

Editorial of the Socialist, issue 919

Combative, vibrant unions should be central to the Corbyn movement

'If at first you don't succeed, try and try again.' Some Corbyn supporters seem to be taking this refrain to an extreme in their continual attempts to befriend the Blairite right wing of the Labour Party. The failure to learn the lessons of the multiple rejected attempts at olive branches and compromise from the Corbyn wing is full of dangers.

This debate about the correct approach for the Corbyn movement is manifesting itself within the trade union movement too. The Socialist Party has argued that the trade unions have a potentially key role to play in this process, and finding clarity on the way forward is therefore vital.

Jon Lansman, a leading figure in the pro-Corbyn group Momentum, gave an interview in the Guardian recently appealing for peace. He called for Corbyn's team, trade union leaders, and MPs opposing Corbyn to "work together so Labour can transform Britain."

In reality, the interview was a response to Len McCluskey, the leader of general union Unite. Len had correctly criticised Labour's deputy leader Tom Watson for his speech at the party's conference attacking the left and defending the record of New Labour. Reflecting the interests of the capitalist backers of New Labour, Watson said "capitalism is not the enemy" and warned that under Corbyn Labour had "ended up sounding like we are anti-business."

In contrast Len rejected any return to the so called 'third way' and pointed out that under the Tony Blair governments, "we lost one million manufacturing jobs, the gap between rich and poor continued, the seeds of inequality that we are seeing today were watered then."

Reselection

He went on to say "if Tom wants to try to refresh his mandate it would be interesting to see what happens." Lansman, on the other hand, was keen to stress that no challenge should be made against Tom Watson, or indeed any of the right. He suggested that in return for not pursuing mandatory reselection or other challenges, the left might receive "reciprocation" from the Blairites - in the form of an end to the purges and exclusions of Corbyn supporters.

This at exactly the same time that Jackie Walker, vice-chair of Momentum, is suspended from the Labour Party for alleged anti-Semitism (and subsequently removed from her Momentum position). While the comments made by Walker - who is herself Jewish - were crass, they do not indicate anti-Semitism. And it is clear that this issue, as well as conflating opposition to the right-wing Israeli government with anti-Semitism, is being used as a cover for targeting prominent Corbyn supporters.

It is fantasy for Jon Lansman and others in Momentum to think anything they do will persuade Blairite MPs to fall into line behind Corbyn's anti-austerity leadership and allow his supporters to organise in defence of it. As we have pointed out numerous times, there are now essentially two parties in the Labour Party - a new party for the 99% around Jeremy Corbyn, and the establishment's same old New Labour. Only one side can win this civil war.

Leadership

But not all trade union leaders see it in this way or are clear about being on Corbyn's side of this battle. The two sides of the Labour Party are mirrored by two sides in the trade union movement. Similarly to Tom

Watson, Dave Prentis, leader of the Unison public sector union, called for Jeremy to cave in on allowing MPs to elect his shadow cabinet, and "slap down those who pursue divisive tactics such as changing the rules to enable mass deselections of MPs."

The GMB union backed Owen Smith in the leadership race. The main excuse the leadership has used to muddy the waters with GMB members is Corbyn's correct principled opposition to Trident nuclear weapons. Many defence workers are organised in the GMB and fear the effect of scrapping Trident on their jobs and the future of their communities. The only way to win these workers over is to be firm and clear on an alternative, socialist plan for creating skilled industrial jobs, including nationalisation of key industries under democratic workers' control and management. The GMB should take a stand against nuclear weapons on this basis of 'not one job lost'.

There are parallels between the battle in the movement today and the ones at the end of the 19th century that led to the formation of the Labour Party. Similarly to the conservatism of the right-wing union leaders about transforming Labour now, there was reluctance then - particularly from the bigger unions representing better off workers - to break with the Liberal Party and form one of their own. In fact, initially less than half of the TUC unions (generally the smaller, more militant ones) took this step and affiliated to the Labour Representation Committee at its first meeting in 1900.

Despite these divisions, the trade unions remain an important pillar for the Corbyn movement to secure. They are at root potentially powerful and decisive bodies for the 99% to organise against the bosses. They include 6.5 million workers. Their structures allow striking junior doctors, Durham teaching assistants, Deliveroo drivers - in other words, those at the sharp end of the austerity Jeremy Corbyn stands against - to speak with a collective voice.

It is this collective voice that should be given a weight proportionate to its size within a refounded, democratic, socialist Labour Party. It is clear how much the right wing fear such structures - the decades prior to Jeremy's initial victory had seen gradual reductions in the role of the trade unions in Labour. In 1993 local trade union delegates lost their vote in selecting parliamentary candidates while the unions only have around 20% of the votes in Labour's national policy-making forum.

Democracy

The Blairites knew that - even if the dominant trend was trade union tops which were docile and accepting of their policies - a structural role for trade unions meant that the capacity existed for a major challenge to their rule when the trade unions were reinvigorated by mass movements in the future.

But as has clearly been shown by the decisions and actions taken by some trade union leaders in regard to the Corbyn movement - counter to the interests of their members - it is not enough to just say the unions should have a greater role. The right-wing leadership of shop workers' union Usdaw may claim that the 440,000-strong union had a say in the leadership election by backing Owen Smith. But in reality this decision involved only a phone-poll of its 16 executive committee members!

The Socialist Party always called for democratic checks of the trade unions' collective voice, known as the block vote, by the rank and file of the unions. Collective representation for the trade unions is only truly democratic if the unions themselves function democratically. So it also matters what kind of unions we have - we need dynamic, democratic, combative unions, to mirror and work with a working class party of the same character.

Unfortunately this isn't the case for most unions today. Most of the union leaderships moved to the right in tandem with the rightward shift in the Labour Party leadership over the last three decades - a process analysed extensively in previous Socialist Party articles. This contributed to top-down bureaucratic approaches that have led to a hollowing out of the unions at branch level and low participation in decision making. Some have even targeted activists for demanding the union show a lead in struggling for better pay and conditions.

Reach

Also, while they are still inherently strong organisations at their present size, the unions need to increase their reach. Slightly less than a quarter of all workers are in trade unions. But this is significantly less for young workers - 12% of those workers aged 20 to 24. Only 3.5% of 'accommodation and food service activities' workers are in a union. Unionisation in the private sector is 14%, compared to 56% in the public sector. This shows a failure by most of the trade union tops over decades to reach out to new layers of workers and to build in previously unorganised but growing industries.

Instead we need unions that lead struggle - and in doing so expand their size. Time and again it has been shown that when strikes take place, workers join unions because it is clear why it's worth it. Many of the unions that formed the Labour Party in the first place had only been recently formed themselves through the New Unionism movement. Then low paid, un-unionised workers moved into struggle for the first time, using working class methods of strikes, picket lines and solidarity. They formed new unions to organise through. They quickly felt the need for a party to fight politically for the demands they were striking and marching for.

Like then, the trade union movement must be transformed from top to bottom into one fit for the battles we face. We need conscious campaigns to recruit and organise migrant workers, young workers, and those in precarious and unorganised sectors. We need efforts to recruit and train reps in every workplace who organise regular workplace meetings discussing industrial and political issues and feed workers' views into the rest of the union.

This type of change could win the vibrant trade unions we all need to play a full and proper part alongside a socialist Labour Party in the fight against the Tories and against austerity.

Weak, divided government...

Tories out!

And kick the Blairites out of Corbyn's Labour

Malik Rofidi

Tory delegates recently convened in Birmingham for their annual conference - to discuss how best to put the boot into the working class, while improving the lot of the super-rich and big business.

Unelected Prime Minister Theresa May provided warm words about helping struggling families, yet her government will plough on with austerity and cuts to public services.

