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NB: A further article commenting on the Labour Party conference will be posted on the Socialist Party website soon, following the end of the conference

Labour's civil war isn't over

Anti-austerity opposition needed to seize on Tories' weakness

Many will have been pleased to see some of the policy announcements coming out of Labour Party conference. Plans for measures to [tackle credit card debt](#) and [bring PFI contracts back in-house](#), for example, are welcome. More disappointing is the lack of any real progress - despite Corbyn's emphasis in his speeches on rank-and-file control and democratisation - [on transforming the party](#).

Unite the Union general secretary Len McCluskey [was quoted as saying](#): "In my 47 years in the party, I have never seen it so united" and that there is now no "serious opposition to Corbyn from within the PLP" because "suddenly, they have realised that not only was that not the case [that Corbyn would destroy Labour's electoral chances] but they themselves have been reinvigorated."

This idea that the Blairites who dominate the PLP have seen the error of their ways and converted to Corbynism is a mistake. It's true that their open attacks on Corbyn have been more subdued since June's general election, which so clearly asserted his popularity. But that will only be temporary, and has not stopped the right's battle for power, particularly over the issue of Brexit.

They were outraged by their defeat in the vote over which contemporary motions would be voted on at the conference - having wanted Brexit and membership of the Single Market to be a key vote. The selection of topics including housing, the NHS, workers' rights, public sector pay and the Grenfell fire for debate showed the numerically strengthened position of the left at this year's conference - where 70% of delegates are thought to support reforms put forward by the Corbyn-backing group Momentum.

Single Market

The right wing wants to maintain membership of the [Single Market](#) mainly because those MPs represent the interests of capitalism within the Labour Party. But they also see it as a way to undermine Corbyn's support from those who voted to stay in the EU out of a sense of internationalism and fear for migrants' rights (both of which are alien to these politicians). Unfortunately past mistakes by Corbyn have contributed to this confusion. His decision to back a Remain vote in last year's referendum means that most of his supporters have never heard the socialist case for leaving the neoliberal EU.

Corbyn said himself on the BBC's Andrew Marr show on 24 September: "At the moment we're part of the single market. That has within it restrictions on state aid and state spending. That has pressures on it through the European Union - for example to privatise rail and other services. I think we have to be quite careful about the powers we need as national governments." He gave the examples of the EU's barriers in the way of nationalising the steel industry and the insistence of brutal austerity in Greece.

But these points are not the ones that have been emphasised in Labour's position on Brexit, because Corbyn has not put himself and the left-wing, anti-austerity ideas he represents at the forefront of this debate. Instead Blairite Kier Starmer has been left to take the lead - including, for example, by giving the main speech at the conference on the issue.

[Starmer's position - of a two year 'transition' after Brexit where Single Market and Customs Union memberships are maintained](#) - has now been adopted by Theresa May. This was an attempt by May to appease Chancellor Phillip Hammond who reportedly wanted a four-year transition (this evidently failed - [he refused to say he thinks May should remain in place to see through another general election](#)). Hammond's preference, reflecting the view of the overwhelming majority of big business, seems to have been reduced at the behest of Boris Johnson and the pressure following his 4,000-word Brexit manifesto in the Telegraph. This has highlighted yet again the mess that the Tories are in and that May has no ability to seize control of either her own party or politics more widely.

In this situation, the opportunities for a Labour Party up to the task are immense. The Tories could tear themselves apart, triggering a general election at any time. There is no time to lose in building a party capable of being a mass, anti-austerity, working class opposition.

The Socialist Party calls for:

- Mandatory reselection 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 Europe on a socialist basis

Scrap tuition fees

Fight for free education

Build for budget day walkouts

Clare Laker-Mansfield, Socialist Students national organiser

Tuition fees can be beaten. Chancellor Phillip Hammond's announcement that he [will consider lowering them in the next Tory budget](#) is an indication of his government's enormous weakness. This vulnerability is clear both in a general sense and on the specific issue of fees.

The move by [the DUP to back a Labour motion](#) aimed at blocking the increases planned under the Higher Education Act indicated the huge fissures that could open up on the issue. It highlighted the potential for a mass movement to break this government.

The [8 June general election](#) represented a revolt of working class people, but particularly youth and students. If on autumn budget day (22 November) Hammond does what he has suggested and moves to reduce university fees, it will be as a concession to that electoral revolt. But it will not be enough.

Under the current system, students beginning university this year face half a lifetime of debt. With interest rates on student loans now set at a staggering 6%, and with huge fees being combined with the abolition of what remained of maintenance grants, the amounts owed by today's students are at record levels.

'Debt time-bomb'

No wonder some commentators are talking about [a 'debt time-bomb'](#). Estimates indicate that a young person beginning their studies in 2017 will have to earn over £50,000 a year before they begin paying back the capital on their loan.

In austerity Britain, with its gig economy and low wages, this means most graduates will never come anywhere close to paying off their debts. In fact most will find that, despite handing hundreds of pounds over to the loans company, the amount they owe will continue to grow year-on-year.

This underlines the importance of us demanding the complete abolition of fees and the reintroduction of grants for students. The promise to reintroduce free education was among the most popular in Corbyn's manifesto. But this should also be combined with a pledge to write off student debt. Such a possibility was hinted at by Corbyn in an interview he gave in the lead up to the election, though he subsequently appears to have stepped back from it.

Rather than accepting the faulty logic of the capitalist establishment which deems this 'unaffordable', Corbyn should boldly demand that the money to fund it is taken from the pockets of the super-rich. After all, why should recent and existing students continue to pay for the pro-1% policies of the Tories or the Blairites?

The task of students beginning their studies this week is to organise. Free education has been placed firmly back on the agenda. We need to use the momentum generated during the election campaign to help make this an autumn of resistance. That means getting organised on every campus. But it also means coordinating the fight on a national level.

That's why Socialist Students is demanding that the National Union of Students (NUS) uses its resources to build and mobilise a massive national demonstration this autumn. In 2010, when tuition fees were tripled to £9,000, an NUS-called demo saw over 50,000 students on the streets - sparking a mass movement of school, college and university students.

Movement

Disgracefully, NUS's right-wing leadership subsequently abandoned the struggle - condemning students who occupied Tory HQ and refusing to organise or even support further action. It was this, combined with the failure of the leadership of the trade union movement to move into struggle against the vicious Con-Dem coalition government at that point, which ultimately led to the defeat of the movement.

Today's NUS leadership is cut from the same Blairite cloth as those who abandoned the fight against fees in 2010.

Unless there is a radical change of course, including, as a first step, the organisation of a huge protest in the next months, they will occupy a similarly cowardly position.

Nonetheless, with or without the leadership of NUS, it's clear that the raw ingredients for a mass struggle on a similarly large scale to 2010, are present in the situation. This is true not just because of the anger that exists at sky-high fees, but because of the increased confidence that an alternative to austerity can be won.

As well as building the pressure on the NUS leadership to act, Socialist Students is calling for a huge day of action - or 'education shutdown' - on budget day. We will be organising for protests on every campus or college where we are present, and encouraging all those who want to join the fightback to take up the call and mobilise students to protest on this day.

Not only stunts and protests, but occupations and walkouts, could potentially be posed. If it were widely taken up, this could act as a spring board to building a mass campaign to win free education and kick out the Tories.

Since Socialist Students called for action on budget day, the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts (NCAFC) subsequently announced their intention to organise a protest on 15 November.

