

[Socialist Party](#) | [Print](#)

Editorial of the Socialist, issue 873

Right wing step up campaign against Corbyn

'No time to lose' to organise against austerity

"I can't remember any other party conference where the leader has been so publicly reprimanded by so many of his senior frontbenchers" (Andrew Rawnsley, Observer).

There is a concerted attempt - not hidden or kept secret - by Labour's right, cheered on by the poisonous capitalist media, to completely undermine the effects of Jeremy Corbyn's leadership victory and what it represents.

Mass rejection of austerity was widely echoed at the massive TUC demonstration in Manchester at the weekend.

This was preceded by an angry march of junior doctors on Westminster days before, indicating that the circle of discontent with the government's unremitting austerity agenda has spread from the working class to growing sections of the middle class. They also made up a lively contingent on the Manchester demonstration.

Corbyn was elected by a landslide which represented a stunning rejection of the policies of the undemocratic parliamentary cabal and their discredited Blairite policies.

Even the Labour Party conference was not a true reflection of the new mood, particularly of the recent joiners.

Delegates to the conference were elected before the leadership contest. Just 7% of delegates voted to discuss the crucial issue of the renewal of Trident.

Yet even some of these became enthused as the conference cheered every call to reject austerity.

Attacks from Labour's right

But even during the conference, in what became a retreat a day, the radical anti-austerity policies of Corbyn were savaged and attacked by the Labour right in concert with the capitalist media.

Opposition to Nato, rejection of the brutal neoliberal capitalist EU, nationalisation of the energy companies and railways, etc, must all be cast aside by Corbyn in the cause allegedly of 'credibility' and 'electability'.

Now, it seems, his pledge to abolish tuition fees has been transformed into just an 'option' by his shadow minister for higher education, Gordon Marsden.

Yet this was a crucial factor in Corbyn's leadership victory because of the enthusiasm among young people which it generated.

The parliamentary right hope to achieve this, through a 'review', not conducted by young people and new members. Instead, a Labour parliamentary clique will probably examine the proposal and no doubt conclude that this and many of Corbyn's other pledges are 'unaffordable'.

Trident

One issue upon which Corbyn intends to stand firm, it seems, is on opposition to the renewal of Trident, Britain's bogus 'independent nuclear deterrent'.

This led to shrieks from the media that Corbyn 'refuses to defend us, he won't press the nuclear button'.

The Labour right weighed in, led by shadow 'defence secretary' Maria Eagle, her sister Angela, and Hilary Benn (whose late father Tony consistently opposed the acquisition and threatened use of nuclear weapons like Trident).

Socialists and Marxists are not pacifists; they have always been prepared to defend the democratic rights of working people, if needs be with arms, against the threat of fascism, whether in this country or from abroad.

Trident is not an 'independent deterrent'. Its use is contingent on the US, in particular, giving permission and support. Moreover, it is a peashooter compared to the massive nuclear arsenals possessed by Russia and the US.

Also, with the diminished power of British imperialism many of the top military brass had concluded that the 'country' could no longer afford it.

The £100 billion saved from scrapping Trident could make a significant dent in the savage austerity being meted out by the Tories.

The fear that Trident workers will lose their jobs can be answered by proposing an alternative plan, along the lines of Lucas Aerospace workers in 1976, guaranteeing all jobs while making socially useful products.

Redcar steel

The same approach should be adopted in relation to the economic and social disaster revealed in the collapse of what remains of the British steel industry on Teesside.

This complex, with all the skills and experience of an educated workforce, should not be allowed to collapse.

It should be kept open through nationalisation, as the Tories were compelled to do by mass pressure in 1972 with Rolls-Royce.

The cruel indifference to the fate of thousands of workers on Teesside gives the lie to the claim of the Tories that they are now the real "workers' party".

However, they are only able to do this because the concept of a distinct workers' party was undermined by right-wing Blairism.

Osborne hopes to win over the 'strivers' with his false proposals for a 'living wage' of £9 an hour from next year onwards.

However, the Institute of Fiscal Studies has already torpedoed his schema by showing that what is given with the left hand will be taken back and more by the right - through the implementation of eye-watering household credit cuts next year.

The cuts proposed will reduce the income of families by up to £1,300 per year.

Union leaders' comments

The fear of mass redundancies resulting from the immediate scrapping of Trident undoubtedly prompted Paul Kenny of the GMB union and Len McCluskey of Unite to publicly oppose Corbyn on this issue, with Kenny even opening the door to the right by suggesting that he could be removed as Labour leader.

There is a precedent for this in Labour history. Former Labour Party leader George Lansbury was removed in 1935 on the similar issue of peace and rearmament.

Len McCluskey hailed Jeremy Corbyn's speech at the conference as 'inspirational'. However he lined up with Kenny on Newsnight, in opposition to the removal of Trident. Trade union leaders have to defend their members' jobs, he said.

But 'pragmatism' is a catch-all phrase which has been used by right-wing trade union leaders to retreat and let their members down.

It can signal a reluctance to fight against a vicious class-based government by seeking a rapprochement with it. This while it is clearly still putting the boot into the working class.

There can be no compromise on crucial class issues like the anti-union bill. Therefore it is unfortunate that Len McCluskey indicated on the Andrew Marr TV programme his preparedness to discuss with the government on this issue, even accepting, it seems, a priori the 50% limit on industrial ballots, so long as it is accompanied with the introduction of online voting, votes in the workplace, etc.

It should be a cardinal principle of the labour movement that the state, the capitalist state in this instance but all states, have no right to interfere and infringe on the democratic rights of trade unions.

Even if we had a socialist government tomorrow, the trade unions would both support such a government but also maintain their independence from it.

Prepare a programme of action, including a 24-hour general strike, against the anti-union bill!

Workers' party needed

Len McCluskey was elected on a left platform and has backed workers who have gone on strike. However, along with other trade union leaders, he and Unite have dragged their feet on the issue of a new mass workers' party.

The Corbyn surge reflected what has existed for a long time; a pronounced mood for change, indicated by the spontaneous 5,000-strong demonstration in Bristol just after the election and the huge turnout on the 20 June anti-austerity demo.

This is as yet more of a mood, rather than an organised movement. It can dissipate if a huge potential force - outside and inside the Labour Party - is not forged to defend the radical agenda of Corbyn's campaign.

There are some reports of a doubling of attendance at some Labour party meetings. There are others which show that the right wing at local level is stubbornly excluding new members on the left who are looking to develop the fight against austerity.

The Corbyn surge is a potential new mass party in formation. It is not at all guaranteed it will succeed if the resistance from the right is not fought and defeated.

The massive cuts that are coming is the defining issue. Labour councillors should heed the words of

John McDonnell at the Labour Party conference: "Austerity was a political choice not an economic necessity." Don't implement cuts, draw up a needs budget.

If a significant number of councils defy the government on this issue, they will receive mass backing.

This needs to involve a movement embracing all left forces - including TUSC and particularly the trade unions - seeking to give an organised expression to this movement.

This should include, at local level, urgently convening conferences of all those who want to fight the cuts to discuss the way forward. Events are moving rapidly, there is no time to lose.

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 6 October 2015 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

After 100,000 march against Tory conference...

Kick out the Tories!

100,000 marched in Manchester against Conservative conference on 4 October.