After his predecessor's failure to meet his own economic targets, Chancellor Phillip Hammond ditched the Tory commitment to a balance of payments surplus by 2020. But of course he refused to condemn the harsh austerity of the previous term that has seen increased hardships for millions across the country.

And while the Tories are united in their unwavering commitment to austerity, there is less consensus on the direction the UK should take post-Brexit. Theresa May played to the Tories' majority Eurosceptic membership by promising that in forthcoming negotiations her priority would be ensuring that the UK could impose even harsher attacks on migrants than the EU does! The subsequent fall in the pound will only add to their crisis.

'Hard Brexit'

A swathe of Tory MPs have since expressed concerns over what a 'hard Brexit' would mean for the UK's relationship with the EU as a trading partner. Some go further in undermining May - like Scottish Tory leader Ruth Davidson. Dismissing the public will shown in the referendum, she insisted that a deal keeping the UK within the single market is both possible and preferable.

Meanwhile thousands of people gathered on the streets of Birmingham to protest against austerity - many inspired by re-elected Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn's anti-austerity programme and his victory against right-wing plotters in the party.

The Tories are divided, led by a prime minister with no mandate, holding a majority of just 12 seats. A mass movement can bring down this vicious government, and their Blairite shadows, so that we can build a better future geared towards the needs of the many, not the profits of a few.

Come to Socialism 2016!

Debate and discussion on:

- US presidential election
- #BlackLivesMatter
- Britain after Brexit
- Corbyn and Labour
- Fighting Tory austerity
- Capitalist crisis
- Building the socialist alternative
- What is Marxism?
- And more!

Bigoted US Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump recently appealed to African-Americans to vote for him: "You're living in poverty, your schools are no good, you have no jobs, 58% of your youth is unemployed - what the hell do you have to lose?"

Probably a lot more if he got into the White House! Then again, would black and ethnic minority people fare better under a Clinton Democrat presidency?

As Barack Obama's presidency comes to the end of his second term, twice as many black Americans than white people are being killed by police.

Also, institutional racism means blacks and Hispanics comprised 59% of all prisoners in 2014, even though they make up approximately one-quarter of the US population.

As black revolutionary Malcolm X famously remarked, racism is inherent in the capitalist system. But such oppression can and is being fought, as shown by the spontaneous eruption of Black Lives Matter protests throughout the US.

In many places this movement has been led by young black women. Likewise, the fight for a \$15 an hour minimum wage to end poverty pay is led mainly by young fast food workers. And more young people voted for Bernie Sanders and his call for "a political revolution against the billionaire class" in the presidential primaries than for Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump combined!

Darletta Scruggs is a young activist in these working class struggles and a member of Socialist Alternative - our co-thinkers in the USA. She will be speaking at the Socialist Party's 'Rally for Socialism' on the evening of Saturday 11 November in central London - part of the weekend event, Socialism 2016.

Both Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton are two of the most unpopular major party candidates in living memory. That's because both represent the corporate establishment and the super-rich 1%. They represent the failed capitalist system.

At Socialism 2016 more than a thousand people will be discussing the socialist alternative to that system.

It's the place to be to learn the lessons of the movements in the US and elsewhere. And it will include serious discussions about organising here to defeat racism, to defend Jeremy Corbyn's anti-austerity leadership, to

kick out the Tories, and much more.

Get your tickets now!

Sam Allardyce corruption shame: reclaim the game!

Laurence Maples

"Big Sam likes a bung," or so the chant goes - seemingly with good reason, if the latest reports of corruption are anything to go by.

Sam Allardyce has been sacked as England football manager after an undercover sting by journalists for the Telegraph. He was caught on camera negotiating a £400,000 fee to help businessmen circumvent inadequate rules on player transfers set by the FA, English football's governing body.

Third-party ownership of players' economic rights is a method agents and businesses use to extract additional money from the game without contributing to it. The third party 'owns' a portion of the player, and receives a fee when that player is transferred, as well as taking deductions from their wages.

This has allowed heavily indebted clubs to access players they otherwise could not afford. But Michael Platini, ex-president of European football administrator Uefa, has described the practice as a "form of modern-day slavery".

It incentivises the third party to trade players like cattle, as frequently as possible, for maximum fees. It undermines the autonomy of clubs to make footballing decisions, and harms players' development. Consequently, both the FA and world football body Fifa have banned it after repeated scandals.

This is not the first time Allardyce's off-pitch dealings have come into question. He and his son, a football agent, both faced accusations of dealing in illicit payments when transferring players, following a BBC investigation in 2006.

This is just one symptom of a game run by crooked owners at every level. It raises the question, though: why did the FA appoint him?

The Socialist Party says: kick out the money men ruining football. Bring the clubs into collective ownership under the democratic control of fans, players and the community. Slash ticket prices, and invest the sport's enormous profits in grassroots and youth football.

- 'Reclaim the Game' by John Reid - a socialist programme for football - £3 plus postage and packing from www.leftbooks.co.uk
-

Asos workers fear taking toilet breaks, sacked for panic attacks

Karine Harvey, zero-hour contract worker

Workers at the warehouse of fashion retailer Asos are unable take toilet or drink breaks, in fear of not meeting their targets.

A three-month investigation by reporters at BuzzFeed revealed the shocking conditions.

Due to the increasing amount of pressure put onto the workers, one began experiencing panic attacks. This resulted in the termination of her employment at the Barnsley warehouse.

Other workers have commented on management deducting 15 minutes of pay even if they are only one minute late. The warehouse runs on a culture of fear.

With three and a half years of experience working on a minimum wage, zero-hour contract, I - and many people around me - have had very similar experiences to the Asos workers. The supposed 'flexibility' of working a zero-hour contract is a facade for the great anxiety and instability it inflicts on workers.

Colleagues of mine have been forced to look for other work as their hours were reduced to zero, with the fitting name of 'death by rota.' Due to our dependency on work and our complete expendability in our employers' eyes, they feel they have complete power over us.

When questioning whether I would be paid to attend a staff meeting, I was told to work somewhere else. When a colleague was told to work longer than his contracted hours but refused, he was told to "fuck off."

Are we really consenting to work? Or are we coerced?

What workers need is strong workplace organising, and a political voice. Collective action like strikes shows the bosses we're not so expendable as they think, and can win big improvements. And a party that fights for workers could ban zero-hour contracts.

UK workers born in early 1980s half as wealthy as those born in 1970s

James Clopp

People born in the early 1980s are half as well-off as those born in the 1970s were at their age. This won't come as any surprise to today's 30-somethings.

A new report from the Institute for Fiscal Studies shows rising rent and house prices, combined with stagnating wages, put home ownership beyond the reach of many who have entered the workplace since 2000.

Certainly, from my own experience, the idea that you could save £30,000 - while the majority of your meagre salary is swallowed up by rent - seems impossible.

Leaving housing in the hands of private landlords and building firms has meant younger people are held to ransom. Not enough houses are built. Many lie deliberately vacant to keep prices high, while speculation in the property market drives rent higher and higher.

When I tell my friends that in the '80s, tenants could appeal to rent boards run by the local council to fix fair rents or guarantee tenure, they are incredulous! These are the kind of policies we need to escape the rent trap, along with a return to a mass council housing building programme.

The report also points out that pension entitlements have dropped dramatically for children born after 1980. We now face the nightmare scenario of heading into retirement with very little savings, while seeking housing in a hostile rental market.

We can start to turn this around by getting organised in trade unions, and fighting for higher pay and better pensions. In the longer term, we need to fight for a government with socialist policies.

The wealth hoarded by the capitalist elite should be taken off them, and used instead to guarantee everyone access to housing, and a dignified working life and retirement.

Millions have less than £100 savings

Ellen Kenyon Peers

How much is in your savings account? According to a new report published by the under-threat Money Advice Service, 44% of UK workers have savings of less than £100.

