

Tories out!

- Vote against austerity, privatisation and racism
- Vote Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition
- Act against the Blairite saboteurs!

The Tories are on the run. For eight years Tory-led governments have tried to create a 'hostile environment' for all working class people.

Those who were born in other countries, or who are from ethnic minorities, have been on the sharp end - often facing, as has been writ large by the Windrush scandal, brutal racism and discrimination.

The Tories have adopted the tactics of divide and rule. They have attempted to disguise reality - that a tiny minority of billionaires have got richer under their rule while the vast majority suffer austerity - by falsely laying the blame for low pay, poverty and poor housing at the door of some of the poorest sections of the working class - above all migrants, but also single parents, the unemployed and others.

In doing so they have tried to create a climate in which public services can be destroyed. It is criminal that people who have lived in Britain for most of their lives have been refused NHS treatment, but it is not accidental. It is part of a conscious policy to move away from the basis on which the NHS was founded - that it should provide free at the point of use, high-quality healthcare for all who need it.

The huge wave of public support for those affected by the Windrush scandal shows that the Tories racist scapegoating has not worked. While some workers are worried about the scale of immigration, and are correctly angry at bosses attempting to use workers from other countries to lower wages in a 'race to the bottom', they have not swallowed the Tory lies. When faced with actual people - instead of abstract statistics - the vast majority of working and middle class people in Britain are [opposed to racist measures](#).

Opportunity

Jeremy Corbyn now has the opportunity to build a movement - against austerity and racism and for public services - which could force May to call a general election. To do so, however, requires drawing a clear line between his leadership of the Labour Party and what came before. The Tories have only been able to get away with their racist scapegoating because in office pro-capitalist [New Labour had already trodden the same path](#).

The term "create a hostile environment" was first used by Blairite Labour home secretary Alan Johnson. Only six Labour MPs voted against the final reading of the racist 2014 Immigration Act, which led to the Windrush scandal. Unsurprisingly they included Jeremy Corbyn, John McDonnell, and Diane Abbott.

Cuts and privatisation for the majority and tax cuts for the super-rich were also the norm under New Labour governments. Today Blairite councils around the country are implementing huge cuts to public services. [That is why the Socialist Party is standing](#), as part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, against some of the worst Blairite cutters at local level. Jeremy Corbyn needs to urgently use the local elections as a launch pad to force the Tories out and to transform Labour into an anti-austerity, anti-racist socialist party.

Ten months after the snap general election the right wing of the Labour Party is once again openly attacking Jeremy Corbyn so blatantly it is recognised even by capitalist commentators. As Independent columnist Andrew Grice put it: "Labour is two parties now. The pretence that Jeremy Corbyn and his centrist MPs belong in the same one has been shattered by recent events."

The popular support for Corbyn's programme in the snap general election temporarily stayed the hands of his opponents within the Labour Party. Unfortunately, much of the Labour left rushed to declare that the party was now more united than ever. But [as we warned at the time](#), those in the pro-capitalist wing of the Labour Party were only biding their time and would once again declare war on Corbyn with whatever weapons they could find.

While the Tories are on the ropes for the untold [misery their racist 2014 Immigration Act has caused the Windrush generation](#) and others, the Blairites - who themselves did not oppose the 2014 act - have rushed to save May's skin. For them the priority is not attacking the Tories, but whipping up a storm - most recently with a debate in parliament - over alleged 'left wing anti-Semitism' under Jeremy Corbyn's leadership. [The Socialist has previously pointed out](#) that this issue is being used to attack Corbyn. Blairite MP Chuka Umunna put their case crudely on the Independent website, arguing "How can we... suggest racism lies behind the Tories' mistreatment of the Windrush generation when we don't get our own house in order?"

Umunna and his ilk would rather leave black and Asian workers in Britain facing continued Tory racism than see a Jeremy Corbyn-led government come to power. In taking that position they are representing the interests of the capitalist class who consider a Jeremy Corbyn-led government could not be relied on to defend their interests and are prepared to take whatever measures they can to split and weaken Corbyn's support base.

As we have repeatedly warned, making concessions to the pro-capitalist wing of the Labour Party, and attempting to conciliate with them, will only give them more power to try and defeat Corbyn. Not one inch should be conceded to them. Instead urgent measures are needed to completely transform the Labour Party into a mass socialist, working class party, with a revitalised trade union movement involved at its core through democratic, representative structures. Such measures must include [mandatory reselection of MPs](#) - which is vital to allow the workers' movement to choose MPs who act in its interests rather than the interests of the capitalist elite.

If such measures are not taken the Blairite sabotage of Corbyn's leadership will only grow. 52 of them abstained rather than support Corbyn's attempt to hold May to account for [bombing Syria](#). Two weeks before 36 signed an early day motion attacking Corbyn over [the Skripal affair](#). And at a certain stage they can go further still. Talk of a right-wing split from Labour to form a new party has been rumbling since Corbyn won the leadership.

Split?

The likely negative consequences for the Blairites' careers of founding a party based on support for war and privatisation has so far stayed their hands, but the rumbles are growing louder. As one anonymous Labour MP put it, "We can't go on like this. We've been sticking together for the sake of the kids. Now they're going off to uni and we've got to decide what to do." If they do go before a general election they will do so, despite the risk to their own careers, in order to try and split the Labour vote and prevent Corbyn becoming prime minister.

If they stay, formally at least, in Labour's ranks it will be in order to try and sabotage any attempts by a Corbyn government to take radical measures in defence of working class interests, splitting Labour at that stage if they consider it is necessary to do so. The right wing could also do both - some exiting Labour while others remain in, at least for the time being.

