



& Workers' Liberty Solidarity

For social ownership of the banks and industry

No 460 31 January 2018 50p/£1

TAX THE RICH TO BUILD SOCIAL HOUSING

Homelessness is on the rise in the UK. By end of 2016, the official underestimate was 4134 people sleeping rough on the streets of the UK.

The figure has doubled since 2010 and is a 16% increase on 2015. The housing campaign Shelter estimates 300,000 people sleeping rough or in temporary or overcrowded accommodation, a 13,000 increase on 2016.

Further tens of thousands are sofa surfing or staying with friends in tense conditions.

By the end of 2017, 79,190 households were in temporary accommodation, a 17% increase on 2015, and a 59% increase on 2010.

Since 2010 the number of government-funded homes built for social rent, already low, has plummeted by 97%. In 2010 36,700 new socially rented houses were built; in 2017, only 1102 social houses.

More page 5

Inside:

Presidents club: sexism common in hospitality



A Unite union survey finds 89% of hospitality workers have experienced one or more incidents of sexual harassment at work.

See page 3

Defend Jon Lansman!



George Galloway wants to use the courts to silence Lansman's criticism

See page 5

Is this the end of the HDV?



Haringey council leader resigns after NEC calls for halt to the housing redevelopment project.

See page 10

Join Labour!

Corbyn: transwomen
welcome on all-
women shortlists

See page 10



Davos: saving the world for the capitalists

By Sam Allen

At the end of January, the world's elite met in the exclusive Swiss ski resort of Davos to discuss how to maintain and improve their position in the economy.

Both the setting and the speeches were utopian, as the politicians and bankers professed the virtues of neoliberalism. While millions were spent on round-the-clock security and caviar, we were told of the dangers of largesse spending by the state and the need to slash public services. Life is tough at the top.

There is growing discontent with capitalism around the world and it is being expressed in several different ways.

It has manifested as Donald Trump, self-proclaimed champion of the American working-class but running an administration in the interests of his wealthy friends. Across the Atlantic, millions of people have been enthused by Jeremy Corbyn's Labour Party and the promise to run the economy "for the many, not the few".

Davos is a bolthole for bourgeois politicians to take a break and formulate a strategy to resell capitalism to the masses. Theresa May talks about tackling "burning injustices", but will not fund sprinklers for tower blocks even in the wake of the Grenfell disaster. European leaders opine about the need for greater integration within the bloc, but in order to open up new markets for capital. Plus ça change.

Trump and May were featured speakers, as was Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell. Though painted as terrifying Trots in the bourgeois press, it is clear Corbyn and McDonnell will give concessions to capital unless there is an organised labour movement behind them.

Therefore, while the capitalists organise in the Alps, it is more important than ever for workers, students and young people to organise in their workplaces, on their campuses and in their communities.

The SPD and GroKo

By Stefan Schneider,
(*Klasse Gegen Klasse*)

By 56 to 44 per cent the delegates at the German SPD's Extraordinary Party Congress (Sunday 14 January) approved coalition negotiations for a new "Grand Coalition" (GroKo). But this will not end the crisis of social democracy: on the contrary.

After the Young Socialists (JuSos) and smaller SPD state associations had tried to stop the GroKo, Martin Schulz and the entire SPD party leadership had to go in with all guns blazing to win delegates to give special permission for coalition negotiations with the right-wing CDU and CSU parties. Always the same message: the results of consultation might not be perfect, but everything would be worse without the SPD in government.

2013 had seen similar discussions around the idea of a GroKo, in which it was widely predicted that entering a Grand Coalition under Merkel would lead to the downfall of the Social Democracy. In the end, as today, the party leadership prevailed. But 46 percent opposition to the leadership motion is a tangible expression of a crisis of orientation in the SPD. The *Tagesspiegel* newspaper pointed out "[this is] a confrontation between the party leadership (or the 'promise') and the party base.... But even if the 'promise' had the upper hand, the situation remains uncertain. Firstly, the coalition negotiations must be approved by a decision of the whole membership — far from a sure thing — and secondly, with or without a GroKo, the question of the SPD's future is being posed more and more acutely."

Martin Schulz swore after the vote: "The [CDU/CSU] Union parties will have to adjust themselves to the fact that the coalition negotiations will be just as hard as the consultation negotiations." But, whether the few extra breadcrumbs that might result from these talks are tempting enough for the party base remains to be seen.

But the opponents of the GroKo also have a problem. Refusing the GroKo does not an alternative project make. Their perspective is limited to staying in opposition for four years (or more) and then coming back to power stronger.

According to the *Welt*, the overwhelming sentiment of the Congress was "it's just got to be yes. This describes the Social Democracy's entire self-conception which, devoid of ideas, has fallen into narrow 'just got to govern'-ism. And it's in the name of that point of view that the SPD keeps bowing lower and lower to the interests of German capital. Or, as *taz* sarcastically put it: 'Merkel remains head of the SPD'."

Many are now speculating as to whether, in the — likely — event of a new Grand Coalition being put together, a part of the SPD may go rogue. It is possible that some will find their way into Die Linke, others will stay behind in the SPD, gnashing their teeth, and others still sink into political apathy. The fact is, the Social Democracy no longer has any positive, overarching project to offer. And so the slow and inexorable death of Social Democracy is set to continue.

The political representation crisis, of which the crisis of the SPD is only one part, could hardly be solved by a new GroKo.

Deliveroo: striking all over

By Gemma Short

Deliveroo workers in Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany and Hong Kong have all been on strike in recent weeks.

Deliveroo workers in Hong Kong stopped work on Monday 22 January and protested at Deliveroo's Hong Kong office. Deliveroo in Hong Kong had previously paid workers by the hour rather than by delivery, giving them a stable and predictable salary.

Workers had previously set the hours they were available for work and would be paid for those hours, apart from a meal break. However Deliveroo plans to change the system so that they can decide how many workers are needed at a time, reducing the number of workers "online" at non-peak hours. Workers estimate they will lose about three to five hours work a day.

Deliveroo has also introduced a penalty system which will be used to evaluate workers' performance.

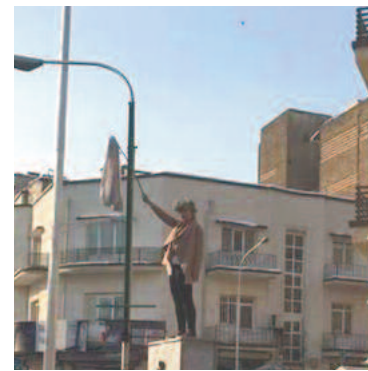
Workers fear Deliveroo will use this to reduce their working hours and wages.

Workers in the Netherlands have been on strike since 20 January as Deliveroo plans to make them "self-employed" from 1 February. Deliveroo workers in Brussels occupied the company's headquarters for three days over the same issue have been striking every Saturday since Saturday 13 January.

On Saturday 27 January workers from the Netherlands joined those in Belgium for a demonstration in central Brussels.

In Germany Deliveroo and Foodora (a similar food delivery app) protested in front of their company headquarters demanding the companies pay for repairs for bikes used for work.

- Find out more: The Riders Union (Netherlands): twitter.com/TheRiderUnion, Collectif des Coursières (Belgium): facebook.com/collectif.coursiers/



Iran protests: "a fire beneath the ashes"

Kaveh Abbasian spoke to Solidarity

On Monday 29 January many women took off their scarves in many parts of Iran, especially in Tehran, put it on a stick, and got on boxes and waved it around, like the woman from the iconic picture from early in the movement.

The action is referred to as "the girl from Revolution Street". That is where the first woman did this action — on top of an electricity substation on Revolution Street. People have laid flowers at that substation since then. The pictures of people copying her are being posted on the hashtag "Girl from Revolution Street". It is a radical act. It is a huge thing to do.

The protest movement is not continuing on at a massive scale but it is like a fire that's alive under the ashes. You see it happening here and there. The movement has created a lot of hope, but there is re-

pression.

Many of the people whom the state could not arrest have had their families arrested, or interrogated. At Tabriz University of Arts, one of the students on the list was not present to be arrested, so the police took his father instead, who has now been disappeared. The student has been told that his father will only be released if he hands himself in.

Several prisons are seeing hunger strikes by prisoners arrested during this movement.

The Haft Tappeh sugar cane workers' company is still on strike. Many other strikes are still ongoing elsewhere in Iran, but they are not necessarily politically-motivated. They are strikes about their living conditions and unpaid wages.

Outside Evin prison, families continue to gather, but the crowds are smaller, since most students have been released. But the students have been released on massive bails, awaiting judgement.

Labour base shifts on Brexit

By Rhodri Evans

The base for a left-wing campaign in the labour movement to defend and extend free movement, and to stop Brexit, is expanding.

A recent poll has shown a four-to-one majority of existing and potential Labour voters want Labour to back permanent membership of the EU's single market and customs union (bit.ly/sm-cu).

Another indicates that nearly as many Labour pro-Brexit people are now in favour of a second referendum (39%) as are against it (43%). A second referendum has overwhelming support from that majority of Labour voters who favour remaining in the EU.

Overall, 65% of Labour people want the public to have the final say on a Brexit formula. Only 19% oppose that (bit.ly/poll26jan).

Jeremy Corbyn is reported to be fixing an "away day" for the Shadow Cabinet to discuss shifting Labour policy to favour permanent membership of the EU customs union. An "away day" is inferior to having Labour conference debate the issue — as it was

blocked from doing in September 2017, but could do in September 2018 — but suggests movement.

The fundamental case against Brexit and for free movement is left-wing — the case for lower borders, for international integration, for liberty.

The ruling class is split on the issue. Big business is keeping a low public profile, but coverage in the *Financial Times* and the *Economist* suggests strong pressure from top bosses on the Tories for "certainty" and minimum disruption.

Reflecting their views, on 25 January chancellor Philip Hammond told global plutocrats in Davos that he saw Britain moving only "very modestly apart" from the EU (bit.ly/hmd-mdst).

Hard-Brexit Tory MPs denounced Hammond, and prime minister Theresa May felt obliged to distance herself, but generally the Tory hard-Brexit camp is at sixes and sevens.

Its promises from before the June 2016 referendum — more cash for the NHS, easy and quick new trade deals with non-EU states — are now a mockery.

