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Cutting Cameron complains to local council

We can defeat the Tory cuts!

Nick Chaffey, Socialist Party Southern region secretary

It's only five months since the general election, when champagne corks popped in the mansions of Tory MPs and boardrooms of their corporate sidekicks. But jubilation among the establishment is giving way to a dawning reality that austerity - planned poverty - is not so popular.

The first doubters were the 70 Tory MPs in the most marginal seats who realised that by cutting tax credits to low-income families they would be hit hard by angry electors.

Now, as council budget proposals for next year see the light of day, opposition to further cuts is shaking the ground beneath the sheltered gardens of West Oxfordshire MP, David Cameron.

On 14 November, 500 campaigners organised a 'baby-blockade' in Oxford. Protests across Oxfordshire at the planned closure of 36 of 44 children's centres by the Tory-led council have pushed a "disappointed" Cameron to write to the council leader, urging him to think again.

What pitiful hypocrisy from the architect of austerity, whose militant mantra of the super-rich '1%', is 'cut the deficit to create prosperity for all'. Yet funding for children's centres across England has been cut by 28% in just three years.

Letter

Cameron complained in his letter that Oxfordshire council could avoid service cuts because the reduction in government financial support to the council was only a "slight fall". And, anyway, couldn't backroom staff be cut instead?

A less than happy Tory council leader replied that the "slight fall" amounted to £72 million or 37%, and that 40% of its most senior staff and 2,800 jobs in total have been cut. Since 2010, £626 million 'savings' had been made by the council!

The Socialist Party warned that these austerity policies would fail to revive the economy and instead would simply line the pockets of the mega-rich - who are now twice as rich as they were in 2009.

As the mighty tremble, the potential exists for a knock-out blow to be delivered. Jeremy Corbyn's welcome anti-austerity stand must be matched by Labour councillors.

If allied to anti-cuts campaigners and council trade unions, this could lead to a national revolt against council cuts (see editorial pages 6&7). Oxford City Labour council could put itself at the forefront of this battle.

At a recent meeting in Oxford, young Socialist Student activists backed the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC - an electoral coalition involving the RMT transport union, the Socialist Party and others) letter to Labour councillors appealing for them to vote against cuts.

If the House of Lords can vote against cuts, why not Labour councils?

How to defend Corbyn and defeat austerity

Jeremy Corbyn continues to face savage and relentless attacks from the capitalist establishment and also from within Labour.

The latest example has been scurrilous attacks by the Murdoch-owned Sky News website, which ran a 'Jihadi Jez' headline following the horrendous terrorist attacks in Paris, merely because Jeremy Corbyn had suggested it would have been better if 'Jihadi John' could have faced trial (instead of an extra judicial killing).

Unsurprisingly, the article was packed with attacks on Corbyn from figures in the Labour machine. This included John Woodcock MP, chair of Labour's backbench defence committee, who condemned Corbyn's position on the Middle East as "willed powerlessness".

Woodcock's position, of course, is to support increased Western intervention in Syria, including UK airstrikes. But this would do nothing to end the nightmare facing the people of Syria and Iraq. It would only make it worse, as Jeremy Corbyn has said bringing: "more conflict, more mayhem, and more loss".

Nor would it do anything to protect people in Britain and elsewhere from the nightmare of the kind of horrific terrorist attacks that took place in Paris on Friday; on the contrary it will make them more likely to occur.

Party structures

This is just the latest attack on Corbyn in a clear escalation by the right wing of civil war in the Labour Party, as they try to undermine the anti-austerity and anti-war programme on which Corbyn was elected.

It would be a major mistake to imagine it is possible to pacify the Labour right, trying to 'peacefully co-exist' with the Blairites while they conduct an all-out war, with the full backing of the capitalist class.

To defeat the right requires building on the 'Corbyn surge' to create a mass movement against austerity. Only a movement of this kind will be able to launch a serious fight to transform Labour so that it not only has an anti-austerity leader, but is an anti-austerity party.

This is not possible on the basis of accepting the current, highly-undemocratic, Labour Party structures.

To say, as Jeremy did, for example, that he was making it 'crystal-clear' he opposed mandatory reselection of MPs was a mistake. It emboldened the right and can potentially disarm the hundreds of thousands of workers and young people who would like to deselect pro-war, pro-austerity Blairite MPs.

Instead of making political and organisational retreats it is essential to stand firm on the anti-austerity programme which delivered a landslide victory in the Labour leadership election and attempt to organise all anti-austerity forces in defence of Jeremy Corbyn.

A 'council of war' involving all anti-austerity forces - including the non-affiliated unions, the Socialist Party and others - is urgently needed.

At this stage the unaffiliated unions' best means of supporting Jeremy Corbyn is not to affiliate - which means handing over large sums of cash to the right wing-controlled Labour Party machine and receiving virtually no influence in return.

Far better now to directly fund Jeremy Corbyn's 'anti-austerity' Labour and help the fight to democratise the Labour Party.

One vital demand should be for all political forces that have been fighting against austerity to be welcomed into Labour. This means removing all bans and proscriptions against socialists but also extending the existing list of acceptable affiliated organisations to include the Socialist Party, the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, anti-austerity forces within the Green Party, and others.

This, in practise, would re-create the vibrant coalition structure of the Labour Party when it was founded, involving trade unions, the co-op movement, social movements and different socialist parties.

It would be a struggle for a force that could take up and defeat the capitalist establishment, which is gathering its forces - including within the Labour Party - to defeat the Corbyn movement.

Labour councils

Another essential strand of the battle against austerity is to fight for Labour councils to refuse to implement austerity locally. Local authorities have already suffered 39% budget cuts over the last five years, with more to come.

Up until now Labour councils have dutifully implemented the cuts demanded by the Tory government. An important element in Jeremy Corbyn's victory in the Labour leadership contest was his urging "Labour councils to stand together against the cuts". This can only mean: don't implement these cuts, which will only add to the already unbearable suffering of working class people.

The combined financial reserves of Labour councils with elections next May amount to a considerable £4.4 billion. For all 100-plus Labour-controlled councils it is much higher. What is to stop Labour councils coming together and - via pooling their reserves and using prudential borrowing powers - collectively refusing to implement a single further cut?

Such a stand would create the conditions to build a mass movement which could potentially stop Tory austerity in its tracks. Clearly, many Labour councillors are on the right of the party and would not be prepared to refuse to implement austerity. But if Jeremy Corbyn were to make a clear call for action of this kind it would encourage more Labour councillors to act and would also enormously increase his standing among the many council workers and service users who are facing cuts.

Conversely, if the new 'anti-austerity' Labour Party was seen to uncritically back Labour councils implementing cuts it would undermine Jeremy Corbyn's anti-austerity stance and inevitably disillusion his potential supporters.

The Socialist Party has a record of standing anti-austerity candidates in elections as part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, along with the RMT (transport workers' union) and others. Of course pro-austerity right-wingers have criticised us for this, but how else could trade unionists, community campaigners and socialists have developed a political voice against unrelenting austerity from councils of all political stripes?

We do not wish to stand against Labour candidates in the future; but to prevent this being necessary requires a strategy to develop anti-austerity Labour councils who are prepared to oppose the cuts not only in words but in deeds.

Jeremy Corbyn's victory has lifted the confidence of all those who oppose austerity and has already dealt a blow to the establishment. However if the right succeed in containing and undermining him the danger is that those drawn around Corbyn's campaign will become disillusioned.

This would represent the loss of another favourable opportunity to strengthen the workers' movement

in the battle against capitalism and its political representatives - the Tories and other forces that base themselves on outmoded capitalism.

There is an urgent need for all those who oppose austerity to discuss how we can defend Jeremy Corbyn's leadership of the Labour Party by building a mass movement against austerity.

