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Militant was right - councils can fight cuts

Lenny Shail, Socialist Party national committee

"Conference, we are in Liverpool where over 30 years ago the council stood up to Thatcher and said: better to break the law than break the poor."

It's no surprise that shadow equalities minister Dawn Butler provoked such scandal and contempt from capitalist establishment politicians and the media when she pointed to the Liverpool City Council of 1983-87 as an example of how Labour councils should be acting today. The council was led by supporters of Militant, the Socialist Party's predecessor.

An attack on the Militant-led Liverpool City Council has so often been the go-to line for many careerist Blairites - a way to burnish their credentials as opponents of any alternative to the politics of big business.

Ed Miliband used his first speech as Labour leader to denounce the council struggle. And, ever since the election of Jeremy Corbyn, scare stories and lies are shuffled out every few days in an attempt to dent and discredit the growing support for socialist ideas.

The victory of Liverpool City Council against Thatcher was historic. Its achievements included winning back over £60 million worth of funding for the city, building 5,000 council homes, opening six new sports centres, creating over 2,000 jobs, and refusing to carry out the £10 million worth of cuts demanded by the Tories. The struggle it led remains an inspiration. It shows what councils can and should do to take on Tory austerity now.

Struggle

It is a disgrace that the overwhelming majority of Labour councils and councillors today prefer to spend more time attacking the legacy of this struggle than they do fighting Tory austerity!

Even the usually Blairite-dominated New Statesmen magazine, no friend to the Socialist Party, carried an article which conceded, amid the widespread media condemnation of Butler's speech, that she had a point...

"Militant offered hope to those in need... Thousands took to the streets in support of the Militant-controlled council's resistance to an unsympathetic Conservative central government.

"Has there ever been any other occasion when 50,000 people marched in support of a local council? Local election turnouts, previously pitiful, soared. Labour's vote rose by nearly 70% between 1982 and 1984."

Today, Blairite councillors dutifully implement devastating cuts all over the country, including in Liverpool. These austerity-mongers should have no place in the Labour Party. Corbyn should be mobilising his supporters to kick them out.

He should be calling for all Labour councillors to take the 'Liverpool Road' - to set no-cuts budgets, which in most cases could be done legally, and to build a mass campaign to demand the funds needed and kick the Tories out.

Corbyn should pledge to underwrite this approach by committing to restore funds on day one of a Labour government to any council which takes such a road.

The Socialist Party, which stands in the tradition of the Liverpool struggle, and which still counts members of the heroic 'Liverpool 47' councillors among its ranks, should also be readmitted to the party on the basis of a renewed, democratic federal structure.

If you agreed with Dawn Butler when she said "it's better to break the law than break the poor", and if you want to be part of the struggle to fundamentally change society, join us.

- Join the socialists! Visit socialistparty.org.uk/join or call 020 8988 8777
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Editorial of the Socialist issue 1011

Fight for a democratic, socialist Labour Party

As we go to press, the Labour Party conference is still taking place in Liverpool. The question is, has the conference made changes to the party that have equipped it to be fully capable of leading the fight against austerity?

Since Jeremy Corbyn first stood for leader, the party has been convulsed by civil war - at times more open, at times more hidden. It's between Corbyn supporters, both inside and outside the Labour Party, who represent a new anti-austerity party in formation, and the Blairites who wished to maintain the status quo of a pro-austerity, pro-capitalist party.

It was expressed in the purges and exclusions that took place during the two leadership contests as the right wing used every means to prevent a Corbyn victory. In the last months it has been shown in the unrelenting attacks by the right-wing MPs. It will be impossible for the party to successfully act in the interest of workers without sabotage from within while this 'Backstabbing Tendency' remains in place.

When thousands responded to Corbyn's stand in 2015 it was because they saw the chance to end the decades of Labour being a Tory party mark two. The absence of an independent, working class political voice has been a big factor in the falling living standards workers and middle class people have suffered.

But Corbyn has been paralysed from acting as forcefully as he should have done because the strategy of appeasement and compromise has only resulted in attacks by the right.

Democracy review

This conference is the culmination of the democracy review announced at last year's conference. But so far it has not produced a blueprint for the transformation of the Labour Party. The conference has voted on some minor tweaks to the processes by which parliamentary and leadership candidates are selected. But they do not amount to the root-and-branch changes that are needed.

The working class has not been put in the driving seat. But that is precisely the task. Denouncing the rotten role played by right-wing MPs is nothing to them if they are allowed to stay in their seats and carry on preventing the party from fighting the Tories.

The conference did have eight rule changes submitted by 13 Labour branches which aimed to make it easier to remove sitting MPs. A petition supporting this aim was signed by 50,000, and there was widespread lobbying of national executive committee members to fight to get reselection of MPs on the conference agenda. Momentum also changed its position from attacking Socialist Party members who put forward democratic mandatory reselection to putting forward a version of it, 'open selection'.

In this context, it is disappointing that Unite the Union, which has a conference policy to support mandatory reselection, did not appear to fight for this demand.

Open selection is based on 'one member, one vote' (OMOV). In previous editorials we have explained why OMOV is a limited form of expression for the working class in Labour. We explained that, in the past, trade union branches would send delegates to constituency Labour parties (CLPs), alongside ward party representatives, to select a parliamentary candidate.

This was the way, for example, that the Militant MPs Dave Nellist and the late Terry Fields and Pat Wall, won their selection as Labour candidates in the 1980s.

That democratic structure, meant that there was healthy, mass participation in Labour parties like in Liverpool and Coventry. These were effectively local 'parliaments of the labour movement'. This was overturned in 1994 by the introduction of OMOV rules for selecting candidates.

Those changes, promoting passive membership over representative democracy, were accurately described by John Prescott as being more important in changing Labour than the abolition of the socialist Clause Four from the party constitution.

Mandatory reselection of MPs to ensure the party becomes a vehicle for fighting austerity must be based on the trade unions having the right to directly nominate candidates onto parliamentary shortlists. We also argue that the role and participation of the unions needs to undergo a process of being democratised, under the control of union members.

We call for the abolition of the national policy forum, where unions hold just 16% of the votes - with policy-making power instead restored to the party conference. In Liverpool this year, there have been expressions of frustration and anger at the limits on the ability of the conference to decide the course of the party.

At Labour Women's conference, Brent MP Dawn Butler praised the Militant-led socialist council in Liverpool in the 1980s, which refused to carry out Tory cuts and instead acted in the interests of the people of the city. That Labour council, along with others, had a 'district Labour Party' structure - with directly elected union branch delegates and the power to decide local election manifestos and elect council Labour Group officers. A return to this, replacing the present council Labour Group-dominated 'local campaign forums', which are responsible for council candidate panels, would be a key step in the necessary process of ending the scandal of Labour councils carrying through austerity and therefore undermining Corbyn's support.

Conference was presented with the opportunity to vote on changes to the way the leadership candidate gets onto the ballot paper. The proposal to be voted on did not reduce the 10% threshold for the number of MPs' nominations that a candidate must gather to get on to the ballot paper, which many CLPs had sought, and also required candidates to secure nominations from 5% of constituency parties, or 5% of the members of trade unions or other affiliated organisations. But the change that is needed is the ending of the MPs' veto over who can be a leadership candidate by introducing a qualifying threshold based on CLP and trade union nominations only.

Socialist Party

In the last edition of the Socialist we published our correspondence with Labour general secretary Jennie Formby where we argue for membership of the Labour Party on a federal basis.

The lessons of Liverpool, for example, as well as how the poll tax and Thatcher were defeated, should be the type of issues debated within a federal-based party that the Socialist Party could be part of. Therefore socialists who have been expelled or otherwise excluded should be readmitted to aid this and to strengthen the fight against the Blairites.

The right to be organised within the party exists for the right wing, for example for the Cooperative Party - so why not for the left? Why not 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?

