



& Workers' Liberty Solidarity

For social ownership of the banks and industry

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IRAN: WORKERS DEMAND RIGHTS

Since Thursday 28 December around 80 Iranian cities and towns have seen demonstrations, amounting to the biggest wave of protests since the 2009 Green Movement which organised around reforming Iran's authoritarian Islamist political system.

More pages 5,6,7

Workers' demands for unpaid wages and cost-of-living rises have been central to Iranian protests. Haft Tapeh workers, pictured, struck on Sunday 7 January



Inside:

One year of President Trump



Ira Berkovic assesses the Trump presidency after one year, and discusses Trump's impact in the world.

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Taking on the academies



National Education Union activist Pat Murphy examines the fight against academies.

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McStrike wins pay rise



A Bakers, Food and Allied Workers' Union activist speaks to *Solidarity* about a pay rise won for McDonald's workers.

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Join Labour!

Corbyn is right on BDS

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Bath VC forced to resign over pay

In November 2017, Dame Glynis Breakwell, the Vice-Chancellor of Bath University, stepped down after a campaign by campus workers and students made her vast pay packet (£468,000 per annum) into a national scandal. Sol Gamsu of Bath University UCU describes this victory in the fight against inequality and management arrogance in education.

There had been warning signs. When [Breakwell] became VC she was bought one of the grand Bath properties to live in.

At an Academic Court meeting in February 2017, a motion was brought expressing concern about her pay and how it was set; because at the time she was sitting on — and had the power to appoint people to — the remuneration committee which set salaries. The motion won narrowly: but she turned that meeting into a farce.

A local journalist from the *Bath Chronicle* picked this up and the *Chronicle* ran with it as a big story, did a lot of FOI requests and so on. In 2016 an FOI request revealed that she'd claimed £2 for a packet of biscuits in expenses.

Another member of the remuneration committee was an executive with the company Vinci, which had been awarded a £60 million contract to do works for the University.

In Autumn of 2017 about 400 staff turned up to a meeting called by all the campus unions — academics, services staff, technicians and porters. We voted to call on the VC and the Chair of the University Council to immediately resign.

The following week, the Student Union was to hold a referendum of confidence in the VC and management. On that same day there was also a demonstration of students and staff. It was a very biscuit-heavy demo. People were chanting things like, “you can eat your chocolate biscuits on the dole”.

As the demo was going on, there was a University Council meeting in progress. Apparently the meeting was tense. Some demonstrators threw biscuits at the window of the meeting room. The Head of Marketing took a call from security and reported to the room: “I can confirm that what is hitting the room is not stones... But biscuits”. At that meeting the VC agreed to resign.

Following this episode, the University has brought in an independent consultant to undertake a “governance review”. The campus unions are organising a governance review of our own.

In Higher Education, a cabal of senior managers have used the changes in the sector to enrich themselves. Bath is only one example of that: it is a problem for everyone in the sector.

Socialist activists Sahaya James, Mark Crawford and Hansika Jethani, who organised 2017's national student demonstration for free education, are planning to stand as candidates of the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts for full-time officer positions at NUS conference, to call for a real fight against the Tories and education-sector bosses.

But to really defeat the right, the left in NUS needs to unite. Left-wingers in NUS need to do more than politely not stand against each other.

They need to come together on a positive platform that can unite the grassroots of the student movement and inspire a real fight, for caps on rent, caps on management pay in education, and a living wage for all education workers; and to defend freedom of speech and assembly on campuses, against the government's Prevent programme and authoritarian college managements.

“Sexist and sectarian” faith schools

By Richard Driver

Ofsted report says schools are not conforming to “British values” such as “tolerance”.

But such vagueness cannot combat the dogma of serious religious people. The only rational solution is secular schooling.

“Will Ofsted start policing thought crime in schools?! the *Catholic Herald* wailed on 13 December. The magazine was responding to an Ofsted report on faith schools.

The report found that “there are schools spreading beliefs...that clash with British values or equalities law”. That “in a handful of schools inspectors found instances of sexist and sectarian literature”. And that “in even more extreme cases, children are being educated illegally in unregistered settings.”

While socialists defend the right to freedom of religious expression, as part of a broader defence of free speech, we do not hold any truck with the idea that parents and priests have a right to force religious education on children or that any religious body should have a say in how schools are run.

The *Catholic Herald* complains that “a society that prizes tolerance must surely allow people the right to have a traditional view of marriage”. But wrapped up in this defence of freedom of conscience is

something quite nasty and more damaging.

Bigoted views about same-sex relationships should not be expounded to students as truth, and certainly not by people whose opinions carry weight within a school community. It would be a good thing if bigots were unable to venture into schools to spread their oppressive moralism. I'm doubtful though that the *Catholic Herald* has anything much to worry about for the moment.

The criticism Ofsted makes becomes woolly when it strays into the territory of “British values”. In 2014 *Solidarity* wrote that “much of the government's talk about ‘British values’ is ‘spin’ rather than something that has or will have substance to it. The government lists among those values ‘tolerance’ and ‘respect’ for those of different faiths. When a school is run by vigorous, convinced, ardently religious people, mandating ‘moderate’ values is either an infringement on religious freedom, or a nonsense, or both.”

The only rational solution is to re-



move religious influence from schools entirely; not in the name of dangerously vague “British values”, but in the name of secularism. Education must be secular. It must provide a space in which children can develop, learn to think and reason, free from the damaging, fearful and self-punishing ideologies peddled by most faiths.

It should deal with religious studies through thoughtful, informed comparison of their different histories, sacred books and core beliefs.

Let the devout pedal their nightmares of a monster that rains fire and death on whole cities whilst simultaneously loving us in the open arena of public debate; not in the institutions that should support children to grow up as free, critically-thinking individuals.

Homelessness continues to rise

By Gemma Short

Over the Christmas period the issue of homelessness hit the news, with examples such as Euston train station being opened up to serve Christmas dinner to 200 homeless people.

But with housing charity Shelter estimating that 307,000 people are homeless, it is not just an issue at Christmas. London remains the city with the highest rate of homelessness. But while London's figures have remained relatively stable, other cities have seen large year on year increases in homelessness. In Manchester, one in 154 people are

homeless (compared with one in 266 in 2016); in Birmingham one in 88 (119 in 2016); in Bristol one in 170 (199 in 2016).

Another housing charity, Crisis, estimates that the number of people living in tents across the UK has risen by 56% to 9,100 between 2011 and 2016. They predict the number will rise to 11,000 in the next three years.

The daily harassment faced by street homeless people was highlighted in early January, when the leader of Windsor and Maidenhead council wrote to Police to demand they use legal powers from the Vagrancy Act 1824 to move homeless

people ahead of the royal wedding. In the letter and a series of tweets the council leader accused the homeless of Windsor of “not really being homeless” and “exploiting local people”.

Manchester council has been condemned for repeatedly “evicting” so-called “tent cities” and confiscating tents, and other councils have been criticised for confiscating a variety of possessions or giving homeless people orders to move from the area.

The homeless continue to be criminalised. 1,500 people were prosecuted under the Vagrancy Act in 2016.

NUS: Unite the left

By Workers' Liberty students

Students face an ever more neo-liberal university system and an FE sector being virtually destroyed — an alarming mental health crisis — absurd, soaring rents — a future of debt and precarious jobs — and a world all around us being wrecked by capitalism.

At the same time huge numbers are inspired by Jeremy Corbyn's Labour Party and increasingly supportive of left-wing politics.

The National Union of Students (NUS) could be playing a tremendous role in mobilising, organising and politically engaging many thousands to take on the Tories and change society — but it isn't. It needs transformation from top to bottom, so it functions as a union and national political organising and mobilising centre, not a glorified, high-budget NGO. It should be a school for struggle, not a school for careerists.

How big business makes the laws

By Rhodri Evans

In December the US Congress has passed the regressive tax-cuts scheme pushed by Donald Trump and long desired by Republicans.

The truly instructive story is about one detail. As part of his populist pitch pre-election, Donald Trump had sworn to sugar the changes at least in a small way by closing a particular tax loophole advantageous to hedge fund and

private equity managers, “carried interest”.

The loophole has survived. Gary Cohn, director of Trump's National Economic Council, and a plutocrat himself, was startlingly candid about it.

“We would have cut carried interest. We probably tried 25 times. The reality of this town [Washington] is that constituency [hedge funds and private equity] has a very large presence in the House and the Senate”.

When it comes to the core inter-

ests of the capitalist class, the “constituency” has an overwhelming presence not only in the US Congress but also in all capitalist parliaments.

It will retain that overwhelming presence until the labour movement develops the strength and the democratic sinews to secure working-class representation in politics through representatives who are truly identified with and accountable to the working class.

Catalonia impasse demands challenge to Rajoy

By Martin Thomas

Spanish prime minister Mariano Rajoy has scheduled the first session of Catalonia's new parliament for 17 January.

Elections on 21 December gave a result similar to 2015. The pro-independence parties won a small majority of seats in the parliament (70/135 this time, 72/135 in 2015) with a slight minority of the votes (47.3% this time, 47.8% last time).

Only now several of the leading pro-independence MPs are now held in Spanish jails for sedition, or self-exiled in Brussels for fear of being jailed if they return to Catalonia.

On Friday 5 January Spain's Supreme Court refused bail to Oriol Junqueras, leader of the second-biggest pro-independence party, ERC.

There is talk of some of the exiled MPs renouncing their seats so that they can be replaced by colleagues to give effect in the chamber to the notional majority.

Catalonia's main pro-independence parties, JuntsxCat and ERC, have signalled no appetite for another attempt at a unilaterally-organised referendum or declaration of independence. Their immediate focus will be on a series of justified democratic demands: the lifting of

charges against their leaders, the ending of Article 155 (direct rule from Madrid), negotiations with Madrid, and a path to a recognised independence referendum. The immediate prospect is for stalling by Rajoy, and exacerbated, sullen tensions.