Public sector pay: make the unions move!

By Charlotte Zalens

Local government workers have been offered pay rises of 2% in each of the next two years.

Further flat rate rises are promised for workers on the lowest pay, but the effect of existing top-ups which bring some of those workers up to the government's National Living Wage is that some of them will get no pay rise at all.

The offer from the Local Government Association is below inflation (CPIH up 2.7% December 2016 to December 2017), and does not even start to make up for pay lost since 2010. According to the Unison union, strong in local government and health, "public-sector pay rise by just 4.4% between 2010 and 2016 while the cost of living rose by 22%".

Unison is conducting a consultative ballot of its members about the offer, and whether they are willing to strike, from Monday 29 January to 19 March. Since a special Unison conference called by branches in response to the sell-out of the 2014 pay dispute, Unison must make a

recommendation to its members on any offer. The Unison members on the National Joint Council voted 12 to 11 to recommend rejection.

Recent ballot results in PCS (consultative) and in the CWU and UCU (formal) show that unions can break the thresholds imposed by the Trade Union Act (minimum 50% turnout, minimum 40% of eligible voters for action). Unison branches should look to how those thresholds were broken by other unions to get the highest possible turn-out in the consultative ballot.

FORMAL BALLOT

Whatever the result of the consultative ballot, Unison should hold a formal ballot — mobilising and redirecting central union resources to win that ballot.

Unite is also recommending rejection of the offer. The GMB is balloting members without a recommendation. That may lead to its members accepting.

Unions across the public sector have put in the same 5% pay demand to employers. This is better and more definite than the rhetoric

in the past few years which talked only of breaking the 1% pay freeze.

But even 5% comes nowhere near the amount lost by public sector workers since 2010. And demands for flat-rate increases — e.g. £2000 for every worker — would help the worst-paid, and help narrow the often large pay gaps in public services between the worst and best paid.

Coordination between unions is important. But remember the 2011 pensions dispute! That was sunk, eventually, by the self-proclaimed "fighting" unions saying they could do nothing unless the least militant unions would join them.

Especially when the employment rate — the proportion of people aged 16 to 64 who are in work — is at its highest-ever, 75.3%, many groups in the public sector have the muscle to win better pay rises even without all-across-the-board unity.

That unity is more likely to be achieved by stronger groups giving a lead, and inspiring others, than by everyone waiting until the weakest duck is exactly in row.

The "perks" of the old boy networks

By Peggy Carter

Revelations by *Financial Times* undercover journalists about the sexual harassment which took place at an event held by men-only fundraising charity the Presidents Club will come as little surprise to women who have worked in the hospitality industry.

Many of the guests were quick to promote their "good boys who left by nine and didn't see any funny business" credentials, yet seem to see no problem in the concept of an all-male event with all-female waiting staff who had been told to wear short, tight, dresses. It was obvious from the set up that these women were meant to be objects of entertainment, whether or not any guests assaulted them.

In Unite's "Not on the Menu" survey of hospitality workers, 89% of respondents said they had experienced one or more incidents of sexual harassment in their working life. 56.3% said they had been targeted by a member of the public. 22.7% said they had been harassed by a manager. 77% said that there were not aware of their workplace having an anti-sexual harassment policy.

The *FT* revelations were also not a surprise to women working in the kind of big businesses which regularly paid large sums for tables at the Presidents Club for their male executives. In October last year, Jayne-Anne Gadhia, chief executive of Virgin Money, published her re-



view for the government on sexism in the financial services sector. Speaking to the Treasury Select Committee she concluded that there was "undoubtedly ... a sort of pervading sexism" in the industry. She reported on her own experiences: "I remember a very senior woman [at RBS] being very upset one day telling me that she was expected to sleep with her boss". A senior executive had recently asked

her why he should hire a woman for a top job "when she could turn round the next day and say, 'I'm pregnant'".

The financial industry seems to have decided it needs to clean its act up. The *FT*'s investigation, following a series of exposés in that paper, may be prompted by the #metoo movement which so dramatically showed how ubiquitous sexual harassment and assault is.

The UK's Women in Finance Charter, a group of big asset managers, have set up a gender diversity drive, and the director-general of the Institute of Directors has warned boards should take the issue of sexual harassment "extremely seriously".

Yet among the rich men at the top, sexual harassment is still seen as one of the perks of the "old boy" networks which underlie big business.



Solidarity in football

By Tess Malone

In 1986, Middlesbrough Football Club (MFC) was on the verge of being thrown into administration. It was Friday 22 August — the eve of the season, and the gates had been padlocked.

Cleveland Police had advised MFC that they were unable to play their first home game at their then home ground, Ayresome Park. The Football League stated that if Boro were unable to fulfil this fixture then they would face expulsion from the Football League.

At the eleventh hour, a lifeline was thrown to our club from our neighbours and footballing rivals, Hartlepool United Football Club (HUFC). HUFC offered Boro the opportunity to play their "home" game against Port Vale at The Victoria Ground with a 6:30pm kick off — after they had played their own home game.

If this offer of solidarity from another north east team hadn't been made, then MFC might not be here today.

Thirty two years on, it's January 2018... Hartlepool United are now in the National League, the fifth tier of English football. They now face administration.

The gap between football leagues has never been greater. Premiership "giants" pay millions of pounds to buy players, whilst Hartlepool

United are struggling to raise money to even pay players' wages.

The average cost to attend a football match has rocketed. A day out can exceed a weekly shopping bill, and many working-class fans who have supported their clubs since they were old enough to understand the offside rule, are being priced out of the game.

On Saturday 20 January, Hartlepool played Wrexham at home. This game was to be named "Save 'Pools Day" and was to repay the solidarity shown in 1986. Boro fans bought around 3,000 tickets of a 7,865 sell out match. Coaches owned by local Teesside firms provided free transport to take Boro fans to the match. I took my ten year old son to the game, who happily stood with the Hartlepool stewards collecting money in buckets.

Football in the north east has a long and proud history among the working class. Football was born out of the steelworks and in the pit villages. Rivalry may be fierce on the pitch and in the terraces, but each club understands what it means to belong to and to show support for its local community.

At the time I'm writing this, Hartlepool United have just managed to pay their players' wages for another month. It is unclear whether the club will be saved, but they live to fight another day.

Left stands for NUS President

University of the Arts Student Union Campaigns Officer Sahaya James is standing for President of the National Union of Students. She was one of the organisers of the "Free Education – Tax the Rich" demonstration in November, 2017.

This month's edition of *Clarion* magazine interviewed Sahaya, where she explained why she was standing.

"Students are charged exorbitant rents, management push our academics into further precarity, pay the cleaners and caterers who keep our institutions functioning a measly fraction of what university VCs earn, starve our mental health services of vital funding.

"The Tories have dismantled our colleges, taken our grants, enforce racist surveillance and are now militantly carrying out their full vision of marketisation.

"Meanwhile we have an NUS



President, Shakira Martin, who shakes hands with Tory fat cats in the Office for Students.

"An NUS President who bizarrely champions arms manufacturers, and who'd rather launch tepid FE reports with Vince Cable, a key figure in the government that tripled our tuition fees, than empower students to fight back against the devastating funding cuts, staff redundancies and college closures."

• Full interview: bit.ly/2rV6EPq

Books that can win

AWL

By Colin Foster

The author Alan Sillitoe described how, as a national serviceman aged 19 in 1955, he was got to read Robert Tressell's *The Ragged-Trousered Philanthropists* by an eager colleague saying: "This is the book which won the 1945 election for Labour".

The Tories, in 1945, tried to counter by mass-distributing a book of their own, Friedrich von Hayek's *The Road to Serfdom*.

The political shift of 1945 was shaped by books, and conversations around books, not by tweets or memes. If we want a similar big shift today, we need similarly heavy ammunition.

Over the last two and a half years, allowing for churn, almost half a million new people must have joined the Labour Party, and the great majority of them because with Jeremy Corbyn they now see the Labour Party as a vehicle for left-wing hope.

Over 30,000 have joined the Labour left group Momentum.

Those people may have thought of themselves as left-wing before mid-2015. But the great majority of them were not politically active in any regular way. At most they might come to a demonstration, sign a petition, express left-wing opinions to their friends.

Now, in one way or another, they have embarked on becoming not just left-wing individuals, but left-wingers active in a collective, organised, systematic way.

Of course some have done no more than sign up, make their payment to the Labour Party, and maybe help out in the June 2017 election campaign.

An increasing proportion, though, are coming to meetings. The number of Young Labour groups is still much less than it could be, but it is increasing. The big majority, we can guess, think of themselves as "socialist" in one sense or another.

It was never likely that this surge of hundreds of thousands of people would have come straight to the explicit activist socialist left. Understandably, most want first to go with the flow and try out the "easy option" — vote Corbyn, get an approximately socialist government for no greater price than just those votes. They are inclined to try that first even if they would prefer Corbyn and the Labour leadership to be bolder, even if they are worried on issues like Labour's abandonment of freedom of movement in Europe.

MINORITY

But a minority are — to some degree or another, occasionally or inconsistently, fleetingly or lastingly — thinking further.

They are wondering what this "socialism" they've got involved in means, whether it can really be won without daring to say the word "socialist", whether it can be won by policies which seek to be "mainstream" and in tune with at least a large part of "big business".

How many of that minority can be drawn now into discussing those questions through, into wanting to be explicit and upfront about socialism, and into organising as socialists — specifically, as class-struggle socialists, as socialists who gear themselves to working-class struggle as the way to win — will be a decisive issue for the coming years, when the Corbyn surge will face sharper tests.

That sort of consolidation requires reading and discussion. Not just reading tweets or Facebook statuses or social-media messages, but studying books.

The legacy of Thatcherism and Blairism, a

relentlessly market-oriented society and a relentlessly credential-oriented education system, can be seen in the fact that Britain's averages for hours spent reading books are now only half the averages for India, which still has 25% illiteracy and 40% of rural children dropping out of school before age 14 (bit.ly/read-x).

Social historians have long explained how the advent of silent, individual reading of long texts was pivotal in developing intellectual rigour, reflective and self-revising thought, science, irony, nuance, criticism of established authorities and established religion.

