

# MEGAPHONE

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50TH ANNIVERSARY OF MAY 68 REVOLUTION IN FRANCE

EDITORIAL: TORIES OUT, CORBYN IN!

THE FIGHT AGAINST TRUMP

WHAT IS COMMUNISM?



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# MEGAPHONE 2018

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# YOUTH ON THE MARCH AGAINST TRUMP

## Michelle Francis Southampton Socialist Students

**F**riday July 13 was the day when over a quarter of a million students and workers massed in the streets of London and other major British cities against xenophobic billionaire, President Donald Trump.

We stood against not just the person he was, but the principles he holds, the policies he supports, and the horrors he allows. We stood against his open racism, misogyny and xenophobia, but his ultimately anti-working class, pro-mega rich politics also.

Tory millionaire and International Trade Secretary Liam Fox claimed that the protests against Trump on Friday “did not reflect the genuine good manners and hospitality of the British people”. I am glad to know that I did not sit idly when a bullying demagogue like Trump comprehended that he can combine playing golf with ticking off an official visit to the UK as President.

And that myself, along with thousands of other young people, decided that we will do everything in our power to prevent Trump from feeling welcome in Britain and will continue to do so until the power he holds and the dangers he forces upon so many of us, are gone.

Young Socialists, in conjunction with Socialist Students, took our campaign

against Trump to the schools and colleges over the summer months. We called for school and college students to walk out of their classrooms and to fill the streets on July 13. In Leicester, Hull, Leeds, Birmingham, London and plenty of other cities across the country, the Young Socialists led vibrant youth protests and marches against Trump’s visit.

I helped lead the protest with the Young Socialists in Southampton. The energetic anger against Trump caught like wildfire amongst protesters, as many youths who attended the protests were active in getting their voices heard. The sense of standing up for what you believe in inspired many students to join the Young Socialists so they could get involved in helping to organise further protests and demonstrations in the future.

## Fight Trump and the Tories!

However, we did not just protest against Trump, but we protested against the Tory government who support him too. We protested against the Tory government who would follow Trump into a nuclear suicide pact, who are selling off our NHS and privatising our education.

This is the same Tory government who have forced 9,850 sick and disabled to die after finding them ‘fit to work’ or placing them in a work-related activity group, cutting their benefits. This is the same Tory government who have condemned the futures of young people through attacks on

our living standards, the housing crisis and cuts to our education and careers services.

Our protests were a rallying cry for a fight against capitalism and the 1% who control the world’s wealth, to stand against the likes of Trump’s billionaire friends who he has granted tax cuts to.

These billionaires, such as Jeff Bezos and Elon Musk, have made their money by exploiting workers. Horror stories have emerged from the workplaces they own. TESLA workers have been publicly rallying to unionise for over a year, citing injuries and burnout from assembling vehicles; some employees have developed carpal tunnel and other debilitating conditions. In one instance, a worker collapsed on the factory floor and his colleagues were told to work around the body. In Amazon warehouses, working conditions are even worse, with timed toilet breaks and employees sleeping on their feet. One woman with breast cancer was allegedly put on a “performance improvement plan”, while another was sent on a business trip the day after having a miscarriage.

## For a socialist alternative

This is because capitalism is a system which prioritises the creation of profit above everything else in society, including the safety of working people. As such, Trump and the Tories both do the bidding of the capitalist class by making young people pay for their crisis, while the rich have their interests protected and are allowed to carry on making super-profits.



# WHERE NEXT IN THE FIGHT FOR FREE EDUCATION?

**Anthony Downes**  
**Birmingham Socialist Students**

**W**ith the average cost of university tuition in England increasing to £9,188, our higher education system has become the most expensive in the world. The Student Loan Calculator released a study in 2017 showing that English tuition fees are almost £2,000 more expensive than the average tuition in the United States. These costs are much higher than typical European countries, many of which have completely free tuition. In the fifth richest country in the world, there is no excuse for such an expensive education system.

Students today are graduating with record levels of debt at an average of £50,800. With interest rates as high as 6.1%, this means that three quarters of students will never be able to pay back their student loans. Students will carry this debt well into their 50s. Since the scrapping of maintenance grants, the poorest students will have to graduate

with debts above £57,000. Overwhelming debt like this will always discourage many working class young people from wanting to study at university. This is especially true considering the ever-decreasing outlook for young graduates entering the working world.

This student loan system is clearly broken. The Tory government have already privatised a portion of the student loan book, selling it off at a very low price to speculators. The sell-off has been estimated to have potentially cost the government £600 million in future earnings, demonstrating that such attacks on students are nothing to do with saving money, but instead protecting the profits of big business: the hedge fund managers and capitalists. This, along with the rising price of tuition, will continue to make our situation worse.

## Youthquake

Over a year has passed since the last general election. For many young people, this was the first general election where a major party offered the promise of free university education in their manifesto.

By standing for the scrapping of tuition fees and an end to the cuts in further education, Corbyn raised the sights of young people who do not want the burden of large amounts of debt as the price for a high quality education. Corbyn helped to popularise the idea that higher education should be free as a basic right - an idea that many students gave up on after their betrayal by the Lib Dems in 2010. The fight for free education is now back on the agenda in mainstream politics.

Students last year came out in solidarity with the striking UCU workers, demonstrating the rise in determination of students to fight back against all government attacks on higher education. Across the country, university staff were out in force to defend themselves against vicious attacks on their pensions, but the strike wave represented a fightback against the increased marketization of universities in general.

This includes the casualization of staff contracts to drive down wages, but also the increasing price of tuition. With some Vice-Chancellors earning huge salaries



of over £400,000 a year, management are running universities as businesses, prioritising profits over the quality of education and research. Students are no longer being offered education as a service, but instead it is being sold to us as consumers.

The Tory Party's divisions over Brexit have completely destabilised the government. – and as they return to Parliament this September, these splits, as well as the possibility of their collapse, will also return. If Corbyn took this opportunity to demand a general election, and called for all-out student demonstrations to kick out the Tories, alongside coordinated strike action led by the trade unions, this would be a colossal opportunity to win free university education.

### Kick out the Blairites!

Unfortunately however, the Labour Party is not united on the question of free education, but is split; between Corbyn and his supporters on the one hand, and the Blairite-controlled Parliamentary Labour Party on the other.

It was only in 1998 that the New Labour government under Blair introduced £1,000 annual tuition fees in all of the UK. One year later the Scottish parliament was established and it was able to abolish tuition fees and separate from the rest of the UK's system. The fees were later trebled by Blair to £3,000 in 2004, and again by the Tories and Liberals to £9,000 in 2012. The fight for free education has to be linked to the fight against the Blairites in the Labour Party.

But Corbyn should not be the only one leading the fight for free tuition. The leadership of the National Union of Students (NUS) is also dominated by Blairites. As such, there has been no serious action taken by the NUS in the struggle for free education since before the general election. We need a fighting, Corbyn supporting NUS leadership that reflects the mood for struggle students demonstrated during the UCU strikes and can lead the student movement in the fight for free education.

### For a Corbyn-led government with socialist policies!

Socialist Students campaigns on and fights for Corbyn's policy of free education, as well as all the anti-austerity policies in his manifesto; the nationalisation of some public services, a mass programme of



council house building, the complete re-nationalisation of the NHS, and a £10/ hour minimum wage for all workers. But we want to see Corbyn's anti-austerity programme go further. For example, we fight for the complete cancellation of current student debt, especially since this student debt is impossible to pay back for most students. Last year Corbyn hinted that he would consider such a policy - Socialist Students says that he should adopt this as official policy.

Yet cancelling the debt would be far from an easy matter. The current total student debt is over £100 billion, the cancellation of which would be met with great resistance by capitalists. In 2015, when the Syriza government in Greece was elected on a radical anti-austerity platform, the Troika (which includes the

European Central Bank and the IMF), working with the Greek ruling class, undemocratically forced devastating austerity upon the Greek workers and students as punishment.

There are no limits to the brutality of capitalist attacks to stop reformist policies. Any progress for working people and students made within the limits of the capitalist system will be victim to attempted sabotage by capitalist political powers.

### Fight for a socialist alternative

The only way to counter such economic sabotage would be to take the banks, and the billions of pounds that they own, into democratic public ownership. Blair's Labour bailed out these banks after the economic crash in 2008. This was over £850 billion taken from the public to help the richest bankers. Yet the working class are expected to accept huge tuition fees, which would cost only a fraction of this.

That's why Socialist Students calls for the nationalisation of the top FTSE 100 companies, banks and finance houses. With the bosses of these companies giving themselves a pay rise of 11% last year, and their pay increasing at a rate six times that of their workers, it is clear that there is huge wealth at the top of society. By nationalising these commanding heights of the economy, this wealth could be used to help all of society and fund free education. But it is only by fighting for the socialist transformation of society that students can win free education on a permanent basis.





