

Tories in retreat - kick them out

Fight tuition fees

Ellen Kenyon Peers, Goldsmiths Socialist Students

News that [Labour would win a parliamentary majority](#) if a general election were held tomorrow has spurred on Tory chancellor Philip Hammond to produce a report recommending a [£5,000 reduction in tuition fees](#) over a three-year course.

This [latest](#), embarrassing retreat by the Tories demonstrates how desperate they have become to maintain power.

But any reduction in fees will be welcomed by students and it's clear a big factor behind this is that the Tories fear a mass movement for free education.

The government has been under pressure on all fronts. Its justification for fees has been undermined, not least following the news of [vast cash resources](#) held by many universities.

The prohibitively expensive £9,250 a year maximum tuition fee has contributed to a [drop in university applicants](#) for the first time since fees were raised in 2012.

Inflation

The [6.1% interest rate](#) for tuition fees disproportionately affects poorer students struggling to pay off the loan, as it rises with inflation. Better-off students who can repay it quickly gain the upper hand, even after entering the job market with the same qualification.

The interest rate includes an additional 3% on top of inflation which has never been fully explained by parliament.

This can add thousands to students' loan repayments once graduates have reached the relatively low £21,000 earnings threshold. All this while university vice-chancellors' pay averages [over £270,000 a year](#).

Corbyn's left-leaning manifesto policies, including to immediately [introduce free education](#), proved extremely popular with young people during the election, winning seats in former Tory strongholds like Canterbury.

But unfortunately since then Labour has [refused to commit](#) to cancelling student debt despite Jeremy Corbyn's hint during the election campaign that it would.

The Socialist Party and Socialist Students fight for abolishing tuition fees, cancelling student debt and a £10 an hour minimum wage to pave the way for a brighter future for young people.

- Join the 'education shutdown' on 22 November
- For more on education and students see socialiststudents.org.uk

Why do young people need socialism?

Theo Sharieff, Socialist Party youth and student organiser

The future for young people in Britain today looks very bleak. The [Centre for Economic Performance reports](#) that within Britain - which is [surpassed only by Greece](#) for worst wage growth of the OECD countries - it is 18 to 21-year-olds who have been hit the hardest. Their wages have been cut by 16% in real terms between 2008 and 2016.

In an attempt to escape the trap of wage stagnation by getting a 'good job', many students attend university. But they often not only finish with well [over £50,000 of debt](#), but discover that no such high-paying jobs exist. We study to get jobs which then aren't offered to us, and all we find in their place is precarious work for low pay.

So ubiquitous is the plague of zero-hour contracts that [they are now a major contributing factor in poor mental health](#). According to [research conducted by the Centre for Longitudinal Studies](#) at UCL, those employed on zero-hour contracts are 50% more likely to develop mental health problems than those with secure work patterns.

And what does this misery earn us as we grow older? [Savills estate agents conducted a report](#) which estimated that while 46% of 25-year-olds were homeowners 20 years ago, that figure has more than halved to 20% today.

We are a generation who, through no choice of our own, is increasingly dependent on rental properties to live. Yet the rental sector is even more insecure for young people. [Sky-high rents are creating a new housing crisis for youth](#) across the country; and for the average young worker in London, [well over half of their weekly wages](#) go on rent alone.

With our working lives currently set to be more fruitless than our parent's generation, they're also set to drag on for even longer. A recent [report drawn up by the Government Actuary's Department](#) projected that workers today aged under 30 may have to wait until they are 70 before being allowed to draw their state pension.

Where's the wealth?

With all these attacks on our living standards, you'd be forgiven for assuming that we've become poorer as a country in recent years. Yet the 29th annual Sunday Times Rich List published this year revealed that within Britain (the [fifth richest](#) country in the world) [the richest 1,000 individuals and families increased their wealth by 14% over 12 months to £658 billion](#).

The list includes Lakshmi Mittal, a steel magnate based in Britain, who managed to increase his wealth by £6 billion to approximately £13 billion in a single year: the same year that [the Tata-owned steel works in the Welsh town of Port Talbot was threatened with closure](#).

Attacks on young people's living standards are nothing to do with there not being enough money. Capitalist establishment politicians often collude with the media in an attempt to soften the blow of attacks young people face by explaining them away as temporary measures preparing for a more economically secure future.

Yet ten years on from [the start of the global financial crisis](#), it is becoming increasingly clear that we are not experiencing a simple blip in an uninterrupted upwards curve of growth for capitalism.

The problems young people face are instead rooted deeply in the inability of capitalism - an economic system which takes the creation of profit as its first and only priority - to socially and economically develop society in a way which delivers for the majority.

The [super-rich hoard their vast accumulated wealth](#) instead of investing that money in a way which would be socially useful for Britain's young workers and students; in education, job creation, housing, apprenticeship schemes, as well as culture and the arts.

Their reticence is the product of capitalism, which fights tooth and nail to maximise profitability, and the global financial crisis which undermined its ability to make profit in the first place.

Corbyn's Labour

It comes as no surprise then, that in [polling recently published by YouGov](#), the Labour Party under the leadership of Jeremy Corbyn is a massive 46 percentage points ahead of the Conservative Party among 18 to 24-year-olds.

Corbyn is [nine times more trusted](#) than the Tories when it comes to the NHS, and ten times more trusted on the issue which defines today's youth, of housing.

Corbyn's manifesto - which promised to [increase the minimum wage](#) to £10 an hour, [abolish tuition fees](#) and grant councils new powers to [enable mass council house building programmes](#) - won him [67% of the votes from 18 to 24-year-olds](#) and 58% of votes from 25 to 34-year-olds.

For many of us, June's general election was the first time in our lives that we were offered some sort of alternative to the chaos wreaked upon our lives by the capitalist system. Corbyn's proposals gave a small glimpse of what would be possible under a socialist society.

It's clear that [the capitalist establishment would not passively accept Corbyn's policies if he were to enter parliament](#), and would do all in their power to sabotage his programme.

We have to be prepared to fight not only to collapse a government which represents the ruling class, but in the case of his election victory, to fight in support of Corbyn's programme which goes against the interests of the capitalist establishment.

This would involve building mass movements of students, young workers and the wider working class. It would mean [waging local battles to fight cuts](#) to our education services, local jobs and community centres, right through to [national campaigns and strike action coordinated by all the trade unions](#) and the Trade Union Congress.

Young people needn't settle for fighting to win victories only to watch them be chipped away at by the ruling class later. We can fight for a socialist system - a society under which the vast wealth that exists would be owned and democratically controlled by the people who create that wealth, the working class.

This means the democratic public ownership and management not only of vital services such as the railways, the NHS, the utility companies and others; but also the financial institutions, the banks and loan companies in order to rationally plan the resources which would be needed to fund the growth and expansion of our society.

The [Panama Papers scandal last year](#) proved that [we cannot control the money we don't own](#), as the capitalist system will always be prepared to help the rich protect the obscene amounts of wealth they keep hidden from the rest of us.

A key step to permanently breaking the financial tricks of the capitalist class would be the immediate nationalisation of Britain's top 150 monopolies and banks under the democratic, bottom-up control of working class people, with compensation for the current owners given only on the basis of proven need.

Workers' party

To fight for this new society, we need a political force which can provide leadership to such a mass movement; a party which can provide a continuous and consistent leadership politically and industrially.

The Socialist Party has [campaigning consistently for the creation of a mass working class party](#) in British society which can fulfil this role, and we appeal for anyone who agrees with us to join us in our fight for such a new force.

We [fully support Jeremy Corbyn's programme](#) within the Labour Party. Yet we also say that the Labour Party is not yet a homogenous and consistent whole, but rather [it is still two parties within one](#).

On the one hand is the party of the Blairites, who introduced tuition fees and are currently using strike-breaking tactics to [force through a mass redundancy of 113 bin workers](#) in Birmingham City Council; on the other hand is the party which belongs to Corbyn's anti-austerity programme.