Socialist ideas must be put to the fore. The average age of a Labour new joiner is 51 according to recently revealed research by Queen Mary University. But poll after poll shows young people are attracted to socialist ideas. A new Clause Four - replacing Blair's that praised "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, is needed.

This is a programme for urgent action. Workers and young people will not continue to look towards a Labour Party that holds them back from fighting austerity. It was the anti-austerity programme that drew them in and, if they are blocked in their attempts to organise against austerity, the enthusiasm generated by Jeremy Corbyn's initial leadership victory is in danger of being lost.

No-deal Brexit, establishment splits, threat of renewed downturn...

Fighting for socialism amid capitalist chaos

On 22 September, the Socialist Party's national committee met to discuss the political situation in Britain, including the tasks facing the workers' movement in this tumultuous period of capitalist crisis. Here, we carry edited extracts of the speech given by Peter Taaffe, Socialist Party general secretary, in opening the meeting.

The end of the summer is often an important time for the Socialist Party to take stock, and to prepare for the period ahead. But a sober analysis, both of the past period and of the coming period, is now virtually impossible given the dramatic events of recent days. These events have altered the script, both for this speech, and for the capitalist class itself.

There was no summer break for the capitalists. They are preoccupied with a world crisis, and in particular the economic situation, with a morbid fear of another financial crash ten years on from the collapse of Lehman Brothers.

One of the themes carried in the capitalist media of what took place a decade ago is that "nobody anticipated" the crash. That's not true; in articles written in the run-up to 2007, we pointed towards the explosive crisis that was brewing.

Today, the dominating issue in British politics is Brexit. However, there is tremendous confusion - no clear pathway to a solution for the capitalist class. This was summed up by Tim Halford in the Financial Times: "I recently had a couple of conversations with bright teenagers. One wanted to discuss philosophy - Godel, Turing, Wittgenstein - not a problem. The other asked me to explain Brexit. Not a chance". He concluded that the Brexit saga is "madder than a box of hallucinating frogs".

There is a deep-going political crisis in both major parties. The Tories are riven with division. It's possible this might come out into the open in a split in the next period, probably around the figures of Johnson and May.

This split is not just on the EU. It's on the whole direction of the party. It's on where to politically situate themselves in a rapidly changing situation, particularly given the ferment among the middle classes - the Tories' traditional base of support.

Labour's own civil war remains unabated. If anything it has deepened.

Economic conjuncture

Understanding the economic conjuncture in Britain and the world is the key to perspectives.

There's been a 'recovery' in jobs - the "best 40 years" according to the raw statistics. In the US unemployment is officially at its lowest for decades.

However, this is just one aspect. The other, and more important, 'reality' is the colossal worsening of the working class's existence - in every respect - including in jobs and particularly in wages and conditions. You only need to see the strike of the Uber Eats workers, where many of the most oppressed workers are fighting against the brutal conditions of the gig economy.

The Financial Times has compared conditions in the working class to the situation of the 18th century in which the majority of workers were on 'piece rates'.

Just 13.5% of private-sector workers are in a trade union. Capitalist commentators are almost imploring big business owners to increase wages. Some even advocate the formation of unions, though tame ones of course! This indicates the dilemma faced by the ruling class. They need an increase in wages to generate demand.

This crisis has not been overcome. In fact new figures show the colossal increase in debt. Worldwide public debt is now \$60 trillion. In the UK, national debt is more than £2 trillion.

The increase in the national debt is because there is no or inadequate growth. While there has been a certain recapitalisation of the banks, at the same time the problem has been transferred from the banks to other sectors like 'hedge funds'.

There has also been a relocation of investments to the so-called 'emerging' markets which are no longer emerging but 'submerging'. Look at Latin America, Asia and Africa. In Argentina there is now a 60% interest rate. Brazil has experienced the biggest recession in its history. This has enormously increased social tensions there.

This is quite apart from the effects of incipient trade war prompted by Trump, where \$200 billion in tariffs against China have led to retaliation. This represents a ratcheting up of the inter-imperialist rivalries.

This is the background to the events in Britain. While workers are not yet acting in mass opposition to the system, there are rumblings. The recent walk out by prison officers, in defiance of Tory anti-trade union laws, was an example of this.

There is not yet a powerful workers' movement or uprising. But this is germinating. As always, this future is signified in the gaping splits developing in the ruling class and its parties.

The most obvious is the crisis over Brexit. One false 'misstep' and a messy Brexit could enormously aggravate the crisis, leading to mass confrontations and clashes in Britain and elsewhere. The sharpness of the clash in Salzburg was an indication of the bitter rivalries. The EU's negotiator, Michel Barnier, first tried to love-bomb May at one stage. But in Salzburg we saw bitter intransigence towards British capitalism's demands. This reflects the fear of the centrifugal disintegration of the EU with major repercussions in other European countries, particularly those in the south of the continent: Italy, Spain, and so on.

However, the overwhelming majority of British capitalist strategists in industry and commerce favour 'Remain'. At a minimum, they desire a continued close relationship to Europe and the single market.

There is an element of 'project fear' in the recent statement of Bank of England governor Mark Carney on house prices.

No-deal scenario

But in general it's not the case that these fears have been exaggerated. The sober statement of Jaguar Land Rover, predicting massive job losses in a no-deal scenario, indicates this. There are real fears of a complete logjam at the ports. Even a two-minute delay in bringing goods into or out of the UK is bad enough. A five minute delay creates a catastrophe - with the resulting lines of traffic stretching for miles. There is the potential for losses of billions of pounds to the bosses.

The capitalist class is not clear on how to approach the Brexit negotiations. They are feeling their way. Labour is similarly struggling to propose some kind of 'solution'.

The famous 'empiricism' of the British ruling class is on full display. They will attempt to muddle through. There is growing support for a so-called 'blindfold Brexit', to maintain the status quo for a period after leaving the EU while negotiations continue into the future. There is also the fear of the Good Friday Agreement unravelling and a further sectarian polarisation in Northern Ireland.

There is consequently a noisy clamour for a new referendum - particularly from the Blairites, the Liberal Democrats and London mayor Sadiq Khan.

While a second referendum can't be completely ruled out, it is unlikely. In reality, it's likely that such a referendum would serve to stoke anti-EU feeling. It would be rightly seen as attack on democratic rights, with the potential threats of street demos, violence and confrontation.

That's why it's vital that we stress our different workers' and socialist approach. If given a lead from the top, the working class is instinctively internationalist. A real 'peoples' vote' would be a general election.

We call for a 'workers' Brexit', but at the same time, we recognise the vital importance of an internationalist approach, which has been enormously reinforced by the colossal integration of the productive forces across borders, which cannot be unscrambled without huge economic damage. Therefore we give emphasis to workers' unity and the need for a democratic socialist confederation of Europe.

Class divide

The class divide has enormously deepened since the first referendum in 2016. Every aspect of the economic and social situation indicates a massive widening of the class gulf in Britain. Even the Tories are affected. They are forced to accept that the 'conversation' has changed. There is now open discussion in their ranks on the 'crisis of capitalism'.

Of course, they only wish to attempt to 'solve' this problem by trimming at the edges - implementing cosmetic reforms. We understand that what is necessary is system change. The intervention of Justin Welby, the Archbishop of Canterbury, is significant particularly when considering the historic position of the Church of England - described in the past as the 'Tory party at prayer'.

Welby denounced Amazon's chief Bezos - and by implication capitalism - for 'greed', for not paying taxes. The shepherd is at least partially reflecting the views of his flock, and up to a point being led by them! In the highly-charged situation in Britain, the ruling class, including its churches, are forced to sway and adapt to the prevailing social and economic winds.

However, there is, at present, a certain frustration in the labour movement that "nothing seems to be happening", particularly on the industrial front. Everybody is waiting for an explosion and it is coming!

Rage is continuing to pile up at the dramatic decline in living standards following ten years and more of austerity. Life expectancy, particularly for women, is declining.

