

Editorial of the Socialist, issue 916

Labour Party needs democratic structures and socialist policies

Leaders of the Labour Party's right wing, realising they have lost their battle for Jeremy Corbyn to be defeated in the present leadership contest, are desperately seeking other ways to entrench their position in the next phase of the party's civil war. The right-dominated Parliamentary Labour Party voted 83% to 17% for a proposal to stop Jeremy Corbyn from being able to choose his shadow cabinet and instead return that power to themselves. Meanwhile some on the left have been weighing up whether it will help them to counter the right if they propose an increase in the size of Labour's National Executive Committee (NEC).

Any such proposals have to be approved by the NEC and then go to the party conference, which convenes on 25 September. Does this mean that the party is fundamentally democratic and that the large, pro-Corbyn influx will make its mark this year?

Certainly there are likely to be more Corbyn supporting delegates this year, though their number will again be limited by the requirement of needing 12 months of party membership before the closing date for delegate 'applications', in order to qualify. But then, after that hurdle, when it comes to trying to influence Labour policy, "there are many hurdles to getting policy submitted, let alone discussed and voted on, let alone passed," as the Momentum NHS group puts it.

There was a time when Labour's conference had vibrant debates on key political issues, often challenging and opposing the position of the party's leaders. But over the last three decades, as the leadership increasingly sought to fend off opposition to pro-austerity policies, it was turned more into an anodyne courting of the capitalist media. Set in train by Tony Blair in particular, the conference was reduced virtually to a consultation forum that wouldn't hinder the leadership's pro-big business agenda.

Policy

The conference's policy-making powers were largely transferred to much smaller 'policy forums' headed by the National Policy Forum (NPF). Conference debates were carefully managed to keep opposition at bay on certain key issues, with the NPF trying to set the parameters. When unwelcome motions were agreed they were simply ignored, such as those to renationalise the railways and Royal Mail. The leadership decided policy, not the members, who were mainly just invited to submit opinions on the order of priorities.

This year many right-wing controlled CLPs (Constituency Labour Parties) may have avoided even organising a meeting to discuss proposing a resolution to the conference. This was made easier for them by the NEC's undemocratic ban on all 'normal' CLP and branch meetings during the Labour leadership contest. Resolutions that do make it to the conference can then face being discarded by the Conference Arrangements Committee for not satisfying the requirement to be on a "contemporary" subject or for being on an issue covered in the NPF's reports. Are the rest then put to the conference? No, because the conference delegates can only choose eight topics for discussion (four from CLPs and four from trade unions), and all the resolutions on those topics have to be composited into just eight - losing along the way many of their clauses, and eliminating all resolutions on topics not selected.

As well as democracy being seriously eroded, so was the influence of the organised working class. The trade unions created the Labour Representation Committee in 1900, which became the Labour Party, as a political voice for the working class. However, in 1993, responding to insistent demands from the capitalist class, Labour leader John Smith began a process of preventing trade union representatives from being able to cast votes in the Labour Party using the weight of their full membership - the 'block vote'. He introduced One

Member One Vote (OMOV) for the selection of parliamentary candidates, deliberately to undermine trade union influence.

Then Blair, in 1996, reduced the voting weight of affiliates (mainly trade unions) at party conference from 70% to just 50%. It had been 90% up to 1992. Further erosions to the votes of trade unionists within the Labour Party structures took place over the years, up to the Collins Review in 2014 when Ed Miliband did away with the 33% voting weight that trade unionists had in Labour leadership elections. Instead, individual trade unionists could become 'affiliated supporters', with only very limited rights within the party.

Miliband argued that his changes would reverse the decades-long decline in Labour's active support base. When moving them he said: "If you vote for these reforms you will be voting for Labour to be a movement again." But it was Labour's policies of privatisation, cuts, the public sector wage freeze and other attacks - continued under Miliband - that were preventing Labour from becoming 'a movement again', as the anti-austerity Corbyn surge has clearly shown.

Membership

Now membership of the party has rapidly risen to be the highest since the 1970s, but today's members have a party structure that is far less democratic and trade union based than in the 70s. The anti-democratic tide needs to be turned back. For a start this should mean an end to right-wing motivated exclusions and suspensions of individuals and even of whole CLPs like Wallasey and Brighton, and allowing those who have been expelled for having socialist ideas to rejoin; no more temporary bans on holding local meetings; a reinstatement of mandatory democratic selection for parliamentary candidates; and the national conference turned into a forum for democratic debate and policy making.

Also necessary is reinstating the trade unions' right to collective representation and a role in the party's decision-making processes commensurate with their size. In addition, while there are still residues of the federal structure formed in 1900 (as well as 14 affiliated trade unions, Labour presently has 22 other affiliated organisations), this should be expanded and strengthened by inviting back in, as affiliates, socialist organisations like the Socialist Party and other anti-austerity formations that have previously been excluded for campaigning too hard in working class interests for the Blairites to tolerate.

Democratisation

Jeremy Corbyn has regularly said that he wants to see democratisation of Labour's policy-making process, with empowerment of rank and file members, which is very welcome. For the right wing it's another story: the history of recent decades shows their desire and trajectory for the very opposite. While the right no doubt would like to remove all Jeremy Corbyn's supporters from the shadow cabinet, Jeremy himself aims to keep to a moral high ground when for instance he says, on the BBC's Question Time, that he hopes for a shadow cabinet that is "balanced and is extended to all wings of the party and we will get together to take on the Tories, and what they are doing to health, to education."

But the burning problem is that Labour's Blairites when in government made many similar attacks on health and education to those of the Tories, and would again, given the chance. They represent the interests of capitalism in the Labour Party and would try to sabotage any measures taken against big business. Only those MPs willing to accept Corbyn's anti-austerity programme should have the Labour whip, never mind being part of the shadow cabinet.

The onslaught of 'warnings' across the capitalist media that Labour can only ever again win a general election if it moves rightwards in order to take votes off the Tories and Ukip are the exact opposite of the truth that they try so hard to conceal. Yes, Labour will have to take votes from other parties and inspire support from would-be non-voters - and it once had enough of those votes when it was still seen as acting even slightly in the interests of ordinary people.

Now a tremendous opportunity has arisen as a result of the Corbyn surge, to bring Labour back to power but on an entirely different, attractive basis. This can be achieved even if the proposed constituency boundary changes go ahead, which disadvantage Labour. But the foundation for this transformation needs to be democratic debate on policy and choosing manifesto pledges such as reversing all council cuts, fully restoring

the NHS, a £10 an hour minimum wage and significantly increasing public sector wages. The Socialist Party will also call for a socialist programme of taking into public ownership the large corporations that supply our most vital goods and services.

#KeepCorbyn: Fight workhouse conditions

For a party that fights for workers

"We have record employment, but also record levels of poverty among those in work... Work for millions has become insecure and stressful. We have to change that."

This is what Jeremy Corbyn wrote in July, announcing a series of policies to protect the low-paid.

He pledged that a Labour government under his leadership would ban zero-hour contracts. And it would force companies with over 250 employees to bring back collective bargaining - negotiating pay, terms and conditions through trade unions. He also demands a £10 an hour minimum wage.

No wonder the bosses and Tories hate him. He stands with workers against their cruel working conditions and poverty pay. That's why his leadership challenge is such a threat to companies like Sports Direct, which has hit the headlines recently for its appalling practices.

'Shane Stephenson', a zero-hour warehouse worker at another 'Victorian' firm, reports on the Sports Direct struggle:

Under pressure from unions and the media, workhouse employer Sports Direct has decided to partially scrap some zero-hour contracts.

Management promises a wage slightly above the national average, and a small number of guaranteed hours.

However, even these tiny changes are only for staff directly employed by Sports Direct. The vast majority are agency workers. In the 3,200-worker Shirebrook mega-warehouse, only 6% will benefit.

