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## Editorial of the Socialist Party issue 1009

# Corbyn must lead in fight against the Blairites

The Labour right's summer of slander is drawing to a close. As parliament reopens and the party's conference approaches, the Blairite fifth column is preparing the next phase in its relentless anti-Corbyn campaign.

Right-wing MPs are anxiously weighing up their options. They are considering possible scenarios and reflecting on which lines of attack have thus far proved most fruitful.

There will be no respite for Corbyn. The key question being discussed by his enemies is what comes next: how can they best escalate the attacks, how can they inflict the maximum possible damage?

In an attempt to provide answers to these questions, Tony Blair has taken to the airwaves to publicly ruminate on possible strategies for his acolytes. In the same week that he took part in an apparently 'friendly' meeting with the far-right Italian interior minister Salvini, in which he deputised on behalf of his current client - the dictatorial government of Azerbaijan, Blair had the astonishing audacity to take part in a lengthy interview with the BBC's Nick Robinson in which he bemoans the rise of 'extremism'.

The so-called extremism worrying him is evidently not that of the far right. Salvini's plan to hold a special census of the country's migrant and Roma populations, with the supposed aim of determining whether people are 'real' Italians, has been compared with anti-Jewish laws of the 1930s. Yet Salvini appears perfectly palatable to Blair.

No, his concerns are closer to home. It is Corbyn in the firing line. Blair's interview with Nick Robinson provides a revealing glimpse of what's really motivating the anti-Corbyn campaign.

### Blairite breakaway?

Gone are the days when the issue of 'electability' was used as a smokescreen to mask the real, fundamental political differences separating Corbyn and his supporters from the Blairite majority in the parliamentary Labour Party. In this interview Blair openly describes his dread at the prospect of both leaving the EU and the potential election of a Corbyn-led government.

"Can it be taken back? I don't know" was his widely reported answer to the question of whether he believed the right could succeed in 'reclaiming' the Labour party. This answer confirmed what has already been reported as being discussed by a core group of Blairite MPs: the possibility of a right-wing breakaway.

The potential launch of a new party was a subject revisited throughout the interview, with Blair effectively confirming it as an option under serious consideration. Indeed, it is Blair's own ex-chief of staff who is reported to be heading up discussions among right-wing MPs.

But a new party is only one possible course of action for the Blairites. Even if it were implemented imminently, it would likely be part of a combined approach.

Whether to protect their individual careerist ambitions, or with the conscious aim of acting as rear-guard saboteurs, or for a combination of these two reasons - it would be likely that many, probably most, anti-Corbyn MPs would remain in Labour in such a scenario.

Their purpose in staying behind would be to continue to act as agents of the capitalist class, attempting to block Corbyn's pro-working class policies. Discussions about MPs going so far as to stop Corbyn from becoming prime minister following a potential Labour election victory have already been reported.

Whether they would be so bold as to act in this way - a move that would immediately provoke mass anger among working class people - remains to be seen. What is certain, however, is that if their strategies for preventing a Corbyn-led government fail, they will take the road of sabotage.

## **False 'unity'**

Faced with this ongoing situation, what should be the attitude of Corbyn, McDonnell and the leadership of Momentum? Up until now, their approach has been to cede ground to the right in the hope of preserving a false 'unity' with the Blairites.

The latest example of this strategy in action was the adoption by the national executive committee (NEC), on 4 September, of all the illustrative examples attached to the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of antisemitism. These, particularly those which deal with Israel, have the potential to become a pretext for disciplinary cases against large numbers of Corbyn supporters. (See ['Antisemitism smears against Corbyn are battering ram of the right'](#)).

It has been reported that Corbyn brought a statement of clarification to the NEC meeting which was designed to try and prevent attempts to restrict discussion on the Israel-Palestine conflict. This clarification was blocked, however, despite the NEC's supposed left majority. In the end, a short and mildly worded clarification was agreed.

Far from placating the right, this retreat has only served to embolden them. The same pattern has been seen throughout Corbyn's leadership.

Every concession granted to the right invites them to demand another. The sustained smear campaign that Corbyn has been subjected to over the summer has not abated.

The veteran Blairite Margaret Hodge was the most blunt in describing what this is really about when she spoke on 2 September: "The problem is that he is the problem... Corbyn has only been there for three [years] - three damaging years".

Even after the NEC adopted the IHRA examples two days later, Hodge continued her offensive. This time, she saw fit to attack the leader for the crime of raising for discussion his 'clarification': "Two steps forward one step back" was the way she put it on Twitter. Chuka Umunna also provoked outrage when he likened Corbyn supporters to "dogs".

Gavin Shuker, an ultra-Blairite, was charged with the task of digging the knife into Corbyn on Newsnight the same evening. He used the opportunity to again hint at the prospect of a new party: "I think it's increasingly difficult not just for me but for other colleagues" to remain in the Labour Party, he threatened.

Ordinary members of his local constituency Labour Party (CLP) clearly agree. On 6 September, the CLP passed a motion of no confidence in Shuker. This followed on from a similar motion being passed in Enfield North, the constituency of Shuker's [fellow Blairite MP: Joan Ryan](#).

These no-confidence votes are an important symbolic indication of the mood of ordinary Labour members and Corbyn supporters. No-confidence votes have no real power in and of themselves.

But they must be the starting gun for the battle to deselect the pro-capitalist Labour saboteurs. In particular, it is vital that Corbyn comes out clearly and boldly in favour of mandatory reselection of MPs ahead of a vote on the question at the upcoming Labour Party conference.

On 11 September, John McDonnell commented that his preference was for the party to maintain its current 'trigger ballot' system. This approach is mistaken. There must then be a huge campaign, drawing into activity the vast majority of Corbyn supporters who want to fight the right, in order to deselect right-wing MPs - replacing them with fighters for the working class.

Under the pressure of such a campaign, it is possible that many right wingers, following in the footsteps of Frank Field, could jump before they are pushed. But this should not be seen as a reason for the left to hold back.

Even if taking on the Blairites in this way meant Labour being temporarily weakened in parliament, if the party were freed from the stranglehold of the right to put forward clear, unmuffled pro-working class and socialist policies, this could lay the foundation for Labour to win mass support among the population - support going far deeper than that which already exists for Corbyn.

Part of taking on the right must mean opening up the Labour Party to all anti-austerity, pro-worker forces. A spectre that seemingly hangs over Blair, and which he repeatedly references in his BBC interview, is that of the Militant tendency - forerunner to the Socialist Party.

What makes the Socialist Party a 'bogeyman' for the right is our implacable determination to fight in the interests of working class people. That's why we call for the Labour Party to adopt a modern federal structure - which could allow the participation of all pro-working class forces, including the Socialist Party - as part of a full programme to redemocratised the Labour Party, restoring trade union rights, and refounding the party along democratic, socialist lines.

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## **Tories in chaos - general election now!**

### **Corbyn and unions must call mass action**

**Simon Carter**

The divide in the Tory party over Brexit is now wider than the Grand Canyon.

Leadership contender Boris Johnson stuck the boot in on Theresa May's 'soft' Brexit plan, calling it a "suicide vest" around the UK. In turn, a damaging dossier on his personal life, drawn up by May's supporters, was leaked to the press.

Boris's tirade against the PM was backed by former minister Steve Baker, who warned that her Chequers plan would cause a "catastrophic split" as 80 Tory MPs would vote against it. That would leave the hapless May dependent on right-wing Labour MPs to secure a deal with the EU. Last July, four Labour MPs, including newly 'independent' Frank Field, saved May from defeat in a Commons Brexit vote.

Clearly, the Tory government's weakness is an opportunity for Jeremy Corbyn and the trade union leaders to mobilise mass action to bring it down and fight for a general election. Labour should pledge to scrap austerity, nationalise rail and the major utilities, and restore our wages and services.

But faced with such an open goal, Labour's Blairite MPs are determined to kick the ball into touch by trying to undermine and remove Corbyn as party leader.

No wonder Labour's rank-and-file members are passing 'no confidence' motions against sitting Blairite MPs and calling for democratic mandatory reselection.

And it's no wonder too that the capitalist elite which dreads the prospect of a Corbyn government is going all out to stop it. That's why the establishment media is full of baseless charges of antisemitism against Jeremy Corbyn, and why figures like Chuka Umunna are threatening to split.

