

## After the Labour leadership election...

# Battle lines drawn: build a real mass party of the 99%

## Editorial of the Socialist, issue 917

As we go to press, polls are closing on the Labour leadership election ahead of the announcement of the result before the start of Labour Party conference. It is no exaggeration to say that this is a pivotal moment for the Labour, trade union and anti-austerity movements.

A victory for Jeremy Corbyn, virtually three months to the day after the Brexit vote, would be another blow against the establishment, the 1% and their political representatives in the Tories and on the Labour right. It could even give a shot of confidence to some big current industrial disputes, such as that of the junior doctors and the wider struggle to defend the NHS from the new Tory cuts.

But it would need to be consolidated and built upon to open the way to Labour being transformed into a pro-worker, anti-austerity party. The starting position for this is to recognise finally that this is a fight to the end against the same establishment and their Blairite agents. Even right to the end of the leadership election, the right-wing Labour machine is carrying out a one-sided civil war against Corbyn and the left.

While tens of thousands of Labour members and affiliated supporters were still waiting for ballots, many did receive a mailing last weekend - but one telling them that they were suspended or even expelled! This included the assistant general secretary of the RMT transport union Steve Hedley, just two weeks after Ronnie Draper, general secretary of the BFAWU bakers' union, was first suspended and then reinstated (although he has yet to receive his ballot!) Both Steve and Ronnie's suspensions were for alleged online statements. Yet Blairite Alan Johnson can give an interview in the Times where he called Jeremy Corbyn "useless" and "incompetent".

It is outrageous that socialists, fighting union leaders and activists, and anti-austerity campaigners are thrown out of the party while the likes of Johnson and right-wing Labour councillors are safe despite passing on brutal Tory cuts. In fact, not only should they be reinstated, but all those expelled for having socialist ideas over the last three decades - from ex-Labour leader Neil Kinnock's witch-hunt against Militant (the predecessor of the Socialist Party) onwards - should be offered the right to re-join.

## Compromise impossible

These suspensions are further confirmation that it is impossible to compromise with the Labour right who will never reconcile themselves to a Corbyn-led party. A victory for Jeremy, even by an increased margin, will not stay their hand. The Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP) vote to change the rules so that the shadow cabinet is elected by MPs is a clear statement of intent from the right wing that the will of Labour members will be ignored.

They may conclude that they have to live with Corbyn until the next challenge - and some are arguing for it to be annual - but if this vote was endorsed by the NEC and at the conference, John McDonnell's position as shadow chancellor would be in their sights. The margin of the vote - 169 to 34 - is a virtual replica of the PLP vote of no-confidence in Jeremy on 28 June, four days after the Brexit vote that effectively triggered the leadership challenge.

The no-confidence vote set in motion an uprising against this attempted coup. While MPs stabbed Jeremy in the back, up to 10,000 Corbyn supporters from inside and outside Labour protested in Parliament Square. This has been replicated in meetings, rallies and protests of hundreds and thousands in many towns and cities up

and down the country. Despite doubts caused by his retreats to conciliate with the right, working class people understand that this attempt to turn the political clock back to the days of Blair and Brown must be fought at all costs.

These supporters will be disappointed by Jeremy's reported olive branch to these same MPs. In fact, the demand of the Socialist Party - now also the position of the Unite union - to reinstate democratic mandatory re-selection of Labour MPs, is increasingly popular at pro-Corbyn rallies. As Jeremy himself said: "I will put it to them [Labour MPs] that I've got a mandate, if I'm elected...[it] is about the policies I'm trying to put forward. Not every dot and comma and crossed t, or whatever. But it is the general direction of the economy and policy. And I'll invite them to work with us."

But we think he should go further by telling the 172 MPs who triggered the coup and they must accept and not contradict the renewed mandate for Corbyn and his anti-austerity, anti-war policies. We also call for the cutting councillors to be challenged from the majority of members who support an anti-austerity programme.

This would be the starting point for the reversal of the measures brought in by New Labour that made the party safe for big business. We support the rule changes that hopefully will get on the conference agenda that seek to restore District Labour Parties, which could hold councillors accountable and decide the manifesto for local elections. The undemocratic National Policy Forum that hasn't actually met for two years should be abolished and annual conference restored as the supreme policy making body. The central role of the trade unions and their ability to act collectively in the party, which has been virtually outlawed, should be restored.

But we would go further. If Jeremy Corbyn is re-elected, especially in the face of a tirade of the undemocratic ruling out from voting of many of those who have been attracted to the party in the last year, it would be a decisive vote to oppose austerity. Therefore, all anti-cuts forces - including the Socialist Party - should be welcomed into a reconstituted federal Labour Party.

The battle-lines have been drawn. It would be a mistake to miss this historic opportunity to build a real mass party of the 99%.

## **Latest post-election analysis**

This editorial was written for press ahead of the Labour leadership election results. We will post the latest news and analysis, as we get it at [www.socialistparty.org.uk](http://www.socialistparty.org.uk)

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# **All Greater Manchester firefighters face sack**

**Hugh Caffrey, Salford Socialist Party**

The employment practises of Mike Ashley's Sports Direct are being brought to Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service.

All firefighters in Greater Manchester face the sack. One in five permanently, and the other 80% only rehired if they agree to worse contracts.

The employer is punishing them for refusing to agree 250 job losses and 12-hour shifts earlier in the year, by imposing them instead.

Greater Manchester is not the only anti-union fire authority - but disgraceful nonetheless.

Fire Brigades Union (FBU) members are meeting to discuss how to respond to these attacks. They have our full support. A mass mobilisation in support of the FBU needs to be mounted by the trade union movement across Greater Manchester and beyond.

A £14 million 'efficiency plan' means that by 2020 the number of Greater Manchester firefighters will have halved in around a decade, with many fire engines withdrawn. This is desperately dangerous, both for

firefighters and the public.

The FBU earlier this year called for the fire authority chairman, Trafford Labour councillor David Acton, to resign, as he had lost the confidence of firefighters. Acton and 20-odd other Labour councillors comprise two thirds of fire authority members. He should resign now.

Jeremy Corbyn and Labour's national leadership should call on Acton to go. And for Labour councillors to withdraw the attacks - and work with the FBU to fight the government, not the firefighters!

Corbyn supporters should demand Labour's local politicians, including metro-mayor prospective candidate Andy Burnham, give their support to the union.

The fire authority must withdraw these threats, and find a stopgap funding solution to buy time to fight back. A determined campaign of mass mobilisation by the trade unions and Labour's anti-austerity majority could achieve that.

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## **Hinkley Point C: wasteful, dangerous and polluting**

**Richard Worth, Socialist Party South West**

Theresa May has given the go-ahead to build the £18 billion 'Hinkley Point C' in Somerset, the UK's first new nuclear power station in 20 years.

French firm EDF, with China General Nuclear, are guaranteed £92.50 per megawatt-hour of electricity. That's more than double the current price, rising with inflation for 35 years.

The National Audit Office says consumers will pay £30 billion through higher bills to subsidise EDF. A former Tory energy secretary described the deal as "one of the worst ever".

Hinkley C will be an unproven 'European pressurised reactor' (EPR) - nicknamed 'enormous problems to resolve' by the French press.

An EPR is being built at Flamanville, where France's nuclear safety authority found weaknesses in the reactor's steel. It's three times over budget, and six years behind schedule. 1,000 jobs have been cut to save €1 billion, compromising safety. In Finland another EPR is ten years late.

With falling UK energy production, Hinkley C won't be ready to meet the energy gap.

A nuclear power station isn't a green or sustainable energy source. Its construction is far more carbon-intensive than renewable plants. The ongoing mining and milling of uranium ore produces huge amounts of carbon too. And scientists believe uranium could start to run short in just 50 years.

Frances O'Grady, general secretary of the Trade Union Congress, welcomed Hinkley C for jobs. But this ignores the dangers and costs for workers and their families.

'Stop Hinkley' campaign spokesperson Roy Pumfrey said: "The few permanent jobs Hinkley might generate aren't worth the exorbitant cost. Developing renewables will generate many more permanent jobs than Hinkley Point C ever will."

