

Editorial of the Socialist, issue 1012

Labour conference shows: Blairites must be ousted

Build a mass movement for socialist change

Ten pounds an hour minimum wage. Workers' rights from day one of employment. The end of zero-hour contracts. An end to council cuts. Thirty hours free childcare. Water, rail, mail and energy brought into public ownership. An end to the "racket" of privatisation and outsourcing. Pledges on climate change including investment in 400,000 green jobs.

We have to be clear, if the popular policies put forward at Labour Party conference are to be enacted, it will entail struggle. With British capitalism facing further economic crisis, even minor reforms will be met with resistance by the bosses.

A Corbyn government would be under immense pressure from the capitalists and their representatives in the Labour Party. The Blairites must be ousted. And we have to fight to build a mass movement, not just to defeat the Tories, but to win a socialist programme that takes the major companies into democratic public ownership and institutes a socialist plan to serve the needs of the millions not the billionaires.

General election

Undoubtedly there was plenty in the announcements at Labour Party conference reaffirming the pledges in [Labour's 2017 general election manifesto](#) to please many workers and young people. The call was made for a general election, and if he fights on a bold programme incorporating these pledges then a Corbyn-led Labour government could be on the cards.

But the question we posed in [the Socialist's editorial last week](#) still stands: after the Labour Party conference, is it equipped to lead the fight against austerity?

While Jeremy Corbyn delivered what many members say was his best speech yet, unfortunately the whole tenor of the speech was about unity and compromise with the Labour Party right wing.

"If we are to get the chance to put those values into practice in government we are going to need unity to do it. We are on a journey together and can only complete it together... Labour is a broad church and can be broader still."

Corbyn's unexpected [victory in the leadership election in 2015](#) opened up the possibility of undoing the Blairite transformation of the Labour Party into a pro-capitalist party safe for big business. It became two parties in one, with the majority of new members supporting an anti-austerity position, representing the potential for a new mass socialist party, but with the vast majority of MPs and councillors - the Blairite representatives of capitalist interests - still in place, setting out to either oust Jeremy Corbyn or undermine him at every turn.

Most recently this has meant a relentless campaign of [accusations of racism and antisemitism](#). Over the summer there was open talk of the right wing splitting away to form a new party, particularly around the idea of a 'people's vote' to re-run the EU referendum.

The view of those around Corbyn and McDonnell is that in order to win government power they have to prevent a right wing split away. And in the run-up to conference, the mood music appeared to point in the direction of the right wing deciding to stay in the party for now.

Deputy leader Tom Watson was praised in gushing terms in the right-wing Evening Standard for saying "centrists need to stay to make Jeremy Corbyn a better prime minister". At a right-wing Progress fringe event Blairite MP Stella Creasy declared: "if you're here to tell me that because of this mess we should give up, walk away from Labour, well then jog on..."

But it would be an enormous mistake to think that this indicates an acceptance of Corbyn's anti-austerity position, or that emollient words will bring their unremitting attacks to an end. The right are weighing up how best to prevent a Corbyn government carrying out policies that challenge the interests of capitalism, which includes making judgements about how much support they currently have. They weigh up whether to split away or try to remove Corbyn as leader, whether to act before or after a general election, or whether to employ the 'anaconda' policy Watson boasted of in 2015, to encircle Corbyn to prevent socialist policies being enacted.

Brexit

The capitalists, including the Blairites, would rather the Tories stayed in power. But the Tories are in such a desperate state over Brexit, especially since the rejection of May's Chequers proposals by EU leaders in Salzburg, that a section of the capitalists are drawing the conclusion that a Corbyn government could be tolerated - if it were severely restrained.

The tone of unity and compromise with the right set at the conference is music to their ears. The Guardian newspaper warmly approved of a move from last year's "policies of the past" to "radical forward thinking". Paul Mason said on Newsnight following Corbyn's speech, "the Labour Party has had two years of moving left, and at this conference it stopped moving left".

In an echo of Ed Miliband's 'responsible capitalism', and with Blairite columnist Polly Toynbee nodding along approvingly, Mason drew a distinction between companies like Uber and Amazon "that exploit their workers and destroy social cohesion", and companies like Airbus and BMW (currently threatening to remove jobs from the country) that "do deals with their workers and respect their employees".

John McDonnell made the same point in his speech to conference: "There are millions of businesses out there which deserve our respect and we will always support them. They are responsible, ethical entrepreneurs, who pay their taxes and support our community."

McDonnell proposed "large companies to transfer shares into an Inclusive Ownership Fund. The shares will be held and managed collectively by the workers. The shareholding will give workers the same rights as other shareholders to have a say over the direction of their company. And dividend payments will be made directly to the workers from the fund. Payments could be up to £500 a year."

Far from the workers' ownership, control and management that democratic socialist nationalisation would entail, in reality this is window dressing, leaving the capitalist owners with the upper hand and bolstering the idea of a unity of interests between workers and the bosses. No wonder Corbyn could declare "this is nothing for business to be afraid of". In fact, socialism was only mentioned once in his speech, in relation to the NHS.

Hence a relatively warm response from Martin Kettle in the Guardian: "Labour's many factions, interest groups and traditions are... mostly managing to work together in a surprisingly pragmatic way." "If the party of today was the fully-Corbynised body that some claim, there would be little room or appetite in it for the habits of pragmatism, compromise or experimentation. Yet there is still that appetite."

That 'appetite' was also shown in the Brexit debate. Corbyn made the case for a "Brexit for the many not the few" and called for a general election to achieve it. But Blairite Brexit secretary Keir Starmer said Remain could be an option in a referendum. Unite's Steve Turner, recognising that millions of workers would feel betrayed by such a development, argued that "despite what Keir Starmer might have said earlier, it's a public vote on the terms of our departure".

The Socialist has explained previously that the only answer to the chaos of a Tory-led Brexit, in which more attacks will rain down on the working class, is to [fight for a pro-worker, anti-austerity, socialist, internationalist Brexit](#). Only this, which would entail many of the policies Corbyn and McDonnell outlined

last week, can answer both the genuine concerns of workers who voted Leave and the concerns of young people who see themselves as remainers from an internationalist point of view.

The compromises made in the democracy review (see '[Fight for a democratic, socialist Labour Party](#)') should be seen in this light. Instead of bringing in democratic mandatory reselection for MP candidates, which would allow Blairites to be deselected, a watered-down version of the current trigger ballot system has been put in place - still an extra hurdle to get over before a democratic selection can take place.

Any hope that this compromise would quieten Blairite MPs, some of whom are facing no confidence votes from their members, was immediately shown to be misplaced. Ilford North MP Mike Gapes, who previously claimed to be agonising every day over whether to leave Labour and described it as a "horrible place to be", immediately leapt into the press to complain of a purge.

Unfortunately, despite [Unite having a policy of supporting mandatory reselection](#), of the trade unions, only the FBU spoke up to support a debate on it. Momentum spokespeople dishonestly went to the press to say the democracy review outcome "falls well short... key proposals were watered down or blocked". But until the eleventh hour they actively opposed the Socialist Party when we argued for mandatory reselection and, in fact, their representatives on Labour's national executive committee were party to [the compromise](#).

There can be no shortcuts. To fight the Blairites and for a socialist alternative to austerity requires action and organisation by the working class.

Socialist Party campaigns against the Blairites at Labour conference

Dave Walsh, Liverpool and District Socialist Party

With Labour Party conference in Liverpool from 23-26 September Socialist Party members have been busy. We sold around 150 copies of the Socialist paper at and around the conference and distributed about 1,000 leaflets. We got a very friendly response from the majority of delegates.

On the first morning of conference the front page headline "[Blairites Must Go](#)" found an echo with many delegates. Clearly, the great majority of constituency delegates and a lot of union delegates want the democratic right to freely choose their parliamentary candidates.

It was clear that the Socialist Party was a significant part of the discussion around the conference. [Dawn Butler's opening speech](#) to the women's conference on Saturday referenced Militant, the Socialist Party's predecessor, and MP Laura Smith's speech raised the need for a general strike, echoing a demand the Socialist Party has raised

The Socialist Party's regional secretary in the North West, Hugh Caffrey, was interviewed by BBC journalist Nick Robinson who asked him "who are the Blairites?" Hugh responded that left delegates knew the answer to that question, and that [democratic mandatory reselection of MPs](#) would allow them to kick the Blairites from their power base in the parliamentary Labour Party.