Outside the parliamentary circus, the vast majority of people want a government which instead of protecting the tax-dodging super-rich and giant corporations, invests in jobs, wages, housing and services. Mobilising millions of workers, young people and the elderly, to take the wealth and power off the capitalist elite, is what the Labour and trade union leaders should be doing.

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# Enfield North Labour Party votes 'no confidence' in right-wing Labour MP Joan Ryan

North London Socialist Party members

Labour Party members in Enfield North constituency in north London have given a stinging rebuke to Blairite MP Joan Ryan, with a 95 - 92 vote of no confidence.

Years of attacking the Corbyn leadership, not to mention her criticised expense claims, voting for the Iraq war and against an inquiry into it, abstaining on welfare cuts, and her behaviour towards local party members that has been described as bullying, have built up a well of anger.

She took to the media to denounce 'Trots, Stalinists, Communists and assorted hard left'. But that 'assortment' turned out to be the majority.

She attempted to use the antisemitism smear even though the 'no confidence' resolution reaffirmed opposition to all forms of racism and anti-Semitism. Members saw through that diversion. Many had watched the undercover documentary from Al Jazeera in which she is shown making false charges of antisemitism.

The mover of the motion pointed to Peter Mandelson's statement that he worked every day to undermine Corbyn, and to Tony Blair's refusal to back Corbyn as a future prime minister, saying that Joan Ryan's actions have showed she has the same priority of damaging the Labour leadership, rather than fighting the Tories.

An Israeli party member said that Joan Ryan does not truly have Middle East peace at heart. Like Israeli prime minister Netanyahu, Ryan has talked about a two-state solution but her actions haven't supported that.

The member dismissed the allegations of widespread antisemitism in Labour, saying that coming from a family that had been hit by the holocaust she took the issue very seriously, but it was clearly being used as an artificial weapon against the left.

Labour Party activists will take courage from this vote after a summer in which they have too often felt on the defensive from attacks by the media and their own MPs.

But it should also serve as a lesson to Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell. Joan Ryan used a placatory interview given by John McDonnell to Jewish News, to claim he has supported her. Members brushed this off, but sending out mixed signals can confuse and demoralise.

There is no compromise on antisemitism to be had with the likes of Joan Ryan; they are interested in damaging the left, not in reaching agreement.

But if members are offered the chance to fight back they will take it. The meeting was the largest all-members meeting anyone could remember in Enfield North and for many present it was their first meeting.

The turnout shows the potential that still exists for a fight to select MPs who fight for socialist policies and to boot out the Tories if a firm lead is given.

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## 4m children in UK in homes that can't afford fruit and veg

## **£10 an hour now**

### **Reverse benefit cuts**

**James Ellis, school teacher, Leeds Socialist Party**

Four million children in the UK live in households unable to afford enough fruit, vegetables, fish and other essential food groups to meet government nutrition guidelines, says the Food Foundation.

It is outrageous that a rich country in the 21st century leaves so many living in food poverty, consigning growing numbers of working class people to diet-related illnesses and poor quality of life. While the super-rich 1% continue to increase their wealth, millions of young people are going hungry.

As a teacher I have seen the impact of hunger and food poverty first-hand. For many the summer holiday means time to relax and spend time with friends and family. But for some young people and their families, the summer holiday means having to cope with hunger.

I have seen students struggling to focus in class because they haven't had a nutritious meal in days; fainting because they can't get breakfast at home.

#### **School meals**

School meals are sometimes their only reliable source of hot food. But many schools, especially privately run 'academies', now contract out their catering to private businesses - whose primary concern is profit, not providing a balanced and affordable diet.

The blame for this epidemic of food poverty lies with Tory and Blairite privatisation and austerity - and all the councils, including Labour councils, who have been passing on central government cuts.

To combat this it will be necessary to roll back austerity and reverse all benefit cuts, implement a minimum wage of at least £10 an hour now, and start a huge job creation programme. That could start to give everyone the means to afford a healthy diet.

There should also be free and nutritious school meals available to all school children.

To guarantee these reforms - and pay for them - it will be necessary to plan the economy democratically along socialist lines. That would have to include nationalising the big agricultural companies and supermarkets under democratic workers' control and management.

It is a disgrace that four million kids and their families are going hungry. There is enough wealth in society to provide plenty for all, but capitalism is unable to meet these basic needs. The socialist transformation of society is the only way to ensure that hunger becomes a thing of the past.

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## **Fearful bosses call for 'fairer capitalism'... we say: fight for socialism!**

**Corinthia Ward, Birmingham Socialist Party**

City banker Dame Helena Morrissey has called for "a more responsible and fairer form of capitalism" as part of a new report by the Blairite IPPR thinktank.

What it highlights is big business's lack of reinvestment - preferring to suck out short-term profits rather than develop infrastructure, technology and wages. This is a long-standing weakness of British capitalism, but is

now a profound problem and part of the world economic crisis.

The report puts forward a list of reforms it hopes would boost the productivity of workers in the UK, and dissipate the anti-establishment mood fuelled by rising inequality. Few of the ideas are new.

Raising the minimum wage to £10.20 in London and £8.75 in the rest of the UK, for example. The Socialist Party campaigns for at least £10 an hour, without exemptions, now.

A 20% higher wage for those on zero-hour contracts. Many zero-hour workers would welcome this, but it risks dividing workforces. The Socialist Party fights for guaranteed hours for all who want them, and a single, trade union-agreed rate for the job.

Forming a national investment bank. Jeremy Corbyn has a similar policy. But to guarantee the resources and control needed for serious investment would also require nationalising all the banks and top corporations.

And giving workers a token voice on the boards of companies. This is something Theresa May had advocated - but subsequently u-turned on last year. The Socialist Party stands for full democratic workers' control and management.

It was a disappointment - but not a surprise - to see that report participant Frances O'Grady, general secretary of the Trade Union Congress, apparently failed to argue for a stronger position for the working class. Never mind the full pro-worker programme the Socialist Party fights for - it seems she didn't even call for scrapping the anti-union laws!

But the fundamental problem is there is no such thing as "responsible" or "fairer capitalism." Every flavour of capitalism is based on the majority of people doing all the work, and a tiny elite of super-rich big business owners making huge profits from it.

There's nothing 'fair' about that. And no system based on putting private profit ahead of everything else can ever be 'responsible'.

The Socialist Party fights for every possible improvement in the lives of ordinary people. But only ending the capitalist system - and replacing it with a socialist society, based on democratic planning to provide plenty for all - can make reforms comprehensive and permanent.

Britain has already seen an array of reforms after World War Two. But under capitalism, only constant working class struggle can offer any protection from attacks by profit-hungry bosses. As early as 1948, only three years after the set-up of the NHS, the capitalists and their politicians started privatising bits of it!

The IPPR report reflects the desperate fear of the capitalists. They are watching an angry working class starting to look for alternatives to their system.

Only a socialist society can truly make inequality a thing of the past. If workers fight to run our workplaces and society as a whole in our interests - to end poverty, for job security, and decent housing and services - we will no longer have to wait for the imaginary generosity of the capitalists.

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## **School students in solitary: for full funding, not exclusion!**

**Allan Gittisham, school teacher, London Socialist Party**

'Isolation booths' - solitary confinement in all but name - are an increasingly common feature of 'zero-tolerance' school behaviour policies.

As the new school year begins, there is, as always, a flurry of articles detailing parents' and school students' opposition to uniform and behaviour policies at schools around the country.

One privately run 'academy' school in Stoke reportedly took dozens of students out of class for not having the correct purple trim on their trousers. And the Outwood Grange Academies Trust has released statistics on exclusions, with one of its schools in Middlesbrough suspending a staggering 41% of its students.

Many of the schools with draconian behavioural policies justify them on the basis that they are part of 'raising standards'.

It is true that for any school to function successfully there need to be clear and consistent systems in place. Students themselves often comment that they like to 'know where they stand' in terms of their behaviour and possible consequences.

## 'Zero tolerance'

However, the trend towards 'zero tolerance' is a worrying one that needs addressing to stop harm to individuals and communities.

Exclusion policies - isolation, suspension and expulsion - often prevent students learning the nuances of interaction with others. At best they are quick fixes which store up more problems in the long term.

And schools chasing league table positions sometimes use exclusions to artificially boost results by getting rid of students who may not perform well in exams.

These developments must be seen in the light of the massive cuts to state education. In the past, young people with complex needs would receive extra support to manage their behaviour and talk through their problems.

