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Corbyn must end false unity with Labour's right

Claire Laker-Mansfield, Socialist Party executive committee

There is no rest for the wicked. Theresa May had to cut short her Italian holiday to visit the French president, Emmanuel Macron, at his Mediterranean castle retreat.

May's hope is that he might help her resuscitate the so-called Chequers deal for leaving the EU - at least in some form - and thus assist in holding her crisis-ridden Tory government together.

Meanwhile, the governor of the Bank of England, Mark Carney, issues dire warnings about the dangers posed by the increasing likelihood of a no-deal Brexit.

Jeremy Hunt, the new foreign secretary, talks of 'no deal by accident'. Environment Secretary Michael Gove - theoretically in the camp of the hard Brexiteers - moots the idea of 'parking' the UK in the [neoliberal single market](#) and [customs union](#) until a deal is worked out at some indefinable point in the future. Police chiefs even claim "a significant loss of operational capacity" would result from no deal.

The Tory party is in a desperate state, deep in the grip of a potentially terminal crisis. May's government teeters so close to the edge that - especially if it were [faced with a mass movement, headed up by Jeremy Corbyn along with the trade union and labour movement as a whole - it could be forced out](#) within no time.

Yet what has dominated the headlines over the past week? A call to action from Corbyn and the trade union leadership? Labour boldly demanding a general election? Nothing of the sort.

Instead, the Tory crisis has often been relegated to inside pages. In its place is a barrage of [poison, slander and vicious abuse directed at Jeremy Corbyn's](#) leadership of the Labour party.

The trigger for this latest, frenzied chorus of attack is precisely the crisis engulfing the government. Britain's capitalist class lacks reliable political representation. There is no party it can count on to act in its interests in negotiating exit from the European Union.

The one thing staying the hands of May's multiple potential Tory assassins is their fear that a general election could see a further surge in support for an anti-austerity alternative - that a Corbyn-led government could be swept to power.

This, the capitalists understand, would have the potential to further awaken the appetite of working class people for a decisive break with austerity, and for more far-reaching, socialist measures.

That's why the agents of the rich 1% remaining in the Labour party - the Blairite fifth column - are approaching this latest round of Corbyn-bashing with such fresh zeal.

Bold response needed

But what is the response of Corbyn, McDonnell, and the leadership of Momentum to these attacks? What shots have been fired in return?

Since Corbyn's election in 2015, [the Socialist Party has warned of the dangers posed by an approach of seeking false 'unity'](#) with the pro-cuts, pro-capitalist elements still dominating Labour in parliament, local councils and much of the party machinery.

Almost three years on, there has been no let-up in their campaign to undermine Corbyn.

On 5 August, Labour's deputy leader Tom Watson further stepped up the rhetoric of Labour's right in a vituperative attack, clearly consciously timed in order to help ensure that there is no respite from viciously

negative headlines for the Labour leadership.

That interview has provoked mass outrage among Labour members and Corbyn supporters, with tens of thousands calling on Watson to resign via social media.

[Fresh revelations of the ongoing plotting taking place behind the scenes emerged on 7 August.](#) Reportedly, a 'core group' of around 12 Blairite MPs has been meeting for away days at a luxury 12-acre holiday estate in Sussex. On the agenda: a new leadership challenge; a party split; a parliamentary realignment grouping together with Tory remainers, Lib Dem cutters and right-wing Labour MPs in a new formation; and, perhaps most outrageously, a plan to organise Blairite MPs to block Corbyn from becoming prime minister should he win the next general election.

Two leadership election victories, a general election surge and a poll lead, have all failed to convince these pro-rich politicians to support him.

It would be folly to think that a potential general election win by Corbyn - now a clear possibility - would have this effect. Every concession made to the Blairite right by Corbyn or McDonnell has acted to embolden them to intensify their attacks.

That is why the decision, seemingly taken by Momentum's (essentially self-appointed) leader Jon Lansman, to drop Pete Willsman from the left slate for the Labour National Executive committee elections following the publishing of a secretly-made recording of him making some clumsy - though by no means antisemitic - remarks, was such a mistake (further material on this to follow).

This was a move characteristic of the general approach that the leadership of the Corbyn movement has adopted since the first poll predicting his victory in the leadership election in 2015.

A change of course is an urgent necessity. The stakes now are higher than ever. With the Tories on the brink, a Labour government is potentially on the cards.

It's possible that a section of the Blairites could move to block such a development by splitting from Labour to form a new party. Fresh chatter in the press suggests this is in the air.

But we cannot wait for them to leave, at a time designed to inflict maximum damage on Corbyn. The workers' movement needs to clear them out.

This is why, as well as calling for people to take to the streets and organise to kick out this Tory government, it's vital that Corbyn fights to mobilise his tens of thousands of supporters, along with the trade union movement, to take on the right in his own party.

This means being prepared to fight for the kinds of measures the Socialist Party has been calling for since Corbyn's election: the measures which are necessary to transform Labour into a genuine workers' party.

[We call for mandatory re-selection.](#) With a snap election on the cards it is urgent that a genuine democratic say in which candidates represent Labour at elections is given to party members and trade unions.

We fight for [the opening up of the Labour Party to all elements of the workers' and socialist movement](#), including the Socialist Party, to participate in it on a federal basis.

We argue for the [reversal of all the anti-democratic measures introduced by Blair](#) and the re-founding of the party along genuinely democratic, socialist lines - including the [full restoration of the democratic rights of trade unions](#) and party members in deciding party policy.

The attacks Corbyn is facing now, severe and relentless as they are, will be as a shadow compared to those that would face him and his government should they threaten the profits of the capitalist class in seeking to carry out their programme.

We therefore call on him to take the urgent action necessary to organise the fight to take on the right now - helping to prepare the forces that will be needed in order to defend his anti-austerity stand and to fight for

socialist change.

This article was updated on 7.8.18

Birmingham home carers strike

Low paid workers fight austerity cuts

Kristian O'Sullivan, Birmingham Socialist Party

Birmingham City Council is once again attacking its workers. Last year it was the bin workers, now it's [coming for home care staff](#).

But the [carers are fighting back](#). 14 days of strike action have begun by the carers' union Unison in a massive show of strength to stand up for their jobs, terms and conditions and the vital public service relied upon by many families in Birmingham.

A further £3 million is being cut from the enablement service budget. Part of the council's proposals is to make all full-time staff redundant and offer them new contracts for either 23, 21 or 14 hours. How are low paid workers meant to live on 14 hours a week work?

These cuts are despite the council previously making huge cutbacks through 'voluntary redundancies', which were over-subscribed by a large margin and meant to solve the issue of funding.

But it seems to have been just the first wave of attacks - not that anyone believed this lie in the first place.

The council is shutting 14 nurseries to 'save' £160,000 but it spent £6 million on scab labour to try to break the bin strike last year! £258 million of planned cuts over the next four years shows that no council service is safe. Yet the council has approximately £400 million in useable reserves.

At the same time the council is spending £12 million on consultants to tell it how to merge the home care service with NHS services in 2019-20, which is likely preparation for privatisation of both services.

These cuts emphasise the need to organise a fightback at the first sign of any attack or else before long nothing will be left of our public services.

Birmingham is destined to host the Commonwealth Games but can't afford its most vital public services for the families and services users of the city. The games are being pushed and used as a vanity project by a Tory West Midlands mayor - with a Chief Executive for the 2022 organising committee being hired on £170,000 a year - £680,000 in total!

Strike support

Socialist Party and Socialist Students members visited the four pickets organised by the home care workers on 1 August to show solidarity and offer support, which was welcomed.

The mood on all the pickets - Suffolk Street, Lifford House, Woodcock Street, Lancaster Circus - was a determination to see this industrial action through to the end.

Support for this strike has been flooding in from service users, their families, trade unions, disabled rights groups and other ordinary people as everyone knows the importance of the home care and enablement service.

The Labour-run council has ignored the popularity of Jeremy Corbyn's anti-austerity message, as shown by voters in the 2017 general election. Instead, the council is continuing to do the Tories' dirty work by

implementing cuts and attacking workers.

Now that the councillors feel 'safe' for another four years, they carry on acting like Tories in all but name.

[Councillors could refuse point blank to carry out any cuts](#) and instead use the reserves while working with, instead of against, unions and communities to build a campaign to demand the money from the Tory government to meet the needs of Birmingham.

Jeremy Corbyn should pledge to restore those funds upon election of a Labour government.

The unions should also call for deselection of Labour councillors who carry out cuts, to hold to account those who go against the unions and their members. Kick out the Blairites!

Home care workers should take inspiration from [last year's bin workers' victory](#). - when we fight, we can win!

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 7 August 2018 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

Northants Council in total collapse: for a citizens' assembly to draw up a 'needs budget'

Steve Score, Socialist Party East Midlands

The unprecedented financial crisis of Northamptonshire's Tory county council continues. The [first council to go technically bankrupt](#) for many years is slashing services even further.