When Catalonia's regional government called an independence referendum, in October, Rajoy condemned the referendum as "unconstitutional", and sent cops to Catalonia to obstruct it, sometimes by violence.

His bid to scare off voters from independence has failed, even though aided by thousands of firms anxiously moving their head offices from Catalonia in the meantime. He is still on the same track, though.

The election results showed a slight shift to the right. The leftish coalition Catalonia in Common, including Unidos Podemos, which opposed both unilateral independence and the Madrid coup, went down from 8.9% of the vote to 7.5%.

In the pro-independence camp, the left-wing CUP did much worse than in 2015. The figures should cool down the talk from Socialist Appeal and the Socialist Party of the Catalan independence movement being a sort of incipient so-

cialist revolution.

Yet Catalonia has a right to self-determination. It has a right to choose, even if the people of Catalonia do not as yet link that choice with a drive for social advance. Even if we may think that the rise of the independence idea represents a search for "realistic" ways of escape from the economic plight of Spain since the 2008 crash, and a diversion and distraction (in fact unrealistic) from socialist politics.

Money wages in Spain have stagnated since 2010. With inflation at about 2% a year, real wages have been steadily dwindling. They were 9% behind 2009's level by 2013. The official unemployment rate stands at 16%, and 38% for young people.

There were big social protests in the city squares in 2011. Some of the energy from them went into a new left-wing movement, Podemos. Launched in 2014, it quickly and briefly led opinion polls in Spain, and got about 20% of the vote in Spain's 2015 general election. But, despite absorbing the Izquierda Unida movement into itself, it has so far proved unable to consolidate the impulse for social change into a solid advance based on the working class.

Its promises of super-democracy inside the new party have proved



illusory; it has lost some of its never-very-sharp radical edge; and its opinion-poll rating, though still sizeable at 15%-18% across Spain, is down rather than up on 2015.

Little wonder that many people have turned to Catalan independence as a more tangible prospect of change, even if they do not believe that Puigdemont's rootedly conservative, and historically corrupt, party will bring much social relief.

Spain-wide, Rajoy's is a minority government. He has been able to pursue his thuggish policy towards Catalonia, and his social cuts across Spain, only thanks to the complaisance of the Citizens' Party and the

PSOE in Madrid.

Opinion polls across Spain signal weariness rather than polarisation for an alternative. Rajoy's PP is at 30%, down from 33% in the 2016 election. The Citizens' Party is up from 13% to around 20%; the PSOE is up a fraction at around 22% to 26%. The opposition parties have made no loud call for a new election.

Socialists should support the justified democratic demands, while at the same time pressing for political mobilisation to oust Rajoy and create paths towards constructive socialist change.

Globalisation in trouble

By Colin Foster

"Expectations were low as the meeting began in the Argentine capital", or so the *Economist* magazine reported on the latest World Trade Organisation meeting of trade ministers, in Buenos Aires on 10-13 December.

"They sank even lower as it progressed. Delegates failed to agree on a joint statement, let alone on any new trade deals".

Eighteen years ago, at a similar meeting in Seattle in November 1999, the WTO appeared as a manifestation of the chiefs of global capital triumphantly carving up the world. Tens of thousands of anti-capitalist protesters, trade-unionists, students, and others, protested on the streets of Seattle.

The Seattle protest inspired dozens of other protests at global-capitalist gatherings (IMF, WEF, etc.) and a series of world and regional Social Forum gatherings.

Since then, both counter-globalisation and capitalist-globalisation momentum has ebbed.

The WTO was launched in 1995 as a successor to the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, an evolving international legal agreement which originated in 1948, and which through seven "rounds" of negotiations had expanded to reduce tariffs from an average of 22%

to an average of 5%, and to include 123 countries after starting with 23.

The WTO, as distinct from GATT, is an organisation, with membership conditions and (cumbersome and long-winded) disputes procedures.

Since it was launched in 1995, it has been trying without success to push through an eighth round of general trade-freeing negotiations, with no result other than some minor deals in Bali in 2013.

REASON

Impasse in the WTO was one reason why the USA and the EU embarked on TTIP, a "Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership", in 2013; but that project never looked buoyant, and with Trump as US president is now sunk.

Nevertheless the WTO exists. It has expanded to 164 member states, including pretty much all those having significant weight in world trade.

It is weighty enough that many Tories say that a hard Brexit will be no big problem for trade, because World Trade Organisation rules will provide enough protection against too-high trade barriers.

The USA used to be the main mover in GATT and the WTO. Donald Trump has said: "The WTO was set up for the benefit [of] everybody

but us... They have taken advantage of this country like you wouldn't believe. We lose the lawsuits, almost all of the lawsuits in the WTO". That's nowhere near true. The USA does have a lot of complaints brought against it under WTO rules, and loses them more often than not. It tends to win its complaints against other states.

WTO insiders are seriously worried that Trump's USA may destroy the WTO from inside, by blocking the appointment of new judges to operate its tribunals.

Trump's Trade Representative, Robert Lighthizer, is a right-wing economic nationalist, but seems less inclined to slash-and-burn than Trump himself. He told the Buenos Aires meeting: "The WTO is obviously an important institution. It does an enormous amount of good".

And when an attempt to get new global rules for e-commerce could not get enough traction among all 164 states represented in Buenos Aires, the USA joined a group of 70 which said they would nevertheless try to get a deal among themselves.

Globalised capitalism and neoliberalism are still up and running. We aim to subvert them from the left, in the direction of solidarity and social equality.

But now there are others trying to subvert them from the right, towards nationalist regression.

What Google search figures teach us

By Gerry Bates

Some political tides are flowing our way a bit, but not as much as we might hope.

Google's latest figures from their web search engine, released in December 2017, show that the number of people taking to the web to find out more about "socialism" is increasing in Britain, though modestly.

The worldwide picture is less encouraging. It shows spikes after the economic crash in 2008-9, and in early 2016, with publicity for Sanders and Corbyn, but no increasing trend.

Worldwide, searches for the term "capitalism" — inquiries by people who have probably realised, to one degree or another, that they live in a social world given not by nature but by a particular, historically-specific system — show a spike after 2008 but then a decline.

In Britain, however, there is a modest increase in searches for "capitalism", and, oddly, no particular spike in 2008-9.

The numbers of searches for "Workers' Liberty" is disappointingly constant. The rows in Momentum in 2016 brought us a lot of hostile publicity, but you might reasonably hope that hostile publicity would also stimulate curiosity.

Searches for the terms "Marxism", "working class", Trotsky show no rising trend since 2007. The same for inquiries about "inequality", inquiries which may show people seeking accounts of how and why polarisation between rich and poor has been increasing.

Searches for "Trotskyism" show a spike in August 2016, and a tentative rising trend. Google reports the countries from which most searches for particular terms come. Those for "Trotskyism" have come mostly from Britain and Ireland, with Australia no.3.

Searches for "Trotskyism" seem to do better than searches for the equivalent French and German terms (trotskysme, Trotzkismus), but the equivalent Spanish term, Trotskismo, shows a comparable tentative rise, mostly from Bolivia and Argentina.

• For graphs see: bit.ly/2CWy2BI

Turning Labour to stopping Brexit

By a Labour Party activist

The resignation of the Blairite Lord Adonis from his position as adviser to the Tory government has shown the issue of Brexit, and whether or not to try and stop it, is live in the Labour Party.

A new survey has suggested that 78% of Labour members want Brexit to be stopped or at least want a second referendum.

Up until last year's election the right-wing of Labour (notably Progress) had only half-heartedly taken up the issue of stopping Brexit. They avoided directly opposing Brexit because they feared the electoral power of nationalistic sentiment.

They couched their opposition to Brexit primarily as the need to retain membership of the EU single market, aware that there was considerable cross-party concern about the impact of withdrawal on business.

For the left in the Party, issues of migrant rights and the growth of political nationalism were the major concern. Last autumn the Labour Campaign For Free Movement collected hundreds of signatures on a statement calling for the Party to be unambiguous in its defence of migration.

For Workers' Liberty, opposing Brexit required taking the issue of defending migrants into "Leave" sections of the working class. These were often poorer sections of the class: unorganised and politically demoralised by decades of austerity.

The 2017 election result changed things in many ways.

The Tory right which, bolstered by the 2016 referendum result, had been dominant in May's government, and locked into a hard Brexit, lost crucial support in parliament.

After a year and a half of Corbyn and McDonnell having to be pre-occupied with the internal attacks against them, they and the left in the Party came out of the election far stronger.

The election made possible a new start in

politics. We can now focus on opposing capitalist austerity rather than the left being on the defensive about immigration.

Yet the left is still ambivalent about how openly we should defend immigration, and by implication, we oppose Brexit.

Some on the left, particularly those influenced by the *Morning Star*, see the view of Brexit voters as immutable. The *Morning Star* has had a long history (from the 70s at least) of not opposing immigration controls, as long as they are allegedly "non-racist". Such views divert the battle against capitalism into arguments about which workers should have their rights defended, and which shouldn't.

Such arguments over immigration are reminiscent of others in the Party over taxation. After 1987, and particularly after the 1992 election result, we were continually told that "the people won't vote for (any) tax rises" (or any radical policies for that matter).

We now know that argument was a bag of crap. It was kept alive by repeated and loud assertion, usually by the very wealthy who would suffer from tax rises. We were told it again and again by the media, the Tories and the dominant elements of the Party — Peter Mandelson and Tony Blair. It became an "indisputable truth", until it was accepted even by many on the left.

SIMILAR

We have a similar situation now. The front bench of both the Tories and Labour endlessly repeat a Tory mantra that "Brexit means Brexit".