Tories flog bank assets to hellhound US profiteers

Tom Baldwin

The Tories have sold off another £13 billion of public assets to a US private equity firm. This time it was mortgages from failed bank Northern Rock, bought as part of Gordon Brown's bailout of the banking system.

Chancellor George Osborne is hailing this as a success because the mortgages have not been sold at a loss. This is certainly an improvement on previous sell-offs. But overall, the taxpayer has made a big net loss on Northern Rock.

Loss

The privatisation of Royal Mail and the sale of RBS shares earlier this year also made a loss of over £1 billion each. This shattered Osborne's portrayal of himself as careful guardian of the country's finances.

It will likely not prove a good deal for mortgage holders. Cerberus, the casino-capitalist buyer named after the three-headed dog which guards hell, has a record of tough enforcement of any breaches of contract. Described by one property developer as "ruthless, unjust and unreasonable", it specialises in risky or 'distressed' assets.

Greedy, speculative behaviour by finance firms was a big factor in the financial crash in the first place. Banks sold 'sub-prime' mortgages - where homeowners would have problems paying them back. So the loans the banks thought would be earning them money were actually worthless.

The then-Labour government rescued the banks by buying up this bad debt, at huge cost to the taxpayer, fully expecting to hand it back to the bosses when it could make them money again. The Tories have dutifully carried out this programme.

The Socialist Party said at the time we should not have just nationalised the debts and let the bosses keep the profits.

We fight for whole financial system to be in public hands, not the hands of these private sharks. Run finance under democratic workers' control to serve society's needs, not just inflate a few bankers' bonuses.

Athletics doping scandal: big business profits behind global sports corruption

Simon Carter

In a dramatic move, the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF - the world's governing sports body) has provisionally suspended the Russian athletics federation. This follows a damning report by the World Anti-Doping Agency (Wada) accusing the Russians of "state-sponsored doping".

The report claims to have evidence of "direct intimidation and interference by the Russian state with the Moscow laboratory operations". The Russian anti-doping federation "gave athletes advance notice of tests, hid missed tests, bullied doping control officers and their families and took bribes".

As Daley Thompson, the former Olympic gold medallist, remarked: "This to my mind is a ten or eleven on the Lance Armstrong scale [the disgraced cyclist]. This is much worse than what [ex-Fifa president] Sepp Blatter has been doing."

But the IAAF, headed since August by former Tory MP Lord Coe, hardly emerges smelling of roses. The report described it as being "inexplicably lax in following up suspicious blood profiles". The Wada report also claims to have evidence of multiple rule breaches by IAAF officials.

Coe has remained tight-lipped about these claims. He is tied to big business and its domination of world sports. The peer made millions via his consultancy company at the 2012 London Olympics, and had been receiving six-figure sponsorship from sports giant Nike.

With billions of dollars involved in sponsorship and advertising, officials taking kickbacks - and a hunger to succeed at all costs by athletes - go hand in hand. The International Olympic Committee has a history of officials mired in corruption, as has its football counterpart Fifa, and cycling body UCI.

Cash

But while officials and top athletes cream in the cash, lesser-known athletes financially struggle. And working class supporters are fleeced by expensive tickets and pay-to-view TV subscriptions.

Investment in grassroots sports - in Britain, a promised legacy of the 2012 Olympics - has suffered from government austerity cuts. Fewer young people are involved than before. Meanwhile, school sports grounds are sold off by cash-strapped local authorities.

The problem of corruption at the heart of world sport is capitalism, and the prestige and profit sport confers. Reclaiming the games for the public good is long overdue.

Councils won't spend a penny

A Labour councillor responsible for closing all his area's public toilets has been caught relieving himself on the street.

Police fined South Lanarkshire deputy leader Jackie Burns for urinating in Hamilton town centre on 7 November. Burns defended closing all the Scottish council's public lavatories in May, blaming £22 million of central cuts.

His authority has nearly £50 million in usable reserves out of a total £1 billion reserve fund. It could use these, along with borrowing powers, to buy time to build a campaign to win that money back.

Medieval

This would defend vital jobs and services - and prevent people caught short from revisiting the medieval system of open sewers.

Camden council in north London plans to follow suit. The Labour authority proposes closing some public conveniences and charging for the remainder.

The total value? £250,000. That's one third of one percent of Camden's planned £75 million cuts.

Quite the saving.

Councillor Merik Apak, the borough's environment chief, said: "It all adds up." When it comes to heaping misery on ordinary people - whether through job cuts or the basic indignity of not having a toilet - it certainly does.

Them & Us

Homeless kids...

Over 100,000 children in the UK will be homeless this Christmas.

Housing charity Shelter makes this the highest level since the 2008 financial crisis. Numbers are up by 15,000 on last year.

Families forced into temporary bed-and-breakfast accommodation, up by a quarter in the past year alone, total 27,000. This means a threefold increase since Tory David Cameron came to power in 2010.

Many children are forced to share beds with their parents. And it is no surprise that insecure, cramped conditions have led to heart-breaking anxiety and depression in youngsters.

The total figure is equivalent to four homeless children in every school in Britain.

...empty homes

Meanwhile, England and Wales have more than a million homes lying empty, according to the Office for National Statistics.

And in Scotland, recent figures from the Scottish Empty Homes Partnership count at least £4.3 billion worth of housing unused. That's 27,000 homes - but Scotland's waiting list totals about 150,000 households.

But this housing is in private hands, waiting to be turned into profit. The Socialist says: nationalise empty homes!

The number of 'property millionaires' - who own homes totalling more than £1 million - has doubled since 2012. Property website Zoopla estimates there are now half a million in the UK.

And in spite of empty homes, many urban areas suffer from appalling overcrowding. The number of households with six people or more rose by a quarter between 2001 and 2011.

A mass programme of council house building could solve this and create jobs.

The end of social housing? How can we solve the housing crisis?

Paula Mitchell (London Socialist Party secretary) and Suzanne Muna (Unite LE1111 housing branch secretary and Unite executive)

The cat is out of the bag. As the Financial Times reported on 13 November: "Chancellor George Osborne is considering a radical multibillion-pound plan to privatise the government's stake in housing associations".

Coupled with the new Housing Bill, the Tories aim to complete what Margaret Thatcher started - the end of social housing.

The government recently announced that housing associations, which are independent charities, would be brought into the public sector. Housing associations have a debt of about £60 billion and a £45 billion historic public grant. Bringing them into the public sector is simply in order that they can be fully privatised.

This step would be the biggest privatisation yet - a windfall for the Treasury, and opening up £133 billion of assets to private profit.

Already, one of the largest housing associations, Genesis, has said it no longer wants to be in the business of social housing, but to build for sale, rent at market rates, or shared ownership. Inside Housing reported: "Neil Hadden, CEO of Genesis, references Inside Housing's recent survey finding that around a third of housing associations will stop building sub-market rent homes. He suspects the other two thirds are 'lying'."

The development of social housing was a huge step forward for working class people. But the ruling class has never granted us anything out of kindness.

The post-World War One government subsidy for council housing was in response to mass rent strikes and the Russian Revolution. The parliamentary secretary to the Local Government Board said: "The money we are going to spend on housing is an insurance against Bolshevism and revolution".

Revolution

The 1945 Labour government created the welfare state, including large scale council house building.

But the rich have never accepted a social responsibility for housing and their political representatives have spent the last 35 years dismantling it. Thatcher's Right to Buy legislation in 1980 forced councils to sell off homes at a massive discount to tenants.

One million houses were sold within ten years. At the same time, spending restrictions reduced new council house building. Then in 1988, Large Scale Voluntary Transfer enabled the moving of housing stock from council ownership into housing association control (which was then massively accelerated under Tony Blair).