But the crisis in Northants is only the first, with many more councils on the brink. East Sussex Tory council has also announced it will be cutting services down to the "core" of statutory services.

The children's commissioner for England has highlighted a national crisis. Councils are failing to meet their obligations to provide services for vulnerable children.

She said there were 1.5 million children in households where there were issues such as severe mental health problems and domestic violence who were not getting the help they need.

Protesters made their presence known once more outside the latest emergency meeting of Northants on 1 August. Councillors discussed a paper proposing up to £70 million of cuts to a budget that had already been devastated.

Even before these cuts, 16 of the 21 county libraries were being closed, along with children's centres, elderly services and subsidies for rural bus services. They say they aim to protect "core services" without detailing what they are.

As Paul Crofts from Save Northants Services said: "The papers talk about protecting children in significant harm. But what about those just at risk of harm? Will the council not intervene?" There is no doubt that vulnerable adults and children will suffer.

Questions have been raised about whether the council can even keep legally required 'statutory services' running because of the severity of its financial crisis. A second 'section 114 notice' has just been issued after the first six months ago, banning all new non-statutory spending.

As a model Tory authority, it outsourced services and made cuts. The huge debt from 'private finance initiative' (PFI) schemes alone costs nearly £50 million a year in repayments.

But let's be clear: this isn't just down to 'mismanagement' by local Tory councillors. This is also a result of the huge [cuts made to council funding by the government nationally](#).

Save Northants Services and public service union Unison have called for an immediate, emergency injection of funds to avert the current crisis. However, they have no trust in the government, left to its own devices, to solve the crisis in a way that will help local services.

Commissioners sent in by the government have proposed dividing the authority. But no amount of reorganisation would solve the lack of money!

The Socialist Party supports the call made by Save Northants Services for a citizens' assembly, involving council staff, trade unions, community campaigns and others who support an anti-austerity agenda, to [discuss working out a genuine people's 'needs budget'](#).

We need an alternative strategy. The cuts must be immediately reversed, services brought back in-house and PFI debt scrapped.

Campaigners are also demanding the council resign and force new elections to give local people a genuine alternative to Tory cuts. The Socialist Party supports this demand - but it is vital that any candidates aiming to replace the Tories adopt a no-cuts budget approach.

With or without an emergency election, a mass campaign needs to be built linking trade unions and the workforce - both direct and outsourced - with the community across Northamptonshire, to force extra funding from the government.

Communities across the county will undoubtedly suffer as a consequence of these cuts. Already in villages surrounding Northampton, bus services have been stripped right back with some ceasing to run altogether, leaving many residents without public transport.

The impact the proposed cuts will have on library services also cannot be underestimated. For several towns and villages in Northamptonshire, libraries are also community hubs, providing a place for jobseekers to search for work, for parents and their children to participate in holiday activities, and also providing bus passes and blue badges.

Without libraries and reliable bus services, residents across Northamptonshire are finding themselves in an impossible predicament, cut off from larger towns and unable to fully participate in social activities.

A proposed 'single-tier' structure to replace Northamptonshire County Council is also in the pipeline. Despite the fact the majority of residents oppose such a measure - particularly in Corby where 98% put forward an emphatic 'No' to a unitary authority - it is looking increasingly likely in the wake of the devastation of Northamptonshire Council's finances.

It is clear the county council is in serious trouble.

Jac Green, Northampton Socialist Party

Rents soar 60% faster than pay - while spivs plan luxury homes on Green Belt

Cap rents, build council homes, protect green space

James Collett, Gloucestershire Socialist Party

Rents have risen 60% faster than wages since 2011. Meanwhile big developers rub their hands at the prospect of building more homes for the very rich on Green Belt land.

The situation is so bad that Tory cabinet minister Liz Truss has claimed that "the choice is building on more greenfield sites... or losing the election and ending up with Jeremy Corbyn, whose policy appears to be appropriating property."

Recent analysis from Shelter shows the gathering pace of the housing crisis, both in major cities as well as more rural areas, and gives a glimpse of the human suffering which it causes. Figures from the housing charity reveal that rents have increased by 16% while wages have risen by only 10%.

The unhindered profiteering of employers and property developers means a relentless lowering of living standards for the rest of us, with the most vulnerable hit hardest. At the other end of the spectrum, however, things are looking better than ever for the big developers.

460,000 houses are planned for land the Tories are releasing from the Green Belt, according to the Campaign to Protect Rural England. But the local authorities authorising the plans have enough brownfield land for over 720,000 homes.

Unaffordable

And 78% of new greenfield homes will be unaffordable - even by the government's own Orwellian definition of 'affordable' as 80% of sky-high market rates.

The housing crisis is now a national crisis. The trend of rent increases outstripping wage increases is becoming evident everywhere, [from big cities](#) to small towns.

In order to live in the style to which they have become accustomed, the super-rich need workers - to run the businesses which make them their money, staff the exclusive restaurants they frequent, maintain the mansions they enjoy, and build their big houses for them in the first place.

Without our labour they'd have no way to make profit. Workers deserve to live in dignity, in safe homes with genuinely affordable rents.

To get this, [we need rent controls for starters](#), as well as a mass programme of council house building and an end to the cuts.

But ultimately the [big construction and housing firms must be taken into public ownership](#), so housing can be democratically planned to meet the needs of everyone, not to increase the profits of the few.

Tax-dodging tech bosses make billions... while 6m workers fear the scrapheap

Nationalise the big tech firms

Stephanie Hammond

Every ten seconds, Amazon founder Jeff Bezos makes the median salary of one of his employees: \$28,000.

Bezos, the richest man in history, has a net worth of over \$150 billion. Meanwhile, [workers at Amazon's 'fulfilment centre' warehouses](#) are subject to total surveillance and impossible quotas pushing them to the limits of human endurance.

He is just one of the billionaires of Silicon Valley who hoard exorbitant wealth. They represent a new type of technocratic oligarch, with zero accountability, [able to dictate the trajectory of technology](#), and how it impacts everyone else, for better or worse.

Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg recently lost over \$15 billion in net worth overnight. That's more than most people can earn in a thousand lifetimes, and it won't affect him a bit.

How many quality, affordable homes could be built for what the casino-house markets removed in a day?
How many illnesses treated, mouths fed, classes taught, and public works funded?

The source of his wealth, perversely, lies in the freely given data of Facebook's more than 2.3 billion users. We are paid infinitely less than the chief executive who trades on our lives being abused for advertising revenue or political capital.

Tesla founder Elon Musk has consistently union-busted, with injuries, poor pay and conditions at his plants - while he dreams up personal pet projects of colonising Mars.

These people [barely pay a crumb of tax](#), and in fact count on subsidies when they open new factories or offices. Last year, Facebook paid just £2.6 million corporation tax in Britain. And Amazon's payment halved - while it posted record profit in its most recent financial quarter.

However repulsive these figures are, the question is not of individual morals - or even of technology - but how society is organised.

The internet has offered unprecedented access to information, and a means of forming bonds between people everywhere in the world.

But like the great new machines that fuelled the industrial revolution, the question is roughly the same: [who overwhelmingly benefits from these amazing new technologies](#) - the bosses, or the rest of us?

The bosses want to use new technology to maximise profit, but also fear the social consequences. Over six million workers in Britain worry new tech will destroy their jobs, according to a parliamentary commission.

But automation would not be a problem in a democratically planned, socialist world. It could lift countless burdens from the backs of workers. The working class could collectively reap the rewards: better living standards, more leisure time and the opportunity to pursue other, creative work.

Why should this new digital oligarchy, or any capitalist, have the final say? The Socialist Party says: nationalise the tech giants and top corporations. Plan production to provide plenty for all - not opulence and vanity projects for the billionaires.

No to Tory plans for radioactive waste under national parks

Geoff and Kate Jones, Swansea Socialist Party

A new Tory plan could see tons of highly dangerous radioactive waste buried in our national parks and areas of outstanding natural beauty.

Parliament's energy committee, chaired by the Blairite Rachel Reeves, backs the proposal.

When a Conservative government built Britain's first nuclear power plants in the 1950s, we were promised cheap, pollution-free energy. In reality, the energy was neither.

There were massive cost overruns in building them. But more important, no one seemed to have considered the tons of highly radioactive waste materials produced.

At present, Britain has an estimated 750,000 cubic metres of this deadly waste - equivalent to a 91-metre-high cube. Some of this will be dangerous for many tens of thousands of years. Currently, most is kept in storage tanks at Sellafield in Cumbria.

The only idea for a permanent solution the government has come up with is to bury it between 200 and 1,000 metres down - at a cost of at least £12 billion.

In 2013, they tried to persuade Cumbria County Council to host the site. But after major local opposition, the council turned them down. Other councils were offered bribes of £2.5 million a year to take the site, but have politely declined.