The Tories have cut subsidies to renewable energies. For the £30 billion subsidy to EDF, free solar panels to 7.5 million households could be funded. The power of Hinkley C could be provided by four big wind farms.

Private energy companies, interested only in profit, cannot provide us with safe, affordable energy. Only by taking them into public ownership, under democratic workers' control and management, can our needs be met with clean renewable energy.

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# NHS care rationing already rife

'Harriet Ryman', NHS nurse

Rationing in the NHS is already widespread and dangerous.

Last issue, the Socialist reported that ['NHS chiefs warn cuts mean rationing or charges'](#). But delaying or denying care is already happening.

A recent Guardian survey found three in four doctors said they had seen care rationed. Areas like speech therapy and varicose vein operations were being rationed or denied altogether. Patients are told to wait unacceptable lengths of time for care, or denied it.

Rationing healthcare is a false economy. It can put even more pressure on the NHS and social services. Conditions left untreated inevitably get worse and harder to treat.

One example is making a patient wait for a hip replacement operation. This can cause deterioration of joint tissue and progression to osteoarthritis. The result is chronic pain and reduction in the patient's ability to function in society.

Delays in mental healthcare lead to increased risks of patients harming themselves or others. According to the Samaritans, female suicide rates in the UK have increased by 8.3%.

This situation is one consequence of establishment politicians' strategy of deliberate under-funding, depleting services and then driving privatisation as the 'solution'.

The only real solution is a fully publicly owned, properly resourced NHS, delivered by well-paid, properly trained staff, with all privatised services taken back into public ownership under democratic control.

## Management

According to the Telegraph, NHS spending on management consultants has doubled in a period when the NHS is not getting any real-terms funding increases. The Mirror revealed in March that the number of NHS managers has leaped by more than three times the rate of frontline health staff.

There are moves to cut and centralise NHS services across the UK. Some managers even look to discriminatory criteria like obesity and smoking to justify excluding patients.

Child and adolescent mental health services have been reduced by 94% in some parts of the country. Anyone without a clear diagnosis will not get access.

One in ten children will suffer a mental health problem, and three quarters of those will go without treatment. Ultimately this will lead to a wave of unnecessary added pressure on adult mental health services and society as a whole.

At the same time, senior 'administrators' enjoy six-figure salaries as part of a burgeoning growth in 'advisory panels' and 'funding panels'. Their contribution to healthcare is to block experienced staff from accessing services for vulnerable people.

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## Them & Us: bosses' bonus billions bonanza

# £44 billion in bonus payments last year

Stephanie Hammond

Between April 2015 and March 2016, bonuses in the UK climbed 4.4% to £44.3 billion. This enormous wealth was enjoyed almost solely by financial sector bosses - the very same group that triggered the disastrous economic crash in 2008.

The Office for National Statistics reports bonuses soared past the previous record of £44.2 billion, set in 2008. That was the year investment bank Lehman Brothers crashed and brought the global economy tumbling down with it.

Yet the fundamental structure of the finance industry is unchanged. The bosses are obscenely rewarded while vulturous banks continue to profit by gambling public debt against the economy.

Tory and New Labour governments systematically stripped away regulations in the decades prior to 2008. No effort has been made to curb bankers' behaviour since.

So Jeremy Corbyn's call for reforms is welcome. But without public ownership under democratic workers' control and management, even the most stringent regulations count for little more than a lick of paint. Privately owned banks will always seek private profit at all costs.

Their parasitic profit-making is in stark contrast to the income and living standards of the vast majority of people. Real wages have fallen dramatically since 2008, by 20%, and show no signs of recovery. Inequality stands at a level never before seen in recent memory, despite the wealth that is clearly available.

No trust can be given in the super-rich class to tackle economic inequality - not least the undemocratically appointed Tory prime minister Theresa May. Her party has done everything it can to assist with transferring wealth from the bottom of society to the top.

The only way forward is for the working class to organise in its own interests. Build a mass, democratic party of the 99% which can fight for public ownership and a living wage for all.

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## **Provocateur accusation against Met police spy**

**Lois Austin**

New allegations claim an undercover cop who infiltrated the Socialist Party may have tried to provoke a dangerous criminal act.

Investigations found earlier this year that 'Carlo Neri' was a police mole between 2001 and 2006. The Guardian recently published comments from two former members of the Socialist Party, who now allege Neri hinted at inciting arson.

If true, this is an appalling example of police manipulation and hypocrisy. The Socialist Party and its forerunners have always totally opposed such methods. As one of the former members making the claim said, "It wasn't something we'd ever do. We just weren't up for it."

Police infiltrators and agents provocateurs are anti-democratic tools of the bosses' state. Their purpose is to undermine and derail protest movements and socialist organisations, to shore up the power and privilege of the super-rich.

Socialist Party members have won core participant status in the official Pitchford Inquiry into undercover policing. But the trade union and labour movement must also launch an independent, democratic inquiry into political policing.

Open surveillance of protesters has increased markedly in recent years. The movement around Jeremy Corbyn is part of a new wave of political and industrial militancy. The state, representing the interests of big business, cannot be trusted not to try dirty tricks as this movement grows.

- Campaign Opposing Police Surveillance public meeting: 'Voices of the spied upon' - 10 October, 7-9pm, The Venue, University of London, Malet Street WC1E 7HY - reserve for free at [www.eventbrite.co.uk](http://www.eventbrite.co.uk)
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## School sexism

Three in five young women aged 13 to 21 have faced some kind of sexual harassment at school or college in the last year.

This figure from parliament's Women and Equalities Committee shows sexist attitudes are still widespread. Establishment politicians and big business have paid lip service to fighting sexism for decades.

But tokenism at the top has gone together with retaining practices like sexist school and workplace dress codes.

The report also finds 29% of young women aged 16 to 18 have experienced unwanted sexual touching at school. And 71% of all students that age regularly hear terms like 'slut' and 'slag' used towards young women.

Another study has listed the best and worst places to be a girl in the UK. Kids' charity Plan UK finds that poor inner-city areas give young women the worst experiences and life chances.

The bottom five are Middlesbrough, Blackpool, Manchester, Nottingham and Liverpool. The best is Waverley in leafy Surrey. Fighting sexism is a class issue.

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## Zero-hour zealots: Guardian and Center Parcs

The Guardian, which has led mainstream media campaigning against zero-hour contracts, employs over 100 journalists on zero-hour contracts.

The liberal newspaper also employs staff like web comment moderators on zero hours. In fact, management compels many workers to take compulsory unpaid leave every so often. Otherwise, after two years of continuous service, they would earn employment rights.

Although some Guardian columnists back Jeremy Corbyn, the paper's editorial line is staunchly against him. Corbyn has pledged to legalise zero-hour contracts.

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Holiday resort Center Parcs recently advertised for Christmas elves - on zero-hour contracts. A spokesperson for Lapland assured the Socialist that bosses had been entered onto the 'naughty' list

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## New Tory attacks on Higher Education - a programme to fight back

João Félix, Cardiff University Socialist Students

The beginning of a new academic year brings fresh attacks on higher education (HE) but also a renewed will to fight them.

HE students and workers have long been victims of successive governments' austerity measures - a sharp increase in tuition fees, staggering rent hikes, reduction of funding and resources, attacks on university

workers' rights, etc.

This is the result of a policy to change universities from being places for the betterment of individuals and society to 'jobs-factories', where education is a commodity to be bought and sold.

The Tory government's HE Bill represents one of the most serious attempts at privatising this sector. The raising of the £9,000 cap on tuition fees, the legal and regulatory changes to facilitate the creation and operation of for-profit universities, as well as the implementation of the widely criticised teaching excellence framework, are all part of a vision to make public higher education part of the marketplace.

Public universities that perform well according to the new teaching excellence framework and the research excellence framework (which will mainly measure employability, graduate average earnings and public and private grants), will be allowed to raise fees by up to £250 a year.

Meanwhile, privately funded universities will have a favourable terrain in which to grow, with a reduction of regulation and the fact that they do not need to achieve the same standard as public universities.

For example, public universities are required to present a balanced and diverse curriculum and a robust body of research, while private universities don't have these requirements. Not being obligated to carry out research dramatically increases their profits potential.