Corbyn's embryonic party represents a step towards the new mass party mentioned above. But within this needs to be the structures for the rank and file to democratically discuss and debate what are the best methods and tactics for taking the anti-austerity movement forward. All [socialists, from various traditions, should be free to affiliate, and raise their programme](#) and ideas within such a party.

For this to happen, [Corbyn and McDonnell need to decisively take on the right wing-controlled party machine](#) and invite back into Labour all socialists who were expelled for their ideas, both recently and in the past.

In such a party, the likes of which have not been seen in this country for decades, young workers and students have the potential to build a working class movement for socialist change that takes the battle to the very end to secure a future for all on a permanent basis. [Join the Socialist Party](#) and help us fight for a socialist future.

Grenfell inquiry begins: not sufficient, not trusted

Jail the killers!

For an independent workers' movement inquiry

Paul Kershaw, London Socialist Party and chair, Unite the Union housing workers' branch

Three months after [the horrific fire at Grenfell Tower](#) the official inquiry has opened in the [De Vere Grand Connaught Rooms](#), Covent Garden. The elegant central London venue's palatial surroundings underline the 'them and us' gap at the core of this inquiry.

Local people and trade unions have voiced concerns that the [terms of reference for the inquiry are too narrow](#) to draw crucial conclusions. Its chair, retired judge Martin Moore-Bick, [allowed no time for questions and ignored survivors' barrister](#) Michael Mansfield QC when he attempted to raise them.

They also reacted with anger to a decision not to appoint a survivor or local resident to a panel of assessors who will advise the inquiry. Moore-Bick argues that "to appoint someone as an assessor who has had direct involvement in the fire would risk undermining my impartiality in the eyes of others."

So much for pleas for diversity and community representation! But his inquiry does have plenty of involvement from establishment figures who had direct involvement in the events that led up to this avoidable catastrophe. Why should working class people have any confidence in them?

Sir Ken Knight, the inquiry's technical advisor:

- responsible for a report that recommended against installing sprinkler systems as [not "economically viable."](#) despite post-Lakanal fire recommendations that they should be installed in tower blocks
- signed off 'Reynobond', used in the Grenfell cladding, as safe, when he was a director of Warrington Certification. His [defence that he was "not aware" that he was director](#) of the safety firm may have convinced the judge but simply won't convince others

Sir Peter Bonfield, advisor to the inquiry:

- responsible for a report in April 2016 which found that [safety regulations in relation to cladding were "adequate"](#)

Robert Black, chief executive of Kensington and Chelsea Tenant Management Organisation (TMO) and so the Grenfell landlord, responsible for the period in which residents' fire safety concerns were ignored:

- facing anger after the fire, he announced his resignation. But it has now emerged [he is still receiving his full six-figure salary](#), in addition to the new chief executive - presumably both paid from local tenants' rent! Kensington and Chelsea TMO says he is assisting multiple inquiries into the causes and aftermath, including Moore-Bick's inquiry, and that this is a full-time job

Will comparable funding go to local residents wanting to document and articulate their side of the story?

Gavin Barwell, the housing minister who sat on recommendations to review building regulations after the 2009 Lakanal House fire in Camberwell, south London:

- now Theresa May's chief of staff. Moore-Bick appears unembarrassed that the narrow terms of reference of his inquiry have been agreed with Theresa May's office

The terms of reference do include the government response in the immediate aftermath of the fire, but why stop there? Despite promises, just two families have been permanently rehoused.

A press officer [told the Guardian](#) that the number moved to permanent accommodation is not a "metric" the council is using. If local people were involved in the inquiry, they might ask why not.

It is essential that broader questions about why resident warnings were ignored, privatisation and lack of accountability, as well as the rundown of social housing and regulation are examined. Local people want the truth to be told and they want justice - as do firefighters, ambulance crew and hard-pressed council workers.

It makes sense to push the official inquiry as far as possible given its resources. But there is a need for an inquiry that does not downplay local residents and working class people, or let the profiteers and capitalist politicians off the hook.

Working with the local community, the trade unions should set up a parallel investigation.

Unite, for instance, organises housing and construction workers among others. Imagine the effect if Jeremy Corbyn and Unite general secretary Len McCluskey, for example, were to convene an inquiry and, in the full glare of publicity, call on residents and workers to give their testimonies.

Such an inquiry could draw the wider political conclusions about the effects of privatisation and deregulation, and point the spotlight on all the main parties and their roles in national and local government defending the interests of big business ahead of working class people.

No excuses - install sprinklers now!

Just 2% of UK social housing tower blocks have a full sprinkler system, [figures released after a BBC freedom of information request](#) revealed. It also found that only one in three blocks had more than one staircase, another issue cited in fire safety concerns at Grenfell.

Following the Lakanal fire there were recommendations that sprinkler systems should be installed. These have been supported by the Fire Brigades Union.

Now London's fire brigade commissioner, Dany Cotton, has [called for retrofitting sprinklers](#) saying "Grenfell should be a turning point. I support retrofitting - for me, where you can save one life then it's worth doing. This can't be optional, it can't be a 'nice to have' - this is something that must happen."

Landlords must act now on this and other fire safety concerns and they must report progress to tenants and residents.

Some have said they do not have the money, or that carrying out the work will result in cuts to other services.

The government has claimed that money will not be a reason not to do the work - but has dragged its feet when it comes to coughing up.

That is not acceptable. [Start the work now](#) - bill the government!

Tories retreat on pay cap - nurses demand more

Strike to save our NHS!

Steve Williams, NHS nurse

Nurses are already well-paid, [according to the Tory MP for Walsall North](#), Eddie Hughes. This is just the latest example of how out of touch with reality the Tories are.

Try telling it to my colleagues, who have experienced a [14%](#) real-terms cut in pay since 2010. Try telling it to the nurses who are forced to use foodbanks in order to get by.

And it's not just in the pockets of nurses where the pay cap causes harm. With [40,000 unfilled nursing vacancies, it has a direct impact on the delivery of care](#), with ward closures caused by staff shortages.

However, the Tories are in disarray. The parliamentary vote on ending the pay cap wasn't even opposed by Theresa May. Our not so "strong and stable" leader feared the damage a Commons defeat would inflict on her government.

A [wage claim of 3.9%](#) has been submitted by the health unions and it is a welcome start. But [3.9% is the same as 'RPI' inflation](#). So in real terms, it would mean wages only just keep up with price rises.

Health service workers need a decent, real-terms pay rise to start to make up for the lost decade of wage restraint.

There's a rising tide of anger against austerity. In Doncaster, [bin workers](#) and staff in privatised care homes are balloting for industrial action in defence of their pay and conditions.

Coordinate the strikes

Then there's the host of disputes reported weekly by the Socialist. The [Birmingham bin workers](#), striking [BA cabin crew](#), and the brave fight of [staff at Barts NHS Trust](#) in east London.

The Socialist Party says [these actions should be coordinated](#), and linked to struggle across the public and private sectors, in an uncompromising campaign against the government and austerity.

Nurses are angry. Colleagues of mine who once would never have considered industrial action now ask me when we are going on strike!

That time should be now. Let's give the Tories a winter of discontent that finishes off their rotten government once and for all.

Fight expansion of disastrous 'Universal Credit' welfare system

Nearly half of current claimants are in rent arrears

50 new areas are due to launch the system in October

Laurel Fogarty

'Universal Credit', the Tories' disastrous flagship welfare 'reform', is due to be rolled out to [50 new areas next month](#).

This is despite new figures showing the system's harsh benefit cuts and long waiting times are driving claimants into serious debt.

Officially, recipients of Universal Credit will wait up to six weeks for their first payment. But [according to the Trussell Trust](#) many wait between ten and 13 weeks.

This drives many in Universal Credit areas, including those in work, to foodbanks to survive - at [more than double the rate](#) of the national average.

The huge delays also put families at serious risk of eviction and homelessness. Landlords can evict tenants who are over eight weeks behind on rent - a stark reality for many waiting for Universal Credit payments.

Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) [figures show](#) nearly half of new recipients of Universal Credit have fallen behind on their rent for the first time. One in five owes over £1,000.