Even in the wealthiest regions, over 30% are 'non-savers'. Although the report identifies low wages and the high cost of living as factors, unfortunately it emphasises respondents saying they lack money management skills.

No doubt this is true for some. But no amount of money management will turn poverty pay into a living wage.

Perhaps the most interesting piece of data, however, is that almost half of 'non-savers' have an income above £30,000 - above the UK median wage. The report states that roughly the same number said they had no financial goals for the next five years.

The average UK rent - excluding London - is £724 a month. This average rises 2.5% every month. And the average house price has skyrocketed to £216,750.

With prices so high, it is easy to see why people earning a real living wage would not set financial goals such as owning their own home. A 25-year mortgage for a one-bed flat in London could cost £2,300 per month.

More council housing is desperately needed, as well as rent control and secure tenancy.

Those unable to save are also at permanent risk of being plunged into debt by a sudden bill or unexpected expense. Even the cheapest funeral, for example, can cost grieving family members around £3,700.

The Socialist Party fights for a £10 minimum wage without exemptions, and living benefits. It shouldn't matter how much is in your savings account. The huge resources of the super-rich could instead provide for all.

Them & Us

Handouts for prince

A multibillionaire Saudi prince receives over £400,000 in European Union handouts - just to breed racehorses.

Khalid Abdullah al Saud is one of the UK's top farming subsidy recipients. The EU parcels out taxpayers' money on the basis of amount of land owned, rather than benefit to the public.

The queen is also a top beneficiary. Estates she owns or part-owns get £557,707.

To be fair, Elizabeth II only owns one manor house in Norfolk. And a castle in Scotland. And 18,454 hectares of land.

Buckingham Palace and Windsor Castle are actually loans from the public. Apparently we can find no other use for their combined 465 bedrooms.

The Socialist says: stop subsidising big landowners. Nationalise the land. Spend the cash on homes, green energy, conservation and sustainable farming.

Homelessness for us

A top property developer has kept a Mayfair apartment block built for working class tenants empty for a year.

British Land bought up land in the exclusive London district to throw up more luxury apartments. But planning rules meant it also had to build some low-rent flats for social tenants and key workers.

The firm claims it had "no concern that the marketing of one would affect the success of the other."

But it also blames the delay on the difficulty of attracting or becoming a registered social landlord. The only reason to do this is because such landlords have the power to filter out some 'undesirable' council tenants.

Other developers have kept super-rich clients happy with segregated entrances - known as "poor doors".

No to poor doors. Reverse the social cleansing of inner city areas. For high-quality, genuinely affordable, secure homes for all.

Fighting racism today

- Fighting racism means fighting capitalism
- Solidarity with Black Lives Matter

Hugo Pierre, Socialist Party black and Asian group

The police killing spree in the United States has unleashed a mass movement.

As in the 1950s and 1960s with the civil rights movement, a new generation of black youth has been forced into action against racism. First in the belly of the beast - the US - but also other parts of the world, particularly the UK.

This movement is not limited to the narrow confines of police brutality. It has spread its wings to tackle all the political issues facing black people and oppressed racial groups. Some are drawing the conclusion that capitalism itself is the root of the problem.

The federal investigation into Ferguson Police Department following the police murder of 18-year-old Michael Brown shines a spotlight on the real issues facing blacks in particular. In a city where 69% of the population is black, the investigation found a justice system riddled with institutionalised racism:

- 93% of all arrests were black - and in 90% of these arrests, force was used
- Black drivers made up 85% of all vehicles stopped, even though these searches revealed they were 25% less likely to be carrying anything illegal
- 95% of those jailed for more than two days were black
- Blacks were 68% less likely to have their case dismissed

But the findings also revealed a corrupt justice system that had become focused on bringing in income from fines. This income was necessary to maintain the whole justice system, as it had become commercialised through a succession of cuts and sell-offs.

For-profit justice

Meanwhile, a system operated where white people who faced fines would be let off by friends, acquaintances, neighbours - and even themselves - working in the court system. Racist emails, even by senior staff, were a matter of course.

This profit-driven approach had lethal consequences for Michael Brown. But the picture is repeated one way or another in police forces around the US. And a black US President and countless black city mayors have failed to take action against a for-profit justice system.

Jails are full of young black men. They are typecast because of petty misdemeanours in school, fallen foul of 'zero tolerance' policies. They end up being statistics in privatised US jails which have to meet their quotas to get government payments.

More young black men are in US jails than on US college campuses. Black communities are blighted by poverty, unemployment and de facto segregation. Growing filming of racist incidents shows how brutal police action is, as testified recently by the killing of Philando Castile in his car in front of his girlfriend and her young child.

Resistance

But black youth across the US have organised mass civil disobedience in response. The #BlackLivesMatter movement has acted as a lightning rod for the discontent and anger of the many. Demonstrations are now a feature following almost any police killing.

Protests in cities have shut down freeways, closed city centres. Some have been attacked by police. Some have led to uprisings against state forces. In Ferguson, the chief of police was forced to resign. But no officer responsible for killing unarmed black men or women has been found guilty of murder.

Rallies, demonstrations and direct action are not limited just to tackling police murders. And the outrage against police killings isn't limited to the US.

Black Lives Matter demonstrations started in sympathy in London, Birmingham, Sheffield and other cities. Of course, black workers and youth in the UK have our own victims. The killings this year alone of Mzee Mohammed and Dalian Atkinson at the hands of British police have caused outrage.

These anti-racist campaigns have brought to the surface the often-hidden inequalities that face young black people: higher rates of unemployment, lower access to higher education, lower access to graduate jobs.

Figures released by the Trade Union Congress showed that London, often considered to be diverse and tolerant, had one of the highest gaps between black and white youth unemployment rates. This was not simply an issue of 'skills mismatch'. When looking at workers with comparable qualifications, black youth could be two to three times more likely to be unemployed.

Studies by UK trade unions have also found that during the post-2007 'Great Recession' and its mass shedding of jobs, black workers were more likely to face redundancy. Some local councils have sacked black workers five or six times as fast as their white workmates. Shamefully, there is little difference in the outcome for black workers whichever party controls the council.

The 'Movement for Black Lives' campaign in the US is drawing political conclusions.

This has come not long after the anti-establishment Occupy movement. It's hot on the heels of the outline of a political campaign against the super-rich represented by self-described socialist Bernie Sanders' presidential nomination campaign. Young people have lifted their sights.

Demands

The Movement for Black Lives has started to raise many political demands around which various campaign groups can organise political action. These include "an end to the war on black people", "economic justice", and investment in education and health rather than "the criminalising, caging and harming of black people".

These are the beginnings of a programme for a political alternative. This is very welcome. But although it highlights many issues seriously, it also currently has some limitations.

The campaign's platform recognises the fundamental right of workers to organise, and the need for collective action. There is criticism of the weakness of current US legislation which enshrines the right to organise, but then is toothless when employers refuse to allow workers to exercise that right. It notes the strength of unionised workers in raising the living standards of black people in both the public and private sectors.

Calling for tougher pro-union legislation, and the repeal of anti-union legislation, is right - but alone will not lead to a change in the situation.

The trade unions will be crucial in developing bold, campaigning organisations to bring workers of all races together to fight for rights at work, against discrimination, and against poverty pay and conditions. Especially in the US - but also in the UK - changing the rotten, pro-capitalist leadership of many of those unions, and widening union democracy, are crucial to this task.

The need to challenge the racist capitalist state will also be central to any successful programme. But simple reforms aimed at encouraging full participation in the current 'democratic' process will not lead to a fundamental shift in the balance of power from the super-rich 1% to the 99%. For that, we need to take economic power from the capitalists.

