

Editorial of the Socialist, issue 1041

Local elections: Tory meltdown but Labour loses ground

Corbyn must lead fight against council cuts and promote bold socialist policies

Last week's local elections have done nothing to resolve the crisis, splinters and potential splits in the main political parties.

Neither have they altered the fact that British capitalism faces a historic crisis in Brexit with no stable political vehicle for its interests. It remains the case that Theresa May and the Tory government could fall at any time.

After the [2017 general election](#) and the [2018 local elections](#), the general view of the capitalist press was that we were looking at a return to two-party politics, after fragmentation and growth in electoral support for smaller parties such as Ukip and the Greens in the years preceding Corbyn's Labour leadership victory.

But the Socialist Party warned that this was only a superficial view. "What we really face is tremendous volatility" [we said in Socialism Today](#), the monthly magazine of the Socialist Party, in June 2018.

The election results confirm this analysis. The fragmentation of politics that the Socialist Party warned about is writ large in these results.

Two-thirds of voters stayed at home, and a quarter of those who voted looked for alternatives to the main parties in order to express their anger and disgust.

The projected share of the vote on a national level, as after last year's elections, puts the Tories and Labour neck and neck.

But this time they are both on 28% instead of 35% last year - only the second time in history that the overall share of the vote of both the two main parties is less than 30%.

The Tories were hammered: they lost 1,334 of the seats they were contesting, their worst result since 1995.

They lost seats all over the country, equally in areas that voted Leave and Remain, and they lost control of 44 councils.

The deep Tory crisis got even deeper. MPs wept at the huge losses, and called for May to go.

One example is David Amess, MP for Southend West, who said the "absolutely dreadful" results happened because they did not set a date for May to stand down.

He called for the Tory backbench group the 1922 Committee to "deal with this matter immediately when Parliament returns on Tuesday... They must take action because we are haemorrhaging support."

The Euro-elections loom in just three weeks' time, unless a deal is agreed in parliament before then. The Tories could face a wipe out.

On this occasion there was no one clear pro-Brexit alternative with which to punish the main parties.

But in the Euro-elections there will be [Nigel Farage's new Brexit Party](#), currently projected to 'win', just ahead of Labour.

Ukip, drifting in a far-right direction and losing its 'raison d'etre' now the Brexit Party is being promoted as a more respectable alternative, lost 145 council seats.

On the same day as some senior Tories, such as Michael Gove and Ruth Davidson, called for unity and echoed May's statement that it was necessary to get on with Brexit, former leader Ian Duncan Smith called for her to go as soon as possible.

Tory party rules mean that technically a vote of 'no confidence' in her cannot be taken by MPs until December, as she narrowly survived a vote before Christmas.

But there is open discussion that the 1922 committee could re-write the rules in order to get her out.

Inherent in the crisis is the possibility of a split in the Tory party. Theresa May and other senior figures continue to aim for an agreement with Labour in order to get a Brexit deal through parliament.

But concessions on, for example, [a customs union](#) or a [second referendum](#) could split the party.

That is now something that is openly talked about. Cabinet minister Rory Stewart has told the press that a Tory split is a price worth paying to deliver Brexit.

But, despite the utter chaos and division of the Tory government, Labour lost seats too: a net loss of 84.

It seems Labour losses were overwhelmingly in working-class areas in the north west and north east where they lost 127 seats. Labour's gains were mostly in the south east.

Socialist Party members met people on the doorstep who said they would never vote again as they could not trust any politicians.

Confusion about Labour's actual Brexit position meant that they were blamed both by Leave supporters for contributing to the delay to Brexit, and by Remain supporters for not opposing Brexit.

It is not primarily because of Corbyn's parliamentary manoeuvres on Brexit, but because of the Labour leadership's failure - on this as on every issue - to go beyond parliamentary manoeuvres and launch a mass struggle, together with the trade unions, for a general election and the coming to power of a Corbyn-led government with a socialist programme.

But this was not just about Brexit. Since 2011, Labour councils have passed on Tory cuts and the reality of what this means is devastating.

91% of schools face funding cuts. In 2017, 600 people died sleeping rough on the streets. Street homelessness has soared.

One in six women's refuges have closed. Hundreds of thousands of council workers have lost their jobs and adult social care and children's services are at breaking point.

The [vote to leave the EU was a cry of working-class rage](#) after years of austerity, while the rich got richer, and people increasingly feel they have no control over their lives. This anger, and the desire for something better, has been displayed again and again.

But it cannot be assumed, as it appears to be by some Corbyn-supporting Labour Party members, and those such as Momentum, that this will seamlessly translate into continuous Labour victories.

The Socialist Party has warned again and again that if Labour councillors do not make a stand, then they will pay a price.

Instead, they should refuse to carry out these savage cuts and mount massive campaigns with the trade unions and local community.

Following three 'Corbyn surges' - in his [election to the leadership in 2015](#), the [attempted coup in 2016](#), and the [general election in 2017](#) - this is now the second time when there has been no Corbyn surge in the local

elections. Instead, many of those who have voted have looked for alternatives.

'Others', including local independent candidates standing on specific issues, gained 661 seats. As part of this phenomenon, the Greens gained 194 councillors.

They are described by the Guardian as the "political arm of the environmental movement".

In reality, they do not fight for the game-changing policies of [socialist nationalisation and planning that is necessary to protect the planet](#), but if Jeremy Corbyn doesn't fight clearly for these policies there is a risk the Greens could regain support.

The [Socialist Party stood 43 council candidates](#), offering a socialist alternative against cutters and privatisers.

The Liberal Democrats celebrated gaining 704 seats. It is probably true they were helped among some voters by being the only party seen to put a clear position against Brexit.

But it must be remembered that these results mainly look good in comparison with the Lib Dem meltdown in 2015, which coincided with a [general election when they were severely punished](#) for their participation in the Con-Dem coalition government. Now some voters saw the Lib Dems again as a means to protest against the 'big two'.

In the Euro-elections the Remain vote could go three ways - to the Lib Dems, the Greens, but also to Change UK, the [new party formed by right-wing Labour defectors and pro-Remain Tories](#).

In a general election, when the question of who will form the government is posed, the mass anger could still find its outlet in a vote for a Corbyn-led government.

But the current impasse could be broken before then by a bold socialist campaign and a mass fightback.

John McDonnell has complained about May talking to the press about their Brexit negotiations - "breaking confidence" - but in reality Corbyn and McDonnell should have made these negotiations public from the start.

They are an opportunity to go over the heads of the Tories and the Blairites to boldly put the case for a [workers' socialist Brexit](#), including nationalisation of companies that threaten job cuts and closures, to end austerity and privatisation of public services, to protect and extend workers' rights and pay, and repeal all EU legislation that prevents these policies. It is essential this is fought for, rather than a rotten compromise deal.

A bold, socialist programme and an appeal to the trade unions to join them in leading a mass movement including demonstrations and strikes, would drive out these hopelessly divided Tories and their cruel anti-working-class government.

That requires taking on the Blairite right-wingers in the Labour Party who continue to work against a Corbyn government.

It would open up the possibility of a government and a mass movement in the interests of working-class people, prepared to challenge and remove capitalism, and to replace it with a democratic, socialist society in the interests of the millions and the environment.

England council elections: socialist anti-cuts message chimes with voters

Hannah Sell, Socialist Party deputy general secretary

On 2 May the Socialist Party, under our electoral banner Socialist Alternative, stood in 43 council seats, plus one mayoral contest in Leicester.

We were standing as part of our ongoing campaign to oppose all cuts to council services and to council workers' jobs, pay and conditions.

On a national basis Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn has pledged that Labour is opposed to austerity, cuts and privatisation.

This is not, unfortunately, the position of the whole of the Labour Party and, at local level, the big majority of Labour councillors are continuing to vote for savage cuts.

Yet the 125 Labour-led councils in Scotland, England and Wales have combined budgets of almost £80 billion, giving them potential to act as a serious counter-power to this incredibly weak Tory minority government. They have a combined £9.3 billion in their general reserves.

Take a stand

They could take a stand tomorrow and refuse to implement one more cut, using their reserves and borrowing powers to fund services until they were reimbursed by a Jeremy Corbyn-led Labour government.

Their failure to do so is the most important reason for the fall in Labour's vote in some of their traditionally strongest areas.

The Socialist Party's candidates all stood on a clear pledge to refuse to implement any cuts and to fight to build a mass movement in defence of local jobs and services.

Our council candidates' results included 45% of the vote in Bolsover North and Shuttlewood, where Elaine Evans was just 45 votes short of being elected.