While it is easy to attribute the massive waiting times to incompetence or errors in the rollout of the new system, much of the delay is, in fact, callously built in to the structure of Universal Credit.

For example, there is a seven-day waiting period before a claim can be made. Then the DWP insists an official wait of up to 42 days is 'necessary' to ensure recipients are on a monthly schedule.

So even when the system works properly it leaves people in serious debt and at risk of homelessness. About one in ten recipients turn in desperation to payday loan companies to keep their heads above water.

Other attacks [such as the 'rape clause' for child tax credits](#), and the massive delays in housing benefit payments, make Universal Credit a still more brutal system that is not fit for purpose.

As a start the rollout of Universal Credit should be immediately halted and reversed.

The Socialist Party opposes all barbaric cuts to the social safety net including the cynical hidden cuts at the heart of this 'reform'. We campaign for an end to in-work poverty, a living wage for all workers, and living benefits without compulsion.

Defuse the consumer debt time bomb: nationalise the banks!

Laurence Maples, Lambeth Socialist Party

Still [recovering from the last crisis](#)? Hold on to your wallet, Britain's bankers are storing up another one.

The Financial Conduct Authority has [urged the government](#) to tackle the explosion in consumer debt, now standing at £200 billion.

When even the fat cats are saying it, you can be sure the problem is serious. [MPs have also highlighted](#) the extent of the crisis, demanding an inquiry.

Nominal [consumer debt has risen](#) 24% in five years, increasing by a staggering 10% last year. At the same time, mortgage debt has increased by 10% - and student debt has risen by 114%, now at over £100 billion, due to the increase in tuition fees.

A rise in interest rates or increase in unemployment could bring this house of cards crashing down, with devastating effects for working class people.

Meanwhile, incomes have flatlined and in many cases fallen, so [8.3 million people](#) now have problem debts.

Workers in the gig economy and on zero-hour contracts are forced to borrow for essentials, as their incomes can fall short of their needs at any time.

Predatory payday lenders make a killing as workers' debts grow and grow. Scandalously, local authorities chasing council tax arrears are often the most aggressive debt collectors, sending bailiffs round at the first opportunity and loading debtors with the cost.

All of this amounts to a looming crisis for working class people, potentially hit by a toxic cocktail of banks, payday lenders, councils, car dealerships, utilities companies and others demanding payments.

End this madness now. The Socialist Party demands:

- No foreclosures or evictions
- Guaranteed living incomes for all, including gig economy workers and those not working
- Nationalise the banks, finance sector and top corporations under democratic workers' control and management
- Ban payday lenders - with affordable finance available instead
- Scrap tuition fees, write off all student debt and introduce a living grant

Editorial of the Socialist, issue 963

Labour Party conference 2017

Corbyn's support must be used to defeat Blairites

As the Labour Party goes into its third annual conference with Jeremy Corbyn as leader, are his anti-austerity policies closer to being realised? Is the party being transformed in a socialist direction?

The conference comes just after a new [survey conducted by the Independent](#) again showed: "The British public has given overwhelming backing to major parts of Jeremy Corbyn's policy agenda." So it's not surprising that the [latest YouGov poll](#) on voting intentions still indicated that Labour would win a general election held today.

This stems from millions of people being desperate to see Corbyn's policies implemented - [an end to neoliberalism and austerity](#) which have meant wage restraint, student debt, lack of affordable housing, zero-hour contracts, profiteering rail, water and energy companies, and much more.

[Labour's general election manifesto](#), engineered directly by Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell, was a hugely welcome departure from the Tory-lite ones that came before it. Also a major step forward has been the willingness of those two top Labour leaders to stand on picket lines alongside workers fighting cuts in jobs, pay and conditions.

John McDonnell's well received message to strikers assembled at the [pre-TUC rally of the National Shops Stewards Network](#) (NSSN) was: "We'll be in parliament supporting you, but we'll be on the picket lines supporting you too."

This pledge, along with the expressed readiness of a number of left trade union leaders to lead industrial action against low pay, gives extra confidence to workers who are entering into struggles.

However, it is also still the case that genuine supporters of Corbyn and McDonnell are in a small minority among Labour's MPs in parliament, councillors in local authorities, and in its party officialdom. Among the

party's rank-and-file members though - [with membership having doubled](#) since 2015 - it is a very different picture. There, Corbyn supporters are a majority, as his [leadership victories twice proved](#). So the party is still very much '[two parties in one](#)': those who back the Corbyn and McDonnell leadership and those who badly want rid of them.

Nature of conference

Conference delegates from Constituency Labour Parties (CLPs), who have half the conference votes when card votes are called, are expected to number 1,155. Corbyn-supporting group [Momentum reports from its survey](#) of their opinions that 844 of them want to see the reforms it supports. This reflects the fact that [newer members and re-joiners have come to the fore](#) in many CLPs across the country, though there have also been reports of areas in which the more established right-wing layer has mobilised and retained its positions. However, the more numerous Corbyn-supporting delegates will have very little opportunity to influence party policy and rules at this conference, [following the years of Blairite changes](#) that drastically reduced the role of the conference as a decision-making body of the party.

Jeremy Corbyn has rightly insisted on [limiting the number of conference platform speeches](#) by Blairites in order to give more time to delegates. The left has also applauded the recent [election of two Corbyn supporters](#) - Billy Hayes and Seema Chandwani - to the conference arrangements committee. But their role doesn't apply to this year's conference, it only begins once it's over.

At the time of writing this editorial, it was not yet known what Labour's national executive committee (NEC) - meeting on 19 September - will decide on shaping the conference agenda. It will agree its proposals for the conference, including on the '[McDonnell amendment](#)', a widely discussed constitutional change to lower the number of MPs and MEPs required to nominate a candidate for party leader, to make it easier for a left candidate to stand. But there have been no reports or expectations of proposals from the NEC for any substantial changes or reversals to be made to the [large body of rules created by the right wing](#) to serve their driving of the party in a pro-capitalist direction. Also, many motions from CLPs can simply be dismissed from being put to the conference.

Undemocratic

In an [interview in Red Pepper](#), Seema Chandwani touched on how undemocratic the conference is: "Faith needs to be restored back into our conference. Last year we saw very distinct rule changes bunched together in one vote, rule changes that included local government budgets (cuts) and whether a sitting leader requires MPs' nominations to be on the ballot if challenged. These are not linked in any way, yet delegates had one vote to vote in favour or against all these changes, not individual votes on each item. How can we honestly trust a process that decides rules in this way?"

The sneaked-in rule she refers to on local government budgets [banned Labour councillors from voting against cuts budgets](#) agreed by their council Labour group. Since that 2016 conference, anger in local communities and council workforces at savage cuts being imposed by Labour councils has only risen further.

There are many examples, including [Haringey Labour council's plan for massive privatisation of public assets](#), involving selling off council homes, land and buildings. But most prominent at present is the sustained [attack underway on the jobs and service delivery of Birmingham bin workers](#) by their Labour council. In both [Haringey](#) and [Birmingham](#) the outrageous actions of the councillors are too much even for the Labour MPs in those areas, who have called on the councillors to change direction.

At the packed-out NSSN rally, John McDonnell argued that the Birmingham bin workers are fighting "against austerity, not Labour". But how can workers separate the austerity from Labour when they are facing unnecessary and devastating job and wage cuts at the hands of Labour locally, right now? And neither are the two separated in people's minds across local communities, as was partly shown by the [local election results](#) in May. Labour lost over 300 seats and only received 27% of the overall vote, compared with an achievement of [40% of the vote](#) just a month later in the general election after Labour's anti-austerity manifesto was released.

[The council cuts don't have to be made](#). The Socialist Party, with its allies in the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC), has time and time again put forward a viable alternative, calling on councils to buy time to

build a campaign against Tory cuts by using their reserves and ample borrowing powers (see, for example, the TUSC document ['Preparing a no-cuts people's budget'](#)). To build real confidence in its anti-austerity leadership, Labour needs to start showing that whenever it is in power - whether locally or nationally - it will completely reject any implementation of austerity.