Anti-establishment

As in the 1960s, campaigns around voter registration could mobilise substantial numbers to engage. But voter dissatisfaction with both Clinton and Trump means these campaigns will have to break with establishment politics to make real headway.

The two successful Seattle City Council elections campaigns for Kshama Sawant, a member of the Socialist Party's US co-thinkers Socialist Alternative, show what achievements are possible when workers have socialist representatives to back their campaigns.

Sawant helped win a \$15 an hour minimum wage in Seattle, the first major US city to adopt it. She plays a leading role in fighting poor housing conditions and anti-working class housing regulations. These are major gains, and have helped to inspire a new generation of black and white young people into political activity.

Corbyn

Similarly, in the UK, the campaign to keep Jeremy Corbyn as leader of the Labour Party has given some political expression to the millions who want a fight against austerity. Some blacks have taken part, but many more will be wary at this stage, because of the right-wing Labour establishment blocking their participation.

Momentum, the 'official' Corbyn support group, must not fall into the traps Labour's right wing has set. Blocking forces outside the Labour Party from getting involved, and backing down to establishment Labour politicians, will blunt or blot out the mobilising effect Corbynism could have.

In the 1950s, '60s and '70s, the mass civil rights movement was initiated by trade unionists and socialists. They enlisted the services of the churches and the broader community to help organise mass campaigns throughout the US.

The leaders that came through this movement were forced to change their views - and ended by groping towards the ideas of genuine socialism. Figures like Malcolm X and Martin Luther King started their political lives with a religious fervour, but were assassinated because they took the side of the working class.

Socialism

Malcolm X said "you can't have capitalism without racism." Martin Luther King said "There must be better distribution of wealth and maybe America must move toward a democratic socialism." He was assassinated a day after marching with striking sanitation workers. The Black Panther Party correctly adopted the ideas of socialism - but unfortunately, without a thorough understanding of what it would take to achieve a socialist society.

Black youth have opened a new chapter of struggle against racism. New movements like Black Lives Matter could play a key role in bringing young people to participate in this essential struggle. The conditions they face will force them to fight to the end.

The lessons of previous movements will have to be learnt quickly. The key lesson is that the struggle to end racism is linked at every level to the struggle against the rule of an economic and political elite which relies on racism to justify exploitation and keep workers divided against each other. That means the struggle against racism must also be the struggle for a socialist society.

Read more

- Malcolm X: Autobiography £10
- The Politics of Windrush by Peter Fryer £7
- Black Jacobins by CLR James £13

All available from www.leftbooks.co.uk

RMT president Sean Hoyle speaks to the Socialist

Under attack but organising to fight back

The transport workers' union RMT has been involved in various disputes recently and played an important role in both supporting Jeremy Corbyn and the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC). RMT President Sean Hoyle spoke to the Socialist about the union's industrial fightback and political strategy.

RMT members are facing a concerted attack on their pay and conditions. How do you see the fightback?

On all fronts the RMT seems to get it in the neck!

For example in Scotland, there were plans to remove the guard with the doors being completely controlled by the drivers, so we went on strike.

Transport in Scotland is devolved so we were dealing with the Scottish Government, who had talked previously about keeping the guard. They weren't serious about keeping that commitment but, with the public behind us, our strike forced an agreement in which the driver will open the doors and the guard will close them. And new electric trains are now going to have controls for a guard put in which wasn't going to be the case before.

We had also previously had the Calmac dispute in Scotland in which we forced Nicola Sturgeon and the Scottish Government to keep it in public hands. That was quite a painful experience for the Scottish National Party and I don't think they wanted to go through it again.

What about the continued dispute on Southern?

We will not be moving from our current position that we need a second 'safety key critical' trained person on the train, so a guard or a conductor. The important thing is they need to be safety critical but Southern's idea of a second person is someone on minimum wage to clean windows, check a ticket and serve drinks at the same time.

We don't think that it is safe to have driver-only. Train drivers' union Aslef has released a statement saying the same thing. It's clear we need a safety-trained conductor on every train.

For example we recently had a medal-winning Olympian coming home from the Paralympic Games in Brazil but then couldn't get home because there was no guard to help them get on and off the train in their wheelchair. They were told they would have to give 24-hours' notice of travel. Why should people with disabilities be second class citizens? That's not acceptable.

At TUC congress this year you moved the RMT motion calling for an emergency conference to discuss resistance to the Tory Trade Union Act. The motion was passed unanimously but a conference has not yet been called. What do you think needs to happen?

In 2013 we had a motion put forward by Steve Gillan of the POA union of prison officers and allied workers, seconded by Bob Crow, at the same venue to consider a general strike and how we would implement it. The TUC responded by sending a bus around the country to gauge opinion!

Last year, previous RMT President Peter Pinkney moved a motion calling for generalised action and nothing happened. The TUC has got form on not acting to implement decisions. But if the TUC don't want to lead, the unions on the left need to do it for them.

Jeremy Corbyn has been overwhelmingly re-elected, but he still faces major opposition from the majority of Labour MPs, councillors, and from the Labour machine. What do you think is necessary to transform Labour into a 100% anti-austerity party?

We won't get a 100% anti-austerity or socialist Labour Party while the Parliamentary Labour Party is formed the way it is. The DNA of hundreds of MPs is different. They have the mindset of Blairism, the mindset of not having principles.

I can see them being welcomed back despite opposing Jeremy, which just stores up problems for the future. The Labour Party for many years has not been a party of labour, only in name.

I support deselection of those MPs who don't support Jeremy Corbyn. I think Constituency Labour Parties need to be more involved.

The Labour Party has grown to be the biggest party in Western Europe because normal working class men and women have gone to rallies, signed up to vote, joined. They've all been inspired by Jeremy's politics, but its got to be more than just a rallying cry to become just slightly left of the old Labour Party. The Labour Party needs to become a workers' party again.

Ultimately, I can only see the splits in the Labour Party leading to divorce. For example John McDonnell came out and said they won't support any councillors who back illegal budgets. We've all been calling for needs budgets. If John really says that these are illegal and won't support them then it's just continued austerity.

And if the call is to continue with austerity then we have a situation where the Tories say they cut us off around the knees with austerity and the Labour Party say they will chop us off around the ankles. Either way you can't walk!

When Bob Crow came up with the idea of TUSC it was because we wanted to take the first steps towards a new workers' party and try to get trade unions on board. We stood over 100 parliamentary candidates, which is quite formidable.

What role can TUSC play in the new situation?

The debate in TUSC now will be how we can best help Jeremy. The RMT's policy is to support Jeremy but we've also got policy that we don't support any candidate that doesn't support Jeremy, which will create problems within our parliamentary group.

We also support Caroline Lucas (Green Party MP) but Labour rules state we can't do that. So it's quite simple for the RMT, we have policy passed in July that we will support anybody that supports us, which would bar us from re-affiliating. We also reaffirmed our position in TUSC.

We have a strong position, we support Jeremy, John McDonnell and others, we were one of the biggest donors to Jeremy in his first leadership campaign. And I think any progressive left movement, whether it's a federation or not, if it brings forward socialist principles then its for the good.

Under the rise of Jeremy we have seen people inspired, some for the first time ever, people from right across society and we need to grab this opportunity to get a socialist party in power.

We are 100% behind Jeremy and John McDonnell but by keeping Hillary Benn, Tom Watson etc happy, how will we progress?

My final point is if the Labour Party carry on in the direction they are going then they can win a general election. The media say Corbyn is unelectable. Well I believe he can be prime minister but he has to stick with what has inspired people. By compromising he could lose what inspired people in the first place.