Determined, inspired and ready to fight. Trade unionists, young people, swelling the streets, looking for ideas, for strategies that can win.

The Tories call themselves the "workers' party" while desecrating jobs. Let's put them out of work.

They talk about freezing our grandparents by scuttling winter fuel allowance. They plan to knacker our doctors and nurses. They want to steal tax credits and benefits from young families.

Blitz

But we can end the Tory blitz. We can win back jobs and services. We can save our communities and fight for a future free from austerity's misery.

We only need to make this mood into fighting action.

The Socialist says: build for coordinated, escalating strikes against cuts, sell-offs and anti-union laws. Join the Socialist Party. Fight for socialism.

Back our doctors and nurses

Support calls for strikes over juniors' contracts

Matt Whale, Student nurse

Jeremy Hunt, the hated Tory health secretary, is under attack from the medical profession. He plans to exhaust and demoralise junior doctors with "unsafe and unfair" contract changes.

Meanwhile, a survey says around half of nurses are considering quitting. And the government plans to make trainee nurses pay to work!

Tory plans for junior doctors - everyone below consultant level - are to redefine unsocial hours. Doctors' union BMA estimates that for some this could mean a 40% pay cut!

Doctors have come onto the streets. Thousands marched in London and Manchester. The BMA is balloting members for strike action.

This isn't just about money, though. The contract could see an end to safe working patterns, meaning potential 90-hour weeks for doctors. Under such a workload, there will be mistakes due to fatigue.

59% of nurses already feel they are too busy to give the level of care required. Bullying from management is commonplace.

Now the Tories are considering introducing tuition fees for nursing students - effectively charging them to work. Students graft on wards during training.

Student nurses are supposedly 'supernumerary', meaning enough qualified practitioners are on duty without them. But cuts mean they are increasingly used to make up minimum numbers and carry out essential care.

There is an increase in the number of patients using the NHS. Yet there are recruitment freezes in most areas! The lessons of the Mid Staffs catastrophe have been ignored.

Hunt's insulting claims that the NHS isn't a 24-hour service have provoked huge anger. But it's clear what the intent is. Stretch the NHS to breaking point, and then sell it off to private companies.

The Socialist Party backs proposed industrial action by doctors. We say nurses and all NHS workers should fight alongside them.

All the health unions should ballot and strike together against unbearable conditions in the NHS. Co-ordinated and with a programme of escalating action, we can stop Tory attacks.

- Back NHS workers - support the doctors' call for strikes
- Defend unsocial hours payments
- End the hiring freeze
- Reverse all cuts
- Kick the private vultures out of the NHS
- Free education for all

NHS cutters pay doctors not to refer sick patients to hospitals

Jackie Grunsell, NHS doctor

General practitioners (GPs) are being paid to reduce referrals to hospital in some areas.

This will cause shock and concern. Patients trust their doctor to always act in their best interests - without gaining financially by denying access to specialist services.

'Clinical commissioning groups' (CCGs) led by clinical professionals took over planning local

healthcare under the last government. This work was previously done by administrators, leaving clinicians free to focus on patients. The change was central to Tory and Lib Dem NHS cuts.

Incentives

We were told CCGs would better advocate for patient care, putting GPs at the heart of decision making. Yet at least nine groups run schemes incentivising GPs to reduce referral rates!

In some cases this includes the aim of reducing two-week-wait fast-track referrals for those with suspected cancer.

GP leaders have called such schemes into question. They are damaging to the doctor-patient relationship of trust.

Our budgets have been cut from every direction. Many GPs may be desperate for any additional funding - simply in order to maintain their service.

However, if patients feel blocked from seeing specialists for financial reasons, they will lose faith in their doctors. It's one of the reasons the General Medical Council, the doctors' regulator, insists we must not receive any "inducement, gift or hospitality".

If NHS resources were adequate to meet patients' needs, these incentives would never have been considered.

Waste

Billions are wasted on privatisation schemes. Drug companies aren't challenged for hugely inflated medication prices. GPs spend valuable time re-analysing their referrals to decide whether they were 'appropriate' or not.

The system needs turning on its head. The Socialist Party fights to reverse all NHS cuts and expand both clinical and support staff.

Tories: let pensioners freeze to death, they can't vote us out then

Amalia

Smug Tories discussed letting pensioners die of cold to save cash at their Manchester conference.

The Taxpayers' Alliance, a malicious pro-Conservative think tank, wants to see older people freeze. Research director Alex Wild says Tories should immediately cut winter fuel allowance.

"Some of the people... won't be around to vote against you in the next election. So that's just a practical point, and the other point is they might have forgotten by then."

Former defence secretary Liam Fox enthusiastically echoed sentiments about cutting pensioners' benefits at the group's Tory conference meeting.

Liam Fox? Whose wealth is estimated around a million pounds? Who, we learned during the expenses scandal, claimed for his mortgage interest - as well as sums under a pound?

He once claimed 3p for a 100-yard car journey he could have walked in under a minute! He also wants to cut free travel for older people, by the way.

Yes, this same Liam Fox is saying pensioners should not be given winter fuel allowance.

Cold

Let's keep them in the cold and give them a hand in that direction, eh Liam?

I'm pretty sure your older family members can afford heating without the allowance.

Outside the millionaires' tiny, luxuriant world there's many that can't. It's a matter of life and death, especially for those with more vulnerable health.

The Socialist Party campaigns to reverse all cuts to pensions and fuel allowances. Bring the energy companies into public ownership under democratic control to stop price gouging!

Them & Us

#PrivetDrive

Renters were appalled - but not shocked - by a supposed London room listing on 30 September.

Twitter user Alex Lomax shared pics of a duvet and pillow spread in an under-stairs cupboard. The stated cost? A mere £500 a month.

It now seems this could have been a shrewd PR stunt rather than a real rental. But either way, it struck a chord with private tenants, especially in London.

Sheds, closets and hammocks in communal rooms are all real manifestations of the housing crisis. Meanwhile, ultra-capitalist tabloid City AM reports super-rich finance workers think nothing of £50,000-plus deposits for luxury London rentals.

Democracy hypocrisy

Conservatives refuse to let unions ballot members for strikes online, while also demanding higher turnouts. Prime Minister David Cameron says electronic voting is not "safe from fraud".

But apparently it's good enough for the Tories themselves. Their London mayoral candidate, tax dodger Zac Goldsmith, was selected by an online ballot!

Jamaican jail insult

Workers in Jamaica are fuming after an outrageous offer made to the former British colony by David Cameron. He plans to boost the country's infrastructure - by building it a jail to house Jamaicans convicted in Britain.

One caller interviewed on BBC Coventry and Warwickshire rightly declared this an "insult". He said the pitiful £25 million offered should at least be used for schools and hospitals.

British capitalists have spent centuries exploiting Jamaica for slaves and cheap labour.

The housing crisis - a crisis of the profit system

11,000 families in England and Wales were thrown out of their homes in the first three months of this year - a 51% increase compared to six years ago.

The ever-dwindling numbers of affordable homes to buy or rent is behind the deepening housing crisis in the UK.

Homeless charity Shelter found that 80% of homes nationally are unaffordable to the average income family, with only 43 properties deemed genuinely affordable in London.

But Tory government policies mean that one group of people - private landlords - are profiting from this misery.