This government of the rich wants to provide massive profits for landlords, building companies and property speculators, while immiserating working class people.

Austerity

So far they have gotten away with it. Their biggest advantage has been the unwillingness of right-wing leaders of the trade unions and Labour to mount a fight.

But now the election of Jeremy Corbyn to the Labour leadership shows the potential for a fight. The huge enthusiasm for an anti-austerity programme needs to be organised.

Britain faces a massive housing crisis, and the eye of the storm is London.

'Social cleansing' is official - statistics published in the summer suggest that tens of thousands of families have been forced out of inner London in the last five years. 50,000 have been placed outside of their borough by local councils.

Austerity attacks - the bedroom tax, benefit caps, pay cuts and job losses - and a massive lack of housing that ordinary people can afford means working class people are driven out and areas become 'gentrified'.

In April only 43 houses for sale in the capital were affordable to first-time buyers. Small two-bed houses in normal working class streets sell for half a million pounds.

Luxury housing typically features apartments at up to £12 million. Prices have soared as international billionaires buy up property.

In last six years overseas companies have bought £100 billion of property in London. Much of this is purely speculative. A third of the property on 'Billionaires' Row' in Hampstead, to a value of £350 million, is lying empty.

Playground for the rich

Government policies such as Help to Buy and very low interest rates, along with the influx of overseas wealth, have blown a housing bubble just waiting for another crisis.

Private rents are sky high. The average rent for a two-bed home is now over £2,200 a month.

Average rents take up over half the pay of people like teachers and social workers, and would consume the whole pay of lower paid workers. Rip-off estate agents add to the misery with huge fees.

And private rent has little security of tenure. Evictions of private rented households in England have doubled in five years.

In the year up to September 2015, 22,531 private renting households were forced out of their homes. As Shelter comment: "Tragically, this year marks the shocking milestone of 100,000 children waking up homeless at Christmas".

The government has encouraged growth of the buy-to-let market, which is now 20% of all housing wealth. As well as big landlords this now involves large numbers of ordinary people in a precarious effort to secure a 'pension' for their future.

And now communities face 'regeneration': councils or housing associations hand homes and public land over to private developers, with existing residents shunted out with limited rights to return. For example on the Isle of Dogs in Tower Hamlets, all the housing stock owned by One Housing Group is to be 'regenerated', and only 30% will be 'affordable'.

Housing campaigners estimate that there are 800,000 too few homes in London.

Community support

Big numbers of community campaigns have grown up to defend estates against social cleansing, such as BoleynDev 100, Save Our Island Homes, New Era, Focus E15, the Aylesbury, Fred Wigg & John Walsh Towers, Sweets Way and many more. Socialist Party members are involved wherever we can be.

Campaigns can include lobbies and demonstrations, and petitions that force councils to debate. It is important that campaigns strive to involve as many residents as possible, with inclusive democratic organising groups, and seek to appeal to the wider community for support.

Solidarity with those facing unfair eviction from individual homes, as well as blockades and occupations to defend estates, are necessary.

The methods of a hundred years ago could return in the form of rent strikes - especially there is the possibility of this developing on student campuses.

Victories are extremely important both for the people directly involved and in increasing confidence more widely. But at the moment these campaigns tend to be short-term and not linked.

The Socialist Party argues that wherever possible campaigns should be brought together in towns and boroughs, with local demos such as those in Waltham Forest and Haringey, and the London and Wales Marches for Homes earlier this year.

Trade unions

The need for a mass movement is one of the reasons why we demand that trade unions take up housing.

Following a series of high-profile battles over pay and conditions, the Unite housing workers branch has initiated a Sector Standards campaign. The branch also produced a Housing Manifesto with a set of demands that can be used for elections. Other trade unions have also started to campaign on housing needs of their members.

Trade unions can play a crucial role, not only in organising housing and construction workers, but also using their strength and power to fight for homes for all.

Unite housing workers have raised a proposal for a national housing alliance initiated by Unite, holding out the potential of a powerful national body which can draw together the strength of trade unions with community campaigns.

Tories' Housing Bill

'Pay to Stay' requires tenants in social housing on higher incomes to pay market, or near-market, rents. Right to Buy is extended to Housing Association tenants. The subsidy for this is from state funds: the Bill requires councils to dispose of expensive vacant properties to fund new 'affordable' housing.

The Bill includes a 'starter homes provision', but Shelter has calculated that most will be unaffordable to people on average incomes.

The Bill gives the Secretary of State further powers to intervene (a total of 32 new powers!), including to reduce regulations on housing associations.

A programme to solve the housing crisis

Demands on the Greater London Authority (Assembly and Mayor)

Jeremy Corbyn was elected Labour leader on a programme to build council houses and cap rents. The 2016 London elections give a huge opportunity to fight to end the housing crisis, building on this victory. The GLA controls a budget of £17 billion plus extra from the regional housing fund. It develops a housing strategy for the whole of London which borough councils are expected to comply with. It can use same prudential borrowing that councils can. Thus the GLA has the capacity to be the spearhead of an anti-austerity fight.

- An anti-austerity Greater London Authority could announce an immediate moratorium on 'social cleansing' schemes
- It could build houses and take over empty speculative property to provide 800,000 genuinely affordable homes with lifetime tenancies
- It could set a London rent cap

The land is there - Transport for London alone owns 5,700 acres of land. There are plans to build 10,000 homes in the next decade, on 300 acres. But it has the space to build nearly 200,000!

Demands on councils

There are now no excuses left for Labour councils. The Socialist Party is part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, which has stood anti-austerity candidates against cutting councillors. We appeal to all Labour councillors to take a stand and act to solve the housing crisis!

Councils could lead a fight, like Liverpool City Council did in the 1980s, when, under a socialist leadership (Militant - now the Socialist Party), they refused to implement Tory cuts. Instead the council built 5,400 council houses, created proper apprenticeships and jobs, and mounted a mass campaign to win the funding from Thatcher's Tory government.

Using current reserves and borrowing powers there is enough money for councils to build hundreds of thousands of homes.

- Councils should refuse to implement the cuts - including the bedroom tax, benefit caps, council tax cuts and 'pay to stay'. Immediately cease all evictions due to austerity attacks
- Stop all schemes involving 'social cleansing'. Renovate council housing without privatisation
- Start a major plan of council house building. Bring privatised housing management back in-house
- Rent controls to cap rents at a genuinely affordable level. Register private landlords to ensure lifetime tenancies, decent homes standards, and no unfair evictions. Set up council lettings agencies as an alternative to rip-off landlords
- Take over long-term empty property to renovate and let as council property
- Enact sector standards for workers in housing. Stop the use of blacklisting firms. £10 an hour minimum wage

How to achieve homes for all - take the wealth off the 1%!

- Tax the super-rich
- Housing benefits that reflect real cost of renting
- Nationalise the large building companies and land
- Nationalise the banks to ensure cheap mortgages
- For a democratic socialist society that puts the needs of the majority, including decent, affordable housing, before the profits of the tiny minority

Report: 'Labour Young Socialists'

How can young people organise to support Jeremy Corbyn?

Young Socialist Party members

The raging civil war within the Labour Party and the Blairite offensive against Jeremy Corbyn formed the backdrop to the 'Labour Young Socialists' rally on 11 November. But the approach of the meeting's organisers - in the main people allied with small group Workers' Liberty - failed to live up to the seriousness of the situation or to offer a way forward.

The meeting was around 100 strong - showing that there is a thirst for political ideas and organisation among young Corbynistas. We had expected to hear from John McDonnell, but he was unable to attend due to other commitments.

Instead, the agenda consisted of an item on the new higher education green paper, a discussion on the witch-hunts and exclusions taking place in Labour and a general conversation on 'what we should do practically'.