On Sunday evening a number of us attended a 'Labour against the Witch Hunt' meeting. Tony Mulhearn, a Socialist Party member and one of the heroic 'Liverpool 47' - the councillors who defied Thatcher in the 1980s - was among the speakers. Tony drew a link between the Labour right's [witch hunt against Militant supporters in the 1980s](#) and the attacks led by the Blairites on Corbyn supporters today.

On Tuesday evening, the Socialist Party held a public meeting. The discussion was 'who were Militant and why were they expelled?' It was well-attended, including by a number of delegates from Labour Party conference.

Zombie Tory government: general election now

Tom Baldwin, Socialist Party national committee

Tory conference was a picture of a party in crisis. Rows and rows of empty seats highlighted the dire state of what was once the most successful capitalist party in the world.

They are deeply divided. Their leader, Theresa May, is [under attack from all sides](#), and runs a government that is almost completely paralysed.

Chancellor Philip Hammond launched a limp rallying cry for the party to "regenerate capitalism." He rightly recognised that ordinary people don't feel the system works for us.

But capitalism is based on exploiting workers' efforts, in order to make profits for the bosses. It can only ever work for a tiny minority.

The Tories have no solutions to the many problems that capitalism creates. In fact their austerity drive has made things worse.

No significant new policies have come through the conference; not that this divided minority government has been able to put forward an agenda anyway.

The transport secretary, Chris Grayling, who has overseen [disastrous changes to rail timetables](#), even arrived seven minutes late for his own speech.

Warfare

So far, the threat of a Jeremy Corbyn-led government has meant the Tory factions' open warfare hasn't resulted in a leadership challenge against May. However, she is pinned down by continual sniping from both sides of the Brexit divide.

Prominent Tory Remainer Dominic Grieve has said he'd be willing to bring down the Tory government in favour of a cross-party one if it meant ending Brexit.

On the other side, Boris Johnson has called the [prime minister's 'Chequers deal' proposal](#) for Brexit "deranged." He is looking to build popularity with what passes for the Tory grassroots in order to further his leadership ambitions.

The Brexit deal is supposed to be sorted by November. But the Tories are incapable of even agreeing with themselves, let alone EU negotiators. Tensions and disagreements are rising between EU leaders as well. And any proposals the Tories or EU do put forward will be to benefit bosses, not workers.

We desperately need to get rid of them. A new general election would be a real 'people's vote'. That would allow us to change not just the nature of Brexit - so that it defends workers' interests - but the direction of the whole country.

We can't guarantee that even this zombie government will simply collapse. All those suffering from Tory austerity need to act together to force them out.

[Coordinated strikes](#) in catering and the gig economy, and big votes for action in other unions, [show the huge potential](#) that Corbyn and union leaders should have tapped into long ago.

The Socialist Party agrees with Labour MP Laura Smith's call for unions to organise coordinated strike action to bring down this cruel and callous government.

Blood transfusion scandal: put the profit system in the dock

Jon Dale, secretary, Unite EM/NG32 Nottinghamshire Health branch

Over 25,000 people have been infected with contaminated blood products the NHS bought from profit-making pharmaceutical companies. Nearly 3,000 have died so far.

That's the background to the Infected Blood Inquiry, which has only now started after 30 years of hard campaigning by victims and their families.

As recently as April 2017 the Tory public health minister resisted an inquiry. The Tories' weak position since the general election made them back down.

From the late 1960s people lacking blood-clotting factors (haemophiliacs) could be treated with plasma products made from up to 60,000 blood donations. But if one donor carried a blood virus a whole batch could be contaminated.

Donors need to be healthy, especially if viruses can't be tested for. The Blood Transfusion Service has always used screened volunteer donors, paid with nothing more than tea and biscuits.

In the US commercial blood banks used paid donors - except in prisons where donors got five days off their sentence for each pint of blood.

Homeless or under-nourished people, alcoholics and drug users are high-risk for carrying blood-borne viruses.

In the 1970s the Blood Transfusion Service had insufficient laboratory capacity to meet demand for plasma products.

Labour's right-wing minister of health, David Owen (who later split to form the Social Democratic Party), pledged £500,000 in 1975 (£4 million today) to increase capacity. However, the plan was never carried out. Imports from the US continued to grow.

1976 was when [the Labour government caved into International Monetary Fund demands](#) for public spending cuts. Were haemophiliacs infected by Hepatitis C and HIV after 1976 the casualties of those spending cuts?

A big US drug company was Cutter (now part of German giant, Bayer). Heat treatment to kill viruses was introduced in 1983.

Cutter continued selling untreated products for months to use up old stock and because it was cheaper to produce.

In 1983 Thatcher's Tory government was warned by the head of the Communicable Diseases Surveillance Centre: "All blood products made from blood donated in the US after 1978 should be withdrawn from use until the risk of Aids transmission by these products has been clarified." Health minister Ken Clarke ignored this.

'Blameless'

Apparently government papers from the time have been 'lost'. But it has emerged that in 1987 secretary of state John Moore issued a memo to the Tory cabinet on how to get the Thatcher government off the hook.

He proposed a £10 million "once-and-for-all payment" to victims, to be administered by the Haemophilia Society. "(This) is particularly attractive," he wrote, "as it minimises government intervention; and it would be consistent with the policy of not accepting any direct responsibility for damage caused in this way."

The Con-Dem coalition government [privatised British plasma products capacity](#) in 2013. Bain Capital, a US corporation, bought 80% for £230 million. It sold it in 2016 to a Chinese investment group for £820 million!

To uncover the full facts, an inquiry of patients, their families, health workers and trade unions is needed with powers to see all government and drug company papers.

Those who put profits first, refused to finance the services needed and tried to cover their tracks must be exposed. The system they defend stands guilty and must compensate those who suffered.

The [pharmaceutical industry needs to be nationalised](#) under democratic workers' control, and to be run as a public service, integrated into the NHS and good public health systems throughout the world.

"It is 6am and the temperature is near freezing. The plasma centre does not open until 7.30, but the queue of donors starts to form well before then.

"Many of these men are out of work. Plasma centres are booming because of the current recession...

"If you're broke and you've got no place to stay that's the first place you go to," said a donor. "Otherwise a guy doesn't know what to do. You've got to look for a blood bank."

1975 ITV documentary filmed in Baltimore, USA.

Shocking new data on declining life expectancy: paying the price of austerity

Lynda McEwan, Socialist Party Scotland

Life expectancy has stalled in England. However, for the first time in 35 years, babies born in Scotland and Wales will live shorter lives.

New data released by the National Records of Scotland and the Office for National Statistics this month show the savage effects of austerity - especially cuts to health and social care - on life expectancy for people living in Britain.

In Scotland, males born in 2015-2017 can expect to live until 77.02 years compared to 77.07 years in 2014-16. For females, it fell from 81.15 to 81.09 years.

The figures are the worst in the UK. The last time a fall occurred was 1983, when Thatcher was in power.

It's no coincidence that the Tories have governed over this fall in life expectancy, but the Scottish National Party (SNP) must share part of the blame for passing on Tory budget cuts.

Brutal cuts

[Ten years after the capitalist global financial crash](#) and the bailing out of the banks and the super-rich with public money, austerity inflicted on the majority has meant that the brutal attacks on the welfare system, the worst in history, are impacting the health of some of the most vulnerable members of society.

The bedroom tax, severe benefit sanctions and flawed fit for work assessments, the discriminatory 'two-child' benefits policy, and the disastrous introduction of universal credit, among other welfare cutbacks, have combined to produce a population struggling to cope and paying the price.

In West Dunbartonshire, where women die five years younger than their counterparts in more affluent East Dunbartonshire, the SNP-led administration is destroying the area with the removal of the local hospital's

breast screening service, the social work department, the One Stop Shop (a frontline service used mostly by the elderly) and the proposed closure of some of the much used community centres.

In a country as wealthy as the UK, and with all the recent advances in technology and medicine, these statistics prove what a disaster austerity has been.

Cuts to services, wages, housing, and so on, are literally killing us off early. Only a socialist transformation of society can secure the social and economic conditions necessary for all working class people to enjoy longer and healthier life spans.

NHS pay discrimination - militant union action can achieve fair pay for all

Len Hockey, Unite Barts NHS Trust branch secretary (personal capacity)

The recent report on the pay gap between black and white NHS medical workers also highlighted the appalling disparity when it came to pay across all NHS occupational groups.