- Hear Sean Hoyle speak at Socialism 2016, 12&13 November
-

Furious Durham teaching assistants ballot for strike action

Elaine Brunskill, Northern Socialist Party

Teaching assistants (TAs) in Durham are furious at the Labour council's plans to 'chop and drop' them. If these proposals go ahead 2,700 TA's will be sacked, then rehired on 23% less pay as they will only be paid during term time.

The same council which is intent on slashing TAs wages was ridiculed by David Cameron for shamefully paying senior councillors thousands in a special clothing allowance.

Unison members, who make up the bulk of the TAs, voted to reject a compensation deal - which offers compensation for two years, instead of one. Belatedly Unison is now to launch a ballot for strike action.

The predominantly women TAs have packed out recent meetings to defend their terms and conditions. At these meetings it is clear that alongside fury at the Labour council, there is also anger at their unions who have 'dragged their feet'. TAs feel they are fighting on two fronts - against the council and their unions.

Disgracefully, no Unison or GMB officials who are overseeing this dispute attended these grassroots meetings. However, the campaign has gained the support of Jeremy Corbyn, who gave the stark warning to Durham City Council to 'get this sorted'.

The TAs under attack have laid out why they cannot accept this massive pay cut when they are already poorly paid. Already one TA has sold her home as she feared she would no longer be able to keep up her mortgage payments. Others have said if these plans go ahead they will be forced to give up the job they love and look for alternative employment.

However, it is clear the Durham TAs are prepared to fight - messages of support can be sent to: spartacusannie@gmail.com and to contribute to the Durham TAs' fund visit:

www.justgiving.com/crowdfunding/CountyDurhamTeachingAssistants

Napo conference 2016: new mood of determination

Socialist Party reporters

Probation and family court workers left Napo's annual general meeting in a significantly more buoyant mood to the one in which they arrived. Increased attendance and key debates about the strategy of the union served to energise the conference in a way that hasn't happened since probation services were part-privatised in 2014.

The central debate was over national collective bargaining in the probation service, where a number of employers are threatening to break away from national agreements.

National Vice-Chair Chas Berry said proposals to set up single employer bargaining would set a precedent making it impossible to return to a fully integrated public service. "Why are we trying to make deals with the devil", he said, "It may look tempting, but once you've sold your soul, you won't be getting it back!"

The motion committing Napo to resist any attempt by employers to break away was passed overwhelmingly and this was carried over into support for the Corbyn-led Labour Party in any campaign to reinstate probation as a national amalgamated public service.

Significantly, over 50 people attended an unofficial fringe meeting under the banner of 'Napo4Corbyn' where a new left platform within the union was established.

It seems clear the enthusiasm generated by the re-election of Jeremy Corbyn as Labour leader can be used as a powerful tool for reinvigorating our union at the grassroots.

This will be vital if we are to put flesh on the bones of the important decisions made at this conference.

Perspective

Putting things into perspective, the most vital motion passed all week was the final one brought by members in the family court section opposing the government's Children and Social Work Bill. This bill proposes to exempt local councils from their legal duties affecting social care, including child protection services.

The motion illustrates why we cannot wait until 2020 for a change of policy. Lives are quite literally at risk if we do not organise the resistance now.

28 copies of the Socialist were sold.

London Met strike against job cuts and victimisation

UCU members at London Metropolitan University took strike action on 29 September over job cuts, attacks on conditions and the victimisation of union reps. One striker told the Socialist: "We're on strike for two reasons, firstly two of our buildings have been sold and the whole of city campus has been moved, leading to redundancies and the closure of many courses. The course I teach is the only one of its kind in the world and that's now gone. Its cultural vandalism and that's unacceptable. Secondly, a further 395 redundancies have been announced as a result of restructuring the university. There has been no consultation and around half of the remaining staff are on zero-hour contracts." photo NSSN

Workplace news in brief

Virgin dispute

RMT pickets were out in force at Leeds train station on 4 October picketing all three major station entrances as part of the Virgin Trains East Coast strike. They were joined, as ever, by local Socialist Party members, assisting them in reprinting their leaflet which had been eagerly snapped up by commuters interested in finding out what the dispute was about and unsurprised at owner Richard Branson's profiteering antics.

See the report online at www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/23672

Ritzy strike again

Following the loud, bustling picket line that shut down the Ritzy cinema in Brixton at midday on 24 September, workers will walk-out again from 1pm on Friday 7 October in their dispute over pay. In 2014 the Picturehouse workers, members of Bectu, took 13 days of strike action in their fight for the London Living Wage (LLW). They won a 26% pay increase, back pay going back nearly a year and an agreement from management to implement the LLW this year. Management have reneged on this agreement in pay negotiations and the workers' minimum pay remains at £8.80 an hour - 60p short of the LLW. They balloted for action and secured a 90% yes vote - 80% of the workforce is in the union. The strike has spread to the Picturehouse cinema in Hackney where workers are balloting for action, with the result due on 6 October.

Newsquest walkout

Journalists working on newspapers owned by Newsquest in south London have voted to hold a 14-day strike starting on 6 October in response to company plans to put nearly all the newsroom staff at risk of redundancy. They want to put pressure on the company to rethink these plans and highlight concerns about health and safety at work, inadequate staffing levels, excessive workloads and deterioration in the quality of local journalism due to consecutive local cuts. The titles and websites affected include the Croydon, Epsom, Sutton, Wandsworth and Wimbledon Guardians, the Richmond & Twickenham Times, the Surrey Comet and the News Shopper in Bexley, Bromley, Greenwich and Lewisham. The two-week strike will take place from 6 October until 19 October.

Corbyn's praise for Cardiff Labour is mistaken

Ross Saunders, Socialist Party Wales

Corbyn needs allies to take on the Tories and big business, but he's making a big mistake if he thinks he can count on most Labour councillors.

At Labour Party conference he applauded Cardiff's Labour-run council for not outsourcing Cardiff Bus, the main bus company in the city.

But it was less than a year ago that members of general union Unite at Cardiff Bus were forced to engage in prolonged strike action against poverty pay. While hundreds of drivers and other workers massed on picket lines outside the depot, Labour councillor Ben Thomas called on them to stop being "greedy"!

Many cities complain about not having an integrated transport system. Cardiff Council is doing its best to rip theirs apart.

They've sold off the main bus station which is directly in front of the main train station, along with nearby land, for plush offices and the new BBC Wales headquarters. Local residents are tired of the councillors who bend over backwards for big business, but won't lift a finger to fight cuts to the services they rely on.

Just a couple of weeks before Corbyn made his speech, Cardiff's Labour council agreed to outsource its leisure services to notorious exploiter Greenwich Leisure Limited.

No doubt Corbyn sees extending the olive branch to Labour councils as necessary in order to pull the party back together. But he will have to realise he has a choice between uniting with councillors who cut and privatise services, or with the ordinary people who rely on those services and those who have fought to defend them.

Non-fiction: Health Divides

Review: where you live can kill you

Zoë Brunswick

Clare Bamba provides a good, easy-to-understand introduction to the major causes of health inequality in rich countries.

The opening chapters introduce the concept of 'health divides' - not only across regions, but often within neighbourhoods. One shocking example is Stockton-on-Tees, where life expectancy varies by 17 years between rich and poor parts of the town.

Bamba goes on to explain the multifaceted causes of health inequalities. Denouncing the claim that poor health is due to poor personal choice, she suggests instead it is a mixture of lifestyle and area that contributes to health inequalities.

Poverty is identified as one of the most pertinent determinants of health. It is strongly linked to unemployment, poor education, poor diet and lack of good housing. Bamba also explores how the rapid deindustrialisation of the north of England and parts of Scotland has led to a certain north-south divide in health.

Political choice

Using the metaphor of a river, Bamba explains that ultimately it is political choices that are the "upstream" cause of health inequality. Political choices to spend less money in working class areas have led to poor education, poor housing, unemployment and the misery and despair those things cause. All this has contributed to health-damaging behaviours such as smoking and excessive drinking.