This reveals not only the inadequacies of capitalism as a whole but also the consequences of the shameful record of the Blairites. Arch-Blairite Peter Mandelson claims the 'centre left' is being squeezed out of Labour. In reality, their capitalist policies are coming home to roost in the deterioration of living standards.

The middle class, as well as the working class has been profoundly affected by the crisis. The majority now fear for themselves, and particularly for their children in terms of jobs, homes and education. Many are looking around for an alternative.

Shockingly, we have been assailed in the last few days by a series of reports of hungry workers and children. 14 million are currently classed as living in poverty in Britain. The Blairites prepared the ground for the Tory attacks with the cuts made to welfare payments - including the withdrawal of benefits.

The struggle against cuts being carried out in local government has if anything increased. Recent events in Somerset and Northampton show this.

Tory councils have in effect given up the ghost. In the face of government funding cuts they say: "We surrender!" They share this approach with a majority of right-wing Labour councils. These areas - allegedly sleepy rural counties - are in fact amongst the leaders in the league of deprivation!

Right-wing Labour councils are desperate to attract high ratepayers. That explains why they have got into bed with the speculators to enforce schemes of gentrification and social cleansing. This has provoked massive protests and internal upheaval in London, such as in Haringey, Waltham Forest and elsewhere.

This is why we demand that councillors stop doing the dirty work of the Tory government by passing on cuts. We will continue to support socialists and trade unionists standing as candidates in local elections to challenge those implementing brutal austerity.

We will also continue to call for the re-grouping of genuine socialist forces under a Corbyn-led Labour Party, on the basis of refounding the party with a democratic, federal structure. It is for this reason that we have corresponded with Jennie Formby, general secretary of the Labour Party, on this question (see 'The struggle to transform Labour' at socialistparty.org.uk).

Labour's civil war

The outcome of the Labour party's civil war remains in the balance. There remain 'two parties in one'. Of course, there are really two civil wars ongoing in the Labour Party and the Tories, with the potential for splits within both.

Capitalist strategists, through the columns of their newspapers, have hardened their approach to Corbyn and particularly to a government headed by him. The Daily Telegraph wrote that the 'biggest crisis' capitalism faces arises not from the economic situation but rather the prospect of a Corbyn-led government!

This remains true despite Corbyn, and particularly McDonnell, doing everything to allay the fears of big business and the capitalist class.

Unfortunately, their programme amounts to little more than the implementation of the recent report of Welby and co, calling for mild reforms, the development of co-ops and so on. There are also other proposals to cut down on the more parasitic elements of capitalism.

But the pressure exerted by the capitalist class on a Corbyn government will go much further. This is illustrated in the relentless campaign of slander which Corbyn has been subjected to over the summer, particularly over the issue of 'antisemitism'.

We have also seen the cranking up of the 'security' issue by the right. This is particularly happening over the Salisbury Novichok attacks. The truth is that this is probably preparation for a dirty election campaign, which will depict Corbyn as weak on 'defence'.

But the hypocrisy of these slanders is shown by the different approach towards Tory EU MPs backing Orbán in Hungary! It is also highlighted by the support afforded to the 'head choppers' of Saudi Arabia by Blair. Johnson's disgusting comments on Muslim women provide another striking example.

However, the campaign of the capitalists and the Labour right on the question of antisemitism has not worked.

Support for the socialist alternative has grown. This is evident not just here in Europe, but also in the US, where one in three youth now support socialism.

In the end, this slander will have little effect. The overriding class issues will come to the fore. It is still likely that the outcome of a general election in the near future would be a Corbyn victory, paving the way for a Corbyn-led government.

One potential stumbling block in the immediate term is the possibility of splits by the right of the Labour Party. While it appears more likely that the Blairites will 'hang on' for the time being, continuing their campaign of sabotage, it's a threat which has not gone away. Blairite Alan Johnson recently described a split as "inevitable".

But Blair took time out from meeting oligarchs and Italian far-right politician Salvini to warn of the possible consequences of repeating the failure of the Social Democratic Party in splitting from Labour.

Therefore, a new 'centre party' is not the most likely in the immediate term, though it remains on the agenda as an option. The Blairite outrider Chuka Umunna - who made the disgraceful statement that he considers the Labour party 'institutionally racist', a term originally used by anti-racist campaigners to describe the brutal methods of the capitalist state - keeps hopes alive. The main obstacle the Labour right face remains the lack of firm social ground for a centre party.

Two-sided picture

The Observer's commentator Andrew Rawnsley recently argued that 'right' populists, not the left, inherited the post-2007-08 crisis period. This paints only one side of the picture.

His definition of the 'left' includes right-wing social democracy, which has become so organically connected to capitalism as to be incapable of benefiting in the present period.

Where the legacy of social-democratic failures looms less large, such as in the US, the growth of support for socialism has been particularly striking.

There is now no room for a sustained revival of right-wing social democracy. This has been shown by developments in Greece, leading to the virtual collapse of Syriza following its capitulation to the demands of the Troika - the EU, the International Monetary Fund and the European Central Bank.

We will continue to play a key role in events. Our main job is to dig roots among workers, particularly young workers.

In this way we prepare our and the working class's future, building a force capable of leading the struggle for the end of capitalism and the establishment of socialism.

Students and workers unite and fight

Connor Rosoman, Sussex Socialist Students

Socialist Students is campaigning for an autumn of resistance against Tory marketisation of our universities. For students, this has meant cuts to education services alongside rising tuition fees and massive debt.

A mass movement against attacks on education could mobilise into action the thousands of students inspired by Jeremy Corbyn's anti-austerity programme, alongside striking university staff.

Unison public sector union members in higher education are currently balloting for strike action against the latest in several years of below-inflation pay increases. They are joined by members of the University and College Union (UCU). Earlier this year UCU held an inspirational strike over cuts to lecturers' pensions.

Pay for uni staff has declined by 21% in real terms since 2009. If both unions strike, there is the possibility of even more significant action this autumn than in the first half of the year, when lecturers were on strike at 61 different universities across the country.

After the tremendous solidarity shown for their lecturers throughout the last academic year, students must work to support the campaign for a 'yes' vote among university staff.

The ballots must meet the 50% turnout threshold imposed by the Tories' draconian anti-trade union laws. But with a concerted effort this boundary can be smashed.

The Tories have been responsible for the destruction of higher education, but their government is caught in a deep crisis. A Corbyn government, if it adopted socialist policies, could provide the alternative many are now looking for. Socialist Students calls for a united struggle of both students and workers against the cuts and to kick out this rotten Tory government.

Freshers fairs: socialist ideas chime with students

Socialist Students, along with Socialist Party members, have been engaging with students at this year's freshers fairs on a wide range of issues - how to build a movement to scrap tuition fees; how to link up students and workers to bring down the Tories; as well as explaining our broader socialist ideas. Below we carry a small selection of reports of these activities. More reports will be carried in future issues of the Socialist.

Manchester

Over three days, Socialist Students in Manchester held regular campaign stalls. Our demand - "Kick out the Tories" - resonated with many students who link May's government to a rise in poverty pay, insecure work and skyrocketing student debt.

The last few years have been marked by young people looking for radical answers. It has become common sense to look at the capitalist system as fundamentally broken. It is no surprise then that around 300 students signed up to Socialist Students and dozens of international students attended our meetings with enthusiasm.

One of our meetings was titled 'What is communism?' As well as continuing to feed the myth that dictatorial Stalinist regimes represent 'socialism' or 'communism', since the collapse of the Soviet Union, people have been fed the myth that the ideas of Marx and Engels are irrelevant in the 21st century. Our experience shows that young people are coming to see through the lies. Our generation is rediscovering Marxism, and Socialist Students is playing a leading role in that.

Tom Costello

Leeds Beckett

This year, Socialist Students had one of the best ever freshers fairs at Leeds Beckett University, with over 90 people giving their details for our mailing list.