In Halton Brook, Cheshire, Steve Armstrong received over 22% of the vote, more than double last time he stood.

In Yarborough, North East Lincolnshire, Kieran Barlow's improvement was even more impressive. He also got 22% this time, compared to 1.9% in 2016.

School strike

Another marked improvement was in Sholing ward in Southampton, scene of the recent heroic victory against cuts by staff and parents at Valentine school, where Declan Clune's vote increased from 1.4% to 6.5%.

In neighbouring Coxford ward, where Sue Atkins had won 14% of the vote in a byelection less than two months ago, she increased her share of the vote to 16.9%.

In St Michaels, Coventry, Socialist Party member and ex-Labour MP Dave Nellist achieved 15.4% of the vote.

Our candidate for Mayor of Leicester, Steve Score - former chair of the successful Save Glenfield Children's Heart Centre campaign - received 1,643 votes, 1.9% of the total.

Overall, the Socialist Party's stand in this election was on a modest scale, but included breaking new ground.

Most importantly, where we were able to, we offered a clear no-cuts alternative to the endless austerity being offered by the vast majority of councillors.

Leicester elections: "We planted a marker for the future"

Leicester Socialist Party

"We'll use cash reserves to set a no-cuts budget" was the Leicester Mercury headline when it reported our manifesto for the Leicester mayoral and city council elections.

The article went on to say that using reserves was "necessary in order to build a campaign to get the money from the government we need for these services." This was just one example of the media coverage we got.

Our aims were to publicise a fighting socialist alternative to the cuts and to raise the profile of the Socialist Party in the city: We believe we were successful.

We had no illusions in what our vote would be, especially given our limited resources.

However, the 1,643 votes for socialist mayoral candidate Steve Score plus 1,237 votes across our ten council candidates, shows that our fighting socialist programme got an echo. Our campaigning also resulted in many applications to join the party.

Cutbacks

Despite Jeremy Corbyn's national call to oppose austerity, the Labour mayor and council have overseen cuts of 60% in services in ten years, excluding social care.

The mayor avoided a Labour selection process earlier this year because right-wing union officials blocked it by using the votes of affiliated branches - which had never been consulted.

The best of the pro-Corbyn Labour activists supported us and many even admitted to secretly voting for us. We took care not to stand against genuine pro-Corbyn Labour candidates.

We wrote to all candidates with a detailed proposal of how Leicester's reserves could be used to set a no-cuts budget.

We explained how this would create time to build a mass campaign. We also used our record as part of the successful campaign to save Glenfield Children's Heart Centre to show that it was possible to win.

Some of our opponents falsely claimed that a no-cuts budget was "illegal". When that was answered they said there wasn't enough in reserves.

Finally, they retreated to saying that the sort of campaign we were calling for could not be built - revealing either no concept of, or faith in, the ability of the working class to struggle.

Labour has consolidated its complete dominance on the council, with 53 out of 54 councillors. But there could be tension within the Labour group over cuts.

The Socialist Party will be calling for the building of a movement in cooperation with left councillors and local trade unions in the ongoing fight against the cuts.

As our election agent and one of the candidates, Tessa Warrington, said: "We have planted a marker for the future, raising a bold socialist position and maintaining our record as consistent class fighters in the city.

I'm so proud of all our members who stood and campaigned both locally and nationally, recognising that it was not about them as individuals but the ideas of our party. Onwards and upwards - join the Socialist Party!"

Bolsover elections: Labour's cuts councillors punished by voters

Socialist Party offers fighting alternative

Jon Dale Mansfield Socialist Party

Elections in Bolsover, Derbyshire, don't usually make national news. But on 2 May Labour lost 14 councillors and control of the council.

The district council has been Labour since it was formed in 1972 and MP Dennis Skinner used to have the biggest Labour majority in the East Midlands.

Neighbouring districts of North East Derbyshire and Ashfield also saw terrible results for Labour. This ex-mining area showed its anger at Labour and lack of a fightback after years of economic decline.

With few resources but a clear programme, Socialist Party candidates showed the potential to build a working-class alternative to Tory cuts passed on by right-wing Labour.

In Bolsover North and Shuttlewood ward, Socialist Party candidate Elaine Evans won 45% of the vote and came within a whisker of winning a seat.

Overall, there was a low turnout - down to 19% in one ward. Jeremy Corbyn has not got across a clear anti-austerity message to maintain voters' past loyalty to Labour, particularly with compromises to Blairite Remain MPs over Brexit.

The other big factor was many independent candidates standing on very local issues and promising to put 'community before politics'.

They will now be tested by the same cuts that Labour failed to fight. Differences between them will emerge.

Cuts

Over the past 20 years local cuts have included closure of the swimming bath, community hospital, council offices, Job Centre, public toilet, Sure Start centre and youth centre.

Huge warehouses with zero-hour contracts and low pay have replaced relatively well-paid and secure mining and factory jobs.

Most of these changes don't fall within district council responsibilities - it's government and county council cuts, and changes in the capitalist economy.

But Labour district councillors argued for years that their hands were tied and there was nothing they could do but try and minimise the damage.

Bolsover district didn't make as big cuts as some councils have. They merged top management with North East Derbyshire and sold council property instead.

But they failed to mount a campaign to win extra money from the government by implementing no-cuts budgets and mobilising mass support.

They have taken the blame for being in power all these years while the decline has taken place.

Halton Brook election: support for our policies on doorstep

Ste Armstrong, Warrington, Halton and St Helens Socialist Party

Standing for the Socialist Party in the Halton Brook ward of Halton council I came second behind Labour - an increase in the vote from 2018 when standing under the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition banner in the same ward.

Labour won with 711 votes, but this is over 170 votes down on last year. The Socialist Party (Socialist Alternative) received 247 votes (22.4%), while the Tories limped into last place with 144 votes.

During the campaign, neighbourhood issues like rebuilding the local youth club and scrapping the precept added to council tax for the Liverpool city region combined authority, were popular policies - as was the idea of a no-cuts budget, with the council's cash reserves being used to temporarily fund public services as part of a fightback strategy.

Voters were also keen to discuss our policy of building council houses, to create homes and jobs for local people and revenue for the council which can be reinvested in the community.

Our plan to fully fund domestic violence and youth services struck home with the electorate. Several people expressed an interest in joining the Socialist Party and we have high hopes of growing the branch over the next few months.

We will continue the hard work put in by party members during the election campaign.

Climate catastrophe looms: We need socialist change

Aidan O'Toole, Nuneaton Socialist Party

Protests against climate change and capitalism's degradation of our environment have been growing. Now the world's leading scientists warn that human society is in jeopardy from the accelerating decline of Earth's natural 'life-support systems'.

The Socialist Party argues that the profit driven internal logic of the capitalist system will indeed push the planet to breaking point. That's why the only real solution to climate change is systemic, socialist change.

The new inquest into the tragic death of a nine-year old in London, which was linked to pollution levels, should underline the urgency of this.

Parliament has now agreed to view climate change as an emergency, with Corbyn correctly stating that individual lifestyle changes won't be enough to tackle the impending environmental catastrophe.

To truly tackle climate change, we would have to see a massive redistribution of wealth and power in our society.

A recent report by the Committee on Climate Change has argued that it will be possible for the UK to go 'carbon neutral' by 2050.

But this target won't be reached while production remains organised in the interests of profit - not people and planet.

Fundamentally, you can't control what you don't own. Going carbon neutral would really require democratic planning of the economy - something only possible on the basis of public ownership of the big monopolies which currently dominate, starting with the nationalisation of the energy companies under democratic workers' control and management.

In fact, the 2050 target might even be possible sooner if the economy were taken under workers' control, with socialist planning used to create a more equal and sustainable society.

In a socialist system, we could tackle the housing crisis by building high-quality, genuinely affordable council homes that run efficiently on renewable energy.

We could utilise recent technology to revolutionise public transport, making it free. This could massively reduce the number of cars on the road.

By taking control of our society's wealth, instead of giving tax cuts to the richest, we could invest in research into green technology and energy.

Under capitalism, the short-term profits of the rich will always take priority over the long-term needs of workers and the environment.

The climate crisis is a global issue. Trump's state visit here is planned from 3-5 June. The US president's climate scepticism is no accident.

He is backed by the fossil fuel industry, which has spent decades funding and promoting climate change denial.

That's why young people and workers, building on the recent youth climate strikes, need to build for mass action to protest against Trump and capitalism this summer.