The book concludes by discussing recommendations from past reports on health inequality, including the Black report and the Marmot report. These identified many of the health issues stemming from unemployment, poor housing and poverty - but governments ignored their recommendations.

Bamba suggests this is due to the neoliberal idea that health is an individual issue. Wider determinants of health are therefore ignored.

While the book explores in-depth the causes behind health inequalities, correctly identifying politics as the root cause, it does relatively little to explain what is needed to resolve it. For example, while commending recommendations such as "building more high quality social housing", the book does not explore in much depth why it is that these policies were not put into practice, and why such large health divides still exist today.

The recommendations in the concluding chapter could also go much further. Bamba suggests we must lobby MPs, and vote in a government that will put through better health policy.

Of course, pressuring political representatives, and campaigning for a pro-working class health policy on the electoral plane, are important parts of any health strategy. But on their own they are not enough to tackle the shocking health inequalities highlighted in the book.

To really overcome health divides, it is necessary to build a mass movement to fight against austerity and for sweeping improvements to reduce inequality. A £10 an hour minimum wage without exemptions, and living benefits for those out of work. A mass programme of public works to create jobs and services. Free education. A fully funded, publicly owned NHS. And high-quality, genuinely affordable housing for all.

Essential reforms like this will not willingly be granted by the capitalist establishment, but need to be fought for and won by the organised working class. Only then will we see a true reduction in health inequalities.

And ultimately, the only way to make such reforms permanent is to transform society. That means fighting for a publicly owned, democratically controlled economy, with a socialist plan of production to meet the needs of

all, rather than enriching a tiny minority.

- 'Health Divides: where you live can kill you' by Clare Bambra - £12.99 plus postage from Left Books - www.leftbooks.co.uk - 020 8988 8789
-

Music: Radio International (Kefaya)

Review: international jazz protest storytelling

Eleanor Donne

They say that you can tell a lot about a band by its name.

Kefaya is an Arabic word meaning 'enough'. It was the cry of the grassroots revolutionary movement in Egypt, a powerful symbol of the 2011 Arab Spring uprisings.

'Radio International' is Kefaya's first album, billed as "stories of migration, tales of musical encounters and sounds of resistance". It mixes music with snippets of spoken word as if you're tuning in to an alternative World Service.

The album features renowned artists from the traditions of Flamenco, Indian classical and Arabic music, brought together by two UK-based musicians, Giuliano Modarelli and Al MacSween. A guitarist and a pianist respectively, they founded Kefaya as an 'international music collective' in 2011.

Intifada

Their primary musical influence is jazz, and this is evident throughout the album. It's largely instrumental, using electronic rhythms and effects to evoke mood.

The musical storytelling is at its best in a piece called 'Intifada'. Reflecting the ebb and flow of the Palestinian struggle against an aggressive Israeli state, an upbeat tune on the oud, a Middle Eastern string instrument, celebrates life and culture. Distant crowds chant, sinister sounds suggest helicopters or rockets maybe, giving way to silence.

My favourite track, though, is 'Bella Ciao', an instrumental version of the Italian anti-fascist anthem from the early 1940s. Check out Kefaya playing this classic at www.tinyurl.com/KefayaBellaCiao. This is definitely one for the campfire!

'Radio International' by Kefaya will be released on 14 October 2016 - for updates see www.kefaya.co.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.

Excluded from Momentum

I'm one of those who have been excluded from membership of the Labour Party and denied a vote I paid £25 for.

I rejoined the Labour Party after years of seeing it as an anti-working class Blairite rump! Like many older workers I've been enthused by the stand made by Corbyn, McDonnell and the thousands of young workers attracted by their anti-austerity policies.

I also joined Momentum, attracted to the idea of like-minded people coming together in fraternal comradeship to fight to defend our class against the austerity policies of the Tories and the Blairites.

However, here in Southampton, it isn't like that. I've been excluded from Momentum.

They are happy for me to make donations, support their public meetings and give out leaflets in the hospital I work in. But not to be allowed to attend members' meetings.

Councillors who make cuts locally and work against local trade unionists, any Blairites who fancy attending, members of other political groups like Socialist Appeal and the Green Party, in fact anyone is allowed in - apart from those associated with the Socialist Party, currently or in the past.

I asked if I could put my case to the meeting in a democratic manner, but that wasn't allowed either. The battle ahead to reclaim the Labour Party won't be won if Momentum joins the Blairites in a witch-hunt against people like me, who support Corbyn's call to fight the cuts, and want to support anti-austerity Labour candidates fighting to defend workers against Tory attacks.

I call on all members of Momentum to allow us to work together, to make Labour democratic and socialist again!

Maggie Fricker, Southampton

Workhouse warehouse

Multimillionaire Mike Ashley's 'Victorian workhouse', the Sports Direct warehouse at Shirebrook near Mansfield, is never far from the news.

Now Dave Forsey, Sports Direct chief executive and Mike Ashley's loyal lieutenant for 32 years, has suddenly resigned. The press have speculated that this may be linked to an upcoming court hearing in connection with an alleged violation of employment law when 200 workers were fired at Sports Direct subsidiary USC in Glasgow.

It may also not be a coincidence that a woman working at Shirebrook sustained a fractured spine several weeks ago, allegedly after a steel cage fell on top of her. She had surgery and was recovering, but tragically developed a blood clot and has died.

Until this company - and every other similar employer - faces determined action by trade union-organised and backed workers, pay, conditions, and health and safety will remain Victorian.

Jon Dale, Mansfield

Blairite joins Tories

The Trade Union and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) was criticised and treated with contempt for standing Seth Cruse, a socialist and education convenor for public service union Unison, as a candidate against Claire

Jeffrey, the Labour parliamentary candidate in the Folkestone and Hythe constituency, at the last elections. She was Labour's only councillor in the constituency, and a member of general union Unite.

However, we knew that she was a Blairite red Tory, despite her protestations that she came from a working class background.

When asked whether she would oppose cuts such as the threats to close Sure Start and respite centres, her response was: "Difficult decisions will have to be made." She has now made her true position clear, and joined her friends in the Conservative Party.

She has refused to stand down as a councillor despite winning her position on the back of work done by ordinary Labour Party members. She has shown herself to be a self-serving politician using the local populist organisation "Folkestone United" as a means to bolster her reputation.

One key reason that she gives for leaving the Labour Party is the right wing's allegations of antisemitism, and incidents of abuse she says she has suffered.

If Claire Jeffrey was abused during an election, this is totally unacceptable. But it is not a reason to smear all Labour Party members and socialists as anti-Semites. In fact, we understand an alleged abuser turned out to be a Ukip supporter.

On the other hand, she argues that criticising the policies of the Israeli government equates to anti-Semitism, and berates and smears socialists and Labour Party members who raise such criticisms. To subsequently use this as a reason to join the Conservative Party - of all parties - is irrational.

Labour Party members and socialists will be meeting soon to develop a strategy to limit the damage that Jeffrey has inflicted on the local labour and trade union movement.

Eric Segal, Folkestone

Self-selecting councillors

Merton Council in south west London is nominally a Labour council.

If there is one thing the local Labour leadership is proud of, it's not fighting to protect vital services, but having frozen the council tax since 2010, and promising to freeze it until 2019.

However, the best laid plans of mice (and Labour councillors) have gone awry, and despite savage cuts already, they plan to cut a further £20 million.

To give themselves some wriggle room they have now started a consultation on whether they should increase council tax to reduce the cuts to £18 million.

This is the day-to-day experience of the Labour Party, in spite of Corbyn's anti-austerity leadership. He should use his new mandate to change the rules so council candidate selections aren't controlled by group leaders, but are democratic. This would help to clear out the Blairite cutters.

