

After the budget - unions must launch pay fight

- Unison's local government executive votes for pay ballot and national demo

Rob Williams and Glenn Kelly

Millions of public sector workers will be vainly [sifting through Hammond's budget](#) for details of any pay rises.

The reality is that most of them will be looking down the barrel at a full decade of Tory pay caps, maintaining the catastrophe of the fall in living standards.

Two million local government workers and half a million civil servants didn't even get a mention. NHS workers got a vague promise that a "funded" pay rise above the 1% pay cap may be on its way - but only if they are willing to accept changes to their terms and conditions in return.

Many workers will now be looking to the trade union leaders for what should be done next. The local government, civil servants and health unions rightly coordinated their pay claims to the employers and the government.

However a number of trade union leaders placed too much faith in the idea that the Tories would lift the pay restraint after the shock general election result and naively believed that all they had to do was write letters to MPs and lobby government "to do the right thing".

Unions like Unison resisted the calls from Socialist Party members to prepare for action and not wait and lose time.

The truth is that the government's real intentions were revealed early on. In the summer the [teachers were only offered 1-2%](#); and then shortly after, the [police and prison officers were offered "unfunded deals" of just above 1%](#).

Despite this, [with the exception of the PCS](#), the unions prevaricated and valuable time was lost in getting the unions strike-ready to take on the government. It is critical that they now play catch up and act fast.

Put words into action

[In September the TUC set out a strategy](#) "To facilitate, organise and coordinate collective action and campaigns, including industrial action... organise a national demonstration... take immediate steps to develop a coordinated strategy of opposition to the pay cap within the public sector, including the sharing and coordinating of bargaining timetables and pay demands, campaign activities, tactics, ballots and industrial action." But over two months later, only the PCS has put these words into action.

Its national consultative ballot on pay showed, [like the CWU strike vote in Royal Mail](#), that the undemocratic thresholds in [the Tory's Trade Union Act can be overcome](#), providing that the unions prepare and commit to a real campaign that can mobilise members.

As a result, PCS is in a position to move to an official strike ballot. Correctly, [it is seeking to use its mandate as a lever on the other public sector unions](#). But some union leaders are hiding behind dates of pay review findings and are delaying plans for action.

The biggest factor of all in the Tories' vacillations on public sector pay is their divisions and weaknesses. The most outspoken ministers on pay have been the likes of Johnson and Gove, for their own opportunistic

reasons.

Hammond claims to be hemmed in by the weak state of the economy, reflected in [worse budget deficit figures](#) on the eve of the budget.

In order to avoid having to pay up, the Tories had hoped to get away with creating the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' public sector worker.

However, instead all they now offer is more effective pay cuts for all. Mass [strike action on the scale of the N30 public sector pensions strike](#) (on 30th November 2011) could land a decisive blow against this crisis-ridden government.

Then, the TUC brought the public sector unions together and 29 of them balloted and took joint strike action in a walkout of two million workers. It shook Cameron and Osborne but they were let off the hook when the struggle was left at one day, instead of being escalated in the days and weeks following that successful action.

The worst thing the unions can now do is delay and prevaricate. The TUC should call an emergency meeting of the public sector unions to plan for coordinated strike ballots.

At TUC Congress, PCS General Secretary Mark Serwotka said that if the TUC is not prepared to act, the PCS would be prepared to convene such a meeting.

This would be welcomed by union reps and activists in unions such as Unite and Unison who have already got motions passed calling for consultative ballots. These ballots should be immediately put in place and built for as a step to move to official strike ballots.

Worryingly it appeared that the local government unions were going to wait for an offer from the employers on 13th December before even starting consultative ballots. This would put off action for months.

But today (23 November), after the budget which has offered nothing, Unison's local government service group executive has passed a motion from the north west region - reflecting members' anger and pressure - to instigate a consultative pay ballot to be set in motion before the end of this year, and for a national demonstration to be organised on pay.

Other local government unions should now follow this example.

The TUC have [now called](#) a national demonstration for 12 May 2018. Union members will welcome such a mobilisation, but many will want it to be brought forward to be part of a real strategy to build confidence for strike ballots on pay.

If this was done, it could rival the [massive TUC demonstration of 26th March 2011 which saw up to 750,000 workers fill London](#).

That march was the starting point for the movement that resulted in the N30 strike that November. A mobilisation now, called by the unions and Jeremy Corbyn, that could reach out to the workers who have been involved in a wave of strikes in the summer and autumn in the private sector, would show what is possible and put Theresa May and Philip Hammond on notice.

- [Click here for this article in the format of a leaflet](#)

This article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 23 November 2017. It was updated on 29 November 2017 after the TUC announced a national demonstration for May 2018. The version printed in the Socialist is a shortened edit of this updated version.

Socialist Students day of action demands free education

Across England and Wales students took part in the education shutdown day of action to fight for free education on 22 November coinciding with the Tories' budget. Protests, marches and campaign stalls took place on over 15 campuses. The Tories are riven by splits and infighting and the budget offered no way forward for young people. Now let's organise and fight to drive them out! Get in touch at socialiststudents@gmail.com or text your name and university, college or school to 07749379010.

London

Students from colleges and universities in London gathered in Parliament Square to protest [the latest Tory budget](#). A pensioner walking past took to the open mic: "they want to divide us, old against young", pointing at parliament he said "we can't let that happen."

The Socialist Students open mic was an opportunity for students to tell the Tories what they thought of the budget. One student from Goldsmiths university made a stirring speech about people struggling on poverty wages and facing benefit cuts. She started a chant: "Single mothers and the sick, did not start the deficit, that's bullshit, come off it, the enemy is profit".

We chanted against Theresa May, tuition fees and an education system being kept for the rich alone.

Goldsmiths Socialist Students society president Ellen Kenyon Peers said: "Hammond doesn't seem very good at his sums, he seems to think there isn't any money for this" but reeled off [the tax avoidance scandals](#) and Trident as examples of the fact the money is there.