Unfortunately, Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell have so far only rejected imposing it when they are elected to power nationally. As well as more vital jobs and services being lost in the meantime, the danger is that after constantly blaming 'Tory austerity' at local level, when at national level they come up against the 'diktats' of capitalist economic crisis and [the determined resistance of big business interests](#), it could be those factors and forces that are blamed next, to justify limiting pro-working class measures.

Austerity - a political choice

Columnist Yasmin Alibhai-Brown, [writing in the 'I' paper](#), reminded readers that "austerity was never about... good housekeeping": "Britain's GDP has doubled since 1978, but only the top 10% of the population has seen its wealth double. Money has grown on abundant trees for that segment; the bottom 10% have been pushed down and vanquished... millionaires and billionaires get more... while the rest are expected to give up more."

The battle in the Labour Party needs to come down to taking clear class sides: either promoting the interests of the working class and the majority in society, or being exposed for succumbing to big business and capitalist interests.

Corbyn supporters need to organise more extensively and efficiently than the right wing, adopting a pro-working class, socialist approach and ideology, to maintain and build on the attraction of Corbyn's ideas. This should include [working with other left and anti-cuts activists who share similar goals](#), and firmly rejecting the thousands of spurious exclusions from Labour Party membership that have been carried out.

[Some Socialist Party members](#) and others have been denied Labour membership for having stood in elections against right-wing, cuts-inflicting Labour candidates. But taking such a stand should have been seen as a badge of honour in the labour and trade union movement, as working class communities certainly have seen it, and not a reason for division between those genuinely fighting austerity.

Labour Party branches and conferences need to be developed as hives of discussion on how to develop this unity, as well as on all the crucial political issues that need to be debated, including [the urgent question of how a pro-working class Brexit can be achieved](#).

In tandem with the development of grassroots discussion and organisation, Corbyn and McDonnell and those around them at the top of Labour have the political authority to be able to push ahead with a [bold programme of party democratisation](#) - taking it directly to the membership in a referendum if necessary. This would need to include [giving trade unionists a greater role, on a democratic basis](#), in the party decision-making processes; and placing the selection of election candidates in the hands of the membership through [reinstating mandatory reselection contests](#).

The huge surge of support for Corbyn, especially from the young, has given more than a glimpse of how popular a Labour Party would be that shows itself capable of really ending all austerity and going on to offer other improvements in people's lives. However, this much-desired outcome will only be achieved through a determined strategy of defeating the Blairite right and democratising the party from top to bottom, laying the basis for meetings that would be attractive and worthwhile for new participants, and for active engagement in workers' struggles.

- Mandatory reselection of election candidates to allow Labour Party members a democratic say in who their elected representatives are - kick out the Blairites!
- Open up the Labour Party. Restore the rights of the trade unions within Labour. Readmit the socialists, with the right to organise in an inclusive federation
- No more cuts budgets from Labour councils. Let the Tories dare to take on councils protecting our local services!
- Fight for a socialist Brexit. Organise a campaign with European socialists and workers' organisations to use the Brexit talks to tear up the EU bosses' club rules. For a new collaboration of the peoples of

Deal concludes Barts health strike - "We have raised our heads high"

Union strengthened for future battle

Paula Mitchell, London Socialist Party

After Unite the Union members' meetings on all sites and a democratic ballot in the hospitals, cleaners, porters and catering staff in Barts NHS Trust have voted to accept the offer made by private company employer Serco.

[24 days of strike action](#) brought the brightest of pickets to the four hospitals in east London involved: Whipps Cross in Waltham Forest, the Royal London and Mile End in Tower Hamlets, and St Barts in the City of London.

The pickets were alive with chanting, singing, dancing, speeches, and numerous visits from trade unionists and socialists from across London and even the world.

We'll remember for a long time parading in a conga round the front of the Royal London hospital, red flags and placards waving in the sunshine, singing 'Solidarity Forever'.

The picket lines were supplemented with rallies and demonstrations, including one [addressed by shadow chancellor John McDonnell](#).

Another key moment was the [joined-up day of protest with BA mixed fleet cabin crew and Bank of England workers](#), addressed by Unite general secretary Len McCluskey.

Serco, a [billion-pound multinational](#) company, dug in. It's no secret whose side [Serco's boss Rupert Soames](#) is on when it comes to exploiting low-paid workers - he is the Eton-educated grandson of Winston Churchill and brother of Tory MP Nicholas Soames!

Profiting from public services is central to [Soames's five-year plan](#) to "turnaround" the "troubled" company. This profiteer plans to take no more contracts from the private sector and concentrate instead on sucking the life-blood from services such as the NHS.

Unite members had [threatened a week of action to "up the ante"](#): a strike and mass meeting was planned for Monday 11 September, a protest at the trust annual general meeting on the Wednesday, a mass turnout at the Waltham Forest Labour council health scrutiny committee on Thursday, a strike and protest at Serco HQ on Friday, and a mops-and-buckets protest at the trust open day on Saturday.

The strike action and this bold plan brought Serco to the table. They realised that their months of distortions, pressure, and use of agency staff were not going to make this campaign buckle.

On top of a 1% increase for the workers on the original NHS contract and an uplifting to the London Living Wage for the workers on the new contract (to £9.75 an hour from as little as £7.50), Serco offered a non-consolidated lump sum payment to all permanent staff, the amount of which the negotiators managed to increase.

It isn't [what workers were originally demanding](#), but the stewards and workers have decided to bank it, and prepare for pay talks starting in October on next year's pay.

It is important that the payment is for all permanent employees, including the London Living Wage staff. Serco had wanted to keep these workers separate, but now, crucially, they will be in the same bargaining unit

as the rest.

There will also be discussions on workload and pay protection. The stewards and members feel this is a win.

The move to Unite has been vindicated. Until recently the ancillary staff in the trust were divided between three different Unison branches. Porter Len Hockey, a Socialist Party member, was branch secretary of Whipps Cross Unison, and led a [fighting branch with battles and victories under its belt](#).

But increasingly the right-wing led London region of Unison in health blocked action and undermined and attacked the branch leadership. In order to be able to fight at all, and to be able to defend their branch leadership from both management and the union, [the porters and domestics at Whipps decided to move over to Unite](#).

The Socialist Party doesn't take this sort of move lightly. Unison is a big union with over a million members, and huge potential power. It is vital to campaign to [change it into a democratic, fighting union](#). Socialist Party members in Unison have taken a lead in that battle for years and still do.

But it is also important that individual workforces are able to organise and defend themselves. They need to be able to take action when necessary.

No union is a panacea in and of itself, and it is vital that workers struggle to maintain democratic control of their own disputes and for a fighting leadership no matter what union they are in.

Tactics have to be flexible - an essential point not understood by the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) whose members in the trust and in the local area [attacked Len Hockey for this move](#).

The move enabled a bold campaign of recruitment of cleaners, porters and catering workers to the union across the trust.

The more experienced Whipps Cross porters have passed on their experience to the newer layers. The union fought for the London Living Wage for the lowest paid and to take workers off zero-hour contracts. Workers were emboldened by their [brilliant action to save their tea breaks](#) in April.

Hundreds of workers joined a union for the first time; others left the Unison branch, which was not fighting, in order to join a fightback.

Many of these strikers had only been in the union for a month when the strike action started. They did not know what to expect, but they knew they wanted action.

New leaders emerged. The strike committee was made up largely of workers new to this kind of struggle. Ordinary low-paid workers, many migrant workers, women, subject to all kinds of pressures, have risen up. Many without trade union experience themselves, they have had the vast challenge of leading a fresh, inexperienced workforce across four hospitals spread over eight miles.

They have led the chanting and the protests, they have organised the picket lines. And they have learned: - about organising mass meetings on picket lines, about visiting other workplaces for solidarity, about collecting money, about spreading the news of their dispute. They have also had to take serious decisions in pressured circumstances.

Now they have experience. Now there is a new-found confidence. A team of leaders, bringing together workers from across all the hospitals, is ready for the next round.

As well as pay negotiations for next year, Serco is conducting a review of jobs, terms and conditions in the whole contract, which will likely mean cuts to jobs and pay.