Meanwhile, fat-cat boss Mike Ashley shows up to the company's 'open day' pulling over a grand in £50 notes out of his pocket at the security check-in. His joking smile showed how little this concerned him.

At the firm's annual general meeting for shareholders, Ashley claimed he had no knowledge of 'sweatshop' conditions such as the 'six-strike policy'. Employees are disciplined for simply spending time in the toilet or talking to other staff.

I'm a zero-hour contract warehouse worker for another massive retailer, B&M. A lot of things are similar. Instead of a six-strike policy, we have three strikes! The majority of B&M stores don't even have proper air conditioning. 'Sweatshop' is right.

The Socialist Party fights for

- Scrapping all zero-hour contracts - for full-time work for all who desire it
- Flexible working for those who need it, but on workers' terms, not the bosses'
- Union recognition and full employment rights from day one on the job

"Sports Direct's huge Shirebrook warehouse is on the site of a colliery that employed large numbers of well-paid, unionised, skilled workers. Today, thousands are employed as agency workers and on zero-hours contracts."

Jeremy Corbyn

NHS chiefs warn cuts mean rationing or charges

Sam Morecroft

NHS bosses have said that the Tory government's 'seven-day NHS' plan is "impossible" under current funding and staffing levels. The head of NHS Providers, the trade body for NHS trusts, has said cuts, charges or "draconian rationing" are the only possible outcomes.

The Tories claim their plans are fair, workable and sustainable, and junior doctors fighting back are the ones putting the NHS in danger. They also promised to ring-fence and even increase NHS funding. But 80% of hospitals in England are now in financial deficit - up from 5% just three years ago.

The Tories want to syphon cash directly out of the NHS and into the pockets of their private health company mates. Privatisation and low staffing levels are driving the NHS into a crisis. That's exactly what the Tories want.

Rationing, turning some people away, charging for service. That would mean the end of the NHS as we know it.

Backlash

But the Tories also fear a backlash. Last week Theresa May called in NHS leaders, telling them to hold off hospital mergers or closures that could spark local protests. Big campaigns are already developing in areas like Huddersfield, where Socialist Party members are playing a leading role.

The junior doctors have to win. The other health unions and entire workers' movement need to unite behind them so they are not fighting alone.

The Trade Union Congress should call a march immediately to support the doctors and NHS, and use that to launch coordinated strikes against the government. We have to show we don't believe the Tory lies - and we won't let them destroy our NHS.

Fund smaller classes - not new grammars

James Kerr, Socialist Party teachers organiser

Theresa May's vow to foster 'social mobility' through the creation of new grammar schools will have made the heads of teachers up and down the country spin.

Even Michael Wilshaw, former head of schools inspector Ofsted, described the plans as "tosh and nonsense". He reminded May, and Education Secretary Justine Greening, that for every grammar school created you get three secondary moderns.

He's right too. As soon as any element of selection is introduced it has a knock-on effect. Yes there are success stories from the grammar system, but there are plenty of examples of failure. And May ignores the leaps and strides in the quality of teaching within comprehensive schools.

It also flies in the face of the research and growth in understanding in the last few decades about how children develop and learn. Much of that research shows the elasticity of the brain allows for humans' understanding and intelligence to grow rapidly under the right conditions.

Brains

For example, London black cab drivers' brains physically get bigger when they take 'The Knowledge'. In other words, a child's intelligence or talent is not fixed, and shouldn't be measured at eleven as a guide for where they'll be in the future.

Instead all children should be exposed to a varied curriculum, surrounded by a broad cross-section of their peers to bounce ideas and skills off each other.

If you want to improve children's life chances, it's simple. Fund reduction in class sizes so children can receive the support they need, and create an exciting and varied educational environment for all young people where they're challenged and inspired on a daily basis.

The Tories seem to view the education unions as an obstacle they can overcome. We need to make sure that's not the case. Otherwise education will be dragged further back to a system of the haves and have-nots.

Benefit cap could shut 67% of women's refuges

Emma Irving, domestic and sexual violence advocate

The new Tory benefit cap could force two thirds of refuges to close, leaving women fleeing violence with nowhere to go.

A study by domestic violence charity Women's Aid showed that on an average day, 115 women and 103 children are turned away from refuges due to lack of spaces. This is only going to increase with the Tories' new rules for benefit claimants, which restrict the amount you can receive per household.

This is particularly devastating for refuges. They rely on housing benefit payments - which sometimes account for up to 90% of their income.

This government claims to want to end violence against women and girls. But it has repeatedly chosen to devastate services with round after round of cuts.

The devastating effect of austerity on refuges is clearly shown when it comes to women with complex needs.

Survivors

I work for a small charity supporting disabled survivors of domestic and sexual violence. Recently four women have approached my service requesting help to find refuge space. Only two managed to find a space.

Furthermore, reports of domestic and sexual violence have increased by almost a tenth in the last year. This puts further strain on services which are already at breaking point due to repeated Tory and Blairite funding cuts.

Many services are barely surviving with staff increasingly laid off. My organisation just reduced its staff from four to three due to lack of funding.

The Socialist Party stands for full refuge provision, and fully funded support services for all victims of domestic and sexual violence. Reverse all cuts to benefits, jobs and services, to help prevent women staying trapped in abusive relationships. Socialist change can end the epidemic of violence against women and girls.

Them & Us

1% owns 23%

The richest 1% in the UK own over 28 times as much as the poorest 20%.

The latest figures from Oxfam show Britain's bottom 13 million hold just 0.8% of the country's wealth. The top 634,000 have 23%.

The charity suggests this was a major contributing factor in the working class revolt that delivered the Brexit vote. The Socialist called this months before the referendum, and Jeremy Corbyn rightly acknowledged it immediately after.

Oxfam's proposals include limiting the pay ratio between workers and executives, and tackling tax dodging. Not a bad start. They also want workers on boards, and incentives to train us for better-paid jobs.

But just one worker in a privately owned boardroom stuffed with capitalists will change very little. We say: nationalise the top companies under the elected control and management of workers and service users.

And absolutely fund education and training. But we still need a living wage for all workers at all levels.

Zero-hour zoom

Meanwhile, the official number of workers on zero-hour contracts has zoomed up 20% in just a year.

The Office for National Statistics says 903,000 workers are now on zero-hour contracts. Many more will be on contracts with insufficient guaranteed hours, or other casual arrangements.

Some of the reported increase will be down to more workers understanding what zero-hour contracts are. They have been widespread for many years in catering and retail. Care is rife with them. Increasingly the public sector uses them too.

In reality, millions of workers could be on zero-hour or near-zero-hour conditions.

31% of zero-hour workers said they wanted more hours, compared with 10% on other contracts.

The Trade Union Congress has found that the median hourly rate for a zero-hour worker is £7.25. The national average is £11.05. That's more than a third less.

What We Saw

The Fabian Society is an antiquated think-tank whose founding purpose was to achieve socialism by, er, slowing down class struggle. Seriously. Their symbol is a cross tortoise.

So perhaps it's no surprise that their Labour conference fringe meeting titled 'For the Many' is advertised as 'invitation only'.

Better still, the event's 'partner' organisation is Deloitte. That's right, the 'management consultancy' (staff cutting) and 'tax advice' (tax dodging) service group.

The Socialist can't even...

New 'strongman' president threatens martial law - while leaning on left parties for support

US president Barack Obama was involved in a diplomatic spat with Philippines president Rodrigo Duterte at the recent Asean summit in Cambodia. Duterte called Obama a "son of a whore" after the White House criticised his human rights record. Duterte said he wouldn't take orders from a former colonial power.

The coming to power of Duterte on 9 May marked a sharp turn in Philippines politics. He has a reputation as a 'strongman' who as Mayor of Davao city ruled with an iron fist.

His shoot-to-kill policy against alleged criminals and drug dealers has so far claimed 2,400 lives in his presidency - half of them slain by shadowy death squads. Human Rights Watch slammed this as "state sanctioned butchery". Duterte also threatened to declare martial law in response to reports that the Supreme Court might intervene to block his hardline policy against street crime.