Education should be a right and not a privilege, and we don't just want to fight for it for our generation but future generations access to free education. Elliot, a student from Woodhouse college, said: "The 1% have too much wealth... and we need to change that" as a cheer went through the crowd.

Most importantly students repeatedly made the point that the Tories are weak and divided. It's the responsibility of young people, students and workers to organise now to kick out this rotten government.

Helen Pattison, London Socialist Party youth and student organiser

Birmingham

Birmingham Socialist Students mobilised massive support from all major Brum universities and colleges for our free education demonstration.

Young and old flocked to our stall to pledge their support for free education and an end to Tory austerity by signing our petitions, making donations and giving campaigners encouragement.

One young person said: "The Paradise Papers show that the money's there, it's just not in the right places for those that need it most."

One elderly gentleman told us of his granddaughter's dilemma about whether she should apply to university and said: "The reality is more young people have to go to university nowadays to get a career that's capable of paying for the very basics. Why should access to university then only be made available to those who can afford £9,000 a year? Taking on debt like that turns many young people away, it's totally rigged."

With the Tory government moving from crisis to crisis and free education being a flagship policy of Corbyn's 'youthquake', an end to crippling tuition fees seems winnable.

This is why it is more important now than ever to keep up the momentum not only for free education but for an end to Tory austerity as a whole.

Sam Witts, Birmingham University Socialist Students

Southampton

Several students made their voices heard on campus as part of the Socialist Students society. It is the first event in a campaign to fight for better education at the university, for both students and staff. We are protesting against the 75 unnecessary job cuts announced recently. We protested because while students have to scrounge for change to print their assignments, the university spends £700,000 a year on the vice-chancellor.

While out on campus we felt an air of discontent. Students are not happy with being saddled with debt for the majority of their lives. Staff are unhappy with the fact that 75 jobs are being cut to save money, and eight faculties are being merged to five, which will inevitably lead to admin staff cuts, while the university advertises for a chauffeur for university executives!

Other societies such as the feminist society and education union UCU supported us. We collected over 100 signatures on our petition which we hand delivered to the vice-chancellor's secretary. Unfortunately he was too busy to actually meet with the students face to face.

This is only the beginning though. We will be back, and won't stop until the vice-chancellor has agreed to freeze tuition fees, stop the 75 jobs cuts and prevent the merging of faculties.

If you are interested in what we stand for and want to get involved, you can find us in room 1083 at 7pm every Monday in Nuffield Theatre.

James, Southampton University Socialist Students

Leeds

'Leeds For Free Education' jointly with University of Leeds Socialist Students organised to protest yet another austerity budget brought in by a government so out of touch they recently claimed there were no unemployed people in the UK.

Speakers at [our protest included those from education union UCU](#) before a lively and very loud march through the city centre, ending with speakers from the Royal College of Nursing, Socialist Students regional committee, and a young speaker from Huddersfield Kirklees College.

- More about Socialist Students: socialiststudents.org.uk
-

Interview: Refugee Rights Campaign

We're fighting for the right to live and work in Britain

On 10 November the Associated Press [published a new report](#) on the torture perpetrated by the Sri Lankan government. Journalists interviewed more than 50 Tamil men who had been "raped, branded or beaten repeatedly." Following the country's bloody civil war that ended in 2009, they are seeking asylum in Europe.

Since the so-called end of the war there has been a change of government but there are still thousands of 'disappeared', most likely interned in secret camps. There is still suppression of protests, enormous repression of the Tamil people, and a denial of their right to self-determination. Political prisoners and those returned after being denied asylum continue to face violent persecution.

Here in Britain a number of [Tamil asylum seekers have formed the Refugee Rights Campaign to fight for their rights](#) in a situation of Tory austerity and racist policies. Here they set out the situation they face and the aims of the campaign.

The Socialist Party is proud to be among the first to back this vital campaign, which needs the active support of socialists, young people and trade unionists.

How did you end up in Britain?

Mathan: It's called 'Great' Britain but we are struggling here. Many people were killed in the civil war in Sri Lanka and face persecution by the government.

Before 2009 the government damaged our house with bombs. Some of our relatives died. I lost friends. I tried to move to Malaysia but Malaysia has no asylum system.

My dad was living here so I thought it would be safe. I claimed asylum here. But the Home Office refused my claim and tried to send me back to Sri Lanka. I was in a detention centre for three months. If we are sent home, we know the government will definitely persecute us.

Lawanya: I came as a student. I completed my first diploma course and applied for another but after two months the college was closed and I couldn't continue. Asylum seekers can't do full-time courses.

Sathya: I was born in Sri Lanka. We fled to India when I was ten years old because my dad's life was in danger. He was a trade unionist. In India we had no legal status, no right to travel.

In 2009 there were protests in Tamil Nadu against the massacre of over 40,000 Tamil-speaking people by the Sri Lankan government, which I joined. Eventually I came to London for a master's degree with a student visa. When it expired I was told I would be returned - but to Sri Lanka, where I have no family, no friends, nothing. I had no option but to apply for refugee status here.

Isai: Hearing your stories makes me realise how much has changed. When I came with my family in 1999, we had to flee because of political persecution of my dad. We had a council home within a few months. When I went to college I received Education Maintenance Allowance. Things have got so much harder.

Why do you need a new campaign?

Mathan: We are already political, we have no choice. Our people want the right to self-determination. I got involved in many campaigns and went on many protests here. I saw that struggles are not only necessary and taking place in Sri Lanka but everywhere people have to fight for their rights.

I interviewed asylum seekers to discuss what we can do. The first thing is that asylum seekers are not allowed to work. So what are they going to do? The solicitors ask for so much money for our cases. The Home Office pays us £35 weekly but it's not enough to survive. Some get refused even that. People have mental health problems. That's why we launched the Refugee Rights Campaign.

Firstly we demand the right to work. This is our basic right. In most European countries refugees can work legally. If we are allowed to work we can concentrate on our cases and on other things. But if we are refused everything what will we do. Nothing to do. All depressed.