Capitalist politicians - including Trump and May - hold no solutions in stopping climate change. In fact they are a central part of the problem.

Only working-class people can really do this - by seizing the wealth currently concentrated in the hands of the super-rich few - and using it to build a new society based on solidarity and sustainability: socialism.

Young and old, unite and fight!

Terry Pearce, Thames Valley National Pensioners Convention

A House of Lords report, 'Tackling Intergenerational Fairness', proposes to scrap or means-test universal pensioner benefits.

The report argues that pensioners no longer live in poverty. In fact, the UK state pension is the least adequate in the developed world.

And pensioner poverty has risen in the last year to 1.9 million, in spite of the 'triple lock'.

The report proposes to remove the triple lock from the state pension - the guarantee it will raise in line with inflation, average earnings or 2.5%, whichever is higher - and phase out free TV licences, with an option to means-test them.

Free bus passes

From 2026 to 2028 free bus passes and winter fuel allowances would only be available five years after a person becomes eligible for their state pension.

These proposals take no account of the scale of fuel poverty, the rising numbers of winter deaths, the increase in loneliness or the benefits of bus travel to pensioners.

This report is clearly an attack on pensioner benefits and an attempt to drive a wedge between pensioners and young people.

The report ignores the fact that most pensioners have paid taxes all their working lives and continue to do so in retirement. Many become unpaid carers in retirement, saving the exchequer £57 billion a year.

Attacking pensioners' benefits will do nothing to help young people on low wages, facing unaffordable rents - victims of Tory austerity.

The only real solution to poverty of both young and old is to build a united campaign based not on divisions between young and old, but between the 1% at the top and the rest of us - the 99%.

Young people are the pensioners of the future, yet many of them cannot afford to pay for pensions and face an uncertain future in their retirement.

Housing crisis

Many young people are forced to live with their parents into their 30s, unable to afford rents or mortgages. At the same time, many pensioners are faced with soaring social care costs in old age.

Reports like this from the House of Lords will neither help the young nor the pensioners.

The National Pensioners Convention - the largest campaigning organisation for pensioners in Britain - has sought to build unity with its 'Generations United' initiative.

The National Pensioners Convention says: "Pensioners must stand alongside today's workers in defence of their jobs, pensions and the right to a decent period of retirement."

The Socialist Party stands against all attacks on working-class people, of whatever age or background.

As well as fighting for living pensions, we campaign for a minimum wage of £10 an hour, as a step towards a real living wage.

We fight for rent controls, an end to zero-hour contracts and against all cuts to health and social care.

The grievances of both young and old can be resolved by utilising the vast wealth at the top of our society.

This requires bringing the major monopolies that dominate our economy into democratic public ownership, under workers' control and management.

A Corbyn-led government with socialist policies could do this to unite young and old, say no to austerity, defend the triple lock, and end low wages and high rents.

Water bosses plan to undermine nationalisation: no compensation for fat cats!

Neil Adams, Reading Socialist Party

I was recently astounded to learn from the GMB union's 'Take Back the Tap' campaign for renationalisation just how much of a rip-off water privatisation has been.

It references a study by the National Audit Office which found that water bills had risen by 40% above inflation since Thatcher privatised the water industry in 1991.

According to the GMB campaign, a staggering 2.4 billion litres of water were wasted through leakage by the nine privately owned water and sewerage companies daily from 2016 to 2017. In other words, over 900 Olympic-sized swimming pools every single day!

At the same time, water companies are building up huge debts to finance shareholder dividends. A recent report from the University of Greenwich found that £47 billion debt has accrued due to £50 billion in shareholder pay-outs.

Therefore the debts accrued to meet the shareholder dividends are being paid directly by the consumer, while no real investment is made in the ageing infrastructure!

In his 2017 manifesto, Jeremy Corbyn put forward the highly popular policy of extending public ownership in utilities, including water.

He proposes doing this by establishing small municipal utilities to compete with the giant multinationals, and buying the shares of some existing companies, or issuing government bonds in exchange for them.

This is not full nationalisation, and would not give a left government proper control of utilities. Even so, the capitalists are frightful at any prospect of losing such a lucrative cash cow.

So, in anticipation of a Corbyn government, Thames Water has already taken action to erect legal and financial barriers.

Bosses have added a clause to outstanding bonds ensuring lenders are paid back immediately should the company be nationalised.

Labour estimates water nationalisation would cost £20 billion - half the market value of the firms. The Social Market Foundation, a right-wing think-tank, put the cost at £90 billion - double the market value!

Clearly the water bosses will not accept a dent in their profits. They will expect full support from the Blairites in the Labour Party, along with other capitalist representatives, in trying to stop the 2017 manifesto becoming a reality.

However, if pressure from workers' struggle means it does, the bosses will look for compensation for what amounts to their gross failure in charge of our water industry.

It is urgent that the water sector and all utilities are fully nationalised, under democratic workers' control and management.

However, this should be done with compensation paid only on the basis of proven need. We should not be compensating the extremely wealthy for profiting from our water misery.

At the same time, it will be essential for the working class to fight for the immediate implementation of wider socialist policies, including nationalisation of the banks, large building firms, and top corporations which control our economy.

Only this can allow funding and coordination of production, infrastructure and public services to truly meet all our needs.

Northern Ireland: Socialist wins council seat

Socialist Party (CWI Ireland) member Donal O'Cofaigh, standing as Cross-Community Labour Alternative, has been elected as a councillor. Donal was standing in the Enniskillen ward for Fermanagh and Omagh council.

Emerging victorious, Donal said: "I am honoured to have been elected by the people of Enniskillen. My deepest thanks to everyone who gave me their backing.

"For me, this is not a personal victory but a political one - it is a victory for cross-community, socialist politics.

"It reflects a growing opposition to the sectarian games, cuts and backward social policies of the main parties.

"As well as holding the establishment parties to account in the council chamber, I will use my position to assist working-class people from all backgrounds in fighting back to defend jobs, public services and our

environment.

"It is fitting that this breakthrough has come in the centenary year of Fermanagh Council of Trade Unions. I hope this is just the beginning.

"I want to help rebuild the labour movement as a real alternative to the dead end of Green and Orange politics in Fermanagh and across Northern Ireland."

Them & Us

Fat-cat pay

Measures to curb excessive executive pay have "failed", according to the High Pay Centre. Every single binding shareholder vote between 2014 and 2018 at FTSE 100 companies approved top executive pay.

Nowhere even came close to rejecting these gargantuan handouts. Only in 11% of instances did more than a fifth of shareholders 'rebel'.

Average FTSE 100 chief executive pay rose to £3.9 million in 2017 - 137 times the average worker's pay.

Tinkering with the capitalist system won't work. Only by implementing socialist policies - nationalising the FTSE 100 under workers' control and management, with compensation paid only on the basis of proven need, not to the fat cats - can we end grotesque wealth inequality.

Nationalisation not deregulation

The Rail Delivery Group - representing rail companies - has tried to sideline nationalisation attempts and protect profits by calling for a new 'independent' body to oversee the network.

Transport union RMT general secretary Mick Cash said private rail operators were proposing "a deregulated free for all where private train operators slug it out on the most lucrative routes" and that it would be "a break from the last shreds of accountability."

First past the post 'failure'

The current 'first past the post' electoral system abets "extremism" and discourages "moderate" politics, according to the Constitution Society.

What the ruling class fears most is the euphoria unleashed by a Jeremy Corbyn government implementing anti-austerity policies, and workers demanding more.

But it's not first past the post that's put this on the table. It's a decade of capitalist economic crisis and austerity, demonstrating the need for a socialist alternative to millions of workers and young people.

Unions must back a general election and oppose bosses' EU

Rob Williams, Socialist Party executive committee

The recent meeting of Labour's national executive committee, called to finalise the party's European Union election manifesto, brought out the division over the EU bosses' club.

In the debate that ensued, affiliated unions were on both sides. But Unite the Union and the Communication Workers Union (CWU) played a key role in defeating advocates of prioritising a 'people's vote' - a second EU referendum with the aim of reversing Brexit.

It's clear that a majority of the Blairites, acting as agents of the capitalist establishment, are using this issue to undermine Jeremy Corbyn and the fight for a general election.

With May and the Tories weak, divided and suffering huge losses in the council elections, once again the Blairites are trying to ride to their rescue.

It is therefore vital that Corbyn and John McDonnell stand firm, putting forward a clear class position that can unite workers in a struggle to get rid of the Tories and bring in a Labour government on socialist policies.