It is therefore now well overdue - and extremely urgent - that the enthusiasm engendered by Jeremy Corbyn's leadership of the Labour Party is harnessed and mobilised in order to reclaim Labour from the pro-capitalist saboteurs who still dominate much of the party machine, the parliamentary Labour Party and local councils.

Windrush scandal: Tories and Blairites must go

Marvin Hay, Socialist Party black and Asian group

The "hostile environment" that Theresa May promised to create as home secretary with the Immigration Act 2014, and the policy and guidance that have spewed from the Home Office under the Tories and Blairites, were always going to lead to increased oppression for black and Asian workers.

The Socialist Party opposes these latest appalling attacks, and has always opposed racist immigration laws.

The government's 2017 Race Disparity Audit showed the effects of racism in housing, education and employment. Without even looking at the effects of the establishment's racist immigration policies, it is clear that non-white people get an especially raw deal when it comes to opportunity in Britain.

These are symptoms of capitalism - from the lasting effects of historic slavery and colonialism, through to the bosses' drive to maximise profits by playing workers off against each other. The profit system wants workers competing in a constant ['race to the bottom' in wages and conditions](#).

June marks the 70th anniversary of the Empire Windrush passenger ship first docking in Britain. The British government encouraged workers and their families from its current and former colonies to come here to fill gaps in the workforce after the devastation of World War Two.

These workers went on to become pillars of public services like the NHS and public transport. But now many of the 'Windrush Generation' find themselves denied access to the NHS, sacked from jobs they've held for a lifetime, detained for undefined periods, and some even deported. It is more than shocking.

Current home secretary Amber Rudd's admission that she was unaware her own department had deported any migrants is testament to the contempt the capitalist establishment has for workers. Public outrage has pressured Rudd and May into stating they will guarantee citizenship rights without fees or tests to the Windrush generation.

These are rights their own governments were responsible for undermining in the first place. The citizenship process should not have to take place at all.

Labour MP Emily Thornberry has rightly called on Rudd to quit, and her colleague Dawn Butler has correctly accused Theresa May of racism. David Lammy MP has also spoken out against the government.

But what are they going to do about it?

Rudd will resist quitting because it would weaken an already weak and divided minority government. And fundamentally the Tory party defends capitalism, a system which is intrinsically unequal and racist. Fighting racism includes fighting to get them out.

Jeremy Corbyn has rightly called for an end to the "hostile environment" and will be marching on the Trade Union Congress (TUC) national demonstration on 12 May. He and the TUC could make that the launch of a serious mass campaign.

Coordinated strike action should be the next step - to force the Tories to call a general election and get them out. This needs to be linked to building proper democratic structures in Labour and getting rid of the Blairites.

The Blairites' record is one of support not just for pro-capitalist policies in general, but racist policies in particular (see below). While using [false allegations of fostering antisemitism](#) to undermine Corbyn's anti-austerity leadership, they supported the creation of the "hostile environment" which caused the Windrush debacle!

The Socialist Party fights for decent jobs, homes and services with full rights for all, no matter where you are from. We campaign for the right to asylum, the right to organise, and the right to work and benefits.

It is the capitalists and their politicians who are behind cuts to pay and services, not migrant workers. By [organising together, in trade unions and political struggle](#), we can stop the race to the bottom and take the wealth off the super-rich who benefit from it.

Blairite Labour's attacks on migrants

We all know the Tory party is a racist party with a long history of bigoted attacks. But what is the recent record of the Labour right?

'New Labour' under Tony Blair introduced a series of laws progressively restricting the right for those fleeing repression and war to claim asylum. It also introduced a racist points-based immigration system for non-EU workers.

In 2007, Blair's successor Gordon Brown called for "British jobs for British workers." In 2015, Blairite Labour leader Ed Miliband's general election campaign included producing mugs demanding stronger controls over migrants.

And the Blairites backed Theresa May's "hostile environment" measures. In fact, Blairite Alan Johnson was the first to use the phrase back in 2010 when he was home secretary in Brown's government!

In 2013, Shadow Home Secretary Yvette Cooper spoke in favour of the Tory bill which became the "hostile environment" Immigration Act. She said "we will not oppose the bill" because "some of its measures are sensible" - but that "it claims to tackle illegal immigration, but does nothing of the sort."

Only seven Labour MPs were among the 20 who voted against the bill at its second reading, when the Commons agrees a potential law's main principles. Only six Labour MPs were among the 18 who voted against it at the third reading, their last real chance to stop it.

Miliband had instructed abstention. Left-wingers Jeremy Corbyn, John McDonnell, Diane Abbott and Dennis Skinner defied his instruction and voted against the Tories each time.

After that, the Blairites went on to lead Labour's Remain campaign in the EU referendum, 'Labour In for Britain'. They fought to stay in the neoliberal bloc on the basis of fearmongering about increased immigration after Brexit.

Alan Johnson, the campaign's chair, said "remaining part of the single market helps us to control... immigration" and "if we leave, the situation is going to be worse." The EU is also responsible for leaving desperate refugees to drown in the Mediterranean, and ruining impoverished African farmers with its 'Common Agricultural Policy'.

Empire and citizenship

After the abolition of slavery - at least in law - in the 19th century, most people throughout the British Empire were simply 'British subjects'. Growing national liberation movements, and the need to repopulate British industry after World War Two, changed that.

In 1948, the Labour government legislated that anyone with a close relationship with Britain or one of its remaining colonies - like Jamaica, Nigeria, and the 'Trucial Coast' which became the United Arab Emirates - became a British citizen.

Nationals of self-governing British 'Dominions' - like Canada, India and South Africa - had both their own national citizenship and Commonwealth citizenship. This was separate to British citizenship, but meant no restrictions on living in Britain, and the right to register as British citizens after a year here.