The importance and urgency for the organised workers' movement developing effective strategies to win on pay, is underscored by this.

Especially in light of the divisive political agenda of the right and far-right in Britain and throughout Europe.

There have been some useful lessons, showing the possibilities for overcoming these obstacles when a fighting lead is provided to health workers.

One example was the [struggle last summer by the Bart's trust health workers](#). Then, 700 ancillary workers employed by Serco in four east London hospitals took 24 days of strike action in pursuit of a pay rise and against precarious working and for permanent jobs.

This strike by Unite union members, the biggest involving NHS ancillary workers outside of a national dispute, was led by militant, overwhelmingly women migrant workers, with Socialist Party members in the branch playing a leading role.

The roots of the dispute lay in the industrial action experience of Whipps Cross Hospital workers whose successful action of earlier years, uniting experience in the mainly white porters with the newly organised African domestic workers, demonstrated in action a formidable, implacable resolve to win.

From a starting point of not being organised, to electing combative shop stewards and then going on to deliver successful industrial action, this became the template for the bigger Bart's strike of 2017.

The final outcome of this particular struggle delivered increases in pay, albeit short of the workers' full demands, and included the ending of 'bank' (zero-hour) contracts.

More importantly, it provided the enduring legacy of organised union structures where previously there had been none.

The important lesson of this campaign in the context of today's developing movements against austerity and the divisive anti-migrant, anti-union messages pushed by the mainstream capitalist media, is that unity of black and white workers in action can lead to concrete gains.

In so doing it begins to drain the swamp of capitalist poverty and hopelessness that racism needs to thrive.

Maximus profitus

In 2012, Socialist Party members were involved in the [strikes by Remploy workers](#) against the Tory coalition government's closure and redundancy programme.

Remploy specialised in employing and finding work for disabled people but was targeted by successive governments for austerity cuts.

In 2008, Brown's Labour government axed 2,000 jobs and 29 factories. The remaining factories were closed in 2013 and the residual company sold to US corporation Maximus in 2015 for an undisclosed sum at the time.

Recently, it has been revealed that this sale was for a knockdown £2 million. But Maximus made profits of £7.1 million from "lossmaking" Remploy in 2016-17, with a dividend payout to shareholders of £2 million over the past two years, according to the Sunday Times. While extracting this profit, a further 100 employees were made redundant.

Maximus also has a finger in the pie of processing [work capability assessments](#) for disabled claimants of Employment and Support Allowance and Personal Independence Payments.

These notoriously biased tests were so flawed and the results to claimants so cruel, that even the Commons work and pensions committee called for the assessment process to be brought back into the public sector.

In the meantime, Maximus continues to cream in the profits - which doubled in 2017 to £26 million.

Tory Brexit Blues festival

Ok, so your libraries are being closed, along with your sure start centre... you're being asked to fund pupils' activity because of your local school's budget shortfall... the nearby hospital A&E is threatened with closure due to cuts...

Relax. The Tories are planning a 'Festival of Brexit Britain' in 2022, costing a mere £120 million.

If Maybot remains at the helm, it could be a dystopian version of the 1951 Festival of Britain, featuring Lancaster aircraft carpet-bombing the country's infrastructure and a medieval castle with the drawbridge closed to EU workers. Can't wait!

Catering and courier workers strike together

A Wetherspoon worker

Food and hospitality workers across the country are [striking together on 4 October](#) in the fight for union recognition and decent pay. The joint strike includes workers at McDonald's, Wetherspoon, TGI Fridays and Uber Eats couriers.

I work for the pub chain Wetherspoon where it's possible to work 6am-3pm one day and 3pm-12am the next - with only sporadic days off.

The fear of the first strike in the history of Wetherspoon has forced management to bring forward a raise.

From 5 November, the company is implementing a wage increase which will be significant for large numbers of staff. Under-18s are receiving a 50p pay rise, 18 to 20-year-olds get £1.85 extra, managers have two and

half hours less to work with no change in salary, and there is a £1 premium when working between 12am and 6am.

So is it good news for workers? Partially, in the way that a plaster on a wound would be good news. The pay rise that is being given now means that no pay rise will be given in April - as is usually the case. Furthermore, a great deal of staff are ex-students with loans and overdrafts to pay off. When this is compounded with the exuberant rent charged in cities, as well as the irregular hours - it's nowhere near enough.

Two pubs in Brighton will strike demanding a £10 an hour minimum wage, equal pay regardless of age, and recognition for the bakers' union BFAWU.

Joining them are [TGI Fridays staff](#) in Unite the Union in Milton Keynes, Covent Garden and east London, who are striking over low pay and not receiving their tips. [McDonald's workers](#), also in BFAWU, are striking in Brixton, Crayford, Cambridge and Watford, demanding elimination of zero-hour contracts, and £10 an hour. And [couriers at Uber Eats](#) and Deliveroo are joining the action in a UK-wide strike called by the IWW union, supported by the IWGB and GMB unions.

Low-paid and gig economy workers are organising ourselves and fighting for our own interests. And this will only be the beginning. The previous rounds of McDonald's strikes began as a spark which rapidly spread, leading to a wage increase.

The mere mention of strike action has now caused Wetherspoon management to rapidly offer an (inadequate) pay rise. If we fight we can win!

- See '[Coordinated catering and courier strikes prove potential for mass union mobilisation](#)'

Coordinated catering and courier strikes prove potential for mass union mobilisation

Strike together to bring down the Tories!

Rob Williams, Socialist Party industrial organiser

[Coordinated strikes on Thursday 4 October](#) mark a massive step up in the battle to unionise workers in fast food and hospitality.

Britain's contribution to the latest global [day of action is a joint strike](#) by members of bakers' union BFAWU and general union Unite at McDonald's, Wetherspoon and TGI Fridays. They will also be joined by couriers at Uber Eats and other gig economy companies in the IWW, IWGB and GMB unions .

This is the biggest show of strength by precarious workers in this country to date, and their message is the same: we are workers, and we deserve to be treated properly.

It is already giving other workers the confidence to fight. On 30 September, workers in the Ivy House pub in south London walked out in solidarity with their workmates who have been sacked. They are all fighting for a minimum wage of £10 an hour with no age exemptions.

In London, the wage recognised as the bare minimum needed to live is actually now £10.20 an hour. Yet the government's national minimum wage is £7.83 if you're over 25, £5.90 if you're 18 to 20 - or as little as £3.70 for apprentices!

This is nowhere near enough to survive at a time when inflation is nearly 4%. No wonder many workers need two or three jobs to get by.

But life is great if you're part of the super-rich. The richest eight people in the world have the same wealth as the poorest 3.6 billion!

This is the reality of capitalism - a system controlled by big businesses to maximise their profits at workers' expense. Workers do all the work that makes this money - profit is the unpaid labour of workers, spirited away by the corporations.

McDonald's workers know full well that they are only paid a fraction of the value of the meals they produce and serve up.

The Socialist Party stands for socialism: a society where the main levers of the economy are nationalised under democratic workers' control and management, so that production is democratically planned in the interests of the majority of people. This is the only way that workers can be guaranteed a real living wage, decent jobs and affordable housing.

Striking workers are also demanding an end to zero-hour contracts - tying workers to the job, or their mobile phone, but only getting paid when it suits the boss. The employers call it 'flexible' - but it enshrines insecurity for their benefit, not ours.

Gig economy

The gig economy is a further step back to Victorian times. But the [Uber Eats couriers](#), like those at [Deliveroo previously](#), have showed that super-exploited workers are up for the fight - blockading the company to demand that their already-too-low rates aren't cut further.

These strikes show that these workers, often young and in many cases migrant, understand that being organised in a union is the best way to protect yourself from the bosses' attacks and fight for decent wages and conditions.

These developments recall when unions first became mass organisations over a hundred years ago. Then, as now, if a fighting lead is given, workers can flood into the unions.

But the unions can give an even bigger lead right now, with the Tories weak and divided. They should take action together on all the issues that face workers: pay, pensions, privatisation and austerity.

They could mobilise the union movement - still potentially the most powerful force in society at six million members - to demand a general election to force the Tories out.

The potential is clear in the many strikes that are taking place every week. University workers are [balloting nationally on pay](#), and school workers are consulting over action too. The RMT union is into its third year of action to [keep guards on trains](#).

Prison officers walked out two weeks ago against the cuts. Even [head teachers demonstrated on 28 October over the school funding crisis](#). We must bring all these fights together.