There are many Tamil-based organisations, mainly founded by people who came a long time back. But they don't speak about the conditions of refugees in Britain today.

We went on a 'Refugees Welcome' march. We held banners that said 'allow the right to work', 'stop deportation', 'close detention centres'. You can say 'refugees are welcome here,' but if you demand the right to work, [an end to deportations and closure of the detention centres](#), that would be good. Why can't all these organisations support these fundamental rights?

Refugees have the right to live in Britain. We want to connect with the workers' movement in the UK to defend this. We need to mobilise and share what we are doing.

Why do you demand the closure of the detention centres?

Lawanya: I was in a detention centre last year. I was taken there on my wedding day, in my wedding dress. We had to exchange our rings there. I had to cancel the reception. I promised to come afterwards but they wouldn't wait.

My husband had given me £25 when I was detained. I had to pay £5 for an ID card there. They gave me a food hygiene exam and an English test and after that they showed me round. I had the food hygiene tests so I could work in the kitchen for £1 an hour. I was crying the whole time. I refused to work for £1 an hour.

They booked me a flight to Sri Lanka

and said pack your things. Then my case won in the court and the judge gave me a 'stop removal order'. My lawyer sent me the order for printing. I went to the library but they were closed and they said you can't print. I waited an hour not knowing if I would get it in time.

Mathan: That's what it's like in there. One guy committed suicide while I was in there. I saw real struggles there but protests were banned. There is limited food. It's like a prison. We are in cells, locked up. They have a medical centre but it's only open for a limited time. If you miss it you can't get your medicine. They say come back tomorrow.

Why is the campaign establishing a free legal clinic for asylum seekers?

Lawanya: The legal aid system means when you win the case the solicitors get money back but sometimes they say you have to pay part.

Mathan: Solicitors keep asking for more money from people who aren't allowed to work. So many people are forced to go and work illegally to make some money, £3 or £4 an hour. People have no choice but to work for some greedy employer. Then how can they campaign - they have to work so hard to pay the rent and pay the solicitor.

Isai: Some work for 12 hours and get £50.

Lawanya: When I had the student visa I was allowed to work ten hours a week - I got a job in a clothes shop where they paid me £1.25 an hour! It was really bad.

Sathya: Refugee Rights Campaign is very important because it gives the chance for refugees to get together and talk and to hear about what everyone's been through. We can tell asylum seekers about legal aid and also how to approach the legal case and what are the different parts of the process. Solicitors don't do this.

The Refugee Rights Campaign brings awareness of our rights. That's the start of fighting for rights. Before this campaign no one else was bringing this into the open.

Isai: We want to link up with groups from other countries to develop this campaign for all refugees' rights. We hope everyone reading this can help us.

- Facebook group: [Refugee Rights Campaign](#)
 - refugeerightscampaign.org
 - admin@refugeerightscampaign.org
-

Model motion: for asylum seekers' right to work

This trade union body notes that:

- We are now witnessing the highest levels of displacement on record. An unprecedented 65.6 million people around the world have been uprooted from their homes by war and environmental catastrophes. Among them are nearly 22.5 million refugees, over half of whom are under the age of 18.
- 80% of the refugees remain within their country of origin or in neighbouring ones.
- Those refugees who reach Britain usually find themselves in dire circumstances. It often takes many years for asylum seekers to be accepted by the system as refugees. They have to go through different screenings and interviews for their cases to be heard. Most of these have inadequate language translators and lack of opportunities for the individuals to explain their cases.
- They are also denied the right to work and are forced to live on a bare minimum of £5 per day to pay for their basics such as clothing, food, drinks, transport. Most asylum seekers are living in poverty and experience poor health and hunger. Many families are not able to pay for their basic needs.
- Thousands of children seeking asylum in the UK are being denied access to education, according to organisations who work with refugees. There is no legal requirement for local authorities to provide education for children waiting for dispersal from initial accommodation by the Home Office.
- Adult education facilities are restricted to certain fields only.
- No advice is given on what healthcare may be available and the lack of such information means that some asylum seekers are made to pay for treatment.
- The UK is the only country in Europe that does not have a limit on the length of time that someone can be detained. There are individuals in detention centres who have been detained for years that are still not given the results of their case.
- In the UK, asylum seekers are encouraged to work within the detention centre for £1 an hour yet they are not allowed to work when they are outside and are forced to look for alternative ways to earn some money to live on. This makes them vulnerable to being exploited by bosses who employ them illegally on slave wages, some on as little as £3 per hour.
- The vast majority of these super-exploited workers are outside of the organised trade union movement.
- Until a decision is made the lives of asylum seekers are left in a limbo.

This trade union body further notes:

- The Refugee Rights Campaign was set up by refugees who have decided to come together to organise, campaign and fight for their rights.
- This campaign has participated in national demonstrations including UN international anti-racism day, the United for Education demo and May Day as well as numerous protests including for the closure of Yarlswood detention centre.
- Refugee Rights organises free law clinics with legal representation and provides free advice and access to information.

Refugee Rights campaign calls for:

- The right to work
- Access to education
- The closure of detention centres
- £10 an hour now
- An NHS free for all
- Language and adequate medical help - including mental health facilities - for asylum seekers and refugees
- The right to join a union

This trade union body:

- Demands that asylum seekers must not be treated as criminals or held in detention centres. Their fundamental human rights need to be defended.
 - Supports the demand to allow the right to work for all asylum seekers/refugees.
 - Agrees to affiliate to the Refugee Rights Campaign, including financial support.
-

Birmingham bin workers score significant victory against Blairite Labour council

Now prepare for the next battle

Ian Leech and Clive Walder, Birmingham Socialist Party

The Socialist Party salutes the marvellous campaign of Birmingham's bin workers. Birmingham council have backed down in their battle with the city's bin workers on the eve of a High Court hearing to [determine whether their 106 threatened redundancies were lawful](#).