We need all those today in the labour movement, and in the first place on the left.

Over the coming weeks, *Solidarity* and Workers' Liberty people will be turning out to talk face-to-face with as many as we can of our friends, workmates, and union and Labour Party co-workers, and to ask each one

of them if they will buy and read our new booklet, a new (substantially reworked, short, cheap) edition of *Socialism Makes Sense*. (The first edition, mid-2016, was entitled *Can Socialism Make Sense?*)

This campaign will identify us to those friends and colleagues, and to ourselves, as the people within the Labour left dedicated to fighting for explicit, unabridged, and authentic (that is, libertarian, democratic, anti-Stalinist) socialism.

It will, we're confident, open up political conversations with many of those we speak to on wider issues of aims and strategy, and of current politics.

It will be a "socialist canvass", an equivalent at the level of talking about socialism, after meetings, in work, or at personal meet-ups, to the talking about Labour vs Tories that we do on a broader and shallower level on the doorsteps.

Socialism makes sense

We now have a brand new and reworked edition of our book first published in 2016 as *Can Socialism Make Sense?*

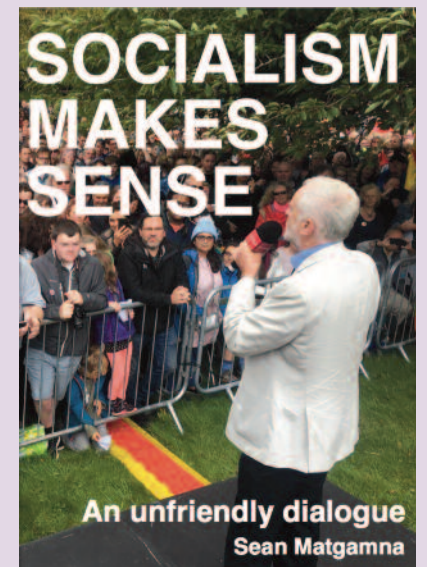
Socialism is again on the agenda — a society based on human solidarity, social ownership of industry and banks, and on political, economic, and social democracy.

This book confronts head-on the strongest arguments against socialism now in circulation, inside the Labour Party and beyond.

Order your copies now for £6.20 including postage, £5 hand-to-hand

www.workersliberty.org/sms

Bulk rates available.



Organising: defects of the SEIU-Crosby model

LETTER

Despite what you might think from David Morris's polemic (*Solidarity* 459), I am in favour of unions employing full-time organisers to unionise new areas.

I am in favour of that, just as I am in favour of unions employing lawyers, running websites, publishing union journals or newspapers.

And better hard-working union officials than "lethargic, cautious, self-serving and incompetent" ones.

All that, however, does not add up to the three cheers David gives for the US SEIU and its version of an "organising agenda", as documented by the Australian union official Michael Crosby.

Scarcely even the most conservative unions these days present themselves as only "servicing" individual members (commercial discounts, cheap insurance, legal services). Almost all talk of "the organising model".

And the difference in "organising models" is not just between the lazy and the hard-working. The problem with the SEIU-Crosby model is more than the slight spots on the sun which David concedes ("serious deficiencies with regard to... lay leadership").

The SEIU-Crosby model calls for a cadre of full-time organisers who make whole long careers accountable only to the top leadership and not at all to the membership. They

are moved on from each area to another as soon as they have filled their membership sign-up quotas.

It calls for those unaccountable organisers specifically to seek cooperation with management, to squeeze out "loudmouth" (combative) workplace representatives, to go slow on worker grievances, and to keep workplace reps "busy" with consensual campaigns like switching off unnecessary lights or encouraging blood donations.

Sometimes the SEIU-Crosby "organising model" has done well by its preferred criterion of raw membership numbers, in abstraction from enabling workers to win better pay or conditions or to acquire a democratic movement of their own. But far from always. The SEIU split the US trade-union movement in 2005 to form a new "TUC", rival to the old-established AFL-CIO. The chief advertised case for the split was that the split-off group, called Change To Win, would pursue the "organising agenda" better than the AFL-CIO.

Since then Change To Win affiliated membership has declined from 5.4 million to 3.5 million. The membership of the old and undynamic AFL-CIO has increased, partly by unions switching back from CTW to AFL-CIO. SEIU membership has been static since 2010 (bit.ly/aflxcio, bit.ly/seiux).

In 2008, the SEIU mobilised 200 full-time organisers and members to invade and disrupt the Labor Notes conference of rank-and-file union activists. The Labor Notes staff



commented that they had often clashed with and been condemned by conservative union leaders, but "in our 29 year history we have never [before] had a group of protesters storm our conference, or assault the brothers and sisters who attend it" (bit.ly/l-notes).

In 2009 many thousand more democratic-minded SEIU members split from it to form the new National Union of Healthcare Workers, after the SEIU put their giant union local (branch) into trusteeship, i.e. shut it down.

From 2012 — towards the end of a 40-year-plus career of hopping from one union-leader post to another, after four youthful years as a Catholic monk — Crosby led United Voice, in Australia. That shows no great triumph. It

now reports its membership as "over 120,000", the same figure as the old Liquor Hospitality and Miscellaneous Union cited before it was renamed United Voice in 2011.

Unite, the British union which makes most noise about "the organising agenda", has — to judge from the figures of ballot papers issued in its recent general secretary election — a sharper fall in membership than many other British unions, and at a time when workforce participation rates have hit record highs.

The union movement needs organising and organisers. But on a democratic and class-struggle basis.

Martin Thomas, Islington

March to save the NHS!

On Saturday 3 February an emergency demonstration for the NHS will take place in London, with additional actions planned in other cities around the UK.

The NHS has suffered its worst ever winter crisis. But this annual event has been getting worse year by year, eroding the service as we know it. Every year the underlying problems that are exposed by the winter crisis are ignored by the government.

Large numbers of patients have received care on makeshift beds in corridors, some dying prematurely as a result. Critically-ill patients have been told to stay away from hospital. Wait times for beds have exceeded 10 hours.

The government accepts that 85% bed occupancy is the limit beyond which it is not possible to guarantee good patient care or guard against MRSA and other infections spreading. This winter the average bed occupancy rate has been 95% across the NHS, and 99% or 100% at 19 Trusts.

The cause of this crisis is under-funding and under staffing. Jeremy Hunt and the Tory government propose to solve the NHS's problems with another restructure: the creation of so-called Sustainability and Transformation Plans, which will offer neither sustainability, transformation, nor adequate planning.

Against this absurd and callous policy, the labour

movement needs to make its voice heard. Campaigning by Momentum NHS, the Socialist Health Association and activists in Workers' Liberty helped win a coherent policy for the NHS at the 2017 Labour Party Conference:

- Oppose the Five Year Forward View
- Reverse all privatisation and PFI
- Include wording endorsing the principles of the NHS Bill
- Affirm that the NHS should be publicly owned, funded, provided and accountable.

The 3 February demonstrations need to be the first step in a major and sustained political mobilisation to impose this policy to save the NHS.

Buy-out boom points to slump

"Private equity" — the industry that raises funds from wealthy people to buy out wobbly companies, take them off the stock markets, ruthlessly chop costs and sell off assets, get them profitable, and then sell them off again at a premium — is booming.

According to the *Financial Times* (24 January), "buy-out groups are setting new records for fund-raising". They're even turning away cash from rich people keen to get in on their operations. And the volume of buy-outs they do rose 27% from 2016 to 2017.

This boom is likely to lead to a crash. "Private equity" essentially depends on the pass-the-parcel going round faster and faster, and plutocrats taking on even bigger debts in the hope of quick profits from quick slash-and-burn operations, until the whirl gets so giddy that the parcel drops and there is a cascade of collapse.

As in 2008 (see graph). A "private equity" crash may or may not sync into a wider financial crash as it did then.

The *Financial Times* quotes Ludovic Phalippou, a finance professor at Oxford University:

"A cataclysm is bound to happen. The combination of overpricing and high leverage [debt] cannot lead to anything other than a lot of defaults... It is quite amazing