There can be no challenge to the referendum decision, even though it was built on lies, it got only a narrow majority, and much has changed since then.

Labour Party spokespersons should have asserted clearly, simply and repeatedly that migrants and refugees are welcome here, that our problems are caused by the Tories. Instead Labour has appeared mealy-mouthed and incoherent. Without a clear lead, contin-



uing with Brexit is seen as "just the way it had to be".

Labour had hoped to force the Tories to debate the issues and political criteria for Brexit. The Tories refused. There will be delayed decisions on many aspects of the single market and customs union, but Brexit is scheduled to continue with minimal debate.

Whilst there might have been ambiguities about Tory Brexit in June 2016, there are none now.

Labour should now be asking, just as with taxation in the past, "is Brexit in the interest of our working class electorate?" If it is not, we should say so and oppose Brexit.

But opposition to Brexit can only succeed if it is a continuation of what was started in the June 2017 general election — a commitment from Labour that we are going to shift power in our society towards the workers, particularly those suffering the effects of the Tory attacks on the lowest paid and weakest in our society.

The Labour right's desire to create a campaigning cross-party alliance would be disastrous. We have nothing in common with the Lib Dems and Remain Tories. We are trying to build a different European political system — one that delivers for working-class people.

The only unity Labour MPs should have

with Lib Dems and Tories is when walking through the same division lobbies in Parliament on specific Brexit questions.

A recent article by Owen Jones was pessimistically headlined "I don't like Brexit — I just don't see how it can be stopped". But he also rightly argued that the Party "should launch itself as a grassroots, populist insurgency: rather than hosting EU flag-waving marches in remain citadels, it should hold mass public meetings and leafleting campaigns in Leave areas, focusing on a positive case directed at those who are not enamoured with the EU (which is most people, including many Remain voters). Its aim should be to shift public opinion so dramatically that calls for a new referendum become unanswerable."

Our positive case should include developing real links with the rest of the radical workers' movement in Europe and transforming the EU.

Moving toward government, a radical Labour Party can energise the European labour movement. We can stop Brexit, challenge austerity on a cross-European basis and stop the nationalist narrative trapping British workers.

We need a working-class campaign to stop Brexit.

Deeper questions behind the Worboys case

By Charlotte Zalens

The news that the so-called "black cab rapist" John Worboys is to be released after just under 10 years in jail has put the criminal justice system and the way it deals with rape cases under scrutiny.

Worboys was convicted of one count of rape, five of sexual assault, and 10 of drug-ging. However police believe as many as 100 women may have been assaulted by Worboys. 85 women contacted police after Worboys' conviction but no further charges were brought against him.

Worboys was given an "imprisonment for public protection" sentence (IPP). IPPs were introduced in 2003 in order to put, and keep, in prison people who were judged to be a danger to the public in cases where the sentencing system does not allow life sentences. People sentenced to an IPP are given a minimum sentence — Worboys' was eight years — but the Parole Boards could keep people in prison indefinitely. Parole Boards hear evidence from prison staff and experts on the suitability of a prisoner for release. The Pa-

role Board hearing for Worboys judged him to no longer be a risk to public safety. However, as Parole hearing proceedings are not released to the public, we will never know why they decided Worboys no longer posed a threat.

Questions are now being asked of the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) about why more charges were not pursued. Was it seen as unnecessary because Worboys was already in jail? What about justice for those women who did not have their accusations pursued?

QUESTIONS

But the questions to be asked of the CPS in the Worboys case are much more complex than this.

Before Worboys was arrested, police had failed to properly investigate and make the links between complaints by 14 women about being "assaulted by a cab driver" over many years.

After the arrest, Harriet Harman, then Labour's Home Secretary, commissioned a review into the way police and prosecutors handle rape cases. At the time of the publication of the review we said:

"The review is worth reading because it shows how the 'austerity regime' is impeding the possibility of real progress in helping the victims of sexual violence.

"There is a consensus now (even in government!) that Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARCs) help many more women and men, including those who would not otherwise seek help. More SARCs are needed but the government has no intention of providing them.

"Other ostensibly radical goals, both in the review and the government's response to the review, are much less than they seem. The government says it favours a 'multi-agency' approach to tackling sex crime but this is next to useless if they are not prepared to provide extra cash to enable public agencies to work together.

"Recently the government has pushed the CPS into being more 'generous' in its prosecution of rape complaints — 'believing the victim' is the new watchword (yes, decades after feminists argued for this common sense approach). But neither lawyers nor police will do that if time, training and money are not put into developing a more appropriate,

sensitive and holistic response from the moment people come forward to make a complaint."

Seven further years of austerity have cut much deeper into budgets, and services that support rape survivors are struggling to survive, if they still exist.

The lack of prosecutions in the Worboys case is far from an anomaly. Only six percent of rape complaints end with a court conviction. An attrition rate of 80% has remained largely unchanged for decades. Cases drop out of the system at the police investigation stage, while being considered by the CPS, and when being prepared for court. On top of that it is estimated that only 15% of rapes are reported, although there is speculation that this number may have risen in the last few years.

A knee-jerk "lock them up and throw away the key" response to Worboys' release does not provide any real answers to the high attrition rate in rape investigations and prosecutions, to how to prevent sexual violence or deal with it when it occurs, or for how the criminal justice system could rehabilitate perpetrators.

Iranian workers push for regime change

Beginning on Thursday 28 December around 80 Iranian cities and towns saw a wave of demonstrations, amounting to the biggest protest against Iran's authoritarian Islamist political system since the 2009 "Green" reform movement.

This has been a tremendous revolt with the issue of working-class livelihood at the centre. A revolt against years of super-exploitation and a vicious regime which exists to enrich itself and boost its own power.

According to official figures at least 1000 people have been arrested and 25 people have been killed (including, three suspicious deaths in custody). The protests have, for now, died down. However, the pressures behind the protests will not go away.

Demonstrations were initially sanctioned by regime hard-liners seeking to mobilise against the so-called centrist President Hassan Rouhani. But the demonstrators quickly went beyond the machinations of inter-regime rivalry.

By the people on the streets, Rouhani was blamed for not using the lifting of international economic sanctions to benefit ordinary Iranians.

Clearly, there is a lot of pent-up anger against the government. Unemployment stood at 12.4 percent in 2017, up 1.4 percent on the previous year. Some reports of youth unemployment put it at 25%, others as high as 40%. About 3.2 million Iranians are jobless, out of a total population of 80 million. Inflation stands at 9%. Last month's government budget slashed subsidies on basic goods and increased food prices.

Students joined the protests because of a dire lack of jobs for graduates. It seems the sort of people who coalesced around the Green Movement — the middle-class and liberals — were less involved, but they too will have been watching the protests with interest.

The protests involved a mix of economic and political grievances. This is not surprising in a country where 80% of the economy is either owned by or strongly connected to sections of the government and state.

The targets of the demonstrators slogans and action were Rouhani, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, and Qassem Soleimani, one of the key architects of the Revolutionary Guards and the military head of the Quds Force, responsible for Iran's extraterritorial military interventions. The protesters also called for the Iranian government to pay less attention to its regional ambitions and more concern for ordinary Iranians.

Protesters have further reason to focus on the government, and the clerical hierarchy that stands behind it. Almost all economic growth in Iran comes from oil and gas production and all proceeds from that go straight to the various wings of the state. Not only is the state using cash to support wars abroad, it also pumps money into clerical foundations. Some of the protests included invasions of government offices, as people looked for evidence of corruption.

There may also be local grievances. For example, in Kermanshah, there has been dismay at the government's response to a recent earthquake. The demand to "free political prisoners" has also been raised.

But the most interesting and important element in the background to recent events is a growing incidence of strikes across Iran in the last 18 months.

Strikes and workers' protests have included enterprises where workers have long-organised, such as the Haft Tapeh sugar cane

plantation, but have also included pensioners and a protest (a petition demanding overdue wages) by workers in the South Pars oil and gas field in southern Iran. Reports indicate networks of workers, demanding unpaid wages and benefits, against sackings and for the right to organise, have developed in the last period. During the protests there have been fresh strikes, including by workers at the Persian Gulf International Transportation Company, Hepco Road Construction Equipment factory, the Ring car factory, as well as Haft Tapeh sugar workers and others.

INDEPENDENT

An independently organised working-class movement (the unions and non-Stalinist socialists) is only social force which has the potential to create an overall society-wide alternative to Iranian reaction and capitalism.

Since the 1979 Iranian revolution the workers' movement has been weak, because it has been repressed. If it grows stronger and more confident, and can emerge from these events intact and ready to fight again, this will be a tremendous step forward.

Government rhetoric blaming "outside interference", and aimed at Saudi Arabia, intensified as the protests went on. They used Trump's entirely hypocritical support for demonstrators to boost and justify repression. In the main the regime used detention rather than violence by state forces or basij vigilantes to repress.

However, there are now hundreds of detainees, and this will be an important focus of our solidarity in the coming weeks.

We also step up our solidarity with the Iranian workers' movement.

We stand with all working-class people in



the Middle East against all the oppressive governments in the region and big-power bullies like the US, especially as Trump is now threatening to not re-certify the 2015 deal which lifted sanctions. Such sanctions will most hurt ordinary Iranians and we should oppose their reimposition.

Above all socialists are clear that the Islamic Republic has to be smashed, not reformed. In its place there needs to be a

genuinely secular and consistently democratic political system that includes not only free speech and human rights but the workers' right to organise independently.

The fight for a secular democracy is a way to help workers develop their economic struggles and organisations, and to grow strong enough to pose and win support for socialist aims.

Corbyn and Thornberry, back Iran protests!