The 2015 Housing Bill, by extending social housing privatisation, will make matters worse. Unite the union housing branch chair and Socialist Party member Paul Kershaw, explains what policies are necessary to solve this crisis.

A roof over your head - or a mattress under the stairs?

Fancy a mattress in a cupboard under the stairs in Clapham for £500 per month? Media reports like this one regularly grab the headlines. And if you did want that cupboard you would also need to find £60 a month for bills.

Whatever the veracity of this story, behind these headlines tenants are being forced to live in worse conditions than they would have accepted in the past and to pay more for their housing.

Three in ten privately rented homes are considered 'non-decent' and one in six are actually physically unsafe - even though councils have a legal obligation to correct hazards in the home.

New legislation does give some formal protection against 'revenge evictions' when tenants complain. But landlords will use insecure tenancies to disguise revenge evictions.

And the lack of alternatives on the market for tenants will make it hard for them to insist on better conditions. Of course council cuts reduce resources to help.

As renters are forced to pay more of their income on rent a new study has shown that up to half of people in London who rent their homes are living in poverty.

Rising house prices and insecure work have put the hope of owning a home out of reach - half of those renting in the UK despair of ever being able to afford a home of their own, according to a recent survey.

This is not surprising when the proportion of 25 to 34 year olds who own their homes has plummeted from 59% to 36% in less than a decade.

The gap between income and house prices has increased so much in the last 20 years that even in the most affordable regions of England and Wales buyers are forced to spend six times their income, according to analysis of Land Registry figures.

The situation is most dire in the capital, where the median house now costs 12 times the median London income.

The government's so called 'help to buy' policy has simply pushed up prices by helping banks to make loans; according to research it has added £8,250 to the price of an average house.

Over the past year one in five working adults aged 20 to 34 has moved back in with their parents. A further 15% of this group has never moved out according to Shelter.

The crisis has hit young people hardest but increasingly it is not just young people who are locked in to the private rented sector living in insecure flat shares.

Between 2009 and 2014, the number of flat sharers aged between 35 and 44 rose by 186%, according to Spareroom, the flat share website, while the number of sharers aged 45 to 54 went up by 300%.

'Right to buy' and Housing Association privatisation

Housing minister Greg Clarke has made housing associations, (HAs) an offer they can't refuse: they had to 'voluntarily' agree to 'right to buy' in exchange for which they escape the fate of nationalisation followed by privatisation.

HAs house one in ten British households. They have built up huge assets with the help of years of public investment but are controlled by unelected boards whose minutes are normally secret.

The deadline for this acquiescence was just six working days from Clarke's announcement. No time for consulting tenants and communities, and actually not enough time for their boards to consider the full implications. But the deal was brokered by their trade body, the National Housing Federation.

The full implications are still emerging but it seems they will get greater 'freedom' from regulation, greater ability to choose their own tenants rather than taking tenants from needs-based local authority waiting lists, and more freedom to behave as fully commercial operations.

Nationalisation?

But how did a Conservative government come to be threatening nationalisation?

The immediate cause was the policy of extending 'right to buy' to officially independent organisations. This triggered a review of the status of housing associations and their debts by the Office for National Statistics.

At the first Prime Minister's Questions with Jeremy Corbyn, Cameron was referring to associations as part of the public sector. That would mean that their outstanding debt of £60 billion would be added to the Public Sector Borrowing Requirement (the size of the government's deficit).

The 'most obvious' solution according to the Policy Exchange think tank was to nationalise the housing association sector and then sell it off.

In countries such as the Netherlands, Germany and Spain private equity funds such as 'Terra Firma' have created a whole new 'asset class' of former social rented housing. No doubt they would love to expand their UK investments.

The National Housing Federation claims this deal as a triumph because it preserves the independence of associations. But it is at the price of collaborating in dismantling social housing.

Associations are fighting for their right to manage the run down of social housing rather than let the private equity vultures do it directly.

What right do HA boards have to agree to sell off assets accumulated over the years by public investment? The 'right to buy' is to be funded by the forced sale of high value council homes on the open market. They are likely to be sold to existing landlords in high value areas.

According to Shelter, in the top 20 council areas that are going to be forced to sell most homes, almost 160,000 households are currently waiting for a council home and over 22,000 children are homeless in temporary accommodation.

'Affordable'

You might think there is a case for more social housing for them but the plan is for there to be less. There is a pledge for one-to-one replacement - although so far, despite earlier pledges, 'right to buy' has only had 10% replacement at most.

But there is no pledge to replace social housing in the same high value areas and the replacement does not have to be like for like. Rather than social rented housing it can be the much more expensive and miss named 'affordable' housing, which can include housing for sale.

Housing developments given per-mission by local authorities on the basis that they were socially balanced with an agreed percentage of social rent will be transformed by the right to buy extension - and if associations are granted freedom to pick their own tenants that process can be exacerbated.

Last year, Genesis Housing (a big London-based HA) sponsored a report calling for the creation of 'free' associations; effectively fully privatising and deregulating associations. The report was compiled with the assistance of CEOs of other unnamed associations under 'Chatham House rules' (ie the source of that information may not be explicitly or implicitly identified).

This year Genesis announced they were pulling out of the development of social housing and reviewing the tenure of their existing stock. Other associations have announced that they are considering similar steps. When the Genesis boss was asked what would happen to the vulnerable he replied that it wasn't his problem.

The Labour front bench and local authority groups have opposed these steps and are looking at legal action. All legal routes should be explored but this should be firmly linked to a mass public campaign for more social housing and against profit driven landlordism.

Pay to stay

Households with earnings of over £30,000, or £40,000 in London will be forced to pay market rents for their social housing - or take up the 'right to buy'. This policy will further reduce the stock of social housing and present families with impossible choices.

340,000 council tenants could be forced out of their homes under Chancellor Osborne's plan.

Savills estimate 60.1% of the 27,108 affected households in London will neither be able to afford market rent or be able to buy their house under the right to buy. In the East, South East and South West regions of England the figure is 49.1%, 43.4% and 26.6% respectively.

A programme to build the homes we need

Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn has promised a break with the housing policies of the establishment parties in recent years. He calls for more house building; rightly stating that there is no solution to the housing crisis that doesn't start with a big programme of building council homes.

He has promised rent control and an end to regeneration schemes that contribute to 'social cleansing' ie reducing social housing and pushing out working class people.

The policy document he produced on housing during the leadership campaign is strikingly different from Labour's previous policies. It is similar to the policies of Unite, which were endorsed by Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) in the general election campaign earlier this year.

Change

The hope for a change in housing conditions was an important factor mobilising people previously alienated from politics behind Corbyn's leadership campaign.

What a contrast with what went before. The previous Labour leader Ed Miliband shrank from a commitment to reverse cuts in the social housing grant (cut from an inadequate £2.3 billion to £1.1 billion by the last government), let alone advocate a massive council house building programme.

Instead, Miliband offered only the weakest measures to address sky-rocketing private rents. Yet, after the election, Labour MPs drew the conclusion that Miliband had actually been too radical!

Chris Leslie, briefly shadow chancellor, rushed to say Labour would not support any form of rent control. He said it would make Labour look 'anti-business'.

MPs like him still sit on Labour's back benches and even in the shadow cabinet. They are stunned by Corbyn's victory and seek to undermine his policies.

