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Editorial of the Socialist issue 985

May's EU speech kicks the can down the road

Corbyn must seize opportunity and fight for pro-worker, internationalist Brexit

The closing line of Theresa May's speech - "now let's get on with it" - will have led to jeers of frustration from any workers listening. For 18 months the lies and distortions of different wings of the capitalist class over Brexit - played out in the civil war in the Tory Party - have created a fog of confusion, leaving millions of workers worried for the future but with no hope that the government will ever get on with anything, certainly not anything that is in the interests of the working class majority. Only 8% of voters believe the outlook for Brexit has got better in the last year.

In reality the goal of Theresa May's speech was responding to [Jeremy Corbyn's speech days earlier](#), and above all aiming to quieten the civil war in the Tory Party.

Momentarily it appeared to have achieved that. The same thing happened after her last speech. Within weeks the fighting again reached fever pitch. This is yet another fudge; kicking the can no more than a few paltry metres further down the road.

The pro-Brexit wing of the Tory Party expressed their satisfaction because May reiterated that after Brexit Britain would not be a member of an EU customs union or of [the single market](#). Instead she argued that Britain would be able to maintain a high level of access to the single market by agreeing to continue to follow many of its rules. In addition she acknowledged that in a number of manufacturing sectors Britain would have to pay for associate membership of EU agencies.

All of this was immediately dismissed by EU spokespeople as 'not solving any of the problems'.

Pro-EU Tory grandee Michael Heseltine scorned the speech as "phrases, generalisations and platitudes" from a woman who had "a knife to her throat" held by the Tory right.

However, the pro-EU wing of the Tory Party, who represent the interests of the majority of the capitalist class, were, in the main, polite about May's speech. Some, however, may still vote with Labour in parliament to support membership of a customs union if the threat of doing so doesn't force May to retreat further, potentially allowing Jeremy Corbyn to inflict a damaging defeat on the government.

Collapse

Such a defeat could lead to a collapse of the government and a general election; bringing a Jeremy Corbyn-led government to power. The majority of the capitalist class are desperate to force May to accept membership of a customs union, and if they can, the single market, but of course are also keen to avoid Jeremy Corbyn coming to power if possible.

One of their mouthpieces, the Financial Times, summed it up in an editorial where they declared: "Mr Corbyn and his hard left coterie pose a greater threat to the UK's growth prospects than all but the worst possible Brexit outcomes," yet, they concluded, "if Mrs May does not change tack, Tory MPs should work with Labour to make it happen."

They hope that the anti-democratic Fixed Term Parliament Act (introduced by Cameron to shore up a previous weak Tory-led government) can be used to keep May in power even while parliamentary defeat forces her to shift on Brexit. This would be difficult for them to achieve, however. The government would be incredibly weak, even compared to the current situation.

Corbyn's recent Brexit speech, however, has put him in a good position to fight for a Brexit in the interests of the working class, and potentially to force a general election. He remains under huge pressure from the pro-capitalist wing of the Labour Party to capitulate to the demands of big business and to argue for Brexit in name only, meaning continued acceptance of all the neoliberal, anti-working class, pro-privatisation rules and regulations that are included in the EU treaties.

His speech, however, pointed in a different direction - stating that he would not countenance a deal that left Britain as a passive recipient of rules decided elsewhere by others. He said he would demand "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."

He now needs to build on this, going further in calling for clear socialist measures, and to shout his position from the roof tops. Unfortunately, the mistaken approach of seeking unity with the pro-capitalist Blairites means that it is they, and not Corbyn, who are making the majority of statements on Brexit. This urgently needs to change allowing Corbyn to more effectively reach millions of working class people - both those who voted leave and remain.

Corbyn should also make an appeal to working class and young people across Europe. The European Commission tries to present the EU as a united monolith. Nothing could be further from the truth. It is highly divided on national and, above all, class lines.

Italy

The Italian election results are the latest earthquake to shake it to its foundations, with the biggest gains being made by populist Eurosceptic parties - the Five Star Movement and the far-right League. The equivalent of Labour (led by Renzi - a Blair type figure) sank to below 20% of the vote. No wonder - Renzi presided over endless austerity. The economy has not yet even reached the level it was before the 2008 crash.

Renzi is not alone. Across the EU the parties that are linked to Labour are from the school of Blair not Corbyn, and are being punished electorally as a result.

In Germany the SPD has suffered its worst election results since World War Two, and is likely to suffer worse in the future - having just agreed to join a government with the CDU, the equivalent of the Tories.

Corbyn should use his international anti-austerity authority to oppose the pro-capitalist policies across the EU, from whichever party they come, and instead spearhead a campaign for anti-austerity, pro-working class policies continent wide in order to help establish a new collaboration of the peoples of Europe on a socialist basis.

- See an [article on the Italian election results at socialistworld.net](http://socialistworld.net)

NHS: public health - not private profit

Alison Hill

The Tories make dangerous claims like 'we're all living longer' and 'people are demanding more treatment'. Of course people want the most up-to-date and effective treatment, it's 2018. And why should the fact that some people are living longer be a problem?

It's not our fault the NHS is under pressure. It's not the fault of the doctors, nurses, cleaners, porters and the other thousands of dedicated workers who deliver such an important part of a decent society. We have to point to those who leach off the NHS, and their political representatives.

The pharmaceutical companies, the building companies, the suppliers of the equipment. Why should these people be able to make huge profits from our NHS?

You can buy three boxes of paracetamol in a pound shop... for £1. But big pharma charges the NHS up to 20 times the price in Asda, according to 2014 analysis by the Telegraph.

And why is everything else supplied by private companies? Surely it would be more sensible to use the expertise of those workers to build and supply all that on an organised, nationalised basis? That would save our hard-earned billions going straight into the pockets of rich shareholders and the other fat cats.

Just down the road from me is a beautiful new hospital, the Royal London, built on the site of one of the oldest hospitals in Britain, where much pioneering work has been done over the decades.

But now the 'pioneering' work is done by the giant building companies who have used the 'private finance initiative' (PFI) to line their pockets and saddle the NHS with crippling debt.

It's time to put a stop to these companies bleeding the NHS dry. The Socialist Party campaigns not just to defend the NHS, but to rebuild it without the vultures of big business flying around.

- No to privatisation and PFI.
- Renationalise all privatised health services, including social care. Nationalise the big pharmaceutical and other big health companies, with compensation paid only on the basis of proven need.
- Fully fund all services and run them under accountable, democratic committees that include representatives of service workers and users
- For a massive programme of recruitment and training to staff the NHS properly with workers on good wages and conditions
- For a socialist NHS to provide for everyone's health needs - free at the point of use and under democratic control

Build the fightback!

- For an urgent meeting of the Trade Union Congress, trade unions and Labour Party to set a date for the next national Saturday demonstration, bringing together the issues of the NHS crisis, austerity and pay - bring forward the march planned for 12 May
- Coordinate strike ballots and action over pay across different unions
- Get the Tories out! For a programme of mass action to force a general election

Snow chaos showed the bosses' coldness - but also workers' grit

Bea Gardner, Southampton Socialist Party

The snow has now mostly melted away. But the chaos is still fresh in our minds.

It's true the weather was severe, particularly in Scotland. But it laid bare the bosses' ruthless pursuit of profit and the inability of Britain's austerity-ravaged infrastructure to cope.

However, it also showed the capacity of ordinary people to organise.

Low-paid workers across Britain were forced to risk their safety and defy the advice of police not to travel due to some bosses refusing to pay workers who couldn't make it in.

Big businesses including Lloyds Bank, RBS, Marks & Spencer, KFC and McDonald's forced staff to come in despite the Met Office's red weather warning, meaning likely imminent threat to life and property.

Unionised workers at one KFC in Livingston, West Lothian reported the only reason their restaurant did eventually close was due to agitation from the staff. This included them all signing a letter threatening to

withdraw their labour.

By the time some employers took on board the severity of the situation, it was already too late, meaning workers left work during the worst of the weather.