The stewards feel that this dispute augurs well for the next stage. But it could be a tough fight ahead. Serco needs to know that the workforce is not a pushover.

The [trust needs to be kept under pressure to intervene](#). They have given a contract to a greedy company extracting millions in profit from increasing the workload and grinding down low-paid workers.

Serco has [used agency staff to try to break the strike](#). It is disgraceful that the trust has attempted to stand aside.

The Labour MPs and councillors need to be kept under pressure to act on the trust. The Corbyn-supporting sections of the Labour Party gave solidarity to this dispute but large swathes of the Labour Party - dominated through most of the trust area by the Blairite right-wing - remained silent.

Councillors have powers to call the trust to account. MPs can exert big pressure on both the trust and Serco.

And Unite must be ready to fight again. As Len Hockey has said at meetings around the trust:

"We must keep ownership of the pay negotiations. We have achieved this through collective action and organisation, and that's what we need for the next battles.

"This inspirational movement of mainly migrant workers is changing, and has changed, how workers view themselves and prospects for changing their conditions in a positive direction.

"Serco had considered that the issue of workers' pay would be settled entirely by the company alone in a one-sided way. They now know better and that an organised workforce has entered into the equation."

"We have raised our heads high. We have achieved something. We have a chance to put our case [in upcoming pay negotiations] and we have hope something will be achieved. If not, we are still strong and we will mobilise our people."

Ebrima Sonka, Royal London Unite rep

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 19 September 2017 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

STOP PRESS!

- After publication, the Brum bin workers' union, Unite, has won a High Court ruling against redundancies. [Read more at the Unite website](#).
-

Birmingham bin workers vote to continue action following rally

Clive Walder, Birmingham Central Socialist Party

Several hundred supporters, including a large contingent of bin workers, assembled on 17 September outside the very building in Birmingham where the decision to [issue 113 redundancy notices and deprive some workers of up to £5,000](#) a year was made by the Labour council.

The rally was followed by the announcement that the bin workers have voted overwhelmingly to continue the strike with a 92% vote on a 72% turnout.

From the start there was a carnival atmosphere with a local band playing. In addition to local trade unionists there were workers from Gloucestershire, Mansfield, Greenwich Unite and a delegation of Southampton bin

workers.

There were supporting speakers from civil servants' union PCS, the National Education Union, Bromley Unite who are battling against the complete privatisation of every council service, and the local Asian community.

Lee Barron, regional TUC secretary, also spoke, attacking the Labour council for issuing compulsory redundancy notices by parodying [Neil Kinnock's attack on the socialist-led Liverpool council](#) at the 1985 Labour Party conference.

Rob Williams, National Shop Stewards Network chair, added that Liverpool council never actually made anyone redundant.

Rob went on to explain that this strike is important to council workers across the country and that other councils will take encouragement if the bin workers lose.

He also said: "[We want Labour councillors to stand up to the Tories](#), not act like them. If they do act like them, Jeremy Corbyn should immediately withdraw the Labour whip from them."

This dispute has now assumed national importance as shown by the appearance of Len McCluskey, Unite general secretary, at the rally.

Len gave the support of the whole of Unite and promised that the solidarity of Unite members and others will ensure victory and that they will not stop the action until they have won.

He warned the council that Unite has a strike fund of £36 million, so the bin workers won't be starved back to work.

Howard Beckett, Unite assistant general secretary, is responsible for the dispute and gave a powerful speech which included several references to the need for Stella Manzie, chief executive of Birmingham council and architect of the attack on the bin workers, to be sacked.

He lambasted her for the fact that she was cutting workers' pay by up to £5,000 a year while earning [£180,000 a year](#) herself.

Plus, she has previously more than doubled her salary by claiming massive expenses. He said that the attack on the bin workers isn't where the council will end, it is where they will start.

The council is now upping the stakes by threatening to stop pay completely if workers continue with their industrial action.

They clearly see [this as a landmark dispute](#), and want this to be an example for other councils to follow. This is shaping up to be a long and bitter dispute.

The rally was a great way of bringing the supporters and bin workers together but wider action involving other council workers allied with solidarity from the whole Birmingham working class may be necessary for a successful conclusion.

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 19 September 2017 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

CWU strike ballot - why I'm voting Yes

Carl Harper, CWU activist and Peterborough Socialist Party

When I started as a postman at Royal Mail I felt like I was providing a much-loved public service.

Businesses, both large and small, trust us with important documents. The elderly need us to deliver letters; in many cases their main source of communication, while also providing them with a regular face to talk to (and on occasion fix their leaky kitchen tap!).

The sick and disabled rely on us to deliver medicines. Children delight as we deliver birthday and Christmas cards and presents.

In my office the only people who had part-time jobs were those who wanted them. There was overtime to boost our modest wages if we wanted it and we looked forward to a half-decent pension.

But following [the Tory-led coalition privatising the company](#), there is now a very different ethos.

We are still required to deliver those items customers demand, but now profits are syphoned off to wealthy investors.

Chaotic and continuous savings plans are introduced to increase dividends, whatever the effect it has on the customers and the workforce. Deliveries get longer and longer and [increased workload is accompanied by pressure and even threats](#). The reduced overtime opportunity is effectively a pay-cut for many.

Our [pension is to be replaced with a scheme which robs us of hundreds of pounds a year](#) in our retirement.

Demands

[We are demanding pay, terms and conditions which reflect the service we provide](#). Hours which are appreciative of the demanding workload. And a wage in retirement.

Voting Yes not only sends a signal to the union that these should be fought for, but also to the business that we do not accept their race-to-the-bottom business model.

A strong and resounding Yes vote will also fly in the face of the [Tories' attempts to scupper industrial action by introducing thresholds](#).

Importantly, it could also show there exists industrial strength which could be harnessed into a political campaign for the renationalisation of Royal Mail.

Fight university's 'sackers' charter'

Socialist Students is appalled at Leeds University management's plans to change the university's charter to worsen protections for staff. These include creating a catch-all term to dismiss staff, the removal of an independent legally qualified chair for most dismissal appeals and the removal of a medically qualified chair for panels deciding upon ill health dismissals. This has quite rightly been dubbed a 'sackers' charter' by UCU lecturers' union.

Socialist Students fully supports UCU members in taking strike action against such attacks and we will be joining them on picket lines when they walk out on 11-13 October. We believe our student union should be taking a stand against the sackers' charter and support staff and the strike action by UCU. Socialist Students will be campaigning for them to do this.

While such action will disrupt lectures and other academic activity, we feel this is a minor price to pay compared to what could happen as a result of the charter being adopted. Dismissal of staff who fall foul of 'third party pressure' (such as government agencies or corporations unhappy about the conclusions of academic research) or a 'conflict of interest' (such as whistle-blowers making the public aware of wider concerns) would disrupt our studies far more.

This should not be seen as an isolated issue, but [part of a wider series of attacks on higher education](#), through funding cuts, the introduction of the so-called 'teaching excellence framework' and ever-increasing tuition fees

and student debt. We believe a mass campaign opposing these attacks needs to be built which rallies around the demands for free education, [raised in the recent general election campaign by Jeremy Corbyn](#).

- Please [sign the online UCU petition](#)

Leeds University Socialist Students

McStrike solidarity event

A speaker system boomed down Woolwich High Street calling for the scrapping of zero-hours, for a £10 an hour minimum wage and for people to get organised and join trade unions. Socialist Party members in south-east London were out campaigning to build [solidarity with McDonald's strikers](#). We were joined by two of the striking workers from McDonald's in Crayford. A couple of campaigners went into the local McDonald's to talk to staff there who were supportive and very interested in our campaign. Saturday shoppers also came up to the stall to give generous donations to the strike fund and even gave drinks and chocolate to sustain us while we were campaigning.

Paul Callanan, London Socialist Party

London Buses safety campaign

Angry London bus drivers in Unite the Union demonstrated outside City Hall on 14 September, demanding a 'bill of rights' to [improve the working conditions in line with the London Assembly report 'Driven to Distraction'](#). One protester said: "Bus drivers are not going to accept the terrible and dangerous conditions we currently endure. We are demanding respect." Speakers included bus workers plus speakers bringing solidarity from the National Shop Stewards Network and the transport union the RMT.