Now the Tories are [commissioning a new generation of nuclear generators](#), Hinkley Point and Wylfa among others. These will produce even more waste, at a time when sustainable power sources - wind turbines, solar farms, tidal lagoons - are within reach of satisfying our power needs.

The Socialist Party [opposes new nuclear power stations](#), which will be hugely expensive, [not risk-free from accidents](#), and will further add to the mountain of radioactive waste.

As for existing waste, no nuclear nation has yet found any good way of dealing with it.

France is constructing a massive storage site, half a kilometre deep. But any site will have a huge above-ground footprint with approach roads and spoil heaps, and would have to be acceptable to local people.

A French expert suggests that geologically, the best site for such storage in Britain would be in the Oxford area - not likely to go down well with local voters!

The Socialist Party says: nationalise the energy and public transport companies. Invest in a massive expansion of green energy and research - not more nuclear.

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Them & us

Branson's NHS billions...

Turns out things in the health service are actually looking up - if you're a bootlegging privatiser, that is. Billionaire Richard Branson's Virgin Care has now gobbled up almost £2 billion of NHS contracts, according to Guardian analysis.

... working while sick

Workers in the UK are taking record-low numbers of sick days: more of us are flogging ourselves in while ill. The average in 2017 was just 4.1 days, compared to 7.2 days in 1993, says the Office for National Statistics. Low pay, insecure work, bullying managers - these days only the super-rich can afford to be poorly.

Pay for nothing...

The ex-head of a Sussex college is still getting his £200,000-a-year salary after leaving - while management denies workers raises. Mike Hopkins, former principal at Sussex Downs, will receive £80,000 over five months, plus an unspecified bonus. The University and College Union is demanding staff pay rises.

... nothing on payday

The Tories' train-wreck ['universal credit' welfare system](#) is underpaying some workers by hundreds - because it doesn't understand the calendar. Claimants assessed too near their payday show up as receiving two pay cheques within one month. Scrap universal credit and reverse all benefit cuts!

Bread and roses (and beer)

More than half of adults in the UK say they struggle to afford the pub. With the average pint costing £3.50 - or £5.20 in London - 56% say it's too much, according to the Campaign for Real Ale.

The socialist movement fights for decent pay and a decent life for working class people, including places to socialise - "we fight for bread, but we fight for roses too!" Meanwhile, in 2017, the world's top five booze firms reported revenues of £92 billion.

- Have you got news for the fishes? Email editors@socialistparty.org.uk

The fight against Labour's Blairites and TUSC's role now

Should the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) continue? The Socialist Party, one of its cofounders, believes TUSC could still play an important role if it is recast for the period ahead. In early July we submitted a discussion paper to the TUSC national steering committee setting out our proposals, an edited extract from which is printed below.

The Socialist Party supports Jeremy Corbyn's leadership of the Labour Party as a bridgehead for the working class against the capitalists. That includes the Blairite agents of capitalism within the party who, as recent events show, are stepping up their campaign against Corbyn.

Building on Jeremy Corbyn's leadership bridgehead is the clearest route, at this point, through which workers could achieve a mass party of our own. But that means being prepared to take on the Labour right wing - including where necessary in next year's local elections. Whether or not TUSC can be the vehicle for that challenge is at the core of the discussion on its future role now underway.

TUSC, an alliance of trade unionists, community campaigners and socialists co-founded by the late Bob Crow (general secretary of the RMT transport workers' union), the Socialist Party, and others, was [set up in 2010](#).

At that time the capitalist establishment - the wealthy elite who dominate the economy and society - were politically represented not just by the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats but by Labour too.

They had achieved unchallenged control of the Labour Party for 20 years, [moulding it politically and organisationally into a new party](#) - Tony Blair's New Labour, continued under Gordon Brown and Ed Miliband - and in doing so had effectively disenfranchised working class voters, who no longer had a mass party they saw as their own.

TUSC's aim in this situation was to push forward the process of re-establishing a vehicle for mass working class political representation.

In its [founding statement](#) TUSC recognised that there were "different strategic views" within the coalition about how to achieve the common end goal. "Whether the Labour Party can be reclaimed by the labour movement", the statement read, "or whether a new workers' party needs to be established", was a strategic question that was left open.

[Jeremy Corbyn's election as leader](#) posed the question more sharply. It showed that Labour could become the mass vehicle for working class political representation - if his unanticipated victory was to be followed up with fundamental changes to the party's policies and organisation.

In the period since Corbyn's victory the Socialist Party, one of the constituent organisations of TUSC, has applied to [affiliate to Labour on the same terms as the Co-operative Party](#), to be free to fight for the socialist policies and organisational changes needed to transform Labour without losing its political independence.

The RMT, another TUSC constituent organisation, expelled from New Labour in 2004, has also [debated whether it should re-affiliate](#) to the Labour Party.

But three years after Corbyn's initial leadership victory it is clear that the political and organisational legacy of New Labour is far from being overturned. The Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP) is still dominated by the Blairites; right-wing Labour local councillors continue to slash jobs and services; and the structures of the party remain much as they were under New Labour.

The RMT at its recent special general meeting (SGM) [decided not to re-affiliate to Labour at this stage and on the terms offered](#). The SGM agreed that Labour "has the potential to be a mass party of the working class" but that the RMT could best "support, defend and develop the socialist advances that have been made" through its own independent political activity. The Socialist Party has not been readmitted.

Events could develop - the formation of the long-touted 'Stop Brexit' centre party with a big chunk of the PLP splitting away, for example - which could hasten the process of transforming Labour into a workers' party. But equally the current situation could drift on unresolved.

The possibilities shown by Jeremy Corbyn's leadership victories have not been exhausted. Three years on, however, it is necessary to soberly assess how the goal of workers' political representation can be realised. That includes discussing what TUSC's future role in that process could be.

Time for action

One of the most important priorities will be to step up [campaigning against austerity policies being implemented by right-wing Labour-led local authorities](#). Sabotaging Jeremy Corbyn's anti-austerity message, they are undermining the chances of winning a Corbyn-led government and for that reason alone cannot be left unchallenged.

Building in particular on the [struggle of Liverpool City Council in the 1980s](#), but in the new legislative framework for local government, TUSC has pioneered a strategy of councils using their prudential (legal) borrowing powers and reserves to formally 'balance' no-cuts budgets to buy time for a mass campaign for increased government funding.

Detailed [information on council reserves](#) and guidance material on [how to prepare a no-cuts 'Peoples Budget'](#) has been produced. TUSC supporters have won significant backing for this strategy in the main local government unions, [Unison](#), [Unite](#) and the [GMB](#). And we have engaged in a dialogue on this issue with those minority of Labour councillors who are looking for a means to turn anti-austerity words into action.

The Socialist Party believes that TUSC should continue with this activity but should also launch a new initiative this autumn. We propose a councillors' petition to the shadow chancellor John McDonnell, asking him to guarantee that an incoming Labour government would replenish any reserves a council used to avoid cuts now and underwrite borrowing made for the same purpose.

Such a commitment to retrospective action is not unprecedented. When the newly-elected Labour government of 1974 moved to repeal the Housing Finance Act it included provisions to remove penalties from councillors who had refused to implement the act (although 17 MPs voted with the Tories or abstained to keep the disqualification against the eleven [Clay Cross councillors](#) in place).

Notoriously the Con-Dem coalition passed the 2013 Jobseekers (Back to Work Schemes) Act to [retrospectively reverse a court of appeal ruling](#) that jobseekers were entitled to compensation for having been made to work unpaid on workfare schemes. With such precedents, why couldn't an incoming Labour government effectively indemnify councils which refuse to implement cuts now?

Such a pledge would give confidence to those Labour councillors who really want to act on Jeremy Corbyn's anti-austerity message - and put pressure on those that don't.

Charter

As Labour was changed into New Labour, the power of the unions within the party was gutted. A vital step to transforming Labour into a party representing the working class must be to [restore a role for the unions](#), the biggest voluntary organisations in Britain, commensurate with their position as the collective voices of millions of workers, as part of a complete democratisation of the party.

To this end, the Socialist Party believes that TUSC should launch a 'charter for workers' political representation' to take into the labour movement on key demands that would be necessary for the Blairites to be decisively defeated and Labour transformed. The steps proposed are not exhaustive but they should include:

- [Mandatory reselection of MPs](#) - with unions having the right to directly nominate candidates onto parliamentary shortlists
- The abolition of the National Policy Forum, where unions hold just 16% of the votes - with policy-making power restored to the party conference
- The replacement of the council Labour Group-dominated Local Campaign Forums, responsible for council candidate panels, by a 'district Labour Party' structure - with directly elected union branch delegates and the power to decide local election manifestos and elect Labour Group officers
- The end of the non-delegate organisation model for constituency Labour Parties (CLPs) - to restore representative democracy in the administration of local parties and ensure a full role for affiliated union branches
- End the MPs' veto over who can be a leadership candidate - by introducing a qualifying threshold based on CLP and trade union nominations only
- [Reinstate socialists who have been expelled](#) or otherwise excluded and ensure their right to be organised - allow the affiliation of socialist parties and anti-austerity, anti-racist, socialist-feminist and Green campaigns and organisations in a modern version of the early federal structure of the Labour Party
- [A new Clause Four](#) - replacing the clause introduced by Tony Blair praising "the enterprise of the market and the rigour of competition" with a commitment to a democratic socialist society based on the common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange

While the charter's demands may need to be modified after the Labour Party's democracy review proposals are released in September, it is regrettably not likely that the review will recommend such a transformational approach. TUSC could play an important role in popularising what will still need to be done to recreate Labour as a workers' party.