This was the case in Southampton. Despite the warning for heavy snow during the afternoon, many people did not leave work until at least 3pm when the worst of the weather had set in.

I watched from my living room window as multiple vehicles skidded out of control on the road outside, with one car hitting a lamppost.

Despite these conditions, a parcel delivery worker, who had abandoned his truck further up, was wheeling parcels down the road before returning to his van to presumably continue with his work.

But why were the roads so bad? This weather was forecast, giving local authorities and workplaces time to consider and coordinate their response.

Presumably, some councils had simply cut the resources they needed. According to the AA, 53% cut their 2016-17 spending on road maintenance compared to the previous year.

And as the snow began to fall, the Tories who ruined Northamptonshire Council passed another cuts budget. It included reducing the number of gritted roads and the budget for road maintenance

Meanwhile, on the rails, many networks ended up cancelling all services, leaving people stranded away from home, including several trains breaking down with passengers still on board.

Hundreds were trapped overnight on lines between Southampton and Bournemouth. One train broke down just outside Christchurch in Dorset, leaving people stuck for 14 hours, without heating, with just three foil blankets between them, and no working toilets.

Rail users in Britain pay extortionate fares compared to our European neighbours. Where is the money going?

Privatised rail providers seem to have concluded they lose less profit by allowing the service to fail than by putting measures in place to manage adverse weather.

The solidarity showed by people like the Greggs delivery driver handing out pastries and doughnuts to those stranded on the A1 contradicts the bosses' lie that people are too selfish for socialism.

The wealth exists - in the hands of the super-rich - for quality infrastructure, housing and heating for all, as well as safety at work and home. Corbyn's anti-austerity manifesto is a good starting point.

He should go further, taking big business into public ownership under democratic working class control. And in the meantime, tell Labour councils to stop making Tory cuts!

Toys R Us, Maplin: worsening retail crisis claims more jobs

Trade unions must fight for public ownership

Scott Jones, chair, Usdaw east London retail branch (personal capacity)

Big high street retailers Toys R Us and Maplin have gone under, with a number of other familiar names like Mothercare rumoured to follow.

5,500 jobs could go as a result of these companies entering administration. This puts thousands more shop workers, mostly women, on a scrap heap which already includes - among others - thousands who lost their jobs after [wholesaler Palmer & Harvey](#) and department store BHS went under in 2017.

[The BHS collapse meant the loss of a high street icon](#), and the jobs of many members of retail and distribution union Usdaw. Following this, Usdaw conference passed a resolution calling on the government to bring companies in a similar situation into public ownership.

But where the union has made statements, they have included no call for public ownership and no firm commitment to fight to save every job.

Consumer spending fell last year, including a 5% fall in high street spending. This is having an effect on retail companies, many of which are in debt. Austerity has left workers with little money in their pockets.

But at the same time millions of pounds are paid out to shareholders at these companies. And despite the debts of some, others who have made staff cuts - such as Tesco, Sainsbury's and Marks & Spencer - make huge profits.

Retail workers should not pay the price for austerity, or the bad management of retail companies like Philip Green's dodgy control of BHS.

We need combative trade unions to confront this slaughter of retail jobs. The brilliant election of class fighter and Socialist Party member [Amy Murphy as Usdaw president](#) is a sign that shop workers agree.

An end to austerity and a plan to stop the retail crunch is needed to safeguard jobs.

Corbyn-led Labour should adopt Usdaw's policy of taking these companies into public ownership to save the jobs if it comes to power, and make demands on this government before it does.

Them & Us

'Communist' billionaires...

Xi Jinping's policies added four new billionaires every week last year. The wealth of China's billionaire 'lawmakers' has more than doubled since 2013.

China's 13th 'National People's Congress' (NPC - the regime's pseudo-parliament) opened its plenary session on 5 March in Beijing. Thus began two weeks of furious rubber-stamping - the dictatorship has already decided which policies will be adopted.

Among the 5,130 appointed 'delegates' attending the NPC and its sister body, the 'Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference' (PCC), there will be 104 dollar-billionaires: 45 in the NPC and 59 in the PCC.

Their total net worth amounts to four trillion yuan (\$624 billion), more than double Ireland's GDP. This is the richest 'parliament' in the world by a very big margin.

... China's workers

Meanwhile, average residential property prices have risen 23% in the past year in China's ten largest cities. This is a faster rate of increase than any single year in the US housing market.

Millions of city people are taking on extreme levels of debt in order to buy a home. At the same time, millions of migrant workers are being evicted from the major cities in a social cleansing campaign against what the Chinese 'Communist' Party calls the "low-end population."

Tens of millions of workers, especially in the service sector where most new jobs are created, are driven into precarious informal work as 'agency workers' or 'individual contractors'. Their rates of pay and working conditions are worse than in the factory sweatshops, many of which have moved to cheaper countries.

The number of workers' strikes each year has risen sevenfold during the first five-year term of Xi Jinping's presidency.

Adam N Lee, chinaworker.info

International Women's Day

Capitalism oppresses women - fight for socialism!

Hannah Sell, Socialist Party deputy general secretary and CWI international secretariat

When the twenty first century dawned, young women in the US and much of Europe were being told that equality was within their grasp. They didn't need feminism because capitalism was offering a glittering future based on growing prosperity and gender equality.

Today that illusion lies in ruins. Worldwide the myth of capitalist progress - of young people having greater opportunities than their parents - has been shattered by the world economic crisis of 2008 and its aftermath.

Young people from working and middle class backgrounds are facing a world that does not meet their expectations - dominated by mass unemployment, low paid and insecure work, cuts to public services, and unaffordable housing. War and conflict are on the rise, leading to millions risking their lives as they are forced to flee their homes. For women this is combined with the sexual discrimination which remains embedded in the fabric of society and means that, in a world of low pay, globally women still earn on average 10-30% less than men.

In the neocolonial world, where most wages are pitifully low, women are super-exploited. They work sometimes 12 hours or more a day on the land, in the markets, in textile and shoe factories. In many places, women and their children work as modern-day slaves.

Far from there being an automatic gradual dying out of sexual discrimination, in a number of countries governments are acting to exacerbate it. In Russia, for instance, where it is estimated a women dies of domestic abuse every forty minutes, domestic violence has been partially decriminalised.

Austerity has impacted directly on the amount of violence and harassment women face, and their ability to fight back. In Britain, for example, more than 30 refuges for women fleeing violence have closed due to lack of funds, with many of the rest facing closure or, at best, severe cuts. At the same time the complete absence of affordable housing leaves women with nowhere at all to go if they flee violent partners.

Or look at the nine out of ten workers in Britain who work in bars, restaurants and hotels who report having faced sexual abuse from employers, managers or the public but who are told that 'it is part of the job' which they should put up with because they are lucky to have work.

Today, no less than in the past, improvements in women's rights will not happen automatically but only as a result of mass struggle.

Struggle

That is why International Women's Day, over a century after it was first initiated in the US, is more important than ever. Attempts to transform it into little more than a sales opportunity for the big corporations - with campaigns to buy the women in your life 8 March gifts - lie increasingly forgotten as 8 March becomes an important event in the burgeoning global struggle against women's oppression.

This year the young women of the Spanish state will be leading the way when, on 8 March, millions of young women and men will be taking part in strike action called by Sindicato de Estudiantes (student union) in which Izquierda Revolucionaria (the Socialist Party's sister party in the Spanish state) plays a leading role.

The final death knell to the fairy story of seamless progress towards equality was the election of the blatant misogynist Donald Trump as US President. From day one, however, his presence in the White House has acted as a recruiting sergeant for struggle against racism and every form of oppression, not least the fight for women's rights.

Following the women's marches last year - the biggest demonstrations on one day in US history, and the biggest globally since 2003 - the 2018 marches were attended by up to 2.5 million in towns and cities across the US. Nor are the US and Spain alone. In many countries around the world new women's movements have developed, or are developing.