Therefore we need a mass movement of trade unions, tenants' groups and young people to fight for socialist housing policies.

Labour's current commitment to build 100,000 social homes is an improvement on the recent past, though still not high in historic terms. Labour is right to say that investing in new homes would pay for itself over the long term. In fact it's the lack of investment in house building behind the rise in house prices and rents.

Shadow housing minister, John Healey, is reported as refusing to be drawn on commitments to build social rented housing. But he is right to describe the "affordable rent product" - at up to 80% of market rents - as a "linguistic con trick".

He points out that government spending on housing benefit will be £120 billion over the next five years, almost £50 billion of which goes to private landlords. Meanwhile, investment funding in grants for building new affordable homes over the next five years will be little more than £5 billion.

We need real rent control that keeps rents at affordable levels, not just a control on the rate of increase as is sometimes suggested.

Private tenants should get proper security and councils should start now by using the powers they have to stop dangerous conditions and profiteering.

Investment

Corbyn has suggested measures such as 'People's Quantitative Easing' (QE) to fund investment in housing and other pressing infrastructure projects. However, other Labour leadership candidates joined

with the Tories in scaremongering, denouncing this idea as 'mad and dangerous money printing'.

In fact, successive Labour, Coalition and Tory governments have carried out massive QE to rescue the banks and capitalism. But instead of investing in socially useful projects the money remains locked up in the financial system.

This lack in investment in infrastructure meant that in 2012-13 there was the lowest number of new housing starts since the 1920s!

Meanwhile the banks, et al, continue to play casino-like games and pay huge bonuses to their top executives.

In contrast, millions of working class people are paying the price of this generosity to the capitalists through austerity, struggling to pay for a roof over their heads.

Therefore any future pro-working class government would be obliged to nationalise the banks to channel investment into housing and socially useful projects.

Indeed, planning to meet the needs of the overwhelming majority in the country, and not the money making interests of the super-rich, requires major public ownership - including the giant construction companies - and democratic control of the main economic levers in society.

Having a safe, secure and comfortable roof over your head should be a fundamental human right. But this is not the case for the majority under capitalism. The Socialist Party is campaigning now for the following policies:

- Rent controls to stop excessive rents being charged and reduce the housing benefit bill
- Increase the minimum wage to £10 an hour as a step toward a real living wage
- An end to benefit caps and punitive benefit sanctions
- Axing the 'bedroom tax' on social housing tenants
- A massive programme of council house building
- Nationalisation of the major banks and giant construction companies to resource this housing programme
- Private landlords enjoy a massive public subsidy; amounting to £27 billion a year, pocketing housing benefit and getting generous tax concessions - the equivalent of over £1,000 for every household
- Rogue landlords in England are raking in £5.6 billion a year for 740,000 unsafe rented homes that fail to meet legal standards
- 126 MPs are landlords. 17 London MPs own various properties worth over £100,000 from which they earn in excess of £10,000 a year.
- Tory MP for Harrow East, Bob Blackman, has a buy-to-let portfolio of six properties in Welwyn Garden City jointly owned with his wife
- As part of its extra £12 billion welfare budget cuts, the Tories have further capped support payments and ended the limited housing benefit currently available to under-21s.

Catalonia

Pro-independence parties win 'referendum' elections

Danny Byrne, Committee for a Workers' International (CWI)

Catalan elections on 27 September revealed a society virtually split down the middle on the question of independence from the Spanish state.

These elections were billed as a "referendum" on Catalan independence by Catalan President, Artur Mas. This call was made in the context of the Spanish state government's repeated refusal to allow for an official independence referendum, despite the growing mass movement over the last few years.

The two biggest parties formally in favour of independence - CDC, the right-wing nationalist party of Mas himself, and the ERC (Republican Left, a 'centre-left' nationalist party) - formed a joint list called Junts pel Si (together for yes), fronted by both politicians and prominent members of civil society.

Votes for this list - as well as votes for the radical left pro-independence party, CUP - were to be taken as yes votes. On the other hand, votes for the array of anti-independence parties were to be taken as no votes, with another broad left list, Catalunya si que es pot (CSQP - Catalonia yes we can, involving Podemos and the Catalan branches of United Left) caught somewhere in between.

Yes/No polarisation

This laid the basis for a polarised campaign. Voter turnout was 77%, 10% higher than the last Catalan elections, reflecting this polarisation and a sense of urgency among people to pronounce themselves on the question of independence.

Rural Catalonia delivered a massive pro-independence majority in almost every area. On the other hand, Catalonia's urban centres, including the capital Barcelona, all fell short of 50% for the pro-independence parties.

For the first time since the beginning of the current movement for independence, an element of polarisation linked to people's origins - established Catalan communities or communities of families from other parts of the Spanish state - was visible, and to an extent played on, mostly by the 'no' parties. There was also an element of generational polarisation, with a large majority of young people in favour of independence.

Junts pel Si won 39.5% of the votes and 62 seats - just short of the 64 seats needed for an overall majority - while CUP won 8.2% and ten seats. The yes side thus won enough seats for an overall majority in parliament, although slightly under 50% of total votes cast.

In reality, the main parties within the Junts pel Si list, while winning the elections, won fewer seats than they had done standing separately in the 2012 elections. The growth of the CUP - which tripled its number of seats - represents an important change in the situation, a radicalisation and shift to the left within an important section of pro-independence voters.

On the no side, the ruling Spanish People's Party (PP) suffered a terrible defeat, winning only 8.9% of the votes. It had stood arch-racist reactionary, Xavier Albiol, as its candidate for President of Catalonia, in an attempt to shore up its support base among traditional right-wing voters, but even this had no effect.

The party which 'won' the elections on the no side was Ciutadans, the new right-wing populist party, which tripled its seats becoming the second biggest party in the Catalan parliament.

Artur Mas and Junts pel Si have announced a plan to form a government dedicated to executing a "process" through which Catalonia will obtain independence from Spain, allegedly in 18 months' time.

However, whether this majority will be reflected in a new Catalan government following these elections is much less clear and straightforward.

A joint 'yes' government would mean the anti-capitalist CUP doing a deal with the austerity-mongers of CDC and Mas, who implemented brutal measures in the first years of the crisis, even beyond those implemented by the Madrid government.

Another option would be the CUP, in opposition, voting to allow Mas to form a minority government and supporting the so-called process towards independence from outside.

Disappointment

The results for CSQP were more disappointing. They won eleven MPs, less than the results of the various component parts in the 2012 elections.

In the polarised atmosphere, their position was interpreted by the majority as a no position. This was added to by the fact that Podemos' leaders such as Iglesias and Errejón personally argued clearly for a no position.

This adds to the general troubles of Podemos on an all-Spain basis, seen to be generally in decline and falling in the polls, having moved further to the right.

Within the yes camp, vastly different political and class forces are represented. This has deep implications, not only for the class struggle on social and economic issues, but for democratic rights and for self-determination.

A cross-class yes camp based on the current balance of forces is neither desirable nor viable, and can only result in the betrayal of both the workers' cause and the struggle for self-determination.

Within a cross-class yes or indeed no campaign, the unemployed, exploited workers, oppressed women and minorities and the devastated middle classes, are expected to share political interests and ambitions with those responsible for their suffering and the crisis ravaging Catalan and Spanish society.