The bill is telling in its wording: "Competition between providers in any market incentivises them to raise their game, offering consumers a greater choice of more innovative and better quality products and services at lower cost. Higher education is no exception."

## **Education commodity**

University students will now leave university with an average £35,000 to £40,000 debt on student loans, having been subject to an education tailored for a "jobs market" that changes with the whims of capitalism.

With all this stress and pressure - the cuts in support services, and an overworked and underpaid staff - it's no wonder that students are now experiencing staggering levels of mental health and stress problems.

At the same time, students from working class and minority backgrounds are increasingly discouraged from attending university, due to the financial burden it would impose on them and their families.

International students have been particularly affected by the attacks on education, with tuition fees double or triple those of UK and EU students.

They also experience difficulties arising from a vicious immigration policy, presided over in particular by the previous home secretary and now prime minister, Theresa May.

International students are hindered by expensive and cumbersome bureaucracy and are often immediately deported when they finish their courses.

The attack on international students is appalling and shows the level of capitalist exploitation of education. Every student, regardless of their origin, should have the right and be provided the means to a free, high-quality, accessible education.

## **Staff and students unite**

Higher education staff have faced a pay loss of 14.5%, in real terms, since 2009. This is especially true for women workers in HE who face a gender pay gap of 12.3%, approximately £6,000 a year, relative to male academics.

But this is not all. Casualisation is rife in the HE sector, with more than 75,000 staff in casual contracts and at least 21,000 on zero-hour contracts. It is also not uncommon for university workers to work twice as many hours as they are actually paid for in order to satisfy all their contractual obligations.

This shows that HE staff, as well as students, are being exploited by a system with a business-like mentality and a profit objective.

I completed my bachelor's degree in Portugal and my master's in the UK. I have witnessed, and felt, the consequences of the cuts, privatisation and attacks on public services, including higher education, in both countries.

I have been affected by the increase in tuition fees and cuts in education funding - which dramatically lowered the quality and accessibility of education, especially stopping people from working class and disadvantaged backgrounds to be able to better themselves and society.

Our struggle for free, high-quality and accessible education is not limited to the UK, it is international. Workers and youth across the world are subject to the same attacks.

Education is not isolated from the rest of society. The attacks I describe are part of a wider strategy of underfunding, cutting and privatising our public services, sacrificing our living and working standards in the name of profit.

We need to fight back to defend education and our public services, as well as fighting for a society that provides for all, not for the few.

## **How do we fight back?**

We organise. Only a wide and coordinated movement of students and staff, linked to the wider struggles of workers and the labour movement, will be able to stop and reverse the current attacks and to achieve a high-quality HE that is free, accessible and fair for all.

The National Demonstration for Education on 19 November, organised by the National Union of Students and the University and College Union, (the unions of students and academic staff), is a step forward but is not enough to achieve a free, public, high-quality and fair higher education. That requires building a mass, sustained education movement.

The fight for socialist education policies, like the ones Jeremy Corbyn has pledged, are paramount in the struggle for a public and free university and college system. A system that everyone can enjoy and that will provide a diversified, interesting and stimulating experience, for students, workers and the wider community.

We need to link up the struggles of the HE community to the wider struggles of workers and working class communities.

In the end, it is necessary to completely change the social and economic system from one based on private property and profit, to a democratically planned society which satisfies the needs and aspirations of the many.

Only a socialist society will give us the education we deserve.

- Kill the HE Bill: Stop the onslaught of fee hikes, privatisation and marketisation on our campuses
- Support free education - scrap university fees and write off student debt
- Bring back grants! Fight for living grants for all college and university students - no more debt
- Fight the teaching excellence framework - for education run in the interests of students and society - not big business
- For education that is publicly owned, democratically run, accessible to all who need it and universally free at all levels. A socialist education system

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## **Socialist Students: setting out our stall...**

**Sussex Uni, Brighton**



Sussex University Student Union's efficient security operation made sure that we couldn't set up our Socialist Students stall near any official stalls, so we had to run it from the subway under the A27. This stopped us getting sunburnt, but didn't stop us talking to loads of people, new students and university workers.

Many students were keen to set up a Socialist Students society on campus - one that's prepared to campaign on issues which matter to them and isn't a dry debating society.

We also had discussions with many international students, who had been watching developments in the Labour Party and wanted to know what we thought.

In total, over 30 people gave their contact details, which will help establish a fighting Socialist Students group at Sussex.

**Ivan Bonsell**

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## **Hillsborough College, Sheffield**

Me and fellow Socialist Party members Alistair, Tim and Michael took our campaign stall to Hillsborough College freshers fair.

We set the table just outside the college entrance and were blown away by the students' positive response to our campaigns. Many signed our petitions supporting the junior doctors action, Jeremy Corbyn's reelection, and for the abolishment of zero-hours contracts.

Many students were interested in socialism, with 17 leaving their details to find out about joining the Socialist Party and nine copies of the Socialist sold.

The students had some fascinating stories to share and were very happy to show support for our campaigns. Not bad for a couple of hours on a Thursday lunchtime!

**Callum Hall**

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## **Waltham Forest FE colleges**

Socialist Party members were at all three colleges in the London borough of Waltham Forest when students started earlier this month. Dozens of students signed up to Socialist Students.

They were angry over issues such as racism and the outrageous cost of going to university. Many were inspired by Black Lives Matter and Jeremy Corbyn and were interested in socialist ideas.

When one new student saw the #KeepCorbyn strap at the top of our petition she said: "Oh my god, I love Jeremy Corbyn"! Lots of school student members of Waltham Forest Socialist Party have started college in east London, and we plan to replicate the dynamic discussion and campaign group they had built in Waltham Forest at their new colleges too.

**Ian Pattison**

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## **Megaphone - £1**

The magazine of Socialist Students

[www.socialiststudents.org.uk](http://www.socialiststudents.org.uk)

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# After TUC congress 2016: Mobilise the anger!

**John McNally**, Public and Commercial Services union national vice-president (personal capacity)

This year's Trade Union Congress (TUC) came only months after the forced resignation of Tory Prime Minister David Cameron following the Brexit vote - a major blow to the corporate and political elite - the introduction of the most oppressive anti-trade union laws in the industrial world, and the continuation of austerity. It should have been a council of war, setting out a fighting strategy to defeat these attacks on our members, class and communities. What an opportunity it would have been to take the fight to Theresa May's post-Brexit vote, crisis-ridden government.

Instead the scale of the profound crisis of leadership in the trade union movement was revealed more starkly than ever. The tone was set in the president's address when she said:

"In this past year, we held our nerve and we found our fight. Mobilising, organising, influencing - what we do best. Heart Union Week was a clever and quirky way of reminding the world and ourselves what we stand for. Celebrating our work. Showcasing our wins. Congress, we should do it more often."

It is certainly right to celebrate wins and left-led unions like PCS, RMT, the bakers' union and others have, despite the scale of attacks, shown that when workers take action and are fully supported by their union leaders, then concessions and even victories are possible.

## **Pay freeze**

But the president's rosy picture is belied by reality. In some areas public sector workers are now in the ninth year of a pay freeze and wages have fallen by over 20% in real terms since the 2008 crash. Some workers are accessing food banks because, as one PCS member said: "There is too much month left at the end of the money".

It is a complete scandal that the TUC and leaders of some major public service unions have failed, yet again, to organise the type of coordinated industrial action - which is congress policy - capable of defeating this attack on workers' living standards.

Once again a motion from PCS was passed calling for coordinated action on pay but the fact that this motion - along with an emergency motion on the junior doctors' dispute - was pushed to the margins of the conference is an indication of the lack of intent to lead on these issues.

## **Rhetoric**

The gap between rhetoric and reality was cruelly laid bare when TUC General Secretary Frances O'Grady stunned many in the hall with her statement on the Trade Union Act: "We can be proud of our campaign against that nasty, vindictive law. But, congress, we beat them. Not on everything. But in the big battles, we beat them back".

RMT President Sean Hoyle politely but effectively demolished that claim by pointing out that no matter how important concessions had been they were "crumbs" from the bosses' table and the worst aspects of the bill, particularly on ballot thresholds designed to severely limit unions' ability to conduct strike action, were now in law.