But social inclusion and special educational needs departments have been devastated by austerity and privatisation. Now exclusions are the preferred 'strategy' instead.

We need to fight for a [genuinely inclusive education system](#), publicly owned and fully funded to meet the needs of all young people in education. School students, staff and parents must have proper democratic input into developing policies and systems based on mutual respect and genuine support - not quarantine.

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## Them & Us

### Them...

- The world's population of bosses worth over \$30 million rose by about 30,000 last year, thanks to the casino stock markets. The 255,810 capitalists are now worth a total \$31.5 trillion, says research firm Wealth-X.
  - Super-rich overseas parents bought 2,162 UK houses worth a total £2 billion in the year to May - to get their kids into top private schools and elite unis. The figure's up from £1.65 billion last year, says estate agent Frank Knight.
  - The number of UK bosses 'earning' over £1 million has jumped 3,700 in the last year - to 18,700, says HM Revenue and Customs.
  - Planning an autumn break? How about a dining tour of Spain by private jet - just £6,995 a head, says the Financial Times. Or if you're more into staycations, an antique 1950s gilt-bronze drinks trolley will give you that five-star feeling for only £2,900.
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### ... and us

- Polluted air causes a "huge" decrease in brain power, says the Yale School of Public Health. Fully 95% of the world's population now breathes [unsafe air](#), according to the Health Effects Institute.
  - Women in the UK now have a life expectancy at birth which is seven months less than the EU average, says Public Health England. And they can expect to live in poor health for a total of 19 years and four months, says the Office for National Statistics.
  - For the first time, the number of desperate refugees stranded on Greek islands - by the EU and capitalist governments - has topped 20,000, says Greece's Ministry of the Interior.
  - Over a million disabled people have now had their benefits docked, says thinktank Demos. Unemployed workers are 53% more likely to face sanctions if disabled.
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## 10 years since the financial crash - the socialist answer to capitalist crisis

Steve Score, Socialist Party national committee

On 15 September this year, a posh get together takes place at a secret venue in London. At it, top bankers who were part of Lehman Brothers - once the fourth largest investment bank in the world - celebrate the tenth anniversary of its 2008 collapse with "cocktails and canapes".

Its demise was a major turning point in the financial crisis that had already been brewing during 2007 but which then developed into a worldwide economic crash.

It is a crisis from which the world economy has still not fully recovered and which has fundamentally changed politics across the globe. Above all, the billions of people who have suffered huge cuts to their living standards as a result will not see a cause to celebrate!

Up until the moment Lehman Brothers collapsed, governments, bankers and economists were still repeating the mantra that unregulated free-market capitalism, with limited state intervention, is always best.

But they then realised that, unless they did intervene, they risked not just a crash, but one on the scale of 1929. This event resulted in the great depression of the 1930s, with all its consequences including revolution and counter-revolution. They were forced to act.

### Government intervention

These neoliberal capitalist governments u-turned. They nationalised and subsidised the banks. They pumped trillions of pounds into economies around the world. But this was not directed towards working class people. Instead it went to the banks and financial institutions. This huge intervention prevented a repeat of 1929 but was unable to stop a significant world economic downturn.

It was not socialist nationalisation of course. Instead it was more of a case of 'socialism for the rich', carried out with the purpose of propping up capitalism. It highlighted the weakness of capitalism. Millions of working class people lost their jobs and homes - living standards were not subsidised!

Yet the bankers who precipitated the crisis were not only largely unpunished for their role, but continued to reap their multi-million pound bonuses.

It once again proved the correctness of Marxism - with sometimes even the main mouthpieces of capitalism reluctantly agreeing that Marx's analysis of capitalism was bang up to date.

Last year, the Economist magazine said "much of what Marx said seems to become more relevant by the day". Of course, their conclusion is not to get rid of capitalism but to shore it up.

Economic crisis is built into the DNA of capitalism. Periodic booms and slumps have never been eliminated, with wholesale destruction of value, productive capacity and labour skills that are built up over time. The

slumps drastically affect the lives and living standards of working class people and, at the same time, demonstrate the waste and senselessness of capitalism as a system. Capitalist economists over hundreds of years have been unable to solve this basic problem.

## **Boom and bust**

In every economic boom, the representatives of the capitalists claim to have found the answer!

Famously Gordon Brown, the New Labour prime minister at the time of the crash, had repeatedly claimed to have solved capitalism's ills. Even in his 2007 budget speech, only months before the crisis developed, he said: "We will never return to boom and bust".

The Socialist Party, through the pages of the Socialist and Socialism Today, had long before then analysed the processes that would lead to an inevitable crash. It was not a matter of if - it was a matter of when. This assertion was not made in the crude manner of some who claim a catastrophic crisis is around the corner every year, but on the basis of a sober analysis of economic factors.

The immediate trigger for the crisis was the loss of confidence in the big investment banks who had invested in loans that would, in reality, never be paid back. On the back of a housing bubble, the 'subprime mortgage' market in the US was making loans to people who could not afford to repay them.

These hugely risky debts were then sold off as financial products, mixed with other loans in complex ways. Banks made huge profits on their speculation, but these were built on a flimsy financial base of debt and risk.

A range of forms of speculation that were meant to spread the risk, eventually became the "financial instruments of mass destruction". The problems came when some of those risks started to fail and banks started to admit they had no idea of the real value of their investment funds.

Lehman brothers itself was massively 'leveraged'. In other words it borrowed 35 times more than the value of its assets. The banks as a whole were 'undercapitalised', lending far more proportionately than they had in liquid assets. The financial house of cards began to collapse and its impact spread worldwide. The financial crisis inevitably extended into the real economy - the production of things.

At that point, the US government stepped in to bail out big investment banks like Bear Stearns, and government-backed mortgage brokers Freddie Mae and Fannie Mac.

In the UK, the government had to step in to save Northern Rock, the Royal Bank of Scotland (RBS) and Lloyds. Chancellor Alastair Darling recalled that he had a conversation with the chairman of RBS, then the biggest bank in the world, who said that it was running out of cash. When Darling asked "how long have we got?" he was told "a few hours".

But the underlying cause of this crisis was far more than financial speculation gone wrong. Debt across the world had built up to unprecedented levels. We commented on these causes in advance.

In Socialism Today, December 2006, Lynn Walsh wrote an article titled: "Is the US Economy heading for recession?". He explained that the boom had, up until then, been sustained by consumer debt. But the growing inequality and impoverishment of workers that had occurred over a number of years was building instability into the economy.

He said of US capitalism: "Its short-sighted profits orgy has undermined its own foundations, and the system faces a future of economic crisis and political upheaval."

In another article, published in May 2007, the Socialist Party said: "Behind the liquidity tide there is a deeper source, the over-accumulation of capital. Capitalists only invest their money if they can find profitable fields of investment. Since the last phase of the post-war upswing (1945-73), capitalists have found it increasingly difficult to find profitable fields of investment in production. Despite the growth of new products and new sectors of the economy, in many sectors there is an overcapacity in relation to money-backed demand. Billions of people lack basic necessities, let alone luxury products. But they also lack the income, and

therefore the purchasing power, to buy the goods and services available within the framework of the capitalist economy."

## **Contradictions**

Capitalism has inequality and exploitation built into its foundations. Marx explained that capitalism is based on the creation of profit. This comes from the unpaid labour of the real wealth creators; the working class. Workers create value, but the bosses make a profit from paying them less than that value.

Over time, there is a tendency for workers to be unable to buy back the full value of what they produce, with a resultant overcapacity in production.

This contradiction can be overcome by capitalism for a while if the capitalists reinvest this surplus back into production. But they are now failing to do that, not even carrying through their historic mission to develop the productive forces. This underlies the 'boom-slump' cycle in capitalism.

In the run up to 2007, the debt bubble sustained the boom for a long time. It had to burst, eventually. Then, the trigger was subprime loans. But it could be the result of many different problems in the system.

Socialists contrast the anarchy of capitalism, a fundamentally unplanned system driven by the need for profits by individual owners and big corporations, rather than the needs of society, with democratic socialist planning. But to be able to plan the economy it needs to be taken out of the hands of the super-rich and to instead be publicly owned.

The bursting of the bubble had an immediate impact on the real economy. Ten million jobs were lost in the US and Europe. Last year, it was estimated that output is now 15% below what it would have been if the crash hadn't happened. In the UK, this amounts to around £4,000 per person.