The Socialist Students committee wrote to the NCAFC leadership with the aim of opening up a dialogue about the way forward for our movement and how different organisations can work together to maximise the potential for mass resistance to the government. We have yet to receive a reply. An extract from the letter, the full version of which can be found at socialiststudents.org.uk, is carried below:

Dear comrades,

We write today in the hope of opening up a discussion on how best to build and take forward the student movement this autumn and beyond. The general election on 8 June raised the sights and expectations of hundreds of thousands of university and college students that the demand for free education is winnable.

Alongside this fresh politicisation of a huge new layer of students and young people, the Tory government, before the election confident that it could strengthen itself in parliament ahead of fresh attacks on the education system and wider society, has instead been severely weakened.

Reflecting this drastically altered political situation, Socialist Students has consistently stated the need for national demonstrations, and that they be coordinated by a fighting and democratic NUS leadership. Without NUS, a national demonstration on 15 November - if it goes ahead - will need to be organised democratically by all capable forces within the student movement.

This should include Socialist Students, which has grown to be a national organisation present on 40 campuses up and down the country. Our organisers have collective experience in leading various student protests and days of action, and we have roots among students on numerous university campuses.

Socialist Students would play a hugely positive role in building and mobilising for a national demonstration in the autumn time alongside NCAFC and other student organisations. Organising a successful national demonstration, especially in the absence of the leadership of the NUS, will take the involvement of Socialist Students and other organisations which have a national presence on university campuses.

The setting up of democratic planning committees, with participants from NCAFC, Socialist Students, and other groups willing to participate, should be central to achieving this aim. By establishing structures which allow for the participation of different groups in democratic discussion around the different aspects of building for such an action (including the tasks of mobilisation, political demands, speakers lists etc) we can have a greater impact as a united movement.

Socialist Students agrees with NCAFC that it is necessary to build further action beyond simply one isolated national demonstration. Socialist Students, under the banner of an 'education shutdown', has called and already started preparations for action on university campuses on budget day. This could potentially be received very enthusiastically and pull new layers of students into struggle, especially if built cooperatively and democratically alongside other groups.

We look forward to hearing your response to the points we raise here and furthermore suggest an urgent meeting ahead of the start of the new term. We hope this will be helpful to building alongside you and other groups for elevated student struggles in the future.

In solidarity,

Socialist Students steering committee

Freshers week campaigning reports

The following brief reports illustrate a hugely successful intervention of Socialist Students during the freshers weeks that have taken place so far.

Portsmouth University

Portsmouth South constituency was won by Corbyn's Labour on 8 June and we met many students at the freshers fair who had enthusiastically voted Labour to end tuition fees and Tory austerity.

Many have signed up to our Socialist Students society and some new faces came to our first meeting, keen to get campaigning for the student walkout on budget day.

Among those who signed up was a survivor from the [Grenfell Tower fire](#) who had lost family members and was furious about the failures of Kensington council and the Tory government. We discussed having a meeting about the fire and campaigning on the issue of housing.

Many student tower blocks are being built in Portsmouth and across the country, with reports that some have a cladding similar to Grenfell and are potentially unsafe.

We have plans for weekly campaign stalls and regular meetings to ensure we get everyone active and reach out to meet more people. Our message is loud and clear - 'Walkout on budget day for free education!'

Portsmouth Socialist Students

Woodhouse FE College

A socialist society has been established at Woodhouse FE College, north London, after more than 100 students signed up. The first meeting was focused against the [Haringey Development Vehicle](#) - a local issue that many were, unfortunately, unaware of.

One topic frequently raised was the college's poor bursary system. Many agreed that action should be taken to improve it. It's likely that it will be the first socialist society campaign in college.

Many of those who signed up were interested in attending Socialism 2017. More generally, the society has been a good way to increase political awareness among students.

George Jenkins

Northumbria University

The Socialist Party staged a three-day long successful intervention in Newcastle, where stalls were held to build regional support and membership for our Socialist Students.

Students signed our petitions for free education and against austerity, and young people and passers-by expressed their discontent towards the out-of-touch Tory government and its policies of privatised education, extortionate tuition fees, zero-hour contracts, poverty pay, rapacious rent charges, as well as their racist and anti-immigrant rhetoric.

Socialist Students national organiser Claire Laker-Mansfield spoke at our public meeting on building Socialist Students and campaigning for a student walkout on budget day.

James Hunter South Tyneside Socialist Party

Leeds

Socialist Students had one of our best freshers week ever in Leeds, with stalls at Leeds University, Leeds Beckett University and Leeds Arts University.

At Leeds University, 185 people left their contact details to get involved - with support for Corbyn and the demand for free education being a real attraction.

25 turned up to our introductory meeting on 'What is Socialism?', and we are hoping for even more new people to attend our second meeting and our abortion rights solidarity demo on 28 September.

Iain Dalton, Socialist Students Yorkshire organiser

Staffs University

Socialist Students had a lively stall at Staffs Uni. We were congratulated by many students we spoke to for actively campaigning to get rid of tuition fees, scrapping zero-hour contracts and for a £10 an hour minimum wage.

Former McDonald's worker Dan told us: "At the age of 16 me and my mate tried to set up a union when we were working for McDonald's but were told that it was not allowed. So it was fantastic to see [McDonald's workers taking strike action](#) last week. How quickly things can change."

We gave out around 500 Socialist Students leaflets calling for a demonstration on budget day to demand free education - which got a resounding yes from everyone!

Andy Bentley

KCL

Kings College London Socialist Students had its first freshers' fair as a registered society. Every day of freshers' week there were Socialist Students stalls on campus.

In just two days over 200 people signed up to the society. There was huge enthusiasm for our ideas; people stopped to talk about everything from Corbyn to Sanders, from the weak state of the Tories to the fight for free education.

Helen Pattison

Liverpool University

Socialist Students at University of Liverpool (UoL) is off to a strong start. Our stall outside the uni got 50 students signing up because they agreed with our slogans of "Tories out - Corbyn in! Join the socialists!"

Many were really enthusiastic about getting actively involved in society meeting and activities, and marching against the Tories in Manchester on 1 October.

UoL Socialist Students will meet weekly on Wednesday, 5pm, in the Harold Wilson room at the Guild of Students. Find our Facebook page: 'Liverpool Socialist Students'.

Liverpool Socialist Students

Sampson allegations show overhaul needed in women's football

Suzanne Wrack

At the start of the summer women's football was riding high. In the build up to the European Championships, England, for the first time in a very long time (in men's or women's football), were one of the favourites. A [crushing semi-final exit](#) to the hosts and eventual winners, the Netherlands, ranked 12th in the world to England's fifth at the time, ended hopes of the title.

The women returned frustrated, but could come home with heads held high, Arsenal's Jodie Taylor with the golden boot too. All talk was about the effect of the tournament on the growth of the game. Of using the success of the Lionesses to lift participation in the domestic game and boost [Women's Super League](#) attendances.

But this success and the start of the new season have been overshadowed. Goings on off the pitch have rocked the women's game.

The [news of an £80,000 payment](#), seemingly hush money, to Chelsea's Eni Aluko following a complaint she had made about racism and bullying within the England set up was leaked to the press.

England manager Mark Sampson was at the centre of Aluko's allegations. The FA had investigated and ruled there was no case to answer. They also commissioned a lawyer to conduct a further investigation which found the same.

However, the gaping holes in these investigations soon came to light. As well as the mysterious payout for a complaint not upheld, the investigations failed to interview any of the key witnesses in the dispute or review footage before reaching conclusions.

With pressure rising on the FA, Sampson claiming innocence and MPs demanding the FA answer to a select committee over its handling of the affair, the case shows no sign of going away.