Our 'Kick out the Tories' leaflets drew lots of positive comments from students, showing a keenness to see an end to this weak government of austerity.

But many students also wanted to discuss how socialist ideas can change the world. This was reflected in the sales of around 20 copies of the Socialist during the week, alongside sales of the Socialist Students magazine Megaphone, showing a thirst for socialist ideas.

Despite a deluge of rain before our 'What is Socialism?' meeting was due to start, several freshers braved the weather to find out more about getting active in Socialist Students.

Iain Dalton, Socialist Students Yorkshire organiser

Winchester

Winchester University freshers fair took place during a downpour. But that didn't stop Socialist Students making its mark in winning new, but drenched, students into our ranks.

I stood outside the entrance to the building containing the major political societies. There isn't an established Socialist Students group, but this is soon to change given the immensely positive response to our leaflets from students.

Unfortunately the rain made it difficult for students to stop and discuss. But nonetheless, six Megaphone magazines were sold and new contacts made! Chants of "Kick out the Tories," "Save our NHS from Tory privatisation," and "Destroy student debt!" were very popular. A personal highlight was shouting "Save our NHS, Tories out!" to local Tory MP Steve Brine's face!

Members of the Tory and Lib Dem societies spotted my success and started to leaflet on the other side of the entrance. However, the sight of a nearby bin overflowing with their leaflets made it perfectly clear that Socialist Students is destined for growth in Winchester.

Michelle Francis

Sussex

Students from Brighton and Sussex had a successful stall at this year's Sussex University freshers fair. With a growing presence at both local universities, we were able to turn up in greater numbers than ever before.

Students were enthused by our petition to kick out the Tories, and others stopped to ask us about socialism. Several put their details down to help us re-affiliate to the students' union this year.

We are currently preparing for an introductory meeting of Socialist Students on 4 October to launch another successful year for the group.

It was clear from the discussions held on the stall that people recognised the need to build a campaigning organisation, with a presence both on and off the campuses, that can help wage a genuine struggle to change society.

Sussex Socialist Students

Portsmouth

No surprise there was interest in our stall at Portsmouth Freshers Fair, we were the only ones saying "Kick out the Tories!" and demanding an immediate general election to ensure tuition fees are scrapped and a socialist anti-austerity alternative is built. Our meeting after the fair discussed that and other questions like Brexit. Portsmouth Socialist Students is up and running and ready to play its part in the downfall of Maybot and the Tories.

Nick Chaffey

Private firms and toothless regulator to blame for trains chaos - nationalise rail now!

An RMT member

Britain's rail regulator admits it was asleep at the wheel in the run up to the May 2018 timetable change which resulted in chaos on vast swathes of Britain's railways.

The Office for Rail and Road (ORR) has said that the May 2018 timetable change created a perfect storm for passengers in the north west and south east of England "directly impacting upon their work and families and in some circumstances their personal safety."

New services introduced in the timetable change required staff to be trained on new routes. But the private train operating firms did not plan sufficient time for this. Add engineering delays on the north west electrification scheme going back to autumn 2017 and the potential for a full-scale crisis should have been crystal clear.

In its report published last week the ORR states that neither they nor the Department for Transport "sufficiently tested the assurances... about the risk of disruption, despite having information and powers that would have allowed them to do so." In other words the watchdog simply took the profiteering rail firms at their word.

Arriva Trains North and South Western Railway cancelled up to 370 and 410 trains each day respectively and, to mitigate this, simply erased advertised trains from the passenger timetable!

Scandalously nobody is willing to take responsibility for the chaos. The tracks, stations and other infrastructure are owned and maintained by Network Rail, which is state owned but which contracts out much of its work to private firms.

Meanwhile, the train services themselves are owned and operated by private train-operating companies on temporary franchises. Even the Tory transport secretary Chris Grayling has admitted that he is "not a specialist in railway matters" but he is now supposedly looking at ways to 'change the system'.

For socialists it is clear that the only solution to the fragmented chaos on the railways is immediate nationalisation under workers control and management. This means removing from the equation the spivs and speculators whose only interest is milking our railways for all they are worth. Labour is far too soft on the rail racketeers by promising to let them continue to leech off us until their franchises expire.

Since rail privatisation in the 1990s public subsidy has soared from £1.6 billion (in today's money) to over £5 billion now. Foreign government-backed organisations today run 72% of the train operating companies. According to the Daily Telegraph nearly 90% of all journeys are made on services provided by foreign backed operators.

However, despite being supported by the vast majority of the public, nationalisation is still off the table, although the Tory government will temporarily step in to rescue failing franchises as it did when Virgin Trains East Coast was on the brink of collapse earlier this year.

Fight plans for A&E appointment system - fight to save our NHS

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

NHS England could introduce an "appointment system" in A&E departments as part of its proposed "NHS targets shake up". This makes me very angry, but it is not with disbelief that I read this latest preposterous idea.

In response to government pressure to meet waiting-time targets, it has been suggested that A&Es in England adopt a model which has recently been used in Denmark to meet its obligation to see 95% of patients within four hours of arrival. This would force the 22 million visitors to A&Es in England to call and book an appointment before arrival.

Professor Keith Willet, NHS director of acute care, would like to see a shift to the Danish system that was attempted in Copenhagen in 2014. It led to complaints that patients faced long delays getting through to busy phone lines. Some illnesses and diseases were misdiagnosed because the person assessing had no face-to-face contact with the patient.

A&E staff also expressed concern as to who would be responsible for triaging - deciding the order in which patients are treated - when they rang.

The Royal College of Emergency Medicine - the body that represents A&E doctors - totally rejects the idea of appointment systems. Its president Dr Taj Hassan stated: "I would be very surprised if this worked in the NHS. The NHS is full of innovated ideas that crash and burn".

Another idea recently suggested to improve efficiency is that targets for cataract and cancer treatment be watered down. This is indicative of the cavalier attitude that the government and capitalist class have towards the NHS.

The Socialist Party demands an NHS that is free at the point of use and operated under democratic, working class control.

Kick out the privateers and cutters, fund the NHS properly, and tackle the chronic under staffing which is the real threat to patient safety at the present time.

Labour civil war rages in Enfield

North London Socialist Party members

Following a no-confidence vote in Enfield North constituency Labour Party (CLP), right-wing MP Joan Ryan has responded with insults to members in the local press.

This type of behaviour - undermining Jeremy Corbyn in the media - was the basis of the motion itself. Ryan attacked her own membership, calling them on Twitter: "Trotskyists, Stalinists, communists and assorted hard left".

CLP vice chair Mark French provided a measured response in a letter to the local newspaper rejecting her suggestions as factually wrong, warning that her approach "can only contribute to the creation of an unhealthy and intolerant atmosphere inside the party. Smearing and dehumanising people one disagrees with are the hallmarks of the McCarthyite witch hunt."

His letter explains that the meeting of nearly 200 members "was conducted in a polite, orderly and democratic way, with speakers for and against the motion. Joan was allowed to address the meeting before the vote was taken.

"There was no heckling at any time, and every speaker was treated with utmost respect. The motion was in fact passed by 95 votes to 92 and is a clear expression by the majority of Enfield North CLP members present of their dissatisfaction with the recent conduct of their MP".

There has also been a press statement issued by the CLP left wing against Ryan's smears and in defence of the motion, with around 70 signatures so far.

Unused to democratic challenge, some of Joan Ryan's supporters reacted to the vote with rage. One supporter allegedly threatened to kill and then assault a young member. The incident was reported to police and has been widely discussed on social media. But it has been ignored by the capitalist media which continues with its false narrative of left-wing bullying.

Her allies were also standing outside the meeting with cameras, harassing members with questions about which way they would vote, chanting "no to Corbyn, yes to Ryan" and waving the Israeli flag.

Deprivation

Significant parts of the constituency face acute deprivation following years of austerity and anyone who tries to commute into central London will be open to the urgent need for rail nationalisation.