This has been exacerbated by the austerity measures imposed by governments, including in Britain. The recession reduces the tax take of the government as people earn less. Yet the more they cut from public spending, the less people have to spend, resulting in a vicious circle. We now have the highest level of government debt since the World War Two.

The austerity measures have devastated public services. Real living standards, for the vast majority, have not recovered from their pre-2007 levels. Mark Carney, governor of the Bank of England, commented last year that there hasn't been a period of such weak income growth in Britain since the 19th Century.

Inequality has continued to go through the roof: The world's top 500 dollar billionaires' net worth grew 24% to \$5.38 trillion in 2017. Oxfam says 82% of the wealth generated last year went to the richest 1% of the global population. The poorest half of the world - 3.7 billion people - got no increase.

## **'Recovery'**

The economic 'recovery' since 2008 has been extremely weak, and there are many factors pointing to yet another crash on the horizon. Debt has again risen, now at 240% of the world's total annual production, amounting to \$30,000 per person!

The US editor of the Financial Times says of the banks: "What has happened is a reliance on private debt - heroin, if you like - has been replaced by a reliance on public debt - morphine. The system as a whole is still unbalanced."

A whole series of threats face the world economy, including rising tit-for-tat trade protectionism, led by Trump, as well as political turmoil and climate change.

Marxism is not deterministic. There is no 'final crisis' of capitalism. It will not collapse of its own accord. It is the role of the working class internationally, with the support of the vast majority of the world's population, to end capitalism and replace it with a saner and more humane system. The role of socialists in providing an analysis, an alternative and a strategy is vital.

The banks and financial institutions, along with the relatively small number of massive companies that dominate the economy - both in this country and around the world, need to be nationalised and brought under democratic control.

That would allow a plan to be put into place to produce what is needed, utilising the world's resources in a sustainable way to benefit the whole of society.

It would enable the ending of poverty, inequality, and all the horrors caused by capitalism.

But to achieve it, we need to build a mass movement and a socialist force that can intervene in events. The result of the austerity imposed on the world since 2008 has been political instability.

There have been huge movements to the left in many countries, but also the growth of far-right populism, as people become increasingly disillusioned with the established political parties.

Over the next few years we will face a series of economic crises and a searching for answers by millions of working class and young people. We need to build mass parties with the socialist answer to capitalism.

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## **NSSN rally: militant trade unionists share ideas to win for workers**

**Sarah Sachs-Eldridge, Socialist Party national organiser**

The National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) rally at the Trade Union Congress was a meeting of over 200 working class militants sharing their experiences to best fight the Tories, the bosses and their austerity.

The packed rally fizzed with determination and focussed on the key questions facing trade unions: how to overcome the anti-trade union laws and make action happen; the right-wing Labour councils cutting jobs and services; the question of the future facing young people and how to get them into the unions; how to fight racism that divides the working class; and, of course, how to get the Tories out and a Jeremy Corbyn-led, anti-austerity government in.

Linda Taaffe, NSSN national secretary, opened the rally. Linda reminded us of how our movement has been built on the struggle of the working class fighting together - to build the unions, to fight for the NHS and council homes, to win workers' rights. But the Tories threaten all of that. So we must take the best lessons and work out how to apply them today. How does the trade union movement respond to the situation "where the rich get bailed out and the working class gets driven out?"

Linda reminded us of the incredible movement that was mounted in 2011 to defeat Tory austerity. That movement was betrayed by the right-wing trade union leaders. However, 'there is no alternative' to workers organising, demonstrating and striking together, and that is what the NSSN is fighting for.

Praise for the role played by the NSSN in building solidarity and support for workers in struggle was on tap throughout the speeches. This included Unite the Union general secretary Len McCluskey who made a surprise visit and gave an impromptu speech. This reflects how the NSSN rally has become the most important left fringe at the TUC congress.

### **Significant victory**

One thing the rally demonstrated in spades is that any reports of the so-called death of trade unionism have been greatly exaggerated. Communication Workers Union (CWU) deputy general secretary Terry Pullinger described how had not had to go on strike to win its very significant victory, but had reached down to the workers and their reps on the ground to get a huge majority of 89% voting yes for strike action on a 74% turnout.

Royal Mail is now complaining that there are more disputes than before - because that dispute "drew a line at the abuse and the chipping away" and workers' confidence has been increased. He warned emphatically against any leadership that drifts off and becomes irrelevant to the members and reps.

Home care workers in Birmingham are striking against brutal rostering changes and pay cuts of up to £11,000 for some. They took inspiration from the bin workers who fought and won in the city last year. Mandy, one of the strike leaders, described the obstacles facing home care workers who work individually. A Blairite council that promised self-rostering and betrayed that promise after the election. And having to re-ballot under the anti-trade union laws - but they came back with a higher turnout of 57% and 97% in favour of strike action.

RMT general secretary Mick Cash spoke after the rally applauded the memory of trade union militant and RMT member Stan Herschel who sadly died recently. Mick also paid tribute to the strike by guards against the threat of driver-only operation. That dispute has been going on for years and is the longest in the union's history. One of the striking guards from Northern Rail spoke to explain the safety-critical role they play, that the rail companies only want profit and to demand support from the TUC.

## **Coordinated action**

Both the necessity of and the potential for coordinated action were a theme taken up by a number of speakers. Unite's assistant general secretary Howard Beckett spoke about how Labour councils across the board were attacking workers, raising the potential for coordinating some of those disputes across the country. Coordination was also raised up by bakers' union BFAWU general secretary Ronnie Draper when talking about action in the fast food and restaurant industry, with action planned in Wetherspoon's and McDonald's, as well as in TGI Friday's where Unite organises.

Howard was not alone in talking about the need to fight Labour councils who have not changed their spots under the leadership of Jeremy Corbyn. Bill from the victorious Mears housing workers dispute in Manchester reported that when the strikers attempted to attend a meeting of the Labour-led Manchester council, instead of meeting the workers and supporting them, the councillors cancelled the meeting!

Len McCluskey finished his speech saying it was a privilege to see what Liverpool's socialist-led council did in the 1980s. He saluted Tony Mulhearn in the audience who was a leader of the council that refused to pass on Thatcher's cuts and instead built homes and created jobs and apprenticeships. For Labour councils who say they will carry on cutting and keep their reserves for a 'rainy day', he pointed out that for working class people "it's teeming out there".

Civil service union PCS assistant general secretary Chris Baugh was among those who spoke from the floor. He was one of many who raised the need for the trade unions to appeal to the young people suffering under austerity. He rightly said that it's action that makes trade unionism attractive to young people. Amy Murphy, the newly elected socialist president of the retail workers' union, Usdaw, pushed the campaign for a £10 an hour minimum wage and an end to zero-hour contracts.

As a trade union council secretary Linda was very pleased to welcome Paul Rafferty, secretary of Manchester trade union council. He developed the point touched on by others, including PCS president Janice Godrich, about the danger of the rise of the far right. He raised that the unions have to take the lead in the fight against racism. He correctly said that we need a programme of fighting for real jobs and council homes for all, and good services to cut across the lies peddled by the far right.

Rob Williams, NSSN national chair, was the final platform speaker and closed with a clarion call to the labour movement to fight hard for a general election. To massive applause he argued that the only 'people's vote' that matters is one that ushers in a Jeremy Corbyn-led anti-austerity government. Our movement now has to organise, demonstrate and strike if necessary to bring a general election.

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# **TUC congress Brexit debate: unions must lead fight for a general election**

**Iain Dalton, TUC congress delegate (personal capacity)**

Brexit dominated the debate at the congress of Britain's trade union federation, the Trade Union Congress (TUC). Throughout the first few days of the congress, it became clear that sections of the TUC leadership are seeking to align the TUC with those demanding a second referendum to overturn the 2016 vote to leave the European Union (EU).

Scandalously, TUC general secretary Frances O'Grady commented to the press along such lines, ahead of the congress even debating the issue and deciding its position. This approach of pre-empting the congress debate - and hiding behind those not looking to overturn the 2016 vote, but who are not prepared to simply accept a Brexit deal delivered by the Tories - angered many delegates.

Her comments, alongside those of right-wing NUS president Shakira Martin, who was invited as a guest speaker, seemingly aimed to create pressure in the run-up to the Labour Party conference for Corbyn to change his position.