So when [Sampson was sacked](#) - after presiding over a 6-0 defeat of Russia in England's first 2019 World Cup qualifier - many naturally concluded it was related to the Aluko case.

Allegations

Except according to the FA, the sacking is unrelated. Instead 'new' information had come to light relating to Sampson's conduct - "inappropriate behaviour" while at Bristol Academy. This allegedly followed FA chief executive Martin Glenn finally reading the report commissioned by the FA in 2015 into Sampson's behaviour, following an investigation that led to him having to undergo a year-long educational course.

How Sampson was able to be appointed to the top job in the women's game following questions about his suitability being raised as far back as 2013, is unfathomable.

Yet the FA did hire Sampson, and ignored complaints about him. And this year they inadequately investigated Aluko's allegations of racism and bullying. Why did they feel the need to protect Sampson? At what point did it become about protecting themselves?

What is clear is that this governing body is less a gatekeeper for the people's game, and more about protecting the reputation of a profitable entity. Those at the top of the national game aren't fit for purpose. An overhaul is needed.

Gig economy exploiter Uber loses London licence

Moshin Ahmed, London bus driver and Tower Hamlets Socialist Party

Transport unions Unite, RMT and GMB are celebrating a victory against 'gig economy' taxi company Uber after [forcing London Mayor Sadiq Khan to refuse to renew its operating licence](#).

Uber has been undercutting unionised taxi drivers, but the unions have been fighting back with strikes and demonstrations alongside legal challenges.

The [GMB won an employment tribunal ruling last October over Uber](#), so that drivers should be regarded not as 'independent contractors' but workers with employment rights. The small independent union IWGB has been waging similar fights against the likes of Deliveroo for couriers who are also super-exploited.

On 18 September, GMB handed in a 100,000-strong petition to London City Hall calling on Transport for London (TfL) to force Uber to respect workers' rights or have their license revoked.

Drivers

The unions should now demand that Uber be forced to compensate drivers who lose their jobs. Also, the mayor and London Assembly should put together and fund a package of assistance for the London Uber drivers to enable them to get other employment, whether as taxi drivers or in other sectors.

Given the cost of travelling around the capital, it's also understandable that some working class Londoners are concerned about the ban. Unions and communities need to fight for a fully integrated and publicly owned transport network in London with full trade union rights for workers on the same agreed pay rates and terms and conditions, and offering affordable prices and an efficient service for all.

Sadiq Khan must refuse to implement the massive budget cuts to TfL by linking together with London's transport unions in a united struggle against Tory austerity. The Uber drivers should be approached by the unions to be part of this struggle - and with the message that to secure decent work they need to be organised to fight super-exploitation by the likes of Uber and any other private operator with a licence.

The unions also point out that Uber's exploitative practices are a real threat to the safety of drivers and customers. Just four days before this petition was handed in, Unite members on London buses [held a protest outside City Hall](#) demanding a '[bill of rights](#)' for the safety of passengers, public and bus workers to show that union organisation is the best protection for everyone.

Uber is already on the back foot, with its chief executive having been forced to issue an apology, saying that mistakes had been made and the company needs to change. Clearly not being able to operate in a major capital city would be a big blow for the company.

Travel chaos for Ryanair customers as airline cancels thousands of flights

Daniel Jones, Caerphilly Socialist Party

There has recently been controversy among the clouds, or rather down on the ground, for Europe's largest airline, Ryanair, [amid cancellations and a major staffing crisis](#). The airline is set to make 2,000 cancellations over six weeks which could affect up to 400,000 passengers. Ryanair has admitted that the problem was caused by mistakes made in pilot rostering after it 'mismanaged' their holidays.

This crisis at Ryanair exposes the limitation of privately owned transport and deregulation. Many customers will not think of using the company to fly again after experiencing short notice cancellations, leaving booked hotels and holidays go to waste and no guarantee of compensation other than for flights as insurers are refusing to cover costs.

Despite the message sent out by Ryanair, implying that these cancellations are down to pushy pilots wanting their holidays and the result of an understanding employer too willing to oblige, it's clear to most people that there is something much bigger happening than a simple rostering mistake.

The European Cockpit Association (ECA), representing 38,000 pilots, opposes Ryanair's anti-union stance and believes the Ryanair pilots should unite as a group. The ECA also says that pilots across Europe support demands from staff for significant changes and improvements to their terms and conditions.

Undercut

Another major issue that faces the pilots is the use of agencies or self-employed pilots who are used to undercut the conditions of those employed by the company and create a race to the bottom on working conditions and wages. The demand for better working conditions and pay was put strongly in joint letters sent by pilots from numerous European bases.

Ryanair has a significant problem on its hands if it doesn't meet its workers' demands, including possible strike action by pilots and cabin staff. [The 24-hour strike by Thomas Cook pilots on 23 September](#) and the

long-running dispute involving [British Airways cabin crew](#) have shown that strike action by workers in aviation is possible.

One in four teenage girls depressed - crisis made worse by cuts

Emily, East London Socialist Party

We are more familiar with depression than ever. What was considered uncommon 20 years ago is now increasingly prevalent, particularly among young people, with new studies indicating that [one in four girls have depression by age 14](#), with children from poorer families more likely to suffer.

By age 14, teenagers may have experienced bullying, exam stress, sexual harassment, domestic issues, poverty or discrimination. Yet depression in teenagers is largely perceived as something to grow out of and the underlying mental health issues and experiences of teenagers are ignored.

Women, in particular, throughout life are disbelieved about their experiences, physical or mental.

Finance

The term 'depression' is linked to the mind, and also to finance. Since the financial crash, schools and the NHS have become critically under-funded and inaccessible. Increasing awareness of mental health issues has not done enough and depression is reaching crisis point.

It is no coincidence that there is a rise in cases of depression as GP surgeries and hospitals are closing nationally, there are long waiting lists for short-term NHS counselling and astronomical price tags for private therapy.

This is on top of prescription charges for anti-depressants and other medication. Teenage years, especially as a woman, can be the most imprisoning time of a person's life, with huge pressure to succeed, limited support and austerity determining their choices.

Depression among young people cannot be solved without adequate funding for the NHS, schools and other public services which improve the lives of young people and families. Wellbeing must be prioritised over profit.

Bristol: demand for no-cuts budget grows

Robin Clapp, Socialist Party south west secretary

In a bitter twist to the pantomime tale of Dick Whittington, a poor man who went to London and ended up becoming Lord Mayor, Bristol Labour Mayor Marvin Rees travelled there on 12 September to seek an audience with the Tories and bring back extra money for the city and ended up with... nothing.

Just three days before, [he spoke angrily about the injustice of austerity to 6,000 cheering demonstrators](#). But this was little more than a cynical attempt to avoid any responsibility for making subsequent eye-watering budget cuts.

Assistance

Bristolians hoped that in going to tackle Tory treasury minister Sajid Javid, Rees would emerge with an assurance that Bristol would receive emergency budgetary assistance that could end the threat to close the majority of the city's libraries, public toilets and other essential services, save the jobs of the 50% of school crossing personnel facing redundancy and stop the further smashing of disability provision.

Instead, not one Tory cabinet minister had time to see him, not even a junior minister, just as Socialist Party members and anti-cuts organisation Badaca had warned would be the likely outcome. Why should Tory ministers give the time of day to Mayor Rees and his entourage, when they know in advance that he has no real intention of standing up to them by mobilising workers across the city around a no-cuts budget based on using reserves and borrowing powers?