Attendees were also informed by the chair that this 'wasn't a decision making meeting' and that therefore nothing could be voted on or agreed. Socialist Party members challenged this and argued that there should, at the very least, be an opportunity for the meeting to vote indicatively on proposals.

Education

The first discussion, introduced by two leading members of the National Campaign against Fees and Cuts, outlined the seriousness of the attacks on education the Tories are preparing.

But they put forward little strategy, either for organising on campus, or for addressing the question of Labour's policies for universities and education generally.

Socialist Students national organiser Claire Laker-Mansfield spoke in this discussion and raised the importance of Jeremy Corbyn's support for free education in him winning the enthusiastic backing of so many young people.

She pointed out the systematic attempt of Labour's right-wing parliamentary party to undermine the policies Jeremy Corbyn won such a huge mandate for.

In light of that, Claire proposed that the meeting take a vote to re-affirm its support for free education as well as its intention to fight against any potential retreat from this pledge.

This was applauded and clearly had support in the meeting. But unfortunately the chairperson refused to allow any vote to take place.

The discussion then moved on to the question of witch-hunts, purges and exclusions. Another small group, Socialist Appeal, had circulated a motion beforehand, calling for the re-instatement of Corbyn's aide Andrew Fisher, who has been victimised by the right on the supposed grounds that he had supported a candidate standing against Labour at the last election.

But Socialist Appeal's statement did not challenge the whole, illegitimate basis of Andrew Fisher's suspension, as well as the expulsions of other Labour left-wingers and anti-cuts councillors. Instead it

gave far too much ground to the right, conceding that "no members of the Labour Party should give support to other political parties".

In practice, this argument means that loyalty to the Labour rule book, inherited by Jeremy Corbyn from Tony Blair et al, should come before loyalty to working class people.

Cuts

Socialist Party member Sarah Sachs-Eldridge pointed out that in areas where Labour councillors have taken a stand to defend local jobs and services by voting against cuts, they have been expelled from the Labour group for doing so.

Where these councillors have stood for re-election, they have had to do so either as independents or under the umbrella of another party or organisation, in many cases that of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition.

Indeed, in the vast majority of areas in last year's elections, backing an anti-austerity candidate necessarily meant supporting someone standing outside of Labour.

What's more, these were among the grounds on which over 50,000 - mainly Corbyn supporters - were excluded from voting in the leadership election in the first place.

Social media statements supporting anti-cuts and TUSC candidates, or even tweets backing community campaigns, were used by the right-wing Labour machine to show people did not share the party's 'aims and values' and thus strip them of their right to vote.

Rather than conceding ground to the Blairites, Jeremy Corbyn and his supporters must instead go on the offensive. They must demand an immediate end to the attacks on socialists and Corbyn backers, and the reinstatement of all those excluded on these grounds, starting with anti-cuts councillors.

Indeed, as Sarah pointed out, to wide applause, it should be pro-austerity, pro-war and anti-working class MPs and councillors who have to worry. Labour members and trade unions should be given the democratic right to re-select them and replace them with genuine class fighters.

Again, the chair refused to allow any voting to take place on the circulated statements or on the issues generally, meaning no decisions could be taken.

Clearly keen to move the discussion on from the more 'difficult' political questions, Michael Chessum, a former president of the University of London Union and an ally of Workers' Liberty, spoke. He argued that there was no need for further political debate and that we should instead move on to a more 'practical conversation about what to do'.

But what should have been the most concrete discussion was actually the most directionless part of the meeting. Members of both Workers' Liberty and Socialist Appeal spoke to generally encourage people to attend Labour party meetings, and make vague suggestions of raising 'left-wing motions'.

But there were no clear ideas as to what these motions should contain. Neither was there suggestion for what Labour Party members should do if, as in many cases, there are no ward meetings held in their area, or where a right-wing local party leadership is attempting to prevent democratic discussion from taking place.

What's more, these contributions completely ignored the fact that many socialists are unable to attend meetings because they have been directly excluded from the party, as we had been discussing earlier.

Lambeth Socialist Party member Laurence Maples described the fact that in his borough, a huge

campaign is being organised against devastating cuts to local libraries that are planned by the Labour council, with library workers currently balloting for strike action.

Clearly there should be no question of socialists 'getting behind and supporting' axe-wielding councillors like that. Indeed, Jeremy Corbyn has himself urged Labour councils to stand together against the cuts, which means refusing to implement them on behalf of the Tories.

Urgency

Clearly there is an urgent need for Corbyn supporters, both inside and outside Labour, to be organised to counter the right and take the fight against austerity forward. Students and young people must be a big part of this.

But the format of this Labour Young Socialists meeting was undemocratic. And the meeting showed an unwillingness among its current 'leaders' to address the central questions of how we build the kind of movement necessary to transform Labour into a party that can consistently act in the interests of working class people.

These factors mean that, unless there is a significant change in its direction - as the Socialist Party argues there should be - the 'Labour Young Socialists' is unlikely to play a significant role in this process.

Paris terror attacks

Only workers' unity can end terrorism, division and war

Jenny Brooks

The atrocities committed by Isis in Paris on Friday 13 November were one of the worst attacks in France since World War Two. While the attacks ten months ago on Charlie Hebdo and a Kosher supermarket were met with much shock and outrage, these latest deplorable killings have stunned and appalled people anew because of their greater death toll and more indiscriminate nature. Young people out enjoying themselves on a Friday night were particularly hit.

This was the fourth terrorist attack linked to Isis in just two weeks, following the loss of 224 lives on a Russian aeroplane and suicide bomb attacks in Beirut and Baghdad, which together killed 61 people.

Isis is willing to target any country or community that opposes its existence and growth, including other Muslims. But following these recent attacks on French and Russian people it said they were targeted because both those countries have begun air strikes on Isis in Syria. So in these cases ordinary people have been indiscriminately slaughtered for the crimes of their governments, who are acting only in the interests of the ruling classes.

French president Francois Hollande responded to the Paris attack by declaring a state of emergency and ordering another, wider bombing onslaught on the Isis-held town of Raqqa in Syria, carried out with the US. Their high-tech missiles - inflicting mass terror, death and injury on civilians and Isis personnel alike - will do nothing to prevent further terrorist attacks in the west.

It was GW Bush's military response to 9/11 - his so-called "war on terror" - that led to today's

catastrophic situation in Afghanistan and Iraq, laying the basis for the conflicts within which Isis has arisen in Iraq and Syria.

When faced with a popular mass revolt against his dictatorship in 2011, Syrian president Assad stoked up sectarian tensions in order to 'divide and rule'. While opposing Assad, western powers were also alarmed by the 'Arab revolutions' that threatened their client regimes. In league with their reactionary Gulf State allies, they funded and armed jihadist opposition to Assad. This helped Isis to grow, through exploiting sectarian division and the plight of the Sunni populations in Syria and Iraq - to now control an area the size of Britain.

Ongoing bombings by western imperialist powers (and Assad's forces) lead to more recruits for the likes of Isis, as film and photos of children torn apart by the missiles circulate in the Middle East and worldwide. Yet the sickening narrative of many capitalist politicians and media commentators - including this week even the usually astute journalist Patrick Cockburn - is that Isis will only be defeated by more military bombardment.

Among them is David Cameron, who has for a long while wanted to extend British bombing of Isis in Iraq to include its territory in Syria. His hand is being stayed by divisions over strategy within the ruling class and his humiliating parliamentary defeat in 2013, when he was prevented from bombing Assad's forces. However, he authorised assassination by drone in September of two British jihadists in Syria and now the Paris attacks could be used to try to whip up support for further incursions.