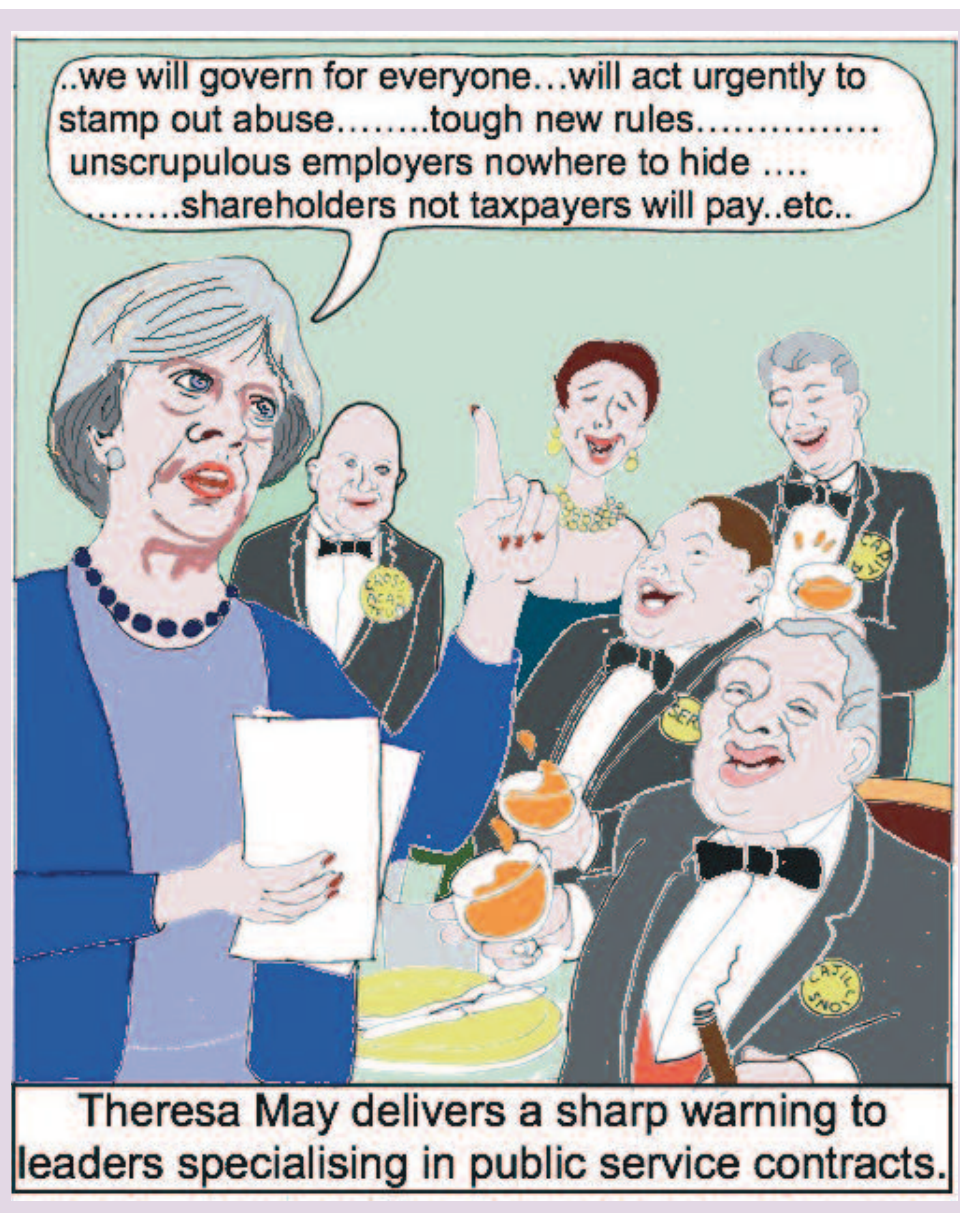
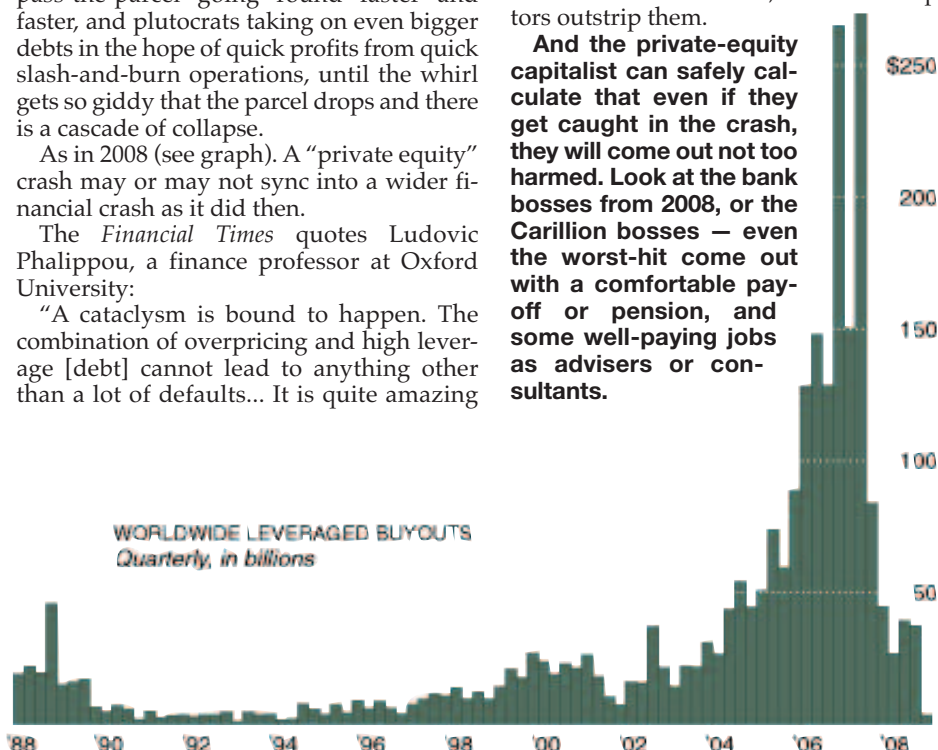
that there is no collective memory that goes beyond five years, or that the world is organised in such a way that history keeps on repeating".

The lack of "collective memory" is a product of capitalism. Capitalists, including private-equity capitalists, have records and accounts. In that sense, they have a better memory than previous ruling classes in history.

But each individual private-equity capitalist, even if she or he knows the history as well as the professor, has a strong incentive to drive for maximum gain, now, as quick as possible.

Rush, and they may coin ample profits before the crash. Hold back, and their competitors outstrip them.

And the private-equity capitalist can safely calculate that even if they get caught in the crash, they will come out not too harmed. Look at the bank bosses from 2008, or the Carillion bosses — even the worst-hit come out with a comfortable pay-off or pension, and some well-paying jobs as advisers or consultants.



Defend Jon Lansman!

The labour movement should rally to the defence of Labour National Executive member and Momentum leader Jon Lansman against George Galloway's threat to sue him for defamation.

Galloway says he has "instructed solicitors to bring a case for defamation against Jon Lansman". That is a response to a tweet by Lansman defending comedian David Baddiel, who is Jewish, after Galloway made a tweet (now deleted) that "no supporter of the Palestinian people" would march "behind" Baddiel (apparently a reference to planned protests against Donald Trump visiting Britain which Baddiel has backed).

Over the years Galloway has run or threatened a number of libel actions, including one against *Guardian* journalist Hadley Freeman in 2015.

British libel law makes it easy for moneyed people to deter criticism from the less-mon-

eyed, since even to start defence against a libel action requires a lot of money, and the person bringing the case can sue printers and distributors as well as the author.

The labour movement should not tolerate legal threats being used in this way to silence comment such as Lansman's.

Appearing on the Iranian state channel Press TV on 27 January, Ken Livingstone responded to a claim by the presenter that the Holocaust was "used" by Israel to make it "untouchable" by claiming chattily that the "problem" at the end of the Second World War revolved around the USA's failure to allow Jews to flee there.

"Death to Israel" has been a common slogan on state-licensed demonstrations in Iran for many years.

A healthy labour movement must protect criticisms of comments like Galloway's and Livingstone's, and allow them to be discussed fully and freely.



An open letter to ASLEF drivers



As strikes by train guards in the RMT union against the imposition of “Driver Only Operation” continue, the role of drivers, most of whom are in the Aslef union, is thrown into sharper and sharper relief.

On MerseyRail, activists have organised magnificent solidarity which has led to Aslef drivers refusing en masse to refuse to cross RMT picket lines. On other companies the picture is less positive.

Off The Rails, a platform for rank-and-file rail workers hosted by Workers' Liberty, recently published an “open letter to fellow Aslef drivers”, calling on drivers to refuse to cross picket lines.

The letter has been viewed over 2,500 times on the Workers' Liberty website and reached around 8,000 people on Facebook.

Spreading this solidarity could be crucial to winning the anti-DOO strikes.

An open letter to fellow Aslef drivers: which side are we on?

Dear Driver,

I am writing to you, as a fellow Aslef driver, because I want to persuade you that we need to change how we approach the current RMT disputes over DOO/DCO.

We may, most of us, be in a separate union, but I believe that our interests in this matter are bound up with those of the guards.

I am addressing this letter to the majority of drivers, who know that DOO is unsafe, is bad news for drivers and the public, and who do not want to see their colleagues' jobs devalued or wiped out.

What this situation needs is for us to stop crossing picket lines.

What are the common arguments?

1. “It's not our fight”

Both RMT and Aslef as organisations are against DOO/DCO. If there's a fight against the practice, it's our fight too. When we cross picket lines, come into work and drive trains around with scab “guards” on the back, we are undermining that fight.

2. “When Aslef calls me out on strike, I'll strike”

Aslef may never call us out on strike. We could find ourselves in a situation where it is too late.

3. “RMT have triggered these disputes

too soon”

Aslef drivers are entitled to their opinions about RMT's tactics and strategy. But solidarity is not conditional on agreeing with every aspect of another union's approach. Solidarity is a trade-union principle.

4. “Aslef's advice is to work as normal.”

Which advice? The union issues advice to all its members on their rights if asked to respect a picket line by members of another union. It's on a page in the Aslef diary headed “Picket Lines”. It's in there every year. It says: “It has long been the tradition in Aslef to respect picket lines whether they are our own or those of fellow trade unionists.” This is a core value of the union to which we all signed up and pay subs. So which advice do you prefer? You can choose according to your conscience as others will choose according to theirs, but let there be no doubt that it is a choice.

5. “I'm worried I'll be disciplined”

No Aslef member has been disciplined anywhere in the country for refusing to cross a picket line in any of these disputes.

We have a choice. On strike days, we can do one of two things: turn back at the picket line or cross and report for duty, working trains with scabs (some of whom are being paid handsome bonuses for their dirty work) and undermining our fellow workers the guards and the fight against DOO. That is the inescapable reality.

The fundamental question is: which side are we on?

Merseyrail: spread the solidarity!

On Merseyrail, nearly 100% of Aslef drivers have respected RMT picket lines. We need to make this the rule rather than the exception.

Trade unionists there have worked hard to build up a culture of solidarity in the depots, persuading Aslef drivers that, even though the fight against DOO wasn't formally an Aslef dispute, all workers had a shared interest in winning it.

Merseyrail drivers have put that assessment into action by refusing to cross picket lines. As noted elsewhere in this leaflet, no driver has been disciplined for this.

We need to spread the solidarity.

• This is an abridged version of the letter to Aslef drivers. A full version can be found online here: bit.ly/aslefletter

Tax the rich to build

By Ken Worthington

Homelessness is on the rise in the UK. By end of 2016, the official underestimate was 4134 people sleeping rough on the streets of the UK.

The figure has doubled since 2010 and is a 16% increase on 2015. The housing campaign Shelter estimates 300,000 people sleeping rough or in temporary or overcrowded accommodation, a 13,000 increase on 2016.

Further tens of thousands are sofa surfing or staying with friends in tense conditions.

By the end of 2017, 79,190 households were in temporary accommodation, a 17% increase on 2015, and a 59% increase on 2010.

Since 2010 the number of government-funded homes built for social rent, already low, has plummeted by 97%. In 2010 36,700 new socially rented houses were built; in 2017, only 1102 social houses.

During the same period the number of “affordable” houses built by local authorities and housing associations halved from 55,909 to 27,792, out of 200,000 built overall.