Recent reports have suggested that Enfield council faces a £9.2 million budget gap, which, unless Labour councillors are prepared to defy Tory austerity, will result in further cuts. Joan Ryan should resign and, if she doesn't, the national party should remove the whip.

The party should now mobilise its heavily increased membership since Corbyn's election to fight for the radical policies identified in his anti-austerity manifesto, without being held back by old-style right-wing politics of Joan Ryan.

Them & Us

Them...

- State-owned Network Rail which owns and manages rail infrastructure has sold all property under rail arches to a private owner for £1.46 billion. 5,200 properties spanning 17 million square feet, the majority of which are converted arches which trade as small businesses, have been offloaded to property managers Telereal Trillium.
- Newly-independent Blairite MP Frank Field has joined a millionaire Tory donor to open a new academy school. Field, who quit the Labour Party whip to undermine Jeremy Corbyn, did not respond to requests from website Schools Week for a comment, but a spokesperson did defend his relationship with Tory donor David Ross.
- Dictatorial Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan has appointed himself chairman of Turkey's sovereign wealth fund which presides over assets worth over \$200 billion. He has even announced that his son-in-law will act as his deputy.

...and us

- More than 14 million people, including 4.5 million children, are living in poverty. The Social Metrics Commission found that the numbers are higher than previous figures.
- The maximum interest rate on student loans in England and Wales has gone up from 6.1% to 6.3%. At 6.3%, a graduate would need to earn more than £60,000 a year before starting to reduce their debt. A father of one graduate - who due to interest now owes £7,642 on top of their £50,000 student debt - says they may as well be in debt to Wonga.
- 54 privately owned student residential blocks in England remain clad in combustible material similar to the Grenfell Tower cladding. The National Union of Students has said the buildings should not be used until they have been repaired and called for a full list of the affected premises to be published.

Reader's comment

Who wants driver-only operation?

Martin Pryor, train guard

If you take a cursory glance at the news these days, you will see problems on the railways - strikes, delays, timetable meltdown and so on.

But one thing that usually comes up is driver-only operation (DOO), which simply means a train with only a train driver sitting by themselves in the cab. Easy right?

Some people might not even think of the guard when they think about getting on a train. This can be for many reasons.

The role has different titles - guard, conductor, train manager, onboard supervisor and more. This has led to misunderstanding of what that role is for and why it is there in the first place.

A guard is there first and foremost to protect the welfare and safety of the passengers and crew, as well as to ensure the safe running of the train. This can be confused with additional duties such as checking tickets.

Face of the railway

For me, the guards' role has always been the face of the railway system, whether for a regular commuter, a kid off to school or a tourist out for the day in the country. Passengers have the opportunity and the security of seeing a face, a human representative of this Victorian institution.

In the worst situations the guard is there, with extensive training and experience, to deal with whatever arises. We communicate not only with the driver, but with signallers, railway control and the emergency services. Mostly our job is to keep the travelling public safe and informed.

So, who wants to remove the guards and why?

Drivers don't want to be abandoned to deal with an array of situations that they may have no experience in or training to deal with. Train drivers' union Aslef calls for "no extension of DOO schemes or introduction of DOO in the form of 'DCO' or any other name."

I have never spoken to a train crew manager who advocated DOO or could explain why it would be a good idea to take guards away. If a guard is non-essential, how essential can a manager's job be?

The passengers overwhelmingly say no. A study showed that 93% of passengers thought guards increased safety and personal security. This is completely understandable at a time when violence is on the increase and sexual assaults on trains doubled from 2012 to 2017.

What could they expect to gain from losing a safety-critical trained member of staff? They would lose the route knowledge and experience of someone who, on average, has worked there for 12 years. Don't even bother hoping for a helping hand with your suitcase, pram or wheelchair.

The prices would stay the same, or in this privatising, profiteering culture, I wouldn't be surprised if they went up.

The only reason I can find to remove a guard is to save money on wages, to increase profits for the shareholders. The public-interest reasons that we need to keep guards far outweigh any monetary or profitability excuses.

The Conservative government wants to attack the strength of unions. It placed in the private tendering process for railway franchises a desire to remove and downgrade the rights and responsibilities of the safety-critical person on board. The government mentions that staff should be visible. But a driver sitting in a front train cab as they go past you on the platform may be 'visible'!

I shudder to think of the number of millionaires railway privatisation has created. The cost has been borne by the taxpayer and commuter.

The government has the aim of giving over more of the public's money and putting it straight into those millionaires' pockets. All the while services decline, prices soar and jobs are lost.

McDonald's, TGI Fridays, Wetherspoon

Hospitality workers coordinate historic strike

In a historic move, hospitality workers from McDonald's, TGI Fridays and Wetherspoon are staging coordinated walkouts to highlight issues of low pay and insecure working.

The Fast Food Rights campaign said the strikers "are part of a growing movement of workers who face similar conditions of poverty pay, precarious contracts and lack of union recognition."

Workers in two Wetherspoon pubs in Brighton; McDonald's staff in Brixton, Crayford, Cambridge and Watford; and TGI Fridays workers in Milton Keynes, Covent Garden and Stratford in London will be going on strike.

Matt Rouse, a kitchen worker at the Bright Helm Weatherspoon Brighton, said: "We're excited and happy to be going on strike. I've been inspired by my co-workers as we stand together to call out injustice in our

workplaces.

"We are determined to make our demands for £10 an hour for all, and union recognition heard. This is only the beginning. We will keep fighting for everyone, for better wages and rights for hospitality workers across the country."

Boni Adeliyi, TGI Fridays waitress in Milton Keynes, said: "We're striking on 4 October to show the strength we have when workers come together. The movement is growing and change is coming!"

"All young workers should join a union - it's important to know your rights and how to fight for them when they're being ignored. Together we are stronger!"

McStriker Lauren McCourt said: "We're joining with Wetherspoons and TGI Fridays workers because when we come together, hospitality workers have the power to transform our sector. The days of poverty pay, insecure contracts and lack of respect for workers are numbered."

"A living wage of £10 an hour for all ages, security of hours, and our right to a union are the basic rights we are fighting for. Hospitality workers are rising up and all those who suffer similar conditions should join with us. We will win."

This will be the first time Wetherspoon workers have been on strike in the company's history. This is the eighth strike by workers at TGI Fridays in Covent Garden and Milton Keynes.

Wetherspoon and McDonald's staff have joined the food workers' union BFAWU. The TGI strikers are in general union Unite.

The Socialist Party will be taking part in the picket lines and protests and sends solidarity to all workers on strike.

Strike vote: college staff want a pay rise

Clare Gibbs, UCU Coleg y Cymoedd (personal capacity)

College lecturers are being forced to the brink by unsustainable and oppressive workloads. A University and College Union (UCU) Wales survey on workload showed that members are working 50, 60 and 70-hour weeks, but only getting paid for 37. We are literally working two days for free.

We cannot provide quality education on the cheap or on our knees, nor should we.

Welsh members of the UCU in further education are balloting for strike action over pay and workload. Pay is a crucial issue for UCU members.

We've endured an approximately 20% pay cut in real terms over the last decade. We're not all in it together, as we have seen principal and chief executive wages rocket.

It's our members who are seeking support from charities as they face financial difficulties. In January, the Education Support Partnership charity claimed requests for grants went up by 40%, with workers citing issues with housing, rent and mortgage arrears.

Others were struggling to cover basics such as food, bills and the simple cost of getting to and from work. Our pay claim of 7.5% goes some way to recompense the losses we've experienced.

We cannot afford any more pay cuts. We cannot afford not to fight on pay.

UCU Cymoedd took strike action in June 2017 as our workloads are unbearable. In January 2018, UCU Wales voted 90% in favour of strike action on workload.

With its customary arrogance Colegau Cymru - the body representing college principals - delayed negotiations. The Tory anti-union laws mean we must win the ballot again.