# 8TH AMENDMENT REPEALED: YOUNG WOMEN AND WORKING CLASS PEOPLE MAKE PRO-CHOICE HISTORY

**Keishia Taylor**  
UCL Socialist Students

On 25 May, 66.4% of the Irish electorate voted to repeal the barbaric 8th Amendment of the Constitution, ending the near-complete ban on abortion in Ireland. This represents a revolt against the misogynistic, backward ideology of the Catholic Church that has dominated the Southern Irish State since its foundation in 1922. It also demonstrates the power of mass movements of young people, women and working-class people and their potential for far-reaching change.

The 8th Amendment was put into the constitution in 1983 as the Catholic Church and right-wing politicians feared they were losing their grip on a changing society. The amendment equated the life of a foetus with that of a woman and forced ten people a day to make the traumatic journey abroad to access abortion, at a huge expense and in secret. It also forced around five people per day to take the safe but illegal abortion pills.

## Savita's tragic death

In 2012, Savita Halappanavar died as a result of Ireland's abortion ban. This resulted in tens of thousands pouring onto the streets in protest, sparking a movement to demand a repeal of this odious amendment. The Socialist Party initiated the organisation 'ROSA' as a socialist feminist movement which

consistently campaigned to repeal the 8th amendment and to legislate for the right to choose.

ROSA used bold demonstrations inspired by the Handmaid's Tale to condemn the repressive misogyny of the establishment and led a campaign of civil disobedience to raise awareness and distribute the medical abortion pills. This direct action exposed the reality that the ban did not stop abortions from happening and made anything less than abortion up to 12 weeks on request unworkable.

Ruth Coppinger, Solidarity TD (MP) and Socialist Party member, along with Paul Murphy and Mick Barry (also TDs who are members of the Socialist Party), played pivotal roles in the campaign. They brought the voices of the movement into the Dáil (Irish Parliament), consistently fought for a pro-choice position, exposed the hypocrisy of the establishment parties and forced repeal onto the agenda.

## Historic victory

Turnout among women aged 18-24 was almost double that at the 2016 general election and almost 90% of them voted yes. But more importantly, young, and particularly working class, women were the driving force of the campaign. They formed a vibrant, militant movement fighting against any hint of sexist oppression. LGBT+ young people and school students also played an important part and there is a feeling of being part of

a global women's movement.

The main capitalist parties refused to reflect the seismic shift in society, exposing the deep disconnect between the people and the establishment, who vilified and 'tone policed' the movement. In October 2016, the establishment parties voted against a bill proposed by Socialist Party members in the Irish parliament calling for a referendum to repeal the 8th. Leading Fine Gael politicians did a complete U-turn to support repeal only 6 months before the vote, but now they are attempting to claim credit for our victory! They hope this will distract from their brutal austerity policies, and from the truth that a powerful mass movement forced the establishment to hold a referendum, showing we can defeat them on other issues.

## Defeat for the backwards establishment

The repeal referendum dealt a huge blow to the capitalist establishment and has given birth to a new generation of fighters with the confidence of a historic victory under its belt. Already since May, there has been a flurry of radical activity led by young people, including the first ever Dublin Trans Pride. Young people are increasingly open to the idea that the ills of our society stem from the oppressive capitalist system we live under. We need to build a movement to completely break with capitalism and build a socialist society, free of all oppression.





# A SOCIALIST STRATEGY FOR FIGHTING COLLEGE CUTS AND ACADEMISATION

**Elena Tsenkova**  
**North London Socialist**  
**Students**

**O**ur education system is deteriorating as funding cuts to our schools and colleges are rising. It is evident that within capitalism, while the rich get richer, the future of our places of education is secondary for the government.

For example, the cumulative impact of funding cuts since 2011 meant that by November 2017, 50% of colleges and schools had dropped modern foreign language courses, 34% of them had dropped science, technology, engineering and mathematics courses, while 77% of them had increased class sizes. The Tories side with the super-rich – as top chief executives received an 11% pay rise for 2017 alone, the Sixth Form Colleges' Association calculated in 2014 that sixth form colleges had lost £100 million of funding since 2010. The unfortunate reality is that the Tories have allowed student life to become harder, year after year. Unlike the lives of the top 1% who are allowed to dodge taxes, such as Google and Vodafone, companies worth billions of pounds.

## **Academies fail students**

Arguably, the government is deliberately underfunding sixth forms colleges in an attempt to 'encourage' them to become

academies – 18 had done so by early 2018. Politicians like David Cameron depicted academies to be 'structure liberating' for disadvantaged students, a place where young people can excel and achieve high-exam results.

However, in practice a recent study conducted by Cambridge University described academy students as "little robots". It outlined the ongoing verbal aggression against, and torment of, school students at 'Dreamfields' (a codename for the academy school included in the study). The school itself 'culturally cloned' students into being the same and those that deviated from the supposed 'ideal student' were punished. Kulz (the researcher behind the study) began to notice how black students were discriminated against: policed and punished for their identity and appearance.

We cannot continue to ignore the deterioration of student physical and mental health because of funding cuts and the creation of unaccountable, run for profit academy schools like 'Dreamfields'.

## **Labour councils should act!**

It couldn't be clearer that on the basis of capitalism, young people can only win a decent future by fighting back. That's why young people flocked to vote for Jeremy Corbyn's anti-austerity manifesto in last year's general election. Students

deserve free education, higher funding and living grants like we used to have, like the Education Maintenance Allowance for example.

But whereas Corbyn talks about establishing a National Education Service and ending cuts to schools and colleges, Labour councils, which are run by Blairite councillors opposed to Corbyn's anti-austerity stance, stand on the sidelines of the battle while the Tories take an axe to our futures.

Labour councils do not have to behave this way however. Legislation from the Department for Education ('Schemes for Financing Schools') allows local councils to issue 'licensed deficits' for schools for up to three years. If Labour councils took such a stand, and publicly backed a campaign which united parents, teachers (including the trade unions) and students in support of Corbyn and his anti-austerity policies, we can put a stop to ruthless austerity and academisation.

Socialist Students is a campaigning organisation with over 40 branches in colleges and universities across Britain. We fight for an end to cuts in the academic sector, accessible student grants, reversing cuts to youth centres and career services, scrapping of university fees and a £10/hour minimum wage for all workers. Let's fight for a better, socialist alternative.





## THE STRUGGLE FOR CATALAN INDEPENDENCE

### Interview with Coral Latorre from Sindicat d'Estudiants

**O**n October 1 2017, millions of people mobilised to vote for Catalan independence in a now historic referendum. Workers and youth on October 1 were met with brutal and violent repression from the forces of the Spanish government, which had earlier declared the referendum illegal. Thousands of young and working people mobilised in the streets to defend their right to decide.

*Megaphone magazine spoke to CORAL LATORRE (pictured above), a leading activist from the Sindicat d'Estudiants (the Students' Union in Catalonia, linked to Socialist Students here in Britain), who told us about the key lessons of what happened in Catalonia, and what the future holds for the independence struggle and the struggle against austerity.*

**Can you explain to us a bit of the background of what's been happening in Catalonia?**

The savage crisis of capitalism has shaken the lives of millions of young people and workers in the Spanish State. During the last few years we have experienced an explosion of struggles against the repressive government of the PP (the

Partido Popular); the mass mobilisation of the students against cuts, the struggle for a public health system, in defence of the right to protest and against the laws that criminalize it, the rebellion of pensioners and in an outstanding way, a feminist movement involving millions of women and men.

In this context, we set the historic struggle of the people of Catalonia for independence and the right to decide its own future. National oppression against the people of Catalonia has been intensified under the government of the PP, the direct heirs of the Franco dictatorship. The consequences of austerity policies, the denial by the State of the right to self-determination for Catalonia, together with provocations and constant attacks against the Catalan language, culture and traditions have caused a real explosion in Catalonia. In the historical mobilisations that we have witnessed this past year since October 1, millions of young people, workers and the middle classes have claimed the democratic right to self-determination, to decide the future of Catalonia and the relationship that it will have with the other parts of the Spanish State. This opened up an unprecedented revolutionary crisis.

**Why are people fighting for Catalan independence?**

The mass movement for the independence of Catalonia has grown strongly in recent years as a result of the austerity policies and the national oppression of the centralist state. This boom is a reflection of the will of millions of youth, workers and people severely punished by the economic crisis to change the reality that we live in: to end cuts to public services, end corruption and end repression against those who fight against injustice.

Those who have boosted the struggle for the Catalan Republic have explained that our battle was not against young people and workers from other parts of Spain, and that our struggle is not a "war against Spain", as the right wing politicians and their media try to argue. The struggle of the people of Catalonia is a battle against a repressive state that waves the flag of the Franco dictatorship in its laws, policy and army; a state that imprisons hip hop artists for rapping against the parasitic monarchy while letting fascists and rapists (as demonstrated by the infamous 'Wolf Pack' trial) go free.



