take on the mantle of world power. In the Middle East, it pushed the project of establishing the state of Israel.

The show records a story of Americans importing nylons for sale in Britain, using the funds to buy guns for Zionist extremists.

The US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) is equally hostile to Britain's reformist Labour government and the Stalinist "red menace" - it does not differentiate.

It is a work of fiction, although there is a high probability that the US State Department spied on Britain in this period.

CIA infiltration of trade unions, for example, is well-documented. John Pilger has investigated CIA spying on Australia and its role in helping to [bring down an elected Labour government](#).

And if that was happening then, the viewer is left asking what the CIA is up to now? No good I suspect!

The ruthless Priscilla Garrick shows yet another facet of actor Keeley Hawes's ability. Garrick is prepared to have the protagonist, new spy Feef Simmons (Emma Appleton), killed over a suspicion she is working for US intelligence. This is all done with a finely balanced veneer of civilised behaviour.

US agent Rowe (Michael Stuhlbarg) is determined to persuade his government of the importance of the CIA's role.

He intends to fight socialism by any means necessary, and if that involves murder and blackmail, well, it's all in a day's work.

Chauffeur Jackson Cole (Brandon P Bell) is the only black cast member. A world war for 'democracy' has left the position of his family back in the States no better. His story is an interesting subplot.

I think it is a series which leaves viewers wanting more.

- Traitors is [available on All 4](#)

Audio version of this document

[To hear an audio version of this document click here.](#)

What the Socialist Party stands for

The Socialist Party fights for socialism – a democratic society run for the needs of all and not the profits of a few. We also oppose every cut, fighting in our day-to-day campaigning for every possible improvement for working class people.

The organised working class has the potential power to stop the cuts and transform society.

As capitalism dominates the globe, the struggle for genuine socialism must be international.

The Socialist Party is part of the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI), a socialist international that organises in over 40 countries.

Our demands include:

Public services

- No to ALL cuts in jobs, public services and benefits. Defend our pensions.

- No to privatisation and the Private Finance Initiative (PFI). Renationalise all privatised utilities and services, with compensation paid only on the basis of proven need.
- Fully fund all services and run them under accountable, democratic committees that include representatives of service workers and users.
- Free, publicly run, good quality education, available to all at any age. Abolish university tuition fees now and introduce a living grant. No to academies and 'free schools'!
- A socialist NHS to provide for everyone's health needs - free at the point of use and under democratic control. Kick out private contractors!
- Keep council housing publicly owned. For a massive building programme of publicly owned housing, on an environmentally sustainable basis, to provide good quality homes with low rents.

Work and income

- Trade union struggle to increase the minimum wage to £10 an hour without exemptions as an immediate step towards a real living wage. For an annual increase in the minimum wage linked to average earnings.
- All workers, including part-timers, temps, casual and migrant workers to have trade union rates of pay, employment protection, and sickness and holiday rights from day one of employment.
- An immediate 50% increase in the state retirement pension, as a step towards a living pension.
- Reject 'workfare'. For the right to decent benefits, education, training, or a job, without compulsion.
- Scrap the anti-trade union laws! For fighting trade unions, democratically controlled by their members. Full-time union officials to be regularly elected and receive no more than a worker's wage. Support the National Shop Stewards Network.
- A maximum 35-hour week with no loss of pay.

Environment

- Major research and investment into replacing fossil fuels with renewable energy and into ending the problems of early obsolescence and unrecycled waste.
- Public ownership of the energy generating industries. No to nuclear power. No to Trident.
- A democratically planned, low-fare, publicly-owned transport system, as part of an overall plan against environmental pollution.

Rights

- Oppose discrimination on the grounds of race, gender, disability, sexuality, age, and all other forms of prejudice.
- Repeal all laws that trample over civil liberties. For the right to protest! End police harassment.
- Defend abortion rights. For a woman's right to choose when and whether to have children.
- For the right to asylum. No to racist immigration laws.
- For the right to vote at 16.

Mass workers' party

- For a mass workers' party drawing together workers, young people and activists from workplace, community, environmental, anti-racist and anti-cuts campaigns, to provide a fighting, political alternative to the pro-big business parties.
- Fight for Labour to be transformed into such a party: deselect the Blairites!

Socialism and internationalism

- No to imperialist wars and occupations.
 - Tax the super-rich! For a socialist government to take into public ownership the top 150 companies and the banking system that dominate the British economy, and run them under democratic working-class control and management. Compensation to be paid only on the basis of proven need.
 - A democratic socialist plan of production based on the interests of the overwhelming majority of people, and in a way that safeguards the environment.
 - No to the bosses' neoliberal European Union and single market. For a socialist Europe and a socialist world!
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