The truth is that right-wing union leaders do not really care about ballot thresholds; While such leaders may tolerate isolated local strikes on specific issues they have fiercely resisted generalising and building disputes through coordinated action either within their own unions or with other unions.

## **Check-off**

The congress president snapped at Sean that the concession on check-off (the payment of union subs through employer payrolls) was very important to unions. The concessions on check-off are important of course but must be seen in context.

PCS has faced and overcome a vicious government attempt to destroy the union through withdrawal of check-off. Incidentally, in contrast to union leaders who attacked PCS in this period, our union offered all unions facing this threat practical help and advice should removal of check-off make it to legislation.

The tremendous campaign run by PCS to defeat that attack gave the government cause for reflection on the issue of check-off but that was not the only factor. The relationship between right-wing union leaders and capitalist politicians is not antagonistic but in many respects symbiotic. Even the most vicious Tory understands it would have been self-defeating to withdraw check-off and weaken unions whose leaders have effectively stopped a mobilisation of the movement against austerity.

This was most clear in the pensions dispute in 2011, which revealed the potential strength of our movement when millions of workers took action, only to be sold out weeks later. This shameful retreat by the 'leaders' of the organised working class gave Cameron and Osborne, who up until then were facing huge opposition, the green light to press ahead and significantly ramp up their austerity programme.

## **RMT call**

An RMT motion, which the right wing did not have the confidence to openly oppose, calls on the general council to convene an "urgent practical conference, as to how best coordinate our legal and industrial response to the Act in line with policy already set by congress". What an opportunity this would be, but we have to say the current leaderships in much of the movement and the TUC itself will do everything to frustrate this initiative.

It is therefore important to campaign in the branches and workplaces to build support for this conference. Such a conference could not only set out a strategy of opposition to the Act in general but commit unions to concrete action - if one union is singled out then all unions should respond in a coordinated campaign.

What is more, such a conference should plan to take the offensive to the Tories by implementing the policy on coordinated action in the public sector over pay, including the demand by PCS for the TUC to organise a national demonstration to build support for joint action over pay which the TUC is committed to, and generalising the campaign in defence of the NHS and junior doctors.

## **Jeremy Corbyn**

It was no accident that Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn was not invited to address congress. Much is at stake in the battle against the Blairite MPs, who as PCS President Janice Godrich pointed out at the National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) rally, owe their very careers to ties to the corporate and political establishment.

PCS, although not affiliated to the Labour Party, has been unequivocal in supporting Jeremy and John McDonnell who have stood on our picket lines and given unstinting support to our members over the years and who have consistently argued for an alternative to austerity.

During the TUC, PCS hosted a #JC4PM rally which attracted well over 1,000 local people and congress delegates, at which Janice Godrich called for reselection of Labour MPs.

The battle in the Labour Party is a reflection of the opposing class interests in wider society and its outcome is of huge concern to those on the right of the trade union movement who have rejected the necessity for a fightback on the industrial and political fronts. They are terrified of the Corbyn phenomena for many reasons but none more so than because of the contrast with their worship of the status quo and their 'there is no alternative' mind-set.

The sharpest contrast was that between the lacklustre self-congratulatory and complacent tone of the congress, and the NSSN rally. No junior doctors were invited to speak at the congress, but two junior doctors spoke

articulately at the NSSN rally about their determination in defending the NHS and calling for solidarity from the rest of the movement, including a national demonstration to defend the NHS.

It would be a fatal error by the bosses and Tories to think that the seeming calm that has characterised the leadership of the trade union movement, with the obvious honourable exceptions, is reflective of the real mood of the rank-and-file activists and members.

There is deep discontent and anger in workplaces up and down the country. The capitalist system cannot deliver for the millions, only for the millionaires and billionaires. It is being increasingly exposed in all its brutality. In addition, the Tory government, post-Brexit vote, is in crisis.

The task of the left is to build the widest possible anti-austerity alliance throughout the trade union movement and within our communities and to link the fightback on the industrial and political fronts in order to build a genuine socialist alternative.

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This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 19 September 2016 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in *The Socialist*.

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## **Thousands of Post Office workers strike**

Thousands of Communication Workers Union (CWU) and Unite members working in the Post Office took strike action on 15 September against attacks on their job security and pensions. In a programme of cuts, including 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. Strikers lobbied parliament where a CWU rep from the West Midlands spoke to the Socialist.

**Why are you here today, why are you out on strike?**

Basically, we're here to fight for the future of the post office.

**How many of you are out on strike?**

It's the Crown Post Office network, including admin and supply staff, which is about 3,000 people out on strike today. And 2,000 of those jobs could go through depot closures, post office closures and job losses as a result of exiting the external market. Our members who work in the supply chain that deliver valuables to the Post Office network nationwide are to go. The Post Office will now only operate the in-house network meaning we will lose 60% of our workload.

**What is the mood like among the members on strike?**

Very, very upbeat. I'm responsible for representing members in depots from Norwich to Preston and the mood is very upbeat and the vast majority of those workers are out on strike today.

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## **Film review: Blacklisted**

# **A film about power, the organisations who wield it and the people who fought back**

**Rob Williams, National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) chair**

"No justice! No Peace!" rings out from a megaphone-wielding Dave Smith in the middle of a flashmob protest in Oxford Street, with the banner of the National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) in the background. This is the opening scene of the new documentary 'Blacklisted - a film about power, the organisations that wield it and the people who fought back'.

The film intersperses interviews from blacklisted construction workers with 'Reel News' footage from many of the protests in recent years. Especially those against the blatant blacklisting of construction workers such as Frank Morris and the victorious struggle of 'the sparks' - construction electricians in 2011-12 - against the infamous Besna contract that would have cut wages by 35%.

The film by Tom Wood from Reel News was premiered at the 'Blacklisting, Bullying & Blowing the Whistle' conference that took place in the University of Greenwich starting on 16 September, where speakers included Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell alongside blacklisted workers.

## **Undercover police**

It follows on from the book co-authored by Dave Smith and investigative journalist Phil Chamberlain - 'Blacklisted: the secret war between big business and union activists'.

The film and the updated book also bring into view the role of the state in colluding with the bosses as well as the undercover policing which is the subject of the Pitchford Inquiry.

The predecessor of the Socialist Party, the Militant was targeted by police in this way along with the blacklisted workers, environmental and anti-racist campaigners.

Blacklisted workers open up about the suffering they and their families faced over decades of being excluded from the industry. Brian Higgins compared it to being "like house arrest" because of the lack of money.

## **Exposed**

The film exposes how the major construction company Sir Robert McAlpine Ltd spent £20,000 in creating the 'Consulting Association' which kept a list of known union activists that workers would be checked against for a fee.

Over 40 companies used the 'service'.

Steve Acheson explained how he hadn't been phoned by any agency for ten years. Often, these workers were targeted for merely being health and safety reps, which of course cut into profits.

John Bryan remembered how one company had employed a 'heavy' to try and intimidate union reps - "I am Mal... Animal." However, he subsequently lost a finger through working unsafely!

The association was raided by government officials in 2009 after being tipped off by a whistleblower. But it took a further seven years to get anything that looked like justice after a heroic campaign from the blacklisted workers and their supporters around the Blacklist Support Group, which was set up in the aftermath of the raid.

The historic £75 million settlement won by the workers and their unions - Unite, Ucat and GMB - represents a huge victory but is only a fraction of what is really owed in terms of lost wages over years and decades. The fight for real justice, to secure employment and unionise the sites is still ongoing.

- [Watch the film on YouTube](#) and buy the book at [leftbooks.co.uk](http://leftbooks.co.uk)

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# **Tube strike over management bullying**

Strike action on Hammersmith & City and Circle tube lines over heavy handed and aggressive management - including putting staff toilet breaks on a stop watch, and a disregard for agreed terms and conditions - was rock solid on 16 September. Socialist Party members and National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) activists joined strikers on the picket line photo NSSN

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## **Workplace news in brief**

### **Junior doctors**

Junior doctors, who are set to strike again in October as part of their ongoing contract dispute, have taken the fight to the High Court in the meantime. A group called 'Justice For Health' mounted the legal challenge, accusing Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt of acting outside his powers. The contract is due to be rolled out from next month with the next strike dates set for 5, 6 and 7 October and then 10-11 October. Despite a £2.45 billion deficit in the NHS in 2015-16, the government is insisting on imposing a contract that seeks to stretch non-emergency services from five days to seven with no extra funding.