Jeremy Corbyn, on the other hand, has argued against bombing Syria, correctly saying it would bring more "mayhem" and that it's necessary to ask questions about what is fuelling the conflict, such as: "Who is arming Isis, who is providing safe havens for Isis? To get there you have to ask questions about the arms everyone's sold in the region".

'Home grown' terrorists

The perpetrators of the Paris attacks included 'home grown' French and Belgium jihadists. As FT writer David Gardner pointed out: "Even if the vast majority of Sunni Muslims are hostile to Isis, the jihadis still have two big pools of potential recruits: despairing refugees on Syria's borders and disaffected Muslims in Europe."

France has the largest Muslim population in western Europe and has had the largest exodus (over 1,500) from a European country to join Isis. Concentrated in large housing estates in city suburbs, French Muslim youth suffer from racial discrimination, many feel alienated and up to 40% are jobless. In Belgium they also have a high unemployment rate - and in Britain.

It is the inequality, racism, wars and lack of opportunity in the capitalist system that lies behind right-wing Islamic 'radicalisation'. France's Centre for the Prevention of Sectarian Drift Related to Islam (CPDSI) estimated that 80% of French citizens who have 'radical Islamist' beliefs have come from non-religious families.

In Europe Isis feeds on legitimate grievances and anger, of young Muslims especially. It aims to divide communities through preaching religious absolutism and using terror, in order to boost its support base and overall fortunes. The more its attacks lead right and far-right politicians to scapegoat all Muslims and refugees, the more successful it regards itself at sowing dissatisfaction in the Muslim population.

Countering the terror threat

It isn't possible for the imperialist powers to completely destroy Isis militarily. In any case, weakening it through military blows won't stop new jihadist groups and sectarian organisations from arising - as is happening globally anyway.

Defeating Isis can only be done by the working class and rural poor in Iraq and Syria, who need to build a united, non-sectarian struggle against all the local reactionary forces - all forms of oppression - as well as those further afield.

Neither will terrorist acts be prevented by governments increasing 'security' measures and surveillance - the potential channels and targets are far too numerous. Measures like the 'snoopers charter' in Britain, and Hollande in France calling for new far-reaching powers for the army, will later also be used against workers' struggles and protests.

Hollande's declaration of a state of emergency, including the banning of mass demonstrations, was a convenient measure for him personally considering that many people were directing anger at him in the wake of the attacks and support for him lowered.

Unfortunately a significant part of that criticism has been more under the impact of attacks from the right and far right - trying to make political capital out of the terror attacks - than from a left direction. However, the posing of a socialist alternative has never been more urgent.

The workers' movements in France, Britain and elsewhere need to develop their own class-based position, completely independent of that of the interests and hypocrisy of the capitalist governments and ruling classes. This must include building workers' unity and action against terrorism, wars and the capitalist system itself, which is increasingly marked by inequality and inability to meet the needs of the overwhelming majority of people.

Progress towards socialist transformations is not just desirable, but is a life or death question for some, as the Paris events tragically show. The best response to them is to join the fight for working class democratic organisation and socialist ideas that the Socialist Party in England and Wales is engaged in, alongside Gauche Revolutionnaire in France and all other sections of the CWI.

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 18 November 2015 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

Junior doctors to defend NHS with first strikes in 40 years

Jon Dale

Junior doctors won't allow Tory health secretary Jeremy Hunt to impose his new contract on them in England. It would cut pay, increase hours and endanger patients.

The British Medical Association (BMA) doctors' union ballot ends as the Socialist goes to press. It looks like a big majority of doctors have voted for industrial action.

The BMA junior doctors' committee announced three strike days. A 24-hour strike with emergency cover from 8am on 1 December will be followed by all-out strikes between 8am and 5pm on 8 and 16 December. This is the first industrial action by junior doctors since 1975.

Emergency

Emergency cover is being defined as a Christmas Day service. Emergency cover on all-out days would be provided by consultants, who are not directly affected by this contract.

Consultants support their junior colleagues, understanding Hunt aims to attack them after the juniors. If he could remove doctors' unsocial hours payments, he would find it easier to attack the rest of the NHS workforce.

Hunt has called the doctors' plan "extreme". He is the extremist, wanting to privatise the NHS.

Cutting health workers' pay makes NHS privatisation more attractive to corporations like Circle - which took over Hinchingsbrooke Hospital in Cambridgeshire, but found it could not make enough profit.

Junior doctors are in the front line of the Tory onslaught on our NHS. Their fight is our fight! Other health unions should ballot for industrial action, and all trade unions should mobilise their members to support the junior doctors and defend the NHS.

There is still time for other health unions to join the doctors on the second and third strike days. A programme of coordinated, escalating strikes can halt attacks on our NHS - and be the start of a movement to reverse them.

Trade union action needed to fight for steel jobs

Alistair Tice

Around 1,000 steelworkers, families and supporters marched through Scunthorpe on Tuesday 10 November fighting for their jobs and a future for the town's steelworks and the industry as a whole.

Hundreds more clapped and cheered along the route, honking horns and even getting out of cars to applaud the marchers. Plate mill electrician Charlotte Upton said "the support from the town and community is overwhelming, incredible."

And no wonder. Not only has Tata Steel announced 900 jobs to go at Scunthorpe but the very existence of the works in the town is in jeopardy.

Last week, Tata Steel Europe chief executive Karl Koehler stated: "Our strategy remains unchanged. Long Products will not have a future in Tata Steel."

If the works closes, Scunthorpe will become a ghost town, like South Yorkshire ex-pit villages before it.

Labour politicians and trade union leaders spoke at the end rally demanding a "level playing field". But there cannot be a level playing field in the global market (ie capitalist profit) economy. Tata is a multinational company that like any other is cutting costs and moving production to where it can make the most profit.

China is 'dumping' its overproduction, forcing down world steel prices - these are the laws of supply and demand in a market economy. That's why the Socialist Party has campaigned all along for the steel trade unions and Jeremy Corbyn to demand nationalisation of the steel industry as the only way to save jobs now and secure the future for the steel industry.

As Charlotte Upton said: "If nationalisation will save the industry, then that's what needs to be done."

Significantly, Tony Burke, assistant general secretary of the Unite trade union, said at the rally: "If the job losses continue then we should call for temporary nationalisation of the industry like the government in Italy has done."

The call for nationalisation is growing after Jeremy Corbyn suggested it as one possible form of state intervention. That is because there's a growing realisation that even if import tariffs, lower business rates and reduced energy costs could be achieved, it would not be enough to save jobs now or stop Tata pulling out of Scunthorpe. And what other steel firm is going to buy Scunthorpe works if Tata says it isn't making enough profit?

Although it is still making big profits worldwide. Half yearly profits of £301 million for the six months to the end of September have just been announced. Where have all the profits gone? Why should workers subsidise Tata's profits anymore?

As Steve Miller from Scunthorpe who is the Unite executive member for the region, told *the Socialist*: "What we don't want is a so-called Northern Powerhouse based on workers doing 16-hour days churning out cheap goods on low pay. We want nationalisation with a purpose. For investment in manufacturing, in highly skilled, well paid jobs. For lower energy costs, affordable supply lines and dedicated customers."

The unions shouldn't wait for any more job losses. They should set a date for a one day strike across the industry and appeal to workers in manufacturing and support industries to show solidarity. And they should demand nationalisation of the steel industry now.

[Click here for a report of the Motherwell steel jobs demo](#)

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 11 November 2015 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in *The Socialist*.

Historic London bus drivers' agreement

A London bus driver

London bus drivers have won a city wide collective agreement for the first time since privatisation over 20 years ago. This had unanimous support from trade union reps and convenors.