Workers and youth - overwhelmingly against austerity and for democratic rights - on either side have far more in common with each other than with the pro-capitalist politicians on either side. The way forward lies in independent working class unity and struggle, for an alternative to capitalism, national oppression and state repression.

Class struggle

However, it is not only social and economic issues which make a cross-class movement for self-determination unviable. Class contradictions and conflicts are fundamental to the question of how democratic rights, including national rights, can be won in the first place.

The Catalan capitalist class has always been opposed to independence from Spain, and remains so. Throughout the election campaign, Catalan big businesses and banks joined their Spanish counterparts in coming out with threats and blackmail against independence, reminiscent of 'project fear' during the Scottish independence referendum of 2014.

The working class, youth and poor in Catalonia must therefore draw the conclusion that only their own forces can be relied upon in the fight for democratic rights and self-determination. This means taking control of the movement out of the hands of political representatives of capitalism, such as Artur Mas.

This requires the working class to be organised, united, and play an independent role, rather than trailing the bourgeois leadership of one side or the other.

Socialismo Revolucionario (SR, CWI in the Spanish state) called for a united left list in the elections, standing on the basis of a programme to break with capitalism as the only way to achieve the

democratic right of self-determination for Catalonia.

However, a united working class movement - also necessary on an all-Spain basis to struggle for the fall of the Rajoy government - cannot unite simply on the basis of ignoring or abstaining from the national debate. The disappointing results for CSQP in these elections highlight the consequences of such an approach.

As a starting point, SR argues that, as with all of the burning issues facing the working class movement, the national question is currently unsolvable on the basis of the crisis-ridden capitalist system.

Real democracy and a dignified life for the people can only be achieved by tearing out the roots of the system - the capitalist ownership and control of the wealth of the peninsula's nations. This means fighting for a socialist alternative of democratic public ownership of the wealth.

Programme

On the basis of a socialist programme to break with capitalism in Spain, a socialist Catalonia could be established, with full control over its own affairs, based on real workers' democracy in the economy and in politics. This would guarantee full rights, including language rights, the right of dual citizenship and freedom of movement to all minorities.

The common ownership and democratic control of the banks and key sectors of the economy would allow for the territorial boundaries of the Spanish state - until now held together by force and profits - to be determined on an equal and voluntary basis.

A revolutionary congress of Iberian peoples could be formed to discuss and determine the future of each nation and the peninsula as a whole.

Such a revolutionary change would also, of course, go far beyond the borders of the Spanish state. Within a socialist Europe and world, Catalonia and the other national peoples of the peninsula could take their place in a truly united nations.

International news in brief

Austria: Socialists organise refugees' solidarity...

On 3 October around 150,000 people filled the city centre of Vienna to fight for the rights of refugees. It was an unprecedented sign of solidarity and strength. SLP (CWI, Austria) had an awesome contingent, and brought dozens of students and parents from schools to the demo.

A SLP member led a huge part of the demo from a truck, tirelessly agitating and spreading our ideas for hours, and receiving enthusiastic responses.

See article - 'Refugee crisis, solidarity and resistance' by Sebastian Kugler, SLP on www.socialistworld.net

... and in Greece too

Xekinima (CWI, Greece) comrades are campaigning in solidarity with the refugees that arrive daily in Greece, organising help and local networks to deal with the situation. The response from the poorer

neighbourhoods is very positive.

Brazil: 'Yes to water! No to profits!'

Demonstration (above) in São Paulo against the sacking of more than 600 workers from Sabesp (the water and sewage company), including LSR (CWI, Brazil) member Marzeni Pereira.

The struggle is also for water rights for the people in the context of the worst water crisis in the history of the city. The demo was organised by the movement "Yes to Water! No to Profits!" (launched by LSR members) and the Roofless Workers Movement (MTST), with the support of other movements and trade union organisations.

Emotional and inspiring National Gallery strikers secure victory

At a packed, emotional union meeting, National Gallery strikers unanimously voted to back a deal that will see a protection of terms and conditions for PCS members at the National Gallery and agency staff brought in by Securitas.

The agreement, reached on 2 October, includes the reinstatement of victimised union rep Candy Udwin and also retains recognition for the right of the union to negotiate on all terms and conditions.

Attacks

This is a great victory for PCS as National Gallery bosses conceded almost all terms and conditions and it will be a great confidence boost to a union under attack by the government over the deduction of union subs and cuts in jobs and services.

The members, who first walked out in February over plans to privatise visitor and security services, took 109 days of strike action altogether including walking out indefinitely from 11 August.

The campaign included a demonstration in Trafalgar Square in May, which was mobilised for nationally by PCS, despite being under siege by the government. PCS also coordinated action with other unions and organised a march down Whitehall on budget day.

Solidarity

Pickets throughout had good support from other trade unionists, members of the Socialist Party and the National Shop Stewards Network who invited Candy Udwin to speak at its conference in July where a collection took place. Strikers were welcomed back to work on 5 October by a demonstration celebrating the victory and bringing further solidarity.

Though the strike did not stop the privatisation, it has secured a number of vital concessions that protect workers' conditions and their union rights.

The inspiring victory demonstrates that strike action is effective and that strikes can win.

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 7 October 2015 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

Junior doctors campaign

Anger at sacrifices thrown back in our faces

As we go to press nearly 90,000 people have signed an online petition supporting industrial action by the British Medical Association, which is balloting junior doctors over changes to their contracts. Lively local protests have taken place and the junior doctors formed an impressive block on the 4 October anti-austerity demonstration in Manchester.

Below is an edited version of a Facebook post from one doctor which 'went viral'.

I am a 35 year old surgeon in training. It is ten years since I graduated with two degrees after spending six years at university.

I have never taken a day off sick. I worked every day as normal throughout two pregnancies without ever reducing hours (a minimum of 60 hours a week).

Unfair

I returned to work full time between my two children to be allocated a hospital two hours' drive from my house. I left my baby at 6am every day and got home at 8pm, except once a week when I did 24 hours on call.

I attended training courses on maternity leave as it was easier than taking study leave from work when rotas are so difficult to cover. I am currently spending my second maternity leave studying for compulsory self-funded £2,000 exams.

This week I am teaching on a course in Surrey training junior doctors (unpaid) while staying with my parents to save on childcare costs. I won't see my husband all week because he is teaching on a similar course in Harrogate (also unpaid).

Protest

Other maternity leave activities have so far included interviewing prospective medical students (unpaid) and being an examiner for medical student finals (unpaid).

This is what the job involves and we accept that. We are not complaining about the efforts we have made.

We are not asking for a pay rise. I understand we are well paid (albeit much less than doctors in many other countries). We care about the NHS and understand it is under-resourced and we regularly provide unpaid service on the basis of goodwill alone.

Tories

But for the government to tell us that what we are worth is a compulsory increase in hours alongside a 30-40% pay cut?

To know that next year many of us will be working more hours in the same jobs, unable to see our families, yet unable to pay the mortgages on the family homes that we have carefully budgeted for?

To know that the new contract will undo progress for women in medicine by penalising me financially if I choose to have another child?

Now, for the first time, I am very, very angry. #ImInWorkJeremy

RMT president election: back Sean Hoyle

Nick Chaffey, Socialist Party Southern region

The election for president of the RMT comes at a time of huge importance for union members facing widespread attacks on pay, jobs and working conditions across the transport industry. It also comes at a time when growing anger and opposition to these attacks is increasing and members are looking for effective ways to fight back industrially and politically.