The BMA will not accept this and adequate funding for the new contract is now a major demand. And it is clear that this new contract is not only an attack on junior doctors, but on the NHS as a whole.

The Socialist Party calls for coordinated action with other health unions against privatisation and cuts to the NHS. The Trade Union Congress should call a national demonstration in support of the doctors and in defence of the NHS.

### **Ritzy strikes back**

Members of Bectu, the entertainment union, who work at the Ritzy cinema in Brixton will be striking from midday on 24 September. Workers at the cinema have been engaged in a long campaign to win the London Living Wage of £9.40 an hour. But Picturehouse Cinemas, who made a £99 million profit in 2015, have rejected the claim and refused to negotiate with the union, rejecting the chance for talks at Acas.

The current minimum rate at the Ritzy is £8.80. In 2014 Bectu members fought a long and successful campaign (including 13 strikes) in pursuit of the London Living Wage as defined by the Living Wage Foundation. Other demands include company sick pay for all plus maternity and paternity pay.

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## **Libya: imperialist intervention helped wreck country and revolution**

**By Robert Bechert, Committee for a Workers' International**

There was nothing for the Libyan people to celebrate in the damning report by a Commons parliamentary committee into the British government's role in the West's contribution to overthrowing the Gaddafi regime in 2011 - an intervention which helped lead to the almost complete collapse of their country and the derailment of the revolution that had begun there.

Partly a settling of internal Tory party scores, this parliamentary inquiry sort to make ex-prime minister David Cameron the scapegoat for what became an utterly disastrous and failed military intervention for imperialism, let alone the Libyan people. In this they were not the first, Obama has also publically criticised Cameron and his ally in this adventure, former French president Sarkozy, for what has happened. But it should not be forgotten that in March 2011 the British House of Commons voted by 557 to 13 in favour of military action. Jeremy Corbyn was one of the tiny handful, mainly left wingers, who voted against.

The inquiry concluded that the result has been "political and economic collapse, inter-militia and inter-tribal warfare, humanitarian and migrant crises, widespread human rights violations, the spread of Gaddafi regime weapons and the growth of Isis in North Africa".

## **Criticising Cameroon while defending Saudi arms deals**

Tragically all this is true, but this parliamentary committee is very selective in its criticism. In the very same week when it published its report on Libya, it almost simultaneously published another one that was effectively trying to shield the feudal Saudi regime's current brutality in Yemen against criticism from other parliamentary committees.

The reason for this apparent contradiction between its approach to Libya and Yemen is that the starting points for such capitalist politicians are the interests of British capitalism and, to a slightly lesser extent, those of imperialism in general. Thus for them the Saudi regime must be defended because it buys billions of pounds worth of weapons from Britain and also is an important prop for imperialism in the Middle East. On the other hand their criticism of the Libyan action is because this British and French adventure resulted in a substantial further destabilisation of an area strategically important for imperialism and also the massive increase of refugees and migrants attempting to cross the Mediterranean after the European Union lost its Libyan border guard.

In part this committee's inquiry has confirmed the warnings against any support for this type of intervention that the Socialist Party and the CWI gave throughout 2011. Jeremy Corbyn also opposed the bombing campaign unlike groups like the Alliance for Workers' Liberty (AWL) in Britain who were loudly shouting that this military action had to be supported in order to 'defend' the Libyan people.

But there is a fundamental, essential difference, between this parliamentary committee's criticisms and the Socialist Party and the CWI's opposition to the military intervention. Our stand was based upon defending the interests of working people around the world while capitalist politicians protect the interests of their ruling classes.

Thus, as socialists, we did not just warmly welcome the revolutionary "Arab Spring" of 2011 but we also argued that in order for the working masses and poor in north Africa and the Middle East to achieve their democratic and social aims it was not only necessary to overthrow tyrants, but also to break with capitalism.

Obviously this was something which imperialist governments like the British and French wanted to prevent and, alongside domestic politic calculations, was a reason why they sought to intervene in Libya in the hope of restraining the revolution there, install a pro-western government and establish a position from which they could intervene in the rest of the region.

## **Warning against hopes in the West**

From the beginning of the revolution in Libya we warned those Libyans striving for genuine freedom not to have any hopes or illusions in western intervention. Instead we pointed to the Tunisian and Egyptian examples earlier that year of mass movements overthrowing repressive regimes which Gaddafi, the then Libyan ruler, had supported. In part Gaddafi's support for other autocrats flowed from the accommodation he had made with imperialism and the fear that the Libyan people would demand democratic rights, real action against corruption and democratic control of Libya's gas and oil wealth.

Gaddafi immediately started issuing blood curdling threats against the early centres of the revolution in the east but these areas, particularly Benghazi, could have been protected by mass, popular defence. But at the same time we warned that unless an independent movement of workers, poor and youth was built the revolution would not succeed in fundamentally changing the country.

The absence of such a movement opened the door to grave dangers. At the beginning of the revolution we explained that the raising of the old monarchy's flag in the eastern city of Benghazi risked dividing the country, which had been first formed in the 1930s and then reformed in the late 1940s, as the old king had come from the east where a minority of the population lived. While a Libyan national consciousness had then developed we warned that without the building of an independent working peoples' movement there was the

danger of the revival and deepening of Libya's regional, tribal and clan divisions, along with hostility to the Amazigh and black Libyan non-Arab minorities. Additionally the fact that, before 2011, up to 2.5 million of Libya's 6.5 million population were migrants posed the danger of hostility both to migrants from other Arab countries and, exploiting old prejudices, against Sub-Saharan Africans.

In Britain, one of the most strident left supporters of this British and French intervention was the AWL grouping who argued that it could not be opposed because, in March 2011, this was the only way to prevent Gaddafi crushing the Benghazi uprising in an "extremely bloody" counter-revolution. While saying that they "did not call for or support NATO intervention in Libya ...it does not follow that opposing this specific NATO action made sense" ("The Libyan revolution: issues for Marxists", September 7, 2011). But in reality for the AWL it was not just the specific question of how to stop Gaddafi's forces advancing on Benghazi in late March 2011. Despite saying there should be "no trust in the NATO powers" in reality they supported the continued NATO action in Libya in the fighting that continued in the months afterwards. Indeed they wanted NATO to do more which was why, after Gaddafi lost Tripoli at the end of August, they complained about "the general laziness of NATO in prosecuting its campaign" ("Libya: the new struggle after victory", September 7, 2011).

While claiming to be "practical", and sometimes pointing to genuine issues like the absence of workers' organisations in Libya, the AWL did not argue for an independent political strategy for the workers and poor in Libya. Instead it argued for a capitalist based "democratic, secular republic", even complaining that NATO "had frustrated" the 'Transitional National Council' which was then unsuccessfully trying to form a pro-capitalist Libyan government.

## **Working peoples' movement is key**

Shortly after Gaddafi's killing we wrote that "now, more than ever, the creation of independent, democratic workers' organisations, including a workers' party, are vital, if working people, the oppressed and youth are to achieve a real revolutionary transformation of the country and thwart the imperialists' plans, end dictatorship and transform the lives of the mass of the people. Without this other forces will step into the gap."

This is unfortunately what has happened. Libya is now in a state of near disintegration. But this does not mean that a revival of a genuine mass movement is ruled out that can unite working people in struggle. However, for lasting success, would need to develop a programme that defends all democratic rights, is against oppression, can organise democratic self-defence, involving minorities and migrant workers, against sectarian attacks.

Libya is still a potentially rich country, but the question is who owns and controls its assets. The Libyan working people have to take the issue into their own hands. A genuine mass movement would oppose the privatisation of Libya's assets, oppose all foreign military intervention and strive for a government of representatives of the workers and poor, based upon democratic structures in the workplaces and communities, which would use Libya's resources for its population. Without this the danger is that Libya remains a playground for warlords, sectarian fanatics and looters, Libyan and foreign.

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## **#JobstownNotGuilty trials begin**

### **Irish state criminalises right to protest**

Anti-water charges demonstrators - arrested following a peaceful sit-down protest in Jobstown, near Dublin, against the then deputy prime minister (Labour's Joan Burton), in November 2014 - are now facing ludicrous charges of "false imprisonment".