Experts estimate that the number of new homes needed to keep up with demand is 250,000 a year, yet the total is way below that, the majority of that total expensive and unavailable to the majority of the population.

From 2012 to 2016 the number of social or council homes available to rent dropped by 120,000.

The government claim it has prioritised “affordable” homes over social homes. Social homes may be rented at 50% of market rate, and “affordable” at 80%, which in many areas makes them not affordable at all to people in work, let alone people on benefits.



The government has reduced the amounts paid in housing benefit to levels often well below rents actually charged, so that many benefit recipients end up paying a large chunk of their rent out of meagre incomes. Under-25s have been barred from claiming more than a shared-room rate for private rented properties. Cuts to JSA, ESA and PIP have left many vulnerable people on vastly reduced incomes whilst inflation has risen.

Universal credit has made things worse. The Government has made it more difficult for people to get their benefit paid direct to landlords. People now get payments only monthly, and those not until after a delay of

Oxford Labour failing homeless

By Mol Konits

In Oxford there is a clear humanitarian crisis on the streets. Since 2010, the number of known rough sleepers has more than tripled.

The council estimates the figure to be at least 60, although they admit that this is likely to be a very significant underestimate. Over the last winter, with temperatures dropping as low as 9 degrees below zero, several of Oxford's homeless have died on the streets.

Two things are becoming ever more clear. Firstly, that this is an entirely politically manufactured situation, and secondly that it is becoming worse.

Tory-imposed central government cuts have been the direct cause of the growing homelessness crisis across the country, and the Conservative-run Oxfordshire County Council has cut its homelessness budget down to nil. The Labour-dominated City Council has retained its homelessness budget despite overall cuts, yet it has shown a clear disposition to side with businesses and the university over marginalised people.

Even minor demands like the expansion of the “Severe Weather Emergency Protocol” (which dictates how often the city council has to open up shelters on freezing nights) have been rebuffed, despite campaigners only calling for what Sadiq Khan has already done in London.

The council continues to use antisocial behaviour legislation to threaten fines against rough sleepers, and recently nearly everyone we've spoken to on the streets have reported greater harassment from authorities preventing many rough sleepers from sitting down during the day. Bedding and possessions continue to be cleared away from doorways, and no lockers are provided for free storage of possessions.

With recent attempts to set up impromptu homeless shelters in the city centre being shut down, and little sign of an improvement in the city council's position, there is reason to be pessimistic. Yet residents and Labour members are clearly horrified by the current situation. This demonstrates the need for greater democracy within Labour and in local communities.

The hope for real change lies in public agitation, not private charity.

Build social housing



six weeks. This causes budgeting problems for cash-strapped tenants. Many private landlords are now refusing to take universal credit claimants.

Universal credit also caps the child tax credits payable and will pay benefits only for the first two children. An overall benefit cap limits the amount of money claimable.

Now the Government is trumpeting the “Homeless Reduction Act”. This pushes local councils to prevent homelessness by working with people earlier in the process in order to try and keep people in properties, and increases support and assistance for single men and women who were excluded from temporary accommodation in the past.

However, it does not come with extra funding. Councils are expected to provide more services with no extra money after having over 50% of their budgets cut over the last seven years.

Front-line housing workers face higher numbers of cases, more work, less resources. Workloads are now unmanageable across the housing sector and this is leading very high levels of workplace stress and sickness within adult social care and housing. Service users are processed as quickly as possible and placed into low quality and expensive temporary accommodation.

Temporary housing is now often provided by charities or private companies, with less security and standards of accommodation dropping.

Many support services have closed down or scaled back the services that they offer. That includes statutory services like mental health support.

That increases the pressure on other services, and leads to service users with more complex needs coming into general homeless services. It is often very difficult to support them with finding permanent accommodation — they have barriers to social housing and would struggle to maintain private rented properties. In the past they would have been placed at specialist accommodation with support workers. Not now. They

end up with long stays in temporary accommodation or becoming revolving door clients as they do not get the support they need to maintain a tenancy.

Labour policy at the 2017 general election was an improvement on the past. It included a commitment to build at least 100,000 council or local authority homes per year by the end of 2022 and to make those homes will be “genuinely affordable”.

Labour is also committed to bringing on controls on rent rises, more secure tenancies, and more rights for renters in the private sector. It has promised to safeguard hostels and accommodation at threat of closure due to austerity.

Jeremy Corbyn recently announced that 8,000 homes would be bought for homeless people with a history of rough sleeping.

Such policies to be expanded to ensure that everyone has access to decent, affordable and secure accommodation. With the current scale of housing shortages and homelessness, Labour’s plan need to go further, hand in hand with reversing cuts to the benefits system, restoring funds to local government, and to allow local councils to build the social houses needed.

At least 100,000 council houses should be built each year from the day that Labour enters government — something more like 250,000 new houses per year are needed to keep up with demand. The housing stocks of housing associations should be transferred back to local authority control so houses can be allocated according to need.

Rent caps, and protections for tenants, should be introduced in the private sector, and local authorities need to have greater powers to deal with slum landlords and empty properties.

Around the UK there are already many great local campaigns around housing and homelessness. In Leeds, for example, “Hands off our Homes” does good campaigning work in local communities and within the Labour Party.

We must build up such campaigns, and take them into the labour movement.

Manchester rough sleeping up 15%

By George Russell

According to government figures, generally agreed to be an underestimate, rough sleeping last year was up by 15% on 2016.

Apart from central London, three of the worst affected boroughs — Salford, Tameside and Manchester — were in Greater Manchester, which showed an overall 42% rise.

The Greater Manchester mayor, Andy Burnham, who pledged to end rough sleeping by 2020 when elected, called it a “humanitarian crisis”. But by his own account, his actions so far have focussed on raising money for the Mayor’s Fund and via a bond issue from the private sector in order to support various projects to provide immediate aid. Little is being done to find a long term solution to the housing crisis.

In fact, policies of Manchester City Council cut against such a solution in either the short or long term.

The council has been trying for years to drive homeless people out of the city centre — I recently saw council workers binning the possessions of homeless people, including sleeping bags, that had been left in a doorway at the side of the Town Hall. At one point, it was claimed that all rough sleepers in Manchester had been offered alternative accommodation and those on the street had refused it. In the longer term, they have given permission for large developments that provide little, if any, “affordable” housing.

Blaming the government (rightly) for the housing crisis and financial cuts should not be seen as a cop-out from supporting homeless people.



Students join fight against social cleansing in Southwark

Student activists from University of the Arts London and other colleges, including Workers’ Liberty members, have been occupying a part of the London College of Communications to protest UAL management’s campaign, hand-in-hand with property developers Delancey to demolish a popular shopping centre in a working-class community in order to build a luxury development. They have been joined by local trade unionists.

Acorn Sheffield organises for Selective Licensing

By Hilary Jones

The Sheffield branch of renters’ union and anti-poverty organisation Acorn are door-knocking residents of Sharrow and Meersbrook to mobilise them in favour of landlord regulation for their area.

Selective licensing would impose minimum safety standards on properties before they can be let, charging an annual fee. Exploitative proprietors will be struck off the register if they refuse to comply.

The council’s inspection teams have gathered evidence in the neighbourhood to suggest three in four privately rented properties contain Category 1 hazards — representing serious risk to human life.

With the consultation deadline closing 23

February, activists are speaking with as many residents as possible, leafleting and holding community meetings to ensure the strong negative response coming from landlords does not drown out voices from the community.

Whilst Acorn by no means views landlord licensing as a silver bullet in the struggle for safe and fair housing conditions, its implementation would have a strongly positive impact on the lives of tenants who have until now been routinely ignored.

The organising effort also represents an opportunity to grow the grassroots movement of renters across the city.

• To get involved, you can join at acorntheunion.org.uk or find them on social media.

Learning the lessons of the Labour left

***A Party with Socialists in it: a History of the Labour Left* (Pluto Press 2018) by Simon Hannah. Reviewed by Will Sefton**

Clarion editor Simon Hannah has produced a well written and concise history of the Labour left from the party's inception through to the present day.

In 270 pages the book deals with over 120 years of history in quick-fire fashion. It is a useful resource for people on Labour's Marxist and reformist left. It is the first book to try to describe the contradictions and struggles of the Labour left as it enters a phase where a lifelong backbench rebel and Labour left activist could become Prime Minister.

From the outset Hannah draws a comparison between two counterposed tendencies of the Labour left. The left has sometimes been a transformative movement, with aims spelled out neatly in the 1974 Labour manifesto: "We are a democratic socialist party and our objective is to bring about a fundamental and irreversible shift in the balance of wealth and power in favour of working people and their families." And sometimes it has sought to integrate itself with mainstream politics and merely exert pressure within that, so it ends up betraying principles and becoming a part of the established order.

As the book discusses, there is a perpetual problem of the Labour left finding itself in a position of influence, or occasionally power, and failing to capitalise on that. Often overemphasis on individual figures, above a broader movement. Witness the capitulation of Bevan on unilateralism, Foot's opposition to mandatory reselection, the tenure of the Wilson government. Often the Labour left

has proven itself unable to push a transformative agenda, even when that was its starting point. Hannah tells us how the Bevanite movement was able to influence and win over many members at its height in the early 1950s, but did very little to entrench and systematically build on its influence.

Where the Bevanite movement was most influential — among young people — was also where Trotskyists were most organised in the party. After 1959 the Labour leadership re-licensed a Young Labour movement. Trotskyists built up the Keep Left youth newspaper. Even with the banning of Keep Left and the expulsion of members of its editorial board, local groups grew to over 700 within a couple of years. A vibrant Labour youth movement should remain a goal of serious minded revolutionaries.

CAPITULATION

The dangers of capitulation and co-option remain.

They are present in our debates on issues like free movement, public sector pay, and council cuts. Here there have already been examples of the Labour leadership rolling back on previously agreed commitments.

The comparison with the movement around Tony Benn's challenge for Deputy Leader (1982) is instructive.