Under the leadership of the late Bob Crow, the RMT gave a lead to its own members and the wider trade union and labour movement through militant trade unionism industrially and politically. The union championed the power of coordinated action and backed the call for a 24-hour general strike against austerity in 2011.

TUSC

It has also supported the need for working class political representation through the launch of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) in 2010. These traditions were represented in the successful recent London Underground strikes blocking attempts to implement 24-hour working through cutting jobs, pay, terms and conditions.

In this year's election, Portsmouth RMT member and TUSC supporter Sean Hoyle has emerged as the strongest left candidate, receiving 37 branch nominations, making him best placed to continue building a fighting, democratic, socialist trade union.

Sean has made clear his intention to continue the militant traditions of the RMT, "My goal is to represent the views of members and not to shrink from the fight to defend them."

"The McNulty report, commissioned under Labour and being implemented by the Tories, is a threat to 20,000 rail jobs and, in attacking the role of the train guard, public safety. Our union is the first and the last line of defence at sea fighting the scourge of poverty pay, in the offshore oil industry countering the cuts demanded by oil bosses in the wake of the oil price crash, on the roads where members face low pay, long hours and dangerous working conditions. Trade unions are under attack from the government and I want to ensure the RMT leads the fightback against the undemocratic anti-trade union laws."

Sean backed the support given to Jeremy Corbyn from the RMT in his election as Labour leader but remains committed to ensuring the union only backs politicians who act in the interest of RMT members. Speaking at the TUSC conference in September, Sean emphasised the central role the RMT and TUSC have played in making the case against all cuts.

Anti-union laws

In the months and years ahead the RMT must campaign for the ideas of generalised strike action against the proposed new anti-union laws and in defense of jobs and services. The Tory government is making massive new cuts to transport spending and this threatens the jobs and working conditions of

all RMT members.

Sean Hoyle is committed to a militant industrial response to this threat. As RMT president he can play a vital role as we seek support for a coordinated fight against austerity throughout the trade union movement.

We also advise that members backing Sean give their second preference to Glenroy Watson from London Underground, who was a TUSC candidate in last year's London council elections.

Steely anger in Redcar as plant is mothballed

North East Socialist Party

The last steel plant on Teesside, the second largest in Europe, is to be mothballed resulting in the loss of up 2,200 jobs.

The steelworks in Redcar is to stop production after nearly 100 years and steelworkers union Community are in talks with bosses of SSI, the company that operates the site.

Protests took place on 24 September. At Middlesbrough football club's home game on 27 September players warmed up in "Save Our Steel" t-shirts and sections of the crowd spelled out "SOS".

Appeal

Despite this however, the government has refused to step in and rejected a last-ditch appeal for financial help from the company itself.

The plant was publically owned and controlled before being privatised by Thatcher in 1988 and has been threatened with jobs losses and closure ever since. The site stopped production in 2009, resulting in job losses. However, campaigning led to the plant being saved after previous owner Tata Steel felt the pressure.

Nationalisation

The Socialist Party calls on the government to fully nationalise the plant, safeguarding the up to 9,000 jobs that rely on the production of steel in the area.

We also call on the trade unions that represent workers' at the site to get behind the call for nationalisation and hold pickets and protests in support of this, to channel the anger that has swept the region since the announcement.

The whole of the trade union movement should support these workers and any action they take. If the government can bail out the banks then they can nationalise Redcar steelworks, which is clearly in the public interest.

No wage cuts! Fund equal pay in Derby

Charlie Taylor, Derby Socialist Party

After years of failing to pay women equally, Derby City Labour council's pay review will see many women and some male council workers lose thousands of pounds from their annual pay. The council claims to be implementing 'single status' - equal pay - but instead they are stealing from some groups of workers (usually women!) to pay other groups.

As reported in the Derby Evening Telegraph one woman faces a cut of £16,000 and a couple who both work for the council will see their salaries collectively cut by £17,000. Changes to terms and conditions will mean 52 week contracts will be cut to term time only, with up to seven weeks loss in pay.

Workers pay

This is robbing Peter to pay Paul and as always it is the workers who are forced to pay. The council says it is a government-ordered review and they had no choice in the matter.

Where have we heard this before? The council says it has to implement massive cuts to its services and there is nothing it can do. The council has given employees until 2 January next year to sign up to the new contracts or face dismissal. Some may be offered their jobs back but this would be on the inferior terms and conditions.

This issue could potentially split workers unless the unions are prepared to launch a determined campaign around the call for 'No wage cuts! Fund equal pay'. Up to this point Unison has advised its members not to sign the new contracts in order to preserve their legal rights and are just advising workers to appeal against their individual contract decisions.

Negotiations

Unison should oppose pay cuts in the name of equality and link this to fighting the slaughter of our local jobs and services. Unison has been in negotiations with the council and now is the time to build on the anger and prepare for industrial action on this issue.

Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn has called on Labour councils to fight austerity and to stand together. The Socialist Party, as part of Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC), opposes all cuts to jobs and services and calls on councils to set needs budgets and to build a mass campaign demanding the shortfall be made up by central government. This call would receive as much tremendous support as the election of Corbyn on an anti-austerity programme.

Derby school support staff protested against pay cuts outside the council offices on 7 October.

Workplace news in brief

Sick pay dispute

Unite members at Hackney APCOA took two days of strike action in August in protest at the refusal of the company to agree a sick pay scheme. A subsequent offer has been rejected by workers as the deal would mean no company sick pay would be available for the first three days of absence. On the same afternoon as the offer was made, workers rejected it and voted to take five days of strike action commencing on 12 October. The anger at the offer intensified when it became clear that the employer is also cheating workers out of the London living wage too. The workers and Unite are determined to win what would be a well-deserved and vitally important victory.

Support for John Vasey

Leeds TUC unanimously passed the following: "Leeds TUC calls on Royal Mail to reinstate John Vasey, CWU workplace rep at Wakefield Delivery Office. We pledge to support the CWU Leeds No.1 Branch in its campaign on John's behalf." John, a CWU postal rep in Wakefield, West Yorkshire has been sacked on what his work colleagues recognise as stitched-up charges.

Kill the Bill lobby

Join the TUC and union members from all over the country coming together to lobby and rally against the trade union bill on Monday 2 November 2015, Central Hall, Westminster (rally) and the House of Commons (lobby of parliament). The rally will kick off at 1pm and the lobby at 2.30pm.

Junior doctors protest

Following the government's announcement of a brutal new contract for junior doctors, protests have taken place up and down the country. On Saturday 17 October, thousands are planning to attend a protest outside the Houses of Parliament from 2pm to 6pm. The march, likely to be the most high-profile street action by doctors yet, follows a previous rally outside Downing Street on 28 September. For more on the the contract and protests see pages 5 and 16 and also issue 872 of the Socialist.

100,000 march against Tory cuts

Hugh Caffrey, Secretary, North West Socialist Party

100,000 people and thousands of pig-themed objects marched through Manchester on Sunday 4 October to demonstrate against Tory party conference.