## What happened on October 1?

Weeks before October 1, the PP government began a repressive campaign against the people of Catalonia and the referendum; arrests and persecution of activists, fines for pro-independence activists for putting up posters, and massive and violent confiscations of ballot boxes. Despite the terror unleashed by the Spanish State and the PP, the people of Catalonia decided to exercise their democratic right to vote, showing that if we get organised, we can win.

More than 2 million people fought against the unjust legislation outlawing the referendum that only answers to the interests of the Spanish oligarchy, the monarchy and the most reactionary sections of society. Hundreds of thousands of people organised around the CDRs (popular committees) and defended polling stations and ballot boxes against the 16,000 police sent by the Spanish State to Catalonia to violently put down the referendum.

There were more than 1,000 injured by police on October 1. The images of families, old and young people being beaten for defending the right to vote, and police confiscating ballot boxes, will go down in history; they are scenes reminiscent of what our grandparents experienced under the dictatorship of Franco.

## What was the response of the Spanish state to the result on October 1?

The people of Catalonia responded with force to the repression of the State with a general strike on October 3, when more than 3 million people took part in mass demonstrations - a historic day that the state apparatus could not allow.

The same night of October 3, the Spanish King addressed the nation with an incendiary speech demanding drastic repressive measures against the Catalan movement. The response was quick; the fierce persecution against the independence movement was intensified, the most recognised political leaders of the movement were imprisoned (while many others were forced into exile), and the autonomy of Catalonia was suspended by Article 155. The Spanish State imposed parliamentary elections in Catalonia in this climate of terror - which was also incited by Catalan big business - resulting

in the independence movement losing its absolute majority in the Catalan parliament.

## How have the main pro – Catalan independence parties fought back against repression? How is this contrasted with what Sindicat d'Estudiants have done?

The struggle for Catalan national liberation is full of experiences and lessons. The most important lesson being that in our movement, there are two opposing tendencies. One is represented by the immense majority that want to break with the regime of 1978 (the post-Franco regime) and win a republic that defends democratic freedoms. The other tendency consists of right-wing Catalan politicians who defend the interests of the ruling class and fear the revolutionary initiative of the people.

The eruption of the masses on the scene has tested all organisations and parties. The main leaders of the independence movement don't propose any plan of action with mobilisations. PDECat (the main party of the Catalan right) joined the independence movement to divert attention from its neoliberal policies that it enacted from the Catalan Parliament. It has proposed to abandon the struggle for the Republic and to initiate a dialogue with the Spanish State, focusing on the Spanish legal framework. ERC (the Republican Left of Catalonia), the traditional majority party of the independence movement, although nominally still fighting for the "republic and democracy", are focusing only in the institutional



and parliamentary field to fight the repression of the state. Finally the CUP, the anti-capitalist party, has a combative discourse, defending civil disobedience to fight for the Republic, but in practice its tactic is similar to the passive and weak approach of PDECat and the ERC.

In Sindicat d'Estudiants, we believe that the leadership of the independence movement must be taken in the hands of its real backbone: young people and the working class. Through a concrete plan of action and forceful mobilisations in the streets, we can win a Republic for the majority. For this reason, we have called six general student strikes over the past year, distributed thousands of leaflets, sold thousands of our newspapers and organised assemblies in hundreds of schools and universities.

## What role have students played in the fight for Catalan independence?

The students and the youth have played a very important role in the struggle for the Catalan Republic, being at the forefront of the battle. Those of us who have grown up with the economic crisis and know nothing but precarious jobs and lives have actively participated in the demonstrations, because fighting for the Catalan republic is a way of challenging this system. The role that Sinidcat d'Estudiants played within the student movement was key.

## What impact had the movement in Catalonia has elsewhere across the whole of the Spanish state?

There have been important solidarity actions against the repression in Catalonia all across the rest of the Spanish state, such as in Madrid, Euskal Herria, and Valencia. However, the unfortunate absence of the leaders of the left parties (such as Podemos) across the Spanish state to explicitly express support for the Catalan struggle has meant that the solidarity response has not yet reached its full potential.

The Catalan struggle cannot be separated from the fall of Rajoy and his corrupt PP government. In Sindicat d'Estudiants we know that the only way to end cuts and oppression, and to end the austerity that the system of capitalism creates, is by joining forces with our brothers and sisters from across the rest of the Spanish State so that the struggle for the Catalan republic serves to promote a higher struggle for socialism across the whole of Spain.

# COMMENT



## NUS LEADERS FIGHT FOR A SECOND EU REFERENDUM: WHAT WE NEED IS A GENERAL ELECTION!

### Mark Best, Socialist Party

Over the summer the leadership of the National Union of Students (NUS) announced that it was signing up to the campaign for a second referendum on Brexit. Unfortunately, the leadership of NUS has done virtually nothing to campaign on the many other more pressing issues for many students: fighting for free education and the writing off of student debt, or for an end to education cuts and privatisation for example.

What then, has made them more willing to act on this issue? Of course, it is true that many students, motivated by internationalism and repulsed by the racism and nationalism of the leaders of the official campaign for Brexit, voted remain in the referendum, but this is not what motivates the leadership of NUS: a big majority of students support the abolition of fees, yet they do nothing on that!

By campaigning for a second referendum, however, they are not having to stand up to the capitalist establishment, but rather are acting in its interests. The majority of British capitalists wanted to stay in the EU – 80% of the members of the

CBI, Britain's biggest business lobby group. Now they want as soft a Brexit as possible. The Single Market - free movement of goods, services, labour and capital - is used by big business in Britain to increase its profits.

### Tory splits over Brexit

Historically the Tories have been the party which has been the most stable and reliable in representing the interests of the capitalist class. Today, however, they are incapable of doing so and are split down the middle on Brexit. The Tory government is in danger of collapsing at any moment.

The capitalist establishment is determined to try and avoid a hard Brexit, but they are also desperate to try and prevent a Jeremy Corbyn-led government coming to power. For all students who support the fight for free education it is the latter that should be a priority, not a second referendum.

It is no coincidence that the Labour MPs who are campaigning for a second referendum, are on the pro-capitalist right of the party, who, at the behest of big business, are so determined to prevent a Jeremy Corbyn-led government coming to

power they are even considering splitting away and forming a new right-wing party.

We say good riddance! A Labour Party without the Blairite saboteurs constantly undermining Corbyn and his anti-austerity programme would be much more effective in taking on the Tories and big business and winning support and implementing policies in the interests of students and workers.

**THE OPTIONS ON THE TABLE WITH A SECOND REFERENDUM COULD BE A TORY BREXIT OR A TORY REMAIN, AND NEITHER WOULD BE IN THE INTERESTS OF WORKERS AND STUDENTS.**

**WE NEED TO FIGHT FOR AN INDEPENDENT PRO-WORKER AND PRO-STUDENT BREXIT POLICY**





It is also no coincidence that the leaders of the NUS have allied themselves with the Blairites by pushing the campaign for a second referendum. Historically positions in the NUS leadership have been a stepping stone for right-wing Labour careerists. This can be seen clearly in the case of Wes Streeting, former NUS president now one of Corbyn's most vicious critics, particularly over his position on the Brexit negotiations.

The NUS is not taking the lead building a fighting campaign for free education because those in control of it are fundamentally opposed to this policy and Corbyn's leadership of the Labour Party.

The support for Corbyn's manifesto in the 2017 General Election shows the impact that a fighting radical programme can have. The demands to renationalise the railways and utilities and to scrap tuition fees enthused and united workers and young people who voted Leave and Remain in the referendum. A similar approach, uniting people to fight for a radical programme to exit the EU, could have the same impact. This can be seen in the number of workers who had voted UKIP in general and local elections who voted for Labour in 2017.

Would the demand for a second referendum help to build a campaign to stop a Tory Brexit in which students and workers will pay the price in falling living standards?

A second referendum could easily be seen by many as an attempt to re-run the vote in 2016 until the establishment gets the result it wanted, as happened with the EU Lisbon treaty in Ireland in 2008 and again in 2009. The options on the table to vote for could be a Tory Brexit or a Tory Remain, and neither would be in the interests of workers and students. We need to fight for an independent pro-worker and

pro-student Brexit policy.

### **Corbyn should stand firm against the Labour right!**

Corbyn's speech in Coventry in February 2017 showed how a Corbyn-led Brexit negotiation could be different from the current Tory shambles.

He outlined that he would seek access to a tariff-free customs union with the EU, answering the genuine fears many workers had, particularly those working in industries highly integrated into the global supply chain, that Brexit would cost them their jobs.

At the same time he said he would "seek to negotiate protections, clarifications or exemptions where necessary in relation to privatisation and public service competition directives, state aid and procurement rules and the posted workers directive." This was a positive step forward however often the Labour position on Brexit is dominated by Blairites such as Keir Starmer who water down and contradict Corbyn's approach.

Socialists are in favour of EU laws which strengthen health and safety and workers' rights, and these should be kept in UK law and improved on. These rights were in many countries fought for by workers themselves, for example it was the impact of the Ford Dagenham strike that won equal pay legislation in Britain before the EU existed. These laws exist to give capitalists across the EU a level playing field as opposed to the idea that the EU is pro-workers' rights.