Benn campaign was based on a lot of solid organisation. The Rank and File Mobilising Committee, which had been winning on important democratic reforms in Labour, supported Benn's campaign (our forerunner Socialist Organiser was a key initiator of RFMC). The Campaign for Labour Party Democracy had helped to build a large movement of rank-and-file Labour Party members who wanted to end Labour Party



A CLPD demonstration outside the meeting at which Reg Prentice MP was deselected in July 1975.

governments being unresponsive and right-wing. The campaign took place alongside a struggle in industry and in local government against Thatcher. It culminated in Benn just losing the Deputy Leadership.

In contrast Corbyn became leader of Labour with no prior rank and file organising, and as Hannah notes, with the Labour left at one of its weakest periods.

The danger now is indicated in some of the rhetoric that has been put out by Momentum and the party. Since the 2017 conference Labour under Corbyn has positioned itself as the new mainstream of politics. Theresa May has accepted some of Labour's ideas — talking now about "ordinary working people". But as Hannah argues, to be the real new mainstream you have to fundamentally shift

the debate and make irreversible change to how things are viewed. The establishment of the NHS, a historic compromise, but one that drove back against vested interests and was part of what Marx called "the political economy of the working class", is one such example of a fundamental shift. Even the Tories talk about protecting the NHS. On the other hand you can become "the new mainstream" by watering down and compromising on your arguments...

It remains to be seen exactly which way the Corbyn movement will go. Serious activists should brush up on their history and understanding of the previous movements that have helped shape the present. *A Party with Socialists In It* is a good place to start.

Raymond Williams: thirty years on

By John Cunningham

January 2018 marks thirty years since the death of Raymond Williams, the writer, theoretician and critic.

In the 60s and 70s Williams' star shone brightly in the intellectual firmament of the left. It has faded somewhat since. Unjustly so in my opinion, for there is still much to be learnt from the writings of this son of a Welsh railway worker who became one of the foremost Marxist thinkers of his generation, much to the chagrin no doubt of many of his colleagues at Cambridge University, where Williams graduated and was to spend all his life as a lecturer.

Perhaps, ironically, it is Williams' very success that has contributed to his marginalisation. For it was Williams who did so much, through works such as *Culture and Society* (1958) and *The Country and the City* (1973) to spread the idea that culture was not the preserve of the elite, that "culture is ordinary", to use his famous phrase.

This idea, so readily acceptable today, so much a part of the "wallpaper" of our way of seeing the contemporary world, was once thought irredeemably radical. It is easy to forget how ground-breaking this was when Williams first espoused it.

Williams played a leading role in develop-

ing the ideas of cultural materialism which although entirely colonised and, I guess, mostly de-radicalised by academia today, nevertheless played an important role in developing new critical ways of looking at the world as Empire crumbled, old "certainties" withered, the Labour Party ossified and the Stalinism went into its death agonies.

Williams was extremely well-read and immersed in English literature and wrote key studies in aesthetics and literary criticism such as *Marxism and Literature* (1977) and *Writing in Society* (1985). Partly influenced by the Hungarian Marxist György Lukács, he emphasised the notion of realism in the arts, while rejecting the woodenness and stupidity of so-called socialist realism. He was an advocate of teaching creative expression and adult education (he worked for the Workers Educational Association for many years), and took a lively interest in the newer forms of media such as TV. It is encouraging that a number of the current leaders of the Labour Party also share this interest in the transforming power of education.

In 1971 he wrote a short critique of the life and work of George Orwell which ought to be compulsory reading for those who have put the author of 1984 on a pedestal. Debunking the Orwell "myth", Williams makes the point that Orwell influenced not only "people who had given up their commitment to rad-

ical social change and who were using Orwell's disillusion as a cover. There were plenty of these, and others who didn't have to live the process through, who could take Orwell's disillusion neat. But there were just as many who began their political commitment from the point where Orwell left off, who agreed with him about Stalinism and about imperialism and about the English establishment, and who made a new socialist politics out of his sense of failure."

Williams was one of those who helped to make that "new socialist politics" a reality. Towards the end of his life *New Left Review*, for whom Williams wrote many essays, conducted a series of long interviews with him, surveying the whole range of his work and ideas and collected them in the volume *Politics and Letters* (1979). He died in 1986. Williams captured much of his early experience in a novel he wrote, *Border Country*,



based partly on his own childhood. Many of his writings, alas, are now out of print but Dai Smith has written an excellent biographical study, *Raymond Williams, A Warrior's Tale* (published in Cardiff by Parthian in 2008) which takes the reader up to 1961; I presume a second volume will follow at some point.

Whether your interest is the drama of Ibsen, Nuclear Disarmament, Charles Dickens, realism in TV drama, working class culture or the North-South divide, turn first to Raymond Williams. It will be a rewarding experience.

“Resistance and change often begin in art”

By Michéal MacEoin

Anti-capitalist and feminist writer Ursula K. Le Guin passed away on 22 January, aged 88.

Le Guin primarily wrote science fiction and fantasy but, not wishing to be discussed in narrowly restrictive (and often implicitly deprecating) genre terms, wished simply to be known as an “American novelist.”

In books such as *The Dispossessed*, *The Left Hand of Darkness* and *The Word For World* is

Forest, Le Guin explored huge political themes: revolution, anarchism, life in a communist society, gender, sexuality, religion, colonialism, environmentalism and more.

One of Le Guin’s most valuable contributions was to use her imagined worlds to relativise and thereby destabilise our common sense understanding of our own society, its social relations, and its manifold oppressions.

In *The Left Hand of Darkness*, for instance, Le Guin consciously constructed a “thought-experiment” in which characters are born with-



out a fixed sex, in order to explore the role of sex and gender in human social relations.

The Dispossessed takes as its theme the existence of two inhabited worlds. One, Urras, is divided into multiple rival states (including an ultra-capitalist, resource-rich and hugely unequal state, and a Stalinist-type state).

The other, the largely barren planet, Annares, is the result of a failed anarcho-sindicalist revolution on Urras. The revolutionaries were then exiled but permitted to construct their ideal society in relative isolation, in the face of overwhelming physical and social barriers.

Though sympathetic to Kropotkin’s ideas of mutual aid, Le Guin’s portrayal of Anarres as “ambiguously good” could serve as a caution to the utopian project of constructing a socialist society off to the side of capitalism, rather than building on its material resources.

As the above suggests, one implication of Le Guin’s work, fundamental to any operative communist politics, is that existing social relations are neither eternal nor permanent. Societies can be organised and re-organised in many ways. Le Guin’s work offers the possibility, therefore, that we can transcend the current state of things, by means of fundamental social change.

Or, as Le Guin put it herself, in her 2014 speech at the National Book Awards:

“Books aren’t just commodities; the profit motive is often in conflict with the aims of art. We live in capitalism, its power seems inescapable – but then, so did the divine right of kings. Any human power can be resisted and changed by human beings.

“Resistance and change often begin in art. Very often in our art, the art of words.”

Overcoming markets

Yanis Varoufakis: Talking to my daughter about the economy: a brief history of capitalism (Bodley Head 2017), reviewed by Martin Thomas

Yanis Varoufakis, the Athens professor of economics who was finance minister for the first five months of the Syriza government in Greece, resigned when Syriza complied with international capitalist diktats, and now leads the Democracy in Europe Movement (DIEM), has written a good plea for socialism.

The book is due out in paperback in July. The coming era, he argues, “will be typified by the momentous clash between two opposing proposals: ‘Democratise everything!’ versus ‘Commodify everything!’ The proposal favoured by powerful and influential people and institutions is ‘Commodify everything!’.”

“Collective responsibility” — for the environment, and for society — “can only be brought about through collective ownership — being governed democratically either at the local level or... via the state”.

He confronts those who say that they “just want to get on with our lives... and enjoy the pleasures that market society provides”.

“Authentic happiness is impossible... without dissatisfaction as well as satisfaction”, without autonomy, rebellion, conflict. We can sustain “our creativity... our humanity and of course our planet” only by “periodic mental withdrawal from our society’s norms and certainties”.

“When you feel as if you’re about to give in to the idea that outrageous inequality is somehow unavoidable... maintain your outrage but sensibly, tactically, so that... you can invest it in what needs to be done to make our world truly logical, natural, and just”.

I guess I’m predisposed to like Varoufakis’s book because it is written as an open letter to his daughter Xenia, now 14, who lives on the other side of the world from him, in Australia, having been taken there by her Australian mother when she was a toddler. I too have daughters in Australia taken there by their Australian mother when they were small children: mine are now in their 20s.

But the book should strike a chord with



any reader. The “market society”, he argues, is inherently mean, inhuman, and unequal. He shows how the labour market and the financial markets, in particular, have “demons” “deep in their bowels”.

Unsurprisingly after his experience in the Greek government, he profiles the role of debt in the development of fully-marketised society more than most accounts do, but no more than fairly.

The book is eloquent, highly readable, with many quirky and unexpected angles. And Varoufakis is clear that he is arguing for a whole new and very different society, not just a softened version of capitalism, “this beast that dominates our lives”.

His story can be criticised on some details. Serfdom in England faded away much earlier than he suggests. His extrapolations about automation killing most jobs are dubious. He seems to defer to the old “quantity theory” of money.

Like most economists, he fails to make the distinction between labour-power (what workers sell to the bosses) and labour (the process of the bosses “consuming” the labour-power they have bought).

More importantly, he nowhere focuses on the special place of the working class within capitalism, on the potential of the working class as the social force that can make socialism, or on what needs to be done to transform the labour movements and convert that potential into reality.

For all that, and for combat against the trickier anti-socialist arguments circulating now, the reader will have to turn to the new book from Workers’ Liberty, *Socialism Makes Sense*.

The newspapers’ film

Simon Nelson reviews ‘The Post’, in cinemas now

Steven Spielberg’s film was designed to win Oscars. With big name actors, Meryl Streep and Tom Hanks, this could have been an exciting story about press freedom and government cover-ups, and a positive message of the good side winning against the bad and dishonest.

It is the story of the 1971 Pentagon Papers. Utterly shocking when first the *New York Times*, then the *Washington Post* and others published them, they documented the US policy in Vietnam since the Second World War. How US’s secretive interventions had backed up the vicious Diem regime in South Vietnam, helped to rig elections, covered up human rights abuses and committed troops to fight against the North Vietnamese well before it was made public. The papers showed that since 1966 successive US administrations had thought the war was unwinnable.