Strikes by drivers, who are members of Unite the Union, in January and February stopped London and rocked Transport for London (TfL) and bus operating companies. A minority of shop stewards voted for further action this summer, confident of our members' support to win our full demand for London-wide pay talks.

But this outcome is still an important step forward. We have won the right to negotiate - and if necessary, strike - on terms and conditions in London despite having different employers.

This agreement does not include pay. London mayoral candidate and bus driver's son Sadiq Khan has said, if elected he'll impose such negotiations on bus firms. Politicians' promises don't impress most bus drivers so we'll see.

This agreement does not compromise our right to further action. No doubt bosses hope the impending trade union act will scupper us.

Again, we will see.

Reinstate sacked CWU reps

As reported in the Socialist last week, Clive Walder, a longstanding Socialist Party member in the Communication Workers' Union (CWU) has had an appeal against unfair dismissal rejected by British Telecom, confirming his sacking after 38 years of service.

Clive is chair of the CWU Birmingham, Black Country & Worcester branch and is a leading lay rep of the union.

Clive has said: "I would like to thank all Socialist Party and National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) supporters for the solidarity shown to me so far in my campaign for re-instatement. The number of likes on Facebook and the number of tweets has been amazing; many from people and organisations I don't follow and have never met. Hopefully BT now know that they are taking on an industrial and political movement and not an individual.

"Having support from union general secretaries, presidents, vice-presidents and executive members is both heartening and shows how seriously sacking a trade unionist is taken. I was particularly encouraged that my union general secretary Dave Ward re-tweeted the NSSN demanding the re-instatement of myself and John Vasey, the victimised CWU rep from Wakefield."

Dismissed

Clive worked in a BT call centre and was dismissed after an aggressive customer reported him to management just 33 seconds into a phone call. The decision was made without taking stress into account despite the local CWU branch reporting that 7% of staff at the call centre leave their jobs each month, some walking out mid shift. Management took the decision without consulting any medical advice or taking into account any mitigation.

An employment tribunal claim for unfair dismissal is currently pending. Clive is an NSSN steering committee member and the NSSN and Socialist Party will be supporting the campaign protesting the sacking and calling for his reinstatement. Email messages of support to cliverwalder@hotmail.com.

Also John Vasey, a CWU postal rep in Wakefield, West Yorkshire, has been sacked on what his work colleagues recognise as stitched up charges. John is waiting for his appeal at the end of November.

The NSSN calls on all our supporters and affiliates to support John's campaign for reinstatement and his union the CWU.

Messages of protest to Jon Millidge, Royal Mail Group HR Director, c/o Tallents House, South Gyle Crescent, Edinburgh, EH12 9PB.

Pro-Corbyn mood among Usdaw members

Scott Jones, Chair, Usdaw East London retail branch C026 (personal capacity)

The shop workers' union Usdaw's Eastern divisional conference on 14 and 15 November took place against the backdrop of Jeremy Corbyn's election as Labour leader and the changed situation since.

However, despite an enthused, pro-Corbyn mood among the workers, shop stewards and some officials who attended, the guest Labour speaker was Enfield North MP, Joan Ryan, who backed right-winger Liz Kendall in the leadership election.

Despite being a member of Labour-affiliated Usdaw, she reflected none of the mood backing Corbyn.

Questions

Ryan didn't mention Corbyn once in her opening remarks; it wasn't until questions were asked by reps at the end that she was forced to comment on her new leader.

When asked if she believed Corbyn would still be leader in 2020 she claimed that this was "up to Jeremy, he has to prove himself in the elections to come, so I don't know if he will be leader in 2020." Hardly a vote of confidence.

This was retorted later in the day by John Dunn, from the Orgreave Truth and Justice campaign who said "It's not up to Corbyn, it's up to us to support him", which received the biggest round of applause of the weekend.

Ryan gave equally unsatisfactory answers to questions on local government cuts, Syria and nationalisation of the steel industry.

She is a perfect example of why Jeremy Corbyn was wrong to say he opposed re-selection of right-wing MPs who don't represent his policies or the thousands of new members who have joined during and after the leadership election. These are also the same MPs who will look to move against him when the opportunity is presented.

Sunday Trading

Industrial issues covered at the conference include discussions on Sunday Trading (see issue 867) and the trade union bill which both received complete opposition from the 100 in attendance.

'Black Friday' takes place on 20 November and could see a repeat of last year when there were frenzied scenes at supermarkets to grab cheap bargains. This was also discussed and there was agreement that Usdaw should demand measures are put in place to prevent a repeat.

Support for Roger Bannister in Unison election

There has been widespread support for Roger Bannister in his campaign to be elected Unison general secretary, with Unison members leafleting workplaces and announcing on social media why they have voted for him.

Bowen Whiteoak, an activist in the West Midlands Community and Voluntary sector branch explained: "I support Roger because he stands for a proper fighting union. We need a leader that will back their words with direct action and won't back down in the face of adversity. Roger is that leader."

Ronnie Job, a Unison member in Swansea announced: "I've voted for a socialist general secretary of Unison on a member's wage."

If you are a Unison member and agree that Unison needs a fighting strategy to beat the cuts and win victories for members, we urge you to vote for Roger Bannister.

Ballot papers are out now and voting closes 4 December.

Follow the campaign at:

@Roger4UNISON

www.facebook.com/roger4gensec

<http://roger4gensec.wordpress.com>

Note: the Unison members mentioned were speaking in a personal capacity

Workplace news in brief

Sackings strike

Workers at the high-security Ashworth Hospital on Merseyside took 24-hour strike action on 13 November in protest over the sacking of two nurses involved in a violent struggle with a patient. The Prison Officers' Association (POA) asserts that both Kevin Gregson and Peter Hilton were sacked despite following guidelines. The POA, which has over 500 members at the hospital, said it was calling for an independent inquiry into the dismissal of the two members of staff.

Rep reinstated

Sandy Nicoll, SOAS Unison branch secretary, SOAS J4C activist and a long standing trade unionist, has been reinstated after being suspended by SOAS management on grounds of alleged gross misconduct (see issue 877). The allegations were not only false but were fabricated in an attempt to victimise him and undermine the trade union support for the students' occupation of SOAS against massive cuts and course closures. The NSSN and Socialist Party send our congratulations to Sandy, his members and his union.

Posties' protest

80 Royal Mail postal workers at Bridgwater Delivery Office in Somerset defied the Tory anti-union laws on 11 November. The workers walked out without a ballot to protest at Royal Mail's refusal to reinstate Andrew Mootoo, a worker who suffers from Multiple Sclerosis. Andrew has been waiting so long for Royal Mail to support his return to work that his pay has been stopped and he has to rely on benefits. Dave Chapple, CWU rep, said: "Most decent employers would do their best to try and get a disabled worker like Andrew Mootoo off benefits and back to work on a properly adjusted duty. Instead, for 18 months, since MS was diagnosed, Royal Mail, nationally and locally, has tried every dirty trick in their book to get Andrew the sack and reduce him to a lifetime of benefits dependency." Every reasonable compromise CWU offered to Royal Mail has been spurned. 80 Bridgwater trade unionists have, a day after the Tory anti-union bill passed the House of Commons, broken these vicious laws to fight for workplace justice for a severely disabled and much respected colleague.

Featured letter: health service

All NHS unions should join junior doctors' strike

Derek Marsdon, Hillingdon Socialist Party

I work in one of the biggest and better financed NHS trusts in the country, which incorporates several major hospitals.

When I see politicians in the press and on Newsnight claiming the government is putting £8 billion into the NHS it makes me furious. The NHS has been requested to find £12 billion of cuts - they call them "efficiency savings" - before we are entitled to the £8 billion.

My trust boasts of £36 million of "savings" last year and has a target of £20 million this year. But what has this meant in practice?