Jeremy Corbyn's lack of vocal support for the Iranian protests is not wholly unexpected but it is disappointing. He has even won praise from such isolationist commentators as the journalist Peter Osborne for remaining quiet in the face of a fight against a brutal theocracy.

Worse than Corbyn's silence was the statement by Shadow Foreign Secretary, Emily Thornberry, who said, "It's very difficult... to actually come to a conclusion as to what political forces are behind the current disputes... We don't want to leap to judgement and say, well we don't like the regime in Iran, these people are against it, they must be the guys with white hats, because it doesn't work like that." Thornberry does not have a general history of supporting regressive regimes just because they clash with the USA. She might have been expected to read the serious commentary by Iranian academics, journalists and socialists who know what is going on in Iran.

The Labour Party manifesto of 2017 inspired many people to campaign on the basis of alleviating poverty, supporting the raising of wages and fighting against "the few" in favour of "the many."

It was quite clear that the Iranian protests were the many striking out against the few. So, back protests which are calling for the freedom of political prisoners, the demands workers like the Haft Tapeh sugar workers,

and for greater human and women's rights!

But Thornberry's myopia is worse than that. For nearly 40 years, since the victory of the clerics in the revolution of 1979, trade unionists have been imprisoned for organising, women have been stoned to death for "adultery" and gay men have been hanged for "sodomy". It should be abundantly clear to the elected representatives of our labour movement, which side they are on.

Since making her initial comments Thornberry published a longer piece on Facebook, but it still failed to give clear solidarity to those demonstrating; rather it makes some criticism of the Iranian Government and calls on it to be fair to the demonstrators.

She cites the turmoil of "revolutions" in Egypt and Libya. So what? Does that mean that our labour movement should never get behind legitimate and just protests for freedom and economic security in the Middle East?

The fact that some protestors called for the restoration of the monarchy should not dim opposition to the regime, and nor should the fact that the protests began with manoeuvres by conservative hardliners in the regime. We should call for the release of imprisoned political activists, an end to repression and for trade union, women's and LGBT rights.

In contrast to Thornberry, the TUC's international department's Owen Tudor has un-

equivocally sided with the protestors and highlighted the active solidarity that can be made with jailed trade unionists like the Tehran bus workers treasurer, Reza Shahabi, who recently suffered a stroke in jail. There have been daily protests outside Evin prison in Tehran, a prison that is now filled with the political prisoners of previous years and new demonstrators who are being arrested every day.

The media has made much of Corbyn's previous associations with the regime. He has appeared numerous times in the past on Press TV, the Iranian-run broadcaster, as well as writing a soft-soap report of his January 2014 visit to Iran. Corbyn will remain compromised by his associations unless he comes out explicitly in support of the protests.

The rest of the British left, from the Communist Party through to the SWP, has come down on the side of the protests, some with reservations about the backing of the protests by elements in the political establishment and Trump. But rightly they all report that the protests are popular mobilisations against a regime that cannot look after its own base.

It is the duty of the left and labour movement to stand solidly behind these protests and to show our solidarity, and it is time the Labour leadership got on board.

“The working class is the key”

Moran Shirin of the Iranian Revolutionary Marxist Tendency spoke to *Solidarity*.

There were many workers' protests on Sunday-Monday, 7-8 January.

Mostly they've been about unpaid wages. These include: Haft Tapeh sugar cane workers (bit.ly/2qL1gxF); Khalij-e Fars Transport (2-4 months of unpaid wages); Phases 22 and 24 of the South Pars gas field development in Asaluyeh (temporary contract workers have not been paid for six months). Zar Shooran gold miners have not been paid since November. Tabas council has not paid its workers for three months. Ghaemshahr Textiles workers have just had some of their three months of unpaid wages paid and have ended their protest. Esfahan Chini (china) have protested about wage arrears of three months. Shafarood dam construction workers in Rezvanshahr have not been paid their wages and insurance for six months.

It is possible that Sunday's Haft Tapeh strike call had some effect on these, but this type of protests and strikes has been going on for many months and will probably grow as we approach the Iranian New Year on March 21st. Almost every year there is an upsurge in struggles as workers demand their unpaid wages and better pay and benefits as they prepare to celebrate the new year with their families.

The budget that has been proposed includes many price rises, subsidy cuts and tax rises. Just the subsidy cuts will make around 30 million people even poorer. E.g., petrol will rise by 50%!

The street protests seem to have come down to just a few sporadic ones. This was bound to happen as the repression is stepped up. The working class has not taken action as an organised class that can lead itself and all exploited and oppressed layers in society. Without a general strike, or the type of strikes that will build towards a general strike quite quickly, then the street protest were bound to be crushed.

The working class, as in 1978-79, is the key. Before the February 1979 revolution we had almost six months of a rolling strike movement. Something like that is needed now. Then, when guns were distributed in working class areas, there was the insurrection. Street protests on their own did not topple the Shah and they will not overthrow this regime — which has now been strengthened because of the nuclear deal.

There have been at least 21 official deaths, nearly two thousand arrested and just yesterday they said that a 22-year-old man, Sina Ghanbari, has committed suicide in Evin prison! Only workers can break the creeping repression.

There are many trade union organisations on paper. The repression of the Ahmadinejad years has meant that many activists have been jailed, some like Shahrokh Zamani have been killed, many demoralised and a vast section of them have been identified, and interrogated and are under surveillance by the Intelligence Ministry.

That is why the recent Haft Tapeh strike was so significant. Many workers taking part

had their faces covered so that they could not be identified and then jailed. That strike was also significant in that many women workers were not only involved but were part of its leadership. One of these women workers was proudly announcing how five women had managed to block a road near the Haft Tapeh complex (blocking roads was a tactic often used about a decade ago).

Another union that has been very active is the Tehran and Suburbs Vahed Bus Company's one. That is why Reza Shahabi, their current leader, is in jail, even though he has already served his sentence!

The protests started in Mashhad and it seems that they were mainly supporters of Ebrahim Raisi, a conservative cleric. Mashhad is a very religious city and Ebrahim Raisi, many regime sources claim, is the most likely successor to Khamenei when he dies.

So even though they were complaining about price rises, particularly the price of eggs, in the beginning there was an anti-Rouhani and 'anti-reformist' aspect to the protest. But such is the discontent at the lack of improvement in the living standards for the majority of the masses, despite oil exports doubling since the nuclear deal, that all sorts of people joined the protests and they spread to many cities and towns. Over 70 towns and even small towns have been involved, especially in areas where national minorities are



Families protesting outside Evin Prison where many protestors have been taken

the majority — like Lorestan and Kurdistan. In Tehran the protests have been relatively small and mainly around Tehran University.

Economic improvements of the past year or so have not benefited workers or even many middle class people. Youth unemployment is at 25%-27% (some say about 40%)

and around 830,000 will join the job market next year.

Although the official inflation rate is 10%-12%, for most people, particularly when it comes to food and other basic necessities, price rises are much higher.

Support arrested students in Iran!

Kaveh Abbassian spoke to *Solidarity*.

Ten years ago, I was part of a leftist student movement named Students for Freedom and Equality (DAB).

In 2007 there was a nationwide crackdown on our movement. Close to 100 students were arrested and tortured, and many went into hiding. Some of the students escaped the country. I went underground, giving interviews from hiding. I was one of the few activists who was outside jail at the time. I came to the UK in 2008. I have known Workers' Liberty members since then.

It took ten years after that for leftwing politics to organise itself inside universities again. The literature was there. But actual activists who organised themselves around socialist demands didn't come back for ten years. Every time there is a crackdown, it takes a while for people to brave the tyranny and come out and start organising themselves again.

This year, on National Students Day, 7 December 2017, left wing students managed to organise some protests and demonstrations around Iran against the neoliberal economy, privatisation, and different factions of the regime. These are not students following Khatami, Moussavi, Rouhani. They are students who stand for workers' rights, women's rights, trying to connect grassroots social movements with each other.

The protests later in December started and

students joined after two days. In Tehran University in particular students raised the slogans of “Bread, jobs and freedom”; “Students and workers unite”; “Students would rather die than accept humiliation”; “Capitalist mullahs give us back our money”; “Reformists, fundamentalists, your story ends here”; “People beg while the Supreme Leader acts like a God”; “All political prisoners must be released”; “Down with the dictator”; and many other slogans.

Students organised demonstration inside several universities and inside student dorms. After those demonstrations, the intelligence services, plainclothes people, started kidnapping students. Many of these student activists were arrested not during protests, but in their homes, from their campuses, from their workplaces. It is worth mentioning that security forces and the police are not allowed on university campuses — it is illegal! So they went in in plainclothes and kidnapped students.

KIDNAPPED

Over 90 left wing student activists have been kidnapped.

Many of them have been sent to Wing 209 of the notorious Evin Prison, which is the wing of the Ministry of Intelligence. They are all under torture. Two nights ago, a 22-year-old protestor died in Evin Prison. The authorities said that he committed suicide, which is of course nonsense. He died under

torture. His name was Sina Ghanbari. Another young man, Mohsen Adeli, also died in jail. The Islamic Republic said that he committed suicide — again, nonsense. Another protestor, Ashkan Ab-savaran, called his own family with his own phone, to say that he had been arrested by the intelligence services. His mother went to the prison to ask about him, and she was told he was not there. So that was a case of disappearance which is worrying.

About ten students have been released in the last two days.

Emily Thornberry's statements are disappointing, as are left wing journalists supporting Jeremy Corbyn's silence. I think it is a shame that Jeremy Corbyn has remained silent. The Western left has been confused about the Islamic Republic for too long.

Left wing people and grassroots student activists, student unions and organisations should defend their comrades in Iran, especially the ones in jail and under torture. All we require is solidarity for the oppressed people of Iran and leftwing activists inside Iran.