Brutal repression of Rohingya people sparks massive humanitarian crisis

Celebrated dissident Aung San Suu Kyi collaborates with military junta

Clare Doyle , International Secretariat, Committee for a Workers' International (CWI)

What was a slow-burning conflict between the government of Myanmar (formerly Burma) and the Rohingya people of Rakhine, has escalated in the last three weeks into a major humanitarian crisis.

More than [400,000 people](#) have fled the country towards neighbouring Bangladesh. Tens of thousands have been trapped in a rain-soaked no man's land without food, shelter or medical aid.

Hundreds of thousands are struggling to survive in makeshift camps in Bangladesh. Newborn infants perish along with the frail and elderly.

The Bangladesh prime minister - Sheikh Hasina - has told the terrified refugees [they must go back!](#)

Now a vast new temporary camp is being built which amounts to nothing but a prison. The refugees are told they must stay in the camps until they return to their country. Local people are forbidden to give them shelter

or aid, even if they are relatives.

Before the brutal military assaults started on 25 August, there were already 400,000 Rohingya in Bangladesh who had fled previous waves of violence.

The government of Myanmar has banned most international aid agencies from giving assistance within its borders.

The United Nations security council has formally condemned the violence which its secretary-general, Antonio Guterres, [describes as ethnic cleansing](#).

For many years, the disenfranchised and oppressed Rohingya people have sought safety beyond the borders of Myanmar.

Just two years ago, there were as many refugees perishing in the seas around Myanmar as those drowning in the Mediterranean.

Today, hundreds of thousands are fleeing the massacres, rape and pillage being carried out by the Burmese military in their 'home' state where they constituted a majority.

Aung San Suu Kyi

[Aung San Suu Kyi is the acknowledged political leader of Myanmar since her party - the National League for Democracy \(NLD\) - won 80% of the popular vote in 2015.](#)

It was the first 'free' general election after 50 years of repressive army rule. But she has earned worldwide condemnation for her failure to speak out against the atrocities inflicted on the Rohingya by 'her' government.

When, two weeks into the crisis, she broke her silence in a phone call to President Erdogan of Turkey, all she could say was that there was a "[huge iceberg of misinformation](#)" about what was happening! This is almost 'Trump-speak' - a total denial of reality.

And this was when the media of the world were exposing incontrovertible evidence of cruelty and mass slaughter of innocent civilians.

She also announced that she would not be appearing at the United Nations general assembly to discuss the issue.

In her most recent speech to Myanmar's parliament she did not address the question of state-sponsored military violence and disingenuously claimed that the government had improved conditions for Muslims living in Rakhine.

Various organisations and academic institutions have called for the withdrawal of Aung San Suu Kyi's Nobel peace prize.

Ironically she was given this award for her own opposition to the rule of the military, which saw her spend 15 years in jail or under house arrest.

The Committee for a Workers' International has always maintained that Aung San Suu Kyi's passive resistance would not be a strong enough weapon to right the wrongs of decades of military rule and she would not mobilise the masses to remove them.

She has long danced to the tune of western capitalism's interests - its trade and investments in the region - but may now be more influenced by the rise of China's military-industrial complex.

Pretext

The military in Myanmar, who still hold the reins of power, justify their actions against the whole Rohingya population (of more than one million) by the need to eliminate 'terrorism'.

Yet it is the army's terror campaign and vicious Buddhist chauvinist persecution which has driven a desperate layer of Rohingya youth in this direction.

On 25 August some fighters of the 'Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army', attacked 30 police posts and an army base, killing several people. The military also said there were 'people inciting riots'.

While an oppressed people has the right to defend itself with arms if necessary, unless there is a mass movement, this kind of tactic alone cannot offer a solution to the suffering of an oppressed people. It can serve as a pretext for state forces to clamp down on a whole population.

The response of the army was to launch a bloody campaign of reprisal, killing hundreds of civilians and burning at least 500 villages to the ground, forcing hundreds of thousands of people - including non-Rohingya - to flee with nothing but the clothes they were wearing.

Muslim Rohingya people have lived in this part of what became Burma since the 12th century. Resentment against them developed when their numbers were increased by the British partly as a counterweight to Buddhist forces during World War Two and also as cheap labour when Burma was regarded as just a province of India within the British Empire.

It was fighters like Aung San Suu Kyi's own father who ended British colonial rule and achieved independence in 1948.

Very soon afterwards, he and his co-fighters were assassinated. Later, in 1962, generals of the Burmese army who had taken power went on to nationalise what had belonged to the British but it was a state without democratic rights and control.

Decades later, in August 1988, a heroic revolt of workers and students came close to overthrowing the generals' dictatorship.

The odds were heavily stacked against them and they did not have the necessary experienced and theoretically equipped party to carry through the revolution.

The uprising was crushed and a further period of intense repression ensued, broken only by a [brief attempt at a new upsurge in 2007](#).

Rights of minorities

In Buddhist-majority Myanmar, the Muslim Rohingya have long been an oppressed minority. There are 135 ethnic groups with recognised status, but the Rohingya are not even recognised as an ethnic group and have been denied citizenship since 1982!

It is notable that Aung San Suu Kyi had not one Muslim Rohingya candidate on the electoral list of her party in 2015.

Nevertheless, ethnic minorities had voted for Aung San Suu Kyi at the time of the election, hoping for moves towards local autonomy and a more federal system.

The military has plundered the natural resources in the states where the ethnic minorities live without giving anything back to them.

Aung San Suu Kyi "is not interested in fighting for the Rohingyas" a Burmese student commented, "and will just let them rot in the concentration camps or perish in the seas," he added.

Several countries in south east Asia have Muslim majorities, including the relatively wealthy Malaysia.

But all of them have maintained, even during the 'boat people' disasters of recent years, that the Rohingya must stay out.

Bangladesh is a poverty-stricken country and one of the most densely populated in the world. But its top politicians - who are second generation 'freedom fighters' from the 1971 war of independence - are among the richest in Asia. They are also among the most corrupt.

On the other hand, the workers of Bangladesh have a proud tradition of struggle - of strikes and 'hartals' - against the bosses and against destructive building projects.

Working people around the world feel powerless to end the suffering of the Rohingya in Myanmar. Within the country there are reports of solidarity demonstrations and angry protests by people from other communities against the atrocities carried out by the military.

Solidarity protests have erupted in Bangladesh as well as Indonesia and elsewhere.

System change

Capitalist politicians and international organisations hold up their hands in horror and weep crocodile tears about events in Myanmar.

But it is their system that breeds war and division. They fear the mass revolt of working and poor people, and may their fears be soon realised!

Events like the present catastrophe for the Rohingya in Myanmar can arouse anger among workers and young people and a questioning of the whole way the world is run.

The struggle to defend persecuted minorities in any country cannot be separated from the need for a united struggle of all workers against the common enemy - the bosses and the defenders of their system.

Parties with socialist ideas and programmes will grow in the hothouse of the big social struggles to come.

Lessons will be drawn about the need to fight for a new society - a society in which the rights of all minorities, up to and including self-determination, are upheld within a voluntary federation of socialist states.

- For [background articles see socialistworld.net](http://socialistworld.net)

Non-fiction: Bitch Doctrine

Refreshing, anticapitalist - but little pointing way forward

Becci Heagney, Salford Socialist Party

Many people, particularly young women, will see their experiences reflected in the pages of Laurie Penny's latest book. '[Bitch Doctrine](#)' features the struggle for abortion rights, the battle against gender stereotypes and the frustration at the little that capitalism has to offer to us.

Penny is clearly anticapitalist, which makes a refreshing change to many writers in the mainstream press who essentially say 'there is no alternative.'

In one of the articles on abortion rights, for example, she argues [it is a right for women to have autonomy over their bodies](#), but also an economic issue: "If there were real choice, real equality, pregnancy, childbirth and motherhood would not come with enormous socioeconomic penalties for all but the richest women."