Pressure

Two staff - feeling the pressure, no doubt - decided to go part-time a few months ago. The gap was to be filled by another full-time worker, probably of a lower grade. Over the same time a senior member of staff left for greener pastures, again to be replaced, hopefully with someone of a similar grade.

The replacement of both these staff members has been stopped to make savings.

Bearing in mind that we were already victims of cuts, reorganisation and down-grading over years of government by all major political parties, our staff are literally collapsing. Two people I know are currently off with stress-related illnesses and a third has just been signed off following complaints of severe chest pains.

The skeleton staff that remain are juggling the annual leave so that they do not follow their colleagues. This is not a long-term solution.

The NHS unions should be balloting to join the junior doctors' planned strikes for 1, 8 and 16 December, with emergency cover only. That is virtually what we are providing on a daily basis anyhow!

A day in the life of a Game retail worker

"Zero-hour contract means I struggle to make my rent"

A Game worker

I wish I could describe a standard working day but being on a zero-hour contract, days are anything but standard.

Due to midnight launches, late night shopping days and special events with early opening times, I am expected to be ready to work anywhere between the hours of 5am and 3am. Often I will be called up with only a couple of hours' notice to cover a shift if somebody goes sick.

There is no consistency in how many hours I will work, sometimes it's over 16 hours which means I'm no longer entitled to job seekers' allowance or housing benefit but often my hours drop below this meaning I have to go through the laborious process of applying again, having only just signed off.

Frustrating

This is even more frustrating when I'd happily work full-time if I could just be given the hours. Instead I spend my free time looking for supplementary jobs (impossible considering how flexible I have to be) and explaining to assessors my ever changing situation.

I can't plan my social life as my hours are never regular and I'm forced to accept any shift offered because if I don't, management will put me at the bottom of the list of people to ask.

I struggle each month to make my rent and I'm constantly on edge wondering if I will have enough left over each month to be able to afford more than one or two meals a day. I go into work sick, tired and often hungry and sometimes work up to seven hours straight with no breaks.

Due to lower level managers and supervisors being salaried, they often work more than 20 extra hours a week just to ensure that all tasks are completed. If staff were employed on genuinely full-time contracts the workplace would be far less daunting. But often you're left with a contradictory situation where most of the staff are complaining that they don't get enough hours while others are grumbling that they work too many unpaid hours and feel unappreciated and exploited.

Staff are cynically employed on minimal contracted hours and are pitted against each other. More hours are only offered to those who have the most sales, complete the most unpaid hours of extra training and be the most flexible with their hours.

The ones that don't adapt to this fast-paced, highly competitive environment just get their four or eight hours a week. There's nothing that can be done about this as that's all they are contractually entitled to.

Insecure

Unions need to reach out to this ever-growing layer of insecure workers.

We need a £10 an hour minimum wage now and at the same time, an end to zero-hour contracts. Many young workers have recently been attacked in the press, particularly by the Tories for being lazy, unproductive and unwilling to work. Give me enough hours and a wage I can genuinely live on and I will happily work it.

Why I joined: "I already feel as if I am finally home"

Richard Price, Gloucestershire Socialist Party

I have been a socialist ever since the day in 1984, when nine years old, I recall my father swearing about Maggie Thatcher during news coverage of the miners' strike. When I saw his reaction, I realised I was witnessing an important struggle, one full of pain and injustice, and I instantly knew what side I was on.

Fast forward to 1992, when, as a 17-year-old, I was just too young to vote in that year's general election. I had a driving lesson on polling day, and I will never forget asking my instructor, an ordinary working class bloke, who he would be voting for.

He said he had been thinking of voting Labour for months, but that he would "probably bottle out and vote Tory" after all.

Tony Blair

In 1995 Tony Blair was elected Labour leader. I admit, I fell for it. He inspired me, so I joined the Labour Party. They were the party of the working class, of the common man - they were socialists, right?

In New Labour on the other hand, policy was decided by a few at the top, and the discussion of political ideas took a back seat.

There were election victories to celebrate, but as a local government worker, I found myself on strike over pay and pensions under a Labour government. It seemed absurd, and I was struggling to square the circle. This was not what I had envisaged.

In 2003, Britain joined George W Bush in the invasion of Iraq. I demonstrated in London against the war, and said I would step down as constituency chair and leave the Labour Party if we went through with it. I knew I had to go.

Con-Dems

I became heavily involved in my trade union, which was the focus of my political activity until, in 2010, the Con-Dems were 'elected', and I felt compelled to do something. Against my better judgement, friends in the Labour Party helped persuade me to re-join. I hoped it would feel as if I was back where I belonged, but it never did.

Labour councils pushed through cuts and Ed Miliband committed Labour to following a programme of austerity. I could see the election defeat a mile off, Labour was not offering an alternative.

I did not see Jeremy Corbyn's victory coming, however I supported and welcomed it. The contest itself reopened old wounds in Labour, and, while the left of the party has won, it's not the end of the battle. I began to ask myself whether Labour's so-called 'broad church' was more of a cavernous cathedral. How had I ended up in the same political party as the likes of Liz Kendall, Chuka Umunna and Tristram Hunt?

The Socialist

I know a few local Socialist Party members that sold the Socialist and have always enjoyed talking to them. They regularly run a stall in my local city centre, where I recently signed a petition on the NHS and bought a copy of the paper. We got talking, and they invited me to their next meeting, and to Socialism 2015.

It was at this event, listening to the inspirational words of comrades at the various sessions and the rousing speeches of Roger Bannister, Hannah Sell, and others at the rallies, that I realised the Socialist Party is where I belong; where I had always belonged. I already feel as if I am finally home.

Comment: The Ragged-Trousered Philanthropists

Robert Tressell's characters are all too real to me

Adam Walker, Plymouth Socialist Party

I am fairly new to the Socialist Party. I have only been a member for a year, and have recently read

Robert Tressell's classic socialist novel *The Ragged-Trousered Philanthropists*. I was recommended the title as I am also a decorator like the characters in the book.

The sad reality is the characters are all too real to me. I see them every day on the building sites I work on.

I see older workers struggle on through ailments, trying desperately to earn enough money to live on. I see ever-decreasing standards of quality, jobs rushed just to squeeze out extra profit. I see health and safety laws and safe practices of work only applied when it suits the employers.

In general workers are made to work hard, long hours in poor conditions, to try and make a small amount of money on a tight price.

And as it is approaching winter it only gets worse. Having to work in dark, freezing cold temperatures - but still expected to produce the same amount.

Seeing as it was published in 1914 I thought it might be dated. I was completely shocked to see how it is as relevant today as it was then.

- *The Ragged-Trousered Philanthropists* is available from www.leftbooks.co.uk starting at £1.99 (plus postage and packing)

My struggle for an income I can live on

"Please Sir, can I have a job?"

Steven Green, London

I have multiple disabilities that include mobility post-traumatic stress disorder and dyslexia. After a long period of mental illness, I reflected on what I would like to do with my remaining 21 years in the workplace.

After much deliberation I decided to re-enter full time education to train as a teacher in the post-16 sector. Anybody who has completed teacher training or a PGCE will tell you it's a long, hard slog.

Throughout my training I kept my incapacity benefit for my disabilities. I need a very complicated operation on my spine - and even that may fail to take away the pain I experience.

Agencies

Upon completion of my PGCE, I entered the minefield that is the job market - the reams of paperwork and compliance checks, all of them necessary so that I can go out into a classroom and teach.

I wasn't confident that I would find work, being middle aged and disabled. I applied to work through agencies but I became jaded with their promises.

It made me realise how it must have felt for the stevedores and others who queued up to be chosen to work for a day in the 1920s.

Time passes by - days turn into weeks. But before they can turn into months, I receive a call - there is a job for me, with hours to suit. It was like winning the lottery I was so pleased.