Some of these are in response to the oppression that women have long suffered - like the continuing movement against rape in India and the 'Ni una menos' (not one less) movement against gender-based violence that has mobilised hundreds of thousands onto the streets of Argentina and other countries. Others are to stop new attacks on the rights of women - like the partially successful movement that developed in Poland in 2016 against a government attempt to completely ban abortion.

Others, however, are going beyond trying to stop things getting worse and fighting for an improvement in their rights. This is also true in Poland - where protests took place at the start of this year for the introduction of abortion on demand up until twelve weeks.

In Southern Ireland, the state - intertwined with the Catholic Church - has since its inception taken an extremely reactionary attitude to the rights of women to control their own bodies, including a complete ban on abortion. Following the appalling death of Savita Halappanavar in 2012, after she was refused an abortion, there has been a groundswell for change.

The Socialist Party in Ireland has played a central role in mobilising and organising that groundswell, alongside the socialist feminist campaign initiated by Socialist Party members - Rosa. Now the capitalist politicians in Ireland have been partly forced to change their tune under the impact of the movement. A parliamentary committee has recommended unrestricted access to abortion up until 12 weeks of pregnancy, and a referendum on repealing the existing ban will take place on 25 May this year.

#MeToo

2017 was also the year of #MeToo. What began in Hollywood - with actors speaking out against the sexual assault and harassment they suffered at the hands of film mogul Harvey Weinstein and others - has spread around the world.

Virtually every capitalist institution from the media, to the major corporations, to parliaments, to charities has been damaged by an avalanche of accusations. This outpouring, largely via social media, is an indication both of the continued all-pervasiveness of sexual harassment and assault and an increased confidence to fight it.

We give no ground to those who try to say that this phenomenon has 'exaggerated' the extent of sexual harassment and abuse. On the contrary, it has revealed only a little of the day-to-day reality for countless women, above all the most oppressed including the lowest paid, those without job security, and women workers from ethnic minorities.

That does not, of course, mean that every single accusation made via #MeToo can be taken as proven; all individuals should have the right to a fair hearing before being judged guilty. Regardless of the guilt or innocence of particular individuals, however, #MeToo has clearly revealed the guilt of the capitalist system which allows millions to suffer sexist abuse.

It is no surprise that so many of the accusations being made are against men in positions of power over their victims. Capitalism is based on a tiny minority of society - above all the capitalist class, the billionaires who own the major corporations and banks - having enormous power to exploit the majority.

We live in a world where the richest eight people own as much as half the world's population. Inevitably in such a society, among those with power will be people who habitually try to use their status to sexually abuse or harass women and men with less power than them, not least their employees. But this does not, of course, mean that working class men are exempt from such behaviour. Sexism is woven into the fabric of capitalism and affects every strata of society.

Without doubt 2018 will see the development of further movements to defend and extend women's rights. This is the inevitable result of women's expectations and the propaganda of equality from a section of the capitalist class, butting up against the sexist reality of capitalism.

Class society

Sexual oppression is deeply ingrained, but it is not innate or unchangeable: for the majority of human history it did not exist. Male dominance (patriarchy), both in its origin and in its current form, is intrinsically linked to the structures and inequalities of class society, which came into existence around 10,000 years ago.

The rise of male dominance was linked to the development of the family as an institution for maintaining class and property divisions as well as discipline. While, today and in the past, individuals' families were often made up of the people with whom they were closest and felt safest with, the institution of the family nonetheless, in different forms, acted as an important agent of social control for all class societies.

The hierarchical nature of society was echoed in the structure of the traditional family with the man as head of the household and women and children obedient to him.

While today more than ever the capitalist institution of the family has its weakest hold on working class people, millions of women around the world remain 'the slaves of slaves' and the idea is still deeply ingrained that women are possessions of men who need to be loyal and obedient to their partners. The whole of society is permeated with propaganda endlessly re-emphasising the 'proper' role of women - as home-makers, mothers, sexual objects, and so on.

Gains under threat

For capitalism one important role of the family is to carry the central burden of bringing up the next generation and caring for the sick and elderly. In the second half of the twentieth century, at least in some European countries, this was partly alleviated by the gains won by the working class such as free or cheap healthcare, nurseries, elderly care and so on.

Today in every country those gains are under threat, leaving families, particularly women, carrying a horrendous load, often at the same time as working full-time or more in low-paid insecure work, desperately struggling to make ends meet. Socialist feminism fights for equality between the sexes. Our role, however, is not to accept the impossible burdens that capitalism places on families - only arguing about who carries the greater share - but instead to wage a determined struggle for properly-funded universal public services, and well paid jobs with a short working week, in order to lift the load of tasks laid on working class families and give people the chance to enjoy life; including spending time with their loved ones.

This struggle is connected to the struggle for reproductive rights, because only on this basis is it possible for women to win a real right to choose when and whether to have children. Socialists fight for women to have control over their own bodies but also for women to have affordable high quality homes, free childcare, a decent income and everything else that is necessary to be able to freely to choose to have children.

Socialist feminism

The struggle for women's liberation is at root part of the class struggle, in which the struggles by women against their own specific oppression dovetail with those of the working class in general for a fundamental restructuring of society to end all inequality and oppression.

We disagree with capitalist feminism because it does not take a class approach to the struggle for women's liberation. To put it simply, working-class women have more in common with working-class men than they do with Margaret Thatcher, Theresa May in Britain, Hillary Clinton in the US, or Sheikh Hasina Wazed in Bangladesh. This does not of course mean that only working class women are oppressed. Women from all sections of society suffer oppression as a result of their gender, including domestic violence and sexual harassment.

However, at root, to win real sexual equality for women, including for women from the elite of society, a complete overturn of the existing order is necessary in every sphere: economic, social, family and domestic. The necessary starting point for such an overturn is ending the system which Thatcher, May, Clinton et al defend - capitalism - and bringing the major companies into public ownership in order to allow the development of a democratic socialist plan of production.

The working class, the majority in many countries, is the force in society capable of carrying out such an overturn. This does not preclude, of course, individual women from the elite of society - even daughters of the capitalist class - deciding that the only way to end the sexism they suffer is to break with their class and to join the fight for socialism.

Workers' movement

Socialists in no way suggest that the struggle against sexism be postponed, as something only to be dealt with after the end of capitalism. On the contrary, it is vital that every aspect of women's oppression is fought now, including sexual harassment and abuse. The most effective means to do this is via a united struggle of the workers' movement.

Recently in London ferry workers took militant strike action against a bullying management, including the systematic sexual harassment of one female secretary. The workforce - overwhelmingly male - won a victory.

For the countless millions of people facing sexual harassment in their workplace worldwide, the single thing that would most empower them to fight back would be to be part of a collective organisation involving a majority of their workmates - a fighting trade union - prepared to back them up when they took a stand. On a broader scale the working class needs mass parties, politically armed with a socialist programme, which put fighting for gender equality central.

Of course, the workers' movement is not immune from sexist behaviour, and it is vital that socialists fight for all such instances to be dealt with as part of a campaign for a working-class struggle for women's equality. The working class has the potential power to bring this rotten, sexist capitalist system to an end, but this will only be possible on the basis of a united struggle of working class women and men. This cannot be achieved by ignoring or downplaying sexism but only by consciously combatting it.

One hundred and one years ago in Russia, on International Women's Day, a strike and demonstration of working women set off the mighty revolutionary events that led, in October, under the leadership of the Bolshevik Party, to the working class taking power into its hands for the first time in history. The later Stalinist degeneration of the Soviet Union included, along with the crushing of workers' democracy, an unwinding of many of the gains won by women after the revolution.

Nonetheless, what was begun in 1917, in an isolated, poor country, gives a glimpse of what socialism could mean for women today, when all the enormous wealth, science and technique created by capitalism could be harnessed for the good of humanity.

Legal equality for women - including the right to vote, and to freely marry and divorce, was introduced long before they were in the capitalist world along with abolition of all laws discriminating against homosexuality. The right to abortion was introduced in Russia after the 1917 revolution. Free nurseries, laundries and restaurants began to be created.

A century later and the growing movement for women's rights will once again be intertwined with the struggle for a socialist world.