An important step is to both oppose a rotten deal with the Tories and to fight for a Brexit deal that defends workers' interests.

The scale of the vote for Leave in 2016 was, at base, a working-class revolt against austerity. The Socialist Party criticised Jeremy Corbyn and the majority of unions in supporting Remain in the 2016 EU referendum.

We argued that the labour and trade union movement should have campaigned for a socialist Leave position, opposing the neoliberal rules of the EU, and appealing for workers' solidarity from across Europe.

Nationalisation

Such an approach would have exposed the neoliberal character of the EU, explaining how its rules against public ownership and state intervention are an obstacle to a Corbyn-led government implementing socialist policies.

This includes many of the policies in Corbyn's 2017 general election manifesto that resulted in a swing to Labour, denying May a majority that contributed to the Tory crisis.

Corbyn's mistaken approach in the 2016 EU referendum allowed the likes of Nigel Farage and Boris Johnson to lead the Leave campaign in a right-wing nationalistic direction.

Since then, however, Corbyn stated that Labour should accept the outcome of the vote and call for a general election.

He has not mobilised the workers' movement around this demand over the heads of the parliamentary Labour Party, but up until now he has at least stood out against the Blairites both inside and now outside of Labour.

Tom Watson walked out of a shadow cabinet meeting when he couldn't win a commitment that no Brexit deal would be agreed without a 'confirmatory' referendum - even if all of the safeguards on workers' rights, state aid rules and so on were achieved.

Shamefully, the Blairites have been joined in this by some union leaders. An amendment from transport union TSSA at the subsequent Labour national executive committee, committing Labour to a 'confirmatory' referendum, was defeated.

Overturn

Corbyn has understood that if Labour is seen as a Remain party looking to overturn a democratic vote, a big section of the working class who voted Leave for anti-establishment reasons will turn against it.

The two unions that have supported Corbyn have been Unite and the CWU. In both unions, which had a Remain position in 2016, Socialist Party members have had an influence.

At last year's Unite policy conference, a motion from Unite LE/1228 branch argued for the union to call for a workers' Brexit, fight for a general election to get the Tories out, and for a Corbyn-led Labour government.

This was incorporated into the union leadership's statement, although it did leave open "the possibility of a popular vote" if there was no general election.

As we reported in last week's Socialist (see '[Communication workers oppose second EU vote, and back new socialist Clause IV for Labour](#)'), the recent CWU conference agreed the union's national executive council emergency motion to not campaign for a second referendum, but instead to fight for a general election and the election of a "transformative Labour government that will deliver an irreversible shift in wealth and power in the UK."

In the 2016 conference, it was a Socialist Party member, a delegate from Coventry, who was a key speaker from the rostrum to oppose the leadership's then position for Remain.

The CWU's latest resolution argues that any Brexit deal "should be consistent with a democratic socialist transformation of the UK economy in relation to competition, the undercutting of workers and public ownership and investment." This is an outline of how Corbyn should approach any Brexit talks.

His 'red lines' should be the end of austerity, the repeal of all the anti-union laws - some of which were prompted by the EU - and no adherence to EU rules on nationalisation and state aid, including bringing Royal Mail and BT back into public ownership.

This would expose May and the EU's pro-boss bias and help Corbyn show workers that he is on their side.

Doncaster pay win shows

Strikes can get results

We can save the NHS

Doncaster hospital strike victory!

On 3rd May Unison has announced a spectacular victory in the strike over pay for privatised NHS workers (see 2nd May Socialist Party report below).

After two days of industrial action Sodexo has reached agreement with Doncaster and Bassetlaw teaching hospitals NHS foundation trust, to pay the Agenda for Change pay deal in full.

Unison full-time organiser Sue Cookman said: "We need to agree some finer details with Sodexo later on this morning, but I am delighted that an agreement has been reached."

"No Sausage, Chips and Beans today!"

Alistair Tice

Hospital catering staff on strike at Doncaster Royal Infirmary (DRI) sang "No Sausage, Chips And Beans (SCABs) today" and "Pay us what you owe", on their picket lines.

Around 80-90 Unison and GMB union members are striking for three days this week (May 1st - 3rd) and have named another three days of strike dates for each of the next three weeks if necessary.

Kitchen and catering staff at DRI, Bassetlaw and Mexborough hospitals were TUPE transferred from the NHS to multinational Sodexo in January 2018.

But Sodexo has refused to pay the first year of the three year NHS pay award which started last April. The rise would mean £2,000 a year to some of the lowest paid staff in the hospital.

Sodexo can easily afford to pay having made £65 million profit last year and paid out more than £5 million to its directors. As Unison regional officer Tony Pearson told the strikers' rally on Wednesday: "Sodexo claim to be a global leader in Quality of Life Services, but just NOT in YOUR lives!"

Head chef and new Unison steward Laura explained how the strike came about:

"I was schooled in the miners' strike, I've worked here 23 years and stepped forward when Sodexo refused to pay.

"There was only about 30 in the union then but I started joining colleagues up, saying if we let them get away with our pay rise, next they'll come for our terms and conditions.

"We got up to 75 members and when we balloted there was a 100% vote for strike action!"

With pickets on all six gates at DRI, fellow workers have been asked to bring "Sarnies in Solidarity" with the striking catering staff.

There's loads of support from the passing public, who respond to the flags and placards with signatures and car honks.

Despite Sodexo bringing scabs in from elsewhere, the strikers are in high spirits and confident that they will win.

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 2 May 2019 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

PCS union: listen to members, link the campaigns - we can win fight on pay

Civil service union PCS's ballot for strikes on pay closed on 29 April. With a 47.7% turnout - 59,452 votes - the ballot fell just short of the anti-democratic 50% threshold for legal strikes under the Tories' anti-union laws. (Read more: ['Strike ballot: huge result must launch fightback'](#).)

The union's annual conference meets 21-23 May, and will decide what next on the 2019 pay campaign, and the approach for 2020.

There was a 4:1 majority vote for strike action in the ballot, and turnouts above 50% in a number of the union's departmental groups.

This gives a firm basis for continuing the fight against the pay cap, and attacks on employment conditions, through coordinated group actions.

A letter from PCS and Socialist Party member Dave Lunn, reproduced below, anticipates many of the issues which the union's conference pay debate will want to consider.

Like many reps, I was absolutely gutted that we missed the 50% legal threshold for an industrial ballot by such a small margin - 2%.

But I am immensely proud of the hard work put in by reps, members and fulltime officers.

What is clear is that our lay rep structure is key to the future success of our union.

In my branch, we had ordinary members leafleting alongside reps. They understand that being a union member is a bit like being a member of a gym. If you pay the membership you won't get much out unless you get active.

Were it not for the Tories' repressive and arbitrary 50% turnout threshold - something that, hypocritically, is not applied elsewhere either in politics or big business - the 78.9% for strikes and 91.3% for action short of strike would have won a huge mandate for taking the fight to the government.

Despite this, though, we cannot escape the fact that we have come up short in the ballot. This prevents us from legally taking the necessary action to force the government to the negotiating table on a national basis.

We need to balance recognising the achievements of reps with acknowledging that this is a serious setback.

This is why it is important that we continue to campaign, but in doing so fully analyse and dissect what went well and what didn't in this and the 2018 ballot.

It will simply not be good enough just to do the same again for a third time. We need to not only organise effectively, but also understand how we can mobilise the membership.

Members who did not vote will have done so for a variety of reasons - including, for example, that they didn't believe in the strategy.

It is these members who we need to get on-board if we are going to make real progress on pay.

This will require a rethink on how we consult with the wider membership if we really want to overcome whatever barriers we face.

We will not get to the crux of why some members do not vote if we simply listen to the voices of those already convinced.

What will definitely not work is member-blaming or member-shaming, which will alienate and entrench those we have not yet convinced.

We also need a much broader debate on the way forward, with nothing ruled in or out. And importantly, this needs to be a much more open discussion, where those who put forward alternative strategies to win support are not labelled 'conservatives' or 'saboteurs' out of hand.

We need the maximum unity if we are to make the necessary progress to break the threshold in future ballots.

This should include considering linking campaigns on pay, jobs and office closures to get the biggest buy-in from members.

HM Land Registry group once again comfortably beat the legal threshold, improving on the 2018 strike ballot turnout.

The reason we get such good turnouts is not just down to our excellent organisation, but because we don't organise in isolation.

Organising

Instead, our organising, campaigning and bargaining is joined up. This allows us to take members with us, as they see tangible benefits in getting active and involved.