“The Islamic Republic cannot give anything to people”

Aman Kafa of the Worker Communist Party Iran — Hekmatist (Official Line) spoke to *Solidarity*.

The left in Iran — as distinct from the Marxist movement — tended not to come from the working class but more from the middle classes, following the remnants of the nationalist movement, and those who supported the nationalisation of oil, and that kind of trend.

The uprising in 1979 was a major change. During that time, what we call the traditional left was close to Russia on one side — not Lenin's Russia but Russia as it was then. We represented the extreme wing of the left. We put our emphasis on Marxist notions of class struggle, revolution, the need for a party. We come from that tradition.

In terms of how we organise in Iran. Firstly, all our individual contacts in Iran are organised in what we call a “column approach”. So, rather than them being connected together, they are each connected to us [abroad]. This is for their own safety and security. Secondly, membership of a party like ours is extremely illegal.

Our activists in Iran undertake all manner of activities in different arenas: women's rights, student movement, Kurdistan, a variety of social activities, NGOs, all sorts. It is difficult to put a finger on something and say where we are — it would expose our people.

There is a large section of society who are exploited — but not necessarily employed. That was the fire which was burning. They came out. But unless it is organised and

formed, it is not possible to win on the streets.

That is why our party has been calling for the construction of a variety of organisations, at the borough, city and county level: in order to make sure that it is possible to build something so people can move onto the next stage; to build something at the grassroots level, between different sections of protestors.

The government's initial expectation was that this would fizzle out very quickly. The spread of it made it much more difficult for them. The growth of the protests has not subsided. It has spread to different cities and more areas. But the number of people participating, especially after the intervention of the Revolutionary Guards, has subsided. The desire for protest is still there, hugely. But what is not there is a leadership or a proper organisation. The Islamic Republic hopes that this will break the movement. But if it is broken, it will continue somewhere else.

Working-class people have a sensible approach in terms of the future. If they don't think they can win better things for tomorrow, they won't come out today. If they think the future can be better, they will go through any sacrifices. The protests so far have not created that kind of expectation. So strikes won't take place until they do.

The Islamic Government has used this fact. The government sent letters to public sector workers threatening them with loss of their jobs if they did not support pro-government mobilisations. They have a strong hold on people's income, and that, more than the physical suppression by the armed forces, is very powerful.

The Islamic Republic does not allow organisations as such. A lot of organisations are clandestine. But they can express themselves publicly by raising demands for things which are commonly acceptable. For example, the right to see a doctor, to have education without paying fees, and so on. The notion of forming such organisations is not uncommon in Iran. We have had them before, in 1979. That has continued, and even the Islamic Republic had to set up its own “Labour House” because the idea of councils is very much fermented among people in Iran. Forming groups, forming councils, sections that can link together and organise — that is the way the protests can establish themselves. Such organisations have been set up in some ways, in some areas. They do not all have the same format. We are trying to promote a standard format so people can understand how to take part.

DEMAND

The main demand for everybody is for better welfare; education; sufficient income; having holidays and so on — against poverty.

The second issue is safety: the Islamic Republic has been calling for safety, from external threats like Daesh. But people are calling for safety, for example from being harassed by the security forces. And thirdly: freedom. In translation, our main slogan we are raising is: “Bread, welfare and freedom.” Haft-Tapeh have called for “Bread, work and freedom.” Their call for work was against the growth of unemployment. The ideas of security and freedom cut the Islamic Republic to their core.

This is a spontaneous protest. Every section of society is trying to appropriate it. If you talk to the nationalists, they say, “the army should come and save us!” The bourgeois left like to think that if people like Khamenei and the Islamic hardliners went away, life would be better. If you look at the bourgeoisie, they say, “the money is going to different factions in Lebanon, in Syria, and so the Islamic Republic is wasting our money.” You have people on the left, and protestors who don't have anything — and they are raising slogans in support of Palestinians, but they don't want the Islamic Republic to be a force in that region. So depending on who you go to, the same slogans are interpreted differently. A couple of slogans raised at the beginning said, “We want the life of the monarchy back”. And so the monarchists said, “people want monarchy!” But that wasn't true. It was nostalgia for

how life in those days was better than life is today. So that doesn't mean that people have come out on the streets in order to bring back the monarchy.

The core of it, which the Islamic Republic recognises, is that people cannot go back, because even if they suppress them, the poverty, lack of employment, lack of freedom, and other problems are still there. So they will come out somehow.

The regime is trying to say: the protests are just about one faction trying to put pressure on the other. That is not true. That was the case with the Green movement ten years ago. But now people are not calling on one faction to bring down the other. Also, the Revolutionary Guard is not just another armed force. They are the last line of defence for the government. Bringing the Revolutionary Guard into the streets is the last playing card of the regime, not the first. There are a variety of forces, like the Basiji and others, who are brought in first. Politically it is not good for them — the Revolutionary Guards have said from the start that they don't want to be seen in the streets, and they have only come out in certain areas. The protests themselves are not armed, so it is not like in Libya, where a lot of people took up arms.

The Islamic Government has had some secret meetings to decide a tactic. Their tactic is not to push people back into their houses. They need to produce an alternative. There are a variety of alternatives open. Currently, they are hoping that this whole thing will fizzle out, when they can come back and do something. But the toothpaste is out of the tube, so that is not going to happen. The protestors want to come out, push the regime back, but unless they can create organisation to establish their gains, they can't see a way forward either.

The Islamic Republic has only one choice: to repress. They cannot give anything to people, because they know there is no end to this giving. We don't have a revolution yet. But we see the process of what we saw happening in the areas surrounding Tehran in the years before 1979. It is an open game at the moment. In this scenario we are trying to push our own agenda, and get more workers to support the protests. The idea that it has finished or that the regime has won — it is not true.

You could see an action tomorrow that could change the whole picture. It is natural, given the regime's show of force and large-scale arrests, that people might be more measured. It is not finished yet.

**Rebellion in Iran:
Iranian socialists speak**
Workers' Liberty London Forum

Friday 19 January

**Nunn Hall, IOE, 20
Bedford Way, WC1H 0AL**

7.30pm, followed by evening social



Trump in America and the world

Ira Berkovic reviews Trump's record

On 22 December, US President Donald Trump passed the most significant piece of domestic legislation of his term thus far, the so-called "Tax Cuts and Job Act".

This tax reform, one of the most sweeping in decades, will cut corporate tax by 15%. The package also includes measures such as lowering taxes on overseas profits.

The BBC's summary of the act was to the point: "The tax reform is good news for businesses, particularly multinational corporations and the commercial property industry. The extremely wealthy and parents sending their children to private schools are set to benefit."

This policy shows no signs of alienating the "plebeian" elements of Trump's base. This syndrome still prevails: "The top 0.1 per cent are very remote to almost everybody. Quite a few of the worse-off can be persuaded or half-persuaded that billionaires got to be billionaires by exceptional energy and skill, and no doubt a bit of luck, in negotiating the sort of channels for advancement that those worse-off people can see as accessible to themselves: starting a small business, winning promotion at work, etc.

"They can be persuaded that policies that would cramp the billionaires would also harm their own chances of advance through individual effort, and divert resources to the feckless and idle." (*Solidarity* 456, 6/12/17)

Healthcare has been another major policy arena for Trump. On 4 January, Trump signed an Executive Order which, if enacted, will end a regulation on health insurance companies selling policies across state lines, effectively widening the marketplace.

On Trump's "travel ban", the US Supreme Court ruled on 1 January that the latest version can be enacted, even while legal challenges to it are ongoing. The ban imposes de facto total restrictions on citizens of Chad, Libya, Yemen, Iran, Somalia, and Syria entering the US for any purpose, as well as citizens of North Korea and Venezuela.

Despite the revelations of apparent panic and cluelessness in *Fire and Fury*, journalist Michael Wolff's new book on the Trump and his circle, the regime, on domestic policy at least, does have a clear agenda: to benefit corporations, property developers, insurance companies, and the super-rich by regulating and legislating to deregulate.

Trump's virulent and overt racism, however, is, at odds with mainstream neoliberalism, which presents itself as broadly cosmopolitan and liberal-minded.

Trump's nationalist-neoliberalism is causing panic in the institutions of global free trade. The 11th World Trade Organisation ministerial conference, held in Buenos Aires in December, ended without agreements.

The US has blocked appointments to the WTO's tribunal, meaning that when the terms of office of its remaining members expire, it will be effectively unable to function.

On foreign policy Trump has been erratic. Trump's previous rhetoric on Iran suggests he may not renew Obama's 2015 deal, which lifted US sanctions. As well as wreaking social and economic havoc not only on Iran's regime, but on its people, the reimposition of sanctions would hand clerical-fascist demagogues in the Islamic Republic a tool with which to diffuse the current protest. They will point to America as the source of social grievances, rather than themselves.

Trump's recent recognition of an undi-

vided Jerusalem as Israel's capital, and of his intention to move America's embassy there, has inflamed tensions in the Middle East. Some have argued the move is a sop to the right-wing Christian-Zionist elements of his base, others that it may be a leftfield attempt to jump-start a deadlocked situation and bounce the Palestinians into a shabby version of a two-states settlement that involves them accepting a serious of non-contiguous ban-tustans as their "state".

The first weeks of 2018 saw further ludicrous grandstanding by Trump on Twitter about nuclear weaponry and North Korea. Some say this is a calculating and clever move by Trump to control news cycles. That may be a factor, but the paranoid-narcissism of a reality TV star, who appears to view world politics in the same terms as the fans of WWE (particularly those who refuse to believe it isn't "real") view their "sports entertainment", has its own dynamics. While there are (hopefully) sufficient checks in the US political system to prevent Trump from unilaterally declaring a nuclear war because someone offended him on Twitter, one cannot always expect bourgeois leaders in the grip of irrational ideologies – whether political, or political-religious – to act in a rational way.