We fight for:

- No to all discrimination on the grounds of race, gender, disability, sexuality, age, and all other forms of prejudice
 - For a mass campaign, spearheaded by the workers' movement, against sexual harassment, violence and all forms of sexual discrimination
 - For fighting trade unions, democratically controlled by their members
 - For mass parties of the working class with socialist programmes, including the fight for gender equality
 - A mass struggle for equal pay, as part of the fight for a living wage for all linked to a shorter working week with no loss of pay
 - No to all cuts. Decent jobs, pay, and housing for all. For massive expansion of public services
 - For maternity and child benefits that reflect the real cost of bringing up a child
 - The right to paid parental leave
 - The provision of high-quality flexible public childcare facilities available to every child
 - For a woman's right to choose. Freely available high-quality contraception and fertility treatment for all who want it. For the right to abortion on demand
 - Public ownership of the pharmaceutical industry
 - Bring the major corporations and banks into public ownership under democratic workers control and management, with compensation paid only on the basis of proven need
 - A democratic socialist plan of production based on the interests of the overwhelming majority of people, implemented in a way that safeguards the environment and lays the basis for establishing genuine equality for all in a world without class division and war
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Women's oppression: the struggle goes on

Women's oppression is far from beaten. The headlines can often seem grim. But, following in the footsteps of generations of women and workers before, the struggle for women's liberation is alive and well. See our International Women's Day statement, ['Capitalism oppresses women - fight for socialism'](#).

Nine in ten firms in Britain pay women less than men

Women's income inequality is worst in construction, followed by finance, according to figures reported to the government's pay gap website.

Over 85% of companies pay women less than men, Financial Times analysis has found.

Budget airline EasyJet has a pay gap of 46%. The worst offender is market research firm Research Now, which reports paying men 94% more than women.

Even in industries which employ more women than men, such as the public sector, women earn less. The majority of women work for companies with a pay gap of more than 10%.

As well as campaigning against sexist attitudes in society, the Socialist Party fights for free childcare and education, genuinely affordable housing, and a real living wage for all workers.

Nine in ten murdered women killed by domestic violence

There were 95 women murdered in England, Wales and Northern Ireland in 2016 according to Women's Aid. Of these, 86 died at the hands of a current or former partner or male family member, says its 2017 Femicide Census.

Figures collected by Counting Dead Women suggest a woman was killed by a man every 2.6 days between January and September in the UK. In the year to March 2017, 1.2 million women and 713,000 men were victims of domestic violence says the ONS.

Socialist Party members are playing leading roles in ongoing campaigns to rescue life-saving women's and children's services from Tory and Blairite austerity. We have a proud record of combating domestic violence, including launching the Campaign Against Domestic Violence in 1991.

One in ten working women currently harassed in Australia

One in ten women under 40 in Australia are experiencing ongoing sexual harassment in their present job.

A University of Sydney study found highest rates among workers with disabilities, ethnic or cultural minorities, and students.

Less than a third of the women believe they get equal treatment at work. A third also feel their boss treats them without respect.

Comments in the survey include one woman who, following a meeting with a doctor, found herself labelled a "tasty little bitch." And a legal worker describes a magistrate instructing her to "prove to me you're more than blonde hair and blue eyes."

The study comes after sexual harassment and exploitation scandals unfolded at the United Nations, Oxfam and Save the Children. 'Non-governmental organisations' are just as unaccountable as private companies and the capitalist state.

Solid trade union organisation can push back management bullying and help tackle sexual harassment. Socialist Party members have shown that collective action can win improvements.

Supporters of Militant, forerunner of the Socialist Party, led a landmark strike against sexual harassment at the 'Lady at Lord John' store in Liverpool in 1983. And just last year, Woolwich Ferry workers in south London struck and got a sexist manager suspended.

The Socialist inbox: International Women's Day

Do you have something to say?

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

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

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

Carers care

Friday 2 March - finally home and looking forward to nine days off. It's been a hard week, mainly because of the worry about getting to and from work in this weather, which I found incredibly stressful.

But, on the plus side, being snowed in at work gave me the chance to get to know my work colleagues a lot better, and we've had some good shifts together.

And thinking of my colleagues, a fellow support worker is back in tomorrow after being taken to hospital for hypothermia after trying to get into work by bus, and being told she was half an hour from death.

Another colleague came in today despite being unwell, and yet another who came in to cover someone, and who will now be working for days.

Also, thinking of my co-workers who struggled in for the night shift. One fell on the ice tearing her Achilles tendon and faces a month off work.

The day shift worker who walked for an hour to make it on time for the beginning of her shift at 7am. The workers who changed their plans to ensure our service users were never abandoned.

Today I read about a care worker who froze to death trying to get to her clients. Support workers understand this dedication to our service users, we go above and beyond.

To our support team I just want to say thank you for the last few days. It's been bloody hard, but I've enjoyed working with you, and have enjoyed getting to know you all better as a relatively new day shift worker.

Mothers, daughters, grandmothers, partners - young and old - all made that extra effort to get to work this week any way we could because we care.

And our worth for this dedication and commitment? Minimum wage, be it night or day, sun or snow. Value these women because they are worth more than you can ever imagine.

A care worker, South Tyne and Wear Socialist Party

Vote 'given'?

It's difficult as a woman to be faced by your own oppression. I find myself all straight-backed and indignant even thinking about it.

Even more so when we are told that it was 100 years since some women were "given" the vote. Given! Like it was a nice box of chocolates for just being us!

We struggled, we fought, we campaigned, we debated, we suffered... We weren't given it, we demanded and took it. We must be cautious of the "given" and remember that in a 'democratic' system it is a right.

Denise Tooley-Okonkwo, Mansfield

Walk tall

We look with horror on the ancient Chinese practice of foot binding. Young girls suffered lifelong deformities as their feet were forcibly twisted into the lotus shape. They subsequently walked with a tottering unsteady gait, interpreted as a sign of status and beauty.

Today we have not, however, progressed very far. In 2016 a receptionist at a corporate finance company was sent home without pay for not wearing high-heeled shoes. Her protests and nationwide support led to a parliamentary inquiry and recent debate.

The inquiry learnt that some companies demanded women dye their hair blonde, wear revealing outfits, and constantly apply makeup.

We can all reject this sexist, demeaning ideology and make the personal the political. So! Women of the world, unite! You have nothing to lose but your blisters and in-growing toenails!

So, come on sisters! Conquer the world in Crocs, tango in trainers, man (haha) the barricades in wellies, and go ape in sensible shoes!

Moira McLeod

Sisters! We are not as good as we look - we are as good as we are! Walk tall in flatties!

Nadia Bromley, Derby

Women's prison

The local paper in Whitstable reported on a "crooked solicitor and his wife" who stole several thousand pounds from clients. The woman was spared jail because of the effect on the couple's children.

While I welcome Judge Adele Williams' sentencing decision, I would however like to highlight how unfortunately many women are not so lucky - and may I suggest it is often working class women and those with mental health issues or addiction problems who are sent to prison.

Most of these women - 84% according to 2016 Ministry of Justice figures - have committed non-violent crimes. Some convicted of stealing food - in one case just a loaf of bread and a packet of ham - to feed their families, or non-payment of council tax.

This year, in marking International Women's Day, the effects of sending women, especially mothers, to prison should be highlighted. In 2007 the Prison Reform Trust estimated 18,000 children are separated from their mothers each year by sending women to prison.

Despite many recommendations on reducing numbers and the need for community-based solutions, it would seem the children are also being punished - and will continue to suffer even when the mothers return, displaying insecurity, anger and anxiety issues.

We should make the children the priority when sentencing mothers for non-violent crimes. What good will come out of prison?

Better to offer a local, community-based solution to give support and try to stop reoffending. Unfortunately, austerity overshadows everything and this needs to end promptly or we will be sowing seeds for more problems in the future.

Delia Hazrati, Whitstable

Alienation, misogyny

Iain Dalton's article in the last Socialist, '[What's behind the surge in eating disorders?](#)', made important points about the material hurdles capitalism puts in the way of healthy eating. But it's also worth expanding on his point about "the general context of misogyny and alienation under capitalism."