A general election would give us the opportunity to get rid of the Tories and elect a Labour government led by Jeremy Corbyn. His [manifesto in last year's snap election](#) gave a glimpse of a future worth fighting for - £10 an hour, abolishing tuition fees and renationalising privatised companies.

The capitalist establishment and big business, the Tories and their Blairite agents in Labour, are all concerned that a Corbyn government could open up workers' horizons, pushing it further to the left.

But workers need to be mobilised - both to fight for an anti-austerity government, and to face down the inevitable resistance from the bosses. Join us in that fight.

York NHS workers strike against privatisation

Iain Dalton, North Yorkshire Socialist Party organiser

Around 80 Unite the Union pickets made their voices heard on the first day of [strike action against York Teaching Hospital NHS Foundation Trust](#) transferring cleaners, caterers, domestics, estates and other ancillary staff into a 'wholly owned subsidiary' - a step towards privatisation.

The two-day action on 27-28 September was determined, with many workers outraged that yet again in the NHS it was the lowest paid who were being forced to bear the burden of Tory cuts.

Socialist Party members have been at the forefront of the campaign in the city against these proposals, establishing a broader campaign against them, and gathering thousands of petition signatures against the proposals.

Speakers

On the picket line, Unite shop steward and Socialist Party member Mal Richardson introduced a strike rally with speakers including local Labour MP Rachel Maskell, Unite reps, local campaigners and a speaker from the National Shop Stewards Network, which Unite has recently affiliated to.

Workers are determined to take further strike action if necessary to reverse this decision and stay "100% NHS".

The best way to force a change is escalating the action, as has been demonstrated by successful strikes against wholly owned subsidiaries in Wigan as well as the threat of strike action by public service union [Unison in Mid Yorkshire Trust and Tees](#), Esk and Wear Valley Trust, with the latter two led by Socialist Party members.

Tube workers walk out

London Underground workers on the Piccadilly Line took strike action from 26 to 29 September. Striker Gary Harboard, an RMT transport workers' union rep in the Piccadilly and District Line West branch, spoke to the Socialist on the picket line.

What is the strike about?

It's about agreements that we've had in place for years - 20 or 30 years - that management are not abiding by. It's about agreements over attendance and trade union release that management on the Piccadilly Line seem to think they can rip up overnight.

Management is telling the media that the RMT has no reason to take action, what is your response?

The quote from management was "we don't understand what your issues are" but these issues have been going on for the last 18 months. Eight weeks ago we were given a guarantee that management would abide by the policies and procedures in place and, within a matter of two weeks, they were ripped up.

There comes a time when we have got say to the membership that there is no other option but to take strike action. Out of the 71% of members who voted in the strike ballot, 95% voted to walk out.

The turnout shows the strength of feeling in the depot. Many of the drivers are new and this is the first time they have taken action. The strike is absolutely solid. Not one train on the Piccadilly Line has run.

RMT members are on strike on the Piccadilly Line but also on other fronts, particularly over driver-only operation, showing the RMT is at the forefront of taking action.

Yes, and it's primarily led by the members. We're telling the leadership that we're not prepared to put up with the conditions that bosses are trying to impose on us and we're in it for the long haul - as the [long-running strike on Southern Rail](#) shows. If bosses want a battle on London Underground they will have one.

1,000 head teachers march on parliament to demand better funding for schools

Glenn Kelly, Socialist Party industrial department

A thousand head teachers marched on Downing Street on 28 September demanding the Tory government give them the money they need to stop the [onslaught on jobs, pay and funding](#) that is destroying our children's education.

Despite this, many of the head teachers felt, that the demo was "not political" - a line they had clearly been given in advance by the organisers. This was no doubt in the vain hope they can plead to the 'better nature' of the Tories. In some areas Tory councillors themselves are demanding more funding for schools.

The reality is that teachers are not allowed to take time off in the school term unless they are granted 'special leave'. This was effectively unofficial strike action sanctioned by the governing bodies.

The make-up of the demonstration was unusual. As one journalist said to me: "It isn't your usual crowd, is it?" It's true this was certainly no dress-down Friday. There were more suits on show than a Savile Row shopfront window. As it turns out, the heads were told to dress 'respectfully'.

The union presence at the demo was very low-key, mainly because their union, the National Association of Head Teachers, had only tail-ended this upsurge from below. The protest was called by the grassroots campaign 'WorthLess' that started in Tory areas such as West Sussex on the basis that the inner cities were getting more funding per child than their areas.

But this has now evolved into a wider call for decent funding for all. The campaign is demanding an 8% increase in schools funding.

Despite all the talk of it being 'non-political', the fact that 1,000 head teachers took this action shows the level of anger and desperation that exists in the schools.

If, as is rumoured, that the largest teaching union - the National Education Union - calls a national consultative strike ballot over school funding, and not just the pay claim, then they should also put the call out to the head teachers' unions and all the support staff unions to join with them.

Head teachers are starting to take up the methods of struggle of the workers' movement. Marches like this could be demanding the end of the Tory government in the future. As one head whispered to me as she marched past me holding the Socialist newspaper: "I am really glad you're here".

Camden - Unison members in pay fight

Unison members in Camden, north London are on strike on 2 October against parking contractor NSL, fighting for an £11.15-an-hour wage. Strikers are determined to win their claim against an employer who collected £26 million last year, of which it pocketed £2 million in profit. Unison Camden and Unison executive committee member Hugo Pierre brought solidarity from the Socialist Party. Search 'Camden Unison' on Facebook for more details and show your support!

Is this generation socialist?

Ideas to change the world

Hannah Sell, Socialist Party deputy general secretary

"We can't expect young people to be automatically sympathetic to capitalism" when they can't afford to buy a house, declared leading Tory Boris Johnson recently.

He could have added when going to university means being crippled by debt, and there is little chance of well-paid, secure work.

Boris Johnson is not unique. His comments reflect the growing fears of the capitalist elite that young people are looking for an alternative to their system.

Last year, young people queued around the block to [vote for Jeremy Corbyn](#) in the snap general election.

This year, hundreds of thousands of them took part in the [massive weekday anti-Trump protest](#).

Blackout

Despite the capitalist media largely refusing to mention socialism - unless it is to attack it in frenzied terms - growing numbers of young people are starting to investigate socialist ideas.

After Novara Media editor Ash Sarkar, under attack from right-wing presenter Piers Morgan, hit back by saying, "I'm literally a communist you idiot", the clip was viewed over 800,000 times on YouTube alone.

It is the crisis of capitalism, and its increased inability to offer young people a fulfilling future, that is driving the search for an alternative.

To have grown up in the last ten years is to have grown up during the longest squeeze on wages in a century.

Your only experience of public services is to have watched them being closed or cut to the bone in the name of austerity. Affordable secure housing seems a utopian dream.

Meanwhile a tiny minority at the top of society have seen their wealth increase astronomically. Of the global wealth generated in 2017, 82% went to the wealthiest 1%. And the majority of that went to the 'elite of the elite' - the 0.1%.

To give one example, Amazon founder Jeff Bezos saw his wealth rise by £4.3 billion in the first ten days of 2018.

These 'masters of the universe' own unimaginable wealth for presiding over a system that is no longer capable of taking society forward.

In the course of its existence, capitalism has transformed the planet. Driven by the blind need to increase profits rather than production for social need, it has always been based on the exploitation of the working class along with a careless disregard for the damage it has done to our environment.

Nonetheless, in its heyday the capitalist class ploughed a considerable section of its profits back into developing the means of production: science, technique, industry and the organisation of labour.

Therefore socialists recognised that it was relatively progressive because, despite its horrors, it was creating the basis for socialism.

In addition the working class majority, by creating powerful mass organisations, was able to win a few crumbs from the rich table of capitalism.

Those crumbs - including a [comprehensive NHS free at the point of use](#) - are now under threat as the increasingly parasitic capitalist class increases its profits via the relentless driving down of the wages and conditions of working class people and the destruction of public services.

This does not mean we are powerless to fight back. On the contrary, the working class is potentially a very powerful force - a majority in a country like Britain - that, if it acts collectively, can defeat the attacks it faces and win concessions. Twenty-first century capitalism, however, means we are under constant attack.

At the same time, the capitalists' levels of investment are at historic lows, as their lack of confidence in their own system leads them to sit on their piles of cash rather than use them to develop industry.

None of the factors which led to the [2008 Great Recession](#) has been overcome. On the contrary, a new phase of economic crisis is being prepared.