The danger is that this would aid the Blairites in their aim to undermine Jeremy Corbyn. Such a position is a defence of the status quo which was rejected in 2016, a status quo that has led to low pay, zero-hour contracts, expensive but substandard housing, and public services on the brink of collapse. If that is what workers are led to believe the labour movement stands for, it could potentially push many into the arms of the right.

In the congress debate, the general council speaker Steve Turner specified that this was "not a call for a second referendum" and Unite the Union general secretary Len McCluskey emphasised "this was not a vote to stay in the EU" and that "the vote we need desperately above all is a general election".

But no wonder there is confusion when, as the transport union RMT general secretary Mick Cash pointed out, Frances O'Grady refuses to rule out a second referendum on membership of the EU when interviewed. The TUC general council statement also leaves the door open to remaining in the EU Single Market, without the abolition of all its neoliberal rules.

The opposition of the RMT forced a debate. As Mick Cash pointed out, the TUC would be lining up with the likes of Chuka Umunna, Peter Mandelson, Tony Blair and the Lib Dems if it supported a 'people's vote' on reversing the 2016 result.

As Cash explained: "It lets them off the hook because the issue becomes not what sort of Brexit we want but whether there should be a second referendum.

"It lets them off the hook because what they are terrified of is not a people's vote but a general election."

While TUC figures talk of "rising to the threat of a Tory attack on workers" when discussing the EU, many workers will be wondering why the TUC hasn't risen to the threat of attacks like austerity and the latest anti-union laws.

The best way to fight such attacks is to fight for coordinated action between unions against austerity, and to mobilise a movement that can kick the Tories out.

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## **Guards move closer to beating driver-only operation on Merseyrail giving confidence to other strikes**

**An RMT union member**

"The feeling from RMT [transport union] guards at Merseyrail is that we will win with the continued support from the Aslef [drivers' union] drivers and from the Merseyside public", [we told the Socialist in March](#). After

16 days of solid strike action over the last 18 months an announcement was made on 31 August pushing back the bosses' attempts to move to driver-only operation.

This announcement came after six months of talks between Merseyrail and the RMT at conciliation service Acas. The 'deal' was hailed by some in the media as an end of the long-running dispute because Merseyrail had agreed in 'principle' and pending finance to keep a second member of staff on every train.

In reality, Merseyrail's position has moved very little from its original stance of having a second person on every train after 8pm at night. In previous statements made by Merseyrail management clearly stated a second person could be classed as an onboard cleaner, ticket inspector or security worker.

This ambiguous wording from Merseyrail and Liverpool metro-mayor Steve Rotheram has caused alarm among Merseyrail guards, as the words 'safety critical' haven't been mentioned. It's clearly obvious to all that these roles are not trained to a safety-critical standard.

A safety-critical train guard will, if not incapacitated, be required to assist with emergency safety in the event of an accident.

All Merseyrail guards and drivers who have shown outstanding solidarity throughout this dispute can see this agreement for what it is, which is, unacceptable to guards in its current form.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the Socialist Party for the truly outstanding work they've done during this dispute throwing their support behind every picket line, through their constant campaigning on stalls in Birkenhead and Liverpool and during the six months of no strike action, when many of the general public thought the Merseyrail guards' dispute had been resolved due to the lack of publicity in the local press.

The facts are, this dispute could easily be resolved by now if the Liverpool regional transport committee's - dominated by Labour councillors - reverses its decision under the instructions of metro-mayor Steve Rotheram and Liverpool city mayor Joe Anderson, who are both elected Labour mayors. Unfortunately Rotheram has said he thinks the strike action is "unreasonable".

Jeremy Corbyn has commented on Twitter that he fully supports the retention of guards on trains, yet Rotheram and Anderson ignore him. It's clear to all that Labour is two parties in one. This dispute ultimately shows that.

- Disputes are continuing on South Western Railway and Arriva Rail North (see below) where guards have been given confidence by the progress on Merseyrail to carry on the fight against driver-only operation.

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## South Western Railway

Pickets at Salisbury station on 8 September were determined to carry on their action against driver-only operated trains. They have been bolstered by the overwhelming 88% vote to renew the mandate for strike action. They said the issue remains one of the safety of the passengers on the train and at the number of stations on the Salisbury line which are unmanned late at night.

One of the pickets said that South Western Railway is putting profits before public service. Money from ticket sales is given to shareholders rather than being invested in the railway. There have been cuts in cleaning, maintenance and servicing to rolling stock on the Salisbury line.

RMT members on South Western Railway have been forced to re-ballot under Tory anti-trade union legislation. RMT president Sean Hoyle says: "The 88% vote for renewed strike action on South Western Railway with a 71% turnout will be a huge boost to RMT pickets striking on 15 September, fighting to ensure the safety-critical role of the guard and protecting safety for the travelling public and workers."

**Jane Ward**

## Arriva Rail North

The RMT took its 26th day of strike action against driver-only operation on Arriva Rail North on 8 September.

In Newcastle the strikers are clearly committed and the picket line is as strong as ever. One of the strikers commented that this participation was mirrored by guards taking industrial action across Arriva Rail North.

Strikers also commented that it was clear that the company is struggling to run trains on strike days.

Public support for the strike is growing, as it becomes increasingly clear that this strike is about passenger safety.

Messages of support to [m.thompson@rmt.org.uk](mailto:m.thompson@rmt.org.uk)

### Elaine Brunskill

Leeds Young Socialists joined RMT pickets on 1 September to support their strike action in defence of the safety-critical role of the guard on Arriva Rail North trains.

At the picket line, Young Socialists unveiled our banner backing the RMT's action and calling for the nationalisation of the railways. We met a good response from passers-by. The overwhelming majority supported keeping guards on trains and were more than happy to take the RMT's leaflets from us.

RMT members are striking every Saturday in September. We'll be going down again to support them, including on the Leeds Trade Union Council day of action on 15 September. And we are planning our own mobilisation again for 22 September.

### Leeds Young Socialists

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## Cardiff Uber Eats couriers strike back against bosses

### Ross Saunders, Socialist Party Wales

Uber Eats courier riders staged their second action in Cardiff on 3 September against low pay and insecure work.

Protesters gathered outside the company's Cardiff office on the appropriately named Vanguard Way to boycott the latest meeting managers had organised under pressure from their angry workforce. To date, no progress has been made on the demands of the riders, who have vowed to step up their campaign.

The 3 September action followed a spontaneous strike first called by Romanian riders who work for Uber Eats. The call was taken up by other riders and all refused to work as a warning shot to the company. Two of the biggest McDonald's restaurants in the city were forced to turn off the Uber app because delivery orders couldn't be filled.

Riders have been pressing the company for months to do something about a long list of grievances including long waits between jobs - up to 45 minutes over the summer - a disregard for couriers' safety, and a lack of 'boost' - a multiplier that increases the amount couriers get paid per mile.

### Minimum wage

Many riders are getting far below minimum wage at present and can hang around all day and receive only a few orders. The company uses modern technology to force workers into Victorian working conditions.

Many had reports of other riders who had been dropped by the company for standing up to them or joining a union. But they've lost their fear. They said more couriers had turned up to the boycott protest than ever attended any of management's sham meetings.

The company is trying and failing to conceal its nervousness. At the recent protest it denied the riders' union rep from the IWW union access to the meeting for fully half an hour with riders chanting "same old Uber - always waiting" until they let him speak to senior managers, who offered no concessions.

Riders played the app sound over the megaphone to cheers, showing how many calls for delivery were going unanswered.

While denying access to the workers' union rep, management called the police to try and get the protest outside dispersed. Armed officers in three vans appeared but protesters refused to be intimidated.

## **Bills**

The company has said that the slackening demand is due to the summer period, when lots of students have returned home. But riders have the same bills to pay no matter what time of year it is.

The company should pay a retainer in periods where demand slackens and a much higher rate per mile, with a guarantee that workers earn no less than a minimum wage of £10 an hour.

The riders' campaign has already been met with huge sympathy in the trade union movement and the wider working class. With strike action at both McDonald's and TGI Friday's, the potential exists to link up the disputes of service-sector workers into a powerful movement that could force considerable concessions from the bosses.

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# **Workplace news in brief**

## **Liebherr update**

Workers at [Liebherr's Sunderland plant](#) have accepted an improved pay offer.

One of the strikers contacted us to thank both the Socialist Party and National Shop Stewards Network for the support we have offered during their recent strike.