At the same time, Duterte has boasted he is the country's first 'socialist' president and has invited representatives of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) into his cabinet, and uses populist rhetoric against foreign mining companies and sections of the establishment.

On the other hand, his alliance with the family of ex-dictator Ferdinand Marco - which remains an influential force in the country's crony political system even after the dictator was overthrown in 1986 - led Duterte to announce yet another highly controversial step: allowing Marcos' embalmed corpse to be buried in Manila's Heroes' Cemetery with full military honours on 18 September.

Vincent Kolo (CWI) interviewed Philippines-based socialist, Gabriel, on the new president and what he represents

Duterte has been compared to Donald Trump, another erratic right-wing populist figure. How would you sum up his politics?

Like Trump, he's impossible to map neatly on the political spectrum. At best he's a populist with a more authoritarian bent. His election campaign rode on the promise of change - which has meant different things to different audiences.

Duterte is a member of a political clan in the Southern Philippines, making him a representative of this faction of the oligarchy. Part of his appeal lay in him being a candidate from Mindanao, the "neglected south".

He is an expression of current frustrations at the political elite, as much as he is a product of the social conditions over which he governed in Davao city, in Mindanao, for over two decades. He has earned his reputation as a strongman who will get things done, as a marked contrast to the departing Aquino administration which was seen as corrupt and inept, despite its promises of reform.

Davao under Duterte is repeatedly compared to Singapore under Lee Kuan Yew, but this is greatly exaggerated. Davao is no Singapore, and remains notorious for drugs and crime. The latter are rather symptoms of deeper, structural crises that Duterte promises to do away with at the national level in the same manner that he's dealt with them in Davao: strong-arm rule, death squads, Machiavellian manoeuvring with both the left and the right.

Ultimately Duterte will prove unable to resolve the problems he set out to defeat. Already his economic platform promises no departure from that of previous administrations [ie neoliberalism]. He has also appointed cabinet members from a different faction of the same political oligarchy, gravitating toward allies of the former Gloria Arroyo administration (2001-2010).

What is the Communist Party of the Philippines's (Maoist) position on Duterte? In what way can he claim a 'left' label?

The CPP is by no means united on the Duterte question. It has released official statements critical of Duterte while at the same time favouring a 'critical honeymoon period' with the man. It is unclear who is really making the decisions within the party.

The CPP has cultivated a long relationship with Duterte in the Davao region. Members of the party there, and the Southern Mindanao command of their armed wing, the New People's Army (NPA), clearly leaned toward Duterte.

Duterte has given the CPP four cabinet posts, including positions in the labour and agrarian reform ministries. This was premised on the condition that the NPA lay down their arms. The CPP got around that clause by saying whoever they nominate won't be members of the party per se but members of their legal fronts that are "nationalist" and "progressive".

The CPP is also banking on Duterte's commitment to revive the country's steel industry. There are illusions that national industrialisation is still possible through partnerships with a 'national bourgeoisie', which is in reality bound hand and foot to foreign capital and has no real progressive dimension.

But it's not just the CPP that is joining the Duterte bandwagon. Another broad 'left' party, Akbayan, joined a coalition of party lists in Duterte's camp (PDP-Laban) in congress.

Members of its leadership were highly critical of Duterte - so the sudden shift is alarming, if not really surprising.

This means there is no viable opposition among the self-defined left. In both cases, the strategy consists of thinking that the left 'wins' when members of particular parties are in government - rather than seeing their role as an opportunity to raise the political programme and put a distinct and independent alternative across, for political opposition to emerge from the bottom up.

This can't bode well for the rest of an already fragmented left who remain critical of Duterte. Should they decide to go along this route, the 'left' will for a long time be tainted by an alliance with Duterte, diluting what progressive politics even means, which is almost everything Duterte is not.

Can you see a popular backlash and protests coming in the future - as for example against president Estrada in 2001?

Duterte's populist streak has in the past been compared to Estrada, popularly known as Erap. But Erap's base of support was solidly among the urban poor. The 'People Power II' protests that overthrew Erap in 2001 were mostly led by the urban middle classes, with the CPP joining the fray. But this buried smaller revolts among urban poor groups that felt it was a 'coup' against their president.

Duterte's appeal at this stage cuts across classes, so he has actually had a pacifying effect on public unrest. His ability to build widely different political coalitions in his favour makes him an unusually useful prop for the ruling class. Mass protests against his rule are unlikely in the near future in my opinion.

But given perpetual political instability, the faith people have in Duterte can just as rapidly turn against him.

One positive development that has emerged out of all this is the fact that it has exposed the bankruptcy of political elites who pose as reformists, as Aquino did. Part of Duterte's stylistic appeal was the fact that he stood as Aquino's antithesis.

Should Duterte himself prove disappointing, it will become clearer than ever that change can never come about through the actions of one man, or by a mere change of president, but rather requires a collective struggle by the majority against the entire oligarchy.

This was an election with only capitalist and elite candidates; there was no option representing the working class and the poor. What is the way forward for creating a real left alternative?

What we lacked was an independent political alternative based on an explicitly class-based programme - one that exposes the bankruptcy of our so-called democracy.

The association between the 'left' and Duterte will be hard to break, especially given that the latter has openly described himself as a 'leftist'. And given the way the self-ascribed Philippine left - Maoists, social democrats, other progressives, even liberals - are now gravitating around Duterte, you'd think we elected Nelson Mandela or Che Guevara as president!

There is space, in the future, for a movement that can in turn lead to the formation of new political parties. This cannot be a repeat of 'People Power', which essentially pivoted around individual 'heroes' and factions of

the oligarchy.

Forwarding an independent alternative will probably entail a break from the traditional left parties. I personally still hold out some hope that bridges can, and must, be built with at least some individuals within the CPP's ranks.

[Full interview on socialistworld.net](#)

International news in brief

Short stories from other sections and co-thinkers of the Committee for a Workers' International, the global socialist organisation which the Socialist Party is affiliated to.

Jobstown protesters face criminal trial

Minors arrested following a peaceful protest in Jobstown, near Dublin, against the then deputy prime minister, Labour's Joan Burton, in November 2014, are due in court on 19 September.

The young protesters were part of a large demo which delayed Burton's car journey but are now facing ludicrous charges of "false imprisonment".

While the state pursues its political vendetta against a working class revolt, government ministers won't pursue Apple for tax dodging.

Exclusive: When Edward Snowden went underground with Hong Kong refugees

Socialist Action (CWI, Hong Kong) member Vanessa, who is also an active member of the Refugee Union, helped whistleblower Edward Snowden in the crucial first days after his revelations about the US state's surveillance dirty tricks.

[Read the story on socialistworld.net](#)

Quebec: Solidarity needed for port strikers

Socialist Alternative (CWI Québec) spoke with Jacques Fontaine, one of the striking workers at the Old Port, Montréal. He explained that 280 workers at the Old Port of Montréal have been on strike since 27 May demanding a \$15 an hour minimum wage.

This is one of the first strikes in Canada for a \$15 an hour minimum wage, and support internationally can help to win this vital struggle.

[See socialistworld.net for interview and solidarity details](#)

Obesity crisis: government strategy offers no solution

Iain Dalton

"Teresa May's first hurdle was obesity, and she has failed" was the headline of one of a series of articles slating the newly announced 'obesity strategy,' which downgraded even the limited proposals put forward by Cameron.

The scale of the obesity crisis in the UK is vast. The 2014 official Health Survey for England showed that 61.7% of adults were overweight or obese. 31.2% of children aged two to 15 were also either overweight or obese.

The National Child Measurement Programme for 2014-15 suggested that the problem increases with age, with 33.3% of ten to eleven year olds either overweight or obese as compared to 21.9% of four to five year olds.