No wonder young people faced with such a diseased system are starting to look for an alternative. For decades, politics in Westminster has been completely dominated by pro-capitalist parties.

The result is that, for many, Jeremy Corbyn's election as Labour leader has been a revelation.

For the first time in their lives a major party is led by a politician who puts forward policies for the many, not the few.

Instead of supporting privatisation, austerity and war, he is arguing for free education, rent controls, mass council housebuilding and some nationalisation of privatised utilities.

For putting forward this modest programme, Corbyn has been under relentless attack from the right-wing press, the Tory party, the Confederation of British Industry, and the pro-capitalist wing of his own party. Yet this is nothing compared to what a Jeremy Corbyn-led government would face.

It is absolutely clear that the capitalist elite would not sit back and passively allow Jeremy Corbyn to implement a policy which redistributed wealth from them to the majority! On the contrary, [they would do all they could to sabotage his government](#) and prevent it implementing a radical programme.

That is raising the questions in the minds of young people who are looking to socialist ideas. How is it possible to create a society that offers us a decent future? How can we harness the enormous wealth created by capitalism to meet the needs of all?

Discussion on university campuses about concepts like "fully automated luxury communism" reflects the huge contradiction between the enormous wealth, science and technology created by capitalism and its inability to meet people's needs.

Robotics is used not to cut working hours for all, with no loss of pay, but to [throw workers onto the scrap heap](#).

Digital technology is used to send us back to the Victorian era with zero-hour workers waiting for their app to tell them if they have a few hours' work - no different to their great-grandparents queuing on the docks in the hope of being picked for a few hours' work.

This is no surprise. Capitalism, as [Marx explained over 150 years ago](#), is based on exploitation, with profits stemming from the unpaid labour of the working class.

New technology will never result in it evolving into a fair system. Only by taking the major corporations and banks which dominate the economy into democratic public ownership would it be possible to harness the new technology capitalism has created to meet peoples' needs.

On that basis, however, it would be possible to begin to develop a democratic, socialist planned economy by immediately massively expanding public services, and provide high-quality, well-paid work for all with a maximum working week of 35 hours, or even less.

A Jeremy Corbyn-led government would be under huge pressure to capitulate to the demands of the capitalist class, [as the left-led Syriza government in Greece did](#). However, this does not mean it would be powerless.

On the contrary, if it mobilised the working class in support of a socialist programme which took power from the tiny capitalist elite, it would really be able to begin to build a society for the many, not the few.

The socialism we are fighting for bears no resemblance to the old dictatorial regimes of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, which were dominated by a privileged caste of bureaucrats.

However, the nationalised planned economy they presided over did play a progressive role until it was strangled by their bureaucratic mismanagement.

We stand for international socialism, based on a huge expansion of democracy, with mass participation in the control and running of industry and society.

Any government carrying out such a policy would need to have an international perspective, collaborating with the workers' movement in other countries to develop socialist planning at an international level.

In a globalised world, the enormous similarities between the struggles facing the working class in different countries mean that such a government would have a very immediate and widespread resonance.

A socialist government in any country of Europe that acted to break with capitalism would immediately receive enormous support from workers across the continent, above all in those hardest hit by austerity.

USA: crisis follows Supreme Court justice nomination

Build a mass movement to stop the Republicans

Thousands of people demonstrated outside a US Senate committee hearing against the appointment of Donald Trump's Supreme Court nominee, Brett Kavanaugh.

Opponents of Kavanaugh say he is unfit to serve as a Supreme Court judge because of allegations that he sexually assaulted women in the 1980s.

While the committee narrowly approved his appointment, Kavanaugh will now be investigated by the FBI before a full vote in the Senate.

Republicans are desperate to get him appointed before November's mid-term elections, which could see them lose control of the Senate.

Erin Brightwell of Socialist Alternative (the US co-thinkers of the Socialist Party) filed this report ahead of the Senate committee's vote. Here, we carry edited extracts.

The nomination of Brett Kavanaugh to the Supreme Court, appearing only days ago to be a virtual lock, is now hanging by a thread.

If Kavanaugh is forced to withdraw, it will be due to the mass anger at widespread sexual abuse within society, and not due to the so-called resistance of the Democratic Party establishment.

It also reflects disgust at his bullying demeanour, which leant further weight to the charges he faces.

Kavanaugh, having amassed a thoroughly reactionary anti-woman, anti-worker, and pro-corporation record as a judge on the District of Columbia Court of Appeals, was already the most unpopular Supreme Court nominee since Robert Bork in 1987. Then Blasey Ford's allegation of sexual assault was made public.

Now Christina Blasey Ford, Deborah Ramirez, and Julie Swetnick are enduring an unimaginably stressful and traumatic episode as nationally known victims and survivors of sexual assault.

Kavanaugh should, in any case, have been challenged on the basis of his right-wing politics and, in particular, the threat he posed to *Roe v Wade* (the pro-abortion rights ruling), which is supported by 64% of Americans according to a July 2018 Gallup poll.

But the Democrats' 'resistance' to Kavanaugh was limited to questioning in the Senate judiciary hearings, most notably by California Senator Kamala Harris.

The entire episode demonstrates the weakness of the Democratic Party. Now, presumably, their spines have been stiffened by the righteous anger of millions of people who cannot tolerate the casual acceptance of sexual assault among the ruling class.

Reactionary politics

Even before Kavanaugh's alleged history of sexual assault was revealed, he was a serious threat to women's rights.

Kavanaugh's hostility to abortion rights was illustrated by his dissent in the DC Court of Appeals decision to allow a pregnant 17-year-old immigrant to have an abortion while she was being held in a private detention centre.

Kavanaugh agreed that the young woman had a right to an abortion, but suggested a legal solution that would have forced her to wait until she was more than 20 weeks pregnant, the absolute limit for abortions in Texas where she was being held.

Trump nominated Kavanaugh at least in part because he is seen as strongly anti-abortion, a position demanded by the highly organised Christian Right who bolster Trump's base.

Kavanaugh's confirmation would be a clear threat to women's bodily autonomy and, while women's groups organised direct actions during Kavanaugh's Senate confirmation hearings, a broader fight against the nominee was possible even before the sexual assault allegations came to light.

The Kavanaugh nomination should be ringing alarm bells not just for women. He infamously wrote a dissent of the DC court's decision to uphold an Occupational Safety and Health Administration fine after Seaworld trainer Dawn Brancheau was killed by an Orca whale during a show, arguing that animal training was similar to professional sports and inherently risky - therefore the employer should have no responsibility for the safety of its trainers.

There are scores of cases in which Kavanaugh ruled against government regulations, including many that protected the environment. Kavanaugh is a model judge for big business and a serious threat to working people.

Between pressure from the right-wing base to get another conservative justice on the court before the midterms, when the Senate could swing to the Democrats, and the concern that even more allegations may surface against Kavanaugh, the Republicans are calculating how fast they can push the nomination through and are willing to brand themselves as the 'party of predator enablers' in the process.

At this point, with the massive anger at Kavanaugh's nomination going forward despite the allegations against him, no Democratic Senator could possibly vote to confirm him without committing political suicide.

We should remember, however, that prior to Christine Blasey Ford coming forward, Kavanaugh's confirmation seemed all but assured.

The Democratic Party leadership refused to enforce a party line vote on Kavanaugh because they felt that a vote against Kavanaugh could hurt the mid-term chances of Democratic Senators in states Trump won.

Women held protests across the country on 24 September and over 100 were arrested doing direct action at Senate offices in Washington DC.

But larger and more militant mass actions that shake the political establishment to its foundations could kill the Kavanaugh nomination once and for all.

From the Women's Marches to the teachers' strikes to the McDonald's women's strikes against sexual harassment, women have shown they are ready to move into action, including against sexual abuse.

Increasingly, there is a contradiction developing between the willingness of working class people to fight back against anti-abortion misogynists like Brett Kavanaugh and the Democratic Party establishment which does virtually nothing to organise a real resistance movement in the streets and workplaces.

The truth is that the Democratic Party fears the activism of working class people. Cancelling Kavanaugh is one thing, but the Democrats worry that once women, young people, and working people experience a big victory through protest, they will demand more changes that may not be acceptable to the party's billionaire backers.

Left party

This whole awful situation speaks volumes about why we need an independent left party in this country with a pro-working class programme which could mobilise people not just in the voting booths but in the streets against Trump and the reactionary agenda of the right.