**Paul Murphy, TD (MP), Dublin South West**



The first Jobstown protester charged with false imprisonment is on trial today (19 September). Next year, another 18 face charges, which could result in sentences up to life imprisonment!

These are the most serious political trials in decades. They threaten the right of people to protest.

The actions of the state leading up to these trials lay bare how it operates to defend the interests of the 1%. The context is one of a mass movement of civil disobedience against water charges, which has now succeeded in forcing their suspension and the collapse of support for the traditional political establishment parties.

## **Ruling class**

The ruling class in Ireland is looking at a scary vista of further social movements, the rise of the left, and the possibility of more victories for working people which will further embolden them. It therefore acted - with hundreds of arrests, the jailing of anti-water meter protesters and Jobstown - to send a message and try to dampen down that protest.

The choreographing of two weeks of dawn raids in February 2015, with many Gardai (police) arresting protesters, was a key part of this. The leaks to RTE (state media broadcaster) by the Gardai were also designed to criminalise the protesters in the eyes of people.

This happened simultaneously to the revelations about Operation Mizen - a police spying operation against anti-water charges protesters. The state forces were marshalled and used in trying to assist the imposition of water charges - a key part of the ruling class' agenda for shifting the taxation burden and privatisation. A particular feature of this trial has been the trial by media and politicians already deployed to try to shape public opinion.

## **Message**

These trials are sending a message that protesting is criminal and that activists are criminals. That is why the old adage "an injury to one is an injury to all" is applicable here.

Faced with a hostile media and state, the community of Jobstown needs all the assistance and solidarity that can be gathered.

This needs to become a major movement of working class communities and young people to defend the protesters. Anyone who wants the right to protest in the future needs to defend the right to protest now, by defending Jobstown!

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## **Non-fiction review: Petticoat Heroes**

# **Uncovering the class struggle behind the Rebecca Riots**

**Scott Jones**

Every kid growing up in Wales knows the story of the Rebecca rioters. Men who dressed as women in the 'olden days', rampaging through the land smashing up toll gates.

The Rebecca Riots, which mainly took place in south-west Wales in the 19th century, occupy an important place in Welsh history. One of the exhibits at the museum of Welsh life in St Fagans is a surviving toll gate. Despite this, general understanding rarely moves beyond the above description - partly because so little has been written on the subject.

That's why 'Petticoat Heroes' by Welsh writer Rhian E Jones is so welcome. Rhian's book is not only a modern, class analysis of the Rebecca Riots - but also looks at the subjects of gender and culture in relation to the riots for the first time, providing fascinating interpretations alongside meticulous research.

Rhian from the outset makes a case for the riots to be understood as a broader movement which she calls 'Rebeccaism'. The riots weren't only against the imposition of toll roads - which they beat. And they weren't only riots. They were a general protest movement "against high rents, tithes, evictions, workhouses and the New Poor Law."

This is a very important point. The age was one of mass struggle. The year the riots started, 1839, was the same year as the Newport Rising. 7,500 working class men from the Welsh Valleys, led by Chartists - probably the world's first mass working class movement - stormed Newport to free imprisoned comrades and attempt to seize power.

While traditional accounts mainly portray the Rebeccaites as farmers in rural west Wales, many were workers. There were clear attempts to link up with the more proletarian Chartists further east, which terrified the ruling class. Rhian points out that the country's first Chartist branch was actually founded in Carmarthen, the heart of Rebeccaite territory.

The linking up of the two movements also worried the better-off Rebeccaite farmers and landlords. They put forward their own, more conservative class demands through Rebeccaism, and colluded with authorities to sell out more militant Rebeccaites.

One such militant was John Jones, known as 'Shoni Sguborfawr' - Johnny Big Barn. He was a notorious 'troublemaker' turned Rebecca rioter, a product of working class Merthyr, who was arrested in a pub in Tumble, south-west Wales, after a tip-off by more conservative Rebeccaites.

This revolutionary undercurrent was understood by the press at the time, as Rhian reminds us. The Carmarthen Journal viewed Rebecca as "personifying a troubling 'spirit of political disaffection'", asking the question 'who is Rebecca?' The paper answers: "an embodiment of the principles of revolution."

In popular culture too, Dylan Thomas's take on the riots, 'Rebecca's Daughters', is a comedy with a serious message: governments only bring in serious reforms when they are afraid of a revolution.

The other core theme of 'Petticoat Heroes' is gender. Rhian concludes that "Rebeccaite cross-dressing demonstrates that the movement's use of costume was more complex than previously recognised".

Viewing the protesters as 'men dressed as women' is too simplistic. Especially given that, as well as opposition to toll gates, they opposed the sexist attacks of 1834's New Poor Law - "most visibly through insisting upon the right of unmarried mothers to public support."

Intriguingly, Rhian also writes that the Rebeccaites' costumes made dressing like women a fashionable or cool thing for men to do. That's a far cry from the official image of Victorian Britain as stuffy and conservative.

Ending by connecting the role of Rebeccaite imagery and disguise to contemporary protest movements like Occupy's use of Guy Fawkes masks, 'Petticoat Heroes' is fantastic for the breadth of issues it covers on a phenomenon most accounts present as a mere quirk of history.

It also connects Rebeccaism to the all-important class struggle taking place at the time, and its lessons for today. And as the reader makes these discoveries, Petticoat Heroes is an enjoyable read too.

- 'Petticoat Heroes' - available soon from [www.leftbooks.co.uk](http://www.leftbooks.co.uk)

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**Comment: nightlife**

# Iconic nightclub Fabric closes doors - another victim of austerity?

Sam Gleaden

London's most iconic night club, Fabric, had its licence revoked by Islington council on 7 September. This comes after the very tragic drug-related deaths of 18-year-olds Ryan Browne and Jack Crossley.

Fabric has been incredibly important in UK dance music culture since its creation in 1999. It's given my friends and I some of the best nights of live music of my life, and I'm deeply distressed to see it go.

The council claims to be taking the decision with the safety of clubbers in mind. However, just eight months ago, a judge called Fabric a "beacon of best practice", even sending other clubs' managements to look at how Fabric dealt with drugs.

It also completely ignores reality for clubbers. Thousands will now turn to unregulated venues across the capital, which inevitably means higher risk.

Islington council faces £70 million worth of cuts in the next four years, with a reduction of 44% in its police force. This creates pressure for councils to save money on policing, while creating higher taxable income from property development if the venue is turned into flats.

London's new Labour mayor, Sadiq Khan, marketed himself as a defender of London's nightlife in his election campaign. However, his record shows him as a supporter of the selling public premises in favour of private luxury homes.

The defence of council houses, public services and leisure facilities are one and the same battle.

Instead of Blairites like Khan, we need councils prepared to refuse to implement cuts and sell-offs and fight to get the money back. Build truly affordable, high-quality council housing, and stop the closure of our nightlife in favour of turning cities into private playgrounds for millionaires.

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## 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](mailto: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.

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### Featured letter: refugee rescue

Every day - if not on mainstream media, then on social media - there are stories of bombings of civilians in Syria. In fact Britain has been responsible for over 1,000 of these bombings.

Is it any surprise there are thousands of refugees looking for safety in Europe and in Britain? Over half the world's displaced people are from three countries: Iraq, Afghanistan and Syria.

Will Theresa May take responsibility for the consequences of her and previous governments' unjust wars?

No, they would rather spend £17 million of our supposedly cash-strapped government's money keeping people out with a wall in Calais. Imprisoning thousands of people, including over 700 unaccompanied children, in the so-called Jungle, at the hands of French police violence.

Everyone deserves a home free from war, oppression and poverty. What can be done to give people sanctuary from the violence they have faced?

Refugees should be welcomed on the basis of a programme of mass council house building, massive investment in public services including the NHS, and the creation of jobs for all - workers already here as well as refugees.

These demands are only possible by bringing in socialist measures in Britain and the rest of Europe.

This could raise the possibility of socialism as the means to bring about peace worldwide.