Self-harm among young women aged 13 to 16 rose 68% between 2011 and 2014, according to the British Medical Journal's latest study. Young women are now about three times as likely to self-harm as young men.

Suicide is also on the rise among women. In Britain men are three times more likely to die by suicide. But the Samaritans have found that suicide among women in Wales increased 62% from 2014 to 2015.

Women are shouldering 85% of benefit cuts, according to a 2016 report by the Fair Deal for Women charity coalition. Austerity is scrapping public sector jobs - mainly women's. It is closing women's refuges.

Prominent figures and institutions continue to attack women's rights and social standing worldwide.

So are these figures any wonder?

Capitalist society robs ordinary people of full control of their lives in every sphere, from work to home and beyond. Marxists call it 'alienation'. It is doubly true for women due to capitalism's enduring sexism, part of its foundations.

In the absence of a visible route for constructive, collective struggle, it is inevitable that some people will seek to assert control over their lives through individual action - often on themselves.

Even the positive or harmless aspects of this - such as the growing popularity of healthy and 'ethical' eating - can turn into their opposites, including eating disorders. Anyone can fall victim, but working class women are perhaps the worst affected.

Jeremy Corbyn and the trade union leaders should take note. Without collective struggle to end crisis-ridden capitalism, suicide, eating disorders - even terrorism - are its fruits.

Art Clements, Manor Park, east London

UCU strike: bosses on the run

Sam Morecroft, Sheffield UCU anti-casualisation officer (personal capacity)

As University and College Union (UCU) members hit the midpoint of [our 14-day programme of escalating strikes](#), it's pretty clear from the picket lines that years of fees, cuts and marketisation have created an army of low-paid and casualised lecturers, tutors, researchers and support workers, and a supporting cast of furious students.

We've had years of real-terms pay cuts and an explosion of insecure contracts. To lose our pensions as well is the final straw. The pickets are determined, they're organised and they're ready to see this through.

We had to strike for two days before Universities UK would even agree to talks, but local managements have issued threats to dock the pay of staff, not just on strike days but when they are working to contract as well!

Already three universities - Sheffield, St Andrews and Keele - have had to issue public retractions and apologies on pay deductions in response to campaigning and we expect more to follow. At Sheffield, not only were heads of department either on strike or unwilling to carry out punitive pay deductions, but alumni of the university began a #DonationStrike on Twitter in solidarity, donating to our local branch hardship fund instead of to the university!

At local level management are desperately trying to placate our members, with Imperial College London now saying they're prepared to maintain our current pension scheme. It's been difficult to keep up with the rapidly growing number of vice chancellors publicly claiming they understand why we're striking and want to resolve the dispute.

But Universities UK, which met with UCU for the first time on 5 March, has given no concrete commitments on any aspects of UCU's proposals to save our pensions.

The employers don't seem to fully understand the power they've unleashed. As we enter the third week of action, picket lines have only gotten stronger and we've received unbelievable support from students and other unions. When UCU has offered a lead, university workers have shown a determination to fight.

We must intensify the strikes, and escalate them if necessary - only strike action won us these current talks, and only strike action will force the employers to protect our pensions.

National lecturers' pension strike continues

Sheffield

At the University of Sheffield, 1,700 lecturers in the University and College Union (UCU) went on strike to resist proposed changes to the USS pension scheme.

The strike was especially strong in the Department of Politics, cancelling all but one seminar on the first day of the strike.

To build student support for striking lecturers, Sheffield Socialist Students in conjunction with other campus left groups initiated a picket tour for the first day of the strike. Striking lecturers were heartened by chants of "UCU, here we are, we support you all the way!" from 50 enthusiastic students.

This was followed by a 300-strong rally on the second day of the strike outside Firth Court, which houses vice-chancellor Sir Keith Burnett's office.

The rally was addressed by Sam Morecroft, a Socialist Party member who is Sheffield UCU's anti-casualisation officer and is seen as a local leader of the strike.

Sir Keith is one of the highest paid VCs in the country, with an eye watering salary of £422,000 a year. This is almost eleven times more than the average staff member at the University of Sheffield!

Sir Keith is due to retire this year and thus will be spared from the pension cuts. Understandably, vice-chancellor pay and benefits drew huge anger from the crowd, with chants of "Keith Burnett, get out, we know what you're all about - cuts, job losses, money for the bosses!"

Student support for the strike has been met with resistance from the university, with posters produced by the Students' Union calling for solidarity removed from university buildings by contractors.

Cracks are appearing in university management however. Sir Keith has written to the head of Universities UK calling for a resumption of talks.

Strikes will continue at the university to ensure any future negotiations are conducted in a manner which will defend staff pensions.

Chris McAndrew

Liverpool

The Liverpool university UCU office had the air of a crowded railway station during rush hour on 23 February, the second day of the strike. Picket volunteers arrived in waves through one door, were registered, provided with a Picket Pack, shuffled through into the adjoining office where they were directed to various sites to do picket duty, (again this was recorded), leaving by a separate door, a one-way traffic system designed to minimise congestion!

The enthusiasm of these members to win the strike was palpable. Eventually branch secretary Jo McNeill was able to delegate one of her members to cover the work she had been doing, and show me to the tiny photocopier room, to discuss how the strike was going.

The university employers are claiming an 18% deficit in the pension fund, but the figures are disputed by the union, based on the advice of actuaries (accountants specialising in pension matters).

The employers want to unilaterally change the terms of the pension scheme from a defined benefits scheme, where there is a formula to calculate retirement pensions based on length of service and salary, to a defined contributions scheme, where retirement income is based purely on the state of the fund at the point of

retirement, introducing uncertainty and insecurity into retirement.

Currently the university employers are complaining loudly at the amounts they have to put into the fund to allow it to meet its commitments, whilst keeping silent about the period between 1999 and 2011, when they put no cash into the fund at all!

University teachers suspect a hidden, more political agenda behind the employers' actions, a wish to destroy the pension scheme in its present form in order to make the universities more attractive to potential privatisers in the future.

The universities themselves, alone among public sector institutions, are cash rich, and to add insult to injury, Bill Galvin, chief executive of the pension scheme, has had his salary raised from £484,000 to £566,000!

Students have overwhelmingly supported their teachers, on an individual basis, and via the National Union of Students. Ironically students have a lever to pull in support of the UCU members: with the introduction of tuition fees, many are now demanding refunds from the universities for the strike days, and are considering legal action in support of these claims.

Meanwhile, the strike action is leading to increased recruitment to the UCU.

UCU members have been balloted for a total of 14 days of strike action and the minds of activists are understandably turning to what happens if the employers manage to sit this period out without a settlement. Several left-led UCU branches support escalation by a further five days, plus a marking boycott, although as a result of the anti-union laws this boycott may require a further ballot.

The determination and enthusiasm of UCU members in Liverpool points to a successful conclusion of this important dispute.

Roger Bannister

Hundreds of striking lecturers at University of Liverpool (UoL) marched and rallied on 28 February. They were joined by lots of supporters from students and the left, including Socialist Students and Socialist Party members.

The impressively big and organised dispute at UoL has tapped into a huge vein of student support. Uni boss Janet Beer ("The only Beer I don't like" is the slogan on a very popular badge on campus) also heads up Universities UK, the university bosses' organisation which launched this attack on lecturers' pensions.

Beer sent a widely mocked email to all students attacking the UCU strike. A majority of UoL students support the strike and so Beer has been inundated with angry emails from students followed by a group of students occupying part of her large office space for a day.

Socialist Students has done a lot of activity to develop student support for the strike, widely appreciated by staff and students, with several students joining the group as a result.

It is explaining that when UoL made a £44 million profit last year, and Beer's salary plus expenses looks more like a telephone number than an income, clearly cash is not the problem.

This is about a further huge lurch towards commercialisation and privatisation, with lecturers' pensions seen as an obstacle to that. But the onslaught has stirred up huge resistance and can be defeated, including in Beer's own backyard.