As the British Empire continued to collapse and all the large colonies won independence, the British state revoked British citizenship for whole swathes of newly 'foreign' nationals, including many already living and working in Britain. Some groups became Commonwealth citizens if their countries of origin joined the Commonwealth.

In the 1960s Tory and Labour governments attacked Commonwealth citizens' rights, introducing immigration controls and longer periods before applying for British citizenship (see ['Enoch Powell's racist Rivers of Blood rant 50 years on'](#)).

In 1971 the Tories denied both British and Commonwealth citizens the automatic right to live in Britain unless they could prove direct connection to it. In 1981 a new Tory law moved British citizens from the

remaining small colonies - like Bermuda, the Falklands/Malvinas, and Gibraltar - into a separate class of citizenship, subsequently recombined in 2002.

The long and complicated history of citizenship statuses means that many people do not have documentation which 'proves' they are citizens. The Immigration Act 2014 put additional burdens on workers to prove their right to stay in Britain.

In the case of the Windrush Generation, the destruction of their 'boarding cards' is a big exacerbating factor. It seems the Home Office eliminated a major source of evidence for immigration status... and then went on to demand workers provide it.

Southampton: the cuts or no cuts election

Sue Atkins, Southampton Socialist Party

In Southampton we are in the enviable position of campaigning to get Keith Morrell re-elected as a socialist anti-cuts councillor for a second time.

As a Labour councillor Keith was [expelled for voting against cuts](#) and fighting to keep Oaklands swimming pool open. He was reelected in 2014 as an independent anti-cuts councillor and is standing again this year. Along with fellow councillors Don and Tammy Thomas, Keith has shown that if you fight, you can win.

We have a great team of helpers and are out every day leafletting, canvassing and running stalls. The canvassing returns are very positive and we have every hope that Keith will be voted in again.

In February we saw a grand opening of the city's new cultural quarter - at a cost of £30 million, £20 million of which came from us, the local taxpayers.

We are now told that the council will have to fork out another £4.4 million to complete the project, which is five years behind schedule and costing more than double the original estimates. No question here of 'no money'.

Labour council leader Simon Letts says he doesn't need to know what the final bill will be because: "The numbers are the numbers" - so, the private contractors can rest assured they have a blank cheque from the council!

This is in cruel contrast to the rest of council services. The council's own figures tell us that they have cut £120 million and axed 1,000 jobs over the last five years in response to the Tories' squeeze on local government.

Local campaigners, backed by Keith, have [fought long and hard to keep a respite centre](#) for adults with learning disabilities open. It has been closed since November, but due to continuing pressure, is on the way back to being re-opened.

Alongside Keith there are five candidates standing as part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition. We also support two other candidates campaigning to re-open Kentish Road Respite Centre.

If Labour councillors continue to say that nothing can be done, then they must expect to be challenged. By participating in the elections this year we are helping to [shape the debate on what needs to be done](#), and will be the only ones offering a clear anti-cuts alternative to the people of Southampton.

Save our schools!

Central to the election campaign is [the crisis in school funding](#). Over the last year a dynamic, determined campaign has been organised by local teachers, supported by the Fair Funding for All Schools group and the teachers' union NEU.

The latest lively demonstration took place on 21 April attended by many teachers, teaching assistants, parents and children, with a clear message to the councillors present that we expect them to support our schools in deeds as well as words.

We demand they use their powers to allow 'licensed deficits' so that schools can provide for children's needs - until a new Corbyn-led government can be elected and provide the resources to fully fund our schools.

Unfortunately, the Labour council has a policy that unlike funding of the cultural quarter, the schools' budget must be slashed under a regime of threats and bullying.

Sheffield and South Yorkshire: no to closures - defend our NHS

Alistair Tice, Socialist Party Yorkshire

In the eight years of Tory-led governments, 95 NHS walk-in centres have been closed - 40% of the original number.

Walk-in centres were designed to ease pressure on accident and emergency departments and provide same day treatment for patients who couldn't access GP services. Yet, as casualty and GP appointment waiting times have increased, more walk-in centres are being closed as part of the misnamed "efficiency" savings, ie cuts, to NHS budgets.

Here in Sheffield, the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) has proposed the [closure of the city centre walk-in clinic and the minor injuries unit](#) at the centrally located Hallamshire hospital.

These plans have met with massive opposition, with a near 15,000 signatures on the petition. Even the CCG's rigged 'consultation' exercise resulted in a majority of respondents either not agreeing or opposing their closure proposals.

This has forced the CCG to review their urgent care review, which they had originally planned to force through this month, and delay any decision until September at the earliest.

In order to increase pressure on Sheffield health bosses to drop their closure plans altogether, Sheffield Save Our NHS (SSONHS) campaign, in which Socialist Party members are playing an active part, is holding a march and rally on Saturday 28 April.

As well as opposing these closures, SSONHS is campaigning against Tory plans for (un)Accountable Care Organisations - which will facilitate even more cuts and privatisation of NHS services - and demanding that Labour councils use their powers to stop these, which to date they have not done in South Yorkshire and Bassetlaw.

That is why the Socialist Party is [supporting Save Our NHS candidate Naveen Judah](#) in the South Yorkshire mayoral election and [standing TUSC candidates for Sheffield City Council](#).

- Sheffield Save Our NHS march and rally Saturday 28 April. Assemble 1.30pm at City Hall. March to Hallamshire hospital
 - Sheffield Socialist Party May Day meeting Fighting NHS and Council cuts. Guest speaker: Hannah Sell (Socialist Party deputy general secretary). Tuesday 1 May, 7pm at Central United Reform Church, S1 2JB
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RMT Labour Party affiliation debate - where do socialists stand?

Last year's annual general meeting (AGM - conference) of the RMT transport workers' union agreed to open discussions with the Labour Party with a view to possible re-affiliation.