Some councils will have all-out elections in 2017. This could be the opportunity to elect some anti-austerity councillors prepared to follow the examples of Liverpool, Clay Cross and Poplar, and show what an anti-austerity government could be like.

Disgusted of Mitcham

Sheffield byelection

Further to my recent article reporting on the byelection in Mansfield Woodhouse, won by a Labour candidate, I wanted to say how this election differed from the Sheffield one with which it coincided.

Mansfield District Council Labour councillors aren't yet in a position to make cuts, as the council is led, albeit with a narrow majority, by Mansfield Independent Forum. Sheffield Labour councillors, meanwhile, are already seasoned job and service cutters.

Jeremy Corbyn's now-strengthened mandate should give him the confidence to instruct his Labour councillors to defy Tory austerity, and instead set needs budgets, while building a campaign against brutal cuts to our living standards. The people who voted for him have a right to expect this.

Liverpool councillors showed the way in the 1980s when they defied Thatcher's pernicious austerity agenda, instead building schools, homes, and other essential amenities.

Working class people cannot wait for a 2020 general election.

Karen Seymour, Mansfield

Socialist ideas - winning a new generation of students

Campaigning in the new term at colleges and universities has generated renewed interest in Socialist Students. As the following brief reports show, many students who have signed up at freshers fairs have been exposed to socialist ideas through the Corbyn Labour leadership campaign, as well as being motivated to fight the government's austerity attacks.

Join the socialists! - De Montfort University, Leicester

Socialist Students held a stall at De Montfort University on activities day, with the aim of establishing a new society. However, not being an official society as yet, it was only a matter of minutes before the overzealous campus security asked us to relocate to across the road from the main event. Despite this we attracted plenty of attention with our 'Join the socialists!' sign.

We sold 14 Megaphone magazines, several copies of the Socialist, and 44 people signed up to join the society. We will be holding our first meeting on 'What next for Jeremy Corbyn?' and discussing plans for campaigning on campus.

Caroline Vincent

Swansea: 'Most engaging political group'

Swansea Socialist Students had a fantastic freshers intervention this year, taking part in three days of stalls and meetings across both campuses.

It was remarked that we were the most dynamic and engaging political group by far. This paid off as we had a large number of sign ups throughout the week and two well attended meetings with fresh faces, excited to enter the struggle and fight back.

Gareth Bromhall

Goldsmiths - A message for the Blairites

Socialist Students is looking to set up a new society at Goldsmiths University in south London. We collected more than enough names on the first day of the fair.

We got the news of Corbyn's victory while on the freshers stall, and one of the student union officers jumped up to announce the win to a cheer. There was a combative mood among students we discussed with over the weekend. The most common message from students was for Labour MPs that refuse to support Corbyn - "there is a party for them. It's called the Conservatives"!

Sixty join cards at Pompey

Two productive days campaigning at Portsmouth University freshers fair resulted in 60 students signing up to Socialist Students.

Our first meeting on 22 September was a general discussion about political developments post Brexit, especially the government's new attacks on students in the Higher Education bill. After this it was decided to do a 'free education' campaign stall.

Our successful first meeting will be followed by a meeting on 'Socialism in the 21st Century'.

Nick, Portsmouth

Herts Uni: Ideas to change the world

Hertfordshire Socialist Students ran a successful freshers fair stall at the University of Hertfordshire, collecting many names of students hungry to learn about our campaign to scrap tuition fees and reinstate grants - campaigns popularised by the election of Jeremy Corbyn. Many students also signed up wanting to know what socialism is and how it can transform society.

Richard Shattock, Hatfield Socialist Party

Leeds Beckett - Wide-ranging discussions

We attended both the Headingley and City Campus freshers fairs and had a good level of interest. We were asked a lot of questions. Some students just wanted a basic definition of socialism, some wanted to talk about current political topics such as Corbyn or the US elections, and others were already active and just wanted to sign straight up.

There was definitely a lot of interest around Jeremy Corbyn, the Labour leadership election, and issues such as tuition fees.

I spoke to a number of students who had developed an interest in politics after seeing Jeremy Corbyn on TV and social media.

Jenny Skinner, Leeds Beckett Socialist Students

University of the Arts London - Democratising Labour

We were back at the loud and colourful UAL freshers fair this year. Socialist Students was set up last year and news of this had obviously spread; people had seen or heard about us and wanted to sign up.

The fair was on the day after Tom Watson's speech attacking Corbyn and praising Blair and Brown's 'achievements' at Labour Party conference. This angered many students who we discussed with. None of them could understand why anyone would be proud of Blair and his policies of waging wars and introducing tuition fees.

The left student union is building for the 19 November joint demo of the National Union of Students and University and College lecturers Union.

Labour Students and Momentum campaigners were keen to organise a joint event to discuss the developments in the Labour Party and the idea of deselection of right-wing MPs who oppose Corbyn and the wishes of ordinary party members.

Building in Bradford

Seven Socialist Party members in Bradford were out campaigning among new college and university students about scrapping tuition fees and fighting the Tories. As a result, several young people were interested in attending our next branch meeting and gave us their contact details.

Matthew Hirst, Bradford Socialist Party

Thousands march in Birmingham against tory conference

Thousands took to the streets of Birmingham on 2 October to 'take back Brum' and demonstrate against Tory party conference starting in the city the same day.

The march kicked off with a rally during which Socialist Party activist and Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS) Vice-President John McNally addressed the crowd bringing support for Jeremy Corbyn and saying: "Let's get this clear, it is not bullying and it is not intimidation to call for mandatory re-selection of MPs. That is nothing more than a basic democratic demand.

"Being an MP is not a career for life, and those who say they want to represent the Labour movement should be accountable to the Labour movement. And just imagine if those MPs fought the Tories with the same determination that they are fighting Jeremy and John McDonnell."

Lively

On the protest itself, a very loud and lively Socialist Students contingent demanded an end to tuition fees, which could be raised even higher by new legislation being brought in by the Conservative government.

A Socialist Party public meeting took place at the end of the demonstration and was attended by around 50 people, many at their first meeting. The discussion ranged from Tory attacks and their effects in the workplace and in society to the battle in the Labour Party and what Jeremy Corbyn needs to do to defeat the Blairites and build a 100% anti-austerity party to take on the Tories.

Protests against children's centre closures in Bolton

Becci Heagney

A series of protests have been taking place outside children's centres in Bolton, 13 of which are threatened with closure by the Labour-controlled council.

The campaign has been set up by the Bolton Trades Council and involves the Socialist Party, parents, Momentum and other activists. Bolton council has over £200 million in reserves and the planned closures of these centres will only save £1.5 million!

Support

We support the call of the campaign for the council to use reserves to keep them open.

The protest in Little Lever was joined by the ward's three Ukip councillors. Ukip have gained support in working class areas that feel betrayed by the Labour Party over the last few years. They are opportunistically supporting the campaign and are moving a motion at council to reverse the cuts.

But in other areas, Ukip are supporting or making cuts themselves. It highlights the need for a battle in the Labour Party to say to councillors, fight or stand aside!

The anti-austerity politics of Jeremy Corbyn now need to be fought for at every level of the Labour Party to put an end to cuts.

Why I joined the Socialist Party: "My only regret is I didn't do it years ago"

Eileen Welland, Staines

I'm a new Socialist Party member at the grand old age of 67. I was a member of local government union Unison for years as an activist and branch secretary.

Each time I went to conference I heard motions put forward by Socialist Party members that resounded with my views. But I was 'guided' by those more experienced and in a higher position than me away from the Socialist Party.

But after my retirement and not feeling pressured by the union staff, I had contact on Facebook with Socialist Party member and Unison activist Paul Couchman. I enjoyed seeing his posts.