**Josh Asker, Southampton**

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## **Meadow Well riots**

This year is the 25th anniversary of the Meadow Well riots in Tyneside. Formerly known as the Ridges Estate, the area was stalked by record historic levels of deprivation. Poor-quality housing and low incomes were facts of life for most residents.

After a growing pattern of police antagonism and resulting period of tension between youths and authorities, two young men, Dale Robins and Collins Atkins, were killed during a police pursuit gone wrong on the Coast Road. Employing the rotten tactics of the miners' strike era, the police would largely fail to contain a week of full-scale unrest that spread to Newcastle's west end.

After the matter became a national controversy, lessons went unlearned. Authorities threw money at the problems, opening a mini police facility on the estate, renovating and rebuilding housing, and attempting to tackle chronic unemployment. The memories of the event are still prevalent in people's perception of the community, even after all these years.

The structural problems associated with endemic poverty cannot be rectified with temporary measures. Only the abolition of capitalism is able to serve the interests of the 99%, those in society struggling.

Poverty is still our reality. People are again beginning to ask difficult questions about the governance of our region, and this broken system. Councils be warned: continue to implement austerity at your and our peril.

**William Jarrett, Tyne and Wear**

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## **Voter preventer?**

Eric Pickles has recommended that the government introduce identification checks for voters at polling stations to prevent electoral fraud.

Should we be suspicious of these proposals? Pickles talks about postal-vote fraud, and illegal 'intimidation' of voters, but ID checks at polling stations will do nothing to stop these.

In the US, strict voter ID requirements were introduced by some Republican governed states after Obama's election in 2008, ostensibly to combat electoral fraud. In reality, their purpose has been to reduce the turnout among groups who traditionally vote Democrat, particularly the African-American and Latino communities.

Research by academics at the University of California, San Diego found "substantial drops in turnout for minorities under strict voter ID laws." People from minority groups are on average poorer, and therefore less likely to possess required photo ID, a driver's licence or passport for instance.

Are the Tories taking a leaf out of the Republicans' book?

**TJ Shaw, Hampshire**

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## **Boot out Blairites**

The conniving, dishonourable, treacherous New Labour collaborators in and outside of Progress - a cancerous tumour within the Labour Party - need to come out of the closet and declare themselves to be Tories at heart.

They can go join Ukip, the Tory party or the Lib Dems; but get out of the Labour Party.

These untrustworthy, despicable, backstabbing, right-wing career politicians, timewasters and opportunistic chancers, are the ones responsible for bringing the Labour Party into disrepute. They would rather have the Tories in than a left Labour government.

By their actions and non-actions over the years, ignoring and taking for granted the membership and the voters, they show themselves to be not interested in our welfare.

They are more interested in their own careers, in lining their own pockets with generous wages and conditions, pensions, expenses, other jobs, directorships and shares in private companies, while voting to run down public services, as directed by their Tory masters.

**W Laws, Sunderland**

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## **Greedy grammars**

In Theresa May's first speech as prime minister, she pledged to support "ordinary working class" families instead of the "privileged few."

Just a few months later, however, and her government has announced new plans to enable the creation of new grammar schools. Fortunately, you don't need a grammar school education to spot the irony.

While Corbyn's anti-grammar school crusade is encouraging, this renewed interest in selective education is worrying. Surely the government's focus should be on raising academic standards in all schools across the country.

The claim that a grammar school education improves social mobility has been discredited. Even if such claims were true, is it really fair to only allow a tiny percentage of our children to advance? I was under the impression that all children matter, regardless of their background and ability.

However the Tories choose to justify this decision, the rebirth of the grammar school system sends the message that the education of all children matters - but that some matter more than others.

**Kaye Jones, Andover**

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## **Usdaw Activist**

I have recently come back from Usdaw's 'Summer School One' in Yorkshire, attended by a cross-section of reps and union activists from across the country.

Despite our union leadership backing Owen Smith in a 'phone ballot', it was clear to me the majority of those there liked Corbyn, several saying they hadn't been 'political' until he stood to be Labour leader.

One rep from Devon mentioned how there, quite a few Tory voters - who might not support Corbyn - still admired his principled stand, and felt that set him apart from other politicians.

But there was real anger when people saw via Facebook an advert for Usdaw general secretary John Hannett speaking at a Progress fringe meeting at Labour Party conference. He will be appearing alongside a rogues' gallery of anti-Corbynites, including Hilary Benn, Liz Kendall, Wes Streeting and other right-wing Labour MPs.

Increasingly, members are coming into opposition with Hannett's disastrous leadership, which recently saw most shop workers lose unsocial hours premiums. Corbyn supporters should join the union's Broad Left and subscribe to the Socialist Party supporters' e-bulletin, the Activist.

- Email [usdawactivist@gmail.com](mailto:usdawactivist@gmail.com) to subscribe to the newsletter

An Usdaw member

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## **#KeepCorbyn campaign reports**

### **Birmingham**

Around 1,500 people attended the Jeremy Corbyn event in Birmingham on 19 September. The Labour leadership candidate addressed the crowd, along with a few supportive Birmingham Labour councillors, and touched on topics such as mental health and the shocking cuts being carried out on the city.

22 Socialist Party members took part to show support for Corbyn and put forward the need for a party for the 99%. There was lots of support for our ideas. We experienced no hostility, despite the recent smear campaign attempt by the Labour right.

Jenn Reid, an activist from Coventry, said: "As my first big socialist event, I was so impressed by the solidarity from across the region. Everyone pitched in and it was great to feel part of something.

"I spoke to many like-minded people disenamoured by a Tory government that continues to ignore the needs of the many in favour of the profits of the few.

"I had a conversation with one chap that epitomised this - just one of thousands of people who have fallen through the cracks in a corrupt system; made redundant, unable to claim for housing or support and facing homelessness.

"I told him about the Socialist Party, what we do, who we are and what we represent. He went away knowing people are out there fighting for him and he took our information so he could become part of the battle too."

We sold 161 copies of the Socialist, handed out 2,000 leaflets and nine people left their details to find out about joining the Socialist Party. As cuts continue to be implemented by the local council controlled by anti-Corbyn right wingers, the arguments put forward by the Socialist Party will be even more important. We must help people work inside and outside Labour to build a democratic party which actually represents the majority.

**Corinthia Ward Birmingham Central Socialist Party**

## Owen Smith

Owen Smith was one of the speakers at this year's annual Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) conference, using the event to promote himself in the Labour leadership bid.

He mentioned his policy of an £8.25 living wage, to be £10 by 2020. I had to ask: since the \$15 minimum wage was successfully fought for in Seattle, why didn't he advocate a wage of £10 now? Also, since he had spoken about the various problems with Universal Credit - the major theme of the conference - I had to ask him why he and other Labour Party MPs had abstained on the Welfare Bill vote!

Neither answer was good. He based his wage policy on information from 'policy experts', but it was better than the Tories' proposal, and he 'regretted' the abstention. He claims that being made shadow work and pensions secretary previously under Jeremy Corbyn was the 'proudest moment' in his political career.

**Coventry Socialist Party member**

## Mansfield byelection

The 8 May byelection in Sheffield mentioned in last week's Socialist ('Labour loses in Sheffield byelection but Corbyn isn't the problem' at [socialistparty.org.uk](http://socialistparty.org.uk)) coincided with another byelection. This was in Mansfield Woodhouse, Nottinghamshire, held because of the death of the Labour councillor. The Labour candidate won, and the turnout was around 23%.

What the two elections also have in common is that there was more support for a Jeremy Corbyn-led Labour Party on the doorstep than local right-wing Labour councillors wanted to admit. This was certainly true in the more working class areas of Mansfield Woodhouse.

The Socialist Party believes that Jeremy Corbyn should build on the goodwill of the many thousands of people who voted for him by campaigning on a clear, bold, anti-austerity, pro-nationalisation programme.

There must be no compromises with the pro-austerity, capitalist right wing, and he should clear them out ASAP. A smaller Labour Party made up of anti-austerity MPs would be much stronger and more united than a party consisting of MPs who would be likely to vote for cuts, and to be more interested in their own careers than their constituents.

Ordinary people are desperate for the socialist change that Jeremy Corbyn is offering. He is the man to lead the Labour Party and to put Blairism in the dustbin of history.