So there will be groups and departments where there has been a strong mandate for action. The national executive committee must work with these groups in an open way and look to launch coordinated pay claims

across them.

Thought should also be given to coordinating ballots for any group-specific action. Alongside this, PCS must up the ante in our campaigning against the anti-trade union laws.

Our general secretary currently holds a senior role in the Trade Union Congress, and must use this to build a coordinated campaign among the unions.

With our annual conference coming up very soon, there is a perfect opportunity to discuss all these issues and put through emergency motions at our mandating meetings.

While this will be the first stage of rebuilding the fightback, there needs to be an ongoing dialogue over the coming months across all structures of our union, responding to political and industrial events, as we do not operate in a vacuum.

This is a temporary setback. But if we learn the lessons from our previous campaigns, listen to our members, and see debate and constructive challenge as a positive thing, then rather than an end to the campaign, the result can be a springboard to winning a ballot and delivering action capable of advancing the interests of members.

That is the fundamental reason I became a rep.

Dave Lunn, vice-president, PCS union HM Land Registry group (personal capacity)

PCS leadership election results

The PCS leadership elections close on Thursday 9 May. As we go to press, Socialist Party member Chris Baugh is campaigning for re-election as assistant general secretary, as official candidate of Left Unity, the union's broad left group.

Socialist Party members Marion Lloyd and Dave Semple are also standing for election to the national executive committee as part of the Left Unity-backed 'Democracy Alliance' slate. Results and reaction to follow...

Usdaw conference 2019

Shop workers demand action on pay, jobs and the right

Socialist Party members in Usdaw

With almost a year since the departure of Blairite general secretary John Hannett, this year's annual delegate meeting of retail and distribution union Usdaw - ongoing at the time of writing - feels different.

In her address to delegates, Socialist Party member and Usdaw president Amy Murphy contrasted her approach with that of her predecessor.

She joked he used to like going to McDonald's during conference, whereas she only tended to go there to support McStrikers.

Similarly, the fraternal speaker from Blackpool Trade Union Council invited delegates to protest against far-right, racist Tommy Robinson's visit to Blackpool in the Monday lunchtime of conference.

The call for this protest was launched the previous day, by Socialist Party member and Usdaw Broad Left chair Iain Dalton.

This followed discussions with Usdaw members on Blackpool TUC at the union's well-attended Broad Left annual general meeting on 4 May.

Over 150 Usdaw delegates and visitors joined another hundred activists to march from outside the conference to where Robinson had been reportedly due to speak - with no sign of him once we arrived.

The conference itself has seen several debates so far. This includes support for an emergency motion, moved by Socialist Party member Scott Jones, on the union's parliamentary group - which four of the Labour MPs who split into the right wing 'Independent Group' came from.

Given their clear opposition to policies passed by Usdaw conference - including a £10-an-hour minimum wage, rail renationalisation, and so on - the motion demanded that Usdaw's parliamentary group should only include those prepared to support the union's policies.

Conference also passed a composite motion on domestic abuse, incorporating an amendment spoken to by Socialist Party member Isai Priya.

This demanded funding for domestic violence services for all who need them, called on Labour councils to use their reserves and borrowing powers to defend existing services, and for an incoming Labour government to pledge to restore any funds utilised for this.

Both of these motions passed unanimously.

Campaigning

The union's 'Time for Better Pay' campaign, launched in the last year, has featured heavily. There have been a number of demands to extend the campaign, with motions passing such as including 16 to 17-year-olds in the £10 minimum wage demand.

Another motion called for broadening the campaign to develop a charter for workers' terms and conditions.

The mover called for it to include defending premium payments and paid breaks, considering whether £10 an hour is still sufficient as a minimum, and calling for more sustained action to win.

This included pointing to the recent Stop and Shop supermarket strike in New England, USA, which defeated some of the attacks retail bosses had sought to impose on workers.

There was a heated debate around the onslaught of attacks on retail workers - particularly the job cuts in Tesco.

This, unfortunately, was not discussed directly to help formulate a strategy for fighting these attacks. Instead it found expression through a debate on restoring pay ballots within Tesco.

Members have grievances on this issue, particularly in light of Tesco's recent £2 billion profit announcement for the last year.

At the Socialist Party's conference fringe meeting, we attracted a number of new attendees. We discussed our strategy to fight attacks on workers, including that Usdaw take a leaf from the GMB union's recent protest outside Asda, and staging a campaign of protests to build support for industrial action if necessary.

Socialist Party members will be continuing to argue for the union to further develop a fighting strategy over the final two days of conference. A full report will follow. Delegates and visitors have so far bought 86 copies of the Socialist - and counting.

UCU general secretary election: fight for a left leadership!

Socialist Party members in UCU

The election for general secretary of the University and College Union (UCU), the largest post-16 education union in the world, opened on 29 April.

By now, members should have received ballot papers for what is a crucial point in our union's history.

There are three candidates standing in these elections. Jo McNeill from the University of Liverpool, Jo Grady from the University of Sheffield, and Matt Waddup, a senior official from the union bureaucracy.

Socialist Party members in UCU would urge all members to vote number one for Jo McNeill, the candidate of the UCU Left, and to encourage others to do the same.

McNeill is a longstanding left activist in the union. She has been a consistent voice for a fighting and member-led UCU for many years.

McNeill has pledged in particular to fight for the future of further education, including restoring 'Education Maintenance Allowance' for students, and taking colleges back under democratic local authority control.

We also, however, urge UCU members to give their second preference vote to Jo Grady, a candidate who is also on the left.

Grady has been heavily involved in 'USS Briefs', an important grassroots resource for UCU members, and has played a positive role in the ongoing 'USS' university pensions dispute.

It is unfortunate that there are two left candidates in this election. If Matt Waddup is elected, it would be a setback for the union at a time when our membership is growing and we have had several important and successful disputes in both higher and further education.

Waddup represents a continuation of the existing leadership of the union, which has favoured partnership with the employers over campaigning and fighting to defend post-16 education.

We in the Socialist Party would have preferred to find a way of agreeing on one left candidate, perhaps by holding an open conference of the union left.

However, because this is a 'single transferable vote' election, and members have two votes, it will hopefully be possible to avoid Waddup winning - provided we use both votes to support both 'Jos'!

UCU is at a crossroads. We have made fantastic progress in recent years, in spite of the Tory anti-union laws.

But we need to elect a left, fighting general secretary if we are to build a union that can defend post-16 education, and unite with other unions to boot this rotten Tory government out.

Newham gas workers to strike against Labour's pay and safety attacks

Stop press!

The threat of strike action has forced the council back! The gas workers have won! More to follow...

Ian Pattison, East London Socialist Party

In October, Newham's Labour council promised a "closer working relationship" with general union Unite, and said it "values its staff and the unions they are members of."

But on 3 May, 40 of the east London borough's housing maintenance workers had to protest outside their workplace - the Bridge Road depot in Stratford - against pay cuts and other issues.

Unite regional officer Onay Kasab said the council's proposed new rota could leave "up to 42 weeks of the year without a manager having gas knowledge to deal with potential gas emergencies and issues involving some of our most vulnerable residents."

On the protest, we heard horror stories caused by cuts. Gas safety managers will strike on 9 and 10 May.

Housing repair and refuse workers are also balloting for strikes. Unite estimates bin workers could have lost up to £20,000 each.

East London Socialist Party calls on Newham's Labour council to immediately agree to the union's demands and stop all these attacks.

In 2018, the council dragged its feet when campaigners urged it to help block local schools becoming privately run 'academies'.

It was only strike action by school workers, led by Socialist Party member and National Education Union branch secretary Louise Cuffaro, [that stopped academisation](#).

Unite will have to do the same now. We back the striking workers 100%.

Hull dinner ladies protest against loss of week's pay from outsourcer

Janet Gibson, Hull Socialist Party

A walkout protest by school catering staff at Winifred Holtby School in Hull took place on 29 April, against outsourcing firm ISS's proposed delay to wage payment. (See also '[Arriva Rail North cleaners fight bosses' punitive pay arrears](#)'.)

Two other schools, Tweendykes and Kingswood, also took part. After joining the Winifred Holtby protest, I was told by one dinner lady that they face a week's loss in pay, from a four-day delay due to changes in their payment schedule.

The offer of a loan from ISS will see future wages docked from pay packets if accepted. And any acceptance of a loan could be perceived as legal acceptance of the change in the contract.

Horns hooted, and residents and friends stopped to ask about the protest. GMB union placards and flags greeted a surge of secondary students leaving school. Some approached a GMB official, asking "what can we do to help?"