Linked to a mass campaign across other Labour local authorities, the ten or 12 mayors and leaders of the big Labour cities would be able to stop the Tories in their tracks. Weak and enfeebled and lacking the judicial power in any case to challenge no-cuts budgets, May would be left as impotent as when ten DUP MPs came calling, only this time such a determined stance could deal a fatal blow to her government and propel Labour into office.

Rees has tried to defend his capitulation, with the council website once again untruthfully insisting a no cuts budget "is not something that is within the power of the council to implement." Yet Bristol councillors used £11 million of reserves this year to balance the budget! The council has nearly £200 million in reserves (most of which is usable for setting a no-cuts budget.)

The local government sectoral conferences of Unite, Unison and the GMB unions, and Wales TUC all support councils setting no-cuts budgets as part of a strategy to defeat Tory austerity.

Message

Even within the Labour Party the message that it's time to fight is now hardening. At a recent Bristol local campaign forum meeting, in the face of opposition from the Labour Deputy Mayor Craig Cheney, the following motion was passed by 16-12:

"17 libraries, precious services for adult dementia and disability services, neighbourhood groups, parks, lollipop crossings and public toilets are all avenues that ensure equality. We oppose these cuts categorically. We are proud of our services and we want them kept as they are, within the council's jurisdiction and not tendered out to charities or businesses. We would like our Labour mayor and Labour councillors to suspend the £4.7 million cuts to Bristol services right NOW by using reserves or their borrowing power: people's lives are in danger."

As this year's budget-setting process begins, this message will grow louder and be taken up more and more insistently. For Mayor Rees, for the Labour councillors - many who are opponents of any fightback, anywhere, and in any period - and indeed for the Labour Party nationally, the time for quietly passing the buck by blaming the Tories and then carrying out the butchering of our local services is coming to an end.

Salford: Labour mayor needs to stop all cuts

Salford Socialist Party members

Elected mayor of Salford City Council Paul Dennett has been seen by many as a welcome change to the previous Labour mayor, Ian Stewart, who acted as the Tories' loyal servant in the city. Stewart ruthlessly decimated services for both children and adults with disabilities and attacked trade unionists for standing up for their members. Paul Dennett, as a self-described Corbyn supporter and set a different tone during the election and the first year after being elected.

Dennett verbally opposed austerity, supported Corbyn, and had a friendly, cooperative approach to the trade unions. Because of this, some in the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) - at the prompting of the

Socialist Workers' Party, which was then a constituent member of TUSC - thought that TUSC should not to stand an anti-austerity candidate against him last year. We thought that this was a mistake and warned that what was needed in Salford was more than a change in words, but a change in actions.

Dennett did not commit to use the position to stop all cuts in the council. We argued that unless Dennett was willing to mobilise a mass campaign to demand the money needed for services in Salford from the government, he would inevitably carry out cuts and come into conflict with working class people. Unfortunately, this is what has happened.

£16 million of cuts

The budget set in February this year included £16 million in cuts, despite Salford City Unison submitting an alternative, legally 'balanced' no-cuts budget. Most of the cuts weren't detailed and instead many services were put up for review.

We argued that a genuine review into services, in conjunction with the trade unions and service users, would be welcome. But, trying to 'kick the can down the road' would just result in making cuts later on.

A no-cuts budget would buy time to start mobilising a mass campaign against Tory cuts, showing the people of the city that the council fights for them. Just delaying implementation of some cuts will not win the mass working class support necessary to wage a serious struggle in defence of public services.

One such decision that has now been made is to close the Grange, Salford's only residential home for disabled children. After years of the Grange being run down, it has now been labelled unviable. Parents and supporters have waged a fantastic campaign to save the home and Unison again submitted alternative options to the council, but the council unanimously voted to close it.

Unison has taken an indicative ballot, which came back with overwhelming support for strike action if redundancies are made or its members are threatened with any detriment to their pay or terms and conditions. Unfortunately, the anti-union laws prevent Unison from balloting against the closure itself, but the local branch has been and remains supportive of the public campaign.

Fire safety

Another crisis that is facing Mayor Dennett follows the tragic Grenfell tower fire. Salford is the city with the largest number of tower blocks which failed tests on their cladding - a shocking 29. Nine of these are owned by the council in the Pendleton area of Salford.

The council had moved quickly in ordering the cladding to be removed but this stopped when the government refused to pay for the costs. The council has now agreed to borrow £25 million to remove cladding from the Pendleton tower blocks. Deputy Mayor John Merry raised at a public meeting that instead of meekly paying the money back, they will instead demand it from the Tories.

We welcome this action by Salford City Council. We have argued for many years that the council can use its prudential borrowing powers to plug gaps in funding, while fighting to get this money back from central government.

Now Dennett must mobilise tower block tenants, trade unions and the wider population in a mass campaign to demand that the Tories pay up, and that all unsafe cladding is removed from buildings in Salford.

The council must also ensure that the other tower blocks in the city that are owned by Salix Homes and City West housing associations - 18 in total - that have failed tests are made safe. These two companies have announced that they will be replacing the cladding, although the work appears to have halted over recent weeks.

While the council does not have direct control over these organisations - after it pushed ahead with stock transfer and privatisation - councillors are still members on the boards and are in a position to put pressure on them to ensure the work is carried out as quickly as possible.

The council's stance highlights that the strategy the Socialist Party has been putting forward is possible. The Grange closure will save the council £300,000 a year. Why not borrow an additional £1 million and keep the Grange open for the next three years?

If Dennett continues to carry out cuts to jobs and services, he will lose support from working class people in Salford and the Corbyn supporters who thought that he would make real change. Jeremy Corbyn and his supporters in the Labour Party need to urgently demand that local Labour councillors fight back, refuse to carry out any further cuts and stand against austerity in action, not just words.

Ledbury tenants fight for decent homes

The Socialist has [previously reported that the Ledbury estate in Southwark](#), South London, following the Grenfell Tower fire, was declared wholly unsafe by structural engineers and residents were told they may have to temporarily leave.

This was due to large cracks (which you could fit your whole hand into) in the fabric of the four 13-storey tower blocks.

The Labour council was forced into action by the revelation that the blocks should never have been installed with gas because the structures would fail in the event of explosion and, like the Newham tower block Ronan Point in 1968, lead to collapse.

Danielle Gregory, Ledbury tenant and leading figure in the Ledbury action group spoke to Southwark Socialist Party activist Bill Mullins.

Bill: Ledbury tenants had been complaining about the cracks for over 20 years. When did you get involved?

Danielle: I have been a tenant for eight years and raised the issue with the council many times. They said there was nothing to worry about, it was down to 'natural movement' but I realised it posed significant fire risk.

On 6 June, a few days before the Grenfell fire I raised concerns. The council once again said there was nothing wrong.

It was only after Grenfell that the council took it seriously. They didn't want to; I had to call the fire brigade in, and their report gave a damning verdict (on the dangerous state of the blocks).

It was only after I threatened to go to the press did the council conduct its own investigation.

BM: What is the main demand of the tenants after Grenfell?

DG: We want safe council homes and an end to the negligence of the council.

Arup (the council's appointed building engineers) came along to look at the blocks. But we took advice from experts, who the Guardian had initially approached for comment, and on 11 July they pointed out, to both Arup and the council, that having gas installations in the building made it very unsafe.

How is it that our experts can see the problem but theirs can't? Is it incompetence or something more sinister?

BM: There were two issues, the cracks in the buildings and the unsafe gas installations. I believe there is a third one now?

DG: Yes there is now the whole question of structural viability. This is a result of the discovery that the buildings do not meet the regulations following the Ronan Point collapse in 1968.