Reflecting a laissez-faire approach that puts securing the profits of big business first, the regimes of both Cameron and May have emphasised the need for voluntary measures. For example, allowing big business to reformulate products to be 'healthier' in their own time.

May's proposals left out a number of suggestions that Public Health England believe will have the most impact. For example, banning advertising of food high in salt, fat and sugar during family programmes. Or banning special offers on junk food in supermarkets.

This type of measure would have cut across the profits of the companies involved - who lobbied hard for them not to be included.

The only measure to attempt to force companies to act is the sugar tax, which was announced some time ago (see 'Condescending sugar tax debate misses real causes of poor diet' at socialistparty.org.uk). This will not come into effect for two years, in which time manufacturers will be encouraged to reformulate products to avoid the tax.

But under capitalism, companies will always try to use the cheapest products to generate the most profits.

Reformulation only guarantees less sugar, not necessarily that the product will be healthier. Moreover, this only targets individual products high in sugar like soft-drinks - but sugar is present in many other processed food products.

'Clean labelling' (for example purporting no artificial additives) has become the latest effort of the food industry to make ingredients we would otherwise jump away from sound natural and nutritious on labels.

Some things don't even have to be listed on labels - like processing aids. In reality, we have a limited knowledge of what goes into our food - shown clearly by the horsemeat scandal. The only way we will really know is by workers and consumers having democratic oversight on the production process.

The cost of healthy food is a major barrier. A survey carried out at Leeds University showed that less than 2% of children's lunch boxes meet the nutritional standards set for school canteens.

Rising food costs are clearly a big factor - both in terms of what parents are able to pack from home and in who can afford school dinners. This was highlighted by the recent example of a free school threatening to put children into 'lunch isolation' with a very minimal lunch as 'punishment' for parents being late paying exorbitant amounts for 'lunch fees'.

The money raised from the sugar tax is due to go towards helping fund breakfast clubs and an extra half hour a day of physical exercise at school. But if these things are necessary, why leave it to a tax where the amount raised is unknown? And schools are facing budget cuts as it is. Improvements in some school provisions can be undermined by cuts in others.

Cuts are having a similar effect on local government-run leisure centres, many of which have closed or been contracted out with higher prices charged. Working long hours, or multiple jobs, in order to make ends meet because of stagnating wages makes accessing such facilities even more difficult.

How are people supposed to increase the amount of exercise they do if the opportunities to do so are being removed? How are we supposed to eat healthier if all we have time for is a takeaway or a ready meal?

The Tories' measures are attempts to put sticking plasters (of very poor quality) over the inequities of capitalism which give rise to these issues. By putting profits above all else, capitalism messes with our health and wellbeing.

Limited time to exercise, poor diet, stress and many other issues result from our lives being bent to fit the capitalist machine. Instead we must fight for a socialist society which is able to fully harness knowledge, science and resources to meet the needs of the majority.

A socialist programme to tackle these issues would include:

- Stop the cuts to schools and local government. Fund decent leisure and exercise facilities in all schools and communities
- Reduce the working week with no loss of pay - give people the time to exercise and prepare fresh food
- Free nutritious breakfast and lunches available in schools and affordable workplace canteens
- Raise the minimum wage to £10 an hour, stop benefit sanctions - don't price people out of healthy living
- Nationalise the major food companies and supermarkets alongside other key sectors of the economy under democratic workers' control and management - use these resources to organise society and plan production to meet human needs and desires rather than profits
- The government spends £14m a year on 'Change4Life' - its anti-obesity social marketing programme. But the food industry spends more than £1bn a year on marketing in the UK
- Obesity prevalence for children living in the most deprived areas is double that of those living in the least deprived areas

-
- Moderate obesity cuts life expectancy by 2-4 years and severe obesity by an entire decade
 - More than a third of adults in the UK have pre-diabetes - a state of increased blood sugar likely to lead to diabetes if not tackled
-

Westbourne Park bus dispute continues

Tower Transit bus workers took further strike action on 12 September over the imposition of new rotas that will see them lose all their previous pay rise. The drivers at Westbourne Park garage said that very few buses were on the road. While I was at the garage for an hour and a half no buses came in or out of the garage and no buses drove past.

The owner of Tower Transit is determined to take on the union and said that drivers could go out on strike for a month straight. But drivers are even more determined to win this battle.

Their two key demands are that they want rotas back to what they were before the pay rise and that all future negotiations involve Lea Interchange and Westbourne Park garages together to cut across management's attempts to divide the drivers.

The drivers are buoyed by all the support they are getting, several people stopping to say to the drivers that they've got to keep fighting. People stopped to offer the drivers coffee, tea and food. The owner of a bed making company opposite the garage came over to offer his support.

At the Lea interchange strikers spoke about a number of issues including getting rid of check-off and the company having said they are kicking the union out of their office in revenge for taking industrial action.

If the management persist in their implementation of these rotas the drivers will be taking further action on 19 September.

Chris Newby and Martin Reynolds

National Shop Stewards Network rally 2016

An urgent time for our movement

Up to 250 trade unionists attended this year's excellent National Shop Stewards Network pre-TUC congress rally in Brighton on 11 September. Sarah Wrack, editor of the Socialist, reports.

"As a junior doctor, I am asking the TUC to call a day of action to support us." With this firm and clear statement, Aislinn Macklin-Doherty - one of two junior doctor speakers - summed up a major theme of the National Shop Stewards Network's (NSSN) rally and lobby of the TUC congress.

Janice Godrich, president of the PCS civil servants' union, had earlier explained that the PCS and the Fire Brigades Union had called for the TUC to throw the full weight of the trade union movement behind the junior doctors. But, she said, they are told this isn't possible because the BMA doctors' union hasn't asked for it. Janice retorted: "When we see people who care for us under attack we don't wait for an invitation, we stand firmly with them."

In opening the rally Linda Taaffe, secretary of the NSSN, outlined that the question of support for the junior doctors should be central to the discussions at the congress in the week ahead. "Visiting picket lines and raising money is great. But the bosses only understand action. The TUC needs to pass a motion for a national demo in defence of the NHS," she said.

This could then be built on to organise coordinated action. Linda argued that there is already a mood among teachers and doctors' to coordinate their strikes, and that if that happened whole swathes of other workers wouldn't be far behind.

Rob Williams, chair of the NSSN, called the fact that no junior doctor had been invited to address the TUC congress a disgrace and appealed for delegates to fight for that.

He also raised the possibility that the TUC and health unions could come in behind the education demonstration organised by the National Union of Students and UCU lecturers' union for 19 November and turn it into a march for health and education. "3,000 marched for the local hospital in Grantham - we could have hundreds of thousands or even millions on a national demonstration."

Mona Kamal, the other junior doctor speaking at the rally, put the junior doctors' dispute into a wider context. "Six years of Tory austerity has left the NHS in ruins. It has been a deliberate plan to run the service down to then sell the idea that privatisation is the only way."

Mona works in mental health and described this as "where the most tragic human consequences of austerity can be seen." She talked of seeing patients suicidal over benefit sanctions and work capability assessments.

Both Mona and Aislinn emphasised that it is a big deal for doctors to strike and they haven't done it lightly. But, Mona said, "the alternative is to let the government go ahead with a contract putting patient care and the NHS at risk - we won't let that happen."

They thanked the NSSN and individual trade unions and workers for the huge support they have received, while being clear that it is now more needed than ever. Aislinn said: "Theresa May keeping Hunt as health secretary sent a message - the government is locked in intransigence, regardless of the cost. But the cost is people's lives."

Corbyn

Another theme of the rally was the Corbyn surge and fight for an anti-austerity Labour Party. As Janice said, "Jeremy Corbyn's victory stung the establishment and changed everything. The Tories and the Blairites know their agenda is under threat if Jeremy and John prevail."

Rob pointed out that the NSSN is not a political organisation. "But this is a fundamental struggle. On the one hand is Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell and all the best intentioned of the trade union movement. On the other is Owen Smith and behind him the Tories, Blairites and establishment."