However, her writing does not focus on what capitalism is and where oppression comes from. Instead it mainly looks at relationships between individuals and language.

Offensive language and behaviour should always be challenged. But to restrict our fight for change to this renders it ineffective.

The book's blurb promises that "these revelatory, revolutionary essays will give readers hope and tools for change." Unfortunately, it disappoints on giving either. In fact it's easy to feel quite depressed after reading Bitch Doctrine.

The first page contains the passage: "As I write, it feels like the world is falling apart. A craven billionaire real-estate mogul and reality television shyster has just been elected to the presidency of the United States, swept to power by a wave of racist rage and violent populism.

"The British government is collapsing after the worst political crisis in living memory, the centre-left opposition is eating itself, bigots are getting brave in the streets and the stock markets are tumbling."

For many people, [the crisis of the Tory government](#) after the EU referendum, including the resignation of David Cameron as prime minister, was welcome! The [following general election pushed the Tories further into crisis](#) as Jeremy Corbyn's anti-austerity manifesto got massive support in the polls.

Certainly it's depressing that Trump won the US election and that racist attacks are increasing. But is it accurate to say that Trump won because of a "wave of racist rage"?

Penny describes Trump's election as being "about white resentment, which is now among the greatest threats to global society." Racist and neofascist individuals and groups do support Trump.

But he was able to win some working class votes by posing as anti-establishment and [promising to bring jobs back](#) to the deindustrialised 'Rust Belt'.

And it wasn't just some white working class people who thought Trump might represent something different - [29% of Hispanic and Asian voters](#) did too.

[Trump was able to get away with this argument because his opponent was the neoliberal establishment figure Hillary Clinton.](#)

Penny reflects the defeatism of much of the left in Britain and the US today. "Personally, I spent three days after the [US] election weeping, writing and trying to force food down myself."

Meanwhile, [Socialist Alternative \(the Socialist Party's co-thinkers in the US\) helped mobilise tens of thousands in protests](#) across the country after Trump's victory was announced.

There is very little in Bitch Doctrine that points a way forward for people who are angry and want change.

Instead, Penny puts the blame, several times, on "years and years of rape apologism on the left" or the "inability to deal properly with male violence against women" and a bizarre accusation that "the usual suspects are at pains to point out that geopolitical disaster could have been avoided if we had all been less precious about gay rights and women's rights and black lives and concentrated on the issues that matter to real people."

It's true that [some left organisations have unhealthy internal regimes and poor positions on fighting for liberation](#). But it is wrong to put the whole of 'the left' in this pigeonhole.

The Socialist Party, for example, has always taken seriously any accusation of violence against women within our own ranks.

We reject the idea that "issues of race, gender and sexuality are at best a distraction from class politics and at worst a bourgeois tendency that will be destroyed after the revolution."

On the contrary. We are at the forefront of campaigning not only against austerity - which disproportionately impacts oppressed groups - [but also against all bigotry and oppression](#).

We want to help build a vibrant movement that involves all sections of the working class to tackle racism, sexism, homophobia and all kinds of discrimination - and the capitalist system which perpetuates them.

But it seems that for Penny, power and class do not originate in the structure of capitalist society, but from an individual's position relative to another individual within that structure.

[For Marxists, it is more complex than this.](#) Class is key not only because it explains where oppression comes from, but because it unlocks the door to creating a better society.

Being working class is not just about being poor. It's about our collective role within society and the power that gives us to change it.

Imagine the difference we can make if we go beyond just correcting the language used by others to mass strikes and political struggle that could start to build a new, democratic and equal society: a socialist world.

Interview: the "socialist John Le Carré"

Edward Wilson is an author described as the 'socialist John Le Carré.' His first novel, 'A River in May', was published in 2002 and is set in Vietnam, where Edward served in the US Special Forces.

The brutal depiction of the horrors of that war are based largely on his own experiences. His latest, ['A Very British Ending'](#), deals with the plot to overthrow Harold Wilson's Labour government.

Below we print extracts of an interview by Tony Saunois, secretary of the Committee for a Workers' International, published in full in the November issue of [Socialism Today](#).

Do you think a government led by Jeremy Corbyn would face the same threat as Harold Wilson did?

Absolutely.

[Wilson was not a genuine lefty.](#) He was an opportunist, although it might not be a popular thing to say. He was a member of the Liberal Club at university. I think Wilson would have liked to lead the right wing in Labour but Gaitskell beat him to it.

Wilson was not a raving Marxist. Yet Gaitskell was their poodle - a prototype Blair. He was to the right of [Tory prime minister] Harold Macmillan. They wanted to stop Wilson - Gaitskell was more reliable.

You set a scene in Gaitskell's home to show where his loyalty lay. The super-rich and secret services are present. Is this a problem today with the Blairites in Labour?

Definitely this issue needs to be addressed. [They would move to sabotage Corbyn.](#)

On the issue of a threat to him and what happened to Wilson. I will tell you about an incident but cannot reveal the names of those involved.

I was at an event sitting next to Lady X, the wife of a general. Not just any general, a senior general. They were very pleasant. She asked me what my next book was about. I said the military plot to overthrow Harold Wilson.

She introduced me to her husband, the Generalissimo, they said - how interesting. We knew three of the people involved. Such a plot was real.

I am not sure the army would react the same way to Corbyn today. I may be wrong. They and the police have been affected by savage cuts. They are more likely to use the banks and the press.

Why use tanks when you have banks? [Greece is possibly a more likely type of threat and what they did there.](#)

Do you think that there is a definite role for novels to act as a mirror to reflect the real life of people and politics?

There should be many more writers who are political. I cannot understand why there are few political novelists. There are many more political writers in theatre.

What better whodunnit than how the ruling class came to power? There is a real plot to develop on that.

In the past there were many more clearly political writers. I like Jack London. Hemingway I despise. Evelyn Waugh was one of the best for the left. Although he was a high Tory he wrote very well to expose the decadence of the ruling class!

The Socialist Inbox

Do you have something to say?

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

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

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

Disability Campaigners

I have had a good relationship with the press recently, not only [the Socialist's response to my letter](#), but the Derbyshire Times last week featured some of my quotes with photographs about my campaign work.

I and my friends Elaine Evans from Bolsover and Adrian Picton from Chesterfield, both Socialist Party members, are involved with 'Disability Campaigners' here in Derbyshire.

We are protesting the fact that people on benefits pay a measure of council tax, whereas before 2014 they did not.

By having to pay this tax, people on benefits have their income taken below basic living levels and into poverty.

We have had favourable responses from the three district councils in north Derbyshire (but no changes of heart yet!) and will press our MPs for a change in the law.

The culmination of our campaign 'Give it Back' is a strike of payments in December called 'Buy yourself a Christmas present'.

More details of our actions are on the ['Disability Campaigners' Facebook group](#). Please ask your readers to investigate and join in by spreading the word and follow-up actions?

Adrian B Rimington

BBC bias

Sir David Cecil Clementi, newly appointed BBC chairman, has said that [politicians have been guilty of allowing the abuse of BBC journalists](#). If so this is reprehensible.

However, it cuts both ways. The disgraceful treatment of the miners during the strike when [the BBC faked footage at the Orgreave Coke depot](#) has not been forgotten.

Nor has the [fake report of Jeremy Corbyn's view on shoot-to-kill for terror attacks](#), for which Laura Kuennsberg was even criticised by the BBC Trust.

It was all part and parcel of a BBC hate campaign against Jeremy Corbyn which shows no signs of abating. If these journalists want respect, then start acting like journalists.

Derek McMillan, Brighton

Sun and socialism

I've just got back from the [Sozialistische Linkspartei](#) (CWI in Austria) summer camp. It was a wonderful week of sunshine and socialism and I'd like to thank all the comrades who helped in it.

I'm going again next year and would like to recommend it to anyone who has a spare week in August.

Andy Beadle, Deptford, south London

Price plunder

The press would like us to think prices are going up due to the decline of the pound versus the euro.