The council have agreed to withdraw the redundancies and give the affected workers new job titles and duties. They will now be promoting recycling among residents but still be working on bin lorries and maintaining their current grade, pay and conditions.

In addition a victimised shop steward will be reinstated, unions will be included in a forum on future changes to the waste management service, and there will be no changes for at least 15 months. The concession the union has made is to agree to a five-day working week but there will be no increase in working hours.

The scale of this victory, [after 12 weeks of action](#), can't be underestimated - a hard-nosed Blairite council hiding behind a union-bashing chief executive has been totally humiliated.

The council, who said that these cuts were an economic necessity have been forced to eat their words and have also agreed to pay Unite the Union's legal costs. They have spent [over £6 million of public money](#) in an attempt to break the union.

No doubt this last minute climb down was a recognition that they faced losing the case and incurring even more disdain from the public by wasting even more of their money on a campaign that never had widespread public support.

After a "vigorous" meeting of bin workers on 25 November, the deal was accepted. The deal only lasts until April 2019 - the workforce having zero trust in the council - are well aware of what might come then. 'Victory, prepare for the next battle' seemed to be the watchword.

The victory is also significant because the attack on 'Grade 3' positions in the bins is widely understood to be preparation for attacks on 'Grade 3' positions and pay across the entire council workforce.

The bins dispute has exposed the sorry role of Labour councillors making Tory cuts. The battle to drive Blairite councillors from the Labour Party continues and the battle to ensure Labour councillors don't just complain about making cuts rather than fighting them needs to be stepped up. Many bin workers have shown enthusiasm for challenging Labour councillors behind these attacks if they stand in next May's elections.

Let's hope that chief executive Stella Manzie takes this as a cue to resign and get off the backs of Birmingham workers.

Howard Beckett, Unite assistant general secretary, who played a significant 'hands on' role in the strike, declared at Labour's 2017 conference: "Birmingham's Labour run council was imposing austerity on staff and

renege on a deal to the end the strike. It is not good enough for Labour councillors to hide behind talk of Tory budgets".

There were a number of key factors that led to the win. There was a high level of organisation provided by convenor Richard Beddows and the citywide reps, as well as a determined unity shown by the strikers throughout the action.

The tactics that strikers opted for - short, intermittent action of three one-hour stoppages each day involving a return back to depots on each stoppage - proved in this case to be effective in creating maximum disruption.

The approach also minimised the loss in strikers' pay and retained the fleet of bin wagons under the control of the striking workers. These tactics brought a predictable condemnation from the council.

Despite waste piling up across the city and the council's media campaign targeting the strikers, the Birmingham public, tired of austerity and cuts to services, supported the bin workers [according to regular surveys](#) in the local press. Significantly, not one of the nine Labour MPs in the city declared their support for the strikers' case but instead waited weeks until seeing the public mood, before [collectively writing](#) to the council leadership demanding that the dispute be 'sorted'.

Key too was the preparedness of Unite to throw all its resources behind winning this dispute in an industrial and political campaign against the Blairite-run Labour council who were prepared to go to extreme lengths to grind the workforce down. Council leader John Clancy was forced to resign having been stabbed in the back by his own cabinet colleagues following an attempt to broker a deal with Unite through conciliation service Acas.

During the action the bin workers received donations and letters of support from trade unionists and socialists from as far and wide as Mexico, Hong Kong and South Africa, along with picket line visits and donations from local union branches. In the course of the dispute, [Richard Beddows was a key speaker at the National Shop Stewards Network rally in September](#) and [Howard Beckett addressed the closing event of Socialism 2017](#).

The victory is a vindication of the solid and determined stand taken by the bin workers and backed up every step along the way by Unite. Fighting back and militancy pay!

Despite GMB and Unison being unwilling or unable to achieve coordinated strike action on the bins, Unite saw the action through to the end and are already reaping the rewards in increased membership and an enhanced reputation as a fighting trade union.

Having chosen to cut services [rather than to campaign and fight to defend them](#), the council has put staff across the city on notice that they will be coming for them next in order to make the cuts demanded by the Tory government.

Only by learning the lessons of this dispute and applying pressure to the local leaderships of Unison and the GMB to be part of strike action coordinated across the unions in the city can members of those unions hope to defend their jobs and the services that they provide.

"There's a lot of anger among my members, the decision to slash the wages of the lowest paid was extraordinary, the decision taken to go on the attack against Unite was quite extraordinary, the decision to deny the Acas deal was quite extraordinary. The decision to issue redundancy notices was just extraordinary, the cost of millions of pounds in order to try to break the strike with agency labour was just extraordinary, the equal pay narrative was just extraordinary and the way that this deal was extracted from the council at the last minute is just extraordinary."

Howard Beckett, Unite assistant general secretary

Liverpool: A City That Dared to Fight - ebook now available!

The chronicle of the Liverpool City Council 1983-87 is now available on Kindle for just £7.50. The council that said no to Thatcher's vicious cuts and won major improvements. The strategy and stance of Liverpool Labour, led by Militant supporters (now the Socialist Party), are essential reading today for all those looking to build an anti-austerity fightback.

[Search the Kindle store](#) or [visit socialistbooks.co.uk](http://www.socialistbooks.co.uk) for more on this and other socialist publications, including [Lessons of October](#) and [From Militant to the Socialist Party](#)

North West: drivers and housing workers escalate strike wave

Becci Heagney, Manchester Socialist Party

Workers' disputes currently taking place in the north west, particularly in Manchester, [are becoming increasingly bitter](#).

[Mears housing workers](#) are a couple of weeks into their programme of 49 days of strike action and the company is attempting to show strength through denying that the solid action is having an effect.

It is being forced to use sub-contractors in order to make sure that work is done and is not informing tenants that the strike is taking place. This is unsustainable and costly for Mears.

Workers are holding picket lines morning and afternoon four days a week and are preparing to step up the pressure on Manchester city councillors and Greater Manchester metro-mayor Andy Burnham.

They have support from workers employed directly by the council who are refusing to cross picket lines in some cases.