A key speaker was Ronnie Draper, general secretary of the BFAWU bakers' union, who recently successfully overturned his suspension from Labour Party membership.

Ronnie was clear that, while pleased that he had been reinstated, there was a long way to go to ensure the Labour Party is fully open and democratic. "Thousands of people won't get a hearing like me, thousands won't get a vote, thousands are still waiting for their vote."

Helen Pattison of Youth Fight for Jobs echoed this anger. "It's disgusting to see young workers excluded from a democratic election - especially when we're always told we're apathetic." She summarised what lies behind the purge saying, "if the Blairites spent their time fighting austerity instead of attacking Corbyn, they would have nothing to fear from a democratic election."

Rob said we also have to go further than just those purged this time. "All those expelled over the last three or four decades should be allowed back in! And reinstate Brighton CLP! And reinstate Wallasey CLP!"

Mick Cash, general secretary of the transport union RMT, attacked those Labour MPs who voted no confidence in Jeremy Corbyn: "To the 172 who initiated the division in the Labour Party I say shame on you. All you've done is given the Tories an easy ride."

Mick was joined by Millie, a striking Southern Rail guard, who thanked the NSSN for consistent support on their picket lines.

Isai Priya, speaking on behalf of Tamil Solidarity, talked about the impact of the Corbyn surge in migrant communities. "People say there's a lack of participation in politics by migrants and black and Asian people. That's not because we don't care it's because we've never had a voice. Jeremy Corbyn offers that voice."

She explained that there are debates taking place in the Tamil community, where some 'leaders' have a history of supporting Blairites or even Tories. But Isai said that that doesn't get an echo because migrants, many who are on low pay and zero-hour contracts, want policies that can improve their conditions - which Corbyn offers.

Blacklist Support Group Secretary Dave Smith demonstrated Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell's long history of standing with campaigners of all types. Speaking of the campaign for justice in relation to blacklisting and police spies, Dave said: "John McDonnell has been with us from the start. It was him who first put the issue down in Parliament. It was him who first named the officers involved."

Mona emphasised the link between the junior doctors' struggle and Corbyn movement by saying, "most importantly, we have to build a movement on the ground to ensure that when Jeremy and John are elected again, they can implement their policies."

Danny Hogan of Greenwich Unite said that if and when Jeremy Corbyn is re-elected, it should be considered a mandate for Labour councillors to join anti-cuts campaigners, stop implementing the cuts and instead set needs budgets.

Trade union rights

Several speakers spoke about the Trade Union Act and the need to challenge it. Steve Gillan, general secretary of the POA union of prison officers and allied workers, outlined how his union has overcome legal limits to take strike action. "We've been honest with every justice minister - if my members want to take action against your laws, we'll support them to do that."

Ronnie also gave a hint of this need to defy the law when necessary, reporting on BFAWU's dispute at Pennine Foods. "The legislation says you can only have six pickets. We had 200 on that picket line. The only time the police tried to get stuff through we blocked the roads and told them they'd have to arrest us all!"

He pointed out that Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell have said that a Labour government would repeal the Trade Union Act.

Rob criticised the leadership of the TUC for failing to call any national demonstrations in opposition to the bill and praised the Trade Union Coordinating Group for organising protests at each stage.

"This congress should be a war council and it's a disgrace that it's not," said Rob, supporting the call by the RMT and FBU for an emergency congress to discuss the act and how the movement protects against victimisation (which was passed - see page 6).

General strike

Littered throughout the speeches were references to the many groups of workers who have been struggling and taking action against the bosses. From Scottish and Welsh museums to Southern Rail guards; from UberEats to tenants fighting eviction on the Butterfields estate; from Deliveroo drivers to teaching assistants.

That so many sections of workers are facing attacks and fighting back shows the need to link up the varied struggles. Janice reminded the rally of previous motions in support of coordinated action that had been passed by the TUC but without becoming reality. She said that the PCS will raise this again this year and that action could especially be coordinated over pay.

Many spoke about the potential to bring down the Tories, who are weak and divided. In answer to those who say the Tories are too strong Rob pointed out that just eleven weeks previously they had suffered a massive defeat in the EU referendum vote which led to Cameron's resignation as prime minister.

After the rally the meeting moved outside and marched to the conference centre where the TUC was taking place. Socialist Party members handed leaflets to delegates as they went in appealing for them to push for emergency measures to be agreed at the congress for action in support of the junior doctors.

The event highlighted many opportunities for stepping up the pace of struggle and drawing whole new groups of workers into the trade union movement. There is no doubt that the working class, if organised effectively, can bring down this hated government and end austerity.

But the tasks necessary to take steps towards that are therefore urgent:

- Action to back the junior doctors
- Keep Corbyn - no compromise with the Blairites
- Smash the Trade Union Act
- Unite the strikes

Library workers defeat Tory cuts

A Unite the Union member

Library workers in Bromley, south London, have defeated their Tory council's plans to turn eight libraries into volunteer services.

The council had decided to force plans through despite massive public opposition. Petitions - and even the council's own biased consultation exercise - returned a massive majority against.

General union Unite, which organises Bromley library workers, led sustained strike action. This was alongside a huge publicity campaign to explain exactly why the union opposes volunteer libraries. The attack was also a main factor in two of the biggest marches through the borough in decades.

We have no problem with volunteering in principle - but not when it replaces public services, and not at the cost of paid jobs. The experience from volunteer libraries all over the country is slow death.

Organisations such as charities are sometimes more interested in using the space for themselves rather than functioning as a library. And the loss of staff professionalism is often there for all to see.

Tactically, we focussed on 'Bromley Community Links' - the organisation the council had chosen to put the volunteer plan together. We leafleted outside its HQ, targeted its events, and contacted affiliated groups and trustees.

Our message was clear. If the organisation assisted in destroying libraries, Unite would escalate the campaign against it. Last week Bromley Council announced Bromley Community Links had pulled out.

This is a magnificent victory against a vicious Tory council. It is hugely significant that this was trade union-led, rather than relying solely on a community campaign. Clearly there is space and a need for both - but this emphasises the role of unions in winning.

The council will now try to hand libraries to a private employer. But the victory against volunteer status is a huge boost. It's 1-0 to Unite - now we need to beat privatisation.

Thousands of Post Office workers to strike against job losses

Carl Harper, CWU member (personal capacity)

Thousands of Communication Workers Union (CWU) members working in the Post Office will take strike action on 15 September against attacks on their job security and pensions.

In a programme of cuts, including a further 2,000 job losses, the loss of thousands of pounds in retirement pay and the ultimate privatisation of its 'flagship branches', the Post Office is continuing to attack the network and supply chain.

In closing down the pension scheme, the Post Office is stealing money workers have built up over many years of service. This is despite there being a surplus of over £130 million - making it one of the best funded pension schemes in the country. In attempts to defeat the strike, the Post Office has offered staff money not to go on strike. CWU representatives could be targeted. This highlights the desperation to achieve the savings.

With similar cuts being made across Royal Mail, there is a desperate need for coordinated action in defence of jobs, pay and terms and conditions right across the industry. This should be linked up with other unions and workers working in the courier companies.

Coordinated action

The National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) rally and lobby of the TUC on 11 September (see pages 8&9) called on delegates to demand such action be coordinated right across the union movement, starting with a national demonstration, linking it to the junior doctors dispute.

Defeat of this Tory government and its cuts programme and the election of an anti-austerity Corbyn government would be a significant step forward in giving workers the confidence to defend themselves against cuts at all levels.