A decade of Tory-imposed austerity and woefully inadequate funding has devastated our sector in Wales. This process has been compounded by college employers who have squandered limited budgets on vanity projects and grossly inflated senior staff pay. In effect we have witnessed ten years of barbaric educational vandalism.

The pay and workload dispute is UCU Wales's most important dispute for a decade. It is essential that UCU members throughout Wales deliver a massive 'yes' vote for strike action. And it is imperative we reach the 50% turnout threshold imposed by the Tories.

We can and must win this dispute. A victory will defend our members from stress induced by workload and real-terms pay cuts. But more importantly, a victory will ensure quality education for our learners across the communities we serve.

Ballots close Friday 19 October. The Ucac Welsh education union is also balloting its members for strike action until Friday 26 October. UCU is planning three weeks of escalating strike action.

Victory: compulsory redundancies stopped at Leicester University

[The threat of solid strike action](#) has won a victory. The campaign by Leicester University and College Union (UCU) means the threat of compulsory redundancies is off the agenda for at least the next year.

Many staff have had a hellish summer. They've been worried about their jobs and many have been forced out of the university. Others have been forced into roles they're not happy about.

UCU is confident a new agreement with management will give the union greater say and limit uni bosses' powers.

Leicester Socialist Party

Safety-critical airport workers continue strike

Hugh Caffrey, North West Socialist Party

Safety-critical workers at Liverpool's John Lennon Airport are continuing their strike action against the real-terms pay cut their employer is trying to force on them. Aviation rescue and fire-fighting; the control room; engineering; and driver operations and airport bird control - these are the kinds of jobs done by these workers, who most people would see as incredibly valuable.

But Liverpool Airport Limited - and, we understand, particularly its new chief executive - seem to want a fight with the workers and say that any pay rise above their offer of 2.2% and a one-off £150 payment would break the budget.

The next strike is 26 September and we urge readers of the Socialist to visit the picket line near the main entrance to the airport.

Glasgow workers striking for equal pay

7,500 low-paid and overwhelmingly women workers employed by Glasgow City Council are to strike for equal pay in October and November.

It will be the first strike on the principle of equality in pay in decades in Scotland. Their strike action by local government unions Unison and GMB comes after years of being underpaid by the employer.

Union branches should send strike fund donations and messages of solidarity to Drew Rigden, Unison Glasgow City Branch, 84 Bell Street, Glasgow G1 1LQ. Donations paid to Unity Trust, sort code 608301, account number 20275789.

Victory for Sheffield Save Our NHS

On 20 September, Sheffield Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) agreed to keep the minor injuries unit, walk-in centre and eye centre in their present form for at least another two years. This was welcomed as a victory by Sheffield Save Our NHS (SSONHS) and all those who had fought the original CCG proposals.

Over the last few years the campaign has consistently been asking questions about the urgent care strategy. Last October we challenged the methods of consultation and helped influence an extension to four months. We then campaigned both publicly and in detail against the proposals as they stood. We lobbied numerous CCG meetings, asked questions, and held the NHS to account.

Rethink

"Our supporters have handed in over 23,000 petition signatures, collected on street stalls week in and week out" said Mick Suter (SSONHS chair and Socialist Party member). He continued: "We have organised rallies, a demonstration, and lobbied the political parties and community organisations to build opposition and support the retaining of these NHS services.

"Our campaign was successful because we did not accept the closures, we were prepared to fight. We gave leadership and hope to local people unlike others, particularly councillors and MPs who too often go along with cuts because they see no alternative. Our mantra was 'if you fight you can win'.

"Sheffield Save Our NHS will continue to hold the CCG to account and expect it to listen to local people in any review. We will continue to oppose and fight any future cuts to NHS services".

Sharon, a SSONHS campaigner, said: "Last week, I took my mother to the eye clinic at the Northern General Hospital (NGH).

"It took over one hour on two buses to get there and then we had to walk for over 30 mins inside the hospital to the Huntsman building for another procedure."

NGH is not geared up for the existing patients never mind if 60,000 patients from the walk-in centre had to come to the NGH and 18,000 patients from the minor injuries unit. Sheffield NHS needs local services across the city not just a big super-hospital.

Residents push back Barking estate landlords

Pete Mason, chair, Barking Riverside residents association and east London Socialist Party

At a recent residents' meeting with the landlords of the Barking Riverside estate, they put a price on the major concessions we have wrung out of them in a bitter three-year campaign - £250,000. It was served up with a somewhat despondent apology for not listening to residents, and we were left with the distinct impression that it stung.

As well it should. Despite the overwhelming opposition of residents, the landlord had gone ahead and displaced perhaps as many as 350 residents' cars from the estate and imposed punitive parking restrictions.

Cars were suddenly plastered with parking tickets. Accumulated parking fines, now estimated at tens of thousands of pounds, are causing residents misery and illness.

Women, particularly black and minority ethnic women, felt vulnerable as they were forced to cross the estate at night to remote parking spaces. Those with children were faced with dragging them and shopping for miles. There was also a great lack of spaces for visiting family members.

Residents felt the injustice. They took control of their residents' association and fought back.

A lawyer advised us that we could sue for 'loss of easement' - at an initial cost of £2,400 - and would win, as the landlord had removed our rights as leaseholders. But we hesitated to take on the landlords through the courts, knowing that judges could be biased, given their class backgrounds.

Political pressure

Many residents refused to pay their fines. And those familiar with the skills needed to jump through legal hoops have won. But eventually, after we drew up a team of Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition candidates to stand against our councillors - two of whom were coincidentally on the crucial council planning committee - the councillors switched sides and gave us full backing against the landlord.

This public declaration, in July 2017, which was made good in the granted planning permission for 108 extra visitor spaces in August 2018, turned the tide and made the landlord realise that they must listen to us - which they have perhaps begun to do.

But we have bigger plans. More than 60 residents packed our annual general meeting (AGM) and unanimously passed a resolution calling for our residents' association to defend the right to residents' democratic control over the estate - which is written into the founding documents of the company set up to run the estate, but which the landlord wishes to overrule.

We also demanded the whip hand over the managing agents, currently appointed by the landlord.

Two days later, residents were informed that one of the managing agents - Pinnacle Places, which we singled out for criticism in our resolution - had been removed from a substantial part of the estate.

Our long term goal is residents' control over such decisions, together with public ownership of the common areas, high quality public and freehold housing and abolition of leaseholds.

And at the AGM, at which our very hard-working committee was elected unopposed, I made clear my socialist credentials and bitter opposition to privatisation that has crashed so badly on the estate.

Brilliant sales at Labour Party conference

Socialist Party North West region organiser Hugh Caffrey reports great sales of over 100 copies of the Socialist at, and around, Labour Party conference in Liverpool this week.

Many delegates who bought the paper were attracted by the 'Blairites must go' front page headline - taking up the fight for democratic mandatory reselection of Labour MPs and also the need to adopt socialist policies.

On the Saturday prior to Labour's conference there were also good sales of the Socialist at the march to save Liverpool Women's Hospital from closure. This important campaign was also featured in the Socialist. Well done comrades.

Directors' contempt for repressed workers

Dane Yates, Salford Socialist Party

On 24 September members of Salford Socialist Party branch visited the headquarters of Wilkinson Star - the official UK distributor of Jasic products in the UK (the address is also the base of Jasic UK) - to demand the directors put pressure on their counterparts in Shenzhen, China to end the repression of their employees and to give rights to their staff to join independent trade unions (see ['China: Solidarity with victimised Jasic Technology workers'](#)).

However, the directors showed nothing but contempt for the plight of the workers.

Firstly, by refusing us access to their reception area. And when two directors finally agreed to speak with us it was only if it was conducted on the road at the front of their car park.

When we reached the perimeter fence we were handed the official statements of both Jasic and Wilkinson Star.

Both statements are a catalogue of lies, including accusations of interference by "foreign-funded illegal organisations" and "extremists" determined to incite the workers. It appears that silencing critics and media distortion extends all the way from Shenzhen to Salford!