The Socialist Party welcomed the move, seeing it as a chance, if the affiliation terms were right, for the RMT to spearhead the changes necessary to completely overturn the political and organisational legacy of Tony Blair's New Labour, from which the union had been expelled in 2004 (see '[The left unions and the Labour Party affiliation debate](#)').

Now the Labour Party has formally invited the RMT to re-affiliate and the union has convened a special general meeting (SGM) for the end of May.

The Socialist reprints below extracts from a special edition of The Red Line, a bulletin produced by Socialist Party members of the RMT, arguing that the terms offered are not right and that the union should not support re-affiliation to the Labour Party at this stage.

The 2017 RMT AGM had a thorough discussion on the union's political strategy, including our relationship with the Labour Party.

The AGM concluded that an immediate or unconditional affiliation to the Labour Party was not appropriate.

The [possibility of affiliation was left open](#), however, dependent on the party's response to several issues and a full consultation with branches culminating in an SGM.

The Labour Party has now responded, with its Q&A reply contained in the document titled, '[RMT Labour Party Affiliation Discussion Paper](#)', and the branch consultation is underway.

Socialist Party members of the RMT welcome the fact that a dialogue with the Labour Party has begun. A transformed Labour Party, with full democratic rights and due weight in its structures for trade unions - the collective voices of workers - would take forward the objectives of the RMT as defined in our rule book: to "improve the conditions and protect the interests of its members" and "to work for the supersession of the capitalist system by a socialistic order of society."

Not for nothing did Margaret Thatcher say her "greatest achievement" was [Tony Blair's New Labour](#). With its commitment to privatisation, anti-union laws, wars and austerity, and the gutting of the trade unions' role within the Labour Party structures, for over 20 years workers no longer had a party that was ours.

That's why the RMT, even though we were not affiliated to Labour, was the first union to back Jeremy Corbyn when he stood for the leadership in 2015.

The RMT was the second biggest donor to both his leadership campaigns, in 2015 and 2016, behind only the 1.4 million-member Unite union. No one can doubt where we stand.

But the question is: how can the RMT best continue our support for Jeremy Corbyn to overturn the political and organisational legacy of New Labour and transform the Labour Party? Are the terms of affiliation currently on offer - losing our political independence and handing £240,000 a year to a largely unreconstructed party machine (if we affiliate our full membership) - really the best way to pursue the RMT's objectives at this moment?

Key issues for the RMT

An RMT predecessor union was one of the principal founding organisations of the Labour Party in 1900. The new party was to be different from the Liberals and Tories, not because there would be individual trade

unionists in its ranks - at that time some union leaders stood as Liberal Party candidates and even as Conservatives!

Instead, the aim was to have political representatives under the collective control of workers - for Labour MPs and councillors to actually implement union policies.

What is striking about the Labour Party's Q&A reply to the RMT is that no commitments whatsoever are given on the key policy issues we asked them about.

There is nothing on what the party will do to [stop Labour-controlled authorities implementing driver-only operation \(DOO\)](#) and sacking guards on Merseyrail and Rail North, massive funding cuts in Transport for London, or privatisation plans for the Welsh railways.

The RMT has AGM policy supporting local councils setting no-cuts budgets by using their reserves and borrowing powers.

Yet right-wing Labour-led councils continue to slash jobs and local services and nothing is said about it.

The national party has shown it can discipline representatives for offensive social media activity. So why can't it instruct its mayors, councillors and first ministers to stop implementing offensive policies? That actually might be worth £240,000!

Yet all the reply says is that "RMT will be free to campaign against cuts from any quarter", "even in Labour-held councils" and other authorities.

We do that already. And we have the option of standing our own candidates or supporting others seeking to replace councillors making the cuts.

But now we're asked to give up that right, for nothing in return. What kind of deal is that?

Where are unions' collective rights?

Our strength as a union comes from the fact that we represent decisions reached collectively by the individual members.

The Labour Party reply lists ways that individual RMT members could participate in the party - for example by voting in future leadership elections, attending local meetings, accessing training to be a Labour candidate.

But of course individuals can do all this already, without RMT affiliation. The question is, what new collective rights will the RMT gain from affiliating now, under the current Labour Party structures which are still largely those inherited from Tony Blair's New Labour regime?

After another round of attacks on the role of the unions within the Labour Party in 2007 the late Tony Benn wrote that "there would be no point in affiliating as a union in the hope of discussing policy" - or, indeed, controlling MPs or the party machine.

Unfortunately he did not draw the same conclusion as Bob Crow and the RMT did of the need for unions to therefore develop their own independent political voice.

But he accurately described the New Labour structures as a "different party" to the one that he had joined.

The unions' share of the vote at Labour Party conference was cut to 50% in 1995. Formal policy-making powers were transferred from conference to the National Policy Forum, where unions hold just 16% of the votes. And locally the situation is no better.

Before New Labour, union branches were able to nominate candidates in parliamentary selection contests but now not even a union the size of Unite has been able to ensure its candidates get onto shortlists!

The old 'district Labour parties' responsible for council candidate panels, with directly elected trade union branch delegates, have been replaced by 'local campaign forums' led by local councillor Labour groups (who can decide their own local manifestos!)

Is it any surprise then that the overwhelming majority of Labour candidates in this year's local elections are from the right-wing, opponents of Jeremy Corbyn and supporting more cuts and job losses?

If the RMT was to affiliate its full 80,000-strong membership, at an annual cost of £240,000, we would have about 1% of votes at Labour's conference.

We would have fewer votes at the national policy forum than the House of Lords Labour Group does.

And, as the Labour Party Q&A concedes, even with 80,000 affiliated members, we would not be guaranteed a seat on Labour's national executive committee. Affiliating with just 1,000 members on the other hand, as has been suggested, would give the RMT less weight than the Fabian Society.