We say that school meals must be taken back in-house, under democratic local authority control. In fact, the whole education system should be fully in the public sector, under the democratic control and management of school staff, students and the working class.

The dinner ladies have given school students their first experience of trade union action. Jeremy Corbyn and the union leaders should follow their example, and call mass action now against school cuts and outsourcing, for a £10-an-hour minimum wage - and a general election now.

Asda workers protest against attacks on paid breaks and bank holiday working

GMB union reps and activists from across the country came to protest outside Asda House in Leeds against the company's proposals to forcibly move what staff remain on other contracts onto 'Contract 6'.

Contract 6, while giving a slight pay increase, takes away paid breaks and forces increased 'flexibility' on staff, including working more bank holidays.

This follows similar moves in companies like Sainsbury's, Tesco and Morrisons, which unfortunately have seen such changes go through with little organised opposition.

Given the protest was only organised with a few days' notice, the turnout of around 150 was impressive, with support from staff working in the various Asda buildings around the headquarters.

Clearly Asda management hadn't prepared for the numbers attending. However, if this forced transfer is to be stopped, this protest cannot be the end.

The union should call mass meetings of Asda workers across different regions to map out a strategy for an ongoing campaign, including to prepare for strike action if necessary.

Iain Dalton, Leeds Socialist Party

Woolwich Ferry staff to strike over pay and safety

Workers who operate London's Woolwich Ferry, used by an estimated 2.6 million passengers a year, are to strike for ten days in a dispute over pay, safety, and staffing.

The key issues are management's refusal to grant a 6% pay increase for the year starting January 2019; imposition of new duties; failure to deal with safety concerns such as inoperable emergency fire pumps; and an inadequate number of staff.

General union Unite has announced 24-hour stoppages on 17, 20, 24, 28 and 31 May, and 3, 7, 10, 14 and 17 June. Two years ago, there was an [acrimonious and long-running dispute](#) with the same employer.

About 20,000 vehicles a week use the free service across the Thames, which opened in 1889 following the abolition of tolls across bridges to the west of London. There has been a ferry at the site since the 14th century.

Radiographers' union slams professional costs at conference

The Society of Radiographers held its annual delegate conference in Leeds on 28-30 April. Socialist Party delegates leafleted the event, and have set up a group for activists in the union.

There were debates for two days on all aspects of radiographers' life and workplace issues. This included student bursaries, and the recent hiking of registration fees by our clinical regulator, the Health and Care Professions Council. Registration is compulsory for practitioners, and fees have risen by 18%.

The legend Mike Jackson - founder of 'Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners', which organised LGBT+ solidarity for the National Union of Mineworkers during the 1984-85 strike - attended to introduce the film which portrays that campaign, 'Pride'.

Jackson spoke the next day at the conference, and gave his support to Jeremy Corbyn and socialism as the only way forward.

Delia Hazrati, Society of Radiographers conference delegate (personal capacity)

Spanish elections - new upheavals underline need for a revolutionary socialist alternative

Tony Saunois , secretary, Committee for a Workers' International (CWI)

The general election which took place on 28 April in the Spanish state, like recent elections throughout Europe, was marked by a deep polarisation.

It came on the heels of the revolutionary upheavals which have rocked Catalonia in 2016-17 and, in December 2018, the shock election victory of the right and extreme right in regional elections in the former social-democratic Socialist Workers' Party (Psoe) stronghold of Andalucia.

There, the Partido Popular (People's Party - PP), the traditional party of capitalism since 1989, together with the populist centre-right Ciudadanos (Citizens) and the extreme right, fascistic Vox won a majority and formed the government.

Spain's right wing was hoping to capitalise on this in the 2019 general election. However, its hope of victory was dashed. The election was a defeat and set-back for the right and far right.

PP collapse

For the PP, led by Pablo Casado, it was a disaster. The party suffered its most serious defeat since its formation.

In 2016 it won 33% of the overall vote. This time, it collapsed to a pathetic 16.7%, and the number of seats it has in parliament fell from 137 to a mere 66!

A dramatic fall in support of the traditional capitalist parties has been a feature in many European elections in the recent period; France and Germany are two examples.

This development reflects a fragmentation and polarisation politically across Europe. In the Spanish state the fragmented right-wing vote moved further to the right.

A big section of the PP's previous vote went to the newly resurgent far-right, fascistic, party Vox (Voice) - led by the gun-toting, former PP deputy in the Basque parliament, Santiago Abascal.

Although support for Vox was not as high as some opinion polls had indicated, it is a warning to the working class and left that such a party managed to secure 10.6% of the vote and enter parliament with 24 seats.

This is the first time that an openly extreme right-wing party has entered the parliament since the end of the Franco dictatorship in the late 1970s.

The centre-right populist party, Ciudadanos, led by Albert Rivera, increased its share of the vote from 13.1% and 32 seats to 15.86% and 57 seats.

The increased turnout and electoral defeat of the right-wing bloc was undoubtedly the effect of the 'whip of counter-revolution', especially following the previous victory of the right-wing coalition in Andalusia.

The prospect of the coming to power of a right-wing reactionary coalition, which would undoubtedly have assumed a repressive character, provoked a backlash among the working class, the radicalised middle class and young people.

At the same time Psoe offered some limited reforms, which resulted in it becoming the largest party in this election.

Reforms

Since Psoe's Sanchez took over as prime minister in June 2018 - when the former PP Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy lost a vote of confidence over his party's corruption - the minimum wage was raised by 22% (the largest increase in 40 years) and 2.5 million public sector workers were given a much lesser 2.5% wage rise.

These and the promise of some further limited reforms probably increased Psoe's support among a section of the electorate.

However, attacks on the working class are certain to follow as the country's extremely ephemeral and shallow economic growth gives way to an even deeper social and economic crisis.

The vast majority of Spanish workers and youth have gained nothing from the small, weak economic growth of the recent period.

Mass unemployment and precarious jobs, especially among young people, continue to be the reality of life for millions.

A renewed era of instability and social upheavals will inevitably follow the election.

Psoe, under the leadership of Sanchez, managed to temporarily reconquer its electoral support which had previously collapsed due to its turn to the right and pro-capitalist policies and the explosive growth of Podemos which emerged from the 'Indignados' movement in 2011.

From 22.7% of the vote and 85 deputies it has increased its electoral support to 28.7% and 123 seats. Much of this was a vote against the right rather than a pro-Psoe vote.

However, it was also a consequence of the collapse in support for Podemos which mainly transferred to Psoe.

The high hopes and expectations which initially existed in Podemos and its leader Pablo Iglesias have been shattered - as the CWI predicted it would if it did not consolidate a radical left or socialist base with internal democracy and democratic control of the party.

In 2015, the combined vote of Podemos and the Izquierda Unida (United Left - IU) was over six million.

Since then the party has swung further to the right, distanced itself from mass social movements, refused to support the movement for independence in Catalonia, and been run in an increasingly top-down undemocratic manner by the leadership.

In 2016 the Podemos/IU vote was just over five million. In 2019 its vote fell to 3.7 million. In this election, Podemos's share of the vote fell from 21.1% to 14% and from 72 to 42 seats.

Podemos

Podemos offered little or nothing to the left of Psoe, much less a radical socialist alternative. In such a situation why should workers and young people vote for the copy when the real thing in the form of Psoe is

seen as a more viable option.

It has allowed Psoe - which played a reactionary role during the movement in Catalonia for independence, with a programme of 'managing' capitalism which will inevitably mean attacking the working class - to rebuild its electoral support temporarily for want of a viable left alternative.

The swing to the right by Podemos combined with the weakness of its programme - it was formed with more of a radical populist character, rather than radical socialist alternative - was, as the CWI warned, a danger that could threaten it as a viable vehicle for the working class to organise a political alternative.

The lack of a conscious participation by the working class in an active struggle in Podemos and its domination by radicalised parts of the impoverished petty bourgeois and semi-working-class sections, has reinforced these weaknesses.

Failure to offer a radical socialist alternative and revolutionary struggle to break with capitalism in a period of capitalist crisis and upheaval will inevitably lead to the type of betrayal over stopping austerity that Syriza carried through in Greece, leading to a defeat of the Greek working class.

This process has clearly been seen in the Spanish state and the implosion of Podemos before it came to power. This is a stark warning for others on the left, notably Jeremy Corbyn in Britain.

It now seems Podemos is poised to play the same role as the Left Bloc and Communist Party in Portugal in propping up the social-democratic Socialist Party-led government but without offering a radical socialist alternative.