However, currently, there is understandably a massive desire on the left to punish the Republicans in the mid-terms by electing Democrats.

Furthermore, with a number of candidates running and winning on a programme similar to that of Bernie Sanders, a new progressive current in the Democratic Party is emerging.

Among these successful progressive candidates in Democratic primaries are a number running as socialists and members of Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), most notably Alexandria Ocasio Cortez .

While Socialist Alternative's position is that socialists should build a party independent of the Democrats and big business, the DSA should test the limits of the Democratic Party on a concrete issue such as Brett Kavanaugh.

Mass movement

The DSA now has 50,000 members nationwide. It should join with its allies in the labour movement, as well as other left groups, to organise urgent protests, walkouts, and direct actions against Kavanaugh all across the country in the coming days, with a broad call to all those who want to defend Roe v Wade and fight against sexual assault.

Republican leaders appear to be prepared to push as hard as is necessary to get Kavanaugh onto the Supreme Court, while the Democrats are now forced to fully oppose Kavanaugh.

Unfortunately, the Democrats' opposition will, in all likelihood, be limited to the Senate hearing itself, not drawing on the enormous potential power of the new movement that is building steam.

With the Democratic Party so far refusing to organise mass protests against Kavanaugh, it is up to the unions, the women's organisations and other groups on the left, including the DSA, to bring Kavanaugh down once and for all, in the event that the weight of the multiple sexual assault accusations against him isn't enough on its own.

More broadly, this issue highlights the role of the Senate and the Supreme Court in blocking the will of the people.

It raises for discussion in the US the need to sweep aside all undemocratic obstacles to realising the will of the majority.

Indonesia tsunami - a disaster compounded by capitalism

Across the planet, ordinary people are feeling shock and profound sadness at the devastating loss of life in Indonesia from the tsunami.

But this horrific catastrophe also poses urgent questions over the failure of the Indonesian authorities to warn the population, and not to have a disaster relief plan in place.

21 tsunami-detecting buoys, donated to Indonesia a decade ago, were either not functioning or had been stolen.

A prototype sea-floor warning system hadn't been deployed because the government wouldn't pay for it.

A tsunami warning was issued by the country's meteorological and geophysics agency but withdrawn. Moreover, it completely underestimated the size of the waves.

Some survivors say they did not receive text message tsunami alerts because the phone network was not maintained.

How is it that the money can't be found for these essential safety measures when the rich in the cities live a life of luxury?

Locally, angry demonstrations have been taking place blaming the government for total incompetence in neglect of people's needs - and, as in the past, these can have big political repercussions.

Survivors will also want assurance that international relief funds and resources go straight to where they are needed.

Past [experience warns us](#) that unscrupulous politicians, officials and businesses can exploit tragedies like this to line their pockets.

If the system can't afford to look after people, then the people can't afford the system. Public ownership of big business, and democratic, socialist planning of the wealth society produces, could easily pay for proper safety and communications infrastructure - rather than more 'tax holidays' for multinational corporations.

And survivors and workers in Indonesia should have democratic control over the allocation of resources in the relief effort, and in the development of society as a whole.

Enthusiasm for Socialist ideas at the freshers fairs

Socialist Students societies have been taking part in this year's freshers fairs - meeting students eager to get involved in campaigning and political discussion. These reports, written by Socialist Students members from several campuses, highlight the enthusiasm for socialist ideas and campaigning that we encountered. Get involved, socialiststudents.org.uk

King's College London

KCL Socialist Students distributed flyers to incoming students. More than 50 stopped to sign up, keen to learn more about socialism and Marxism. In terms of campaigning, besides building the fight for free education, we were also supporting the KCL cleaners' now victorious campaign for their jobs to be brought back in-house.

Berkay Kartav, KCL Socialist Students

Nottingham

We ended up with a stall next to the Conservative Students group. Considering that the first text that caught the eye on our leaflet was "Tories Out", it was a humorous juxtaposition. It made it very clear that more students were interested in left-wing ideas than in what the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats had to offer!

Ernst Shafer, Nottingham Socialist Students

Swansea

As well as interest in socialist ideas, there was a definite mood of frustration among students we spoke to - frustration with the Tories and Brexit, frustration with Corbyn and his inaction on tackling the Blairites, and frustration at the capitalist system that has given us Trump, May and their cronies. We sold nine copies of the Socialist Students magazine, Megaphone, signed up 90 interested students, and hosted a well-attended meeting at the end of the second day.

Gareth Bromhall, Swansea Socialist Students

Leicester

Students were eager to sign our petition and have discussions on topics like Brexit, Corbyn and tuition fees. Next, we are organising a meeting on 'socialist ideas and the Labour Party' where we will explore the lessons that can be learnt from the struggle of the Militant-led Liverpool City Council for the fight against Tory austerity today.

Franklin O'Riordan, Leicester Socialist Students

Derby

At Derby we were campaigning to kick out the Tories and demand a general election. The response was great with many students agreeing that change is needed now. Lots supported the idea that we need to end Tory austerity and privatisation, and that young people have an important part to play in the fight for a Corbyn-led government with socialist policies.

Lily Branchett, Derby Socialist Party

Lincoln

At Lincoln freshers fair we were successful in attracting members for our newly affiliated 'official' students union society. We were placed next to the feminist society stall and noticed a trend.

Despite the odd student who would go to their stall but not ours (or vice versa) it was often the case that students went to both stalls or neither. I am sure the reason is obvious to the readership!

The "Tories Out!" sign on our table grabbed attention and showed the desire for a general election as soon as possible. 16 students attended our first meeting discussing 'What is Socialism?'

Tom Vale, Lincoln Socialist Students

Tyneside

We've spoken to hundreds of college and university students across the north east. Our stalls have attracted lots of attention, most importantly from students who liked our message of, "Tories out now! Fight for free education!"

But, alongside the positive response we have had to contend with management and campus security attempting to chase us off - even though we weren't on their premises! At Northumbria a security guard warned us that if we didn't move (from the public footpath) the police would be called and I would end up in a police cell!

But the harassment from these educational establishments gave us a certain amount of street cred. Students were impressed that we stood our ground.

Elaine Brunskill, Newcastle Socialist Party

Reading

One person we met was Judy, a law and human rights student from Kenya: "My brother said it would be different here, so I was shocked to see people sleeping in the streets." We discussed the crisis in Kenya and the role of imperialist powers like China, the US and Britain.

Judy's enthusiasm grew as we outlined our socialist answers to these problems and she asked to join the Socialist Party and agreed to help us start a Socialist Students society at Reading University.

Reading Socialist Party

Liverpool

Over 100 students signed up for membership at Liverpool freshers fair. There was a very positive response to our society. Some of the good responses included students coming up to the stall and saying that they were looking specifically for it and some students saying that they had read up on the activities of the society already ahead of the fair.

Michael Hollinshead, Liverpool Socialist Students

Sheffield

300 students signed up to Socialist Students at the University of Sheffield and 80 at Sheffield Hallam. There was a general appetite for socialist ideas. We got 36 to our first meeting. We took ten new members to protest at the Tory Party conference.

Leeds

We signed up 119 interested students at Leeds freshers fair. This was reflected in the positive turnout for our first meeting of the new semester, with over 20 students in attendance.

I spoke to several of our new members after the meeting and felt an instant connection amongst the group. I believe that this passion and eagerness to get involved will lead to a year of successful campaigning from the Socialist Students branch at the university.

Morgan King, Leeds Socialist Students

'Tories must go' demonstration in Birmingham

Sana Ulfat, Birmingham Socialist Party

On the eve of the Tory party conference in Birmingham, people gathered in Victoria Square to protest Tory and Blairite austerity, say enough is enough, and demand an urgent snap election.

It is no secret that this Tory government is no friend of the working class. They have done nothing but focus on the interests of the ruling class, recklessly implementing austerity measures at the expense of working class people. Today, a sad consequence is workers such as nurses have to resort to using food banks.

A defiant rally included Birmingham home care striker and Unison public sector union member Mandy Buckley, secretary of the West Midlands Fire Brigades Union Andrew Scattergood, and a statement on behalf of Jeremy Corbyn.

Frustration was evident. It is about time that the Tories are held to account for their actions alongside the Blairite councillors who impose cuts on their behalf.

Birmingham [home care workers are on strike](#) against a Blairite Birmingham City Council which is attacking their working conditions. They led the successful, lengthy and noisy demonstration on the streets of Birmingham. The general public were met with chants of "when they say cut back, we say fight back" and "students and workers, unite and fight".