The other day I went into three supermarkets on the same day and I looked at the price of a bottle of a particular Australian wine. In the first it was £7, so I declined to buy.

In the second it was £8.99 - this was the 'consumer-friendly' Co-op - I kept my money in my pocket. In the third it was £8, still too high.

I cannot tell if exchange rates were moving violently on that afternoon, but I suspect prices are rising more because supermarkets think they can get away with it and make a quick profit than anything else.

Pete McNally, Worcester

Mystery shopper

Just imagine working for a drive-in fast food outlet, where maybe six people should be working but just two are left due to holidays, sickness and easy sackings.

Coffee machine broken, ice machine broken, each customer has to be served in a two-minute limit or else; while serving one has to have a smile, hold conversation asking how the customer's day's gone, how lovely their clothes look, that their kids are marvellous even though the kids are spitting at you, and by the way do you want one of our superb muffins?

Then a car pulls up. Someone gets out, takes a photo of the outlet and dread hits you, for you have served the company's "mystery shopper."

You're called in the next day by your manager to be told you will not be receiving the extra 50p an hour for that week because the mystery shopper waited for two minutes and 15 seconds to be fully serviced - and worst of all, you didn't ask them if they wanted one of our superb muffins.

Smarten up or else - even though to get a mark of 100% from the mystery shopper and qualify for a week's extra reward in your pay is near on impossible.

'Rebel with a Cause', Rotherham

Protest to pressure Labour to scrap Haringey redevelopment plans

Nick Auvache, North London Socialist Party

Reflecting pressure inside and outside the Labour Party, [both of Haringey's Labour MPs](#) have called on the Labour council to [stop its massive redevelopment and privatisation plan](#). The plan would transform much of north London from Tottenham to Wood Green, reducing social housing while building new luxury properties.

But the embattled council leadership has shown no sign of listening and recently added to local anger by signing a further development deal with Lend Lease, a property company linked to blacklisting.

Ahead of Labour Party conference, a demonstration through Haringey is planned on Saturday 23 September under the slogan 'social housing not social cleansing'.

Jeremy Corbyn has always spoken out against social cleansing, for protecting existing council housing and the importance of building more council housing to solve the housing crisis. He has also spoken out against privatisation and outsourcing.

Austerity

He should seize on this movement to assert Labour's commitment to opposing austerity and building more social housing and say that the 'Haringey Development Vehicle' should stop. Not to do so risks Labour's support being undermined locally.

If Jeremy Corbyn were to say that such schemes would not be tolerated under a future Labour government then this would also add further pressure and could result in the abandonment of the scheme, which would signal a victory for housing campaigners not just in Haringey but elsewhere as well.

The Corbyn-supporting [left has made advances in the local Labour Party committee elections](#). The Socialist Party argues that it is important that this leads to Labour candidates committed to oppose the disastrous redevelopment and cuts, [in deeds as well as words](#).

Equally, tenants' organisations, trade unions and community organisations should campaign for this. They should ensure that Labour candidates make a pledge to support these aims and if they refuse then there would need to be a conference to build broad support for standing candidates who genuinely represent Corbyn's anti-austerity, anti-privatisation ideas.

- Oppose the HDV demo: Saturday 23 September, assemble 12pm, Tottenham Green, nearest tube Seven Sisters, march to Finsbury Park
-

Fight for an alternative to the misery of capitalism

Join the Socialist Party

Sarah Sachs-Eldridge, Socialist Party national organiser

It's not surprising that [94% of 18 to 24-year-olds](#) don't trust the Tories to handle our education. All they offer is fees and cuts. But nor can they offer answers on homelessness, poverty, inequality.

The stock exchange may have reached [record highs](#) bringing ever-more-obscene wealth to a tiny handful, but for millions of people in Britain and billions across the world, the system that the Tories defend - capitalism - brings only austerity, poverty, war, environmental crisis and misery.

The Tories are incapable of solving our problems because capitalism is based on the pursuit of profits. Inequality and exploitation are at its heart.

The Socialist Party brings together people who want to fight back against this unequal system. We start with the basic but crucial idea that capitalism is not only rotten, it is not the only way to organise society. A socialist society is possible.

We stand for transforming society, taking the top industries into public ownership and democratically planning the economy to meet the needs of all. And we show that change is possible.

The Socialist Party and our [sister parties in the Committee for a Workers' International](#) have a proven record of putting forward ideas that have helped workers and young people win victories. The [mass campaign of non-payment of the poll tax that brought down Thatcher](#), the school [student movement that defeated government education attacks in the state of Spain](#), the first [victory for a \\$15 an hour minimum wage in Seattle in the US](#), all show that when we organise and fight, we can win.

By [joining the Socialist Party](#) you are joining the most determined and effective socialist organisation in the country. Our branches meet every week for inclusive and democratic political discussion and to organise our forces to fight back and to fight for socialist change worldwide.

Tragic death highlights Chatsworth ward closure risk

Jon Dale, Mansfield Socialist Party

Chatsworth ward campaigners were shocked and saddened to hear of the tragic death of a Mansfield man in a house fire recently. Although the full circumstances are not known, the 54-year-old victim was disabled.

The campaign believes this shows how essential it is to have both strong community support and rehabilitation services for people with disabilities.

Past council cuts in community services and the threatened closure of Chatsworth ward mean the lives of many local people with disabilities will be more difficult and even dangerous.

As well as thousands of local people signing petitions, among others lending support to the campaign has been Len McCluskey, Unite general secretary. "Campaigns like 'we are all Chatsworth' show the massive support for the NHS throughout the community," he said. "We must all fight together to save our NHS."

Despite an assurance from the Sherwood Forest Hospitals Trust chief executive to the whole ward staff that no one would be disciplined for participating in [the campaign to save Chatsworth ward](#), in this past week two leading members of the campaign have faced thinly veiled threats from senior management.

Campaigners were angered to hear this and are calling on all their unions to step up the fight to defend Chatsworth and local health services.

It is vital all health unions give full support to members taking a courageous stand on behalf of their patients. If any disciplinary action were taken, this would quickly need to be taken up at national level. Health workers have a right to speak out to defend their patients' services and must not be muzzled.

- Send solidarity messages to weareallchatsworth17@gmail.com
-

East London summit fails to address housing crisis

Waltham Forest Trade Union Council

Before the start of a Waltham Forest housing summit, recently held at Walthamstow town hall east London, many agreed that the system was broken. Around 200 people involved in housing were there.

Unfortunately, the purpose was not genuine dialogue, but in reality to give an aura of legitimacy to the tiny group of property developers who operate under the more appealing names "housing associations" with upbeat titles.

They claim a vision to find "innovative solutions" to so-called intractable problems like landlords charging rents too high and bosses paying wages too low!

It was full of glossy materials and slick presentations. Yet it all boiled down to a series of sales pitches: 'Choose my company to be the council's partner to build homes' and 'let my outfit profit from your residents' needs'.

Pocket Living, a company claiming a social conscience, has carved itself a niche in the market to produce 'compact living' at a so-called discount for single professionals.

A nod in the direction of recognising the plight of young people was a piece of research which concluded that what young people needed was "more information about their options"; and the council responded with ideas about "home-sharing" - living in spare rooms - or about housing with shared facilities!

Linda Taaffe of Waltham Forest Trade Union Council spoke at the summit:

"These private companies are not addressing the needs of the thousands of people registered in housing need, or even those who live in need but don't see any point in registering. The market will not solve the problems. Housing is a social need. [We need thousands of council homes at social rent.](#)"

This was met, amazingly, with a round of applause from those present, but with personal derogatory remarks from the council leader.

Interest at Nottingham Green festival

With a leaflet about [the devastating impact of Hurricane Harvey](#), the Socialist Party held our regular campaign stall at the large, annual Nottingham Green Festival on 17 September.

We advertised our meeting to discuss climate change and events in the US on Monday 25 September. We also collected lots of names of people interested in joining the Socialist Party, sold 48 copies of the Socialist and raised £27.93 for our fighting fund.

Gary Freeman Nottingham Socialist Party