Hugh Caffrey

Leicester

Drums were beaten, speeches were delivered, chants were boomed, and banners and placards were held high.

It was both fantastic and extremely moving to see the campus so alive on the day of the strike. From the picket lines of striking lecturers, researchers and professional services workers beginning bright and early at 7.30am, to the rally ending at around 2pm.

Not only was it moving to see university staff out on strike, passionately fighting against vicious attacks from their bosses, but it was amazing to see so many students standing in solidarity.

The message delivered to vice-chancellor Paul Boyle and his pal David Willetts was clear: Not in this university; not in any university! The president of the Students Union highlighted the false (although unfortunately common) perception of Leicester university as apolitical.

If ever there was a day to challenge such a perception, she argued, it was this one! Non-associated students and society-involved students alike were out in full force showing their unequivocal support for the struggle of our lecturers in fighting to keep their pensions unharmed.

Leicester Socialist Students was out from the start of the protest - flying our banner, joining in on the series of fantastic megaphone-delivered speeches, roaring out chants in solidarity with the striking lecturers and unleashing a tirade of chants scolding the sorry excuses of our vice-chancellor, Paul Boyle, and appointee-chancellor David Willetts.

It was clear from the support received by all the speakers and rallying chanters, ourselves included, that this was not a demonstration representing a narrow spectrum of student and lecturer opinion, but a demonstration voicing the outrage and discontent of a unified force of students and university workers alike, who refuse to stand idly by while our education and quality of life are under attack by an elite section of society.

This demonstration is only the beginning of what we hope will be an extremely fruitful and powerful political struggle over the next few weeks and, if it need be, months.

It has proven the raw power and potential of student-worker cooperation and organisation in fighting threats, whenever and wherever they arise.

Lecturers, researchers and professional service workers: carry on striking and standing up against this despicable attack on your future livelihoods, and know that you can rely on the force of us students who will stand beside you and fight for your rights and wellbeing.

Students: do not cross the picket lines. And if you have a lecturer who is not supporting the strike, ask why.

Such loyalty to university staff will not go unrewarded, for if and when they come for us students to further undermine our rights and futures, I am sure the staff will stand at our side and actively fight for us as we have for them.

Taran Spivey

York

The UCU pension strike has been largely downplayed by the mass media so far in terms of its high turnout on pickets and demos from both academic staff and students alike. The reality is, both staff and students are able to understand the severe consequences that gambling with pensions can have.

For students in higher education, the bigger picture is that if we do not support our lecturers and staff on the picket lines it will be our pensions in the future that we let slip away without a fight. Students must see beyond the 'poor value' of fewer contact hours or longer between marking turnarounds, and instead of directing frustration at those who want to share their knowledge with us and help us obtain our degrees we must be angry at those higher up.

At the University of York, the numbers on the physical pickets have grown despite the heavy snow and freezing conditions. As someone who has joined my lecturers on the pickets, it was warming to give them my solidarity in exchange for all of the support that they have given me during my undergraduate, and now

postgraduate, degree. Students: contact your vice chancellors, write open letters and emails - do not stay out of this fight.

Katie Smith

FE college lecturers also took strike action this week

Despite the -6 temperatures and threats of victimisation from management, over a dozen UCU members at Sandwell College in West Bromwich were on the picket line, showing the determination to win a better deal on pay.

Nick Brook-Hart

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 1 March 2018 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

Whole lotta shakin' goin' on in Merseyside DOO dispute

Hugh Caffrey

Saturday 3 March saw another solid strike across the Arriva Northern and Merseyrail railway franchises by guards defending their jobs.

Cost-cutting management, in cahoots with the Tory government and local Labour councils, want to axe the role of safety-critical guards and move to driver-only operation (DOO), which is both unwanted and unsafe.

Arriva refuses to even meet with the RMT union, while paying scabs bonuses for crossing picket lines. Merseyrail, under the direction of local Labour councillors, continues to spin and posture while city region mayor Steve Rotheram fools no one with his continued pretence that it's nothing to do with him.

Support

The mood of pickets was high because of overwhelming public support for them and for renationalising the railways.

Pickets at Birkenhead Central were pleased that Jeremy Corbyn has retweeted campaign material by the RMT about the need to keep the guards - the first time he has supported the guards' dispute. But they were even more pleased that 'Elvis' joined the picket line (see photo)!

Socialist Party members distributed a leaflet encouraging RMT members to consider standing for the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition in May's council elections against the Labour politicians driving DOO, with several strikers saying they were interested in doing so.

PCS: Re-elect the left and fight for decent pay

Marion Lloyd, PCS NEC and chair Left Unity

The past month or so, branches of the civil servants' union PCS have been holding annual general meetings.

Feedback indicates solid support for Left Unity motions to the annual delegate conference in May on the major issues facing PCS members. Nominations for the 2018-19 national executive committee indicate continued support for the current Left Unity (Democracy Alliance) PCS leadership.

There are seven Socialist Party members on the Democracy Alliance slate (a joint PCS Democrat/Left Unity slate). This includes Janice Godrich for president and Fran Heathcote for vice-president. Ballot papers for the union's national executive election will be sent out in mid-April.

The Easter holiday break will eat away at the time available to prepare for the ballot. Preparations should start now.

The Left Unity website (leftunity.org.uk) will carry full information on the ballot and materials issued by the Democracy Alliance.

Left Unity (Democracy Alliance) is standing for re-election on its record - making PCS a fighting, democratic union.

But it's also a question of electing a leadership which will stand up to the many challenges we face. Immediate among these is the campaign for the union's pay demands of 5% or £1,200 a year increase; with a return to central bargaining.

A meeting of key reps at PCS HQ on Monday 26 February endorsed the pay demands and the campaign outlined by Mark Serwotka (general secretary) and Chris Baugh (assistant general secretary).

Hull workers united against bosses

In a determined and clear show of solidarity, more than 150 workers in Hull rallied in support of University and College Union members from Hull University on strike to defend pensions, railway workers from the RMT striking to keep a guard on every train and the FCC strikers battling to win sick-pay rights.

Called by Hull Trades Council, the rally and demonstration through the pedestrian areas of the city centre was supported by striking workers, fellow trade unionists and members of the public.

A bucket collection of passers-by added to the donations already raised by local trade unions. Hull National Education Union (NEU) has already donated £1,000 and East Riding NEU has donated £250. Other unions meeting this week have promised money.

The feeling of unity among the strikers from the different disputes even went so far as to have fierce local rugby league rivals Hull FC and Hull Kingston Rovers supporters shaking hands in solidarity!

The trades council is determined to continue to coordinate support and ensure that all workers are victorious.

Mick Whale, Hull Trades Council president

FCC Environment strike solid

Despite sub-zero temperatures from the "Beast from the East" on the first morning of the strike and intimidating tactics from the local management, FCC recycling workers are standing firm.

This is an inspirational strike by Unison members who are battling to win decent sick pay for all of the workers at the Wilmington plant in Hull.

A feature of the dispute is the solidarity from council bin workers from Hull and the East Riding councils. Not one council bin wagon has crossed the picket line.

The picket line has been well supported by trade unionists. Labour council candidates have also visited the picket line, as has Councillor Alan Clarke, the portfolio holder for waste collection in Hull, and Emma Hardy, MP for Hull West and Hessle.

This support has been welcomed, but the strikers need Councillor Clarke to put pressure on FCC to meet the just demands of the strikers. Workers will increasingly wonder why Hull Labour council is contracting its recycling out to such a company.

FCC is a multinational company with an HQ in Madrid. It has made huge profits but clearly doesn't care a jot for its workforce.

The striking workers know they are in for a long struggle but are determined to carry on until they win.