Catalonia

In Catalonia the right wing suffered a devastating defeat, reflecting the recent revolutionary movement over Catalan independence which had taken place there.

For the first time the parties that support independence secured a majority. The main electoral beneficiary was the ERC (Republican Left of Catalonia).

The ERC had an electoral base largely among the urban middle class but has now won support among sections of the working class.

The ERC featured demands for the release of those imprisoned during the independence movement and opposition to state repression, which helped increase its support.

Yet its leadership, which has propped up previous capitalist governments in Catalonia and voted for cuts budgets, with no democratic accountability, is not a viable alternative for the Catalan working class.

The crisis in Catalonia is certain to erupt again. It will be one of the conflicts which will erupt and confront the new Psoe government.

The defeat or setback of the right in the elections is a positive development. Yet the victory of so-called left parties which do not offer a radical socialist alternative but are defending capitalism, reflects the challenges now facing the working class.

The electoral defeat of the far right in these elections does not mean that the threat they pose has disappeared.

The failure of Podemos and others on the 'left' to offer a real alternative means that the right wing threat can re-emerge during an even deeper crisis of Spanish capitalism which is threatening to take place.

The lack of a new mass party being built by the Spanish working class at the moment can inject contradictions and complications into the explosive situation which exists in the Spanish state.

It is a mistake by some on the Spanish revolutionary left to try and bury their heads in the sand and ignore these weaknesses and dangers.

To celebrate the defeat of the right and proclaim a "left victory" is not enough. The right and far right have not gone away.

The role of Marxists is not to try and prettify the situation but to assist the working class in reaching the conclusions of the tasks necessary to advance the struggle to break with capitalism and carry through a socialist transformation of Spanish society.

The elections in the Spanish state will open a new era of polarisation, struggle and upheaval in which the working class, youth and others exploited by capitalism will need to build a revolutionary socialist alternative to defend their interests.

Labour launches homelessness campaign

A Unite union housing workers' branch member

An enthusiastic crowd attended the launch meeting of the new Labour Homelessness Campaign. Left opinion columnist Owen Jones expressed anger that people sleep on the streets in Britain, one of the richest countries.

Rough sleeping has gone up at least 165% since 2010 and figures issued on the week of the meeting show rough sleeping in London up 31% in the first quarter of this year compared to last year.

Local authorities have drastically cut the amount spent on services for single homeless people. In 2017-18, £1 billion less was spent on single homelessness services than ten years before.

It is no surprise that numbers dying on the streets are rising - up 24% over the last four years according to official figures.

There were at least six speakers on the platform, unfortunately none of them from a trade union. General union Unite - one of Labour's biggest trade union backers, and which organises homelessness workers - was not invited to send a platform speaker.

Trade union involvement in this campaign is vital, not least to avoid a situation where workers are seen as the enemy.

No-cuts budgets

Speaking from the floor of the meeting, a homelessness worker in the Unite housing workers' union branch, Jack Jeffrey, called for Labour councils to take a stand against cuts.

He argued for them to set legal no-cuts budgets balanced by drawing on reserves and borrowing powers to save jobs and services.

Labour MP Kate Osamor said that although she was sympathetic things were 'more complicated'. She raised the question of Labour councils with no reserves, apparently unaware that there are none without reserves to borrow to avoid cuts.

She also warned of the danger of not setting a budget - a strategy no one had proposed!

A speaker from the floor got a big echo from the audience calling for Labour councils to collectively refuse to make cuts and to launch a campaign including strikes and civil disobedience against cuts.

The new campaign could play an important role in highlighting the issue of homelessness but there will be a need to discuss what programme can really tackle the crisis.

- [Full report on housingworkers.org.uk](https://housingworkers.org.uk)
- See also campaign website: labourhomelessness.org.uk

Socialist vision at Leeds May Day rally

Leeds Socialist Party

"If we want a society that doesn't destroy our planet, then it is up to us, working-class people, to come together and fight for it.

"All that this capitalist system does is put the interests of big business and their profits first.

"We need real, socialist change, based on public ownership, democratic control and meeting the needs of the many, not the few."

This was the message from Leeds TUC secretary and Socialist Party member Tanis Belsham-Wray at this year's May Day rally.

Around 300 attended the march and rally with an increased number of trade union branch banners present.

The rally included fiery speeches from Bfawu food workers' union president Ian Hodson and Leeds East Corbynista MP Richard Burgon.

We heard from local campaigning groups such as the LS26 Homes campaign, fighting profiteering housing developers in Oulton on the outskirts of the city.

The rally also heard of the success of the Deal campaign of parents over special educational needs and disabilities (Send) school transport funding and their forthcoming protest against funding cuts on 30 June.

After the demonstration, a question and answer session on trade unions was held with Ian Hodson and local Unison activist and Socialist Party member Ben Mayor.

This discussion was proposed by young delegates on Leeds TUC including Socialist Party members and was a huge success with 45 predominantly young people attending.

Alternative housing awards shames bosses

Dressed in tuxedos, managers in social housing organisations arrived at the swanky Grosvenor House Hotel on Park Lane London on 1 May for a social housing 'awards' ceremony, no tenants invited!

They had paid as much as £3,250 for a 'networking and hospitality' table, while just yards away in Hyde Park, many homeless people prepared for another night without adequate food, shelter, or basic amenities.

As they entered a group of tenants and housing association workers reminded them of the sector's failings and suggested better use could be made of tenants' money.

Based on an online poll, 'alternative awards' were handed out for 'terrible performance', 'poor repairs' and 'terrible treatment of staff', including de-recognition of trade unions, and more besides.

The organisers, SHAC (social housing action campaign - a network of housing association and cooperative residents and workers) and the Unite housing branch, called for proper accountability for social landlords and a mass programme of council house building.

Fiction: The Friends of Harry Perkins

Sequel to 'A Very British Coup' - workers' struggle, not bosses' EU and media, is route to socialism

Michael Morgan, Coventry East Socialist Party

Chris Mullin, the former Labour MP, released a sequel to his highly acclaimed novel, 'A Very British Coup', in March.

That first novel was a scathing work of fiction in which the left-wing Labour MP Harry Perkins was swept into parliament and subsequently became prime minister.

Perkins won an election on the platform of abolishing Trident nuclear weapons, getting rid of US military bases in Britain, and a raft of socialist policies - doesn't sound bad, right?

A Very British Coup then illustrated the depths to which the capitalist establishment and media would go in order to prevent socialist policies in parliament challenging the profit system, ending with a coup organised by the capitalist class.

This is based in fact. Ending capitalism cannot occur through the parliamentary chamber alone. A mass movement of the working class, including strike action and the formation of workers' democratic structures, is necessary to enact a socialist programme.

It is a shame, then, that 'The Friends of Harry Perkins' is so uncritical of the neoliberal European Union, which surely would play a large role in opposing socialist change in Britain. It has done so across the continent, most visibly in Greece.

The anti-austerity Syriza government capitulated to the EU's demands for austerity and privatisation in exchange for a bailout.

Instead, Syriza could have led the way for Europe's working class by refusing to capitulate, leaving the EU, and mobilising the unions behind socialist nationalisation and economic planning.

Appeasement

The sequel sets itself in 2025, in a post-Brexit Britain where "the Armageddon that some had prophesied had not occurred, but neither had the economic miracle proposed by Brexiteers."

Harry Perkins has died. Fred Thompson, a left-wing journalist from the first novel, is selected as the Labour candidate in his former seat.

Thompson wins, and through a string of events mirroring Jeremy Corbyn's rise, becomes the leader of the Labour Party.

However, Thompson differs to Perkins in many ways. In his bid for leadership, he argues the party should "abandon some... cherished shibboleths" to gain power.

This is where Blairite spin doctor Alistair Campbell's glowing quote on the front cover - "brilliant, chilling and all too plausible" - begins to make sense.

The novel goes so far that Thompson meets with the character Sir Peregrine Craddock, who organised the coup in the first novel.

Craddock wields enormous power in the media, and Thompson gains his support in exchange for Labour supporting Trident.

This expresses the long-held utopian notion of some reformist leaders in Labour, that by appeasing the capitalists enough you can convince them to hand power to you.

But the more you capitulate, the less power you have - and only total capitulation will satisfy the bosses.

The novel is especially concerned with the rise of far-right groups. It is dedicated to the murdered Labour MP Jo Cox.

Themes within the novel imply that media normalisation of the far right, and sensationalist rhetoric on immigration during the EU referendum, caused the terror attack that took Cox's life.

