

# HOW CAN WE GET JEREMY CORBYN'S ANTI- AUSTERITY POLICIES INTO OUR LOCAL COUNCIL?

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# LABOUR COUNCILLORS HAVE A CHOICE - DON'T IMPLEMENT TORY AUSTERITY

**H**ow can we save our local leisure centre?

**W**hat can be done to halt gentrification and meet housing need?

**H**ow can the deepening crisis in social care be addressed?

**W**hat must be done to protect local jobs and halt attacks on pay and conditions?

These are just a few of the questions being asked especially as we approach council budget-setting and May's local elections. They demand a strategy to fight cuts.

Since the beginning of Corbyn's leadership the Blairites have sought to use their base in local government – where they have the vast majority of Labour councillors – in order to undermine him. In particular, they have ferociously opposed any suggestion that Labour councils might have options other than those of cuts, privatisation and redundancies. But they do - refuse to make them!

In one indicator revealing the extent to which many Labour councillors have accepted the 'logic' of neoliberalism, it has been revealed that Leeds City council was on the verge of offering a £100 million contract to the parasitic company Carillion just before its collapse.

The Socialist Party opposes all cuts and puts forward a strategy to fight them – making the point that if Labour councils refused to make the cuts they would be unworkable. Now a number of strategies are being put forward as the anger against intolerable cuts mounts.

Councillors do have a choice. Around Britain, Labour councils currently hold over £9 billion in general fund reserves. They administer combined budgets of almost £75 billion. They have substantial borrowing powers, as well as the ability to work together to 'pool' funds and collaborate with other local authorities.

In other words, far from being powerless 'technocrats', bound by the logic of austerity or the chaos of the market, Labour councils are in fact a potential alternative power in Britain.

Indeed, even if just one Labour council was to take a stand, using reserves and borrowing powers and refusing to lay more hardship on working class people, it could mobilise behind it a mass campaign and have a profound effect on the political situation. It could hasten the demise of May's weak, divided government and bring about an early general election.

Any hint that councillors could take such a road is anathema to the Blairites. Unfortunately, as part of their mistaken strategy of attempting to 'keep on board' the Blairite rump that remains dominant in Labour's parliamentary party, local government and machinery, they have made a number of concessions to the demands of the right on this issue.

But far from placating the right and buying their loyalty, concessions like these have only encouraged the Blairites to press Corbyn to back down on other issues. In particular, these have included questions of party democracy and the selection and reselection of candidates.

This week, Labour's NEC elections saw Momentum backed candidates win all three of the available seats. The question is: how will this position be used? To fight for mandatory reselection, that will allow Labour members and trade unions the chance to democratically decide candidates and kick out the Blairites? To help take on cuts-making Labour councillors and support any and all who are prepared to resist austerity and refuse to implement cuts?

In recent weeks, Momentum's leadership has begun to push an alternative strategy for 'fighting' local government cuts, which is based on a model out forward by Bristol's Labour mayor, Marvyn Rees.

The essence of it is to support and call for protests against cuts, and to use these as a platform to ask the government to provide more funding – hoping that the pressure of large demonstrations will bear down on May's government.

Borrowing from the strategy put forward by the Socialist party, they even suggest drawing up 'needs based' budgets. But unlike us, they see this as merely an exercise in propaganda, not as something to be acted upon and implemented. It

is here that the strategy ends.

Should the Tories refuse to provide funding, councils should, according to Momentum's leaders, make the cuts as required. Those who have joined protests to demand an alternative should be asked to simply accept that the council 'has no other option'.

Demonstrations are not a bad place to start. But they must be linked to a strategy which includes councils refusing to implement cuts. So far, the 'Rees model' has singularly failed to extract further funds from the Tories.

Indeed, when the Bristol mayor came to London to meet the communities' secretary he was snubbed – not even offered a meeting! He went home and the Labour council is making huge cuts.

In the June election, Corbyn's anti-austerity manifesto generated a surge of enthusiasm. But this manifesto provides a sharp contrast with the programme on which the majority of Labour's right-wing councillors will be standing at this year's local elections.

As Unite assistant general secretary, Howard Beckett, put it at this year's TUC congress "if Labour councillors act like Tories we should treat them like Tories". In the view of the Socialist Party, this should include being prepared to provide an electoral challenge to cuts-making councillors – whatever colour rosette they wear.

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