Southern Rail dispute update

The dispute on Southern Rail continued with a 48-hour strike on 7-8 September. The action by Southern RMT guards was solid and determined once again. Pickets at Victoria station in London were joined by Disabled People Against the Cuts (DPAC) protesters as part of their week of action (see page 11). They made the point that guards on the train makes their journeys safer and easier and in some cases possible in the first place. The picket line at Victoria and stations in south London was also supported by the National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) and Socialist Party members. For more on the dispute and an interview with RMT EC member John Reid see: <http://tinyurl.com/railworkersfightback>

Workplace news in brief

TUC Congress update

TUC Congress has unanimously passed an RMT motion calling for an emergency conference to discuss resistance to the government's Trade Union Act. In moving the motion, RMT President Sean Hoyle said one of his first acts as RMT president was to go on a lobby of Parliament against the bill, noting it was the same place that passed the Slavery Abolition Act in 1833. But now the Trade Union Act will be used by bosses to hinder workers' democratic rights. Sean pointed out that some concessions were won by the trade union movement when the bill became an act but we shouldn't "be happy with crumbs". He also called for the emergency conference to discuss general strike action to resist the act. The motion was amended and seconded by the Fire Brigades Union, National Union of Teachers and Unite.

For a report of the National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) lobby of the TUC see pages 8&9 and see next week's issue of the Socialist for a report of TUC Congress 2016.

Police staff walkout

Guards working at Met Police control centres in Bow, east London and Hendon, north London, took strike action on 9 September in response to worsening pay, with real terms rates falling year on year and starting salaries now less than £22,000, including working nights for no extra pay. Night shift walked out from 1am and 7am, with the day shift out between 7am and 1pm. PCS reps at the control centre at Hendon reported 100% of members took strike action both on the night shift and day shift. The strike action coincided with the passing out parade for over 1,000 new police recruits and the pickets reported that they ran out of leaflets. Similarly, at Bow there was 100% turnout, with ten people on the picket line. PCS Met Police branch and Unite joined the picket line to show their support.

Rip-off fees... austerity... rent hikes...

Why you should become a socialist student!

Gareth Bromhall, Swansea

Since the financial crisis of 2007-2008 and after six years of crippling Tory austerity, students find themselves facing the prospect of being worse off than the previous generation.

This has undoubtedly led to an increase in political activity with movements such as #BlackLivesMatter, rent strikes, strikes over pay, occupations taking place and demonstrations against racism, the prevent agenda, cuts, homophobia, sexism and war happening on campuses across the country.

Increased austerity and the threat of the higher education white paper looming mean that struggle on campuses is set to reach fever pitch.

Socialist Party members have been at the forefront of many of these struggles.

We have also been some of the strongest defenders of Jeremy Corbyn and more importantly the politics and ideas that have led to the movement behind him.

After suffering under a zero-hour contract for five years with no rights as a care worker; after experiencing health issues and seeing the NHS and public services decimated by cuts; after seeing massive rises in tuition fees and the increased marketisation of my education - I can see the need to fight back. I can see the need for real socialist change.

- If you're angry about these things too, join the Socialist Party today. Visit www.socialistparty.org.uk/join or call 020 8988 8777.
-

Student housing crisis

Students and workers unite to cut rents

Aiden O'Toole

It's no secret that London house prices and living costs are unaffordable for most working class people. It's also no secret that students have been hammered by successive governments, which have increased tuition fees and axed maintenance grants.

It is of no surprise then that this situation has pushed students at University College London (UCL) to the edge, causing them to organise a rent strike to fight the unaffordable costs of student accommodation.

Student anger was so strong at UCL that over 1,000 students responded to the strike organised by Cut the Rent, which, after a five-month battle, won rent freezes and concessions worth over £1 million. However, the group says that this isn't the end of the campaign and plan to continue fighting for affordable student accommodation.

Rent strike

This successful example of a rent strike has the potential to influence other students to use similar tactics in the future. With the Tories' continuing austerity cuts, student anger is bound to increase.

The National Union of Students (NUS) has said that it would support and give advice to student groups that are looking to take similar actions to UCL students, with the vice principal for welfare expressing her pride for standing alongside the London strikers.

The unaffordable cost of student accommodation isn't only a problem in London. The NUS says the cost of student accommodation nationally has risen by an average of 18% since 2012. This at the same time as students' budgets are becoming tighter and tighter - a catalyst for student anger.

Rent rises rarely, if ever, translate into improved housing. Instead, student accommodation has become a profitable market for companies - like Unite Students, which makes money from squeezing large chunks out of students' maintenance loans.

Socialist Students societies campaigning on the issues of student housing have won important victories. In Coventry two years ago we successfully changed student union policy when students voted overwhelmingly to campaign on student housing issues, particularly over quality, affordability and better regulation.

At York University Socialist Students won a massive victory in gaining a not-for-profit letting agency run by their student union - proving it is possible to provide student accommodation which doesn't just line the pockets of unscrupulous landlords and rogue letting agencies.

Community

The problems students face over housing also impact on wider working class communities. The massive profits landlords can make by renting single rooms to students means that rents have also risen for ordinary families, who can't afford to buy a house.

This has led to families being pushed out of their homes with those houses then being converted to rent for students. Understandably, in areas like Coventry with a big student population, some local residents feel animosity towards students who they blame for the actions of landlords.

However, by actively campaigning on these issues like the UCL students and Socialist Students have done, students can raise awareness of their housing problems. By working with local residents groups, students and workers could get organised and force universities or local authorities to take action.

The Socialist Party calls for a mass house building scheme to tackle the misery working class people have in finding a home. We support Jeremy Corbyn's attacks on the Tories' abysmal house building record and his call for rent control.

Why I joined the Socialist Party

Ending inequality - bringing about lasting change

Finn Midgley, Sheffield

I've always been into politics, as are my parents who I have political discussions with. My mum is an NHS nurse and she would tell me about how understaffed they were and how private companies were buying it, not to help people but to make money.

I did some research and saw how much inequality there is in Britain and across the world. I started to talk about it at school and have debates with my friends and teachers.

It was the attacks on education and teachers by former Tory minister Michael Gove that made me see first-hand the effects of capitalism and austerity. This encouraged me to find out more and fight back. I came across the Socialist Party at an anti-TTIP (proposed US/EU trade deal) demonstration and gave my contact details.

I was really interested in the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition and how the Socialist Party was actively involved in putting across a socialist alternative.

After helping out on a few Socialist Party stalls and campaigning for the junior doctors and against Sports Direct's exploitative practices I decided that the Socialist Party was the right party for bringing about change.

Join the Socialist Party - join the fightback

Matthew Robinson

Growing up in Coventry I'd often see the Socialist Party campaigning in the town centre. No other group is so dedicated to fighting back and demanding better for people. Seeing the things right-wing governments in Britain have done to weak and vulnerable people showed me that I had to join the fight.

The party provides an alternative, sticks to its values, and accepts people of all backgrounds who are willing to fight back.

I have been particularly inspired by the party in Coventry spearheading the campaign to keep libraries open despite council cuts.

As a student, the Socialist Party helps me further my knowledge alongside fighting back for a better society. Other members share their experiences and give their opinions about a range of topics.

Theatre: Dare Devil Rides to Jarama

Fighting fascism with motorbike stunts

The 1930s was a decade sharply divided between left and right. It was also a time when intrepid motorcycle racers stunned spectators with 'speedway' stunts. Socialist theatre company Townsend Productions combines the two in its upcoming show 'Dare Devil Rides to Jarama'. James Ivens spoke to Socialist Party members Neil Gore, writer and actor, and Louise Townsend, director.

So, this is a show about the Spanish civil war?

Neil: It's a bit about that, and a lot about the politics of the 1930s in Britain. It follows the life of Clem 'Dare Devil' Beckett, his life story.

Tell us about Clem Beckett.

He was a top speed rider in the new sport of dirt track racing, or 'speedway' as it's called. He was the superstar of Sheffield stadium.

He was on it all the time, trying to give opportunities to young riders. Inevitably this put him at loggerheads with the business owners of speed racing. They realised how much money they could make. You could get 15 or 20,000 just at scratch events, at coal pits.

How does this connect with politics?