He ended by underlining the importance of industrial action, saying: "You must fight... even if you don't win, at least you've tried."

**Elaine Brunskill**

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## **Bus strike**

Some bus drivers working for Trent Barton in Nottingham have had to resort to food banks due to low pay.

Unite the Union members at the bus company were out on strike on 10 September opposing a 2.5% pay 'rise' offer which was being imposed by management. Unite officer Scott Lennon told the Socialist that drivers were being forced to work 50 to 60 hours a week to earn a decent wage. Pickets told me that some worked 13 days out of 14.

They were incensed that lies were being told to the media about wage rates. 70% of members voted for the action which will continue every Monday.

**Pete Watson**

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## **Nicaragua: With the people against the Ortega government and imperialism**

**Andre Ferrari, LSR (CWI Brazil)**

Since April this year, Nicaragua has become a bloodbath, with over 400 dead and thousands injured, arrested and disappeared.

The trigger for this process was a mass movement against the attempt of Daniel Ortega's FSLN (Sandinista Front of National Liberation) government, in agreement with the International Monetary Fund, to implement social security cuts. These would have lowered the value of pensions and raised the value of contributions.

This mass movement was savagely repressed by the government, which used both the state apparatus and paramilitary organisations to do so, with methods reminiscent of the former Somoza dictatorship.

The violence of the government radicalised the popular resistance, made up of students, peasants, indigenous people, workers and the urban poor, transforming it into a genuine rebellion against the government.

A few days later, the government was forced to retreat on the pension counter-reform, but it was too late. This social explosion was the expression of years of accumulated discontent, social tensions, and opposition to the neoliberal, pro-capitalist policies of the Ortega government.

### **FSLN degeneration**

The FSLN, led by Ortega who has ruled the country since 2007, has degenerated to the point of being transformed into another instrument in the service of big capital, and the interests of Ortega, his vice-president, Rosario Murillo, and the new rich pseudo-Sandinista oligarchs.

There is virtually nothing left of the organisation which led the revolution that toppled Somoza in 1979 and which inspired millions of workers and peasants all over Latin America. The tragic destiny of the Sandinista revolution has innumerable lessons for the left in Latin America and beyond.

Once Somoza had been brought down, the government led by Ortega and the FSLN stopped half way on the road of completing the revolutionary tasks of the day.

Contrary to what had taken place in Cuba, they avoided expropriating the whole of big business and establishing a planned economy. Their illusions in a 'mixed economy' opened the way for internal sabotage from US imperialism, including the formation of the reactionary "contras" armed force.

The imperialist offensive and the mistakes of Ortega and the Sandinistas, with the adoption of an increasingly 'pragmatic' economic policy which was more and more distant from the ideas of the revolution, led to the defeat of the FSLN and the return of the right wing to power in the 1990 election.

Since then, Ortega and the FSLN turned increasingly to the right. They built alliances with sectors of the old oligarchy and right wing, like the corrupt ex-president Arnoldo Alemán.

Ortega also sought ties with the reactionary Catholic church establishment, reconciling himself with old enemy of the Sandinistas, Cardinal Miguel Obando y Bravo, and supporting legislation to totally ban abortion in the country.

Ortega lost elections in 1996 and 2001. When he won in 2006, the leadership of the FSLN had already consolidated its turn to the right and alliances with the old Nicaraguan oligarchy.

The economic model pushed by Ortega was based on neoliberal policies of privatisation and the opening of the agribusiness, mining and fishing sectors to foreign capital. This deepened the subservient, dependent character of Nicaraguan capitalism in relation to imperialism, while at the same time guaranteeing profits and wealth to the local oligarchy and new rich elite.

An example of these policies was the project of the building of the Inter-Oceanic canal, linking the Atlantic and Pacific, which was awarded to a Chinese consortium. If it is concluded, this project will be a monumental ecological disaster and will displace 25,000 people.

Since 2014, this project has seen peasant and indigenous protests against it. The building of the canal began in 2015, but it had to be suspended due to the Chinese company's bankruptcy.

As in other Latin American countries, economic growth based on primary product exports has not eliminated social inequality and poverty, but only built up more contradictions and political volatility.

Nicaragua remains the second-poorest country in Latin America, with half the population living in poverty, rising to 68% among the rural community.

Despite still using some left or anti-imperialist rhetoric to manipulate the memory of the historic 1979 revolution, Ortega's government plays the game of the right wing and imperialism. Countless former leaders of the authentic Sandinista movement have denounced Ortega.

## **Mistaken cheerleaders**

However, there are some on the left who echo the distortions of Ortega. Recently, the secretary of international relations of the Brazilian Workers Party (PT), Monica Valente, compared the conflict in Nicaragua with the demonstrations in June 2013 in Brazil, saying they were actions by "small student groups, especially from private colleges, financed by the USA".

This statement makes it clear that the leadership of the PT has understood nothing about the 2013 protests, and even less about events in Nicaragua today.

The movement of June 2013 was not right wing, but a popular explosion, with great transformative potential which was not seized upon because of the betrayal of the traditional Brazilian left and the weakness of the new left in a process of being constructed.

In the case of Nicaragua there can be no question of siding with Ortega in the face of this massacre. He must be fought, and a left-wing, working class alternative must be built.

The role of socialists is to encourage the independent organisation and struggle of the workers and poor for their rights and interests. The movement must reject any alliance with the bosses, the right wing, imperialism or the church.

The working class, students, peasants, indigenous people and women can only rely on their own independent and organised power.

The struggle should be democratically organised from below with committees of struggle made up of elected representatives, and coordinated on a national level.

Only on this basis can a real alternative to Ortega, the traditional right and imperialism be built.

- [Full article on socialistworld.net](http://www.socialistworld.net)

# Support for Putin's regime dips over major attacks on state pensions

**Rob Jones, Socialist Alternative (CWI Russia)**

The day Russia unexpectedly won its first game in the football World Cup tournament the government announced a major attack on the pension age, first established decades ago - currently 55 years for women and 60 years for men.

Immediately after his re-election in March, Putin declared that one of the tasks of his term would be to increase the male retirement age to 63. But when the government announced its plans, it proposed that men would now retire at 67 and women at 63.

Anger was immediate. The small Confederation of Independent Trade Unions launched a petition against the reform, which within days gathered over two million signatures.

Such was the feeling that the official state trade union con-federation and even a few isolated deputies from the ruling 'United Russia' party spoke out against the reforms. This did not, of course, prevent deputies from the trade union voting for the reform in the state Duma (parliament).

Opinion polls indicate that 90% of the population are against the reforms and significant numbers say they are prepared to actively protest. Notably many of those protesting are young. They chant: "We will not live till our pension!"

If this reform goes through, Russian pensioners will have one of the highest retirement ages and lowest life expectancy rates in Europe. They will receive just 40% of previous earnings, when in most countries the elderly get over 60%.

This is on top of the fact that average wages in Russia are among the lowest in Europe. In addition, business pays practically no tax and the single-rate 13% income tax means the rich pay almost nothing to help support the poorest in society.

The government argues that while, in the past, there were three or four working people to support every pensioner, now there are less than two. The real reason for the crisis is that the wealth accumulated during the Soviet Union was robbed during the restoration of capitalism.

When the global financial crisis hit Russia in 2008 the government stopped paying its share of the pension fund to bail out the banks. To add insult to injury, the government claim that people now live longer. But the average life expectancy for males in Russia is about 70 years, which is a good decade less than that in Western Europe.

## Backtracking

Putin declared in a 40-minute TV broadcast that he "didn't like" any of the possible reforms and announced he would "only increase" the pension age to 65 and 60. This was presented as a softening of the position, but it is actually higher than the 63 years Putin proposed last May!

Rather than dissipating the anger, his speech seems to have only increased it, and a wave of further demonstrations spread across the country.

Although the official 'opposition' parties - the Communists and 'Just Russia' - voted against the reforms in parliament, these parties are incapable of mobilising. Rather than have a united demonstration against the attack on pensions, the communists declared that they would have a separate demonstration to build support for their candidate in the 9 September Moscow mayoral election.

The independent trade unions formed a bloc with Just Russia, whose leader had welcomed Putin's proposals! In their speeches, Just Russia members blamed immigrants, the unemployed and those workers whose employers pay them wages in envelopes to avoid taxes. Most significantly, both parties attracted people to their protests by paying them. This angered those genuine protesters who want to see a mass protest develop.