EU rules promote the privatisation of public services and try to inhibit government subsidies and nationalisations. These rules would be a legal obstacle to implementing even Corbyn's modest programme of

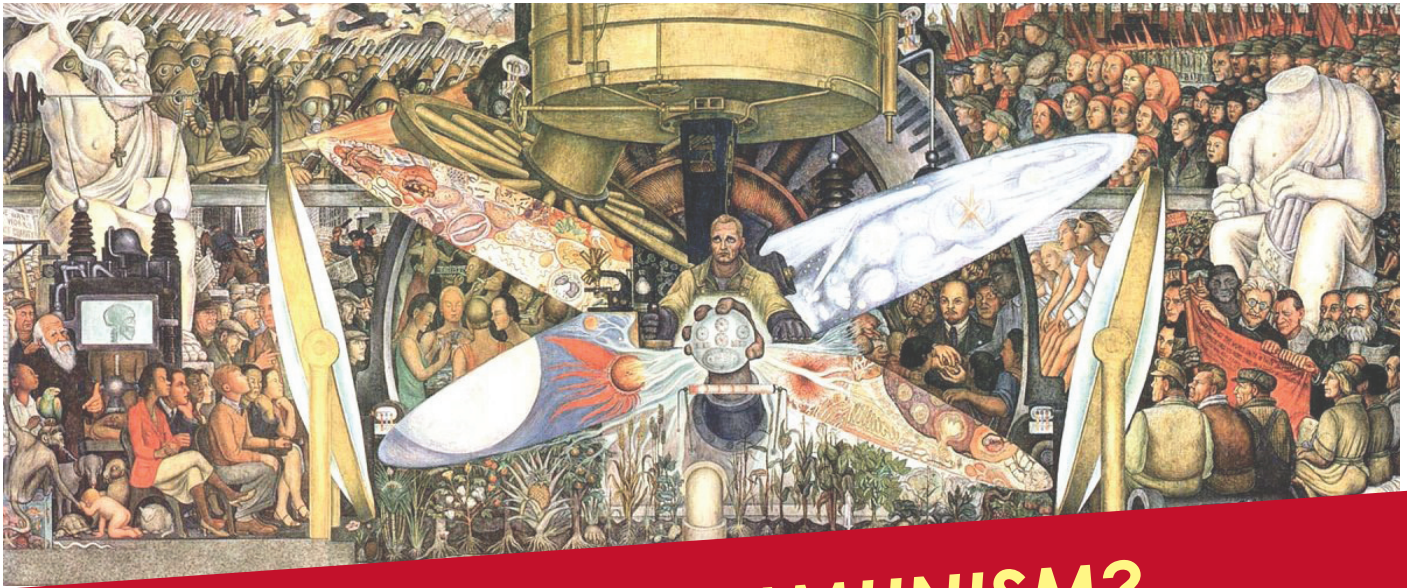
nationalisations let alone taking the big banks and companies into public ownership and running them on a democratic socialist basis. EU rules and laws would have to be defied by a Corbyn-led government in order to implement their manifesto; it is right that Corbyn said they should be a red line in Brexit negotiations.

### **Kick out the Tories - for a socialist Brexit!**

Our slogan should be for a General Election now and to kick the Tories out! The government is incredibly weak, even former Tory ministers have attacked the party as it is "unable to govern." But the fear of a General Election and a potential Corbyn government is the main thing holding the Conservative Party together. It's no coincidence that the main weapon the Tory whips used to keep the government together after May's Chequers plan was that if Tory MPs voted against the government there would be an election and they would lose their seats.

A campaign for a general election, backed by trade unions, the NUS, students and Corbyn could bring down the government. Linking the demands in the negotiations to the demands for nationalisation and scrapping tuition fees that made the Labour manifesto in 2017 so popular could build a movement that unites workers and students across the country. This would have to be linked to a campaign to kick out the Blairites from the Labour Party and the fight for a socialist programme.

The referendum result in 2016 was a huge blow to the establishment, as was the Corbyn surge in 2017. If we take this opportunity to kick the Tories out it would be a major advance in the fight to transform society and consign the Tories and the capitalist system to history.



# WHAT IS COMMUNISM?

**Gareth Bromhall**  
**Swansea Socialist Students**

“Communism is back baby!”. That’s according to Owen Jones. And he is right; for many young people communism is no longer a dirty word. This is despite Fukuyama’s 1992 pronouncement that “what we may be witnessing is not just the end of the Cold War, or the passing of a particular period of post-war history, but the end of history as such: that is, the end point of mankind’s ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government.”

This famous statement was made amid the collapse of the Soviet Union and other Stalinist states that marked the end of the Cold War. The legacy of these regimes – which represented not the genuine “communism” envisaged by Marx, Engels or the leaders of the Russian revolution, but a grotesque distortion of their ideas – cast a shadow over this word.

Nonetheless, the experience of the past 26 years has starkly revealed the falsehood of Fukuyama’s assesment. Capitalism is a system in crisis. It offers a future of austerity, climate change, poverty and war. No wonder thousands of young people, in particular, are taking a fresh look at ideas that offer an alternative.

For instance, the journalist Ash Sarkar, in a recent, fiery interview with Piers Morgan, proudly asserted “I’m literally a communist”. She later reiterated and expanded on this in an interview with Teen Vogue, who ran an article earlier in the year entitled “Who Is Karl Marx: Meet the Anti-Capitalist Scholar”.

In her interview, talking about wealth inequality, Ash Sarkar suggested that “... there are different ways of distributing that more equitably. That’s possible under social democracy through taxation or universal basic income. It’s possible under socialism. But communism is the only thing which says all things should be brought into the hands of commons to benefit all people. In the past, you’d call that communism. I think in the future, we’ll have to call that common sense.”

This is happening during a period where a majority of British and American young people, across several polls, have indicated a preference for a socialist society over a capitalist one and the youth support for self-described socialists Sanders and Corbyn greatly outstripping those of their opponents.

Socialism, Communism and the ideas of Marx, Engels and their torch bearers are being discussed (and attacked) in the mainstream, and are striking a chord with young people around the world.

Even Governor of the Bank of England Mark Carney, whilst talking about

automation and new technology has warned that “Marx and Engels may again become relevant” and “If you substitute platforms for textile mills, machine learning for steam engines, Twitter for the telegraph, you have exactly the same dynamics as existed 150 years ago – when Karl Marx was scribbling the Communist Manifesto”. The capitalists are scared.

## So what is communism?

Marx and Engels, in publishing the Communist Manifesto of 1848, laid the central ground work for the ideas as we understand them today. These theories were built on by Lenin, Trotsky and others, who put the ideas of Marx and Engels into practice in the Russian Revolution of 1917, where capitalism broke at its weakest link, when the Russian capitalist and feudal elite were removed from power by a socialist revolution led by the working class. Tragically, left isolated by the defeats of similar movements in other countries, this historic revolutionary victory was ultimately betrayed by Stalin and his bureaucracy.

Communism as a theory can be boiled down to the idea of a societal system in which there is common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange - a stateless society run democratically, in which the needs of all of its citizens are met.

Marx popularised the slogan “From



each according to his ability, to each according to his needs” to describe the function of this highest stage of socialist society.

## What is capitalism?

Under Capitalism, the vast majority of society’s wealth and resources is concentrated in the hands of a tiny few. This doesn’t happen because rich individuals are especially clever, hardworking or brilliant, but because of the way the way society is organised.

Under capitalism, goods and services are produced by millions of workers all over the world, working together and cooperating. It is workers who turn the world’s natural resources into things people can use - workers who transport and distribute goods, and who provide society’s services. The problem is that there is private ownership over the means of producing that wealth.

So rather than workers creating what’s necessary to meet the needs and desires of the majority, production is instead organised for profit. Profit comes from not paying workers the full value of what they produce in wages. Marx termed this exploitation. Profit is the driving force behind capitalist production – concerns like solving world hunger or tackling climate change must all be relegated to its demands.

## And socialism?

A socialist society would mean democratic workers’ control over the means of production, distribution and exchange. That would require bringing the major

monopolies that currently dominate the economy – and by extension the lives of millions – into public ownership. On this basis, it would be possible for working class people to democratically plan the economy in order to meet the needs of everyone, without destroying the planet.

## Socialism and communism

Marx argued that socialism would only be the first stage of building a new world. A socialist society would still need a state, but instead of acting in the interests of a small minority – the capitalist class – a democratic workers’ state would act in the interests of the majority. As society developed, with science and technology created by capitalism harnessed to meet the needs of humanity, what Marx described as a society of ‘superabundance’ could develop, and the state would wither away.

A communist society would be a stateless, moneyless, classless society where workers control not only the means of production, but also its output.