The fact is, our current political strategy allows us to make a far greater impact than we would have in the structures that, unfortunately, are still in place from the 20 years of New Labour.

Lessons from Corbyn's victory

It is true, of course, that Jeremy Corbyn won the Labour leadership in 2015, held off the Blairite coup a year later, and pushed through a radical general election manifesto against the opposition of most Labour MPs.

But the main lesson of his victories was that he achieved them by appealing over the heads of the Blairites to those outside the formal structures of the party. That's what needs to be done again.

Labour must be completely transformed if it is to be able to resist the pressure of the bosses and their political, media and legal establishment and carry out the socialist policies that the working class needs.

If [the Labour Party democracy review](#) - due to report in September - doesn't restore trade unions' collective rights or bring back mandatory re-selection of MPs, Jeremy should present his own proposals directly to trade unionists, members, and registered supporters (like in the leadership contests), and not get bogged down in the quagmire of New Labour-origin 'procedures'. Then it would be worth discussing if affiliation offered fighting trade unions like the RMT a viable way to advance our goals.

In the meantime the RMT needs to keep its ability to act independently. That's the other, vital lesson of the Labour leadership contests.

As a politically independent union, the RMT was able to contribute more to Jeremy's campaign than the Labour-affiliated rail unions, Aslef and TSSA, whose £100,000-plus annual affiliation fees instead helped to finance the anti-Corbyn Labour apparatus. John McDonnell praised the RMT for being the first union to fund Jeremy in 2015, saying that without our support he could not have fought the campaign that he did.

It's a fact. Affiliation would not have added a single vote to Jeremy Corbyn's score in the leadership elections as any RMT member could vote as an individual party member or as a registered supporter (for just £3 in 2015). But it would have stopped us backing him as a union in the way that we did.

It is welcome that a dialogue has begun with the Labour Party. But it must be an honest one. Unfortunately many of the replies to the RMT's questions dress up the reality of the position and are sometimes completely misleading.

For an honest dialogue

The Q&A says, for example, that affiliation would enable the RMT "to formally nominate for any future leadership election" - but this is purely symbolic because MPs have a veto on which candidates are allowed onto the ballot paper.

Another example - the Q&A says that the RMT could affiliate without financially supporting the Scottish Labour Party, but then admits that "RMT affiliation would be to the Labour party at UK level". Why not tell it as it is? Once the cheque is handed over it's no longer our money.

One unanswered question is, who drafted the document? The window-dressing and evasions are disappointing if they were written by a left-wing party official.

Wouldn't it have been better to admit up front that there's a massive job to be done to overturn the legacy of Tony Blair on the democratic functioning of the Labour Party and the unions' role within it?

At least then we could have an honest discussion about the balance between the (extremely limited) opportunities and (still considerable) overheads that affiliation would bring.

And then seriously discuss how the RMT can continue to contribute to the struggle to consolidate Jeremy's position, whatever the SGM decides.

Striking McDonald's workers say

'We demand a living wage and decent conditions'

Striking McDonald's worker, Watford

On 16 April, [McDonald's workers](#) organised in the Bakers, Food and Allied Workers Union (BFAWU) voted by 95.2% in favour of strike action at five stores across the UK. This is an overwhelming mandate for the upcoming 'McStrike' which is due to take place on international workers day on 1 May.

The five stores include Crayford and Cambridge (pioneers of [the first historic McStrike](#)), Manchester, and two restaurants in Watford.

The McStrike has been derided by The Sun, which distorted the figures of those who had been balloted and falsely claimed that the strike was off. The fact that the Murdoch-owned press took time out to slander our campaign shows that we have rattled McDonald's and their media mouthpieces. They are scared of us and so they should be!

In Watford, where I work, 100% of all those balloted voted in favour of strike action - all the more satisfying seeing that Watford is the hometown of McDonald's multi-millionaire CEO Steve Easterbrook.

Another McDonald's worker in Watford, and new Socialist Party member, comments: "Steve Easterbrook says he's a Watford lad, yet those of us who work in the Watford store have had enough of poverty pay, zero-hour contracts and lack of respect on the job. He makes millions while we struggle to get by. He should get on his private jet and come talk to our union. We deserve a wage that means we can live with dignity."

The support that we have received has been incredible, including Labour's John McDonnell and Laura Pidcock (Corbynista MP and former McDonalds worker), the National Shop Stewards Network and the Socialist Party.

With our determination and the huge support we have received, I believe that we will win!

Our demands are simple and clear:

- £10 an hour and an end to exploitative youth rates, which discriminate against younger workers
- An end to zero-hour contracts
- Full trade union recognition and an end to bullying, harassment and abuse

Pickets and demonstration

- Manchester: Midnight picket and 7-8am morning picket - 36/38 Oxford Rd, Manchester M1 5EJ
- Watford demonstration: 12-1.30pm - 128-130 High St, Watford WD17 2BJ
- Cambridge: 8-9am - 639 Newmarket Rd, Cambridge CB5 8WL
- Crayford: 8-9am - Crayford Rd, Dartford DA1 4LD

A well-attended fundraiser on 20 April in Tottenham, hosted by BFAWU, raised over £1,700. Thanks also to the Socialist Party for their support on the night. We are also asking if union branches can donate to the strike fund.

- For online donations: actionnetwork.org/fundraising/fast-food-rights-uk
 - Cheques to BFAWU, Stanborough House, Great North Road, Welwyn Garden City, Herts AL8 7TA
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Bromley library strike wins pay and conditions boost from outsourcers

By a Unite member

Bromley library workers have won a huge victory. This follows [all-out indefinite strike action](#) which began on 28th March.