The council cannot find the plans from when blocks were built between 1968 and 1970 and whether they live up to the regulations from that period.

BM: What will do you want if it turns out the blocks have to come down?

DG: We want to see the blocks safely fixed, that is our priority. If that cannot happen we want the land kept in the council and that the new buildings are council tenancies.

BM: What has the council said to that?

DG: Vague promises. If Arup says it's not feasible or affordable the council have refused to say what they will then do. They refuse to enter into discussions about that!

BM: What do you want if the blocks are not brought up to standard?

DG: Sam Webb (a retired RIBA architect) said the buildings cannot be safely fixed. If that is true then we are really upset.

We are now awaiting the Arup report due out on 20 November. If it says the blocks can be fixed, good. But if not then we expect the promise made by council leader Peter John to keep the land in council ownership be delivered, and that any new developments are council homes not private ones.

We have to be prepared to fight against what Peter John inferred - that a PPP (public-private partnership) arrangement would take its place. We are totally against this.

First and foremost we want the blocks fixed. If Arup says the buildings have to come down, we want a guarantee that the blocks will be replaced by council homes at council rents, with council tenants, not so called 'affordable ones' or 'housing partnerships'.

Ledbury estate protest march

Sunday 24th September

3pm, outside Ledbury TRA hall, Pencraig Way, off Old Kent Road, London SE15 1SH

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 22 September 2017 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

Hundreds march against Labour council's development plan

Nick Auvache, North London Socialist Party

Around 600 people marched through the streets of Haringey, north London, on 23 September to oppose [the council's Haringey Development Vehicle \(HDV\)](#).

HDV is a huge redevelopment scheme, run by a blacklisting company, which will see thousands of tenants driven out of their homes and small businesses destroyed.

The demo definitely had a big impact on passers-by as it weaved through the streets. There was a determined but jubilant mood among the protesters, many who could smell victory as this is an issue that has split the

Labour council.

Both the affected Labour MPs and constituency Labour parties have made it clear that they oppose it but still the leaders of the council refuse to withdraw their plans.

As well as local opposition, a legal challenge has now begun. This could have a positive outcome but to rely exclusively on this would be a mistake. That's why it is important to ensure that all Labour council candidates for the 2018 elections are clearly opposed to both the HDV and further cuts.

Some Labour Party members recognised that the right wing would still win enough support to put up candidates that support cuts and the HDV. They also did not rule out the possibility of the Lib Dems winning some seats at the expense of Labour due to their opportunist opposition to the HDV scheme.

We have a duty to explain that these forces are unrepresentative, unreliable and cannot be a solution to the problem - which is why we raise the idea of standing independent candidates.

The Socialist Party welcomes recent developments in the shift to the left in the two Haringey Labour parties. But if Labour candidates that oppose the HDV and cuts are not secured, then a conference of local community groups, parties and trade unions to discuss standing independent candidates should be considered.

This idea was welcomed by those on the demonstration. It was also commented that while some Labour councillors had voted against the HDV they were not present at the demonstration.

Had they appeared openly and defiantly in support of the demo, it would have delivered a very public blow to the council's social cleansing plans. While tweeting and posting their opposition is important it is also important demonstrate on the streets with those who have built this campaign.

The support received for our ideas was confirmed by the hundreds of leaflets distributed, 32 copies of the Socialist sold and four people who filled out cards to find out more about joining the Socialist Party.

Stop the cuts - save our vital services

Steve Williams, Doncaster Socialist Party

"They cut, we bleed - Save Women's Aid" was chanted outside Doncaster council chamber by approximately 30 trade unionists, socialists and community activists, on 21 September.

We were on the streets to demand that [Doncaster council restore funding to Women's Aid](#), which provides a lifeline to women desperate to escape from domestic abuse. The sum being asked for is only £30,000. Doncaster's Labour-run council has around £90 million in usable reserves.

The councillors, mainly right-wing Blairites, showed their disdain by closing the blinds on the windows of the council chamber that looked out on the lobby.

Inside, angry protesters demanded to know, if Women's Aid is forced to close, are the councillors responsible prepared to pay for the funeral of the next local woman to die due to domestic abuse.

They also unfurled their banner, which carried the slogan: "They Cut, We Bleed".

The answer from Ros Jones, the elected mayor, was to adjourn the council meeting, while the protesters were removed.

The fight to defend Woman's Aid will go on. The protesters are unbowed and have an itinerary of action lined up for the coming weeks.

However, a fight for reselection also needs to be conducted within the Labour Party. It is time for those Labour mayors and councillors who continue to implement Tory cuts to be deselected and replaced by

fighters who can transform Labour into a truly anti-austerity party.

Lessons of October new edition out now!

A new edition of Lessons of October, by Leon Trotsky, is out now from Socialist Books!

As the centenary of the Russian revolution approaches, this new publication is ideal reading. It is the first overview of how the revolution was won, written by one of the leading participants.

The new introduction, written by Socialist Party executive committee member Judy Beishon, outlines the historical context and the modern importance of the 1917 revolution, as Trotsky examines the build-up throughout the year, and crucial role that the Bolsheviks played.

- [£5 available from socialistbooks.co.uk](http://socialistbooks.co.uk), call 020 8988 8779 or send cheques made payable to Socialist Books to PO BOX 24697, London, E11 1YD
-

Escalate summer strike wave into coordinated action to defeat the pay cap

Rob Williams, Socialist Party industrial organiser

The demonstration outside the Tory party conference in Manchester on 1 October is the first main mobilisation since the TUC congress in mid-September. [At the TUC, unions agreed to launch a campaign of demonstrations and industrial action](#) to break the Tory public sector pay cap. Workers will be hoping that the Manchester protest is the launch pad for such a fight.

The summer has already seen a whole number of low-paid workers on strike - including at [Barts NHS Trust](#), [British Airways mixed fleet cabin crew](#), [Bank of England](#), [Argos](#), [Mears](#), [Birmingham bin workers](#) and of course the historic [McDonald's workers](#). These disputes and others represent the beginning of a revolt against the attack on workers' living standards by the employers and their Tory government that has caused a cut in incomes not seen since Victorian times.

In addition, the RMT transport union [has continued and escalated its action against driver-only operated trains](#), which will see coordinated strikes at four train companies. Also, the Communication Workers Union (CWU) will announce the result of [its strike ballot of 110,000 workers in Royal Mail](#) on 3 October, the first national ballot under the new undemocratic voting thresholds of the Tory Trade Union Act.

Ten years since the financial crisis struck, followed by seven years of vicious austerity, workers have taken any opportunity to strike a blow against the capitalist establishment. The 45% vote for Scottish independence in 2014 and the Brexit vote in 2016 represented this mood.

As did the mass movement that propelled Jeremy Corbyn into the Labour leadership, taking full advantage of the rule changes that unintendedly opened up the election. This was repeated in Corbyn's reelection last year and most clearly by the performance of Labour under his leadership and anti-austerity manifesto in the general election, which shocked the Tories and denied a May a majority.

That election result has undoubtedly weakened the Tories and given a boost of confidence to workers that they can be defeated or at the very least, serious concessions can be won. But it would be a serious mistake of the union leaders to believe that the scrapping of the pay cap will just fall into their laps.

Neither is it the case that there is no need to fight because of the 'inevitability' that the Tories will implode and be replaced by a Jeremy Corbyn-led government. But this prospect unnerves the capitalist establishment, who are worried how far such a government could be pushed by an expectant working class.