Response

Socialist Party members worked tirelessly so we could get the best possible response to our ideas. We pushed for an end to public sector cuts and the need for a snap election, stressing the importance of coordinated and organised mass action to force the already unstable and divided Tories from power.

We sold over 100 copies of the Socialist, raised over £50 for the fighting fund and met people who wanted to join the Socialist Party throughout the day. Well done to all involved! This is just the start of the fightback, not the end.

Big business calls the tune: anti-fracking protesters jailed

Three anti-fracking activists became the first environmental protesters to be imprisoned since 1932. Then, Lancashire Ramblers carried out a mass trespass on Kinder Scout in the Derbyshire Peak District.

The three - Simon Blevins, Richard Roberts and Rich Loizou - were jailed for taking part in a lorry protest lasting nearly 100 hours outside Cuadrilla's shale gas site.

The prosecutor claimed that the protest caused traffic disruption, inconvenience to businesses and additional costs. Under capitalism, big business calls the tune and the government and the judiciary usually dance to it.

The [High Court injunctions used against anti-fracking protesters](#) could well be used by other capitalist companies seeking to prevent peaceful protest.

John Sibbald, Wakefield and Pontefract Socialist Party

Save Wirral NHS walk-in centres

Only months since Eastham NHS walk-in centre was restored to full opening hours after the tremendous successful local campaign against the previous threat to close it, five centres across the Wirral face closure under new plans.

The cutters in Wirral are using very similar language to their equivalents in Sheffield, who proposed similar attacks but who have [just been defeated by a local campaign](#). Even the ridiculous pretext that shutting the walk-ins is to stop people getting confused, is identical to the cuts proposals in Sheffield. This is clearly a coordinated plan.

We're turning over our Socialist Party branch meeting on 4 October to a public discussion on how to save the walk-in centres, come along and take part.

- How can we save Wirral's walk-in centres? Thursday 4 October, 7.30-9pm, Stork Hotel, 41 Price Street, Birkenhead, CH41 6JN.

Hugh Caffrey, North West Socialist Party secretary

More party than protest, but great response to socialist ideas at Leicester Pride

With over 10,000 attendees including 3,000 people in the parade, Leicester Pride was the largest the city has seen.

Although the atmosphere was definitely more in line with a party than a protest, people liked the Socialist Party's message that [we need socialist change to truly win liberation](#).

Groups of more than five had to register with the organisers. This is unlikely to affect corporate delegations.

Large rainbow flags with corporate logos were visible all around. But such tactics might be used to keep organisations like us out, to further depoliticise pride.

We asked a Tory councillor during the march about his own party deporting LGBT+ people back to countries where people are killed for being gay. He said: "I've never thought about it like that."

We also [campaigned for trans rights](#) and the ability to self-identify your gender. Many people were enthusiastic to sign our petition.

We gave out 200 leaflets advertising a public meeting on the fight for trans rights and against austerity. We raised £68 for the fighting fund and sold 18 copies of the Socialist.

Jade Ritchie, Leicester East Socialist Party

Theatre: The Ragged-Trousered Philanthropists

Interview: one-man show's new take on lively socialist classic

Socialist theatre company Townsend Productions is about to tour a brand new version of The Ragged-Trousered Philanthropists. The Socialist spoke to Socialist Party member Neil Gore, who adapted and performs in the working class classic.

For people who've never come across The Ragged-Trousered Philanthropists: how would you describe it?

It's a classic story. [It is the working class novel.](#)

It's the one that everybody turns to, because it encapsulates all the problems of capitalism. It presents them in a way which paints a wonderful picture of society - not just house painters in Edwardian England, but of all society under capitalism.

And it goes a long way to suggesting solutions as well. It opens up opportunities for debate and discussion.

What [author Robert] Tressell manages to do is to capture working class life with really well-drawn, truthful characters. You're left with a very sharp impression of what life was like.

That's the strength of the book. It's heart-rending. It's a devastating read on many levels.

With the play, we aim to entertain. And the book helps with that, with brilliant descriptions of daily life - and how the population of the time enjoyed themselves. So we have included many of the songs that are in the book, many of them music hall songs - and we hope to encourage some audience participation.

And this is a fresh version?

We're currently in the process of putting together a new adaptation of The Ragged-Trousered Philanthropists. But this time it's for one actor.

Yes, [we saw your earlier production](#), when it was a two-hander.

Haha! Now we've got even less! But to do that we've had to re-look at it. It's been good from that point of view, because it means you go back to the book and completely reappraise it and readapt it.

So you still get all the major events of the book, all those wonderful moments that were in the two-person show - you get the Great Money Trick, the breakfast scene, the beano outing and so on.

The Great Money Trick is a classic demonstration. What is it trying to explain?

I can only quote Frank Owen, the socialist workman in the book. He says it's the means by which those in power exploit the workers - it's the device by which capitalists, who are too lazy to work for a living, rob the workers of the fruits of our labour, how they hide it.

He argues that money is the main cause of poverty! It's capital, of course. Pay low wages, charge high rates for the necessities of life, keep people needing to work to earn, get people in debt. They've got mortgages, credit card bills - then you can control people.

What's new in this adaptation?

It reintroduces the character of Barrington, for instance, the mysterious labourer who doesn't speak to anybody. And it turns out he's from quite a wealthy background, seeking a political career.

He really takes up the baton from Frank Owen in the book. Owen's brand of socialism is like that of Tressell: connected to the traditions of the Social Democratic Federation, with people like William Morris.

Barrington represents [the new, proactive politics of the time, through the Independent Labour Party](#) (ILP).

There's some tensions within that relationship which we explore, but our aim is to ask questions of our audience and leave them with plenty to talk about.

We also get better insight into Hunter, the foreman. He's twisted and battered by the pressures of capitalism, the pressures of trying to make enough profit for the boss so that he can earn his own small percentage cut.

He's on the verge of suicide from the start. You could say he's as much a victim of the system as the blokes he bullies in the workplace.

You mentioned the ILP - is political organising a theme?

Frank Owen tries to introduce his fellow workers to the possibilities of other ways of living, and how they can be achieved. We see it through the Great Money Trick and Barrington's Great Oration.

In our version, we see Barrington becoming a leader of the emerging Labour Party. It's about 1910. So he's stood in front of the banner for the ILP. The main issue is about socialism being the alternative.

And there are characters in it we can recognise today.

Oh, people on insecure contracts, greedy bosses, corrupt councillors, hypocritical religious leaders. All of that! [The book is so relevant](#), it always is.

It's something I've always come back to because it's vital, important work. If we can get this into schools, if we can get young people to see it - theatre's a really good accessible means to reach new audiences. It's live, it's immediate, so it's got impact.

It might just spark an interest. Then they can look at the book or the politics of the book. So that's part of what we aim to do.

The Ragged-Trousered Philanthropists

- For updates visit townsendproductions.org.uk

Dates confirmed so far...

September

29: The Place Theatre, Bedford

October

3-5: The Lantern Theatre, Sheffield
6: Marsden Mechanics, Huddersfield
7: Leicester Adult Education Centre
11-12: The Sandon, Liverpool
17: Chilwell Arts Centre, Beeston, Nottingham
18-19: Seven Arts, Chapel Allerton, Leeds
20: The Ropery Hall, Ropewalk, Barton-On-Humber
23: Seven Theatre, Shrewsbury
24-27: Tara Arts, Earlsfield, London
30: The Wedgewood Rooms, Portsmouth

November

1: Rondo Theatre, Bath
2: Luton Library Theatre
3: Mumford Theatre and Ruskin Gallery, Anglia Ruskin University, Cambridge
7: Marx Memorial Library, London
8: Ruskin College, Oxford
9-10: Working Class Movement Library, Salford
13: Clydebanks Town Hall
14: Newcastle Trades Council, Wallsend Memorial Hall and People's Centre
15: Unite the Union, John Smith House, Glasgow
16: North Edinburgh Arts
17: Chaplaincy Centre, University of Dundee
23: The Seagull Theatre, Lowestoft
28: The Plough Arts Centre, Tavistock
29-30: Broadmayne Dorchester

December

2: Shipton Gorge, Bridport

The Socialist Inbox

Letters to the Socialist's editors.

Do you have something to say?

Send your news, views and criticism in not more than 150 words to editors@socialistparty.org.uk, or if you're not online, to Socialist Postbox, PO Box 24697, London E11 1YD.