Before he was a rider, Clem worked for Platts, making machines for the cotton industry. Then he went to a blacksmith's, shoeing horses. He joined the blacksmiths' union. That's where he started to be politicised. He was only about 15 or 16.

There's this story about him going to see [legendary socialist union organiser] Tom Mann speak. There and then he joined the Young Communist League.

He got into a fight with the speedway authorities. He wrote articles for [the Communist Party's newspaper] the Daily Worker, explaining how track owners were killing the sport. Tracks were closing down all over the place.

Business owners were doing it to maximise profits for themselves, but also for the star riders. There were not the opportunities for young riders anymore. So he wrote about the men bleeding the sport of speedway, and the owners banned him from riding.

How does Clem cope with the ban?

He travelled Europe in a 'wall of death' show. He ended up going to Hamburg in 1931. Right into the fire!

I've made a bit up here. There's not much about him while he was there, but he broke his leg in Germany. There's the story of Oswald Lasselley at the same time. Lasselley was shot in the stomach by a Nazi police officer, his subordinate, just for having Jewish descent. It was quite a big news story in Hamburg at the time.

I've combined the two. Clem gave blood at some point to somebody in hospital. Oswald Lasselly would have needed blood. We get the story of the rise of Nazism.

Does he come back?

Yes. Then he goes with the British Workers' Sports Federation to tour the Soviet Union. And he takes part in the mass trespass of Kinder Scout [to protest against walkers being denied access to the English countryside].

Eventually he sets up a bike shop in Manchester on the Oldham Road. It's around about the time that [British fascist leader] Oswald Mosely comes and does his big meeting at Belle Vue.

I've no record Clem was there, but he had to be. He was so active, always taking his bike round and delivering the Daily Worker. He must have been among the 3,000 who greeted Mosley and his Blackshirts and shouted him down. "Mosley go to hell" and probably much ruder things. Singing the Red Flag and the Internationale.

So how does Clem end up in Spain?

He meets Harry Pollitt, general secretary of the Communist Party at the time. As soon as [the civil war in defence of the revolution in] Spain kicked off, Pollitt asked Clem to take charge of a fleet of Communist Party-funded ambulances to Spain.

Eventually he got to Jarama, having got through training - such as it was. They were really unprepared for it all. He dies with about half the British Battalion in the first day. All these fantastic bright minds and brave fighters go off to Spain and perish.

The man was a motor. I don't think he felt pain. The number of broken legs, arms and whatever. He just carried on. His story is a great story.

It's an epic story to tell with just two actors.

Louise: With a two-hander production, you have to be more creative. You have to solve problems.

Obviously you have only two people to do lots of different characters, times and places. Clem [played by David Heywood] is the essential character, and meets lots of different characters on the way.

Then you have speedway, which is huge. You have the 'wall of death'. Jarama where he's killed, a battlefield. Logistically it's quite difficult.

Neil: To achieve it I've gone back to the time, to poetry and songs. Songs the volunteers sang, songs of the time about motorbike races, George Formby songs, Ewan MacColl's political songs.

So it's all-singing, all-dancing?

Neil: Not a lot of dancing.

Louise: No, there is dancing!

Neil: That's news to me.

Louise: It's not for you!

Why tell this story now?

Neil: It's about a point in history that galvanises extreme political views. There's a sense of internationalism and unity at this time, versus a feeling of reactionary nationalism. Inevitably a furnace of political activity across the board.

Clem's story goes to the heart of so many modern political issues. The times are really so similar.

At the end, it's one of those stories that makes you want to stand up and leave the theatre and join the fight.

- 'Dare Devil Rides to Jarama' is touring nationally from 24 September to 3 December. For dates, venues and booking information, visit www.townsendproductions.org.uk
-

The Socialist inbox

Do you have something to say?

Send your news, views and criticism in not more than 150 words to Socialist Postbox, PO Box 24697, London E11 1YD, phone 020 8988 8771 or email editors@socialistparty.org.uk.

We reserve the right to shorten and edit letters. Don't forget to give your name, address and phone number.

Confidentiality will be respected if requested. Views of letter writers do not necessarily match those of the Socialist Party.

Marathon money

I ran the Great North Run half marathon on 11 September, and will run the Leicester Marathon on 23 October.

It will be my first marathon and I will be 64 years of age. Recently I wrote an article about why I became a socialist, and joined Militant aged 17.

The Socialist Party needs money to campaign against austerity and develop the struggle for socialism. I'm hoping my efforts will inspire people to donate to the fighting fund.

You can donate online at socialistparty.org.uk/donate. Please put 'Heather Rawling marathon' in the comment so we know how much was raised.

Heather Rawling, Leicester Socialist Party

Sarah Picton

It's with sadness we have to announce the death of Sarah Picton.

Sarah was an avid campaigner for the underprivileged in society, in Chesterfield and beyond.

Her experience of blindness, together with her husband, Socialist Party member Adrian, made her a determined advocate for people with disabilities. Sarah also had the distinction of winning the first ever Chesterfield Socialist Party quiz.

She will be widely missed. Our thoughts are with Adrian and the family.

Dave Gorton, Chesterfield Socialist Party

Labour lose in Sheffield byelection but Corbyn isn't the problem

Alistair Tice, Sheffield

On 8 September Labour suffered a shock council by-election defeat in Sheffield that was seized upon by the right wing of the Labour Party, locally and nationally, to say once again that Jeremy Corbyn is unelectable.

The Liberal Democrats, who had come fourth in the ward in May, won the Mosborough seat by over 400 votes with a dramatic 32% increase in their share of the vote. Labour's vote fell 9%, the Tories by 8% and UKIP 10%.

Angela Smith, the Blairite MP for Penistone and Stocksbridge (in north Sheffield and Barnsley), quickly blamed the defeat on 'traditional Labour voters' in Mosborough turning their backs on the party due to Jeremy Corbyn's leadership.

Real reasons

But the real reasons for Labour's loss in Sheffield are entirely different. The Labour candidate was a vehement anti-Corbynite who had tweeted and retweeted against Corbyn, even quoting Denis Healey and Hugh Gaitskell against him!

The Mosborough ward is in Sheffield South-East constituency where Clive Betts is the Labour MP. Betts recently moved the motion at the Parliamentary Labour Party meeting that they should elect the shadow cabinet, to undermine Jeremy Corbyn's leadership. The constituency has benefitted little from the Corbyn membership surge and so had few active members on the ground.

Enter the Lib Dems. Although discredited nationally through Tory coalition and locally through Nick Clegg (a Sheffield MP), their candidate lives in Mosborough and had been a Lib-Dem councillor for the ward from 2008 to 2012, which contrasted with the Labour candidate, who lives in Stocksbridge, 16 miles away at the other end of Sheffield.

This reinforced the view that Labour takes working class votes for granted. Interestingly, the victorious Lib-Dem candidate has spoken out since, saying that she found on the doorstep that "Jeremy Corbyn was more popular than Angela Smith wants to admit. I certainly do not agree that is why I won. Most people told us that they never saw Labour, only at election time and they felt taken for granted. One lady told me that she had been canvassed by Labour, who when she told them she was voting for me, was told 'You cannot vote Lib Dem, you live in a Labour area'.

"And that is the arrogance of this Labour Party here in Sheffield - Corbyn is not as unpopular as they would like you to think. They need to look very closely at their own leadership in Sheffield."

Obviously the Lib Dems have their own agenda, but it is true that the Sheffield Labour council has slavishly carried out the Tory government cuts for the last six years and has a reputation for not listening. So far from Jeremy Corbyn 'losing' the by-election, years of New Labour policies and attitudes both nationally and locally were the main factors.

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 13 September 2016 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

Protest against closure of vital heart unit in Leicester

Michael Barker, Leicester Socialist Party

The NHS is in crisis and there can be little doubt that it is all because our government refuses to fund it properly.

Estimates suggest there will be a £22 billion funding gap by 2020, while current proposed cuts already mean that local hospitals face losing £451 million from their annual budget, with the threatened closure of the A&E at Leicester General Hospital looming on the horizon.