Election tactics

TUSC has already recalibrated its electoral activity. In the 2017 general election, in which the working class had an opportunity to put Jeremy Corbyn into Number Ten, [TUSC agreed not to stand any candidates](#), from the position of being the sixth-biggest party on the ballot paper two years earlier in 2015.

If the same situation arises - a general election in which there is the possibility for a Corbyn-led government to be elected - TUSC should adopt the same approach. But local elections are not the same as a general election, which is about determining who forms the government at a national level. The issue in local elections on the other hand should be about how councils can expand or at least defend local public services - and, in doing so, best use their still considerable powers to resist the drive for cuts and privatisation coming from Westminster.

But that is not the position of Labour's right wing in local government - which predominates not just among MPs but in local council Labour Groups too. They unresistingly carry out the Tory government's austerity agenda.

It is councillors from this camp that TUSC has stood candidates against in the three sets of local elections held under Jeremy Corbyn's Labour Party leadership.

And while the responsibility for challenging such alleged 'Labour' representatives who implement Tory policies does not rest with TUSC alone, our coalition should continue to contest local elections on this basis, beginning preparations this autumn to stand in the May 2019 elections.

Should TUSC continue?

The Socialist Party has been committed to TUSC because we recognised the role it could play in crystallising the arguments around working class political representation, particularly within the trade unions. Participating in TUSC inevitably puts constraints on the Socialist Party's independent activity.

However, although the terrain has changed since Jeremy Corbyn's election as Labour leader, we are prepared to continue carrying this overhead because we believe TUSC still has a role to play, if it is recast along the lines set out here.

It would be wishful thinking, however, not to recognise that there is some support within the RMT for TUSC not to continue. It is inevitable, for example, in a union of over 80,000 members, that there will be some who want to support Labour councillors in local elections regardless of the cuts policies they are carrying out, and who will be unhappy with TUSC standing candidates next May. So it is appropriate to discuss what TUSC's future role should be or whether it is time to end the project and agree a process to do so.

But that is not the preferred position of the Socialist Party. We not only defend what TUSC has achieved in its eight years of existence but believe that its potential role in helping establish socialist, working class political representation is far from exhausted.

- The full text of the Socialist Party's proposals has been published in [a discussion document at the TUSC website](#). It includes a comprehensive TUSC timeline 2009-2018, setting the current discussion in context

NHS workers angry at reality of mis-sold 'pay rise'

'William Malcolm', NHS nurse

As thousands of NHS workers across the country checked their payslips in July it was a huge disappointment to see that the promised backdated 3% pay rise was a fantasy for those staff not already at the top of their pay band.

The deal, which was [heralded by all the health unions \(apart from the GMB\)](#) as a major step forward and a smashing of the 1% cap, in reality for many staff has meant a pitiful 1.5% pay rise - with the extra to be realised only if they hit their increment.

The anger from NHS staff has been huge. The Royal College of Nursing (RCN) general secretary has issued a sensational apology to RCN members admitting that the pay deal had been mis-sold to them. Within the RCN, grassroots campaigners have gained the signatures needed to trigger an emergency general meeting on the pay deal.

From the meeting there is potential for a vote of no confidence, with anger growing as more details emerge. There are calls for talks to reopen.

Health union Unison, however, released a statement that, in reality, blamed members for not understanding the pay deal, despite the complicated wording and disgraceful publicity proclaiming rises of up to 29%. Throughout the pay dispute, grassroots activists were told that the new deal was a smashing of the pay cap.

In my hospital, senior matrons had 'worked out' the extra pay staff should have expected in their pay packet. Some nurses not at the top of their band were told to expect back pay of £300 plus, only to realise they have barely bettered the previous 1% we've suffered for years.

Trust in the union leaderships is at an all-time low. Following this revelation there have been countless nurses ripping up their lifetime union memberships in complete anger at the role played by the leaders. The unions didn't engage with members through the consultation period with turnouts of 30% and 27% in Unison and Unite the Union respectively.

The unions should give a lead to NHS staff and reopen the talks to pressure this weak Tory government into real pay rises for hard working staff.

The prospect of a new generation of NHS staff thrust into action by this debacle could signify a new layer of activists who can dislodge the right wing leaderships of the main health unions and offer a genuine fighting lead on pay and the wider issues facing our NHS.

Government fail to deliver on funding and teachers' pay - demand action to win 5%

James Kerr, Lewisham National Education Union (NUT section)

The government's announcement on teacher pay, released when many education workers are already on holiday, is in effect a further real terms pay cut for most and will go nowhere near solving the teacher recruitment and retention crisis.

The timing, and the fact the government have had to ditch the 1% pay cap, demonstrates they are feeling the pressure. Earlier in the week, a new toolkit for schools to use to support in workload reduction was also released, a far cry from their blasé attitude towards teacher recruitment and retention up until now.

The facts and figures in the 'School Teachers' Review Body' report expose the extent of that crisis. While pupil numbers are rising, the number of teachers leaving the profession continues to increase. Yet the government refused to even accept their recommendation of a 3.5% increase to all teachers. Instead, the 3.5% rise (in reality only a 1% real terms uplift with CPI inflation running at 2.4%) will apply to at best 40% of teachers. The 2% for the Upper Pay Scale (UPS) is merely a smaller than usual pay cut and all teachers will be impacted as they pass through threshold to an eroded UPS. The leadership scale is even lower at 1.5%.

The headlines that the rise is 'fully funded' are also inaccurate. 1% will come from school budgets, budgets that are already strained to the limit and in many cases can't take anymore. The rest isn't new money from the Treasury but raided from other Department for Education (DFE) pots. That'll mean further cuts. How will that solve the crisis in provision for students with special educational needs? What other services are under threat as a result? An immediate demand placed on the government should be to answer these questions. Parents and students should know about what this will mean for them too.

The official response from the National Education Union (NEU) missed the mark on all these questions. Mary Bousted, general secretary, welcomed the news and Kevin Courtney described the additional DFE funding as "a tribute to our campaign". Yet, [the NEU had demanded 5% across the board](#), a demand that has not been met.

This will have disorientated NEU members who try to work out the reality of the award. It also undermines a very important united front with the headteacher unions, who had recently issued a powerful joint statement calling for a fully funded pay rise and instructing Heads to go into deficit to buy time to win the money needed.

This mistaken approach must urgently be corrected. It will only have reassured a government that is dishonestly trying to spin the real facts as it tries to head off a fightback from education workers at a time when they are weak and divided. We can't simply chalk this up as a victory to sell back to members but need to prepare for an autumn campaign to win the funding we need for education.

To really win the money schools need to fund pay, jobs and reduce workload, a national strike ballot will be needed. The summer announcement means that teachers have been unable to meet together to discuss its implications. However, at the start of next term, union meetings must be urgently called to analyse the details and to convince school staff that we either confront this government or continue to face a continuation of cuts to children's education, and our pay and conditions. Inspired by the [West Virginia educators](#), union groups are also building for 'fed up Fridays', starting on 14 September.

Regrettably, it looks like we might also need to convince our own leadership and that will probably mean more time is needed to make sure the union is ready to go out and win a national ballot. But that national ballot is urgently needed.

The [deep crisis in education](#), exemplified by the teacher recruitment and retention crisis, will not be solved by recycled cash or smoke and mirrors. A massive injection of funds is required and [we will need to fight for it](#).

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 25 July 2018 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

PCS union: break the pay cap - the fight continues!

Katrine Williams, Dave Semple and Marion Lloyd, PCS union national executive members (personal capacity)

The PCS pay strike ballot result, despite not reaching the threshold, [represents a significant achievement](#) - getting 50,726 members to vote for strike action (86%).

Thousands of our reps worked tirelessly throughout the whole ballot period. We have extended our influence into new workplaces.

It is crucial that we do not lose this momentum and use it to organise group action on pay, to stop other attacks on terms and conditions and continue to build the pay campaign for the rest of 2018 and to prepare for 2019.