Both of these systems have workers’ control and the aim of a healthy, happy and productive society free from exploitation at the heart of them, and the theory states that the success of the democratic workers’ state in gaining control over the means of production will eventually lead to the withering away of the need for the state itself.

## How can it be achieved?

When talking about socialism and communism it’s important to remember that these things will not develop

naturally under the capitalist system. It is only by the working class taking the place of the ruling class in owning the means of production that this societal change can be achieved.

There are some who argue that this could happen through reform – a bit-by-bit chipping away at the system from the inside until, one day, there is socialism. Tony Benn, for instance, maintained that “Every generation must fight the same battles again and again. There’s no final victory and there’s no final defeat”.

However, as Rosa Luxemburg, a leader of the 1918 German revolution, explained in her pamphlet *Reform or Revolution*: without the ownership of the means of production itself, any reforms won from the capitalists can and will be clawed back over time.

That’s not to say that socialists don’t fight for reforms and improvements. In fact, socialists are the hardest fighters for every gain that working class and young people can make. We understand that it is through struggling for improvements in wages, living standards, services and so-on, workers gain confidence in their collective strength – in their ability to change and run society.

But we also understand that to make reforms permanent, it’s necessary to fundamentally change the way society is organised.

Decades of neo-liberal capitalism have shown that pay rises, better conditions, the NHS and welfare state can and will be reversed if the capitalists can get away with it. This lays bare the reality that without a mass struggle against capitalism and to transform society along socialist lines, neither socialism nor communism can be achieved.

## Change the world

Because Communism is in the media again, and socialism is back on people’s lips and, importantly, among young people is consistently the preferred system for society, now is an excellent time to get involved in the fight to change society. As Karl Marx famously wrote: “The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways, the point, however, is to change it”.





## EDITORIAL: MAY'S GOVERNMENT ON THE BRINK TORIES OUT - CORBYN IN!

**A**s students will be arriving at university this September, the Tory government will be returning to parliament. So too will they be returning to the monumental crisis which opened up for them during the summer.

A meeting at the prime minister's countryside residence, Chequers, hoped to stabilise the situation for Theresa May, but instead brought her government to the very brink of collapse. After hoping that the meeting could cobble together an agreement within the Tory Party that would reconcile the pro and anti-Brexit camps within the party, the steady trickle of resignations began from her cabinet team and other positions soon afterwards. The Chequers deal only lasted a week before the splits once again rose to the surface, resulting in all out warfare between each side. However the summer recess temporarily saved them.

The divisions which have split the Tories down the middle have not disappeared however. In fact, they will only worsen as we enter into September and Brexit negotiations drag on.

### **Students and the general election**

Since the snap general election back in June 2017, the Tories have stumbled from one political crisis to the next. Theresa May called the election with a view to strengthen the Tory majority in Parliament, and arrogantly approached the election assured that this would be the case.

Herself and the other Tory leaders severely underestimated the popularity of Corbyn's anti-austerity programme. The election gave Corbyn the chance to present and argue his anti-austerity manifesto in front of workers and students across the country. As a result, Corbyn rapidly climbed the polls in the short campaigning period. The end result – the biggest increase in Labour's vote share since 1945 – severely damaged the Tories, forcing them into a coalition with the reactionary DUP.

Students played a key role in the 2017 general election, mobilising in their tens of thousands, alongside young workers, to demand an alternative to years of capitalist driven austerity.

Since then, it's been crisis after crisis for the Tories – from universal credit to the NHS, from Windrush to Brexit.

### **Why are they still there?**

This begs the question then – why are they still there? Although the Tory government is sitting on the precipice, their collapse is not guaranteed. Theresa May, despite her total inability to lead the Tories effectively, is all that sits between the current government and an early general election. All the senior Tory figures who want her gone simultaneously understand that moving against her risks the possibility of another snap general election, and that Corbyn might win it. For now, the fear of a Corbyn-led government is staying the hand of the potential Tory assassins.

This means that it's going to take a determined fight to kick out this long hated government. Corbyn should call on working class people to mobilise in the streets to fight tooth and nail against the Tories. Students and young people could be integral to this fight back – especially if it were





also led by the NUS was linked to the fight against tuition fees and attacks on the lives of young people in general. An all-out offensive by workers and students, alongside co-ordinated strike action led by the trade unions (which have an overall membership of 6 million), could rapidly change the situation and force another early general election.

### **Kick out the Blairites**

It isn't just the Tories that Corbyn has to worry about however. Within his own party, the majority of the Blairite Parliamentary Labour Party, like Theresa May, fear the election of Jeremy Corbyn as Prime Minister.

The Blairites aren't cut from the same cloth as Corbyn. They represent the right-wing takeover of the Labour Party which was carefully prepared by the ruling class for decades, culminating in the rise of Tony Blair and 'New Labour' in the 1990s. This was, for years, the ambition of British big business: to have both major political parties, the Tories and Labour, reliable to carry out the political ambitions of the rich. Margaret Thatcher famously declared that her proudest achievement during her political career was the creation of New Labour.

Whilst the election of Corbyn represented the overwhelming desire of working and young people to break with the anti-working class and pro-establishment Blairite tradition, the bulk of the Labour Party's structures, including the Parliamentary Labour Party and the party machine, today remain dominated by the right of the party.

Ultimately, the Blairites and the Tories both represent and defend the interests of the rich and their system of capitalism. As such, they rely on each other to prevent a Corbyn victory. There

## **THE DIVISIONS WHICH HAVE SPLIT THE TORIES DOWN THE MIDDLE HAVE NOT DISAPPEARED. IN FACT, THEY WILL ONLY WORSEN AS WE ENTER INTO SEPTEMBER AND BREXIT NEGOTIATIONS DRAG ON.**

is no better example of this than a tweet posted by Blairite MP and rampant Corbyn critic Jess Phillips in the middle of the Brexit white paper crisis. Phillips tweeted of the government cabinet resignations "Theresa May should hold her nerve, just replace them".

While the former Tory MP Chris Patten and current Chancellor of the University of Oxford spoke of having never seen the party in such crisis, the pages of the media were loaded with attacks by the likes of Phillips against Corbyn. Instead of taking the opportunity to push for a general election, the Blairites instead chose to attack Corbyn, and therefore hand to the Tories on a plate the opportunity to cling on to power.

Their treachery doesn't stop there however. It has since been revealed that a group of 20 Blairite MPs have been meeting on a regular basis to discuss building yet another coup against Corbyn's leadership.

This includes secretive meetings at what has been described as a 'luxury estate' in Sussex on two occasions. And they aren't just discussing a plan to remove Corbyn from the party leadership ahead of the next general election – but also a plan to split from Corbyn in the event of his successful

election as Prime Minister. Such a split would see the Blairites come together with Tory and Liberal MPs to found a new 'centrist' political party.

This reveals how totally hopeless attempting to compromise with the Labour right is. No matter what Corbyn does, the Blairites will never be satisfied until they have regained total control of the Labour Party from both Corbyn and the hundreds of thousands of members who have joined Labour to support him. The fight to kick out the Tories and put Corbyn in Number 10 has to be linked to the fight against the Blairite saboteurs within the Labour Party.

### **Fight for a Corbyn-led government!**

Socialist Students calls for the building of an almighty movement which can exploit the crisis which currently grips the Tory Party. Students, who voted in their tens of thousands for Corbyn's anti-austerity manifesto (with its policies to scrap tuition fees, nationalise key industries and establish a £10/hour minimum wage), would rally behind a call by Corbyn to flood the streets demanding a new general election.

The cause of mobilising students also means a struggle to dislodge the stale Blairite leadership of the National Union of Students (NUS), and replace it with a leadership which reflects the determination of its members to struggle against the Tories. (See article on page 19 for further analysis of the NUS). A mass student mobilisation which moved alongside a campaign by the leaders of the trade unions for decisive, coordinated national strike action, could boot the Tories out.

Students can play an important role in sweeping away this dying government. Tories out – Corbyn in with socialist policies!



# FIGHT FOR REFUGEE RIGHTS

## Lawanya Ramajeyam Refugee Rights Committee member

**A**cross the globe, we are experiencing an unprecedented refugee crisis. By the end of 2017, there were 68.5 million people who were displaced from their homes due to conflict and persecution. Amongst them are 22.5 million refugees.

The vast majority of today's refugees are fleeing from war. These are wars caused by right-wing governments which prioritise the interests of the capitalist class over our own lives. 80% of those displaced by war move to neighbouring countries – it's only a small percentage who attempt to make the dangerous, life-risking journey to Europe.

Since 1993, more than 35,000 deaths of refugees have been recorded – yet not all of these deaths have occurred at sea. Shockingly, over 500 refugees have died during their time held in detention centres, asylum units, and refugee camps all across Europe.

The British government, as well as all capitalist governments, are responsible for creating these refugees. Simultaneously, refugees are treated as criminals, held in detention centres where even some of their most basic rights are denied them.