A mass meeting on 18th April agreed to accept proposals recommended by union reps who attended negotiations with the employer the previous day. The campaign has won concessions from the employer on all the main items in dispute.

This includes the immediate filling of 17 vacant posts, protection for pay and conditions that goes beyond the legal protection provided by 'TUPE' (workers were [transferred out from the council to Greenwich Leisure Limited](#) - GLL - in November 2017), a pay increase from this April, implementation of the London Living Wage and paid trade union facility time.

This is a hugely significant trade union victory. GLL took over the service promising to make "efficiencies" - code for cuts. Inevitably, this was going to be in the area of staffing and they certainly wasted no time. GLL attempted to run libraries with significant numbers of posts kept deliberately vacant.

This led to the service being stretched to the point of collapse and was the final straw leading to the walk out.

The union had also been pressing for a 'TUPE Plus' agreement. This was based on previous knowledge of TUPE, which is the legislation supposedly set up to protect staff pay and conditions on transfer to a new company.

However, the legislation is clear, protection is only on the day of transfer, so you transfer over on your current conditions, then the company decides it needs to re-organise and away goes your protection.

Not only did the campaign win an agreement that bettered TUPE, but pay rises were also won. Bromley council had itself withdrawn from national pay bargaining some years ago.

The win at GLL means that the vast majority of Unite members will actually get a better pay increase than they would have done at the council. This does not mean that outsourcing is good! The point is that there was no pay campaign at the council - but there was at GLL.

In fact, some staff did even better under the strike proposals than the national local government arrangements for 2018. Again, this is because a campaign, with strike action, was mounted.

The other important point is that GLL does not recognise unions - but this did not stop a pay claim being made and an effective campaign being undertaken.

The company is supposed to be a social enterprise where profit is not the main motivator. However, GLL acts just like the worst of private employers.

Campaigners in Belfast have been marching and demanding that Belfast City Council take the service back in-house. Now, on the back of the Bromley victory, is the right time to link up a much wider campaign, bringing together all those people across the UK and beyond who are fighting against GLL. The Bromley strikers have shown what can be done and how.

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 22 April 2018 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

Newham school strike forces head to say privatisation will stop

Parents' protest supports strikers' demands

Strike still on till academisation cancelled in writing

Stop press: Avenue's headteacher reneged on her promise of stopping the privatisation drive later the same day. So angry parents again occupied reception and demanded to speak to her on the morning of 25 April, where no fresh promise seemed forthcoming. The strikes and protests will continue.

James Ivens, East London Socialist Party

Privatisation at Avenue school in Newham, east London could be on the verge of defeat - after striking staff and parents on 24 April forced the headteacher to promise she will call off 'academisation'.

Workers at the school were taking their [17th day of strike action](#), with more days scheduled. A visiting music teacher also refused to cross the picket line.

And a surprise occupation organised separately by a group of supporting parents added to the pressure. They decided to go into the school en masse, some with their children from classes whose staff are on strike, to collectively register complaints and demand the headteacher see them.

Staff and parents want, at the very least, a vote on whether the school becomes a privately run 'academy'.

The Avenue campaign has involved one of - if not the - highest numbers of strike days against academisation by any school so far. It is led by the secretary of Newham's National Education Union branch, Socialist Party member Louise Cuffaro.

The borough's right-wing Labour council has officially resolved to oppose further academies - although [outgoing Blairite mayor Robin Wales](#) refuses to let this turn into concrete action against them. The process is also under investigation [through a judicial review](#).

As the pickets' chant goes: "The council says stop! The court says stop! Give us a ballot and the strikes will stop!"

Management called the police to deal with the mortal threat of parents and children standing in a school reception. Parents forced the head to come out and talk to them. She declared she had lost the battle, and would tell the governors that academisation must stop.

Louise said: "Nothing is in writing yet. We are still on strike and will be going ahead with our lobby of the governors' meeting this week. But this shows that striking and campaigning works, and the privatisers can be beaten!"

Elsewhere in the borough, management at Eastlea school has now [followed Keir Hardie](#) and Brampton schools in seeing the strikes at other schools and deciding against becoming an academy.

And [Cumberland school workers](#) are out for eight days over three weeks against academisation. The secondary could become an academy as early as 1 May.

Labour's new mayoral candidate Rokhsana Fiaz must publicly state she will intervene to block academisation when elected.

The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) - the electoral alliance that includes transport union RMT and the Socialist Party - is also standing in the 3 May elections. We are challenging Labour candidates still supporting academisation, and we are fighting for an end to cuts and privatisation across the borough.

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 24 April 2018 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

Usdaw conference 2018

Retail union backs zero-hour ban, leaders oppose rank-and-file coordination

Ryan Aldred, Usdaw conference delegate (personal capacity)

The left is making steps forward while the right-wing bureaucracy continues trying to hold back struggle at Usdaw's annual delegate meeting (ADM). The 22-25 April national conference of the retail and distribution union is still underway at the time of writing.

The union leadership opposed affiliation to [the National Shop Stewards Network](#) (NSSN) - a rank-and-file body established by transport union RMT and supported by nine national unions.

Every contribution to the debate supported the motion. The leadership admitted its opposition was because Socialist Party members play a leading role in the NSSN.

The vote was clearly 50/50 on a show of hands. But outgoing president Jeff Broome refused a card vote - despite numerous calls and general uproar. About 50 delegates walked out to complain about blatant breaking of the rules.

The final result was declared as 42% for, 58% against - a close defeat at the hands of a hostile and cavalier leadership, and clearly justifying the card vote.

The ADM did pass an emergency motion calling on the union's executive council to support workers at Shop Direct. Three distribution sites in Greater Manchester face relocation to an automated site - which could result in the loss of over 2,000 jobs.