Inspired by left winger Jeremy Corbyn's Labour leadership victory, big numbers arrived for their first ever protest. Energetic young people and trade unionists eagerly took up Socialist Party placards, newspapers and leaflets.

Bold

Our bold and serious approach to organising in defence of trade unions and Corbyn's anti-cuts stand was well received. Many marchers discussed with us and were keen to get involved.

The Trade Union Congress (TUC) called the demonstration under the banner "No to austerity - yes to workers' rights". Marchers showed yet again that an army is willing to fight, if only the generals will give a serious lead.

Manchester's Labour councillors attacked Tory austerity policies, despite consistently implementing them. Only a year ago they stampeded towards the government's bogus devolution deal: limited powers in return for massive extra cuts.

Meanwhile, massive enthusiasm was on show for any mention of fighting back, striking or socialism.

Len McCluskey, head of general union Unite, and Matt Wrack, general secretary of the Fire Brigades Union, brought this out. Both promised to stand by workers in struggle despite the Tories' anti-democratic trade union bill. Len McCluskey said: "If that means taking us outside the law, then so be

it".

Fine words, which rightly were strongly applauded. But now we need a strategy for action.

Decisive industrial action - co-ordinated and general strikes - can 'kill the bill' and bring down the Tories.

Strikes

Mick Cash, general secretary of transport union RMT, said the trade union bill will "make us outlaws, and we will all be Robin Hoods."

Robin Hood hit the sheriff's profits with bow and arrow. We can hit back at Tory poverty deniers with strikes.

On 2 November, the TUC lobbies parliament. The unions must build to make that a mass demonstration, piling pressure on leaders to step up the fight.

If TUC officials won't lead, then the left-wing union leaders must seize the time.

Working class people can't just wait five years for a possible Labour victory. The attacks on our jobs, homes and services are happening now.

Mark Serwotka, head of public sector union PCS, saluted the success of National Gallery strikers to massive applause.

That's the spirit we must translate into strikes. Backed by further mass mobilisations, we can pitch the Tories back into the pig pen where they belong.

Socialist Party activists from up and down the country had a visible and energetic presence. We sold hundreds of copies of the Socialist, and raised over £700 in donations to our fighting fund.

Kick out the Tory entryists

Robin Clapp, South West Socialist Party

"We've got to stop talking about austerity. It doesn't get us anywhere and it doesn't mean anything." Labour needs to boost its standing with business and reinforce trust in its economic competence. This must include a commitment to "ban the word austerity".

The comments of a jaded journalist offering perjured counsel to Corbyn perhaps? Malicious advice from George Osborne, trying to talk up Britain's supposed economic recovery at the new leader's expense?

Tories in disguise

No. Here's another clue: "I got it at all these hustings... often people coming up to me saying 'oh you know, if only people had been anti-austerity we would have won the election'. That's bollocks. That's not supported by the evidence. And the SNP didn't win because of austerity - that again is a total myth."

These are actually the words of diehard New Labour Exeter MP Ben Bradshaw reported in the Western

Morning News on 30 September. Never mind Trojan horses in the Parliamentary Labour Party looking to overthrow Corbyn through devious displays of disloyalty.

Even Caesar's assassins Cassius and Brutus showed more subtlety than Bradshaw's guide to the art of political murder.

Jeremy Corbyn has been a spectacular lightning rod for exposing all the pent-up fury at what the Tories have done to us since 2010. Bradshaw and his ilk have long aided and abetted Cameron's war on the poor. Now he even seeks to deny that austerity exists.

Jeremy Corbyn

What better argument for mandatory reselection of Labour MPs? Bradshaw and the local clique of councillors around him spent the last few weeks in their constituency bunker ruling out dozens of enthusiastic leadership voters.

These exclusions allegedly include people whose only crime was not to answer their door to a party canvasser last May and so could not be considered 'one of us'.

Jeremy must give genuine socialists in the Labour Party the mechanisms to kick the Tory entryists out once and for all!

Better to break the law...

Eric Segal, Folkestone Socialist Party

In the late 1980s the moves to bring in the Poll Tax, that provided a wealth transfusion to the rich from the poor, started. There were two basic strategies to beat this draconian legislation. The battle to defeat the anti-trade union bill should learn the lessons of this campaign.

...than break the poor

The first strategy called 'Stop It' was promoted by the then right wing leadership of the Labour Party and a motley group of supporters. It was designed to delay the legislation until the Labour government came over the hill to the rescue. It didn't happen.

The second strategy was summed up in the slogan "better to break the law than break the poor". Many people, including 35 Militant (forerunner of the Socialist) supporters, went to prison for refusing to pay the Poll Tax.

A mass democratic movement of 18 million people, led by Militant supporters, organised in the communities, trade union branches, street by street, workplace by workplace, defeated the Thatcher government and led to her resignation in 1990.

Tories attack workers

Under the cover of bringing the party into disrepute, Labour used our actions against the poll tax to expel many good socialists and activists from the Labour Party, opening it up for the right wing Blairites to take control.

This anti-trade union bill, if enacted, aims to break organised opposition to welfare and benefit cuts. It will let wages and pensions be cut to the bone. Better to break the law than break the poor!

Anger after violent youth deaths

Communities under pressure need public services - not council cuts

Martin Powell-Davies, Secretary, Lewisham National Union of Teachers

Hundreds of angry residents packed into the Honor Oak Community Centre on 1 October to discuss the recent violent deaths of two teenagers on the Turnham estate in Lewisham, south London.

There was plenty of emotion on display, as well as anger - anger at the loss of life, at the lack of support for the family of local victim Shaquan, and at the pressures facing the local community as a whole.

Many different contributions were made from both invited speakers and from people in the audience. Concerns about racism and about knife-crime among black youth in particular featured significantly throughout the evening.

Poverty

Lee Jasper, opening the meeting, pointed to the racism still ingrained in our society evidenced by the disproportionately high levels of poverty and unemployment facing black communities.

The mother of a black teenager shot at Streatham Ice Rink back in 2007 talked tearfully of the wasted lives of both the victims and the youth behind bars facing indeterminate sentences for 'joint enterprise'.

A common theme raised was the decline in 'social solidarity', in opportunities for communities to work together, of the need for fathers to engage with their sons. However, some of the most powerful contributions focused on the collective pressures on families struggling to make a living and to support their children while services were cut and real incomes were falling.

A young man, Marlon, delivered an angry diatribe to the local politicians on the panel, pointing to the cuts to Sure Start, Connexions and youth services. He complained about 'gentrification' and plans to build more housing on the estate, supposedly social housing but, as a young woman behind me shouted out, "it's not affordable!"

A young woman speaking on behalf of Shaquan's mother Sharon, pointed to the reality facing so many working parents, not least Sharon herself.

Sharon hadn't been able to stop to grieve; she had no choice but to carry on working at her local hairdressers to pay her rent. This is an estate where most people are in work, but where too many have to rely on food banks because of low pay.

Turning to Lewisham cabinet member Janet Daby, who had offered little more than the need to 'give youth wisdom' and the importance of 'Operation Black Vote', the young woman said pointedly: "Why should we vote, when we don't trust you?" adding, "why should youth talk to the police when they don't trust them either?"

Change needed

Alienated and angry communities like this urgently need a party that can earn their trust by showing that it is genuinely prepared to fight poverty and racism. Such a party would refuse to carry out Tory cuts, fight for a £10 an hour minimum wage and end the housing policies that are leading to the 'social cleansing' of working class communities across London.