The UK, which currently has 11 detention centres, is the only country in Europe that does not have a limit on the length of time that someone can be detained. There are individuals in detention centres who have been held for years as they await the results of their case. Horrifically, many of these cases end with refugees being deported to the country they were originally fleeing from without a proper assessment of their safety. They might be called 'detention centres', but

judging from the experiences of those who have been detained, they are very much like prisons. Those detained are held behind numerous locked doors, have timetabled lunch and dinner, are given small portions of food, and even have selected times to go outside. Refugee Rights demands that these detention centres are closed immediately.

When people arrive in the UK and apply for asylum, they are not allowed to work while they wait for their claim to be decided. Those who have savings must live off them; those who are destitute – an understandably high number, given the circumstances in which many people flee their countries, are entitled to support in the form of housing and an allowance of £36.95 per person per week.

This allowance is meant to cover everything – including food, transport, clothing, as well

Refugee Rights is a campaign which was initiated by Tamil Solidarity in September 2016, and is unique in that it is organised by refugees themselves.

Refugee Rights wants to link the struggle of these refugees with the struggles of working class and young people against the attacks of the bosses and the Tory government.

## OUR DEMANDS ARE:

- Allow the right to work
- The closure of detention centres
- NHS free for all
- Access to education – education to be free
- £10 an hour for all
- The right to join a trade union

as expenses for their children. So how is it possible to live on such a small amount? This meagre allowance leaves refugees vulnerable to exploitation by bosses that employ them illegally on slave wages. Refugees are also encouraged to work within the detention centres for as little as £1 an hour. Detention centres, many of them privately run, make big profits as a result of this.

The Windrush scandal exposed the racist immigration system and the brutality of the 'Hostile Environment'. This is a systemic approach of the Tories to try and blame migrant workers and refugees for austerity and attacks to public services and living standards.

## Mass action gets results

300 refugees are currently facing eviction from their properties by the private company SERCO in Glasgow. These destitute refugees, many of whom are suffering mental trauma, will be thrown out onto the streets unless these evictions are halted. In response to the eviction notices, the Refugee Rights campaign organised a protest outside Serco's headquarters in London. Alongside protests organised by workers and youth in Glasgow, our action successfully pushed SERCO back and forced them to grant a three week pause of the eviction process.

But soon this grace period will be over. The crisis facing refugees cannot be solved on a permanent basis until we have a fundamental socialist change in our society. The history of struggle shows that such concessions are never just handed out by the government, but instead are won by working class people demanding and fighting for change.

Please get in touch to find out how your Socialist Students society can help build up support and get involved in the fight for refugee rights!





# MAY 1968:

## 50 YEARS ON FROM THE REVOLUTIONARY EVENTS IN FRANCE

**Connor Rosoman**  
Sussex Socialist Students

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the events of May 1968 in France, in which the French workers held history's greatest general strike, and challenged the capitalist system itself. This historic event took place during the post-war economic boom, which saw comparative economic stability in Europe. As a result of this, some socialist groups abandoned the traditional Marxist view that the working class would be the agent of change in Europe, believing workers had been 'bought off' by increasing wages and improving living standards. Instead, these groups looked towards students and guerrilla movements such as those of Cuba and Vietnam. At a conference in England just a few months beforehand, Ernest Mandel, a leading French Marxist, proclaimed that there would be no possibility of revolution in Europe for another 20 years. The events of May would soon prove him wrong.

In France, the authoritarian government of Charles De Gaulle was coming up against fierce resistance from French workers.

Workplace conditions were harsh, with armed guards policing factory workers. Paramilitary organisations were even used to suppress any workers who organised to improve their situation. Despite this, there were outbreaks of strike action across the country in the months leading up to May. Meanwhile, discontent was building throughout Europe - for example in Portugal and Spain against the collapsing fascist regimes; and in Eastern Europe too, with Czechoslovakia's 'Prague Spring' against the Stalinist regimes of the Eastern Bloc.

On 2 May, students at Nanterre University in Paris protested against their conditions. Lectures were overcrowded and students felt restricted by archaic rules. In response to the protests, the university administration shut the university down. The next day, students were viciously attacked by riot police, sparking outrage from lecturers and school students who joined the university students in a demonstration of 60,000 people in Paris. The French Communist Party (CPF) outrageously denounced their actions, describing the students as "pseudo-revolutionaries". Police forces met the protesters with

brutal violence, culminating in the "night of the barricades" on 6 May, in which hundreds of students were taken to hospital with injuries after fighting in the streets with police.

This brought the public's anger with the government to boiling point. Workers understood that, if this brutal repression could be used against students (many of whom were, at that time, the sons and daughters of the ruling class), the state would not hesitate in using such measures against strikes and workers' protests. At the same time, students approached workers in the factories, in an attempt to convince them to join in with the protests.

### Workers join the struggle

In response to the police brutality, and under pressure from their members to act, the leaders of the communist-led CGT trade union federation were forced to call a 24-hour general strike on the 13 May. They saw this as an opportunity to win some of the reforms workers had been fighting for, as well as serving as a release valve to let off some steam, with the aim of returning to work the next day.

However, after months of struggle, factory workers at the Sud Aviation factory refused to return to work and locked 20 managers in their offices!

This opened the floodgates, as they were joined by more and more workers. Strikes began to spread all across the country. From 200 striking workers on 14 May, this number sprung back to 2 million by the 19th. By 21 May it would reach a peak of 10 million people!

Charles De Gaulle fled the country and called for a referendum, but found himself unable to even have the ballot papers printed, as printing workers refused to produce them. Power was entirely within the hands of the mass of French workers, and not a single wheel could turn unless they decided so. In the following days, De Gaulle returned to France and met with leaders of the military and CGT in order to bring about an end to the strike.

### Shameful role of Stalinists

Afraid of the movement that had been unleashed, Stalinist union leaders attempted to put a lid on things. They claimed this was not a revolutionary situation, and the strikes were ‘purely’ about the demands for higher wages and better conditions. After long talks, the union leaders announced various concessions they had won from the capitalist leaders. These included substantial wage rises and other improvements in conditions – the fruits of mass struggle.

But for the workers, having tasted their own power to run society, it was not enough! When the CGT’s leaders addressed mass gatherings of strikers they were booed out of factories as workers

## BUT FOR THE WORKERS, HAVING TASTED THEIR OWN POWER TO RUN SOCIETY, IT WAS NOT ENOUGH!

called for a “people’s government”. The effects were felt across Europe. In Italy, calls for a general strike went up, directly inspired by the movement in France. Britain’s Evening Standard described the period as a “revolutionary situation of an almost text-book kind”

Despite this, the Communist Party still refused to go any further. Being the main party of the French workers, with a membership around of 2 million, this organisation had the potential to play a decisive role in bringing the working class to power in France.

At every stage, the CPF failed to offer a way forward for the working people of France. Despite a mass revolutionary movement from below, the Stalinist leadership made every effort to prevent it from succeeding.

This was because such a movement would not only have threatened their comfortable positions within the trade union bureaucracy, but also that of the bureaucratic governments of the Eastern Bloc. The establishment of a democratically controlled workers state in France could have had a huge effect on the workers, in Czechoslovakia or elsewhere, in inspiring their own struggle against the Stalinist regimes taking place at the time.

This was something the CPF, whose leadership was closely tied to the Soviet regime, was desperate to prevent. The movement was already spreading in neighbouring countries like Italy, Spain and Portugal, threatening an end to both capitalism and Stalinism, and its replacement with a democratic, socialist society.

As a result, when De Gaulle returned to the country and called a general election, the CPF ended up boasting that they

‘only’ lost half a million votes – despite having been at the head of a colossal movement just weeks ago.

The events of May 1968 also highlighted the failure of many other left groups at the time. Those that had abandoned the working class, instead prioritising student struggle or fetishising guerrilla movements, found themselves totally unprepared for the mass working class action. The student movement was important, but it was the act of linking up their struggle to that of the wider layers of working people that led to these events threatening the rule of capitalism.

### Working class key to the situation

This is due to the position of the working class in society. It is workers who produce society’s wealth and provide its services. The potential to change society is therefore in their hands.

The French working class demonstrated its profound ability to organise a movement, defying the union bureaucracy that attempted to rein in any thoughts of revolution, and the potential they have to organise society based around people’s needs. Workers banded together to provide food, create art and hold meetings to democratically decide how they wanted to run affairs.

However, without being organised in a party based on a bold, socialist programme, they were unable to decisively take power into their own hands. In 1938, Leon Trotsky explained how the political situation was defined by a historical crisis in the leadership in the leadership of the working class. The events of May 1968 demonstrated this for all to see.

The inspiring revolutionary movement of May 1968 is rich in lessons, including for today’s student movement. In particular, it reminds us that in order to truly change society, the student struggle must link up with the working class.