Meanwhile First bus drivers in Rusholme, having walked out every Monday since the beginning of October are now escalating their action to every Monday, Wednesday and Friday.

This is to show that they are serious and to force the company into negotiations but also to make it harder for First to 'bus' in scab drivers - managers from elsewhere who are being put up for the night in hotels in Manchester.

There are also rumours that other First depots in Manchester are preparing to ballot over issues like holiday pay.

At the same time, [Arriva North West bus drivers](#) - striking in Wythenshawe in Manchester but also at ten other depots across the region - have announced a massive escalation of strike action in December.

They, similarly to First, have been striking every Monday but now will strike on 4,7,12,13,14,20,21,22 and 23 December.

Unite the union correctly described pay talks with Arriva as an 'insult' after it offered an increase of 1p an hour!

The Socialist Party in Manchester is hosting a solidarity meeting on Tuesday 5th December, at 7pm, in the Britons Protection pub, Great Bridgewater Street, M1 5LE.

We have invited speakers from all of the disputes, as well as the union members themselves, to build support for their individual campaigns but also to help build unity and coordination between the multiple strikes taking place across the city.

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 24 November 2017 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

Kirklees bin workers ballot for strike over schedule and bullying

Matt Hirst, Huddersfield Socialist Party

After [the tremendous struggle of the Birmingham bin workers](#), the fightback could move north to Kirklees.

We have seen rumblings over the last few weeks. In a wildcat strike early in November, bin workers refused to complete their rounds. And workers at the Huddersfield depot are in dispute over working conditions and time off during Christmas.

Since the last time rounds were changed in 2015, bin workers have worked 38 hours from Monday to Thursday. However, the bosses are now demanding collections run on Friday 5 January. This sets a dangerous precedent that staff aren't consulted on changes to agreed contracts.

On top of the additional days over Christmas, workers report that managers are refusing holiday requests - and bullying, swearing at, and treating them "like children."

Shop stewards have been denied time off to attend union meetings. Council bosses have refused to meet with senior members of the workers' union, Unison, to resolve problems. Members are now being balloted for strike action.

Huddersfield Socialist Party will stand alongside the bin workers in their struggle for better working conditions - and for changes to be consulted on, rather than the council riding roughshod over workers' rights.

Brighton Uni lecturers strike against job cuts

University of Brighton Unison activists

Academic staff at the University of Brighton struck to defend two members of staff threatened with redundancy.

A lunchtime walkout of lecturers on 23 November preceded a full day of action, including at least one striking clown! This followed a magnificent 85% vote in favour of striking against forced redundancies.

The striking members of education union UCU were widely supported by students and members of public service union Unison.

The students' union disgracefully refused to support the strike, but groups of students took this up with public messages of support.

Higher education workers are tired of being told by [colossally overpaid vice-chancellors](#) that there is no money for them because the priority is shiny buildings and a 'flexible' workforce.

We want institutions with well-paid and motivated staff, free for all who want it.

UCU members at Brighton will now work to rule. They have planned further action for next week if management does not reverse the redundancy threat.

A national UCU ballot for action against attacks on pensions will run from 6 December till 19 January.

- Messages of support to ucubrighton@gmail.com
-

DWP to outsource more work to Capita

'Daniel Lambert', PCS member

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) announced on 16 November that more telephone work for benefit claims will be outsourced to Capita.

This includes new claims for Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) and Income Support, plus general enquiries for Jobseekers Allowance (JSA).

This is not the first instance. JSA claims were handed to Capita in 2012, resulting in a failure to meet processing targets. The decision to outsource new ESA claims to Capita will be disastrous.

A huge proportion of claimants suffer mental health problems, so are more vulnerable. If Capita performs as well as it did with JSA this will have a severe impact on their wellbeing.

It is already beginning to affect the morale of DWP staff. Many workers fear losing their jobs, or the stress of a complete change to the role they have trained in.

The PCS union, which represents DWP staff, has [consistently opposed privatisation](#). We campaign for all services to be brought back in-house.

The Socialist Party does too. We also fight for reversing all privatisation - run services for people, not profit. And ending sanctions, and reversing benefit cuts - for the right to a decent living, and support for those who need it

PCS union says no to pay misery

Marion Lloyd, chair, PCS Left Unity (personal capacity)

It will take a [determined, united campaign from all public sector workers](#) to break the government's refusal to fund decent pay levels for public sector workers.

Earlier this year, civil service union PCS put its pay demands to the government:

- end the pay cap now
- fund above-inflation increases of 5% or £1,200, whichever is greater
- for a living minimum hourly wage of £10 for all, including government contract workers

The negative response to this claim from the government led PCS to [renew calls at the 2017 TUC congress for coordinated industrial action](#) across the public sector.

It led also to a [PCS consultative ballot](#) asking members to reaffirm opposition to the pay cap and indicate support for strike action.

[Members gave a massive boost to the union's pay campaign](#) with 98.9% voting to scrap the pay cap and 79.2% supporting industrial action. With a 48.8% turnout, PCS is on course to win a statutory ballot for action.

Other public sector unions are considering their position, with a number proposing to hold similar consultative ballots. This is to be welcomed - and they need to get on with it.

United, coordinated action on pay, culminating in a mass demonstration early in the new year, could pave the way to ending public sector pay misery.

Historic fall in living standards

Make the Tories history

Nick Auvache, North London Socialist Party

What a shocker! "Families are now projected to be in the early stages of the longest period of continuous falls in disposable incomes in over 60 years - longer even than that following the financial crisis."

That was how the [Resolution Foundation think-tank greeted](#) Chancellor Philip Hammond's recent budget.

While some Tory MPs may have hailed it as a success, for most of us it was another disaster. It will deepen the economic misery that working class people face.

But it appears that not all families in Britain are alike. The think-tank's report added that the poorest third of households could lose £715 a year if the Tories last till 2022. Meanwhile the richest third would gain £185.

This is further proof that we can't wait for a general election. We need this government of spivs out now!