- Please send messages of support to Adrian Kennett (secretary of Hull Unison) and Mick Whale (secretary of Hull Trades Council). Cheques should be made payable to Hull Unison.
- Both messages and cheques should be sent to Unison, Town Hall Chambers 39, Alfred Gelder Street, Hull HU1 2AG
- Email hullnut@hullnut.karoo.co.uk and a.kennett@unisonhull.org.uk

Syria: No ceasefire for 'hell on earth' eastern Goutha

Per-Åke Westerlund, Rättvisepartiet Socialisterna (CWI Sweden)

Eastern Goutha, outside Damascus, is "hell on earth", according to United Nations (UN) chief Antonio Guterres.

Nearly 400,000 civilians have been under siege in this rebel enclave since 2013. The day after the UN decision to organise a ceasefire, bombing continued.

Over 700 people have been killed and many thousands wounded in recent weeks. A doctor told the BBC his hospital has "no electricity, no medication, no oxygen, no medication for anaesthesia, no painkillers, no antibiotics".

A stripped-down aid relief convoy, promised since mid-February, has only now entered the besieged area.

The UN security council's decision on 30 days' immediate ceasefire has had little effect. The Assad regime in Syria and its ally Russia state that the conditions for the ceasefire are not clear and that they are entitled to continue "attacking terrorists".

In criticising 'Russian aggression' the western powers are indulging in rank hypocrisy. US forces led several massive military assaults against cities in Iraq over the last decade, including Fallujah and more recently demolishing Mosul in 2017. Today, the major powers back the Saudi regime's air attacks on Yemen, where many civilians have died and chronic hunger and epidemics stalk the land.

The UN resolution speaks of immediate ceasefire except in the case of violations by Isis, al-Qa'ida and al-Nusra.

The dominant armed groups in eastern Goutha are two other militias, Jaysh al-Islam and Faylaq al-Rahman. These jihadist groups have regularly launched missiles on inhabited areas of Damascus, causing casualties among the civilian population, although on a far smaller scale than the regime's strikes.

Instead of bringing about peace after Isis was forced to retreat by Assad and his Russian and Iranian allied forces and by US and its proxy militias, the war in Syria has entered a new, if possible even bloodier phase. Those who were supposed to secure peace have stepped up the war.

The conflict revolves around how global and regional powers will secure their positions in a future Syria. Above all, it is a clash over power, influence and prestige between the United States and Russia, with Turkey and Iran as active participants. Israel has also taken action, with fighter aircraft used against Iranian forces in Syria in recent weeks.

At first, Washington supported the same Islamist groups supported by Turkey and Saudi Arabia. But with the emergence of Isis, which established a 'Caliphate' in 2014, the United States was forced to find new allies.

Its most important allies on the field in recent years have been the Syrian Democratic Forces, with the Kurdish PYD's YPG/YPJ troops in the leadership. The subsequent focus on fighting Isis and Russia's military intervention in Syria since the autumn of 2015, rescued Bashar al-Assad's regime.

Influence

Isis is the convenient opposition that the US uses to maintain troop forces in north eastern Syria. In reality, US actions are about limiting both Russian and Iranian influence. The "stabilisation" that both the US and Russia say they are striving for will be far from stable.

Syria was already a dictatorship shaken by a series of crises before the 'Arab Spring' uprising of 2011 and subsequent civil war.

Today, the country has collapsed, with over 500,000 killed and more than ten million forcibly displaced. This is a result of the wars of imperialism, capitalist exploitation and Assad's dictatorship.

Against this, in order to prevent further war and the revival of Isis or similar groups, a revolutionary socialist movement is needed to liberate the working class and oppressed people.

Turkey's military attack against the Afrin pocket under the control of the Kurdish YPG militia started over a month ago, ostensibly to 'fight terrorism'. Hundreds of civilians have been killed and wounded according to Kurdish sources.

The Turkish regime's goal is to eliminate any Kurdish rule in Afrin and Rojava in northern Syria, thereby crushing Kurdish aspirations for national self-determination. At the same time Erdogan's regime has ramped-up Turkish nationalism at home to hinder the development of a united workers' movement against its authoritarian rule.

The Turkish regime seems open to either an escalated war or some form of agreement with the Assad regime in Syria having previously unequivocally called for Assad's overthrow.

Despite Erdogan's very tough stance, accusing the US of being involved in the attempted coup against him in July 2016, and condemning Washington for its cooperation with the PYD in Syria, the White House has avoided direct conflict with Turkey. Trump's security advisor, Herbert McMaster, visited Ankara to reassure Erdogan.

Russia, which controls the airspace over Afrin, gave Turkey the green light to attack by air - strengthening the theory that Erdogan is looking for some form of agreement with the Assad regime.

Nouri Mahmoud, spokesperson for the PYD's armed forces, urged the Syrian government to send troops to secure the border with Turkey. But there is no reason for the Kurds in Afrin to trust troops sent by Assad. The regime in Damascus is acting in response to Turkey, but also to regain control of northern Syria from Kurdish rule.

The YPJ/YPG is a force to be reckoned with. But the Kurdish forces also mistakenly relied on support from the US and Russian air bombings, holding back the possibility of building a larger support for their struggle among the people whose livelihoods have been shattered by these airstrikes.

The Kurds' struggle for independence and the class needs of workers and poor in the Middle East will never find any allies in imperialism nor regional pro-capitalist governments. US imperialism has a history of betraying Kurdish people in the region.

Behind the region's deep crises lie the crisis of capitalism and the historic weakness of the workers' movement, whose struggle for democratic socialism is the only way forward.

- [Read article in full on socialistworld.net](http://socialistworld.net)
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Japan - toxic legacy of the Fukushima disaster

James Clement, Coventry West Socialist Party

The magnitude 9 Tohoku earthquake of March 2011 was powerful enough to move the largest island of Japan 2.4 metres east. The tsunami which followed sparked the world's worst nuclear disaster since Chernobyl. 15,000 lives were lost.

Today, there are still almost 55,000 displaced evacuees in Fukushima prefecture, forced to abandon everything. The radiation exposure there still continues to claim lives, with 50 people having died since March 2016.

On top of this, across the three prefectures of Fukushima, Iwate, and Miyagi - all affected by the disaster - 155 survivors committed suicide between 2011 and 2015.

Some may see this as a freak natural occurrence; Japan sits on the Pacific 'ring of fire' meaning it will always be highly prone to earthquakes. However, the Fukushima disaster highlighted how the interests of big business will always take precedence over human life.

As far back as 2002, the Tokyo Electric Power Company (Tepco), which runs the Fukushima plant, refused a request by the now-defunct Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency (Nisa) to carry out a simulation at the plant after a report highlighted the likelihood of a major tsunami hitting the region within 30 years to be 20%.

And in 2008, although a Tepco simulation showed that a 15.7 metre-high tsunami could hit the Fukushima plant, nothing was done to improve safety measures.

In September last year, a court ruling forced Tepco to pay measly additional compensation of 376 million yen (£2.5 million) to 42 evacuees - on top of the 500 million yen (£3.3 million) that a court had already ordered both the state and Tepco to pay out to the victims in compensation, due to the failure of both to enforce or implement safety measures.

The failure of the state to look after working class people is also shown in the disgraceful decision to increase the rent for 70% of survivors of the earthquake living in government-run housing, which will affect 16,000 households across Fukushima, Iwate and Miyagi prefectures.

After the disaster, also amid the huge movement against nuclear power that developed, nuclear power plants across Japan were forced to close down operations. But the major energy corporations running them will not tolerate a loss of profits in a highly competitive market for long.

Despite massive opposition to nuclear power, plants in Fukui prefecture - which houses more reactors than any of Japan's 47 prefectures - have seen multiple reactors owned by the Kansai Electric Power Company (Kepeco) resume operation.

The anti-nuclear movement has already drawn huge numbers from across many sections of society; from young people, to trade unions, and citizens' groups. For the class struggle in Japan, the need to link the anti-nuclear power movement to the need to break with capitalism will be vital.

Clearly, under capitalism the threat to peoples' lives from irresponsible, profit-hungry companies will never disappear. Instead, we need a socialist plan for the economy, putting people's needs before profit.

Salford nurseries consultation delayed as mayor pledges to "fight for the five"

Salford Socialist Party

After a huge public [meeting of 250 angry parents and staff](#) demanded that Salford council "fight for the five" remaining council-run nurseries, mayor Paul Dennett has agreed to do just that.