Socialist Alternative (CWI Russia) organised actively against the reforms, arguing for a united campaign, controlled by elected action committees, to demand no increase in the pension age, an end to cuts in health and welfare budgets, and that wages and pensions be increased to a decent level.

Pension funds should be state financed and under the democratic control of elected committees of workers and pensioners. Extra finance should be raised by proper taxes on the banks, big business and the rich.

This should be linked to the struggle to fundamentally change society, to end the rule of the capitalist oligarchs and for a democratic socialist society that plans the economy to serve the needs of the majority.

- [Full article on socialistworld.net](http://socialistworld.net)
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## Sweden: left and far right gain as establishment parties falter

Dave Carr

As expected, the racist, far-right 'Sweden Democrats' increased their share of the vote from 12.9% to 17.6% in the country's recent general election. The former fascist party was able to capitalise on the failure of the neoliberal policies of the ruling Social Democrat-led coalition.

Both the Social Democratic Party and the Moderate Party - which heads the conservative opposition coalition - suffered a significant decline in their share of the vote. Both were seen by many voters as remote, elite and clearly part of the establishment - which, of course, they are!

And despite criticising the Sweden Democrats' explicit racism, both the government and the opposition have blocked refugees and promoted nationalism - thereby fuelling the capitalist lie that migrants are to blame for society's problems.

However, while the establishment media highlighted the success of the far right, it barely mentioned the rise in vote for the Left Party from 5.7% to 7.9%.

Rättvisepartiet Socialisterna, the Socialist Party's sister party in Sweden, had mixed results in the municipal elections held at the same time.

They were able to retain two councillors in Luleå in the north. But unfortunately, they lost two seats in Haninge, south Stockholm, by just 70 votes - despite increased support - due to new election rules.

While the main parties in the coming weeks will be squabbling over the spoils of office, Rättvisepartiet Socialisterna will continue to build an anti-racist, anti-austerity workers' movement against capitalism.

- Read the full analysis at [socialistworld.net](http://socialistworld.net)
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## Ireland housing occupations

The Guardian newspaper reported: "A backlash is brewing. Using the hashtags #homes4all and #TakeBackTheCity a coalition of housing activists last month occupied a four-storey property in the heart of Dublin which has been vacant for three years.

"Dozens have rallied outside while others inside have bedded down. They remained there at the weekend in defiance of a court order to leave the property last week.

"'Injunction be damned: it's better to break the law than to break the poor,' tweeted Mick Barry, a socialist member of the Dáil, Ireland's parliament."

Mick Barry is a member of Socialist Party Ireland. The Socialist Party said: "Solidarity with North Frederick Street occupation defying injunction by landlord and developer.

"We must end reliance on the private market and oppose 'solutions' to the housing crisis that are about maximising profits and income for a super-rich elite. We demand massive investment to build social and affordable homes for those who need them."

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## Catford campaign against regeneration

### Lewisham Socialist Party

Lewisham in south London has a big problem with a lack of council and social housing. Not enough has been built and existing homes are being lost to housing associations, right-to-buy schemes and 'regeneration', social cleansing schemes.

Catford town centre is the latest target for a 'regeneration' programme and the Socialist Party organised a public meeting on 3 September to discuss the plans.

The redevelopment of surrounding areas has led to existing residents no longer being able to afford to live there. A billboard advertising one of the new developments says that a deposit of £16,000 to £20,000 is needed to secure a flat!

'Team Catford' (the group which is managing the regeneration on behalf of the council) is holding consultation meetings and has outlined the proposed changes. 276 flats in Milford Towers and Catford shopping centre will be demolished, and Lewisham council will put up rents for small businesses on Catford Broadway by £6,000.

This is an astronomical amount for any small business and it is an attempt to make up for the cut in funding from central government. Instead, the council should stand up to the Tories, say no cuts and use reserves and borrowing powers while building a campaign to win back the funding.

Milford Towers, which will be demolished, has been left unkempt in a deliberate attempt by the council to run it down to justify its claim that there is a need for regeneration. The flats have a history of crime and other problems, and in the past local people have called for it to be demolished and new like-for-like social homes for residents built.

But this is not what is planned by the council. The redevelopment will be taken over by developers, which will mean the towers will be demolished and new properties will include only a small percentage of 'affordable' housing. This is really a social cleansing exercise.

A recent assessment of new homes needed in Lewisham suggests that we need around 1,600 new homes a year to meet the demand for housing across the borough. We call for an end to 'regeneration' which drives out working class people and instead demand a mass council house building and upgrade programme to meet the needs of residents.

At the campaign meeting we made plans to lobby Team Catford, for campaign stalls and door knocking. A protest against rate hikes will take place on 15 September.

The working class is under attack and we must stand up, fight together and demand social housing.

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# Students unite and fight - free education now!

**Dana Harris, Birmingham Socialist Students**

Since 2010 students have been paying £9,000 a year for university tuition fees. In 2017 the total student debt in the UK rose to over £100 billion, according to the Student Loans Company.

Students are faced with the inescapable reality that if we want higher education we will leave uni with over £50,000 in debt. We will spend the next 30 years of our lives paying it off - if we can ever afford to at all.

And the bosses don't spend this vast sum of money on the needs of students by providing affordable housing or crucial counselling services.

Instead it's being creamed off by the bureaucratic fat cats, such as the University of Birmingham's vice-chancellor, David Eastwood. He receives a £439,000 salary package and is the highest paid uni boss in Britain.

The last general election saw a huge movement of young people behind Jeremy Corbyn's anti-austerity manifesto. It pledged to scrap tuition fees and reinstate maintenance grants for higher education, among many other pro-youth policies.

However, Corbyn and the union leaders have not yet mobilised this huge potential force. And the right-wing leaders of the National Union of Students (NUS) have left it to waste.

Last year, Socialist Students called for students across Britain to organise, to walk out of classes and march for free education on the Tories' Budget Day to make our demands heard. Where was the rallying cry from the official leaders of the students' and workers' movements?

Young people and students cannot wait for a Corbyn-led government: we need action now. We must start to build our own movement to unite students and workers and force the Tories out, whether or not the NUS supports it.

We must demonstrate and organise to fight for free education, to scrap student debt, and to end universities being treated like big business by the super-rich and their representatives. If you agree, join Socialist Students!

- Join Socialist Students: text 'join' plus your name and postcode to 07749 379 010 or visit [socialiststudents.org.uk/join](http://socialiststudents.org.uk/join)

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# Reading council plans privatisation - set a no-cuts budget instead!

**John Gillman, Reading Trade Union Council (personal capacity)**

Reading Borough Council plans to privatise many of its key services. Bins, parks, road maintenance, housing benefit payments and council tax support are all at risk.

It is threatening to restrict the free bus pass for disabled people and their carers. If it gets away with this, museums, libraries and adult education could be next.

As far as council workers and service users are concerned, it will mean suffering with job cuts, worse terms and conditions and even more decimated services. This is on top of £20 million cuts a year because of the Tory government's attacks on local authority funding and the failure of the Labour-led council to fight these cuts.

However, in what might be a sign that the council is under pressure not to carry out these proposals, it has extended the consultation period until 14 September.

A reversal of all the cuts is needed. It is the national policy of local government trade unions Unison, GMB and Unite for councils to set no-cuts budgets. Reading Council's last financial statement said it has over £28 million in reserves and that to borrow £20 million would only cost it £1.5 million a year.

On this basis the council could set a legal no-cuts budget which would be popular, especially if it included building real, affordable council homes, restoring services, increasing the number employed with trade union rates of pay, terms and conditions, and job security for council staff.

Labour's general election manifesto promised an immediate £4 billion injection to local government and a review of council finances. Corbyn should pledge now that any council prepared to stand up to the Tories and implement a no-cuts budget would have the funding restored on day one of a Corbyn-led government.

If the councillors addressed the council workforce with the above programme it would have mass support among council workers and the wider working and middle classes. If councillors are not prepared to fight on such a programme then working class people could support standing anti-cuts council candidates that will.

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## **EDL outnumbered and confronted in Worcester**

### **Worcester Socialist Party**

The Socialist Party was involved in organising a counter-demonstration against another visit of the far-right English Defence League (EDL) to Worcester on 1 September. Together with the trade union movement and local Asian youth we taught the racists a lesson they will not forget too soon!