## “REVOLUTIONARY SITUATION OF AN ALMOST TEXTBOOK KIND”







# THE FUTURE OF THE NUS

## Theo Sharieff, Socialist Students National Chair

**T**heresa May's gamble of calling an early general election last summer backfired spectacularly. Students and young people mobilised in their thousands, responding to Jeremy Corbyn's anti-austerity manifesto, which included his promise to scrap university tuition fees. With the Tories still not fully recovered from their near fatal blow, the possibilities are there for a new student movement which could play its part in kicking them out of government.

The National Union of Students (NUS) conference met in Glasgow, 27-29 March, against this political backdrop. Many would have been left stunned, however, by the lack of discussion and debate over the three days. Hundreds of motions had been submitted, including from Socialist Students, on the fight for free education, building support for the University and College Union (UCU) strikers, and the struggle for abortion rights in Northern Ireland. Only a tiny fraction were taken and voted on. The rest were either not discussed or automatically remitted to the national executive committee (NEC) for consideration at a later date.

At no point in the numerous speeches

made by the NUS president and other leaders was there any recognition of the massive opportunities that have developed since the general election. The fact that the NUS has remained unshaken by the 2017 youthquake poses an important question: can the NUS be used as an effective tool to fight for free education and to help get rid of the Tory government?

The bureaucratic conference procedures were introduced by an NUS leadership firmly on the right. In 2009, a 'governance review' was introduced which significantly reduced the size of the conference and the length of time it lasts. These new rules were deliberately designed to consolidate the gradual transformation of the NUS from a student equivalent of a trade union – actively involving and mobilising its membership – into an organisation run like a charity, lobbying government officials without the involvement of its rank and file.

Years of failing to lead students in struggle, as well as the increasingly small and closed nature of annual conference, has left many students totally alienated from the NUS. This is also linked to the erosion of democracy within student unions on university campuses, which make up the NUS as a whole. They once acted as democratic

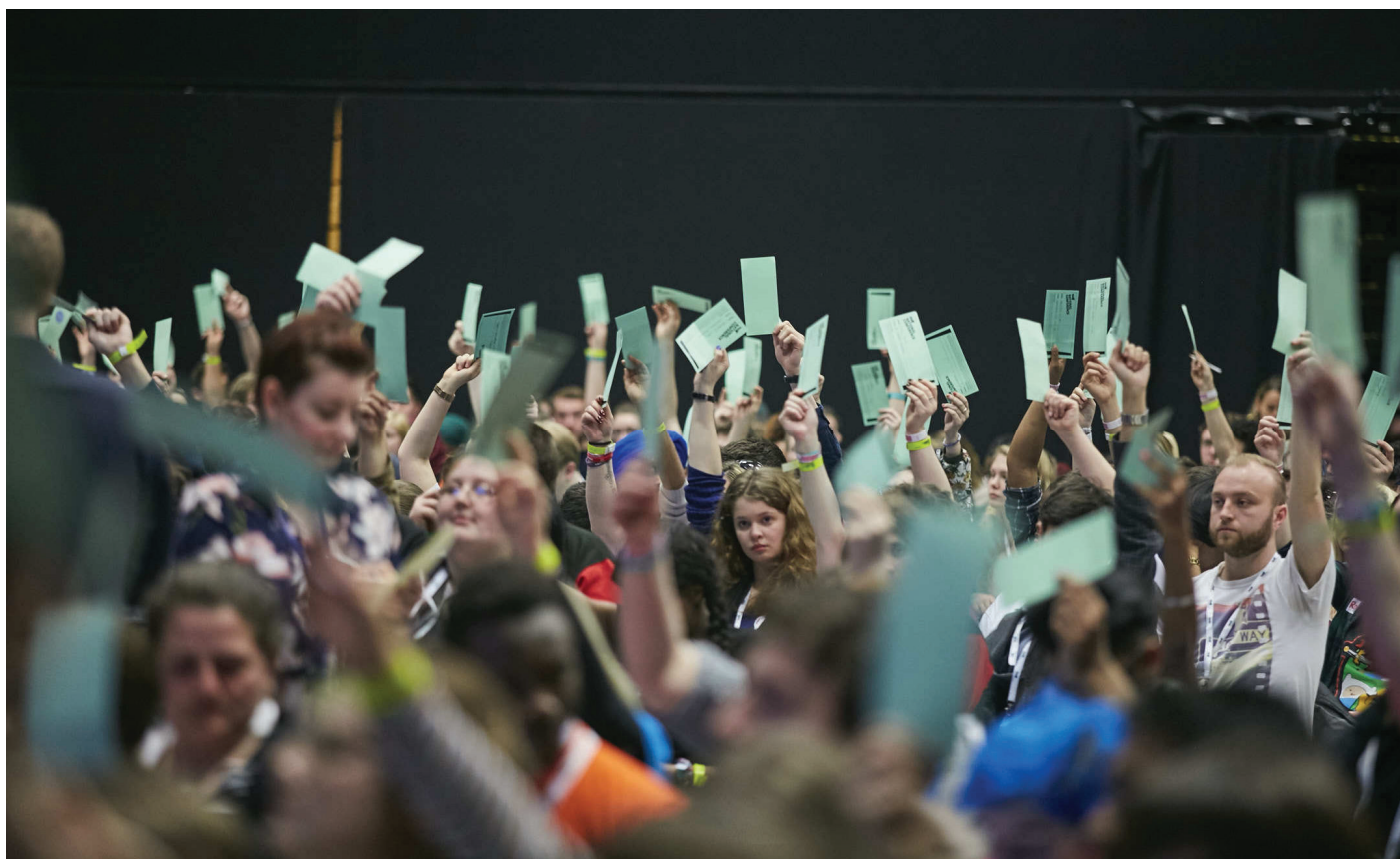
political bodies locally, where students could meet to discuss policy and submit motions, but today play no such role.

As the frustration continues to grow, some students might draw the conclusion, understandably, that the NUS has passed the point of no return, and that now is the time to build a new students' union.

Indeed, the numerous and repeated failings mean that, as students face up to the Tory government's attacks, they will be forced into struggle without the 'official' call to action by the NUS. This was demonstrated during the recent UCU strikes, when students organised marvellous solidarity action with their lecturers and teaching staff despite a shameful lack of support from the NUS.

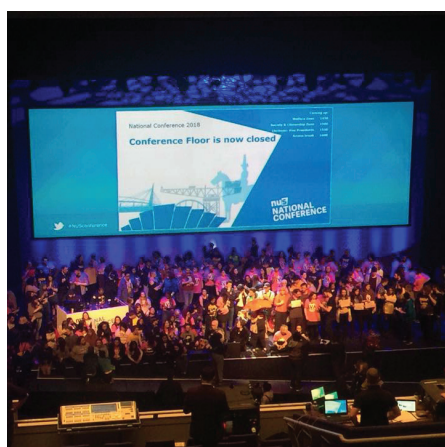
At the same time, it cannot be ruled out that, under the weight of events, mass student struggles would find an expression through the channels of the NUS. A student movement that took to the streets to kick out the Tories could act as a tool to rapidly dislodge the right-wing leadership, and allow a radical student movement to be reflected in NUS structures.

This was the case in 2010. Only a year after the governance review, the stale NUS tops were forced to call a national



demonstration, and 50,000 students poured into the streets of London. This shook the bureaucracy and opened up possibilities to replace the old leadership. While the exact course events take remains to be seen, it would be wrong to call prematurely for a complete and total break from the NUS at this stage.

Small rumblings of what a future movement through the NUS could



**Stage protest at NUS Conference 2018**

look like arrived on the Wednesday afternoon of this year's conference. After the right-wing bureaucracy decided to filibuster the discussion on abortion rights in Northern Ireland, around 150 delegates spontaneously occupied the stage to express their outrage.

Any struggle to reclaim the NUS as an organisation committed to leading struggles must be linked to the fight against the Blairite right wing of the Labour Party organised in the NUS, mainly through the Labour Students organisation. One of the main figures linked with the introduction of the governance review was the then NUS president, Wes Streeting. He is now the Blairite Labour MP for Ilford North and one of the key opponents of Jeremy Corbyn within the Parliamentary Labour Party.

And although there were some successes for the left in this year's NEC elections, the most prominent positions are still mainly controlled by those cut from the same cloth as Streeting. Shakira Martin, the Blairite president elected at last year's conference, was re-elected with 352 votes (50.9%).

The fight to transform the NUS has to go further than struggling to replace a handful of elected officials. It also has to be linked to a fundamental shake up and democratisation of NUS structures. This struggle must begin on the university campuses – as well as in the relevant schools and colleges – to fight for politicised and democratised student unions. This would be a huge step towards seeing the NUS transformed into a fighting, democratic force which

## THE FIGHT TO TRANSFORM THE NUS HAS TO GO FURTHER THAN STRUGGLING TO REPLACE A HANDFUL OF ELECTED OFFICIALS

can take on the Tories and fight for free education.

This would mean campaigning for student unions that call regular general meetings, widely advertised and open to all students, to discuss how best to fight the problems they face in today's neoliberal higher education system: for affordable housing, for example, and against job cuts, outsourcing and spiralling fees. Successful campaigns to transform even a small handful of student unions along fighting and democratic lines would provide the basis for a renewed battle to transform the NUS from the ground up.