When we questioned the validity of the statements we were told that they had nothing further to say. However, when we emphasised that they are working alongside a company whose employees have been arrested and tortured, the sales director of Wilkinson Star openly laughed!

It would appear that, to the directors at least, a lucrative distribution agreement between Wilkinson Star and Jasic Technology is worth more than the lives and freedoms of employees whose labour provides their profits.

Huddersfield campaigners keep their powder dry

Hands Off HRI has called a public meeting to assess the recent announcements on the future of Huddersfield Royal Infirmary (HRI). The hospital trust has announced, following a lengthy campaign by Hands Off HRI, that the A&E has been saved and that HRI is not now to be axed.

This is very welcome news but they also have plans to expand Calderdale Royal Hospital, and intend to run down all acute and emergency services at HRI. Campaigners fear this will leave Huddersfield without full hospital services.

Hands Off HRI public meeting Tuesday 25 September, 7.00pm, Brian Jackson Centre, 2 New North Parade, Huddersfield HD1 5JP.

The main speakers are Tony O'Sullivan, Lewisham Hospital campaigner and co-chair Keep Our NHS Public; Yogi Amin, head of public law, Irwin Mitchell and Dr Jackie Grunsell, local Socialist Party campaigner and GP. Hands Off HRI is also calling on all supporters to attend our next protest march on Saturday 6 October in Huddersfield. Assemble at Market Cross (opposite McDonald's) at midday and march around the town centre

US-China trade war

Trump's tariffs raise international tensions and threaten to derail global economy

On 24 September, a further tranche of US tariffs on \$200 billion of imported Chinese goods - nearly 6,000 products - was imposed by the Trump administration. The Chinese regime of President Xi Jinping retaliated by levying tariffs on \$60 billion worth of US exports to China, but at lower rates (5-10%) than had been anticipated.

Starting at 10%, the new US duties will rise to 25% in January 2019. Further tariffs on \$267 billion worth of Chinese imports, threatened in the New Year, would mean virtually all of China's exports to the US would be affected.

Trump was pressured into deferring the 25% rise on the September tariffs and the additional \$267 billion of tariffs, after US retailers warned that they would cause a consumer sales slump at Christmas.

Both sides are engaging in brinkmanship to secure a trade deal, but it's uncertain when and what would be agreed. A lasting trade war, with all its domestic and international implications, could ensue.

Vincent Kolo in the following article on chinaworker.info analyses the geo-political tensions being ratcheted up between the US and Chinese leaders.

The trade war between Washington and Beijing looks set to escalate. Trump's claim that trade wars are "easy to win" was mocked by Financial Times columnist Gideon Rachman, who compared this to the wildly inaccurate claims of the British ruling class in August 1914 that World War One would 'all be over by Christmas'.

There is enormous uncertainty even about what strategy the Trump administration is following, if any. Different factions in the government send out contradictory signals.

Sections of the US capitalist class, their Chinese and global counterparts, are holding their breath to see if the conflict can be contained or escalates with potentially grave implications for the world economy, which is already experiencing turbulence especially in 'emerging markets'.

Washington's mixed signals are illustrated by the recent proposal from Trump's treasury secretary Steven Mnuchin for a new round of trade talks with China. This glimmer of hope briefly lifted the gloom on Asian and other stock markets in early September. But Trump quickly disassociated himself from Mnuchin's move, tweeting he was under "no pressure to make a deal".

Previous talks have proved abortive, despite the Chinese side initially offering significant concessions. The result is increased wariness on the part of Xi's regime fearing that the US side will just keep moving the goalposts if Beijing offers bigger concessions.

The instability and siege mentality of the Trump administration further complicates matters - as it faces 'Russiagate' investigations and numerous other domestic crises, and with opinion polls predicting a Democratic 'blue wave' that could wipe out Republican control of Congress in the November elections. But the roots of today's trade and economic disputes go much deeper than this, to the fundamental inability of global capitalism to take society and the economy forward.

Imperialist conflict

The more Trump's trade agenda rolls out, the clearer it has become that China is the main target. His administration reached deals with the EU in July and Mexico in August, both of which increase the pressure on Beijing.

It's also clear that this conflict is only partly about trade and is in fact driven by bigger geopolitical and strategic issues. US imperialism is seeking to defend its position as the preeminent world power against its strongest international rival.

As one Chinese fund manager told The Economist magazine: "The Americans don't want a deal. They want to screw us."

Having initially gone into battle over the huge trade imbalance between the US and China, Trump's spokesmen have shifted the focus to technology and Beijing's 'Made in China 2025' industrial modernisation

plan.

Furthermore, US politicians now speak about the 'structural issues' with China's economy. They are increasingly taking aim at China's state capitalist economic model: its large state sector and more extensive government intervention compared to 'normal' free market capitalism.

The US and its hungry multinationals, which want to prize open China's protected state sector, complain that the Chinese approach amounts to "cheating". Xi, while prepared to offer concessions, will never compromise over this issue which is central to the regime maintaining its dictatorial rule.

Alarm

Trump has claimed his tariffs are working "big time" against China. But this is a mixture of bravado, showing toughness in order to shore up his domestic position, and the president's poor understanding of the subject.

In fact, the US trade deficit with China and worldwide has actually risen since his first batch of tariffs were introduced in July. The rise in the dollar, a byproduct of Trump's policies, is the main reason for this because it has made foreign goods cheaper.

Capitalist commentators are increasingly alarmed about the potential impact of a full-blown trade war between the world's two most important economies, which together account for 40% of global GDP (total output) and 53% of global growth. This could ultimately tip the world economy into recession.

It would also enormously frustrate any coordinated inter-national response to a new financial crisis, an eventuality that is not at all excluded.

None of the fundamental causes of the previous crisis in 2008 have been addressed. Actually, they have reached even more extreme levels of indebtedness, financial speculation and bubbles.

At the same time, as a South China Morning Post editorial recently stated, the policies implemented globally to 'solve' the last crisis have resulted in "the greatest wealth transfer in history from the have-nots and have-littles".

Trump's policies, despite his populist rhetoric, only reinforce this process while injecting much greater instability into US and world politics.

A recent survey by the American Chamber of Commerce in China showed that three-quarters of US companies based there are predicting reduced profits and sales as a result of the tariffs.

Rather than target these companies for retaliation, Beijing is trying to woo them with concessions. It is not accidental that no anti-US protests or boycott calls have broken out in China, on similar lines to past protests - largely stage managed by the authorities - against Japan, South Korea and the Philippines.

None of Beijing's options for retaliation are pain free. That, of course, is implicit in any tit-for-tat conflict. Xi's regime does not want to widen the conflict, in so far as it can decide this, and has therefore taken only minimal countermeasures while at the same time muzzling its own media to prevent overly nationalistic and belligerent outbursts.

China's economic problems

This reflects deep concerns within China's ruling elite over the vulnerable state of the economy. These problems predate Trump and his 'America First' policies, but the trade war could now make things a lot worse.

China's stock market slump - shares have fallen 25% since January - is one symptom of mounting economic problems.

China's debt-driven growth model is losing speed. Discontent is rising as social inequality reaches alarming levels. The government is caught on the horns of a dilemma - to continue its crackdown on debt (to avoid a

financial crisis) or revert to debt-financed stimulus (to avoid a sharp slowdown or recession).

Its response to the trade war is therefore to try to keep a lid on things and tread a precarious balance in the hope of not 'provoking' Trump further while also not appearing weak.

The longer a trade war drags on the higher the risk that companies - foreign and Chinese - will relocate to other countries outside the trade war. This is a process that was already underway. South Korea's Samsung, for example, has already announced a cut in smartphone output in China, shifting some production lines to India and Vietnam.

If Trump makes good on his threat to levy tariffs on all Chinese imports this would have a serious impact, causing the loss of 5.5 million jobs according to Haibin Zhu, chief China economist at JPMorgan Chase in Hong Kong.