I signed up to the Socialist Party email list and when Jeremy Corbyn was elected Labour Party leader again I contacted Paul to ask if I could go to a Socialist Party meeting.

I want to be active in helping Jeremy Corbyn get the Labour Party back to what the Labour Party was initially started for. To support the workers and the vulnerable, to ensure policies are formulated for the greater good and not the privileged few.

Get active

I attended the meeting and I felt in the company of like-minded people.

Paul gave me a load of information together with a membership form. I read the booklets and decided I wanted to be involved rather than just sit on the side lines so called him and met him four days later with my membership form.

If you can relate to what the Socialist Party stands for - fairness, equality and socialism - then contact us and have a discussion. If you don't, you will never know.

I may be an old joiner but my only regret is I didn't do it years ago.

Fighting fund record smashed again!

Ken Douglas, Socialist Party national treasurer

Socialist Party members raised a magnificent £30,772 between July and September, breaking the record for this period of the year. The quarterly fighting fund target had been increased to £30,000 at the beginning of July, a challenging total but one that we were determined to reach.

Liverpool branch raised the highest total of £2,677 followed by Wirral, two of the four branches that raised over £1,000, from a combination of campaigning stalls, asking supporters for a donation to help our work and fundraising.

The Socialist Party has no rich backers, the fighting fund is vital to help maintain our profile and ensure our ideas and analysis reach as wide an audience as possible.

Resolute

Our members were resolute that nothing would stop them from hitting the new target and came up with many and varied ways to supplement the day-to-day campaigning stalls, including running marathons, giving up chocolate, car boot sales, curry nights, baking birthday cakes and selling plants at local festivals.

At the same time the weekly sales of the Socialist also hit a five-year high. There were big sales at Jeremy Corbyn's election rallies, as those attending agreed with our demand to kick out the Blairites and let socialists join, and on hundreds of local protests and demonstrations.

First time readers of the Socialist also took advantage of the new direct debit facility on our website (www.socialistparty.org.uk/subscribe) to make sure that they get their copy every week.

Trevor Hall, a new member in Cornwall, guaranteed that his branch smashed its fighting fund and paper targets, by taking the Socialist on tour and selling in towns around the county and finding new audiences for socialist ideas.

Could you, like Trevor, become a seller of the Socialist? You don't have to be a member, contact us to arrange a supply of papers on a sale or return basis. Or can you help by raising funds for us or making a one-off or regular donation to the fighting fund?

Leeds: Solidarity demo with Irish abortion fight

Socialists in Leeds called on the Irish government to repeal the 8th Amendment to the Irish Constitution at a city centre solidarity protest on 27 September.

The amendment bans abortions and is the focus of a campaign by Rosa (for Reproductive rights against Oppression, Sexism and Austerity) a campaigning group set up by Socialist Party members in Ireland.

Protest organiser Amy Cousens spoke about the injustice of this sexist policy, giving examples of women who had suffered greatly as a result. Maddy Steeds, equality and diversity officer at Leeds Beckett student union and Tannis Belsham-Wray, a Socialist Party member, also made speeches about the need to fight for the abolition of the 8th Amendment. They explained how cuts to social and welfare budgets are further punishing women.

Iain Dalton, West Yorkshire organiser for the Socialist Party, concluded the protest with a speech further emphasising the links between oppression in society and austerity which is perpetuating inequality. He went on to discuss recent attempts by the Irish government to introduce water charges as an example of the wealthy few forcing the poorer majority to pay for their mistakes through crippling austerity measures.

Yorkshire socialists stand with Rosa and Irish women to repeal the 8th Amendment and allow women to take back control of their reproductive rights.

Heidi Scarce, Leeds Socialist Students

London: Socialism Today milestone celebration

West London Socialist Party members hosted a successful '200th edition' celebration of the party's magazine Socialism Today on 14 September.

Addressing the gathering, editor Lynn Walsh stressed its importance in providing a thorough Marxist analysis of events and a guide to action for the workers movement, and the struggle for socialism.

Lynn's speech was made just a few hours after Jeremy Corbyn's re-election as leader of the Labour Party. Forthcoming issues would show what was needed now to develop Labour as an inclusive, democratic, and campaigning socialist organisation.

A woman living in Streatham, originally from Serbia, attended because it was the only event advertised on the internet that that was going to discuss Corbyn's election.

Also, Socialist Party finance organiser Naomi Byron explained the importance of fundraising, which the party relies on. She concluded with a financial appeal which raised £116. This was doubled by the coins collected by Sharon Dixon from her sales of the Socialist.

Several people joined the Socialist Party.

Keith Dickinson

Worcester: Public meeting discusses Corbyn

If Labour split, can Corbyn win? This is what Worcestershire Socialist Party members discussed at our well attended public meeting on 29 September. Our guest speaker was Dave Nellist, former Labour MP and Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) councillor in Coventry.

Dave pointed out that Corbyn received 313,209 votes in his second Labour leadership victory, which begs the question, what would the numbers have been without the exclusions of members and union affiliates etc?

Dave argued that the attacks by the Blairites are far from over. He also touched on how TUSC and the trade unions can play a role in Labour's structure. In the discussion, views were raised ranging from the closing of various local services, the lack of council housing, a federal Labour structure and also how will the Socialist Party fit in with Labour with Corbyn as leader.

Calvin Fowler, Worcestershire Socialist Party

Poland: Fighting back against anti-abortion law

Socialist Alternative (CWI, Poland) reporters

A mass movement is developing in Poland against the Law and Justice-led government's reactionary bill which bans abortions. This has included demonstrations of hundreds of thousands and a women's strike on 3 October.

The restrictive existing law means that an estimated 150,000 women each year are forced to risk illegal abortions. The new law championed by right-wing prime minister Beata Szydło will jail women for up to five years for terminating a pregnancy, regardless of the reason.

The current anti-abortion law was introduced in 1993 in the early years of the restoration of capitalism in Poland under intense pressure from the Catholic Church, which was seen as a key pillar of support for the establishment of capitalism and the resulting rampant neoliberalism.

At that time about 70% of society was against the introduction of the abortion ban and supported the existing law, which allowed access to abortion "for social reasons".

Nevertheless, the ban was forced through, along with the introduction of religion in schools and the signing of the Concordat, which gave huge material privileges to the Church.

Socialist Alternative has consistently campaigned for women's right to choose and against the new law. More generally it has linked the fight for women's rights to a struggle against the governing right-wing coalition: to end poverty, defend workers' rights and the exploitative system of capitalism.

It calls for:

- Legal, safe and free abortion on demand
 - Free and reliable high-quality healthcare
 - Universal access to free contraception
 - No place for religion in schools - compulsory sex education
-

Ireland: repeal the 8th Amendment!

Ruth Coppinger, Anti Austerity Alliance TD (MP) and Socialist Party (CWI, Ireland) member, gave a widely publicised speech in the Irish parliament on a woman's right to choose. This follows a recent historic mass demonstration in favour of abortion rights. Ruth demanded a referendum to repeal the eighth amendment to the Irish constitution which prohibits women's abortion rights.

See video of Ruth's speech on www.socialistworld.net

Joint declaration by Izquierda Revolucionaria and the CWI

Following extensive discussions on the international situation and developments in Spain and Britain, a joint declaration was agreed between the CWI and Izquierda Revolucionaria (Revolutionary Left - a Marxist organisation with presence in the Spanish state, Mexico and Venezuela, also known by the name of its newspaper, El Militante).

The degree of agreement which exists between both organisations means there is sufficient basis to proceed to work towards a wider and deeper collaboration on a principled political basis. To further this process a series of exchanges, visits and interchange of material was agreed, to be organised in the coming months.

See statement on www.socialistworld.net