The members are preparing for industrial action and were emboldened by the level of support. Socialist Party members called for no relocation, and a shorter working week with no loss of pay.

Usdaw has committed to a campaign to ban zero-hour contracts in favour of minimum 16-hour contracts, except for those who specifically request less. Socialist Party members pressed the importance of not just committing in words but seriously preparing a campaign.

I spoke in support of [reintroducing the original, socialist 'Clause IV' into Labour's constitution](#), which the leadership opposed and defeated. But the ADM did pass a maximum income policy, on a card vote, after the leadership opposed it.

A number of important motions - including supporting the [Refugee Rights Campaign](#) - have yet to be decided at the time of writing.

It's apparent Socialist Party member [Amy Murphy's election as next Usdaw president](#) has emboldened the left in the union. Iain Dalton of the Socialist Party has also been elected chair of Usdaw's Broad Left, which continues to grow.

At the time of writing, we have sold over 70 copies of the Socialist. Full report to follow - but it's clear support for socialist ideas is rising in Britain's fifth-largest union.

NUJ conference 2018

Journalists' union leaders defeat call for political fund, but potential for left grows

Socialist Party reporters

Socialist Party members in the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) made successful contributions on workplace stress and Catalan independence at the union's delegate meeting on 20-23 April.

Prior to the annual conference, Socialist Party member Anton McCabe (Derry and North West Ireland branch) was re-elected to the union's ruling national executive council (NEC).

Niall Mulholland (London Magazines branch) moved a motion on the housing crisis. This was remitted on the basis of a commitment that the union will survey members about housing for use in campaign work.

Niall also successfully moved a motion on workplace stress. This committed the NUJ to act on this burning issue.

Roger Butler (Swansea branch) seconded a motion calling for the union to set up a political fund. Against strong opposition from the NEC, and misinformation, the motion fell. But with a significant minority in favour, the issue will not go away.

Seconding a successful motion on Catalonia, Anton McCabe condemned the state violence unleashed by the right-wing Madrid government [against the self-determination movement](#).

Avoiding full debate and voting, the NEC managed, partly through procedural manoeuvres, to see off several motions. This included on Israel/Palestine, and the 'antisemitism' smear campaign against Jeremy Corbyn.

The leadership also faced setbacks. A motion to raise members' subs, already amongst the highest in the union movement, did not get the majority required. To build the union and its finances, recruitment must be energetically prioritised - on affordable subscription rates.

The strong second-place vote for vice-president achieved by Steve Bird, regarded as the opposition candidate, indicates the potential for the left in the NUJ.

50 years since the greatest general strike in history

France 1968: when workers were on the brink of taking power

Clare Doyle, Committee for a Workers' International

Much has changed in the half century since the revolutionary events of May 1968 in France. At that time there was still a 'cold war' between states with very different social systems - capitalism and private ownership of industry in the West and Stalinism in the East, based on bureaucratically run state ownership.

But the ruling elites on both sides of the 'iron curtain' feared revolutions from below, which would see power in the hands of democratically elected representatives of the working class.

The greatest general strike in history - when ten million workers paralysed the 'strong state' of president Charles de Gaulle - showed that such a revolution was possible. If it had succeeded, it would have spread like wildfire across Europe and worldwide.

1968 was a year of big conflicts and mass protest internationally, not least against [the US war in Vietnam](#). 17 March saw 100,000 on a mass protest at the US embassy in London and violent clashes, including police on horseback charging into the demonstrators.

Workers as well as students in Britain organised sit-ins to pursue their demands. Women machinists at Ford's Dagenham, east London, won [their historic struggle for equal pay](#).

Unrest

The month of revolution in France was preceded by a number of important strikes and unrest among students in schools and universities.

Ten years of 'Bonapartist' rule under De Gaulle was stultifying society; an explosion was in the making.

Workers' living and working conditions were lagging behind economic growth. Inflation was eating into wages.

In some of the big factories, production lines were literally policed by armed men hired by the bosses.

Students in the universities and schools were angry about overcrowded classes, lack of flexibility in their courses and graduate unemployment.

By the end of April 1968, armed police were sent in against their occupations and peaceful demonstrations.

Battles raged and barricades were erected in the streets of Paris. Hundreds of students were arrested, hundreds more were hospitalised.

The ruling class - the government in particular - was split over whether to continue with repression or make concessions. This is a typical feature of any revolutionary situation as it begins to develop.

At the beginning of May 1968, government concessions actually emboldened the students. But more demonstrations saw more injuries meted out by the police and sympathy from the middle layers in society grew rapidly.

It was not long before young workers joined in the demonstrations and the trade unions were forced to call solidarity action.

A one-day official general strike on 13 May saw five million workers around the country take action and one million on the march in Paris.

The leaders of the sizeable 'Communist' Party (CP) had hoped this would act like the valve on a pressure cooker and that workers would be content to go back to work.

How the movement developed was detailed at the time and later in the newspaper Militant (forerunner of the Socialist) and elsewhere.

There will be articles in the next few issues of the Socialist covering the events week by week.

Strikes spread

No one could have predicted the speed with which the strike movement would develop as workforces across the country followed the example set by young workers at Sud-Aviation in Nantes who decided to stay on strike and lock their bosses up in their offices!

Car factories were occupied, shipyards, coal mines, schools, offices, hospitals, depots, theatres... Mass meetings were held, committees set up, red flags hoisted.

Workers everywhere were singing the revolutionary anthem - the Internationale - and discussing what contribution they would make to building a socialist society.

Farmworkers began sit-ins at farms and depots and their unions called for a national demonstration on 24 May.

The forces of the state began to mutiny - conscripts, police, sailors, even the hated CRS riot police.

By Friday 24 May, ten million workers - more than half of France's total workforce - were on strike. Violent battles raged on the streets of Paris.