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.

Tory nationalisation lies

Whenever there is talk of renationalising privatised utilities, the usual mantra emanates from the Tories and their press. It will take too long, be too costly. Let's look at this a little closer.

In 1970, Ted Heath's Tory government nationalised Rolls-Royce to prevent its collapse. All within 24 hours. Not too long there, then. Nor seemingly too costly.

In 2008, to prevent the collapse of the banking system, the Blairites part-nationalised the banks. Again, as above. Once the taxpayer had bailed them out, they were promptly privatised again.

Strange how quickly utilities can be privatised. What they don't tell us is that with [genuine socialist nationalisation](#), compensation would be based on proven need. Not a penny for the fat cat multimillionaires.

The wealth from democratic, socialist public ownership would be for the benefit of society as a whole, and would be planned from the base up.

Unlike previous nationalisations, which were bureaucratic and top-down, based on the profit and loss mentality. With, of course, those at the top taking the lion's share.

I urge people not to listen to Tory lies.

Bill Buchanan, Nottingham

Crypto-Trotskyist crossword

On Tuesday 25 September, an answer in the Blairite-supporting Guardian's cryptic crossword was 'Trotskyists'. The next day, one answer was 'Trotsky'! Perhaps the Guardian's crossword compilers are rebelling against the paper's editorial line?

Of course, you won't necessarily come 'across' the real ideas of Leon Trotsky in the Guardian. It will be 'down' to the Socialist to provide the explanation of his ideas and method today.

Kevin Parslow, Leyton, east London

Pensioners need homes

"All I want is a room somewhere, far away from the cold night air..." When Audrey Hepburn first sang this in 1956, it did seem as though this was what we were all going to get.

Is there a 'home, sweet home' for everyone, young and old, in 2018? No! "Must do better, much better," according to the 'Home Sweet Home' housing report from the National Pensioners Convention (NPC), published this year after extensive research.

More houses need to be built. NPC states that 65,000 houses should be built every year for older people in order to meet the current demand and the projected population rise.

The common consensus is that we need 250,000 houses in total across the population, and that by 2040 one in four households will be headed by someone over the age of 65.

Involve us when making decisions about our housing. Older people should be at the heart of planning decisions.

That way, more older people will live in housing that has a design and ethos suitable to supporting and creating sociable communities.

Older tenants need stronger rights. Some tenants are living in unsafe and poor conditions. Many are frightened to report problems since some landlords fail to take action, and older tenants fear retaliatory eviction, or huge rent rises as a result of essential repairs made to their rented property.

A tenants' charter would raise awareness of tenant rights. It should put an end to letting agent fees, and make available much longer tenancies.

Older people should never be forced to move. For those who want it, help and information should be available.

As a member of the National Pensioners Convention Gloucester, Avon, Somerset Region, I fully support these findings.

Claude Mickleson, Lydney, Gloucestershire

Trains need guards

The evidence against a [driver-only operated train service](#) must be overwhelming for the jury of public opinion, judged by the following reports that were printed in the Times on the same day.

"The number of passengers suffering serious injuries on the rail network has soared by a fifth in a year amid warnings that stressed commuters are taking extra risks to board delayed trains.

"Official figures show that 318 passengers sustained major injuries in the 12 months to the end of March - the highest number in at least 15 years."

And it's not just humans suffering. "Rose Barry, a disabled pensioner, was struggling to board a Thameslink train at Elstree and Borehamwood station, Hertfordshire, with Jonty, her shih tzu, a walking frame and luggage.

"The doors closed with the retired nurse, 75, and her dog still on the platform, trapping her hand.

"She was able to pull herself free but the lead was stuck in the doors, resulting in Jonty being dragged when the train departed. The dog was found dead in a tunnel near the station."

As we approach the autumn equinox, another regular safety challenge arises. "Thousands of passengers on C2C, the network that operates between London and Essex, have had to wait during the past few weeks for trains delayed by the awkward angle of the sun.

"The company said it had been forced to slow services because the low autumn sun had been dazzling drivers' eyes.

"It said the strong glare bouncing off monitors used by drivers to check train doors made it difficult to ensure that all passengers had safely boarded.

"This had forced drivers in some cases to leave their cab and walk the length of the train to carry out manual checks."

John Merrell, Leicester

Labour affiliation debate

I just want to make a couple of comments on the exchange of letters between Peter Taaffe, Socialist Party general secretary, and Jennie Formby, Labour Party general secretary, on the question of our enquiry about affiliation to the Labour Party (see '[The struggle to transform Labour](#)').

Jennie, in her first reply to Peter, states: "As the Socialist Party is part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) who stood candidates against the Labour Party in the May 2018 elections, it is ineligible for affiliation. Furthermore, it is not 'associated under a national agreement with the party'."

And reiterates in her second reply: "Whilst the Socialist Party continues to stand candidates against the Labour Party as part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, it will not be possible to enter into any agreement."

I was wondering how the Labour Party leadership squares these statements with its [courting of the RMT union for affiliation](#) over the last year or so.

The same RMT that, together with the Socialist Party and others, founded TUSC as the only consistent anti-austerity electoral option.

It would seem the Labour Party is not unwilling to 'bend its rules'.

Norman Hall, Gateshead

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What the Socialist Party stands for

The Socialist Party fights for socialism – a democratic society run for the needs of all and not the profits of a few. We also oppose every cut, fighting in our day-to-day campaigning for every possible improvement for working class people.

The organised working class has the potential power to stop the cuts and transform society.

As capitalism dominates the globe, the struggle for genuine socialism must be international.

The Socialist Party is part of the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI), a socialist international that organises in over 40 countries.

Our demands include:

Public services

- No to ALL cuts in jobs, public services and benefits. Defend our pensions.
- No to privatisation and the Private Finance Initiative (PFI). Renationalise all privatised utilities and services, with compensation paid only on the basis of proven need.
- Fully fund all services and run them under accountable, democratic committees that include representatives of service workers and users.
- Free, publicly run, good quality education, available to all at any age. Abolish university tuition fees now and introduce a living grant. No to academies and 'free schools'!
- A socialist NHS to provide for everyone's health needs - free at the point of use and under democratic control. Kick out private contractors!
- Keep council housing publicly owned. For a massive building programme of publicly owned housing, on an environmentally sustainable basis, to provide good quality homes with low rents.

Work and income

- Trade union struggle to increase the minimum wage to £10 an hour without exemptions as an immediate step towards a real living wage. For an annual increase in the minimum wage linked to average earnings.
- All workers, including part-timers, temps, casual and migrant workers to have trade union rates of pay, employment protection, and sickness and holiday rights from day one of employment.
- An immediate 50% increase in the state retirement pension, as a step towards a living pension.
- Reject 'workfare'. For the right to decent benefits, education, training, or a job, without compulsion.
- Scrap the anti-trade union laws! For fighting trade unions, democratically controlled by their members. Full-time union officials to be regularly elected and receive no more than a worker's wage. Support the National Shop Stewards Network.
- A maximum 35-hour week with no loss of pay.

Environment

- Major research and investment into replacing fossil fuels with renewable energy and into ending the problems of early obsolescence and unrecycled waste.
- Public ownership of the energy generating industries. No to nuclear power. No to Trident.
- A democratically planned, low-fare, publicly-owned transport system, as part of an overall plan against environmental pollution.

Rights

- Oppose discrimination on the grounds of race, gender, disability, sexuality, age, and all other forms of prejudice.
- Repeal all laws that trample over civil liberties. For the right to protest! End police harassment.
- Defend abortion rights. For a woman's right to choose when and whether to have children.
- For the right to asylum. No to racist immigration laws.
- For the right to vote at 16.

Mass workers' party

- For a mass workers' party drawing together workers, young people and activists from workplace, community, environmental, anti-racist and anti-cuts campaigns, to provide a fighting, political alternative to the pro-big business parties.
- Fight for Labour to be transformed into such a party: deselect the Blairites!

Socialism and internationalism

- No to imperialist wars and occupations.
 - Tax the super-rich! For a socialist government to take into public ownership the top 150 companies and the banking system that dominate the British economy, and run them under democratic working-class control and management. Compensation to be paid only on the basis of proven need.
 - A democratic socialist plan of production based on the interests of the overwhelming majority of people, and in a way that safeguards the environment.
 - No to the bosses' neoliberal European Union and single market. For a socialist Europe and a socialist world!
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