I knew I would have to contact the DWP as I had found a job - I did, and told them of my part time hours. I was told it would have to go to the 'decision maker'. I waited and waited. In the meantime I had to miss the dreaded medical because I was scheduled to teach at that time.

One day I came home from work and there was a letter explaining that my incapacity benefit would be stopped from November. The issue is whether I was carrying out 'permitted work' - but this had never been mentioned to me.

They sent me a form to fill in - more fun for a dyslexic! I'm broke - physically, mentally and financially. I have had to reclaim housing benefit.

I find myself on one hand a highly valued teacher, but on the other marginalised and under scrutiny. Not for the first time in my life, I'm in a position where I could find myself homeless.

I'm still available for work, should any arise that I can do with my disability. Please Sir, can I have a job?

Labour bans union activist

London bus driver and Unite branch secretary Joanne Harris has been barred membership of the Labour Party for five years.

Joanne applied to rejoin Labour after supporting Jeremy Corbyn's election campaign and his committment to leading an anti-austerity party.

However, the Labour Party's 'star chamber' membership department said that because she had stood as a Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition candidate in 2014 against her local cuts-implementing Labour council in west London, she would be excluded until after the next general election.

Joanne has appealed to Jeremy Corbyn to overturn the ban and support "reinstating my membership to the party as I am a loyal left supporter of Labour. As far as I am concerned I never left the party, they left me."

Thousands march against India premier's bloody sectarianism

Isai Priya, Tamil Solidarity trade union coordinator

"Modi, Modi, you can't hide - you committed genocide!"

Thousands gathered outside 10 Downing Street on 12 November to protest against the visit of Narendra Modi, prime minister of India. Huge police presence and private security surrounded the Hindu nationalist sectarian.

It was a loud and energetic demonstration. Nepalese, Sikhs, Kashmiris, Tamils and members of the oppressed Dalit castes were among the many who came, chanting "caste system - down, down!"

Tamil Solidarity took an active part in this important protest. Our members were able to talk to several mainstream media outlets including the Guardian, Channel 4, ITV and others.

There was huge anger at Tory prime minister David Cameron for welcoming alleged war criminal Modi - first at his home and later on in parliament. "Blood on your hands" and "shame, shame" echoed out against both.

The two austerity leaders, on the other hand, exchanged flattery and made business deals. Cameron announced that 2017 will be a UK-India 'year of culture'.

He said "the great partnership between India and the UK extends beyond economic ties to the broads of the Bard and the beaches of Bollywood".

Anti-worker

The only great partnership between the Tories and Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party is that of aggressive pro-big business, anti-worker policies. Both these parties are no friends of workers and the poor.

Ordinary people in Britain need a fighting strategy to unite us against establishment politicians who only serve the interests of big business and millionaires.

Strike to save Lambeth libraries

Laurence Maples and Steve Nally, Lambeth Socialist Party

Labour controlled Lambeth Council in South London plans to devastate library services in the borough. It plans to close down five of its ten libraries in order to sell them off to private gym companies. Lambeth's residents are not prepared to put up with this attack.

On 7 November Lambeth Unison held a demonstration to demand the reversal of this decision.

This was filled out by the Friends of the Libraries group and 600 people angrily marched from Windrush square to a group of councillors' surgery, ironically held in a library.

Strike action

The Socialist Party energetically took part in the demonstration and our demand for an escalating programme of strike action was enthusiastically received.

There was a real understanding among protestors that councillors have other options, particularly given that they are spending £50 million on an unnecessary new town hall and tens of millions a year on agency staff.

Many protestors highlighted the injustice of careerist councillors defying Jeremy Corbyn's anti-austerity mandate.

Unfortunately, the organisers prevented Socialist Party members from speaking at the closing rally despite the Socialist Party having an elected officer in Lambeth Unison branch.

Shamefully, the councillors snuck out of the building, refusing to engage with protestors and left with chants of "shame on you" ringing in their ears.

A few days later 250 lobbied and attended an obscure committee meeting which saw cracks appear as some councillors put limited demands on council leaders to review their plans.

More protests and legal action are planned and Unison is considering strike action to save libraries and and much needed jobs.

Lambeth Socialist Party also held a successful public meeting to discuss how to save the libraries on 12 November and recieved media coverage in the London Evening Standard on 11 November (see inset).

Gaining momentum in Lewisham

James Kerr, Socialist Party Lewisham

Socialist Party members recently participated in another large Momentum meeting in Lewisham, south London. Momentum was established to support Jeremy Corbyn.

The meeting was convened to discuss the £45 million worth of proposed cuts to local council services.

The Labour controlled council, with its directly elected Mayor, has made huge cuts in recent years, including the loss of nearly a third of the workforce.

Luke Sorba, Labour councillor for Telegraph Hill ward and a Corbyn supporter, introduced the discussion; explaining 'the council had no choice but to make the cuts' because they 'can't set an illegal budget'. Otherwise, Tory appointed commissioners would be sent in and it was better that the Labour council 'mitigate the cuts'.

He also argued the directly elected mayor has all the power in decision making and reiterated there was no national movement to back up anti-cuts councillors.

However, nearly all speakers from the floor expressed opposition to all cuts and said the councillors should fight. Councillors could play an important role in standing up to the government and building a national anti-austerity movement.

Socialist Party (SP) members asked how far councillors were prepared to go and raised the 'needs budget' amendment, moved by the rebel councillors in Southampton in 2013, as a model for the type of action they could take.

This was never properly answered, although the three councillors who were there said they'd look at it.

SP members also suggested collecting an 8,000 signature petition to trigger a debate in the council chamber over spending cuts, which was endorsed.

Former Socialist Party Lewisham councillor Chris Flood pointed out that while council officers may not agree with you, they are obliged to explore the possibilities of a 'needs budget'.

Fightback

Chris also suggested writing to Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell to ask for clarification on their anti-austerity position and support for councils and councillors opposing cuts. This was unanimously endorsed.

Many contributions from the floor highlighted the housing crisis and dire state of services but also pointed out that the 2013 Lewisham Hospital campaign had been successful because a fight was mounted.

Library workers in Lewisham faced with closures attended the meeting and asked for the backing of the meeting and councillors. Councillor Sorba was asked if he would support them if they went on strike. Eventually, after pressure from the meeting, he agreed to. A step in the right direction!

This meeting needs to be built on with the petition being taken into workplaces, communities, schools and colleges.

The demand for a 'people's budget' should also be put forward by the local trade union movement and community organisations.

Momentum in Lewisham could play an important role in coordinating this work inside and outside the Labour Party so that a fighting alternative to austerity is built in Lewisham and nationally.

Anger at care home closure

The lead Nottingham city councillor in charge of social services was raked over the coals by Clifton residents in a recent consultation meeting.

A facility called Oakdene, used by adults with learning difficulties, is in need of refurbishment. But the council is considering finding a new place for them by closing an elderly care home and moving the facility there instead!

Relatives of those in the care home are furious and worried about what would happen to them due to the stress of moving - some have dementia. One person even asked if the council would cover the cost of her mother's funeral if the stress of moving killed her.

The councillor admitted that the plan put forward is due to cuts and admitted that if the same were happening to his own parents that he would be just as angry as them.

However, he insisted that using some of the £200 million reserves that the council has to cover the cost of a new facility wasn't possible despite the fact that the council's reserves went up last year.

The anger of the residents and objections by local trade unionists and Socialist Party members have forced some concessions. Support will be provided to pay higher charges at the private care home nearby. It might not be enough to stop the plans at this point. However it is important that councils know that getting away with closing these sites won't be easy.

Geraint Thomas, Nottingham Socialist Party

<http://www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/21772>