Next steps

The national executive committee (NEC), at its meeting on 24 July, agreed a number of actions to take the pay campaign forward. This included:

- Call upon the government to reopen negotiations on the pay remit/cap of 1-1.5%
- Seek a joint union judicial review of the lack of consultation on the Treasury pay remit
- Coordinate and support negotiators in all bargaining areas to continue to challenge the pay cap and support action

Socialist Party members on the NEC argued for a sense of urgency when it came to maintaining the momentum created during the pay ballot campaign and that it is crucial to fully consult union activists.

We must draw on their experience to work out why we didn't reach the ballot threshold, what we need to do to rectify that, and to decide on next steps.

We argued for an early special delegate conference in the autumn to take stock and determine the way forward.

Counterposed to our proposal and agreed by the NEC was an event planned for the end of 2018 or beginning of 2019.

Socialist Party PCS members are concerned that this is too late and means the NEC and senior full-time officers will make decisions without fully consulting reps and members who are responsible for delivering the

ballot turnout in our workplaces.

We are concerned that if a special conference is not organised as soon as is practically possible, the pay campaign will be stalled until several months into the new year and momentum will be lost in preparing for the 2019 pay campaign.

This is especially urgent as government departments are planning to use the "flexibilities" on pay to attack terms and conditions in 2019 [as they are attempting to do in Ministry of Justice](#).

This reinforces the need for the national union to work closely with groups to fight for our pay demands and counter this latest divide-and-rule tactic.

The main pay motion (A283) agreed at [this year's conference](#) has been overtaken by events. We need to update our mandate and believe a special delegate conference is the best way of doing this.

Socialist Party NEC members will continue to argue for the need to bring our key activists in branches together as soon as possible and for lay democracy when it comes to evaluating the recent ballot and decisions about next steps for our union and the national pay campaign.

The fight goes on

We say:

- The fight to call on the government and the other civil service unions to reopen negotiations on the pay remit (1-1.5% cap), our claim for a fully funded 5% or £1,200, and for national pay bargaining must continue
- If the government's position remains unchanged, full support to negotiators in all bargaining areas to continue to challenge the pay cap and support submissions for action, working to link up different areas of the union in action
- A special pay conference as soon as is practically possible to assess the pay situation and further develop plans for carrying forward the fight against the government's vicious and discriminatory pay cap policy
- We must learn the key lessons of the ballot result and prepare the ground for the concerted trade union fightback to defend members' interests and workers' rights

Kirklees bin workers' strike forces management back

Mike Forster, Huddersfield Socialist Party

The [threatened all-out strike of Kirklees bin workers](#) has been averted. The week-long strike at the start of July ended without an agreement being reached and Unison announced their intention to call all-out action if the dispute wasn't settled.

The primary issue was [management bullying and racism](#), as they tried to manage shrinking budgets by pushing the workers harder and harder. This included pushing the workers to overload wagons beyond the legal limit as rounds were expanded, denying time off for hospital appointments for a worker who had cancer and refusing other time to take their leave entitlement. Complaints and grievances were ignored - in fact one of the stewards was suspended for bringing a complaint!

The first July strike was solid among Unison members, but unfortunately the handful of GMB members were escorted across the picket lines by their union officials. Likewise, some Unite members continued working - but a significant number refused to.

Management had clearly hoped to break the strike using the other minority unions. When this ploy backfired, and further action was announced, management agreed to more talks. The new offer was accepted unanimously.

It includes recruiting ten more permanent drivers with two new rounds and a further 30 agency staff to cover for leave and sickness. Crucially two of the more hardline managers have been removed from the workplace.

Yet again, the threat of strike action has forced management to climb down. The agreement will be kept under close review as the ballot will remain live for the next few months. Any backtracking by management will be met with resumed strikes.

Socialist Party members had decided not to wait for the announced all-out strike and successfully proposed that the trade union council organise a public meeting on 23 July to launch a 'Bin Workers Support Group'. Speakers included reps from Mid Yorkshire Unison, who also recently voted to take strike action against privatisation, and the hospital campaign Hands Off HRI.

Anger was directed at the Labour council, whose leader has announced that the strike was politically motivated, and which had taken management's side in the talks. This betrayal has not gone unnoticed and further pressure is being applied to the Labour group and party activists to censure the council for refusing to support a critical dispute.

Ministry of Justice workers angry at barrage of attacks

Tessa Warrington, former PCS union MoJ member

Huge anger is being stoked up among staff in the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) after the 'modernising employment proposition' (MEP) pay offer came as yet another in a long line of slaps to the face.

Staff have faced years of the public sector pay freeze, and declining living standards, with the MoJ being the lowest-paid department across the civil service.

Not only does this offer of an average 11% pay rise over five years (1%-3% a year) and fall well short of the civil service union PCS' recommended 5% a year, but it is 'cost neutral' - meaning completely unfunded.

The money for the 'pay rise' would come only from changing the contract of employment in order to attack terms and conditions.

Staff would have to agree to an increase in the working week to 38 hours, stoppage of all overtime rates and compulsory working on Saturdays, bank holidays and evenings. Other allowances would also be cut like to motor mileage allowance and sick pay.

When I worked in the MoJ, the staff almost universally relied on being paid time-and-a-half for overtime to top up their wages.

Overtime was never short because the courts service was already severely under-resourced. In reality, MEP will mean a pay cut for them. Ex-colleagues have told me they are hopping mad!

The PCS MoJ group executive committee is rightly recommending rejection of the MEP and will ballot its membership.

The offer was made amid the national PCS ballot on pay in July and a majority of the 1,000 people who joined PCS during that time were from the MoJ. There is clearly a huge mood to fight on this issue.

After the [failure of the national ballot to meet the undemocratic Tory anti-union thresholds](#), the bubbling situation in the MoJ is an indicator of the real mood and an opportunity to immediately push the Tories onto the back foot and inspire the rest of the union.

PCS in the MoJ should immediately start planning a strategy to campaign for escalating industrial action after the MEP ballot result, with a view to building this across the rest of the union and whole public sector. It's time to stand up and say 'Britain needs a pay rise'!

Take on probation privatisation with union action

Napo union member

Privatising probation services through the 'transforming rehabilitation' programme has been an absolute disaster, and an expensive one at £3.7 billion!

Trade unions have opposed privatisation throughout this experiment, and the commons justice committee has now agreed that the scheme has been a failure. And yet, the Tories are still set to throw hundreds of millions of pounds more at it!

The experiment of using private 'Community Rehabilitation Companies' (CRCs) for probation services has resulted in a worse service for staff and for prisoners.

The splitting of services between public and private contracts has created a two-tier system and created a range of complications in administration and delivery. Putting unnecessary complications creates a serious risk to the successful rehabilitation of those leaving prison.

Privatisation often leads to cost-cutting measures to maximise profits. The CRCs often fail to provide anything more than phone calls and signposting of other organisations as their form of 'continuous support' for people leaving prison. Reducing reoffending requires a building of trust with prisoners, and weeks of support in housing, finance, education and so on, and CRCs are proving they are incapable of delivering this.

The CRCs now owe £110 million in fines due to their failure to meet performance targets - despite this outright failure they'll be paid £2.2 billion anyway!

Meanwhile, staff morale is at an all-time low due to high workloads, redundancies and a nine-year pay freeze. These are issues probation unions raise constantly, falling on deaf ears.

The Tories have refused to listen to the clear evidence. Instead, they have cut existing contracts by two years to 2020 - at a cost of £170 million - only so that they can begin retendering larger contracts! We see the same issue in the NHS.

Under the guise of unifying health and social care, health contracts are being put to tender covering far more services than previously, with the aim of making the offers more lucrative to private businesses. This carving up of public services for private contract serves no benefit to the public; its only benefit is to give profits to giant companies and their shareholders, at our expense.

Against the evidence that privatisation in any part of the public sector does not work, the Tories are pushing ahead with ending public ownership wherever they can. Not only have they refused to listen, the Napo trade union suspects that the Tories have pushed through these changes just before parliamentary recess so that they can be brought in with as little scrutiny and challenge as possible in parliament.

Urgent action from the trade union movement and from Labour is needed to fight privatisation and end Tory rule. Unions and campaigners should push to inform more probation staff and take a leading role in rallying support for industrial action and protest.

Mass action of workers in the probation sector, supported by the wider trade union movement, can push back Tory plans and put this weak government on the back foot and fold to the demands of workers in the probation sector.

Bournemouth train guards' RMT strike

RMT guards on strike on 31 July in Bournemouth were united in their [continuing action against driver-only operated trains](#). One of the pickets said that South Western Railway has refused to guarantee a safety-critical guard on every passenger train. This is the safest working method which ensures access for all passengers.

The elderly, vulnerable and disabled know they can use any service without advanced booking. The RMT views any changes to this as a retrograde step and a move away from a progressive, safe and inclusive transport network.

The striker went on to say that the dispute has lasted for ten months and there had been meetings with the company including at conciliation service Acas. The talks have collapsed and it seems clear that South Western Railway only wished to delay, obfuscate and play with words. RMT guards remain resolute in the face of their threats, false assurances and media condemnation.