Warnings

However an even bigger threat could come indirectly, in the form of a chain reaction of collapsing confidence among the capitalists. The capitalists and financial speculators are dumping emerging market assets such as stocks and currencies and fleeing for higher returns in the US.

Most commentators seem to have concluded the trade war is going Trump's way, but this is short-sighted in the extreme. Both the US and China will lose from this standoff, and unfortunately the working class in both countries will pay the biggest price through business closures, lost jobs and inflation.

Socialists don't support capitalist 'free trade' which is a false label, hiding the exploitation of poorer economies by the most powerful ones. Neither do we support capitalist protectionism, which aims to defend the profits of one set of capitalists against another.

The current trade war is yet another wake-up call showing the need to build a socialist alternative internationally to put an end to the toxic system of capitalism.

Money talks - Trump listens

One exemption to the president's latest round of tariffs on Chinese imports to the USA is smart watches. After the mega, tax-dodging corporations Apple and Dell complained to the White House administration, Trump responded by tweeting that Apple, instead of complaining, should relocate its production to the USA. But it seems the author of 'Art of the Deal' settled for a poor second. A case of big money talking even bigger than big mouth.

Non-fiction: Don't Let My Past Be Your Future

Powerful defence of the welfare state - but blind allegiance won't save it

Mary Finch, East London Socialist Party

Harry Leslie Smith, the World War Two veteran and welfare state campaigner, has crossed the supposed generational divide and issued a "call to arms" to young people to organise to change society.

'Don't Let My Past Be Your Future' paints a powerful and devastating picture of the absolute destitution faced by working class people through the story of his own youth in 1920s Yorkshire.

He describes the dark, damp, dilapidated housing he was born in, and which his family was regularly forced to flee because they couldn't afford the rent.

He was put to work at the age of seven - his family had no other choice. Harry's father had already lost his job and was struggling to find any employment following a serious injury.

1945 is a constant point of reference throughout the book. The sweeping reforms that workers won as a result of the threat of revolutionary struggle transformed lives. The creation of the NHS and the welfare state showed millions of workers where the potential power in society lies.

But although Harry is far-sighted on many issues, his book unfortunately misunderstands some of the key processes shaping today's politics.

Brexit, like 1945, is a regular feature of the book, looming over the whole narrative with a sense of impending devastation. Harry correctly recognises the alienation and frustration which led to the Brexit vote - workers were sick of paying for the bosses' crisis, and saw a way to express their frustration in the EU referendum.

Yet he seems to hope Britain will find a way to remain in the EU. This is understandable, given the failure of Jeremy Corbyn and the union tops to lead mass struggle and fight for an independent, socialist Brexit.

But socialists have explained from the beginning that the EU is, and always has been, a bosses' club. Capitalist governments created it to maximise the profits of Europe's capitalist classes, and defend against greater public ownership, the planned economies to the east, and international competitors.

Every supposed benefit for workers of being in the EU was actually won - and can only be defended - by workers' struggle, just like the NHS and welfare state which Harry so eloquently champions.

And Harry's frustration over Corbyn's lack of enthusiasm during the referendum campaign is still confusing. Why would Corbyn show any serious dedication to staying in the neoliberal EU, when - like Tony Benn - he previously always held the position that Britain should leave?

Corbyn only adopted a position of Remain under pressure from the Blairite wing of the party.

Later, immediately after the referendum results were announced, the Tories were on the verge of collapse.

A general election seemed imminent. But rather than press the advantage, the Labour right launched another coup attempt against Corbyn.

In reality, the Blairites are capitalist politicians, and as terrified of a pro-worker leader becoming prime minister as any Tory. Harry is therefore also mistaken to call for Labour's left and right wings to reconcile. Corbyn's leadership is untenable for the Blairites, and they will do anything to get rid of him.

It's clear Harry remembers Labour as the party the working class used to create the NHS. But millions of working class and young people remember far more vividly the terrible role of New Labour, including accelerating the privatisation of the NHS.

He also says he stuck with Labour during the Iraq war, at the same time as millions were taking to the streets in mass demonstrations against it. Young people and workers won't be convinced by blind allegiance. After a decade of austerity, we are demanding more.

The only way forward for Corbyn's Labour is to take the battle to the Blairites and fight for a democratic, socialist Labour Party which truly represents the 99%.

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.

Gift card theft

Among other things, the collapse of House of Fraser and its takeover by Mike Ashley has brought home the risks around using gift cards.

I use gift cards through a work-based scheme to save a few percent off shopping, mainly in high street stores and supermarkets. Luckily I don't have a House of Fraser gift card.

Thousands of people are being left out of pocket as the cards are not being honoured.

The BBC reported the words of Cathy Martin: "I honestly feel like going and lifting £150 worth of stock and walking out! I mean, it's the same thing, isn't it?"

"Except I'd be arrested, and House of Fraser gets away with pretty much the same thing. They've stolen £150 from me - and thousands of others."

That would be my feeling exactly. One law for the rich, another for the rest of us.

Bryan Clare, Stevenage

Faithful's fascism fiction

'The Faithful' by Juliet West tells the story both of adherents to Oswald Mosley's British Union of Fascists, and of a young man who turns his back on them to fight against the Spanish fascists.

Some of the characters have a 'sympathetic' reason for supporting Mosley. There is the mother who wanted to save her son from war and calculated that Mosley was the best chance to do so.

However, the book also charts the disillusionment of loyal fascists and the growing realisation of the consequences of the increasingly racist policies of Mosley's 'New Party'.

It is a revelation to hear fascist ideology not couched in foreign accents, but in aristocratic British ones. The thuggery of Mosley's Blackshirts is not emphasised, but rather the reasons some felt the attraction of fascism - the theory that a 'corporate' state would bring an end to class conflict.

The narrative follows the characters into World War Two. Suddenly the Nazi bombs weren't falling on Spanish 'reds', but on British homes. It helped bring about a different perspective for some.

The background to the story is factual but the characters are fictitious. It is a book which brings history alive.

Derek McMillan, Durrington, Sussex

Far-right threat

On 17 September 1993, the far-right British National Party (BNP) won its first council seat in a by-election in Millwall, east London.

The BNP no longer exists as a political force. But other racist parties, such as Ukip and Britain First, have partly taken its place. And there are, unfortunately, individuals who are increasingly active in mobilisations led by the far right.

This is highlighted in a rise in the number of far-right terror suspects currently in prison. In fact, Home Office figures show there has been a rise of nearly five times since the murder of Jo Cox MP by Thomas Mair.

13% of all those held for alleged terror offences are now reported to be right-wing extremists. The fight to destroy the BNP may well have ended, but the fight against the far right continues.

Carl Harper, Peterborough

Freight pension advice

I have heard that a freight company in the rail industry wanted to close its pension scheme. Management said it would arrange for independent financial advisors to meet with employees.

Their advice was to stay in the pension scheme! This could be connected to the fact that your contributions to such a scheme are not subject to income tax - and that employers also pay into the scheme, adding to the pension you receive...

A member of train drivers' union Aslef

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What the Socialist Party stands for

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

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

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

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

Our demands include:

Public services

- No to ALL cuts in jobs, public services and benefits. Defend our pensions.
- No to privatisation and the Private Finance Initiative (PFI). Renationalise all privatised utilities and services, with compensation paid only on the basis of proven need.

- Fully fund all services and run them under accountable, democratic committees that include representatives of service workers and users.
- Free, publicly run, good quality education, available to all at any age. Abolish university tuition fees now and introduce a living grant. No to academies and 'free schools'!
- A socialist NHS to provide for everyone's health needs - free at the point of use and under democratic control. Kick out private contractors!
- Keep council housing publicly owned. For a massive building programme of publicly owned housing, on an environmentally sustainable basis, to provide good quality homes with low rents.

Work and income

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

Environment

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

Rights

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

Mass workers' party

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

Socialism and internationalism

- No to imperialist wars and occupations.

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