While it's clear that the Tories are vacillating over public sector pay, with serious divisions opening up, they are very wary of how to proceed. A total capitulation would be a huge boost to workers' confidence and would demoralise the Tories. Alternatively, to do nothing could turn the growing anger into mass action.

During TUC congress, they announced pay increases for police and prison officers that breached the 1% pay cap but both were less than half the RPI inflation rate revealed on the same day.

'Underserving'

It's clear from this however, that their approach will be to divide and rule by looking to scrap the cap for the 'deserving' public sector workers - police, prison officers, nurses, firefighters - rather than the 'underserving' civil servants and council workers. Union members across the public sector must fight to ensure that these divisive methods are defeated.

In any case, May and Hammond could reap the worst of all worlds for them - offering something that is totally inadequate and continues to anger workers but at the same time being enough to give workers confidence that it's possible to fight for more.

Workers may demand that the pay cap be lifted but they also know that prices are rising by nearly 4% and they want some of the losses that they have experienced over seven years of pay freeze to be recovered.

Civil service and local government unions are demanding a 5% pay rise while health unions want a minimum of the most recent 3.9% RPI rate. It is vital that unions are not limited by the verdict of pay review bodies, that in any case only cover about 45% of public sector workers.

But they also want any pay rises to come from new resources, not be paid for through the 'efficiency savings' of more job losses, privatisation or outsourcing.

This was reflected in the rejection by the Fire Brigades' Union (FBU) of a pay offer over the pay ceiling. There was also real anger by rank-and-file firefighters over the strings that opened the door to taking up some paramedic duties. The FBU should now put itself at the heart of united union action over pay.

TUC policy

The debate on public sector pay was one of the least controversial at TUC congress. All the motions were composited together, meaning that TUC policy now includes:

"To facilitate, organise and coordinate collective action and campaigns, including industrial action when required, on the part of affiliates to end public sector pay restraint across the UK... organise a national demonstration... take immediate steps to develop a coordinated strategy of opposition to the pay cap within the public sector, including the sharing and coordinating of bargaining timetables and pay demands, campaign activities, tactics, ballots and industrial action."

Of course, as the record of the TUC shows, left to themselves these words will remain on paper. Therefore, it is vital that union members immediately put pressure on their respective unions to demand that these instructions are carried out. If not, the left unions must act.

The [TUC demonstration on 26 March 2011](#) brought up to 750,000 workers to London. It set the scene for the 30 June pension strike by civil servants' union PCS and the education unions NUT, ATL and UCU.

At that year's TUC congress, 29 public sector unions agreed to coordinate strike ballots which resulted in the massive [two million strong 'N30' strike on 30 November 2011](#). It should have been the beginning of a decisive struggle against the austerity government of Cameron, Osborne and Clegg but it was halted weeks after by the TUC and conservative union leaders, only emboldening the Tories to roll out more of their cuts offensive. This cannot happen this time.

The public sector unions must now meet to coordinate industrial action ballots. In his union's fringe meeting at the TUC, PCS general secretary Mark Serwotka reminded delegates that this is exactly what happened in

2011 after that year's congress during the pensions struggle. He also promised that if the TUC didn't move to convene such a meeting, PCS would write to unions to try and bring them together.

PCS will launch a consultative pay ballot in early October. It is designed to seriously prepare the ground for a strike ballot in a few months time. PCS sees it as an ideal opportunity to test the union's capability in overcoming the undemocratic voting thresholds in the Trade Union Act.

PCS understands that the unions can't be paralysed by this new Tory anti-union law. It is possible to get the votes to have national action but a massive campaign has to be conducted, just as is being done by the CWU in Royal Mail.

The other public sector unions (Unison, Unite, GMB and the new National Education Union) must now, as a minimum, use the PCS tactic and launch consultative ballots and not wait until the end of sham negotiations with the government and employers to determine whether to accept or reject another pay cut.

The fact that the TUC is now backing the unions' evening London demonstration on 17 October against the pay cap is a step forward and a start.

There is no either/or on strikes and marches. A national Saturday demonstration, called in the name of the TUC and the unions, can play a central role as part of such a campaign to win a positive strike vote.

Tory budget

Now that the Tory budget has been scheduled for 22 November, a demonstration called for the Saturday before could be huge, particularly if it was backed by Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell, even more if included in its demands was the abolition of tuition fees, which could attract the young people that were mobilised in such numbers in the election.

Corbyn's campaign gave this austerity generation hope but it also found an outlet for their rage at the daily experience of work, at poverty pay in zero-hour contract jobs.

But this reality is also a threat to the unions. In its post-TUC article the Financial Times conceded that: "Britain's trade unionists are in bullish mood...they believe that the political winds are beginning to blow their way... (with) the weakened Conservative government."

But the Financial Times sought comfort in the continued falling union membership, mainly due to deindustrialisation and the cuts to the public sector where union density has been greatest. The latest official figures released this week show that less than 17% of workers are employed in the public sector, the lowest share since 1947, the year before the NHS was founded.

The GMB estimates that almost a million public jobs have been lost since 2010 due to funding cuts, privatisation and outsourcing. There was nothing inevitable about this. In particular, the actions of union leaderships such as in the GMB along with those in Unison and the TUC in prematurely ending the pensions struggle opened the door to the full force of the Tory cuts, which have been dutifully passed on by Labour councils.

Disgracefully, this is still continuing, flying in the face of Jeremy Corbyn's anti-austerity leadership. Derby and Durham councils are looking to cut the wages of teaching assistants by 23% and Birmingham is trying to use the practices of the worst Tory or private sector employer to take up to £5,000 from bin workers' pay.

But all these workers have fought back over the last year. They are part and parcel of a new wave of workers' resistance which shows that if the unions fight together on public sector pay, they would get huge support from workers in the private sector and in fact inspire them to get organised in a union and take action themselves.

Pay isn't the only issue that is angering workers but it can be a lightning rod for all the other grievances that they have, particularly if the unions fight together.

Now is the time to put words into action, to name the date for a Saturday demonstration and to coordinate the strike ballots for the action that can scrap the pay cap for all and defeat the Tories.

Birmingham bin strike: council humiliated in court battle - but war isn't over yet

Birmingham Socialist Party

A Tyseley bin worker summed it up nicely: "We've taken the lead, but it's only half time."

As Unite the Union won its High Court victory against the illegal redundancy notices issued by Labour-run Birmingham council, it's another round to the bin workers. Judge Fraser, referring to chaos in the council, said: "Neither party (councillors or officers) comes out of this sorry saga with any credit at all." The public can now see even more clearly who caused this mess.

The court ruling may be a window where bosses are sacked and the council come to a just deal - and we hope for the best - or it may be a window for the courts and council to plan to attack the workers again. So workers must be prepared to resume the fight. The tremendous ballot result of 92% in favour of action gives a platform to resume the battle if it arises.

In the meantime, we should work to build support across the council workforce that we may need later. Meeting them at workplaces to explain the threat to their jobs and conditions revealed during this dispute.

This has been another setback for the council in what's been a long attritional war. A war bin workers have proved they have the stomach for. As one lad said: "We should all be proud of ourselves."

But the council has not declared an end to its war on jobs and services and will be egged on by the Tory government. Unite and the trade union and socialist movement must continue our war against attacks on working people and austerity for workers while the wealthy get millions.

As well as preparing to fight with industrial action, we should fight on other fronts as well. A fight to change the council. Who are these so-called 'Labour' councillors who have been happy to sack workers or take £5,000 a year off them?

Ballot box

Next year, every council seat is up for election. Whoever wins a seat then is there for at least four years, with no other elections to be able to change them.