There have been two strong votes in favour of industrial action despite the draconian anti-trade union laws. Furthermore, in response to the sacking of two Bournemouth guards during the strike, Bournemouth and Weymouth guards returned a massive 'yes' vote for action in defence of their colleagues who have been dismissed in circumstances including the use of an illicit covert recording gained without permission and accepted and used by the company.

Jane Ward

London cleaners' coordinated strike

Low-paid cleaners at five different sites in London took coordinated strike action for the London Living Wage and sick pay. The workers in the United Voices of the World union walked out at the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) and Kensington and Chelsea council on 7 August.

The outsourced cleaners argue that the MoJ and the council are responsible for their pay: "The companies always say we can't change your pay because it is in the contract with the MoJ", said one.

Another said: "You have to find a way to survive. But £7.83 an hour is not enough. You have to pay rent. You have to pay bills. You have to pay transport."

United Voices of the World has previously led successful cleaners' disputes for the living wage plus sick and holiday pay at Sotheby's, the [London School of Economics](#) and the [Daily Mail's offices](#).

Note: This extract will be replaced with the full version soon (when the translation is finalised)

Israel: mass demonstration against Nationality Law

An edited extract from an article by Socialist Struggle Movement (CWI Israel/Palestine)

Some 90,000-120,000 people in Israel, including thousands of Druze citizens, attended a protest rally against the Nationality Law on 4 August in Rabin Square, Tel Aviv.

The new law declares that "the right to exercise national self-determination in the State of Israel is unique to the Jewish people".

The mass demonstration was another slap in the face to the government, coming only 13 days after tens of thousands of demonstrators protested against LGBT+ discrimination.

"Bibi [Netanyahu], resign, we will not give up on equality", the crowds shouted. Every time the name of Israeli prime minister Netanyahu was mentioned on the stage, tens of thousands whistled contempt.

In addition, there were cries of anger against Druze media minister Ayoub Kara who voted in favour of the new law.

Protest against government

This demonstration was less establishment-critical than the mass demonstration for LGBT+ equality (see socialistworld.net 'Israel - Tens of thousands protest and strike for LGBT+ rights').

But it appears that the vast majority in the square sought an effective protest against the right-wing government, which is engaged in provocative incitement aimed at preserving and nurturing its support base in the settler and religious right and the most nationalist strata of the population.

The few polls conducted show that a majority of the Jewish public and about half to a small majority of the general public support the Nationality Law.

But a large minority opposes it and the protests can in themselves affect public opinion.

The intensity of the opposition to the government's policy in various areas illustrates the extent to which the government's real support base is in fact narrow.

But it is inflated by security demagoguery against which the official 'opposition' has no real response.

The rally organisers, led by officers in the army reserves and Druze mayors, focused on a divisive, exclusive message - not a general protest against a law that continues to discriminate against non-Jewish citizens in the interests of the right-wing government.

The existence of the "covenant of blood" between the Druze in Israel and the state is manifested in the Druze participation in compulsory military service.

A right-wing message from the Druze organisers created a connection with a battery of generals, heads of the national intelligence agency Mossad, former Shin Bet security personnel and politicians from the establishment opposition parties who came to the rally.

Originally, it was the High Follow-up Committee for Arab Citizens that planned to organise the rally, under a call for general opposition to Netanyahu's rule and discrimination on the basis of nationality.

The call by the Druze leaders to hold it under their messages, including the authoritarian idea that minority rights should be conditional on "loyalty" to the regime, particularly military service, led the High Follow-up Committee to declare its original event postponed.

The religious leader Sheikh Muafak Tarif, who lit the torch for the "glory of the state" at the ceremony on the last Independence Day, repeated the message of patriotism in the rally: "The Druze are loyal."

As if there is no institutionalised discrimination, no racism, [no occupation and oppression of millions of Palestinians](#).

These messages excluded most of the Arab-Palestinian public from the rally, and also many young Druze who do not identify with the current Druze rebellion because they are fed up with the false promises of equality based on 'proof of loyalty' and the divide and rule policies towards the Arab public.

A few days earlier, Tarif claimed that Netanyahu was offering the Druze a "historic deal" - ostensibly diverting budgets to Druze communities and offering benefits to Druze citizens and other non-Jewish citizens serving in the army.

It is reasonable to assume that the deal was already signed, as Tarif hoped, and the rally would have been cancelled had it not been for the protest organisers.

Netanyahu tried to stop them going ahead, but his moves backfired and encouraged the Druze leadership to close ranks.

Three Druze officers have declared their retirement from the army against the background of Nationality Law.

In recent years there has been a significant increase in the number of Druze refusing military service, whether for economic reasons or political - due to opposition to discrimination and to the occupation.

Young Druze, like other young people in Israel, especially non-Jews, suffer from acute housing shortages.

This is compounded by unemployment, precarious contracts and discrimination, which block and limit job opportunities and personal development.

The conflict between the state and the Druze Zionist elite is a matter of concern among parts of the Israeli establishment, not least because the 'bridge burning' policy undermines government stability.

It is likely to contribute to the process of radicalisation among young Druze and the weakening of another fig leaf used to cultivate a democratic image for the discriminatory capitalist state.

Linking struggles

The rally had the potential to become a much bigger headache for Netanyahu and his hawkish right-wing government, if it were organised not around a narrow ethnic message and show of "loyalty to the state" but under a call to build a broad front for the overthrow of the Nationality Law, racial discrimination and the government itself.

This could be linked to the fight for equality for the entire Arab public, linking up with the various social struggles, including the equality protest for LGBT+ people.

The next steps should include the building of a broad and general struggle against the government and for equality.

Therefore it is necessary to strengthen the next rally planned in Rabin Square for 11 August.

Deadly fires ravage Greece: austerity contributed to high loss of life and property

More than 90 deaths, including infants, and over 150 injured. Dozens of people made homeless, 2,000 properties destroyed or damaged, and incalculable destruction of forests and forestry land. This, so far, is the result of the devastating fires that recently took place in Attica, Greece.

The Syriza-led coalition government has been attacked for its slow and wholly inadequate response - the clear consequences of [years of deep austerity cuts](#) that have crippled the country's firefighting capabilities. Last year's fire service budget was €354 million, compared to €452 million in 2009.

Defence minister Panos Kammenos, who visited the affected area, was heckled by distraught survivors accusing him of abandoning them, and of non-existent civil protection despite similar fires in 2007. Xekinima (CWI Greece) reports on the aftermath.

In one afternoon, at least three large fires took hold in Attica, and 15, in total, throughout the country. The dimensions of this tragedy recall the fires in 2007 when dozens of people died and many forests burned in the Peloponnese and Parnitha.

The simultaneous number of fires and the places and times when they began, has led to people asking what caused such damage.

The government already speaks, directly or indirectly, of arson. Prime Minister Tsipras talks about an "asymmetric phenomenon".

But the question really should be: Is this tragedy caused only as a result of some people, for whatever reason, starting fires? Can the government justify the magnitude of the damage by claiming that it is an "asymmetric phenomenon"? The real question, surely, should be, what is the government doing to protect the country and its forests from such threats?

Regardless of what is proven later, there is an undeniable reality: the deficiencies and cuts suffered by both firefighters and the Forestry Service, both in human resources and in materials. This has meant that the firefighting response faces more difficulties, if not an impossible situation.

In 2007, firefighters protested that 29% of posts in the fire department were not filled. They also said that much of their equipment and fire extinguishing materials were obsolete and defective.

During the last great fires in 2007, firefighting vehicles were damaged on the way to extinguish the fires, water hoses had holes in them, and there was a lack of personal protective equipment for firefighters.

Eleven years later and after several austerity 'memoranda' imposed by the Troika (European Central Bank, International Monetary Fund and the European Union), the situation is even worse.

Catastrophic as this situation is, it is worth mentioning a much more hopeful aspect - the great solidarity and willingness to help that hundreds of people demonstrated. Teams of forest protection volunteers, who were provided nothing by the state, were formed to help extinguish the fires alongside firefighters and forest rangers.

Calls were made on social networks for resources to cater for those affected by the fires, and the response was massive. Medical doctors volunteered to treat the wounded.

Veterinarians and animal welfare activists are attending to domestic and wild animals.

Starting from this wave of solidarity, we have to, bit by bit, regain our collective strength and enter again into the struggle to end the policies that have led to this tragedy.

This means completely transforming a system that puts the profits of banks and large companies above our lives and the environment.

Striking Portuguese dockers show the way forward

National strike against union busting, precarious employment and workplace harassment

João Félix, Cardiff West Socialist Party

Portuguese dockers took strike action across all ports on 27 July. They are fighting against widespread persecution and union busting in Portuguese ports, especially in Leixões and Caniçal (Madeira), where

workers are being threatened and harassed for joining SEAL - the national dockworkers union that strives to unite workers and fight for fair and safe working conditions and contracts.