These are important factors. But it nominalises the material effect that capitalism and austerity have in driving some people to false alternatives and brutality.

The novel features a stereotypical skinhead who physically threatens Thompson. It does not go into his background, or explore why he might have become so alienated by society. He is presented as a two-dimensional thug.

This is why approaches to far-right extremism which limit themselves to pushing for media reform and regulation miss the point.

To tackle the root cause of the rise of the far right, the trade union and Labour leaders must fight for the end of austerity and capitalism.

This means organising mass protests and building towards strike action, demanding jobs, homes and services for all, and a general election to end the Tory government which has pursued these anti-worker policies.

TV: Line of Duty

Twists and turns as organised crime meets police corruption

Derek McMillan

The TV series 'Line of Duty' is a work of fiction. Consequently, undercover police officers are not targeting trade unions and environmental campaigns.

Instead, they are involved in the rather more hazardous activity of infiltrating 'OCGs'. That is one of many acronyms in the series, and stands for 'organised crime gangs'.

The series is full of unexpected twists and turns which keep viewers on the edge of our seats. This review does not contain spoilers.

The show addresses the issue of how far an undercover officer has to act like a criminal in order to infiltrate a gang.

They would be spotted and probably killed if they failed to join in with robberies. But what about killing other police officers to gain credibility?

Adrian Dunbar plays police boss Ted Hastings, and leaves the viewer wondering what is going on behind his bluff exterior.

Martin Compston plays subordinate Steve Arnott, whose apparent abduction is one of many shockers in the series.

Vicky McLure plays fellow detective Kate Fleming, whose struggle to succeed in a sexist environment is a theme.

Stephen Graham plays undercover-cop-gone-native John Corbett, alongside Rochenda Sandall as crime boss Lisa McQueen.

The organised criminals are portrayed as a business venture - gangster capitalism, in fact.

Interesting as the series is, it should be a matter of concern that the only unit pursuing police corruption is a fictitious one.

Corrupt senior police officers routinely retire on fat pensions. People die in custody with no questions asked.

Perhaps the truest line in the series is spoken by police lawyer Gill Biggeloe (Polly Walker): "Sometimes we have a non-exclusive relationship with the truth."

Parliament's home affairs committee commented on the former Independent Police Complaints Commission that it was "woefully underequipped and hamstrung in achieving its original objectives.

"It has neither the powers nor the resources that it needs to get to the truth when the integrity of the police is in doubt."

It's a far cry from 'Dixon of Dock Green', and I hope no one is fooled into thinking the police have the issue of corruption in hand. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Instead of letting the state mark its own homework, the Socialist Party calls for democratic working-class control of police policy and staffing, and independent, trade union-led inquiries into police misconduct.

And only through workers' struggle for socialism, where wealth and the state are controlled democratically by the working class, can we eradicate organised crime, and police repression in defence of profit.

The Socialist Inbox

Letters to the Socialist's editors

Do you have something to say?

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

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

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

EDF rip-off

On a recent visit to the north east, I was talking to a worker in an EDF Energy call centre.

In talks about pay with GMB and Unite union negotiators, EDF Energy bosses said the workers in the north east call centre were "paid too much for what they do." They offered a one-off, non-consolidated, taxable bonus of £450 for 2019.

Workers in the call centres are low-paid, although those in the south of England are paid more than those in the north because of legacy arrangements with previous utility companies which EDF took over.

EDF nuclear workers were offered 3.35%, which they have rejected. Workers in field services have rejected an offer of 1.2%.

EDF has said that profits are down in its nuclear sector and it cannot afford to pay more. This is far from the truth. EDF would rather pay shareholders' dividends than workers' wages.

EDF made £691 million in profits last year. It paid shareholders an interim dividend of 15p per share in December 2018, and will pay a further 16p on 10 June.

Although stock in the parent company is mostly owned by the French state, there are 3,010,267,676 shares in EDF altogether. Meanwhile, EDF increased its standard variable tariff rate by 10% on 7 February.

Workers should reject the offer and demand a proper pay rise. We need to nationalise the utility companies under democratic workers' control so that workers get proper wages and customers get a fair deal.

Clare Wilkins, Nottingham

Raking it in

Two pieces of news that broke recently perfectly sum up Birmingham City Council.

It was reported in the Birmingham Post that a former senior council officer received a £455,000 severance payment when his job disappeared under a reorganisation.

The council justified it by saying that over £300,000 of this was a pension contribution.

How many council workers who took voluntary redundancy received such generous pension provision? No ordinary council worker would receive such an amount during their complete retirement period.

Meanwhile, in north Birmingham, the council is threatening to close Walsall Road allotment, currently used by over 100 local gardeners, and considered one of the best sites in the country. It has been featured twice on BBC Gardeners' World.

The council wants to use the land for the 2022 Commonwealth Games. Allotment holders maintain that there are plenty of other sites in the same park that could be used for the games.

There we have it. Birmingham City Council makes huge payouts to senior managers, while taking away valuable community assets to satisfy a vanity project and the egos of senior Blairite councillors.

At least Brummies can take comfort in having the largest Primark store in the world!

Clive Walder, Birmingham

Musical chairs

Politics in Worcestershire is becoming confusing. Louise Griffiths was elected a Green councillor for Battenhall on Worcester City Council last year - but has defected to the Conservatives, complaining of antisemitism, and feeling "restricted by the set-up of the Green Party here in Worcester."

Now Daniel Walton, who was Labour Party candidate for West Worcestershire in the general election of 2015, is standing for Malvern Hills District Council, Broadheath, as an independent.

I think a bit more testing out of candidates' values and views might be in order to see how committed they are before they stand.

Pete McNally, Worcester

Rouse, Ye Women!

Four GMB union members from Beverley and their partners travelled across the Humber Bridge to the former ropery works in Barton-upon-Humber to watch a Townsend Theatre production of 'Rouse, Ye Women!'

The play is set entirely to verse and song, and focuses on the low-paid women chainmakers around Cradley Heath in the Midlands.

While heavy and medium chains were produced by men in the factories, the women made lighter chains, working in isolation from home, in a small back room, in cramped conditions, with a forge and a hammer and tongs.

The women working in these sweatshop conditions were dependent on the "fogger" - a middleman, subcontractor to the large manufacturers - who delivered iron rods and collected the finished chains.

The fogger would take a 25% cut of the money paid by the manufacturers, leaving the women five shillings for a 54-hour week.

It was the work of Mary Macarthur, the founder of the 100,000-strong National Federation of Women Workers, that inspired and gave confidence to these women to strike. Ten weeks in total - and £4,000 raised in strike fund, an enormous amount at the time.

Thanks to the strike and Macarthur, the Liberal government passed the 'Trade Boards Act' to set minimum rates in four low-paid trades, at two-and-a-half pence per hour. For most women, this was a rise of 100%.

The participation and interaction from the audience was spectacular, joining in with song that put a bit of fighting spirit in your belly. When the fogger entered the scene he was met with a chorus of boos reminiscent of a Christmas pantomime.

If we fight, yes we can win. The verdict of Beverley GMB members: absolutely outstanding, thoroughly enjoyable performance - highly recommended.

- For tour dates and venues visit townsendproductions.org.uk

Tony Davison, GMB Beverley

Democratic rights

The state uses the threat of crime to attack democratic rights. I was giving out leaflets, and told to move on.

I refused, and got searched - when they realised I was a 'threat to the public' as I had my work knife on my keys. I told them I work on a building site. They took it. That cost me 15 quid.

Mike, Southampton

Payday penury

The people of Romford, east London borrowed 55,299 payday loans out of a population of just 95,894 in 2018, according to the Financial Conduct Authority. Their loans totalled just over £15 million.

Also, Birmingham was named as the payday loan capital of the UK, with its residents borrowing a total of £37 million in 2018.

A report in the Guardian went on: "In recent years, millions of people have turned to the high-cost payday loans to help pay their rent or mortgage, deal with an unexpected emergency, or simply afford their weekly food shop."

These statistics cannot convey the sheer misery behind them - the human and social cost paid for in poor mental and physical health, homelessness, family and relationship breakdown and rising crime.

We socialists must, however, translate these stats into a programme for revolutionary socialist change - based on common, democratic public ownership of the means of life, including land, our essential public services, industries, and the finance and banking sector.

And we must carry forth a strategy of coordinated, mass action, building towards generalised strike action, to drive the heartless Tories and their Blairite apologists from office and their positions once and for all.

Len Hockey, Loughton

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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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