On 25 May, tripartite talks began between the government, the bosses and the trade union leaders (who were still insisting that the struggle was not political!)

After three days and nights of talks behind closed doors, a generous package of reforms was agreed on wages, holidays, working time, etc.

These reforms were the product of revolutionary events but they did not quench the thirst of the millions of workers occupying their workplaces.

They rejected them, striving for something else that their traditional leaders were incapable of articulating.

A rally on 27 May filled Paris' Charlety Stadium with 50,000 people to discuss a political alternative to Gaullism and capitalism. The CGT union federation announced a demonstration in Paris for the evening of 29 May - the day De Gaulle 'disappeared' from France saying: "The game is up"!

Half a million strikers marched through the capital but the workers' leaders had no intention of taking power.

Later, the CP leaders said the state was 'too strong', but the state was already disintegrating.

Revolutionary situation

A classical revolutionary situation had developed. The ruling layer in tatters, the middle class clearly on the side of the working class and adopting its methods of struggle. The French working class was fully in action and ready for a fight to the finish.

Workers in neighbouring countries were refusing to do the work of the striking French workers - printing government material, moving goods in or out of the country.

To carry through a successful transfer of power a revolutionary leadership is required with a mass base of support. What could have been done to complete the revolution?

Linking up the strike committees on a local, regional and national level to form an alternative government was what was needed.

This was put forward by active participants in the movement but their voice was small. They lacked a base in the workers' movement.

In 1968, Militant - forerunner of the Socialist Party - had no co-thinkers in France. It had politically separated in 1965 from the Trotskyists of the Fourth International who had some forces, especially among the youth.

But they had been pessimistic about the European - including the French - working class, arguing that they would not move into action for at least 20 years. They concentrated on the student movement and on the revolt against colonial rule.

One of their leaders, Ernest Mandel, voiced their views in London at a public meeting in the spring of 1968.

He was challenged by Militant's editor, Peter Taaffe, who insisted that the working class still retained its capacity to rise and confront French capitalism quite soon.

Mandel disputed this, but, within a month, his false position was answered by the workers of France. With their revolutionary traditions they were on the move again!

In the early days of the events themselves, Peter pointed out to a meeting in the London School of Economics that a sure sign of a revolution on its way in France was the 12 and 13-year-olds trying to join the demonstrations.

Their teachers were locking them in their classrooms... until they themselves went on strike! By the end of May 1968 the situation was rotten-ripe for a revolutionary takeover.

In Nantes, a committee was formed early in the movement, of representatives of workers, students and small farmers, which took control in the region of Loire Atlantique over every aspect of society - production, distribution and exchange.

Food was brought into the towns by the small farmers, prices and fares were held down, the police were made redundant by students and workers patrolling the neighbourhoods.

If similar representative bodies had developed in every region and sent elected delegates on to a national council, committees of struggle could have become organs of workers' rule.

As in Russia in October 1917, a trusted revolutionary leadership would have taken all the necessary measures to bring the ranks of the existing state forces over to the side of a socialist government.

They would also have made a direct appeal to the workers of every other country to follow suit and prevent the development of a military intervention from outside.

But the leaders of the major union federations and of the Communist Party of France were the ones who least wanted a successful revolution.

If workers could take power in a developed industrial economy, they knew, it would inspire the workers of the Soviet Union to throw the parasitic bureaucracy off their backs and reconstruct genuine workers' democracy. They literally betrayed the French revolution.

Reaction

It was the workers' 'leaders' who gave De Gaulle the confidence to return to France and call an immediate election, mobilising the forces of reaction onto the streets.

The police and army moved in against strikers and left-wing organisations. Hundreds of militant workers were victimised and sacked. Various left organisations were outlawed.

In the June parliamentary election, the Gaullists gained and the Communist Party lost votes - standing, not for a new socialist society, but for 'law and order'.

Yet within a year of losing a referendum on constitutional amendments, De Gaulle was gone, replaced as president by a man he had pushed aside as prime minister, Georges Pompidou.

The initial gains for workers arising from the tripartite agreement were, as Militant had warned, undermined by capitalist exploitation in general, and inflation in particular.

But the trade unions grew in numbers. Various social-democratic forces came together to launch a new Socialist Party with Francois Mitterand its leader in 1972.

In less than a decade he was elected as president. The same year, 1981, the Socialist Party was voted into government by a massive 55% of the electorate.

Without an all-out programme of nationalisation and democratic workers' control and management, even a 'socialist' government by name will eventually end up implementing policies in the interests of the 1% - the capitalist class.

This was the lesson not only of the Mitterand governments but of the [ignominious defeat of 'socialist' President Francois Hollande](#) and his government last year.

France today

Today, France is embroiled in a new contest between the classes. Emmanuel Macron, the 'president of the rich', is determined to push through a programme of anti-working class measures. The [workers and youth of France are determined to fight](#) them.

A new 1968 is in the air. Eight out of ten French people view the events of 50 years ago positively. Popular [left figures like Jean-Luc Mélenchon](#) and Olivier Besancenot are calling for a united struggle and a fight to the finish, but the trade union leaders again are failing to give a lead.

History never repeats itself exactly and time is still needed to build a leadership that can take a revolutionary movement on to victory.

In France and internationally, discontent and anger are welling up among students and young workers. A look at the greatest general strike in history will inspire a new generation with confidence that socialism can be won, not just in one country - wherever it breaks out first - but worldwide.

- 'France 1968: Month of Revolution' by Clare Doyle - [available from leftbooks.co.uk](#)

Audio version of this document

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

What the Socialist Party stands for

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

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

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

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

Our demands include:

Public services

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

Work and income

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

Environment

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

Rights

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

Mass workers' party

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

Socialism and internationalism

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