DULL

Unfortunately, ‘The Post’ manages to make the story as dull as the process that the original whistle-blowers had to go through — of photocopying 30 years of documents of American policy in Vietnam.

Newspapers from the *Express* to the *Telegraph* have been full of praise for the film. Why wouldn’t they? It presents the establishment media as being on an unending search for the truth. A far cry away from hacking the phones of celebrities or the family of a murder victim. Spielberg also puts in some none too subtle hints about the parallels with Trump’s “fake news” agenda.

But as a political thriller, the left me shuffling in my seat and checking my watch.

The main protagonists in the film are Ben Bradlee (Hanks) the executive editor of the *Washington Post* and Kay Graham (Streep) the owner. Bradlee is determined to improve the quality of the paper, to get out the big stories which speak truth to power. This all sits uneasily with his previous cosy relationships with the Kennedy administration.

Graham, who has had the paper thrust on her after the suicide of her husband has to battle sexism in the boardroom and her own friendship with former defence secretary Robert McNamara who had the papers put together, as she decides whether to risk a stock market flotation by publishing classified contents.

The most effective parts of the film show the real footage of presidents making statements about the war while we are shown how these statements are lies. Similarly, the footage of Nixon pacing round the Oval office making increasingly tense phone calls about the conduct of the war is far more thrilling than watching Hanks chain smoke.

While the film suggests the Pentagon Papers were a watershed for newspapers and their relationships with politicians, the succeeding 50 years shows different.



Where we stand

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

The capitalists' control over the economy and their relentless drive to increase their wealth causes poverty, unemployment, the blighting of lives by overwork, imperialism, the destruction of the environment and much else.

Against the accumulated wealth and power of the capitalists, the working class must unite to struggle against capitalist power in the workplace and in wider society.

The Alliance for Workers' Liberty wants socialist revolution: collective ownership of industry and services, workers' control, and a democracy much fuller than the present system, with elected representatives recallable at any time and an end to bureaucrats' and managers' privileges.

We fight for trade unions and the Labour Party to break with "social partnership" with the bosses and to militantly assert working-class interests.

In workplaces, trade unions, and Labour organisations; among students; in local campaigns; on the left and in wider political alliances we stand for:

- Independent working-class representation in politics.
- A workers' government, based on and accountable to the labour movement.
- 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.
- Global solidarity against global capital — workers everywhere have more in common with each other than with their capitalist or Stalinist rulers.
- 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.
- Maximum left unity in action, and openness in debate.

If you agree with us, please take some copies of *Solidarity* to sell — and join us!



More online at www.workersliberty.org Workers' Liberty @workersliberty

NEC intervenes on HDV

LABOUR

By Simon Nelson

In a motion moved by Jim Kennedy from Unite, the Labour NEC has called on Haringey Council to reconsider the Haringey Development Vehicle, a plan to sell off £2bn of public land and form a private partnership with blacklist developer Lendlease to build 6,400 homes.

The intervention of the NEC has been deeply controversial on the right of the party, who have condemned intervention from, as one Haringey Cabinet member put it, "the politburo" into the affairs of the local council. The move is unusual, but so are the circumstances of the council's plan. There are currently 22 sitting councillors who oppose the HDV and the overwhelming majority of selected council candidates also oppose the scheme. Only six Labour candidates who are standing in the May elections are in favour of the scheme.

STOPHDV

Pressure has mounted on the council since both CLPs in the borough came out in opposition to the plans alongside both of Haringey's MPs.

A lively public campaign, StopHDV, has also built up opposition to the schemes throughout the party.

At the end of December, a public meeting with John McDonnell in Wood Green pushed him repeatedly as to what local members could do to stop the HDV being put through by a lame duck council leadership. McDonnell could give no assurances then, but urged the council not to do anything "that could tie the hands of an incoming administration."



It is perfectly legitimate for the NEC to make a decision such as this. The NEC is the highest ruling body of the Labour party. More can be done to democratise its functioning, but it has representatives from the constituent parts of the Party and there is direct election from the mass membership for the constituency places. It is far more representative than the Leader and Cabinet structure in Haringey.

LETTER

The NEC's intervention happened following a letter from three Haringey councillors asking them to consider a ruling.

Opposition to the NEC intervention has now spread to a letter to the *Sunday Times* signed by 70 council and Labour group leaders from across the UK. This is more than half of the 123 leaders across England and Wales. It should come as no shock that entrenched right wing Council leaderships have rallied behind Haringey council leader Claire Kober. The NEC taking a decision that benefits the communities they are meant to serve and also chimes in with the new

and left wing membership — that is what worries them.

As *Solidarity* went to press it was being reported in the *Evening Standard* that Claire Kober has announced she will now stand down as council leader, and won't be standing to be a councillor in the May elections.

The Labour NEC had asked Labour Shadow Cabinet Office minister Andrew Gwynne to negotiate with Claire Kober and the council. In a letter to Gwynne, Kober said she would leave the final decision on the HDV to the next council leader — meaning this is almost certainly the end of the HDV.

A motion to abandon the HDV put up by the opposition Liberal Democrat councillors is due to be put to a full council meeting on 7 February.

Labour councillors who opposed the HDV would have been expected to vote against the HDV given the NEC ruling, although the motion will now most probably be amended by Kober or another cabinet member to say the decision has been deferred.

Events

Saturday 3 February

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

Friday 16 February

The red suffragette: Sylvia Pankhurst
7.30pm, Institute of Education
20 Bedford Way, London WC1H 0AL
bit.ly/redsylvia

17-18 February

Student Feminist Conference
10am, Institute of Education
20 Bedford Way, London WC1H 0AL
bit.ly/2FDYkpT

Have an event you want listing? Email:
solidarity@workersliberty.org

Thursday 8 February

1918: votes for women?
Newcastle Workers' Liberty meeting
Venue TBC
bit.ly/2DLO3GJ

Saturday 10 February

London Momentum groups meeting up
2pm, Unite, 128 Theobalds Road, London WC1X 8TN
bit.ly/2novMJq

Thursday 15 February

Pamphlet launch: George & Minnie Lansbury and modern feminism
6pm, Tower Hamlets Local History Library, 277 Bancroft Road, E1 4DQ London
bit.ly/2BFrdib

Corbyn: transwomen welcome on all-women shortlists

By Gemma Short

On the Andrew Marr show on Sunday 28 January, Jeremy Corbyn affirmed that "the position of the party is that where you have self-identified as a woman, then you are treated as a woman."

Although the NEC is yet to make a formal announcement, it is expected that it will affirm that transwomen can self-define in order to stand on all-women shortlists and in women's sections of the Labour Party, and will not be asked to have a Gender Recognition Certificate.

Corbyn's position is correct, and his statement is a welcome affirma-

tion of what had been the norm for transwomen in the Labour Party before challenges were raised to it in recent months.

A large number of other organisations allow self-identification without detriment to women, including those who work with women who are survivors of sexual violence. Most women are not asked to "prove" their gender. We should not be in the business of saying some women don't look or act enough like women so should be asked for "proof".

Obtaining a Gender Recognition Certificate is a bureaucratic, often personally difficult, and costly process. Many transwomen will

not have one, or not have one yet. We should not be demanding they do in order to recognise and include them.

There is not a queue of men who are going to identify as women to enter all-women shortlists. Why would they when life in politics (and in general) is much easier as a man?

Transwomen are often oppressed as women, as well as for being trans. Our struggle should be a common one.

The inclusion of transwomen in the Labour Party will be to the benefit of the Labour women's movement, rather than to its detriment.

Lecturers strike over pensions

By a UCU member

Staff at 61 universities have voted to strike in a dispute over pensions, beginning on 22 February.

University bosses want to remove guaranteed pension provision, in favour of a “defined contribution” scheme where the eventual pay-out is dependent on performance of investments. Staff face losing up to £200,000 over the course of retirement.

The ballot achieved a 58% turnout nationwide with an impressive 88% vote for action. The universities involved are primarily the older “pre-92” universities, and the affected workers are academic and academic-related staff plus some senior administrators. The vote for action was on an individual branch basis: six branches that did not meet the 50% threshold for action are to be reballoted.

Fourteen days of escalating strike action have been announced over four weeks, beginning with two days in a week and rising to five with a work-to-contract alongside. We need strike committees to involve new activists, and solidarity from other campus unions and the wider labour movement. Fundraising for strike pay should be a priority now. Much university teaching is delivered by hourly-paid or nine-month-contract staff for whom two

weeks’ lost pay is a very big hit. The Picturehouse dispute has shown how important strike pay is in sustaining action among casualised workers, and without these staff on board the strikes have little chance of success.

Student support is also vital. Many branches are already working with student unions to plan teach-ins for the strike days. The autonomous nature of academic work means strikes don’t necessarily feel like a collective experience unless there’s a conscious effort to organise pickets, protests and direct action alongside.

The backdrop to the dispute is a long-running row about the operation of the Universities Superannuation Scheme. This is the UK’s largest private employer pension scheme, and is subject to new regulations that in theory are supposed to prevent scheme collapses like the one currently affecting Carillion workers. But the Pensions Regulator (which answers to the Government) is taking no account of the difference between a large collective university scheme and a private firm’s provision. Instead, it



has insisted USS switch its money into lower-risk, lower-return investments, which in turn make the scheme look unsustainable without much bigger employer contributions. At the same time the Regulator overlooked an actual private sector shambles and allowed Carillion to keep paying shareholders while its pension deficit mushroomed.

On the positive side for UCU, the employers are split. A significant number know it is not in their interests to offer a pension that is substantially worse than the post-92 universities do (their staff are in the Teachers Pension Scheme). On top of that, Brexit is already affecting international staff recruitment and this will only make matters worse.

Only a small number of employers need to be swung towards a deal and the worst of the pension cuts could be halted.

Home care workers strike over 40% cuts

By Charlotte Zalens

Home care enablement workers in Birmingham struck on 20 January over plans to make 40% of them redundant and to institute a shift pattern that would see workers being given three split-shifts in a day.

The plan to give workers three split shifts over a day would see them expected to work 7am-10am, 12-2pm, and then 4-10pm. The

council sees this as three separate shifts with breaks in between, but in reality workers would not have adequate time to go home and have a break at all. These workers provide a service in the home for people who have just left hospital, meaning they have to travel to different people’s homes over the course of a shift. The new work patterns would leave workers exhausted, and less able to provide good care to patients.