As part of this ongoing programme of cuts, NHS England is presently attempting to close down three heart units across the country - one in Leicester, one in London, and another in Manchester.

Government officials tasked with stealing our services try to dress up their attacks as help, saying they will improve service provision. But everyone can see through this shallow lie.

On 10 September, over a hundred people marched up and down Belgrave Road for over an hour demanding that the government leave our city's vital heart unit at Glenfield hospital alone.

Fight

Sadly, this is not the first time that the people of Leicester have had to fight to save Glenfield heart unit. The protest was organised by 18-year-old Ria Pahwa, who had organised an identical protest almost exactly four years ago. In that instance the popular campaign to oppose the closure of Leicester's heart unit repelled the government's attack, and so yet again we must make sure we succeed.

Like last time round, the so-called consultation is attempting to pit different heart units against each other. Therefore, it is clear that to be successful the campaign must continue to oppose the closure of any heart units. The NHS must be taken out of the hands of private profiteers and completely renationalised as a more lasting solution. In this way our health services can be funded properly, and allowed to grow, not shrink.

We distributed leaflets advertising a public meeting on 24 September at the Leicester Adult Education Centre, LE1 6HL from 2pm to 4pm. This will then be used as a stepping stone to building for a rally in Leicester on 29 October to make sure that the government gets the message that the people of Leicester will not take its brutal cuts agenda laying down!

In the meantime sign and share the online petition; over 28,000 people have signed already:

<https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/160455>

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 13 September 2016 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

Socialist Party members join the 'Rights Not Games' week of action

Disabled People Against the Cuts (DPAC) called a week of action, 4-10 of September, called 'Rights Not Games' to coincide with the beginning of the Paralympic Games.

London

Socialist Party members joined the protest in London on 6 September in solidarity with the demand for equal rights and reversal of cuts. We sent video selfies supporting the action, sold the Socialist paper and gave out a leaflet.

A Socialist Party member spoke at the protest saying: "We condemn the establishment's hypocrisy of using the Paralympics to present themselves as inclusive, when with the other hand they impose austerity that's led to over 2,000 deaths of disabled people! We also say that there is an anti-austerity mood expressed around the support for Jeremy Corbyn. It is crucial for disabled people to finally have a political party that 100% opposes austerity and fights for the workers!"

Amalia

Gateshead

On 6 September Disabled People Against the Cuts (DPAC) North East and Cumbria assembled at the Sage Gateshead for our 'Rights Not Games' protest. Those attending were a diverse group uniting together to raise awareness in support of disabled rights and against continuing benefits cuts that disabled people are facing under this Conservative government and previous governments.

Speakers included those from DPAC, National Shop Stewards Network, Socialist Party, Peoples Assembly, Green Party with support from Unite Community, Unison, National Union of Teachers and a local community radio show, Mentally Sound. Each speaker gave a passionate message regarding the attacks on disabled people.

The introduction of the Work Capability Assessment is so derisory that thousands have died within six weeks of being assessed and told they are able to work. The scrapping of the Independent Living Fund for severely disabled people, with funds transferred to local councils, but not ring-fenced, so individuals are not getting the level of support they previously received, often ending up isolated and housebound.

These are just some of the measures that are affecting many of the most vulnerable people in society. This latest crippling round of austerity is, as Jeremy Corbyn has said, a political choice, not an economic necessity.

Claire

- See socialistparty.org.uk for the leaflet we gave out at the protests.
-

#KeepCorbyn

Thousands of people have attended rallies and meetings in support of Jeremy Corbyn. A few are reported here, for more detail and further reports see socialistparty.org.uk

Featherstone

On 10 September Jeremy Corbyn attended his 35th election rally in the last month, at Featherstone Rovers Rugby League ground in Yorkshire. Several hundred gave him a standing ovation.

Introductory speakers commented how it had been difficult to keep the faith with the Labour Party after the experiences of Blair, Brown and Miliband. However, Labour is now potentially back where it belongs, in the hands of the people.

A young, recently joined Labour member asked the question: "Is it too much to want affordable housing, stable jobs with decent wages and free education for future generations?"

Jon Trickett, Labour MP for the area, related back to the Featherstone massacre of 123 years ago, when miners were shot at for striking against pay cuts. Back then, Labour's first MP Keir Hardie spoke in Featherstone and campaigned hard for the miners' case.

It was raised that we face the same question today. Do we want a Labour Party led by socialists, fighting for a political voice of workers, or another set of pale Tory imitators?

He said that we must, and will, offer something very different to the electorate. He went on to explain an alternative programme of good quality, full employment all over the country.

Corbyn summed up by saying Labour would eliminate all discrimination, come together with the people to defeat the Tories and create a society that is better for all.

Socialist Party members held a prominent campaign stall outside the ground and sold 84 copies of the Socialist and raised £35 for our fighting fund, as well as selling other literature including a copy of the 'Rise of Militant' book. Several young people expressed their interest in joining the Socialist Party.

Mick Griffiths, Wakefield Socialist Party

Nottingham

Jeremy Corbyn received a fantastic reception from 2,500 people at an open air rally in Nottingham on 7 September. Jeremy spelled out the ten points of his programme for leader of the Labour Party.

He represents a break with the past Blairite leadership highlighting that Labour's programme at the last general election was at fault and led to defeat: "Sure Start workers and teachers were not to blame for the recession of 2008" he said.

It was the greed of the unregulated banking sector which caused the crash. He went on to say that the measure of success of a Labour government would be taking people out of poverty and extending workers' rights.

He explained his policies on housing and the NHS which were greeted with cheering and enthusiasm by the audience.

Corbyn spent some time explaining his energy programme. He is in favour of the establishment of hundreds of publicly owned energy companies to provide competition for big energy providers.

This should be a subject for debate as nationalisation of the big energy companies should be a priority in any such programme. Socialist Party members received a good response from the audience.

We sold 120 copies of the Socialist and distributed hundreds of leaflets.

This was the largest open air left-wing public rally in Nottingham for probably decades. It was so large it even received a brief report on the local BBC radio station!

Pete Watson, Nottingham Socialist Party

Reading

I went to my first Momentum meeting in Reading on 7 September. It was welcoming and friendly with nearly 40 people there with an age range from 17 to the veterans of the movement.

There were people that used to be in the Green Party, Labour Party members and some that haven't yet joined. The main topic was helping Jeremy Corbyn win the election with phone banking.

However lots of people wanted to discuss politics with some saying Jeremy has to be more forceful in getting his policies across. There was some discussion on deselection of the Blairites and organising street campaign stalls to reach people.

I had interesting chats with lots of people, especially on how the Socialist Party has been helping support Jeremy from outside Labour, with our action in the trade unions. For example, getting Unite to pass a reselection resolution and our position (and now the position of the three major trade unions) on Labour councils passing no-cuts budgets.

I sold five copies of the Socialist and Reading Momentum are organising another meeting soon.

John Gillman, Reading Socialist Party

Staines

The Socialist Party organised a 'Surrey 4 Corbyn' rally on 8 September in Staines, chaired by Unison rep Paul Couchman. The speakers included Socialist Party Deputy General Secretary Hannah Sell.

Questions were raised concerning what would happen after the Labour leadership contest. Would a split encourage the right to leave the party and set up their own? Or would they fight for the Labour name? We should join with any campaigns that would fight the right.

Whatever the result of the leadership contest, there still needs to be continued campaigning to keep up momentum and support for the socialist ideas that have attracted hundreds of thousands to the Labour Party. The capitalists are well aware of the danger.

One thing is for sure, the civil war in the Labour Party won't end after the result of the leadership election on 24 September. Corbyn represents a massive opportunity for the movement. The Blairite forces in the Labour Party are absolutely determined in their fight and therefore so should we be in ours.

James Bibey, Bracknell

<http://www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/23556>