The EDL billed the day as the 'Battle of Worcester' following [an earlier demo on 21 July](#) when its supporters were outnumbered and prevented from marching. But barely 100 followed their call.

The EDL even resorted to giving out flags to children in the street to make their numbers look larger!

The speeches were full of the usual hate, lies and historical inaccuracies, and less and less of their crowd continued to clap as the rants became more and more extreme.

At this point the 600-strong counter-demonstration marched into view. Socialist Party members led the chants, joined by trade unionists, such as the large Fire Brigades Union contingent, and hundreds of local supporters.

Serious questions have to be asked about decisions made by the police. Close-up filming by the police of the faces of Asian youth as they travelled to our event was designed to intimidate.

This was followed by the detention of one of the local Asian young people who helped lead our previous protest. A meeting has been organised with the police to discuss these concerns.

The day was a victory with many protesters returning to the local community centre where they were served with tea and cake. However, we know that this was just a single battle.

Under the current system there will be other disaffected people who could potentially fall into the dead-end trap of racism. We need to replace the rotten capitalist system, linking the fight against racism to the struggle for decent jobs, homes and services for all.

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## **Fight against billionaire Newcastle boss Mike Ashley continues**

Socialist Party members stood alongside a group of Newcastle United supporters on 26 August, as part of [our continuing campaign against billionaire boss Mike Ashley](#) for his despicable treatment of Sports Direct workers and mismanagement of Newcastle United.

Around 200 people came out in support of the demonstration outside Sports Direct in Newcastle city centre, where we heard excellent contributions from three Socialist Party members as well as trade unionists and supporters of the club.

Our message received huge support, especially our demands that the club be brought under democratic control. We demanded that Mike Ashley step down but also emphasised that only by kicking big money out of football can we reclaim the game completely.

We also highlighted the various ways that Ashley has exploited workers in Sports Direct, including massive use of zero-hour contracts, below-minimum-wage pay and the despicable 'six strikes and you're out' policy which forced workers back onto the job despite ill health, for fear of being sacked.

With his purchase of House of Fraser, our need to tackle billionaire bullies like Mike Ashley only grows stronger - we will continue to fight for both workers and fans.

**Dan Gilmore, Newcastle Socialist Party**

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## **When working class women dominated football**

**Nick Fray, Newcastle Socialist Party**

One hundred years ago the 'beautiful game' came to be dominated by women.

World War One saw a generation of male footballers conscripted and sent to fight and die on the Western front and around the world. Women suddenly found themselves in great demand at munitions factories around the country. Over 900,000 women worked in them.

Munitionettes worked with very hazardous chemicals on a daily basis without adequate protection. Many worked with TNT.

Prolonged exposure to nitric acid turned their skin a yellow colour. These women were popularly called canary girls.

The chemicals also created serious health risks for the munitionettes, including severe harm to the immune system, liver failure, fertility problems, and many other very serious side effects.

Another hazard was the risk of explosion. One explosion at a munitions factory in Chilwell near Nottingham in 1918 killed over 134 workers and injured hundreds more.

Most factories employed a welfare officer to monitor the health and behaviour of their new female workforce, and actively encouraged them into recreation in what little spare time they had. Between long, heavy and very dangerous shifts, the women workers began playing various sports.

Football became the game to play. The informal kickabouts at their breaks became popular for the women. An activity that was previously considered unsuitable for the 'delicate female frame' was now encouraged as good for health, well-being and morale.

As the war progressed, the women's game became more formalised, with football teams emerging from the munitions factories. The teams which sprang up - usually named after the factories they worked in - filled a vacuum. They represented, for a brief moment on a Saturday afternoon, an important means of escape for both players and spectators from the war's horrors and factory monotony.

## **Killed off**

Women's football was already established, but until the war it hadn't been well received. Initially women footballers played in skirts, were regarded as a novelty and were frequently ridiculed, but their skills, talent and enthusiasm soon saw them being taken seriously, with large crowds watching them play.

Bella Reay played for Blyth Spartans, the biggest and most successful of the women's teams in the north east of England. Bella Reay scored a colossal 133 goals in one season.

Once the war ended the munitions factories closed and women were forced back into domestic servitude. On 5 December 1921 the Football Association governing body voiced strong opinions about football's unsuitability for women, and effectively killed off the rise of women's football, banning clubs from allowing women's games to be played at their grounds.

Blyth Spartans Ladies folded in 1919, but Bella, among others, was to go on and play for other teams on unofficial grounds. Some women's football matches were organised in 1921 to raise funds for miners and their families during a three-month coal strike.

It was a period when miners and other workers struggled to stop savage wage cuts imposed by the Tory-Liberal government and mine-owning industrialists (see ['Black Friday'](#)).

## **Golden era**

The best women's football team around this time was arguably Dick Kerr Ladies in Preston.

Their renowned striker Lily Parr is recognised as the greatest goal scorer in English history, male or female, since she reputedly scored more than a thousand goals during her 31-year career between 1920 and 1951.

One Dick Kerr game attracted 53,000 spectators at Goodison Park, with another 14,000 trying to get in! A bigger crowd than most teams in the top-tier Premier League can attract today. It's possible, if the ban in 1921 hadn't been imposed, that women's football would already be equal in popularity to the men's game.

With the war now over, devastated communities attempted to put themselves back together. Factories closed and women who had been galvanised and liberated during wartime found themselves being quietly shunted back into domestic life.

A golden era of women's football was to be short lived. Despite this, a small number of female teams continued for a while, Dick Kerr Ladies being one. But the women's game became increasingly overshadowed by the return and growth of the men's game.

It wasn't until a full 50 years later that women were accepted back onto grounds to play. The game has continued to grow from there. The legacy of the forgotten women's footballers deserves to be recognised.

These pioneering women not only managed to achieve phenomenal success, they were inspirational, and football owes them for their considerable legacy. Who knows what other achievements and records may have been broken had it not been for the repressive actions of the footballing authorities.

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# **The Socialist inbox**

## **Do you have something to say?**

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

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

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

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## Capitalism and education

Regarding the back page of issue 1007 and the comments of Adam Abdullah (see ['Exam factories, cuts and violence - fight for our future'](#)).

Capitalism only educates the working class to the point that a person has sufficient intelligence to do the mundane work required to further the interests of the 1%.

I had a failed education. When I was doing my Ordinary National Certificate my lecturer informed me: "The British education system has failed you. Here you are boys and girls, 17 to 18 years old, working for banks, building societies and insurance companies. And you don't know the first thing about economics." He was so very correct and I remember it well.

I wish Adam well with his GCSEs in 2019 and must remind you all of the words of George Orwell from his book 1984, "hope lies with the proles."

**Adrian B Rimington, Chesterfield**

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## Tribunal said 'no'

After nine months and three tribunals they said 'no'. They stole two weeks' money at the start of my claim for 'universal credit' and two weeks at the end.

This is a government of thieves, liars and politicians who either destroy your life or end it.

After nine months waiting, I went to appeal court for the third time to retrieve the money they stole from me. As the magistrate had a sign round his neck saying I've already made up my mind, I was not confident.

I was sent another letter to further appeal, and rang Cardiff to be told I am 58 in the queue. Is there another planet?

**Mike, Southampton**

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## Socialist fighters or Blairite poodles?

The question of the realignment of British politics could be very interesting in the coming months. If the Brexit deal, or no deal, is not to the liking of politicians such as Rees-Mogg and Boris Johnson, they could break away from the Tories and form a right-populist party, with the likes of Farage and his ilk.

Obviously the Blairites wish to keep Corbyn from forming a left Labour government. If a general election is called in the autumn, the Blairites could split from Labour leaving May and the Tories with a 'centre-right' organisation.

However, to quote the president of the RMT transport union, Sean Hoyle, if Labour isn't elected, it would be more beneficial to have say 60 socialist fighters in parliament than 250 Blairite poodles to this rotten system.

A left-wing Labour Party could soon be democratised, providing all socialist parties, groups and individuals were allowed re-entry. One thing's for certain: we are entering interesting times with great opportunities for

the ideas of socialism to advance and take hold.

Finally, to quote Len McCluskey, general secretary of Unite the Union: if the Blairites want to go, just go. I'd like to know the views of other comrades.

**Bill Buchanan, Nottingham**

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## Audio version of this document

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

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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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## Audio version of this document

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<http://www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/27938>