# URGENT ACTION NEEDED TO FIGHT THE HOUSING CRISIS

**Tom Costello**  
**University of Manchester**

**T**he Tories' housing crisis has hit a breaking point. Recent studies have shown that rents are sky high. One study conducted this year found that, out of the average tenant's salary, more than 50% goes towards paying rent - 89% in London. 100 tenants face eviction for failure to pay their rents every day.

What is behind all of this? The Tories give tax breaks to big property developers as they build luxury flats across our cities while the mass of people continue to suffer. Driving this crisis is the capitalist model that housing runs on, where private housing is built and run for profit and not to meet the needs of the majority of people. Of course, the Tories are not going to confront this – almost one-third of all their MPs are landlords themselves!

## Student housing

This crisis has affected almost all layers of society. It was revealed this year that 17,000 students in the UK have faced potential eviction after falling behind on their rent payments. This is closely connected to the privatisation of student accommodation, as housing giants are increasingly worming their way onto the market.

Most of us have had experiences with student housing that is unattractive, cramped and overpriced. One building

housing students in Portsmouth failed a safety inspection last year, as it was found to have a similar cladding to that found on Grenfell Tower.

## Combating the crisis

All of this has understandably resulted in a great deal of anger. Students and workers are increasingly looking for ways to fight for decent homes for all, and to tackle the capitalist politicians, major landlords, construction companies, and rich speculators and investors who benefit from the crisis.

One promising result of this is the growing popularity of tenants' unions like the recently formed Acorn. Last year at Sussex University, Acorn members took part in a four-day rent strike over the terrible condition of student accommodation. While rent was higher than ever, students reported having to live in run-down and battered halls, often damp and infested with rats. The renters won improvements almost immediately after university management agreed to talks. This was an important victory.

Jeremy Corbyn's policy of building 500,000 council houses was greeted as a welcome change from what the Tories and Blairites had to offer.

However, his approach is not shared by all Labour's elected representatives in parliament or local councils, a majority of whom are cut from the old, Blairite

cloth. We cannot ignore the poor record of Labour councils across the country. In Haringey, the Blairite council attempted to push its hated "HDV" scheme, which would have meant a £2 billion privatization of social housing, benefiting the big housing companies and nobody else. Working-class people in the area, including many Corbyn supporters, correctly opposed the plans and got organised to fight them. This included mobilising to deselect the right-wing councillors who were supporting the scheme.

But Labour councils don't only have the power to stop making things worse. They could, for instance, use the millions currently held in reserves to start building council housing now, while building a mass movement to fight gentrification and social cleansing. Working together with democratic groups of tenants, they could draw up a plan to cap maximum rents in such a way that benefits the millions, and not the millionaires who make their profits off our backs.

If Corbyn was to promise now that any Labour council prepared to go down this road would have funds reimbursed on day one of a Labour government, it would help put pressure on councils to act and would draw in the support and enthusiasm of millions of workers and students, enthusiastic at seeing genuine anti-austerity policies being carried out on a local level. Until then, the current approach to the housing crisis falls short of the mark.



## STRIKE! UNIVERSITIES SET FOR AUTUMN OF PROTEST

**Jamie Brackley**  
**Birmingham Socialist**  
**Students and UCU Member**

From February to March this year, Socialist Students groups up and down the country supported academic and academic-related staff as they took part in the largest ever university strike. It was an unprecedented action with members at 65 institutions taking part in a nationally coordinated, sustained walkout over 14 days to protect their pensions. It was the biggest strike in the history of higher education with 42,000 staff taking part in the walk out and led to the collapse of the employer's proposals to get rid of guaranteed 'defined benefits' at retirement.

But this could be dwarfed by proposed action over pay, equality, and casualisation planned for the autumn term with all 110,000 UCU members across universities and colleges set to be balloted in joint union proposals that could also see UNISON, and other trade unions representing support staff, joining the dispute. The university ballots will propose continued and sustained strike action to achieve a £10/hour minimum wage, 7.5% pay

settlement including a minimum £1,500 pay increase, concrete action on gender inequality, and an end to casual contracts, with a separate pay ballot for FE Colleges soon to be announced.

So how exactly did a moderate union with a relatively passive leadership who had never taken continuous strike action come so far? And what is the role for students as we enter the next dispute?

### **Victory on staff pensions**

It is fair to say that when employers quietly proposed that the USS pensions scheme, available to staff at pre-92 universities, be 'reformed' they did not expect the scale of the response. Indeed, the very idea that an industry churning out record surpluses of over £2.3bn could propose the abolition of the guaranteed 'defined benefits' without increasing their own contributions showed just how over confident they were less than 12 months ago. UCU estimated that staff would be 20% to 40% worse off, with early career academics set to lose as much as £9,600 a year in retirement.

But UK Higher Education is changing. UCU now estimates that 54% of all academic staff are now on some

form of precarious or casual contract, and at many well-known institutions that figure is as high as 75% to 80%. Salaries and conditions are being driven down, with pay having fallen by over 20% in real terms since 2010; early career researchers face increasingly precarious employment; migrant workers face constant monitoring and even deportation; and, crucially, staff are joining their trade unions.

Within days of strike action previously intransigent employers, represented by Universities UK, were back around the negotiating table. After an initial offer was rejected, employers returned with a revised offer promising to keep both the defined benefits element of the pensions package and significantly increase their contributions.

### **Tentative leaders, fighting members**

The victory in the pensions dispute was not won in isolation; it was an expression of anger at an increasingly exploitative education system that has generated incredible wealth across universities, excessive vice chancellor pay, while at the same time dismantling the terms and conditions of an ever increasing layer of staff.





The general secretary of UCU, Sally Hunt, was widely derided for attempting to defend the initial offer from employers, which would have allowed them to make significant cuts to pensions and only improved on the initial cuts by creating a ‘three year transition’ period. While the final offer was significantly improved, it again fell short of total victory just when employers had clearly become desperate. Most worryingly, the revised deal was forced through in a highly contentious e-ballot, in which the union leadership seemed to majorly misrepresent the alternatives, and made claims about support from local branches which would later prove to have been largely fabricated.

Having come so close to a complete victory, and having conducted a vibrant campaign seeing 20% to 30% increase in union membership in many branches, a broad layer of new and active members attended the UCU annual congress in May. Our delegation, from Birmingham, went fully expecting to see a leadership defending their handling of the pensions dispute in light of what had been, nonetheless, significant steps forward for the union.

Instead we saw a bureaucracy entirely determined to prevent any criticism of the general secretary whatsoever. Much of the three day conference descended to farce as union officials sought to frustrate congress business from the platform, which eventually led to repeated walk outs from the full time staff working for the general secretary, and the UCU president repeatedly suspending and then closing congress rather than debate the issues.

While these were incredible and

laughable scenes, there were well over 300 delegates from across the country who had seen the real face of the UCU leadership. A statement from the majority of members in the hall, in establishing the #OurUCU campaign, read:

“We UCU elected delegates voted repeatedly in line with the advice of our Congress Business Committee to hear motions criticising the General Secretary which were in order... We believe the union members have the right to hold our most senior elected officials to account. This is a basic democratic right in all trade union and representative systems.”

Where this leads remains to be seen, but one principle is clear – where there is a broad and exploited class under a given set of material conditions; then grass roots democracy, organisation, and consciousness will lead to direct and radical action that will confront that exploitation. As young members joining our union en masse, we expect to be listened to – but for socialists in this context, we must also ensure that this consciousness extends beyond the immediate anger at the leadership over pensions. We must ensure that we achieve a fully democratic grass roots union in order to build a movement that is capable of achieving a truly democratic and grass roots emancipatory education system.

### Broadening the fight: the role of Socialist Students

In the Autumn pay demands, agreed at the UCU HE Sector conference, it is clear that members now want broad and ambitious reform on pay, equality, and casualisation, and that they’re prepared to take action to get it. Additionally, the

possibility of UNISON, who represent thousands of academic support staff, joining the action could seriously escalate the dispute.

On the one hand, it will be crucial that Socialist Students and other groups on the left are able to play a proactive role in communicating the real issues at stake and building solidarity – in an increasingly consumerised sector, employers will attempt to pit students and staff against one another. But equally, our role as socialists will also be to ensure that the lessons of the strike are that we win when we are together – and that the fight does not stop at a few reforms over pay, nor even at a genuinely democratic university that puts education and research before tuition fees and grant capture, but at a grass roots socialist society that holds all of its leaders to account.

This important victory has shown that united and determined strike action gets results. Students also played an important part in this struggle, organising solidarity protests and joining picket lines. This helped boost the confidence of University and Colleges Union (UCU) members to continue the strike over several weeks of action. Members of Socialist Students were at the forefront of organising and taking part in solidarity action on campuses all over the country.



Sheffield Socialist Students at a UCU solidarity rally

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