Will a Corbyn-led Labour provide that party? As things stand locally, it appears not. Councillors offered condolences and fine words but little more.

Newly-elected local Labour MP Vicky Foxcroft offered even less, replying to the young residents with the excuse that "the political reality is that it's the Conservative government's cuts". That was met with shouts of derision and the MP sat down silently for the rest of the meeting.

A Lewisham council officer had earlier spoken to the meeting about what the council was doing to help with 'crime reduction'. Yet, as part of the £40 million of cuts made last year, Lewisham council chopped £1 million from its crime reduction budget!

Worse, its report on one of those cuts spelt out bluntly what such a cut would mean to black youth in particular: "As young men from black and minority ethnic communities are over represented in the criminal justice system the impact there is likely to be increased."

Not surprisingly, the officer also didn't reveal the further 'savings proposal' to her service discussed at the previous night's Mayor and cabinet meeting. It suggested a further £2.5 million cut in the 'Crime Reduction and Supporting People' budget that will mean "reduced support for mental health, learning disability and single homeless clients" which might lead to "a rise in anti-social behaviour on the streets". Their words, not mine!

That's just one cut among a further £45 million planned over the next two years - from a council budget that has already been slashed by £120 million (one-third) since 2010. That could include £300,000 further cuts to youth services.

However, it's clear that trade unionists and communities are getting prepared to fight those cuts. A lobby of the next Mayor and cabinet meeting discussing the budget, on 9 December, is being planned.

Fight the cuts

I hope the anger shown at the meeting sent the politicians who attended home to think again about their role in passing on Tory cuts.

Labour councillors can't claim to stand against racism and poverty while they preside over cuts to communities that already have their backs to the wall.

As the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) and the Socialist Party have explained, Labour councillors could choose to lead a fight, instead of just meekly passing on cuts. If they did, they would get massive support - including from embittered and embattled communities like those on the Turnham estate.

Until 2010 the area was represented by Socialist Party councillors who voted against cuts and would have helped local people organise a campaign to fight for the resources necessary. TUSC reps have now written to the local councillors to open up a discussion about a needs budget for Lewisham.

Former Honor Oak (Telegraph Hill ward) Socialist Party councillor Chris Flood said:

"Ian Page (fellow Socialist Party councillor) and I got to know Sharon (the victim's mother) as we did some case work for her after the council had overcharged her for leasing her shop. Cheryl McLeod (TUSC candidate) and I went to see her after her son had been killed.

The Labour administration has axed many important local services that have helped to reduce crime, especially youth crime, in our inner cities.

Our councillors should be fighting and resisting these cuts to key services that hold communities together, instead of passing the government cuts on to poor communities and saying there is nothing they can do.

Jeremy (Corbyn) - you will have to go over the heads of some of these politicians who, unlike you, don't see a need to resist austerity. Work, I say, directly with the communities, like the residents of the Honor Oak estate, that are desperate to fight for their communities and oppose austerity."

Enthusiasm for socialism at freshers fairs

Leeds

At Leeds University, we signed up 81 students, gave out 500 leaflets and sold ten copies of Socialist Students' magazine Megaphone on just our first day! Socialist Students in Leeds had one of our best ever freshers interventions this year. 68 people attended our first event of the year, a film showing of Pride. Ray Goodspeed, one of the founding members of Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners (LGSM) spoke at the very successful event. There's new enthusiasm for socialist ideas among students and young people following the Labour leadership election victory of Jeremy Corbyn. Many students who joined our society said they were doing so because Socialist Students stood head and shoulders above the other groups on campus. We've campaigned against the student loan privatisation, run campaigns against sexism and won the women's rep position in Leeds Beckett Student Union. Now we're leading the Leeds For Free Education campaign, which is organising a demonstration on 24 October.

Mary Finch

Cardiff

Socialist Students made an appeal to Cardiff freshers to join the campaign to end the refugee crisis. Even the dazzling opportunities of freshers week couldn't distract students from demonstrating their solidarity. The society set up campaign stalls both inside and outside societies' fairs and called on every student who walked past to sign the petition to defend the right to asylum. The generosity and solidarity that we tapped into shames the capitalist governments of Europe who have done everything in their power to block refugees from getting the help they need. £100 was contributed over the course of two days, helping to pay for material to get the word out and other campaign expenses. The outpouring of sympathy has very clear, concrete aims - to fight to get the needs of desperate people what they need. But it also has another meaning: it is a protest against a system that puts profits before the satisfaction of the basic needs of ordinary people.

Ross Saunders

Swansea

Swansea Socialist Students kicked off the year with a successful stall at the student union's freshers fair, the best for years. We spent two full days distributing over 750 leaflets, selling 46 copies of the Socialist, and signing up almost 90 students. This was followed by a well-attended meeting where we

planned our first protest.

Gareth Bromhall

Sunderland

Four members of the Socialist Party attended Sunderland University freshers fair. There was an enthusiastic interest in discussing the ideas of socialism as shown by the 62 who signed up to Socialist Students. Also, 26 copies of the Socialist were sold and many expressed an interest in joining the Socialist Party. We spoke to a Colombian student who signed our petition against tuition fees and couldn't believe that a "rich country like Britain" charges its citizens for education, whereas in her "poor" home country she had completed two university degrees free of charge.

Peter Rippon

Leeds to get 'ethical' letting agency

Iain Dalton, Leeds Socialist Party and West Yorkshire TUSC convenor

In April campaigners put the argument to Leeds City Council that the answer to the housing crisis in Leeds would be a mass council house building programme and, as a more immediate measure, the setting up of a not-for-profit letting agency to deal with issues in the private rented housing sector.

The council's executive board considered this at its 23 September meeting.

Damning

The council's response contains damning comments on the quality of some private rented properties. Government data shows that 16% of private rented properties fail to meet basic legal standards and present "a severe threat to health or safety". This is around 9,000 homes in Leeds.

But despite this low quality, rents are soaring. The average is £144 a week - more than the average mortgage repayment.

The council talks about a range of actions to tackle the problems in private rented housing. Unfortunately, its concept of an 'ethical lettings agency' differs somewhat from what Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) supporters have in mind.

The council intends to create a service for "property owners who have only one property". While this would be a step forward, it is quite a limited letting service.

And the council has a wilful ignorance of the points we made about council house building. With a waiting list of around 20,000, the council's current plans to build around 1,000 new homes is a drop in the ocean, especially when some housing stock is being demolished to make way for them.

PFI

Scandalously, the council is using rip-off Private Finance Initiatives to build these homes.

We will be continuing our campaign and Leeds TUSC will be organising a lobby of the council

executive which meets to consider this on 10 February 2016.

Cuts to school crossing supervision in Derbyshire

Labour-controlled Derbyshire County Council has failed its first post-Corbyn test. Despite the council leader publicly declaring her support for Corbyn, the council voted to back its decision to decimate its school crossing patrol service, part of a £157 million cuts onslaught. Anti-cuts campaigners, including Lisa Blakemore, the recently elected Chesterfield TUSC secretary, have collected thousands of signatures from irate parents. Campaigners, including TUSC, will continue to build a mass campaign against the cuts.

Elaine Evans

<http://www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/21534>