Unite should give no political support to councillors who've behaved in this way, and should work to change them all. If they aren't changed then the trade union and socialist movement needs to consider challenging them, the Socialist Party is certainly discussing that option.

Outside the High Court, Unite's Howard Beckett said: "The High Court ruling leaves Birmingham council's unfair and unjust plans in tatters. The council needs to reflect on the misery it has inflicted on the people of Birmingham and its own bin workers.

"Stella Manzie, the chief executive of Birmingham City Council, must now step down. She has repeatedly used the threat of equal pay cases to frighten and bully the council into agreeing the downgrade of long-serving bin workers when it has no substance whatsoever and was not so much as mentioned by her legal team.

"This ruling underlines that Unite will not shrink away from using all the tools at its disposal to defend its members and the services they deliver."

Food processing workers vote for action against miserly bosses

Lindsey Morgan, Leicester West Socialist Party

Leicester Socialist Party and the National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) attended an emergency branch meeting for workers from Tulip, a food processing plant in Coalville. The members present on 24 September voted unanimously to ballot for industrial action due to a series of abuses by their employers. This was after talks between Tulip and the bakers' union (BFAWU) broke down.

Workers at Tulip have not received a pay rise in three years. This is despite the extreme conditions in which they work, handling meat at -4°C and -5°C all day.

After pay talks broke down, and without regard to the health and safety of their workers, Tulip stopped providing gloves. When workers asked for plasters for cuts on their hands damaged at work, they were refused.

A consolidation of pay grades and the removal of premium rates have meant a real-terms pay cut for these workers. These are workers who are already losing wages having to pay travel expenses to get to the remote site.

Tulip is owned by Danish Crown, a global company that recently invested £140 million in infrastructure. It has the financial security to invest in its workers but has so far refused to. Of the 19 demands BFAWU put forward to Tulip, all were rejected.

At the meeting BFAWU pledged to support and fight for its members. Leicester Socialist Party, along with the NSSN, is proud to support the workers too, offering ongoing support to the Tulip staff and BFAWU.

In a brilliant closing speech, Alex Morgan, a member of PCS and the Socialist Party, (translated by a young Polish Socialist Party member Artur Wilk) said: "If PCS can beat the government, you can beat your employer. Solidarity!"

Usdaw elections announced - fight for a left leadership, vote for Amy Murphy

Socialist Party members in Usdaw

Usdaw general secretary John Hannett's retirement, announced at the shop workers' union's annual summer school, has been a long time in the offing.

Having foregone the election five years ago on the basis of Thatcher's anti-union laws, which allow general secretaries due to retire at the end of their next term to not face the ballot box, then this was something many activists knew was likely - hence union activists calls to run the general secretary election alongside the executive council elections.

The executive council and presidential elections, which will now happen concurrently with the general secretary election, are perhaps even more important.

Jeremy Corbyn

From having an executive council in the past predominantly made up of nodding dogs, the most recent executive has kept Usdaw's leadership on their toes, narrowly missing out on getting the union's endorsement

for Jeremy Corbyn in last year's leadership election and [winning support for the left candidate in the current Scottish Labour leadership campaign](#).

The coming elections offer the possibility of building on these changes to elect a left-wing executive that will hold the new general secretary to account. That's why we will be supporting the biggest possible challenge from Usdaw's Broad Left in these elections and its presidential candidate, Amy Murphy - currently executive member for Southern division and a Socialist Party member.

It's striking however, that the only general secretary candidate to declare so far, current deputy general secretary Paddy Lillis, has positioned himself to the left of the current leadership's presidential candidate Barbara Wilson.

Lillis' nomination leaflet, for example, specifically raises Usdaw's support for a £10 an hour minimum wage for all and abolition of zero-hour contracts, as opposed to

Wilson's vague references. However, Usdaw members may be concerned that when Lillis references winning decent pay rises for members he doesn't rule out giving up hard-won terms and conditions as has been the trend in recent negotiations.

Usdaw Broad Left candidates are clear in pushing for all of those issues, including mounting serious campaigns among the membership and public to win such demands. It is imperative that Usdaw members make sure we have a fighting president and executive council to take our union forward.

Surrey County Council staff on collision course over pay freeze

Unison Surrey County branch

Surrey County Council employees in public sector union Unison are being balloted over an offer from the local authority which has been described by lead Unison negotiator Paul Couchman as a 'slap in the face' for long-standing members of staff.

While the government continues to impose an unacceptable pay cap of 1% on this year's cost-of-living increases, Surrey council have actually decided not to offer a cost of living increase at all. While inflation hovers at 2-3% and when gas and electricity prices look to be rising by over 10%, this 'offer' will do nothing to relieve the cost-of-living pressures on county council staff.

[Office for National Statistics data](#) shows that public sector pay increased by 4.1% between 2010 and 2016, whereas rents went up by 17%, the cost of electricity went up by 28%, the cost of sending a child to nursery school went up by 21% and the cost of UK holidays went up by 27%.

The council has agreed to allow staff to move up their pay scales by a meagre 1% or by an incremental step (depending on their job role) but these incremental steps have been effectively capped or frozen for the past ten years.

Unison is also campaigning for a serious increase in the council's minimum wage rates - currently £8.25 an hour, less than the UK Living Wage Foundation's (LWF) £8.45 an hour. The council's offer does include an increase to a minimum of £8.46 an hour and an agreement to review this when the LWF adjusts its figures in November. The council is aiming to achieve the government's target of a £9 an hour minimum wage by 2020 - Unison believes this is not ambitious enough given the clear levels of in-work poverty across Surrey.

Paul Couchman said: "No-one seriously believes that public sector workers should have yet another year of pay misery. Yet Surrey council is not just suggesting a 1% pay cap - it wants to impose a total pay freeze on its staff.

"Last year, we recommended acceptance of what was actually still a fairly poor offer which was improved through negotiation. This year the council has come back with an even worse offer. We cannot accept this and call on all our members to vote No in our current ballot and be ready to take action if the council does not renegotiate."

CWU strike ballot to win 'Four Pillars'

On 6 September, the Communication Workers Union (CWU) served notice to Royal Mail for a strike ballot.

After months of unsatisfactory talks between the business and CWU representatives, the union leadership has now decided to act over the company's attacks on pensions, terms and conditions of employment and working practices.

As part of the ['Four Pillars' of security](#) the union is seeking from the business, the CWU has put forward an alternative 'Wage in retirement' proposal to address Royal Mail's plan to replace the current defined-benefit pension scheme with a far less generous one.

The other demands are a reduction to the working week, extensions to the legal protections promised after privatisation and a commitment to grow the business.

The industrial action is to win the 'Four Pillars' demands and the Socialist Party is calling for a Yes vote. The ballot ends on 3 October.

Catalan independence referendum

Strike against Madrid's 'state of emergency'!

The Spanish state's minority government, led by the right-wing Partido Popular (People's Party - PP), and propped up by Psoe (the social-democrats), has ruthlessly enforced its ban on the Catalan government holding a referendum on 1 October on Catalonian independence. This has provoked fury across Catalonia with tens of thousands of young people and workers immediately taking to the streets of Barcelona and elsewhere in protest.

The combative Sindicato de Estudiantes (SE - Students Union) in Catalonia, under the leadership of Izquierda/Esquerra Revolucionària (the sister party of the Socialist Party), has called a student and education strike on 28 September. Messages of solidarity with the strike should be sent to barcelona@sindicatdestudiants.net

SE has also been invited into meetings with other left, radical and workers' organisations to prepare a general strike on 3-4 October against the PP diktat. These include Podemos, ERC (Republican Left of Catalonia) and the CGT (General Confederation of Labour).