**Karen Seymour Mansfield Socialist Party**

## Malvern

We held our first ever Socialist Party meeting in Malvern on 19 September, with the title "Keep Corbyn, Fight for Socialism." Worcestershire Socialist Party members leafleted estates, a school and held a campaign stall as well as putting up posters in shop windows and doing some press releases.

A couple of dozen people came, mostly at their first meeting. Jane Nellist introduced, followed by a very good and wide-ranging discussion. A collection at the meeting raised £63.78.

**Ruthie McNally Malvern**

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## Why I joined the Socialist Party

# "I've had enough - it's time to fight back"

**Stephen Burrows**

As a public sector worker, a social housing tenant and someone looking towards the last ten years of their working life, I fear this Tory government and what plans they have to exploit working people and give our assets and resources to their wealthy friends. I had the benefit of the post-war settlement where healthcare, housing and education up to post-graduate level was possible for me as a working class person.

All that is virtually gone. A young working class person now has a negligible chance of going to university due to crippling tuition fees and the return of the grammar schools which will only entrench inequality even further.

They cannot possibly buy a house or get on a social housing list and will be left to the mercy of private landlords who will continue their gouging till the system collapses. They are stuck with diminishing wages and rights at work as the elite demand a bigger slice of the pie year after year.

And of course, with the planned privatisation of the NHS they will live in fear of becoming ill as healthcare will become an unaffordable commodity. I've had enough and judging by the huge interest in politics in this country and abroad, so have millions of others.

It's time to fight back and demand that we, and the next generation, have a stake in society rather than be exploited for profit and for gain by the elite. This is why I've joined the Socialist Party.

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## **Fightback is on to save NHS heart services**

**Steve Score, Leicester Socialist Party**

Children's heart surgery is to end at three hospitals around the country if NHS England gets its way. My son, along with thousands of others, has had lifesaving operations at specialist heart centres like the one at Glenfield Hospital in Leicester: one in 111 kids are born with congenital heart disease.

Glenfield serves a wide area across the east Midlands and there has been an angry response, with nearly 30,000 people so far signing the online petition for a public review into the decision.

NHS England bosses claim the decision is to meet "standards", but the key one is an arbitrary figure of 125 operations a year per surgeon. This is supposedly so they can "maintain their skills" in order to ensure "excellent outcomes".

Yet last year the three surgeons at Glenfield carried out 332 with the number increasing each year. In fact, recently, the Care Quality Commission pointed out that Glenfield has "excellent clinical outcomes."

Shirley Barnes, a campaigner whose son has had surgery at Glenfield said: "NHS England are treating patients and their families with total contempt. They are taking away any element of choice as it seems highly likely that children will have to go wherever there is a bed. This could be the other end of the country and will inevitably mean extra stress, anxiety and expense for families."

### **Cuts**

In a week that Jeremy Hunt has been lambasted by senior scientists and doctors for misusing statistics on weekend deaths in order to justify imposing the junior doctors' contract, you have to wonder about the arguments of NHS England in this case too.



They deny this decision is to do with cuts, but is it any coincidence that this has happened at the same time as the government is imposing billions of pounds in efficiency savings because of NHS deficits?

Not only will it be devastating for heart patients and their families, it will have knock on effects on many other services such as children's intensive care.

Glenfield pioneered ECMO (Extracorporeal Membrane Oxygenation) equipment and skills which allow patients, both adults and children, to survive heart or lung failure - it has 50% of the entire county's capacity. It even has a mobile unit that rushes this equipment and medics to other hospitals to save lives.

A campaign has been set up which includes patients and their families, trade unionists, health workers and activists. We have the support of a number of trade union bodies and campaigns and it is growing. On 24 September we are holding a public meeting, and on 29 October there will be a demonstration through Leicester.

Similar proposals were defeated three years ago. We are determined to stop this horrific attack on children's health services once again!

- Sign the petition: <https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/160455>

## Public meeting

Saturday 24 September, 2pm at Hanson Hall, Leicester Adult Education Centre, Wellington Street, Leicester LE1 6HL

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## Tamil Solidarity demands refugee rights

Refugee rights campaigners took part in a 'Refugees Welcome' demonstration on 17 September which demanded many democratic rights for refugees. Supported by Tamil Solidarity, a number of refugees from Sri Lanka took part, putting forward demands like the right to work for all refugees, providing adequate medical help including mental health facilities, stop treating refugees as criminals, end the detention of refugees and close down all detention centres.

We called for jobs, homes and services, not racism. Mathan Arunthavanathan, organiser of the Tamil refugees, said: "Horrendous genocidal slaughter in Sri Lanka, committed by government authorities, has displaced many Tamils. Discrimination, detentions and killing of political activists continue to this day. Those who fled these conditions to find a safe home in Britain are treated by the Home Office as criminals. This is why we have begun to organise as a group and will continue to build support for our demands."

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## Sheffield mental health services to lose council funding

**Tim Jones, MHAGS founder and project coordinator, and Socialist Party member**

"Why is it when we have a good day, only bad news follows? The good news is we had a great pool competition against St Wilfrid's Centre Sheffield and we won 3:2. The bad news shortly after was that we will no longer receive any funding from the council next year."

This was the reaction of Mental Health Action Group Sheffield (MHAGS) to learning that our £10,500 a year funding from Sheffield's Labour council will end on 31 March 2017. The day centre is used by 20 to 30 people every weekday, providing meals, activities and trips.

It is the only mental health user-led service in Sheffield and operates without any paid staff. If it closes, there is no similar alternative provision in the city and it will have disastrous consequences.

## **User-led**

The 'Friends of MHAGS' campaign has been set up by service users and supporters to force the council to restore funding and keep this vital service.

I founded this vital user-led service back in 1992. We were a campaign group in the 1980s and we were responsible for winning mobility passes for the disabled. It was piloted in Sheffield and later became nationwide.

The reason why we became a day centre and later a charity in 1990 was that the last legislation Margaret Thatcher passed before she was ousted over the poll tax was the NHS in England becoming trusts. This meant psychiatric day centres closed down at an alarming rate.

The organisation was born out of a massive campaign to save Pitsmoor day centre. We had a small victory as we thought we came to a compromise - it would reduce its opening times to keep it open.

## **Constant attacks**

Later they used the reduced staffing levels to justify reducing our grant support! We have been constantly under attack.

Our first premises in the town centre accepted 40 to 60 service users a day. Then Sheffield City Council announced it was selling off the premises for private housing developments. Subsequently they moved us to Shalesmoor which was a red-light area, which put off service users.

In 1997, when the council was in the process of redeveloping the Peace Gardens where our premises were, we staged an occupation highlighting the social cleansing policy that Sheffield City Council was implementing.

Eventually we were forced out and now our day centre is once again out of the city centre, reducing its accessibility to many service users. Even so, we will fight to win back our funding and keep MHAGS open.

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# **Disgraceful decision to close vital Bradford day centre**

**Peter Robson, Bradford Socialist Party**

Bradford Socialist Party recently found out that the Edmund Street day centre in the city is closing.

The centre has been in existence for 40 years, providing services to the poor and homeless of Bradford since 1976.

It is due to close its doors for the last time on 1 December, with this essential service being transferred to the Salvation Army building, after they were awarded the contract by Bradford's Labour Council. This building is much smaller and at the top of a steep hill outside of the city centre.

This is a disgraceful situation. The probation service, social services and the NHS have often made referrals there - it is literally keeping people alive at times.

With benefits cuts also kicking in, you can see the issues in cities and towns like this up and down the country. Many service users have said that they will not be able to get to the new centre due to finance or health issues.

However, it is not only the service users that are worried. Staff places are not being guaranteed and a lesser service and a race to the bottom in terms and conditions is likely.

The council's response was to say that it was awarded to the Salvation Army after a competitive tendering process. And there is the problem - vulnerable people have become pawns in a 'competitive tendering process' which takes no account of their needs, just a money saving exercise.

This Labour run council is sitting on millions of pounds of reserves. When the Socialist Party has challenged them to use their reserves, their response has always been that the money is for a rainy day. Well to continue the metaphor, it is a torrent now!

- Follow the campaign on Facebook: Save Edmund Street Centre
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<http://www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/23608>