ENTENTE

2017 also saw Trump's entente with ultra-authoritarian Filipino president Rodrigo Duterte, who had previously made a shrill anti-US-imperialism a key facet of his political self-presentation.

There's speculation that Trump's property interests in Manila are a factor there.

The web of scandals related to the FBI's ongoing investigation into the Trump campaign's links to Russia continues to expand. Wolff's book alleges that Steve Bannon, Trump's former adviser, may now be collaborating with Robert Mueller, the FBI chief heading the investigation.

There is a great deal of tin-foil-hat politics here. The centre-right Democrats and some moderate Republicans and conservatives talk about "treason", and ascribe every new development to Russian collusion or interference. On the right, some Trump supporters are claiming the whole thing is a conspiracy contrived by the "deep state" to get rid of Trump.

The US socialist paper *Socialist Worker* (unconnected to the British publication of the same name) explains: "[The Russia investigation] is not just a distraction from more important issues that affect working class people... It's clear that many members of Trump's team had repeated contacts with Russian officials and then lied about it, which is strange.

"What we don't know is the extent to these contacts, and whether they come from Trump's personal business history of shady deals with Russian financiers, or a desire for warmer relations with Russia in order to pursue the tougher stance against China... that it's impossible to disentangle the two is the real crisis of the Trump presidency for the US ruling class.

"The keys to the empire are in the hands of an untrustworthy and incompetent rogue and the motley crew of fawning charlatans and neo-fascists surrounding him — who wouldn't have made it past the security desk in most previous administrations."

Trump's overall approval rating, according to pollsters Gallup, increased slightly over the holiday season, from 35% in December to 39% on 5 January. The December rating made



him the least popular first-term president since polling began.

A poll published by *Time* magazine in December showed that 36% of voters would definitely vote for Trump in 2020, and 18% would "probably" vote for him, with 38% saying they would vote for the Democratic candidate, and 14% "probably" voting for them. So his core base is largely holding up.

In terms of potential sites of resistance to Trump, the issue of women's rights remains key. With six members of Congress having recently resigned after being accused of sexual misconduct, and a growing movement across public life to challenge the abuses of powerful men, allegations against Trump will resurface. Even Nikki Haley, America's ambassador to the UN, has gone on record to say that the women who have made allegations against Trump "should be heard".

Other recent events in America could galvanise resistances; a recent Grenfell Tower-type tragedy in a working-class apartment building in the Bronx, New York, has provoked huge anger. So far that has mainly been directed against municipal government, but with Trump's background as a property developer and landlord the political links are easy to make.

The best hope in the US far-left firmament remains the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), which continues to grow. 15 DSA members won election to public office across America in elections at the end of 2017, and many of those candidates did run campaigns that openly identified them as socialists. But they were not in any sense "DSA candidates".

As DSA member Emmett Penney wrote in *The Clarion* magazine (Issue 11, December 2017): "It's a fact of American political life that can't be ignored: as it stands, the greatest obstacle to left wing, progressive victories in electoral politics is the Democratic Party itself. Their collusion with imperialist gluttons and Wall Street primadonnas, taken with their incredible self-regard in the face of

failed policies and a crushing defeat in 2016 makes them a party to combat, not join. This puts the DSA in a tight spot: it's not a political party, so it often relies on candidates' enrolment in the Democratic Party to run races. It's damn near impossible to get third party candidates on the ballot at all, even in local races."

DSA functions mostly as a network where local chapters conduct semi-autonomous campaigning activity. There are moves to centralise things to a greater degree, with a drive for local chapters to focus on a nationally-agreed campaign on healthcare. There are also rows, mainly online, over international issues, with a newer kitsch anti-imperialist wing particularly (and probably unrepresentatively) vocal on Twitter.

In the US labour movement, there are some fairly high-profile ongoing unionisation drives in prominent media organisations, such as the *LA Times* and *Vox Media*. The Fight for \$15 movement continues, although without a strike day for some time. The overall situation is understandably bleak; the rank-and-file journal *Labor Notes*'s review of 2017 describes a "nationally-coordinated employer's offensive", and talks about "using attacks against us as organising opportunities". The tone is very much defensive.

Socialists in Britain should do what we can to amplify the struggles of the US labour movement and wider social movements: feminists, LGBT+ movements, civil rights and anti-racist activists, and more. The journals *Jacobin*, *Labor Notes*, and *New Politics*, as well as the International Socialist Organisation's *Socialist Worker* and *Solidarity's Against The Current* are useful sources of information and analysis.

In planning protests against Trump's planned visit to the UK in February, socialists should ensure that such actions are not simply denunciations of Trump as an individual, but expressions of solidarity with those organising against him and his social project.

“Zombie” academies, zombie policy?

By Pat Murphy, National Education Union Executive, personal capacity

The Tories’ flagship education policy, the drive to make all schools academies, is floundering. As an explicit goal enshrined in legislation “forced academisation” was defeated before it developed any real momentum.

The proposal for an Education White Paper which would force all schools to become academies by 2020 were announced by George Osborne in his March 2016 budget. The response was a relentless, nationwide campaign of opposition which exploited opposition within the Tory Party. The proposals were withdrawn within a few months. When the idea was ditched the government insisted that their intentions had not changed and the aim to make all schools academies by 2020 should stand.

Since then things have not gone well for the academy programme. The rapid rate of academy conversion following the Gove 2010 Academies Act has slowed down significantly. The defeat of the forced academies bill gave heart to those opposing conversion and brought many of the arguments against academies into the public spotlight.

VICTORY

For the first time since the academy programme was introduced (by Labour) a tangible national victory has been won, the academy steamroller has been slowed down.

This reputational damage has been made worse by developments in a number of academy chains or the more local multi-academy trusts (MATs), most dramatically, at Wakefield City Academy Trust (WCAT). As reported in *Solidarity*, following a long period of financial investigation and criticism WCAT announced in September 2017 that they no longer had the capacity to manage their 21 schools, were closing down their op-

eration and abandoning the schools, their pupils and parents. Since there is no legal provision for academy schools to return to their local authority, the 21 schools would be reallocated to alternative MATs (in DfE language they would be “rebrokered”).

Parents, school staff and trade unions within WCAT were furious. They thought that most of the problems with WCAT are endemic to the academies system and not unique to one chain or MAT. In December, Wakefield City council (not an especially left-wing Labour body) voted to have the WCAT schools returned to the local authority and for a public enquiry into the financial management of the Trust. This is the first Labour council to take this step and is the result of energetic campaigning by unions and parents in the area.

In December a Freedom of Information request revealed that, in fact, there were over 40,000 children in what Labour education spokesperson, Angela Rayner, called “zombie academies” — schools which had either been abandoned by, or taken from, their original academy sponsor. Unable to return to a local authority these schools and their pupils are awaiting reallocation to a new academy sponsor. There are 64 such schools, over half of which were part of two trusts, WCAT and the Education Fellowship Trust. The latter became the first MAT to abandon all of their 12 schools in March 2017. Schools in this position are often subject to strict conditions which stop them, for example, spending money on resources or appointing new staff.

A significant problem for the government and academy advocates is that few sponsors want to take over additional schools, particularly if those schools are more likely to depress than enhance the headline results for their new MAT.

There is no obligation on any academy sponsor to take over any other school, and yet there is no route back to the local authority. In the entirely plausible circumstance where a larger number of chains containing many more schools decide to close down,



there would be a serious crisis in education provision.

There have been other less high profile signs that the academy programme is losing its grip. In late November 2017 the Bright Tribe Academy Trust announced that they would let go of Whitehaven Academy in Cumbria following complaints by teachers, parents and pupils that the school was in a dilapidated state.

Explaining this decision Bright Tribe said, “As we have been unable to grow beyond a single school in Cumbria, we recognise the need to explore alternative sponsor options for Whitehaven academy.”

At the same time the Harris Federation has been asked to take over the Durand Academy in south London after the school failed to address financial concerns and potential conflicts of interests and had its funding agreement terminated.

On the Isle of Wight an academy run by the Academies Enterprise Trust, Sandown Academy, plans to close and be replaced by a local authority school on the same site. These plans have the support of the local authority and have been approved by the DfE. This is being widely seen as the first “renationalisation” of an academy school.

Finally in Hackney the Labour Council recently approved plans to set up a Hackney Schools Group with a budget of £100 million to support 50 schools. The details of this plan are not yet known but emerged after a consultation of residents. The Deputy Mayor of the borough claimed that “One of the strongest things that came out of the Schools for Everyone [consultation], is that residents felt that the council still should have a role in education.”

The academy programme became an ideological crusade for a small group of neo-liberal zealots spearheaded by Michael Gove. Gove was succeeded as Education Secretary by Nicky Morgan who was in post when the forced academies plan was announced.

Following the Brexit vote and the election of May as Tory leader, Morgan was removed and replaced by Justine Greening. Now Justine Greening has been replaced by Damian Hinds.

The impact of Brexit, the divisions exposed in the Tory Party and the damage done by the forced academies debate, combined with the removal of successive Education Secretaries took the drive out of the programme. The Tories can now propose only those new laws that have more or less unanimous support amongst their MPs. Pushing the academy programme further isn’t such a policy.

As stated repeatedly by anti-academy activists, there is absolutely no evidence that

academies improve school standards or outcomes for children. Indeed, that was the finding of the first ever government research into the programme carried out by Price Waterhouse Cooper for the last Labour government. Subsequent reports by the Education Select Committee and the Education Policy Institute have also found no evidence that academy status improves standards in primary or secondary schools respectively.