Further revelations paint the picture of a land mired in poverty with little prospect of things improving - underlining the need for socialist change.

The average set aside for savings has slumped to [just 1.7%](#) of disposable income - for those who can even afford to save. The average over the last 50 years was closer to 10%! Borrowing is up, as is inflation.

In short - we are being paid less, so we can't save. [And to twist the knife, prices are rising.](#)

This is the brutal reality of life under this broken capitalist system. But it also presents an [opportunity for the trade unions to mount a national campaign to say enough is enough.](#)

The government is on the ropes, [as u-turn](#) after [u-turn showed](#) in the run-up to the budget. Mass demonstrations and coordinated strikes could push them out the ring.

Hammond attempted to fend off criticism with a more relaxed approach to borrowing. But this is a drop in the ocean compared with what would be necessary to restore living standards to pre-crisis levels.

Meanwhile, working class people are already forced to borrow just to make ends meet. For us there is no relaxed approach. The only things that would help us relax would be wages rising, living costs falling, an end to the cuts - and the Tories out of office.

Tory housing policy: build zilch, hike prices

We say: cap private rents and build council homes now

Dave Carr, East London Socialist Party

In his recent Budget speech, Chancellor Philip Hammond - to the delight of bleating Tory MPs - announced a [cut in stamp duty](#) on house sales, and measures to build [300,000 new homes](#) a year.

As is always the case with Tory headline claims, the devil is in the detail. Closer inspection shows Hammond's housing initiatives don't amount to a hill of beans.

They plan to abolish stamp duty for first-time buyers on properties costing up to £300,000. And there will be 0% tax on the first £300,000 on properties costing up to £500,000.

But this will not reverse the trend in rising housing costs and declining home ownership.

Firstly, it will have little impact on property hotspots like London and the South East. And by the way, [only the very affluent could afford the deposit and mortgage required on a £500,000 house](#) - the average price in London.

Secondly, [according to the Office for Budget Responsibility](#), "the main gainers from the policy are people who already own property, not the first-time buyers themselves." The cut in duty goes straight on the house price. This is based on evidence from a similar scheme New Labour's Gordon Brown introduced after the 2008 financial crisis.

But what about Hammond's other master stroke - building 300,000 new homes a year by pumping in £44 billion of investment?

The headline £44 billion investment is mostly in the form of loans and guarantees. According to the Institute for Fiscal Studies, the actual amount of new money is [only £1.5 billion](#).

Compare that to the £20 billion the Tories have ripped out from UK housing projects - the equivalent of 280,000 homes, according to a Labour estimate.

Moreover, the latest house building announcement doesn't promise much more than the existing 'Starter Homes Initiative' introduced by the Tories in 2014.

Scandalously, [it was revealed](#) two days before the Budget that under this scheme not a single house has been built! The only beneficiaries appear to be the big builders.

The simple truth is that the last time any government built 300,000 homes was when it did it itself. Councils could start right now by building council homes. Jeremy Corbyn should tell them to do so, and pledge to reimburse them when in power.

- 100,000 households are priced out of the property market every year, [according to estate agent Savills](#)
- The Tories have slashed house building grants to councils and housing associations by 81% - from £4.1 billion in 2010 to £764 million last year

Them & us

Raise for uni boss...

The head of Bath University [has had a raise](#) - bringing her total compensation package to £468,000.

The vice chancellor's salary hike is £17,500. That's more than a full-time worker would earn in a year on the Living Wage Foundation's recommended £8.75 outside London.

And who awarded Glynis Breakwell this increase? The university's remuneration committee. Which included... Glynis Breakwell.

... wages won't recover

Pay will still not have recovered to pre-crisis levels by 2021. The [Institute for Fiscal Studies reckons](#) wages will be "nearly £1,400" lower than predicted just last year.

Its director Paul Johnson said "we are in danger of losing not just one but getting on for two decades of earnings growth."

No tax for Cadbury's...

Mondelez - the US owner of chocolate maker Cadbury's - made £2.1 billion profit last year, [says the Sunday Times](#). How much did it pay in UK tax? Almost nothing.

Mondelez UK paid just £122,000 on profits of £22 million - that's 0.6% tax. Meanwhile fellow Mondelez subsidiary Vantas International paid £0 on its £442 million of income.

... food prices up

The price of groceries is growing, though, as bloated bosses make us pay for high import costs.

Tea and coffee was [8.5% pricier](#) this October than last. Meat was up 3.9%. Healthy eating's no good either - vegetable costs rose 5.7%.

And a [separate survey](#) by Good Housekeeping found ingredients for even the cheapest Christmas dinner are 18% dearer than 2016.

The general rate of price increases is 3% according to official ['CPI' inflation](#) - or 4% according to the more comprehensive ['RPI' measure](#).

57-room mansion ...

Multimillionaire model Tamara Ecclestone lives in a £70 million, 57-room compound, [the Evening Standard reports](#). It's in Kensington Palace Gardens - you know, round the back of Prince William's gaff.

The daughter of Formula One billionaire Bernie also has a staff of 50 - a staff of 50 - to manage her life. But, she revealed, she does her shop at discount retailer Costco. Playing at budgeting seems to be a hobby.

... £1k homeless fine

Stoke City Council [has proposed](#) a novel solution to homelessness: fine people in tents £1,000.

Of course, trying to get a grand out of every tent dweller in the city centre makes perfect sense. Why are socialists always pointing to the wealth of the super-rich?

Obviously it's people who have to live in tents who have all the money.

Save Glenfield Children's Heart Centre! Save our NHS!

Steve Score, chair, Save Glenfield Children's Heart Centre campaign

A grassroots movement is continuing to build up against the grievous bodily harm being committed against the NHS by the Tory government.

Hospitals, wards, A&Es and [many different NHS services are threatened with closure or downgrading due to cuts](#).

In towns and cities across the country protests are taking place every week. In the East Midlands, for example, there has been a [massive campaign to save the Glenfield Children's Heart Centre](#).