The strike had 100% participation, with all the ports either completely shut down or seriously slowed down.

In a marvellous example of working class solidarity, dockers in Lisbon also struck in solidarity with their victimised colleagues. This led to attacks by the bosses who used it as an excuse to rip up a collective bargaining agreement agreed two weeks ago.

The 27 July strike was not only about union busting. It was also about supporting and defending precarious workers, who are forced to accept less than half the wage of other workers.

There are reports of precarious workers who affiliated to SEAL being arbitrarily downgraded in their responsibilities, and of attempts to bribe these workers with thousands of euros to disaffiliate.

Unfortunately, other so-called unions, supported by the bosses, have tried to divide and disown this strike. However, the strike had an overwhelming effect in all ports where SEAL has a presence.

Next stage

Continuing the action, a four-week 'strike' (overtime ban) against the excessive hours dockers are obliged to work has been announced across all ports in Portugal. It will run from 13 August to 10 September.

The Portuguese dockers, following their [prolonged strike and demonstrations in 2016](#), have again sent a powerful message to both bosses and workers.

Their action shows the power of the organised working class, and what fighting, democratic, member-led unions can do.

As the slogan from 2016 said: "Precariousness? Not for the dockworkers, nor for anyone".

- Socialists, trade unionists and workers can send messages of solidarity to the Portuguese Dockers Union: setc@setc.pt

A mass campaign and trade union organisation can defeat the far-right FLA

London Socialist Party

As [reported in the Socialist issue 1004](#), RMT transport union assistant general secretary Steve Hedley has called for a trade union stewards group to defend demonstrations against the far-right 'Democratic' Football Lads Alliance (DFLA).

This follows the vicious attack on trade unionists after the DFLA marched in London on 14 July. This has now been followed by an attack by their thugs on the socialist Bookmarks bookshop in London.

This call is extremely welcome. Socialist Party members argue for the trade unions to provide stewards [in our resolution](#) that is being discussed in trade union bodies. We would urge all trade unionists to respond positively to this proposal.

The DFLA is an attempt by racist and fascist individuals and organisations to try to pull together a far-right street force. Its figurehead is former leader of the racist English Defence League, Tommy Robinson, and the mobilisations include a number of hooligan football 'firms'.

The DFLA has the backing of far-right figures internationally including 'alt-right' former adviser to Donald Trump Steve Bannon, who is aiming to raise a million pounds to fund a new right-wing movement.

Now Tommy Robinson has been released from prison it is possible that there will be more demonstrations around the country. If any far-right force invades a local community, it is essential that it is countered by a mobilisation of the local community and trade union movement.

It is very important that these counter-demonstrations are not only as big as possible, but also properly stewarded and defended. It cannot be left to the police to protect demonstrators - the police have been used to kettle, snatch, beat and intimidate student and anti-racist demonstrators. If they know that safety is being taken seriously, many more people will be encouraged to participate.

An initial appeal has been made for 20 volunteer stewards from each union - a good start towards organising for hundreds. An extensive list of trade union volunteers could be drawn up, headed up by an experienced trade union chief steward, which could be called on for any necessary mobilisations.

This could then mean hundreds of well-organised trade union stewards could form a strong team on any counter-demonstration, and could also supervise the safe dispersal of demonstrators once a march is over.

In raising this idea, we can draw on experience of mobilisations against the far-right, for example in the [battles against the British National Party](#) (BNP) in the early 1990s. Socialist Party members argued for and provided effective stewarding to defend the big Welling demonstration against the BNP HQ in October 1993 from ferocious police attack. We had to argue for this against the refusal of the Socialist Workers Party to take stewarding seriously.

When BNP activists in Tower Hamlets created a climate of fear that included several racist attacks in the early 1990s, our members argued for community defence patrols under the democratic control of the local trades council and community representatives. We also helped local people organise a whistle alarm defence campaign to protect estates.

The far-right can be defeated by a mass campaign. It is essential that a workers', anti-racist, anti-austerity movement is built that fights for jobs and homes for all, and that trade unions and Jeremy Corbyn do all they can to lead that.

This could [undercut any potential support for the far right](#) amongst alienated disillusioned working class people who have been at the brunt of austerity and decades of cuts and privatisation, and feel betrayed by capitalist politicians. Democratically controlled stewarding by the workers' movement should be an important part of that mobilisation.

Protests win temporary halt to refugee evictions in Glasgow

Matt Dobson, Socialist Party Scotland

After large-scale protests, including legal challenges and activists preparing to occupy properties against evictions and lock changes, multinational company Serco has been forced to grant a temporary halt to [plans to evict refugees in Glasgow](#).

Serco now says: "In order to facilitate the path of a legal adjudication, Serco will extend the notice period by 21 days for the six people currently subject to lock-change notices.

"We will also pause all further lock-change notices to other asylum seekers who have received negative decisions while the law is being tested and clarified.

This will also give stakeholders who support asylum seekers more time to prepare for what is likely to be an increase in the number of people seeking their help."

The retreat by Serco is partly in response to legal challenges by Govan Law Centre but is also as a result of the political pressure of working class people, youth and trade unionists who have protested in Glasgow and, organised by the Refugee Rights Campaign, outside Serco headquarters in London.

If Serco had persisted with the lock changes scheduled for 6 August, they would have found that close to a thousand people had committed to physically block evictions in Glasgow.

On 4 August, a protest of 300 gathered outside the Home Office in Glasgow and burned Serco eviction notices.

This was after two of the threatened Afghan refugees went on hunger strike outside the building. One of them is tragically stateless, growing up in Scotland after being born in a refugee camp in Pakistan, whose government says he cannot return. The previous day police in Scotland had also brutally arrested protesters.

Speakers at the rally included Brian Smith, secretary of Glasgow City Unison and a Socialist Party Scotland member, who brought solidarity from council workers.

Brian called for the public contract with Serco to be ended and housing services for asylum seekers to be brought back into the public sector.

He also called for a united working class struggle for decent jobs and homes for all and for an international socialist solution to the capitalist crisis.

Socialist Party Scotland activists in Glasgow have been active in this campaign. We have helped mobilise trade union support from PCS and Unison.

Step up campaign

We call on all activists to use the next 21 days to step up the campaign to defend refugees from evictions, including, where needed, the tactic of occupation.

We support the demands raised by the refugee support organisations that housing associations refuse to cooperate with Serco and refuse permission to change 'fixtures and fittings'.

Housing associations and the council should immediately draw up temporary tenancies with the refugees to prevent them having to move.

This fight must be linked to a wider, united struggle in the city against cuts and austerity. Refugees face eviction now but many of the city's tenants face rising rent arrears and the threat of homelessness with the roll out of Universal Credit in Glasgow from September.

This crisis starkly shows it's time that elected politicians, including in the Glasgow SNP-led council, stand up and fight the Tories by setting a no-cuts budget and demanding more funding for the city.

Why I joined: "I saw the need for Corbyn to stand against the right"

Connor Rosoman, Brighton Socialist Party

In the run-up to 2017's snap general election, I found myself increasingly angry at the ineptitude and apparent contempt for working class people of the Conservative Party.

This couldn't have been more obvious when the Tories made the £1 billion deal with the DUP, despite claiming there was no "magic money tree".

At the same time, I was [inspired by Jeremy Corbyn's Labour manifesto](#), and the enthusiastic movement behind him.

Although I initially considered joining Labour, I saw [the need for Corbyn and the movement around him to stand against the right wing](#) of the party, and for a bold programme to really tackle austerity and capitalism.

The Socialist Party, echoing these views, gave me an organisation I could confidently be a part of, and express these views more widely.

Since joining, I have had the chance to get involved in many campaigns, including the inspiring [University and College Union pension strike](#) this year. I have met lots of people and learned so much already, and joining has only made me more eager to keep fighting to change society!

What we heard

"Reading your paper convinced me you're down to earth and know what you're talking about!"

A new member of the Socialist Party

Shropshire NHS - fight the cuts to our services!

John Mann, GMB union (personal capacity)

Shropshire's reorganisation or 'Future Fit' plans are to close an A&E department at one hospital and have an urgent care centre at the other.

Shropshire has two main hospitals - Princess Royal Telford and Royal Shrewsbury. Over a number of years they have come under threat.

Shropshire is a vast county consisting not only of towns but many rural villages and the NHS serves parts of Wales.

Not having access to two A&E departments will inevitably cost lives. 20 A&E consultants are required but there is only funding for nine.

'Future Fit' means 842 staff lost - 20% fewer nurses and midwives - and a 10% cut to beds, which will lead to more bed blocking and trolley waits for patients.

Conservative MPs have been proud to emphasise the £312 million from central government, but this is a loan. £200 million is repayable and the rest is a type of private finance initiative deal - repayment of this is at least £11 million a year.

Six local constituency Labour Parties have agreed to a joint statement requesting full funding for both hospitals to retain all services. In a recent visit to Shropshire Jeremy Corbyn echoed this need.