In 2010 Birmingham Council employed 7000 people in social care, today that workforce is less than 2000, with 40% more to be cut.

A demonstration in support of the home care workers’ strike gathered over 350 people in central Birmingham on 20 January, and marched through the city centre to the council offices on Victoria Square.

Workers will strike again on Tuesday 6 February.

Cleaners refuse to work for half the pay

By Gemma Short

Outsourced night cleaners at the Royal College of Music, employed by outsourcing company Tenon FM, are facing unfair dismissal after they refused new contracts that would see their hours cut in half.

Cleaners and their supporters will be protesting outside the college on Thursday 1 February demanding that their original contracts be restored, that dismissals be stopped and that the company reinstate the cleaners that have already been sacked.

Cleaners have been virtually unanimous in rejecting the new

terms that would require them to clean the college in half the time and for half the pay. The new conditions would not only put the cleaners in significant financial hardship, but would also impact their physical and emotional well-being, due to the strain resulting from having an increased workload.

And the burden would not only fall on them, but on the families for whom they provide.

According to their union, the college, which has a multi-million pound budget, has imposed these changes in order to save little more than £50,000.

This is not the first time these mi-

grant workers have faced outsourcing companies. Last year the IWGB initiated legal proceedings against Kingdom, the company that was then in charge of cleaning services for the Royal College of Music, Royal College of Arts and Heythrop College, after it had illegally deducted thousands of pounds in wages from its cleaners.

The company ended up settling the claim, paying the workers what it owed and damages, but this didn’t stop the new provider from trampling all over these workers’ rights.

• Support the workers strike fund: bit.ly/2rMMNC0



Reinstate Ian Allinson!

By Michael Elms

Fujitsu workers fighting job cuts and union-busting victimisations have started an 11-day round of industrial action with strikes over 24-26 January.

On Friday 26 January hundreds of Fujitsu workers demonstrated alongside Manchester Mears housing maintenance workers and First Manchester bus workers, who are engaged in long-running strikes over pay.

Fujitsu workers have balloted for strike action against compulsory redundancies and breaches of redundancy procedures, as well as the victimisation of Ian Allinson and other reps – all of which take place in the context of a culture of bullying. For example, one of the workers faced with compulsory redundancy has claimed that her selection for dismissal was linked to the fact that she has an ongoing grievance against the company for sexual harassment at work.

On 12 January Fujitsu dismissed Ian Allinson, chair of Unite in Fu-

jitsu UK, under the pretext of redundancy.

While Ian was on compassionate leave for a family funeral Fujitsu wrote to tell him he would be dismissed later that week. Fujitsu refused to allow him to work his notice, despite not yet having responded to his application for a job they encouraged him to apply for, breaking previous promises. This is not the first time Fujitsu has tried to victimise Ian, and Ian is not the only rep they have targeted.

Fujitsu’s aggressive approach is shown by their threat to withhold bonuses, often worth up to 20% of annual income, from anyone who strikes.

This latest round of action comes in the same month that engineers at nearby GNB Industrial Power in Horwich won an average pay increase of £3,500 by taking four days of strike action.

• Signing the petition here: tinyurl.com/signreinstateian

Ballot on Tyne and Wear Metro

By Peggy Carter

The RMT is balloting workers on the Tyne and Wear Metro over the 1% pay cap.

Because the Tyne and Wear Metro drivers are employed by local government they have been

subject to the public sector pay cap. While workers doing similar jobs in other forms of transport have had at least small pay rises, these workers have been kept below 1%.

The RMT organises 250 workers on the Metro system.

DLR workers to strike again

By Ollie Moore

Cleaners and security workers employed by ISS on London’s Docklands Light Railway will strike again from 1-3 February.

Following a solid strike on New Year’s Eve, the RMT union is organising further action in an at-

tempt to force ISS to adhere to its own agreed procedures for negotiating changes to working practises. The union also wants ISS to respond to its pay claim.

As well as the strike, RMT has also called action-short-of-strike from 5-10 February, in the form of a work-to-rule around risk assessments.

Royal Mail deal on the cards

By Gemma Short

A deal has been reached between CWU and Royal Mail in the CWU’s dispute over pensions, job security and a shorter working week.

The CWU’s postal executive is

due to meet to consider the deal as *Solidarity* went to press on 30 January. It is expected this meeting will make a decision either to recommend the deal to members in a ballot or return it to negotiations.

As we go to press, details of the deal are not yet clear.



Solidarity

For a workers' government

No 460 31 January 2018 50p/£1

Stop Turkey's assault on Afrin!

By Simon Nelson

Turkey's incursion and bombing campaign in the Kurdish-controlled area of Afrin on the border with Syria is a worrying escalation in a prolonged stand-off between the two forces.

There are almost two million Syrian Kurds, most of whom live in the north east Syria.

The hostility of Turkish President Erdogan to the expanding territory under the control of Kurdish forces has been held back by the support of both Russia and the US for the Kurdish forces. But as relations between Turkey and Russia have thawed, the dynamic has changed.

Turkish forces are being supported by Syrian rebels as they seek to push Kurds back from the Turkish border. The assault is happening at the same time that a new police and border force is being set up from the SDF (Syrian Democratic Forces), of which the Kurdish armed forces, the YPG, are the largest part. Turkey claims to just be establishing a 19 mile "deep safe zone" between itself and the Kurdish controlled enclaves in Syria.

More than 25,000 pro-Turkish fighters have been drafted into the offensive operation "Olive Branch." Several villages have been captured, despite Kurdish forces driving back some attacks. A YPG shelling of a housing area on the border killed two Syrian rebel fighters.

Because of involvement in the SDF, the YPG are not isolated and have had considerable backing from the USA to carry out operations, primarily against Daesh, but increasingly in other areas that

nominally fall under Syrian government control.

This closer collaboration has angered Turkey. Many Kurdish forces are still positioned around Raqqa, where Daesh has now been driven out. There is now growing pressure to pull these forces back to help defend Afrin. Both Turkey and the USA should be bound by NATO agreements, and as "allies" they will not go into open conflict.

Plans for the operation accelerated when US officials said they would help the SDF build a new "border security force" to prevent the return of Daesh. This is in addition to Rex Tillerson, US Secretary of State, confirming that the US plans to keep 2000 military advisers and logistics troops in Syria with no date named for their withdrawal.

The US wants to keep its advisers in Syria in order to undercut the influence of Assad and Iran, particularly if there is any resurgence of Daesh or other hardline Islamist rebels.

MATTIS

Overall the US has been remarkably relaxed about the attacks by Erdogan.

US Defence Secretary Jim Mattis told the press: "They warned us before they launched the aircraft they were going to do it, in consultation with us. And we are working now on the way ahead."

The Assad regime has condemned the assault as further proof of Turkey's support for Islamist rebels and another attempt by Turkey to destabilise Syria.

The other major force in the conflict is Russia. Their troops had given protection to Afrin, stopping Turkish planes using the Syrian



airspace, which they jointly control. But the change of allegiance of the YPG, to the US, has caused Russia to move its troops out of the area. Turkish jets will be able to bomb the area with impunity.

Patrick Cockburn, who has long been a semi-apologist for the Assad regime in Syria, argues in *The Independent* that the Kurds have over-stretched themselves, trying to take on more territory than they can either manage or that is strictly Kurdish. It is true that the seizure of oilfields in Deir Ezzor was in effect carried out on behalf of the US. If Turkey is allowed to beat the Kurds back, then Assad can hope to make the Kurds think that the US is unable to protect them. Or so Cockburn sees it.

The Kurdish political party, the PYD, is furious at Russia for allowing the Afrin offensive. In a statement published on its website on

20 January it blamed Russia for the operation:

"We know that, without the permission of global forces and mainly Russia, whose troops are located in Afrin, Turkey cannot attack civilians using Afrin airspace.

"Therefore, we hold Russia as responsible as Turkey and stress that Russia is the crime partner of Turkey in massacring the civilians in the region."

Following the defeat of Daesh, the Kurdish forces are less useful to any side in the Syrian conflict. Assad, who has turned a blind eye to much of the Kurdish military involvement, has never supported any degree of Kurdish autonomy.

The defeat of Daesh in Mosul, followed by the subsequent setbacks of the independence referendum in Iraqi Kurdistan, will also hamper the Kurdish leaders. Although the YPG put up resistance

in Afrin, their isolation from the rest of the Kurdish area of Rojava puts them in a bad position.

Turkey should withdraw from Afrin and stop attacks on Kurds in Syria and within Turkey. Erdogan does not care who is killed in this conflict. He is an enemy of the Kurdish people, and Russian assistance makes Turkey a terrible threat.

Increasingly fragile alliances are using the Syrian conflict as a proxy to fight out the much bigger global conflicts between the Gulf states, Iran, Russia and the US. That will not provide any respite to the Syrians and Kurds, still locked in siege conditions.

The Labour Party should come out firmly against UK military support to Turkey and condemn the authoritarian regime of Erdogan.

Subscribe to Solidarity

Trial sub (6 issues) £7 ☐
Six months (22 issues) £22 waged ☐, £11 unwaged ☐
One year (44 issues) £44 waged ☐, £22 unwaged ☐
European rate: 6 months €30 ☐ One year €55 ☐

Name

Address

I enclose £

Cheques (£) to "AWL" or make £ and Euro payments at workersliberty.org/sub
Return to 20e Tower Workshops, Riley Road, London, SE1 3DG.

Or subscribe with a standing order

Pay £5 a month to subscribe to Solidarity or pay us more to make an ongoing contribution to our work

To: (your bank) (address)

Account name (your name)

Account number Sort code

Please make payments as follows to the debit of my account:
Payee: Alliance for Workers' Liberty, account no. 20047674 at the Unity Trust Bank, 9 Brindley Place, Birmingham, B1 2HB (60-83-01)

Amount: £.....

To be paid on the day of (month) 20.... (year) and thereafter monthly until this order is cancelled by me in writing.
This order cancels any previous orders to the same payee.

Date Signature

Contact us

020 7394 8923

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

Printed by Trinity Mirror