As we go to press, NHS England is due to announce on 30 November whether it will close it. Campaigners will gather in Leicester city centre to either celebrate a victory or proclaim that the battle goes on.

If we win, it will be the result of people power and a campaign that has involved thousands. If the decision goes the wrong way it will not be the end of it. We will step up the pressure on this weak and divided government.

A fully funded, fully public NHS can be won by national action. If the Labour leadership and trade unions were to call for a mass demonstration on the NHS in the new year, and coordinated strike action, the Tories could be defeated!

Save our NHS!

Protests on Saturday 2 December include...

[Huddersfield, Yorkshire](#)

Assemble 11.30am at Reinwood playing fields, then march to Huddersfield Royal Infirmary

Totnes, Devon

Assemble 11am at the Seven Stars Hotel, The Plains, Totnes

[North Shields, Tyneside](#)

Assemble 12 noon in North Shields, Bedford Street

'Hands around HRI' to save Huddersfield A&E

Fighting 'closure by stealth'

Mike Forster, chair, Hands off HRI campaign

The [campaign to save Huddersfield Royal Infirmary](#), Hands Off HRI, has called a protest on 2 December in solidarity with staff and patients.

Two weeks ago the local NHS trust announced plans to centralise some services by moving wards to nearby Halifax, claiming this was due to staff shortages and a looming winter crisis.

We have explained this is part of a 'closures by stealth' programme by the trust. Although it has claimed the wards will be reopened, no one believes them. Especially since the wards earmarked for closure would be part of their plan to close the A&E anyway.

The people of Huddersfield remain very angry and worried about the implications of these cuts. One woman contacted the campaign to tell us her grandmother is seriously ill on one of the wards and any move could kill her.

Thousands of leaflets have been distributed, and twice-weekly stalls have been taking place, calling people to action.

Of course [the campaign is still pursuing a full judicial review against the planned moves](#), and has now secured legal aid to take the case all the way. At the same time, local councillors vetoed the plans earlier this year, and have referred the whole matter to the government's 'Independent Reconfiguration Panel' which can order a rethink.

So the campaign goes on. It continues to attract new supporters every week [due to high-profile events](#) and ongoing local support.

The protest is supported by all local MPs - two of whom will be joining the protest - as well as local councillors. As the campaign approaches its second anniversary, morale remains high. Campaigners are hopeful the judicial review can force the trust back to the drawing board.

Protestors will assemble at Reinwood playing fields at 11.30am on 2 December, before marching to the hospital to join hands and rally at the main gates just after midday. Everyone is welcome.

- Messages of support to info.handsoffhri@gmail.com, Twitter [@HoHRIItD](#) and Facebook ['HandsOffHRI'](#)

Tyneside to protest against A&E and walk-in cuts

William Jarrett, North Tyneside Socialist Party

Two NHS walk-in centres, and night-time A&E services at North Tyneside General Hospital, face closure. 'Save North Tyneside NHS' is holding a public protest and rally against these threats on 2 December.

The campaign formed in November 2016, including Socialist Party members from its inception, [after the clinical commissioning group \(CCG\) announced these cuts](#). Its pressure forced the CCG to [reopen consultation on the closures](#).

It even exposed the CCG's chair, Dr John Matthews, as an open admirer of serial privatiser Richard Branson. Save North Tyneside NHS activists asked if Matthews was fulfilling his Hippocratic Oath by executing plans which harm patients.

Local health professionals have revealed serious failings in Northumbria NHS Trust to the campaign. There is increased time waiting for A&E treatment at the flagship facility in distant Cramlington, and a dangerous shortage of ambulance provision.

Present conditions could be disastrous over winter. Treatment waiting times at Cramlington on 24 November were reportedly up to six hours by midnight.

Local Labour MP Mary Glendon - who [backed Blairite Owen Smith](#) against Jeremy Corbyn's anti-austerity leadership - [has wished the campaign well](#). She assures us North Tyneside's Labour council is doing all it can. But it's actions, not words, which matter.

Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell must instruct Labour councils to take a stand against austerity by refusing to sign off on ['sustainability and transformation plan' cuts programmes](#). Doing so could well collapse this divided Tory minority government.

- The rally will start at 12 noon on 2 December, Bedford Street, North Shields town centre

- Follow the campaign on Facebook at '[Save North Tyneside NHS](#)' and Twitter [@SaveNTNHS](#)
-

Bristol libraries safe - for now - as council caves to pressure

Tom Baldwin, Bristol Socialist Party

Library campaigners in Bristol are celebrating - the service has been granted a temporary reprieve from cuts.

Bristol's Labour mayor Marvin Rees had proposed [closing 17 libraries](#), more than half of all in the city. The council cabinet was due to decide which would face the chop next month.

But following an outcry from the public, it has been forced to delay the decision by at least four months.

The future of Bristol's libraries is far from guaranteed. Other options under consideration including libraries sharing sites with other services, which could still mean cuts.

But this setback for the cuts programme is very significant. The rethink was triggered by a small rebellion of Labour councillors who voted for a Lib Dem motion on libraries, against their party group and mayor.

This follows growing pressure from below in the Labour Party. The cracks are beginning to show in the council's assertion that it has no choice. Members are looking for alternatives.

The party's 'local campaign forum' recently voted to demand the mayor use reserves and borrowing to stop cuts. The [Bristol and District Anti-Cuts Alliance has been invited to put this case](#) to Labour branches. Now it seems that pressure is reflected by some councillors too.

Anti-cuts campaigners will not be taking anything for granted. We will keep up the pressure to make this stay of execution permanent, and to stop all cuts to jobs and services.

Osborne evades Carlisle socialists

At short notice, Carlisle Socialist Party organised a protest on the morning of 24 November to greet the high priest of austerity himself - George Osborne. He was visiting a local school with the city's Tory MP - slumming it in [the 'Northern Poorhouse' he spent six years making even poorer!](#)

Despite protesters covering two entrances, they managed to sneak him in a side entrance.