The following extract is from a recent Esquerra Revolucionària statement:

In an operation reminiscent of the days of the Franco dictatorship, members of the Civil Guard arrested 14 officials of the Catalan government responsible for the organisation of the referendum on 1 October. They have also seized referendum literature and raided printing premises.

Madrid has also moved to take control of the Catalan police force.

In addition there has been the imposition of a massive news blackout; arrests of youth for pasting posters; threats of criminal action against hundreds of mayors who backed the referendum; indiscriminate seizure of

records in the headquarters of government buildings and attempts to raid the headquarters of the CUP [Popular Unity Candidacy].

The prohibition of political acts supporting the right to decide in Madrid, Gasteiz and Gijón; the intervention in the finances of the Catalan government by the central government, and the deployment of thousands of police officers in Catalonia to intimidate the population, all amount to the imposition of a state of emergency.

Scandalously, the Psoe leaders support this Francoist offensive against the people of Catalonia.

This is the consequence of Psoe embracing pro-Spanish nationalism for years and merging with the ruling class in all essential matters. The Psoe leaders have not only abandoned a socialist approach to the national question, they are placed alongside Franco, who denied that Catalonia is a nation.

The idea that the referendum represents a 'coup d'état' and is an 'anti-democratic' imposition against a section of the Catalan population is one of the biggest lies that the media, at the service of the Spanish capitalist class, is trying to sell.

If the state, the PP and the parties that are supporting them are so sure that the supporters of independence are a minority, why not accept the result of the ballot box? Why prevent the vote?

The real reason that explains the closed-mind attitude of the right-wing and the state is not that they defend democracy, but quite the opposite. They deny that the people of Catalonia have a right to decide and make Catalonia a nation.

The PP is a party flooded with cases of corruption. It has savagely cut public education and health and given more than €100 billion to the bankers. It evicts us from our homes and condemns us to precarious jobs and low wages. It supports dictatorships like the Moroccan or Saudi regimes, and encourages the foreign military interventions of imperialism. This party wants to give us lessons in democracy!

The attack on democratic freedoms represents a tremendous threat to the population of all of the territories, and especially for workers, young people and their fighting organisations throughout the Spanish state.

Leadership

Esquerra Revolucionària fully supports the general strike mobilisations being developed in Catalonia, but if we want to defeat the authoritarian assault perpetrated by the central government it must be accompanied by an appeal for the mobilisation of the working class and the youth of the rest of the Spanish state.

A mobilisation of this character is the way to more effectively confront and defeat the PP and its nationalist policies, and win the right of Catalonia to govern itself.

Unfortunately, the parliamentary formations to the left of the social democracy (CUP, Can, Comu, Izquierda Unida in Catalonia), and trade unions, have abandoned the struggle to lead a mass movement. They have failed to fight for a programme that unites the struggle for self-determination with economic and social demands that are being demanded by the majority of the working class, youth and the wider sectors.

It has given the formal leadership of the struggle against the state and the government of the PP to the PDeCAT (Catalan European Democratic Party), allowing these capitalist politicians to appear as victims of the authoritarian politics of the Spanish right wing.

The leaders of the PDeCAT looked for every excuse not to call the referendum. Finally, the pressure of the movement, and prospect of heavy election losses if they did not call a referendum, compelled them to do so.

The repression unleashed from the PP is a shock to millions of workers and young people from working class neighbourhoods of Catalonia.

Right now the conditions are present for many more to join the millions who are already mobilised, ready to defend the referendum, together with the sectors that also want to fight against repression but are suspicious of PDeCAT.

Esquerra Revolucionària calls on all workers and young people in Catalonia to fight for the right to decide their own future, against this authoritarian coup of the PP and the state.

A Catalan socialist republic would generate overwhelming sympathy among workers in the rest of the Spanish state and in all other countries of Europe, opening a path to transformation social and the liberation of all oppressed peoples.

- [For background articles and updates see socialistworld.net](http://socialistworld.net)
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German elections: rise of the far right and right-wing government will provoke resistance

Robert Bechert, Committee for a Workers' International (CWI)

For the first time in decades a racist, right nationalist party, AfD (Alternative for Germany), has entered the German parliament.

While AfD's entry into the Bundestag was expected, the size of its vote shocked many. It jumped in as the third largest party with nearly six million votes, 12.6% of the total. The surge in AfD support is a sign of the unrest and dissatisfaction that has developed among sections of the population despite recent economic growth.

However, the AfD's election success provoked immediate protests. Many of the mainly young people who came out onto the streets were enraged at a party whose leadership echoes the language of the far right of the 1920s and 1930s.

Such protests can be an important part of rebuilding a united movement that fights against the far right, the attacks a new right-wing government is likely to introduce, and for a socialist alternative.

After her lacklustre victory the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) chancellor, Angela Merkel, is now widely seen as a 'lame duck' leader. The sharp fall in the votes of the outgoing CDU/SDP 'grand coalition' - losing millions of votes - led the boss of the giant Siemens corporation to describe the result as "a defeat of the elites".

This result will lead to a new polarisation, political instability and, possibly after a pause, new workers' and anti-establishment struggles.

The most likely new government, a coalition of the Merkel-led CDU/CSU alliance, the liberal FDP and the Greens, will attempt to pursue further so-called economic 'liberalisation', ie counter-reforms against working people.

Right populism

An important part of AfD's success was opposition to migration, particularly people's fears of the possible consequences of hundreds of thousands of refugees coming into Germany in 2015.

But while AfD had the support of right-wing nationalists, it also gained votes from some of those alienated from, and embittered by, a system which is seen as unjust and elitist. About 20% of AfD's support came from people who did not vote in the last election.

Significantly, AfD's neoliberal economic policies were not prominent in its campaign. While its success will encourage right nationalist and fascist elements, AfD is also unstable and riven with divisions.

The SPD leaders reacted to this by refusing to continue in coalition with Merkel and hoping to restore their position by going into opposition.

Part of the reason for this SPD shift is the continued support for Die Linke (Left Party) whose vote increased slightly from 3.75 million to 4.29 million, winning five more seats. Significantly Die Linke won support from around 430,000 former SPD voters, and gained among youth.

Nonetheless, at the same time it lost votes in eastern Germany and east Berlin. Some 400,000 of its 2013 voters switched to AfD.

Die Linke has had a strong electoral base in the east. Currently it leads one eastern federal state and is a junior coalition partner in another. But in these governments (and also in Berlin) it does not challenge and fight against capitalism, rather it seeks to administer it.

Disappointment with Die Linke in the east helped allow AfD, in this election, to become the second strongest party there.

However, Die Linke's slight strengthening in this election gives it another opportunity to play a key role in building movements against the growing low wage sector in Germany, increasing rents alongside resistance to the far-right and whatever attacks the new government will introduce.

- [Full version available on socialistworld.net](http://socialistworld.net)

French Labour reform protests

Thousands demonstrated in Paris, France, on 23 September in opposition to the labour reforms of President Macron. The protest was organised by Jean-Luc Mélenchon, a left-wing presidential candidate and leader of La France Insoumise (Unbowed France) who claimed 150,000 attended. At the protest Mélenchon bought a copy of L'Egalité, the paper of the Socialist Party's sister party in France. Unions and workers are fighting the changes to the French Code du Travail that they say would make their position more precarious and give bosses greater flexibility to hire and fire. They are also protesting against the reforms trade unionists blocked access to several fuel depots on 24 September and the workers' unions have threatened a fuel strike.

<http://www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/26196>