But Telford Labour's elected councillors produced a leaflet opting against the joint statement. They supported keeping Princess Royal Telford A&E open but downgrading Royal Shrewsbury - this they said would save £62 million.

A postcode lottery within the NHS should not be supported by Labour councillors who will be asking working class people to re-elect them next May.

Shropshire Defend Our NHS is a grassroots campaign, and has been fighting to reject cuts to both hospitals planned in the Future Fit policy.

Tolpuddle festival: combative trade unionism and anticipation of general election

Thousands gathered at the annual Tolpuddle Martyrs festival in Dorset on 20-22 July to remember the sacrifices of the early farmworkers who were persecuted and transported to Australia. Their only crime was to form a union to seek better pay and conditions.

There was a smaller crowd this year, not unexpectedly. [2017's massive crowd](#) was a result of the events surrounding the general election, increase in Labour Party membership and heightened expectations. There was a considerable drop off in young people attending.

At a fringe meeting John McDonnell, Labour shadow chancellor, spoke to almost 500 trade unionists. The biggest cheer at the meeting went to Shen Batmaz from the BFAWU bakers' union who has taken part in [strike action at McDonald's](#).

She outlined the struggle for set hours and a £10 an hour minimum wage. She received a standing ovation at the end.

Even with the lower attendance, the Southern and South West regions of the Socialist Party managed to sell over 170 copies of the Socialist and raise £200 for the fighting fund.

Speaking outside the RMT transport union tent, the union's president Sean Hoyle called for support for the [ongoing strikes and campaign against driver-only operation](#) on the railways.

He attacked those Labour councillors who are on the side of the bosses in the North West.

He noted that the RMT has been conducting what amounted to mini-general strikes and that the Trade Union Congress general council has a [policy of starting to organise for a national general strike](#) - but that the union leaders have sat on their hands doing nothing to support.

Jeremy Corbyn, in his closing speech, reiterated the Labour Party's commitment to the policies in the 2017 general election.

This added to the raised expectations of the possibility of the downfall of May's Tory government and an autumn election.

Sean Brogan, Exeter Socialist Party

Trade unions mobilise against EDL in Worcester

On 21 July the far-right racist English Defence League (EDL) [came to Worcester](#) to protest against the building of a mosque.

The 25 or so [EDL supporters](#) were outnumbered ten to one by protesters, mobilised by Worcester Trade Union Council and others.

Trade unions present included general union Unite, public sector union Unison, the Fire Brigades Union, the National Education Union and rail union Aslef.

The racists had to be protected by a police and security cordon.

They now say they will be back in Worcester on 1 September, so arrangements are being made for a larger turnout from the trade unions and local community.

Pamphlet: If we fight, we can win!

A must-read for anyone fighting NHS cuts

Andrew Bromhall, NHS nurse, Swansea and West Wales Socialist Party

It was with great pleasure and admiration that I recently read the pamphlet published by the East Midlands region of the Socialist Party to celebrate their recent successes in fighting cuts and closures within the NHS.

Written by Tom Barker and Steve Score from Leicester, and Jon Dale from Mansfield, the pamphlet details the fights Socialist Party members helped to lead against the closure of essential NHS resources.

It is an example of determined campaigning by committed and effective Socialist Party branches, and is a must-read for anyone involved in the fight against cuts.

I will not go into any great detail regarding the individual campaigns. To do so would detract for the reader when they come to this excellent and very well-written account of working class struggle.

The first part of 'If we fight, we can win!' is an introduction to the present crisis in the NHS. Particularly, the underfunding which has led to the present shortage of frontline staff, and also Theresa May's much-hyped [£20 billion "70th birthday present" to the NHS](#) - which has come after seven years of cuts.

It outlines the reasons that a mass fightback is needed to save the NHS - with the examples of the recent victories.

The pamphlet then goes on to the [campaign in Leicester to save Glenfield children's heart centre](#). Its closure was not suggested by the local hospital trust or clinical commissioning group, but by the Tory government via the bosses of NHS England.

The trust itself even opposed the closure - and not a single local politician would admit to supporting the decision, due to its unpopularity.

Readers learn how the campaign was built, with the mass involvement of the public in meetings and demonstrations, supported by more modern techniques including social media.

The importance of the role of the Socialist Party and local trade unions, particularly general union Unite, is made clear.

NHS England's decision to keep Glenfield children's heart centre was announced in December 2017 as a result of the campaign.

The pamphlet then looks at the [Chatsworth neurorehabilitation ward at Mansfield Community Hospital](#), and the seven months of struggle to save it from closure.

It details the importance of effective campaigning. By the staff and patients at local level; by the Socialist Party and National Shop Stewards Network at a national level; and also with support from members of parliament in Ireland and councillors in Sweden and the US in the Socialist Party's international sister parties. It all helped give campaigners the much-needed solidarity and profile to carry on.

It must be said at this point, however, that although the majority of members on the ward belong to public service union Unison, there was anger at the initial response from right-wing Unison officers who did not seem to want to fight for the ward.

Despite setbacks and threats of disciplinary action, and due to the brave and valiant actions of the campaigners, the local NHS trust decided to cancel plans to close the ward in February 2018.

The pamphlet concludes with a section on [a socialist programme to save the NHS](#).

It discusses the role the organised working class must take if we are to defend the NHS from the threat of continued privatisation and outsourcing, pressed by Tories and Blairites alike.

It also outlines the fightback needed in order to secure an NHS which is fully publicly owned and funded and fully free at the point of use.

- 'If we fight, we can win!' - lessons from two NHS campaign victories, East Midlands Socialist Party - £2 from leftbooks.co.uk

The Socialist inbox

Do you have something to say?

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

We reserve the right to shorten and edit letters. Don't forget to give your name, address and phone number. Confidentiality will be respected if requested.

Views of letter writers do not necessarily match those of the Socialist Party.

Thatcher's Militant blacklist

I wasn't surprised that [newly released cabinet papers confirm](#) supporters of Militant (predecessor of the Socialist) in the civil service were under secret surveillance and that Thatcher wanted them sacked.

In the late 1980s I applied for a job in the Health and Safety Executive as an employment medical adviser.

I went to an office in Whitehall for the interview and supplied references. A few days later I got a letter saying the department was pleased to offer me the job, "subject to confirmation of your date of birth, professional qualifications and other matters."

I sent copies of my birth certificate and qualifications - and waited before giving notice to my employer.

After six weeks I got another letter informing me that due to "a change of operational requirements" the post was not now going to be filled.

As there was nothing wrong with my birth certificate or qualifications, I could only assume "other matters" were the problem. By then I'd been active as a socialist with Militant for about 15 years.

Jon Dale, secretary, Unite EM/NG32 Nottinghamshire Health union branch (personal capacity)

World cup nationalism?

Trotsky, in one of his writings, comments that only the working class - of any nation - has the real 'interests of the nation' at heart.

What did he mean by that? It is the case that in any crisis of the capitalist system the capitalist class will abandon 'the nation' if the bosses think their profits are at stake.

A Corbyn-led government, even if it only goes halfway in implementing a pro-worker programme, will witness a flight of capital.

Meanwhile, on the contrary, it is the working class which wants to see a socialist programme implemented - not just to improve their own lives, but also to 'better the country'.

Witness the outpourings of support for the NHS 70th birthday celebrations. Even the capitalists are forced to pay lip service to its merits - through gritted teeth, while they plan to dismantle it.

For the working class, the NHS is socialism in action. They take pride in saying 'it's the best in the world'.

Are they being nationalist? Of course not, but rather expressing the feeling of ownership and wanting to keep the NHS.

In the 1970s, I remember well that the Union Jack was the flag carried by the National Front, and rightly it was seen by those on the left as espousing the poisonous racism of the fascists.

Today I don't think that is necessarily the case. Flying the Cross of Saint George is, for most, nothing more in my view than saying "I support the England football team."

Most workers want a lift from their everyday humdrum lives, and that is what it is all about - nothing more.

Bill Mullins, Lewisham and Southwark Socialist Party

Capitalism wants slums

Slum housing - that's the best solution that capitalism's brightest thinkers can come up with to the housing crisis in Britain.

In 2015 the Adam Smith Institute gave an award to a young right-wing author [for a blog post](#) saying "Some people might not feel like they need a bedroom space as large as the state expects (70 square feet, with a minimum ceiling height of 7.5 feet), while others might not mind sharing a bathroom with another family (!) if it means lower rents." (Our comments in brackets.)

Rather than accept being crammed into whatever spare space the big landlords can find, [we need decent housing for all, with rent controls](#), an end to letting fees, and most importantly a big programme of building council houses.

Yorkshire Young Socialists

Audio version of this document

[To hear an audio version of this document click here.](#)

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!

Audio version of this document

[To hear an audio version of this document click here.](#)

<http://www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/27789>