Incredibly, local Labour councillors made a public statement welcoming some of his proposals without criticism. This was a slap in the face for the rank-and-file Labour members who protested with us.

We got the real message across though. No more austerity - Tories out!

Robert Charlesworth, Carlisle Socialist Party

Amber warning lights flash on British economy

Robin Clapp, Socialist Party national committee

"A government with income inequality at a 30-year low, unemployment at a 42-year low and disposable income at an all-time high would struggle to be considered the worst government in a century" [according to](#) the right-wing editor of the Spectator magazine, Fraser Nelson.

His fantasy sharply contrasts with that of Tory MP and veteran Brexit flag-waver John Redwood, though. Pocketing £180,000 a year as chief global strategist for leading investment company Charles Stanley, he [urges clients](#) to withdraw their money from the UK before economic disaster strikes.

The tools used to manage the economy since 2008 - [ultra-low interest rates](#) and '[quantitative easing](#)' (QE - inventing extra money to encourage lending) - have not created sustainable recovery. Rather, they have led to booming asset prices and [excessively strong credit growth](#).

When the next economic crash explodes, central banks will be forced to come up with some new ways of stimulating their economies. Ideas like [direct cash payments](#) to voters, and 'targeted' QE - using invented money to buy small business or consumer debt rather than banks' government bonds - are not looked on favourably. But this could have to change.

The UK's official 'CPI' inflation is [now at 3%](#), its highest level in nearly six years. So the Bank of England has [finally raised](#) interest rates by 0.25% to try and counteract the '[overheating](#)' dangers brought about by cheap borrowing.

This hike in banks' borrowing costs risks tipping the UK economy into another recession. Households are already tightening spending amid a protracted squeeze on living standards from rising inflation. Price increases are in large part a result of higher import costs due to the drop in the value of sterling - [around 15%](#) against the Euro since the EU referendum.

David Blanchflower, a former member of the Bank of England's rate-setting Monetary Policy Committee, [has warned](#) that "this is no time for a rate rise as the economy slows."

High street sales collapsed in October, and British retail fell to its [lowest growth rate](#) in four years. There has been no boost to workers' salaries in that period, with [figures showing](#) negative real wage growth.

Most workers have barely had a real pay rise since 2005, and without organised struggle are unlikely to see one.

Average weekly pay will still be [over £20 lower](#) in five years' time than before the financial crash. The biggest squeeze on wages since the end of the Napoleonic Wars in the early 19th century could extend well into a second decade, [according to the Resolution Foundation](#).

[With food prices rising sharply](#), energy companies raising tariffs as winter approaches, and retailers passing on the higher costs of imports caused by a weaker pound, Bank governor Mark Carney hopes higher borrowing costs will choke off inflationary pressures.

Yet a combination of higher prices and stagnant wages is actually deflationary for the economy. Living standards come under further downward pressure, leading to consumers tightening their belts, and companies investing less.

Uncertainty about the Tories stumbling into a "hard" Brexit that could cause another downward lurch in sterling - thus further raising the cost of imports and pushing inflation closer to 4% - is one of several nightmares for the Bank.

Desperate borrowers already find themselves struggling to pay usurious interest rates associated with credit card debt. The Bank's Alex Brazier [has pointed out](#) that "outstanding car loans, credit card balance transfer and personal loans have increased by 10%, while household incomes have risen by only 1.5%." This debt has [topped £200 billion](#) for the first time since before 2008.

According to Which? magazine, high street banks can charge people borrowing just £100 up to [12.5 times more](#) than legally allowed by payday loan sharks!

More than a quarter of inquiries [to the MoneySuperMarket website](#) sought a loan equivalent to at least half of their annual income, while nearly one in ten were from people hoping to borrow more than their yearly wage. The average amount asked for in 2017 has risen to £8,958. Reliance on borrowed money to cope is a ticking time bomb.

The Bank of England [has warned](#) that the UK banking sector could lose as much as £30 billion in unpaid debt from credit cards, personal loans and car debt if interest rates and unemployment rise sharply.

Aside from those barely surviving in zero-hour and casualised work, 'self-employed' workers now account for [15% of the workforce](#) in England and Wales. [Over a million](#) more mothers with dependent children are in work in England than in 1996, many with little credit history.

Just as in pre-crash 2007, loans are increasingly resold in packages, or 'securities', for investors to buy. The mortgage-backed securities market was at the heart of the last crash. It is possible a securities market based on consumer loans can become the trigger for the next.

Many amber warning lights are flashing for the UK economy. Annual productivity growth has averaged [just 0.2%](#) since 2012. The amount being set aside by workers for savings has slipped to [just 1.7%](#) of disposable income, the lowest level on record.

Easy credit has become the norm, but growth is too weak to risk a quick return to "normal" monetary conditions. Those ingredients add up to a credit bubble that could burst any time.

Working families on low incomes will be among the biggest losers when the next recession hits, their finances weakened by welfare cuts in the wake of the 2008 crash. The [Institute for Fiscal Studies says](#) Tory plans for tax credit cuts will have an especially hard impact on households facing falling hours or wages.

Cuts in payments of Universal Credit have already [forced thousands of families to food banks and led to increases in arrears](#) in council tax and rent payments.

The share of households in private rentals has doubled in a decade, according to the [2016 English Housing Survey](#). Estate agent [Knight Frank expects](#) the proportion to rise by 2021 to almost one quarter, an ever growing number of whom will be in very vulnerable situations on insecure tenancies.

Recovery from the 1930s depression prompted a big increase in UK housebuilding. In the past decade, however, low interest rates have led merely to a big increase in house prices and little new building.

Debt charity [StepChange has calculated](#) that almost three million people are in severe financial difficulty and almost nine million are close to the edge. Even this small interest rate rise puts an [additional £1.8 billion](#) on interest payments for those on variable rate mortgages.

For working-age adults, young people, the disabled and the unemployed, the lost decade since 2007 has been the equivalent of a Mark II Great Depression. Capitalism doesn't work for us. It has to go.