In addition a 2017 Sutton Trust report concluded that “disadvantaged pupils in sponsored academies did less well than those in all mainstream schools”. Research by the National Education Union found that a child was more likely to be taught by an unqualified teacher and that their teacher was more likely to leave their job in an academy. The NEU also found that teachers are likely to be paid less in academies, while senior management are more likely to earn more than in local authority schools. The academy programme has offered the government little or no tangible gain for significant and now growing political embarrassment and criticism.

SCANDAL

The public dialogue about academies now centres almost exclusively on financial scandal, excessive CEO and leadership pay, and abandoned children in “zombie schools”. School education is now an area ripe for a clear and popular Labour response.

Although Corbyn’s Labour has, rightly, promoted the idea of a national education service to match the NHS and been much more prepared to criticise the government’s obsession with academies, it hasn’t committed to a clear and unambiguous policy of bringing existing academies back into local authority management.

The importance of a policy like this cannot be overstated. In a political climate where Labour’s performance in the last election and standing in the polls makes the government in waiting, such a commitment would act as a huge disincentive to any school currently considering conversion. It would embolden more local authorities to follow the lead of Wakefield and call for the return of academies to the maintained system.

The end of the Tories’ flagship education policy is within our grasp, but we need the political wing of the labour movement to catch up with the trade union wing and the mood of parents.

We need a commitment to ending academies and moving back to local, democratic, accountable and comprehensive education.

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Today one class, the working class, lives by selling its labour power to another, the capitalist class, which owns the means of production.

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- A workers' charter of trade union rights — to organise, to strike, to picket effectively, and to take solidarity action.
- Taxation of the rich to fund decent public services, homes, education and jobs for all.
- A workers' movement that fights all forms of oppression. Full equality for women, and social provision to free women from domestic labour. For reproductive justice: free abortion on demand; the right to choose when and whether to have children. Full equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. Black and white workers' unity against racism.
- Open borders.
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- Democracy at every level of society, from the smallest workplace or community to global social organisation.
- Equal rights for all nations, against imperialists and predators big and small.
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If you agree with us, please take some copies of *Solidarity* to sell — and join us!



Events

Wednesday 17 January

Organising Meeting for Sheffield Says No To Trump
7pm, Central United Reformed Church, 60 Norfolk Street, S1 2JB
bit.ly/2AJCzBg

Friday 19 January

The rebellion in Iran: Iranian socialists speak
7.30pm, Nunn Hall, Institute of Education, 20 Bedford Way, WC1H 0AL
bit.ly/2CUW4MI

Saturday 20 January

Marxists, the labour movement, and the Labour Party dayschool
12 noon, Nunn Hall, Institute of Education, 20 Bedford Way, WC1H 0AL
bit.ly/2mbFltT

Sunday 28 January

Marxists, the labour movement, and the Labour Party dayschool
12 noon, Rutland Arms, 86 Brown Street, Sheffield, S1 2BS
bit.ly/2AJYrws

Saturday 3 February

Emergency Demonstration — NHS in Crisis: Fix It Now!
12noon, Gower Street, London WC1E
bit.ly/2AIgALh

26/27 February 2018

Protest Trump's visit
London
bit.ly/2iUocaK

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Workers' Liberty



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Corbyn is right on BDS

LABOUR

By Ira Berkovic

In response to a tweet from Labour MP Kate Osamor supporting the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) campaign against Israel, Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn clarified his own position on Israel/Palestine.

He made clear, again, that he supports an end to Israeli occupation and a genuine two-states settlement; an independent Palestinian state alongside Israel. He also reiterated that while he supports targeted boycotts of settlement produce, he does not support a blanket boycott of Israel.

There is much to criticise in Corbyn's international politics, particularly in his politics on the Middle East, but on this issue, Corbyn is right, and Osamor is wrong.

Workers' Liberty has long been in a minority on the activist left in our support for a two-states settlement and our promotion of practical links between workers' organisations as an alternative to blanket boycotts of Israel. For advocating a policy almost identical to Corbyn's, we have been denounced as "Zionists". It is an indication of a culture in which sectarian slander substitutes for political debate that no such opprobrium (rightly) attaches to Corbyn for expressing similar ideas. We hope his comments can catalyse a serious debate about what politics and tactics should inform socialist solidarity with the Palestinian people.

The groundswell of support for BDS amongst left and liberal-minded people has noble motivations: a desire to do something — anything — to stand up to the Israeli state and its oppression of the Palestinians. Support for BDS is more understandable still amongst Palestinians themselves. It appears as a non-violent, civil-society-based way for Palestinians to mobilise international support to apply pressure to the Israeli state, in an increasingly desperate moment

when all other strategies seem to have failed.

All socialists — who, if they are any kind of genuine socialist at all, oppose Israel's occupation of Palestinian territories and support Palestinian independence — share the desire to see international pressure brought to bear on Israel that underpins much support for BDS.

No socialist should oppose campaigns, for example, for divestment of public institutions from companies involved in the arms trade, or that profit from settlement expansion. No socialist should oppose the demand for an arms embargo, undoubtedly a form of "sanction", on Israel.

But the BDS movement has become more than a set of tactics that might be deployed in pursuit of a variety of different policy aims; it has ossified into a kind of political religion for Palestine solidarity, which increasingly dismisses the consistently democratic two-states policy advocated by Corbyn as neither possible nor desirable.

The conscious comparison made by the BDS movement is with the boycott campaign against apartheid South Africa. But the comparison is limited and problematic in two key ways. Firstly, on a practical level, it was not decades of cultural and economic boycott that toppled apartheid, but the self-organisation and activity of black workers. The lesson for Israel/Palestine is that social upheaval within both the occupied territories and Israel itself will be necessary to shake the Israeli government, which can easily weather an international consumer boycott of goods on which it is not even heavily economically reliant.

FLAWED

There is a second, and more fundamental, sense in which the comparison is flawed.

South African apartheid was predicated on the exploitation of black labour by a narrow privileged caste of white people. The aim of the movement against apartheid was to isolate and ulti-

mately smash the state belonging to that caste, replacing it by a state where black and white would have equal rights.

But the Israeli-Jewish nation is not a settler caste. All classes in Israel benefit from colonial privilege over the Palestinians, but the Israeli economy relies for its functioning largely on the exploitation of Jewish, not Arab, labour. The Palestinians in the occupied territories are Israel's colonial subjects, and the Arab population within Israel an oppressed minority whose civil rights are denied. Those are injustices that need redress, but a policy aimed at isolating and ultimately dismantling the Israeli state, as South African apartheid was isolated and dismantled, only makes sense if one denies that the Hebrew-speaking Israeli-Jewish population constitutes a national group. Corbyn is right to acknowledge that it is a nation.

The balance of forces is stacked against progress towards a real two-states settlement. The current Israeli administration opposes it, effectively operating a chauvinist "Greater Israel" policy of colonial expansion. Israel's most powerful international ally, the US, now has a president who also opposes it.

But it remains a fact that two distinct national groups exist in historic Palestine, the national state of one group standing as the colonial oppressor of the other, whose self-determination is denied. The necessary first step on the road to justice is for that denial of self-determination to end. Short of the voluntary dissolution by the Israeli-Jews of their state into a post-national federation (surely a more fantastical and far-off prospect than two states), that can only be realised by the establishment of a Palestinian state alongside Israel.

A radical, socialist, internationalist Labour Party could play a meaningful role in building international working-class solidarity with the Palestinians, and for two states. Labour should say, categorically, that a Labour government would support the establishment of a Palestinian state, end arms sales to Israel, and work with left-wing and labour-movement organisations on the ground to build links between Israeli-Jewish and Palestinian-Arab workers.

Corbyn's comments are a welcome antidote to the fatalism of much of the discourse around Israel/Palestine, which forecloses on the possibility of ever changing the balance of forces except by decades-long campaigns of boycotts chipping away at Israel's might (while the meantime, the Palestinians remain subjugated and oppressed).

It is to be hoped that such comments can help reestablish a politics of solidarity based on consistent democracy and workers' unity, that a reinvigorated Labour Party won to socialist ideas could help make a reality.

Momentum Youth shut down

By Michael Elms

After Momentum's internal democratic structures were shut down in January 2017, its nascent youth wing was taken over by a small friendship group.

Momentum Youth and Students became obsessed with factionalism, lauding trade union leaderships (in the hope of gaining employment in their offices), and weird Stalinist iconography. It was mainly active on social media.

But the group's cringeworthy

over-use of emojis, paranoid factional gossip and pictures of Stalin has clearly embarrassed Momentum chair Jon Lansman. On 8 January Lansman asked MYS to shut down all its online accounts.

It was sad that Momentum's youth section, which had so much promise, was taken over by a clique. It is not good that one person feels entitled to shut down a youth group's social media accounts by fiat.

The answer to both problems is to build an open, democratic youth wing of Momentum.

McStrike wins pay rise

By Gemma Short

On 2 January a notice appeared on the staff noticeboards of some McDonald's stores announcing a significant pay rise for workers.

Pay for under 18s will now go up to a minimum of £5.75, under 21s to a minimum of £6.75, under 25s to a minimum of £7.95, and over 25s to a minimum of £8 in London. All workers will get an above inflation pay rise of between 5.4 and 6.3%. It is the biggest pay rise McDonald's workers have had in 10 years.

A Bakers', Food and Allied workers' Union (BFAWU) organiser told Solidarity: "There is no doubt that this is a direct result of McDonald's employment practices and wages being exposed by workers going on strike. There is also no doubt that a pay rise for these low waged workers will mean that workers and their families will be eating better, have a chance of finding better accommodation than they currently have, and children will have better clothes.



"However it is not enough. The real living wage in London is £10.20 per hour. They can afford to pay more, and they should pay more. Youth rates need to be abolished. Discrimination in pay would not be accepted in any other group in society so why should it be accepted, and legislated, for young workers?"

McDonald's workers at two stores struck for the first time in UK history on 4 September 2017.

The BFAWU said: "Workers are organising in different parts of the country at the moment. We've had a significant response from across the country after the pay rise news. Not just from McDonald's, but from workers across the service industry.

"There will be more strikes. Workers will chose to strike if McDonald's does not increase wages more than it has — watch this space."

Picturehouse workers to strike for 13 days

By Peggy Carter

Workers at five Picturehouse cinemas will strike for 13 days at the end of January, including two 48 hour strikes on 20-21 January and 26-27 January.

The strikes were called after another ballot of workers returned 100% in four sites and 97.9% in one site in favour of more strikes. Work-

ers at the cinemas also struck on 24 and 26 December, during a busy time for cinemas cashing in on Christmas holiday customers.

Picturehouse, and parent company Cineworld, still refuse to negotiate with the workers union Bectu. But the strain of the strikes on management is beginning to show as Picturehouse has maintained a recruitment freeze, fearful that new workers will join and

spread the dispute.

Community supporters of the strike will be organising actions to put pressure on Picturehouse, particularly during the film awards season, as well as raising money for the workers' strike fund.

• See picturehousefour.org for more information

London transport workers' roundup

From the Tubeworker blog

DLR ISS staff

Cleaning and security workers employed by the ISS contractor on London's Docklands Light Railway struck on 31 December, after ISS refused to respond to the RMT union's pay claim.

Further action will be taken if the employer continues to refuse to negotiate.

Train prep fight still brewing

London Underground managers seem intent on pushing ahead with their plan to reduce the frequency of train safety checks from 24 to 96 hours.

This means that some trains could be running for up to three days without having vital safety mechanisms such as brakes and door operations checked and signed off by qualified staff.

RMT is opposing the cut.

"Road map" to pay parity at Ruislip Depot

Engineering workers at London Underground's Transplant Depot in Ruislip suspended a planned work-to-rule, due to commence on 20 December, after bosses agreed a "road map" to pay parity between difference grades of workers.

Maintenance staff balloted for action to demand equal pay after Engineering Train Operators and others secured a 6.1% pay increase.

Strike to end outsourcing

By Charlotte Zalens

Security workers and receptionists at the University of London will strike on 25 January.

Workers, organised in the IWGB union, are fighting for an end to zero hours contracts, for the university to implement promised pay rises, and to be brought in house. Outsourced workers have far worse pensions, holiday entitlements, sickness entitlements, and maternity and paternity leave than in-house employees.

On the strike day the university will be holding the UK's largest postgraduate fair, where universities market courses costing many thousands of pounds to prospective students.

Students and other supporters will be holding a solidarity demonstration at 6pm on 25 January.

• Donate to the strike fund: bit.ly/2slf1lq



DOO strikes escalate

By a rail worker

RMT guards on Northern, Merseyrail, Greater Anglia and South West Railways trains will strike on 8, 10 and 12 January, with Southern members also joining the action on 8 January.

This represents a necessary escalation in the fight against driver only operation (DOO), and will cause disruption to trains for most of the first proper working week of 2018. With the escalation have come some other developments — by choosing a Monday, Wednesday and Friday the union has ensured that three days of action span a full working week but only hit strikers for a maximum of two days pay each.

Further, this is being coupled with £200 per member strike pay that will offset almost the full two days' pay. This should help strikers carry on to beat the employer and the DfT.

Finally, a separate Merseyrail Solidarity Fund has been set up in recognition of the rock solid unity between drivers and guards on that franchise, where Aslef drivers have been refusing to cross picket lines. This will allow solidarity payments to be made both to RMT

guards and any other rail workers who have refused to cross the picket lines on strike days.

Supporters of the fight against DOO should can help raise money for this fund by getting their union branches and other organisations to make donations or hold collections for the fund. We have included the bank account details for the fund below.

The Merseyrail fund should be opened up so that drivers and other workers at other franchises who have refused to cross picket lines can access it. This would have the added bonus of allowing the fund to be a focus for a national solidarity drive to keep the dispute going.

An increasing number of drivers at Northern have been refusing to cross picket lines, and a driver at one depot has secured a guarantee from the employer that no disciplinary action will be taken for not crossing the picket line.

• For more information on the Aslef "deal" on Southern see bit.ly/2AlwHsg

• Merseyrail Solidarity Fund: Unity Trust Bank 60-83-01, account number: 20388537

Strikes against academisation

By a teacher

Workers in schools in London are fighting inspiring battles to stop their schools converting to academies.

Numerous news stories about spectacular failures and government and education reports have exposed converting schools to academies as a costly, and at best ineffective instrument for improving education, yet schools continue to try to convert. This has much to do with the huge pay packets for senior leadership and the opportunities to employ your family members.

Royal Docks School in Newham and Village School in Brent both struck before Christmas in their attempts to avoid academisation, Cumberland Secondary, also in Newham, will strike as *Solidarity* goes to press on 9 January.

School workers' unions in Lewisham are preparing a campaign over the possibility of



Childeric Primary becoming a part of a Multi-Academy Trust. As reported in this paper before Christmas, the impressive action by school workers at Charlton Park led them to a significant victory.

School workers in Brent, Newham and elsewhere in London will be bolstered by that victory, and hopefully will learn lessons from their colleagues at Charlton Park.



Solidarity

For a workers' government

No 458 10 January 2018 50p/£1

March for the NHS on 3 February!

By a junior doctor

The health service has hit its annual winter crisis.

16,900 people had to wait in ambulances for hospital care in Christmas week. 4,700 of those had to wait in an ambulance for more than an hour to be seen. Media images of five, ten, fifteen ambulances queueing outside A&E departments have become common.

An 81 year old woman in Essex was found dead in her home when an ambulance arrived four hours after her initial 999 call. In Portsmouth an 88 year old woman died after five hours in an ambulance and two hours on a trolley waiting for a hospital bed.

On 15 December the *Independent* reported that one-in-five NHS trusts had run out of beds on at least one day so far this winter — a situation that will only get worse as winter progresses. On New Years Eve 12 hospital trusts reported 100% bed occupancy. Yet on 8 January Health Minister Phillip Dunne told the House of Commons that there are “seats available” in hospitals which run out of beds.

On 3 January 21 trusts (many with multiple hospitals) were on

“black alert”, meaning they can no longer guarantee patient safety or provide their full range of services.

Around 50,000 operations have been postponed in order to free up beds and ease the crisis.

For years there has been increasing concern about the capacity of the health service. Two years ago junior doctors went on strike to highlight the bad implications for patient safety in the terms of their new employment contract. In the winter of 2016 the Red Cross said there was a “humanitarian crisis” in the NHS. In some A&E departments it has felt like last winter never ended.

While the Secretary of State for Health, Jeremy Hunt, exchanged factoids with celebrities on Twitter about the state of mental health, and argued he should not only to keep his job but add social care to his brief, those who provide healthcare have gone beyond breaking point.

I’ve worked in departments with longer wait times, worse morale and sicker patients. I’ve never seen situation where the three have combined so toxically and caused so much avoidable risk of patient harm. What’s worse is that this is crisis has hit all hospitals across the country.

NHS workers are incredible, working above and beyond their job description, again and again trying to meet the needs of their patients. But the hard work of individuals are not going to fix this problem. From fellow junior doctors across the country, I hear the same reports — not enough staff, not enough beds, too many patients. Reports of critically ill patients being told by 111 to stay away from hospital; others without clinical need being told to come straight to hospital.

HONESTY

It’s time for some honesty about the state of our NHS from those at the top.

We knew last winter was catastrophic, we know that this winter’s flu strain is worse than previous years. Yet the planning and preparation for this winter has been woefully inadequate.

The government’s “solution”, Sustainability and Transformation Plans (STPs), now being implemented in England are not going to improve matters. In my region either Darlington or North Tees A&E is threatened with closure as part of these plans. The risks of these plans become apparent when I was caring for a patient in North Tees who has been transferred by ambulance from Sunderland 30 miles away, because Sunderland, Durham and Darlington Hospitals were all full. STPs are nothing more than cover for cuts to NHS budgets, and can’t provide the sustainability, transformation or plans that are required to drag our NHS back to health.

Bodies like the Accountable Care Organisations are not the



way to have an honest conversation about the NHS. They are neither accountable to the population or caring about the state of the NHS.

There is still a huge amount of good will towards the NHS from both patients and staff, but that goodwill is being eroded by the consistent pressure the service is under.

The government should make

emergency funding available to recruit extra staff and open more hospital beds.

Employ more clinical staff in the 111 telephone triage service, to better screen for the acutely unwell and at the same time prevent unnecessary presentations at A&E and Urgent Care.

Treat staff with respect and not with empty platitudes.

Emergency Demonstration

NHS in Crisis: Fix It Now!

Saturday 3 February

Assemble 12 noon, Gower Street, London WC1E

More info: bit.ly/2AlgALh

The NHS funding crisis in numbers

- Between 2010-11 and 2016-17 health spending increased by an average 1.2% above inflation, well below the average of 4% spent by governments in the years before 2010 to cover greater numbers of elderly and expensive new treatments.
- In 2015-2016 acute trusts recorded a deficit of £2.6 billion.
- In the budget the NHS received a £335 million bailout and an extra £1.6 billion for the next financial year. This is about half of what it needs to keep up with demand.
- Britain is 24th out of 34 OECD countries in terms of numbers of doctors relative to population.

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solidarity@workersliberty.org

Write to us: The editor
(Cathy Nugent), 20E Tower
Workshops, Riley Road, London,
SE1 3DG

Solidarity editorial: Michael Elms,
Simon Nelson, Cathy Nugent
(editor), Gemma Short, and
Martin Thomas

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