The nurseries are facing closure because of Tory cuts to the 'dedicated school grants'. In a welcome step, the Labour council has announced that it will delay the consultation and spend that time building a campaign for the extra funding.

The council announced it would back the campaign, already launched with a committee of staff and parents elected from each nursery, shortly before the budget-setting meeting on 28 February. Mayor Dennett said that they would be inviting Jeremy Corbyn, John McDonnell and other Labour front-benchers to a huge meeting and march in the city and sending a delegation to parliament to demand the extra money needed to keep the nurseries open.

No-cuts approach

Socialist Party members have long campaigned in Salford for the council to take this approach - not just on the single issue of nursery closures but on all cuts. This shows that the strategy we have put forward is possible.

Councils can refuse to make cuts. They can delay the decisions by borrowing money or using reserves and use that time to build a mass campaign to demand the money back from central government.

The response among parents, staff and the wider public to the campaign has been incredible. If prepared to fight all cuts, the councillors would get the overwhelming support of the working class in the city. If this road is taken, this weak Tory government could be brought down.

The people in Salford are willing to fight the nursery closures with or without the council, but it does strengthen the campaign to have the mayor and councillors - who ultimately make the decision - on our side. But it is not without its contradictions.

At the moment the council and mayor have only put the start of the consultation back by a month. This is unlikely to provide the time to force the government into a retreat and we - along with the local Unison trade union branch, staff and parents - are calling on the council to remove this restriction and to use all available resources to hold off the consultation while the campaign develops.

Furthermore, after making this pledge, Dennett and other supportive councillors went straight into a budget-setting meeting and voted unanimously for a further £11 million of cuts. This is while they have £13 million in reserves.

Reserves can only be spent once, but as is being shown with the campaign to save the nurseries, if that money is spent to 'buy time' while fighting for the money stolen from the council to be given back to the city, services and jobs can be saved in the long run. We will support every step in this direction the council takes, while continuing to argue that it can go further - and that councillors can refuse to make cuts.

Donate to the Socialist Party building fund

Nancy Taaffe, Waltham Forest Socialist Party

[Six hundred people turned out](#) to rage against the land grab by sell-out Blairite councillors and greedy corporations in Waltham Forest, east London, on 24 February. We marked out the space in Walthamstow square to be stolen in this scheme and marched round our square to the sounds of a brass band chanting: "Homes for families, not for profit!"

As the date of the square occupation drew near, newspapers and television stations contacted us. We went to Millbank Tower in central London to be interviewed on Russia Today. We found out that tenants of Millbank Tower were up for eviction! A luxury hotel and flats beckon, yet again, on the banks of the Thames.

All areas of society are facing capitalism looking to land and property for short-term speculation. At our expense.

It is in this context that [the Socialist Party faces our own eviction](#) from offices that we have stayed in for 18 years.

The Socialist Party has launched a building fund to appeal to the labour movement to assist in finding new headquarters in London. The pushing out of our party from the capital city is an attempt to push national working class resistance out of London. We can't let this happen.

We appeal to you [to donate to this fund](#). We appeal to you to ask ten members of your family and friends, or fellow trade union members, to donate to this fund.

Resist the evictions! Keep Marxism in the belly of the beast. Donate today!

Hands Off HRI campaign group meets Corbyn and Ashworth

Matt Hirst, Huddersfield Socialist Party and Hands Off HRI campaign

40 hardy souls from the Hands Off HRI campaign braved the bitterly cold and snowy weather at 6am to climb aboard a coach from Huddersfield to London to meet with Jeremy Corbyn and shadow health secretary Jonathan Ashworth on 28 February. We had a local ITV journalist with us to report on the day, and the BBC also showed footage of the campaigners in local news.

On the way in to the Houses of Parliament, the police advised us that our campaign clothing was to be covered up as there were to be "no political messages" in Westminster. I wondered what our representative MPs do on a day to day basis, are they not allowed to be political when in session?

Members of the campaign steering group then met Corbyn and Ashworth to request the following five things from a Labour government:

- Bring an immediate halt to the closure of HRI and retain A&E services
- End the scandal of 'private finance initiatives' which are crippling our NHS trust and bring all services back in house
- An immediate injection of funding for the NHS
- Full support for the 'NHS Reinstatement Bill' which will in effect halt the backdoor privatisation of our NHS
- End the pay cap for all our NHS staff

Corbyn has now vowed to throw his political weight behind our efforts to block the downgrading of Huddersfield's hospital. Following the meeting he and Jonathan Ashworth said they "unequivocally" backed the campaign to save the A&E and a host of other hospital services. Corbyn also agreed to back the NHS Reinstatement Bill.

Following this, we then held a small march from outside Westminster to the Department of Health. As many readers of the Socialist will be aware, the decision to close our hospital has been referred to Jeremy Hunt and the Independent Reconfiguration Panel (IRP).

We had a small (but noisy!) rally outside and the Hands Off HRI secretary, Mike Forster, was interviewed by several news outlets. We then delegated a member of the campaign, Helen Robinson, to deliver the 15,000 names on petitions we have been collecting over the last few months to demand that the IRP conduct a full review of the plans to close our 400-bed hospital.

The IRP will be making a decision on whether to rubber stamp the plans to do this, or to conduct a full review. The IRP certainly now knows that the people of Huddersfield want to keep their hospital open!

TUSC plans to stand on Waltham Forest anti-monster block platform

Theo Sharieff, Waltham Forest Socialist Party

Socialist Party activists and local residents attended a meeting on 3 March organised by the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) in Walthamstow. We announced TUSC's electoral challenge to right-wing Labour councillors responsible for driving through [plans to construct four tower blocks of luxury flats](#) in the centre of the borough.

The demonstration in Walthamstow town centre on 24 February, which 600 people attended, demonstrated the scale of the anger which exists against the corporate takeover of public land. Many people in the borough will now be looking to the local elections in May as an opportunity to exact revenge on councillors who have undemocratically supported the 'monster block' development.

Some people in the Save Our Square campaign understandably raised at the meeting the idea of standing candidates on a single-issue basis, as a step towards creating a broad alliance with multiple candidates on an 'anti-monster block' ticket.

The Socialist Party is not opposed to such broad alliances. Wherever it can, the Socialist Party seeks to work with members of other organisations and individuals on a principled basis and has a track record of doing so. We encourage people to come forward as candidates.

Nancy Taafe, Socialist Party member and local housing campaigner, raised the need to not only discuss anti-monster block candidates, but also to discuss what lies further down the road.

The question was also raised in the meeting about lending support within the campaign to Tory and Liberal candidates who have, in words, opposed the monster block. Campaigners in the meeting responded to these questions by highlighting the role the Conservatives and Lib Dems have played both nationally and locally in supporting policies which have created the housing crisis.

TUSC supporters plan to stand in every ward across Waltham Forest on an anti-cuts basis. We stated at the meeting that any local resident wishing to stand in the local elections is welcome to stand on the TUSC platform of setting legal no-cuts budgets, voting against cuts in the council chamber, and building campaigns locally to win extra funding from the Tories in central government.

Derbyshire says: No fracking way!

Elaine Evans, Chesterfield Socialist Party

"No fracking way" was the chant by the hundreds of people from groups all over Derbyshire and Yorkshire at the end of a three-mile march between Clowne and Bolsover on 24 February.

Even nearby Sherwood Forest and Clumber Park, which have huge numbers of visitors who come to enjoy the beautiful countryside, are threatened. The National Trust is resisting seismic testing, stating fracking company Ineos had not considered the environmental impact.

Fracking is very unpopular with the public, forcing Derbyshire council to recently refuse planning permission for a 60-metre-tall rig to drill a bore hole to take samples of shale rock.

In these former coal mining communities, there are solar farms and wind farms appearing that are providing clean energy with none of the harmful waste that fracking produces. Renewable energy is rapidly growing - let's invest in that instead.

Coventry shows solidarity with the Syrian people

Coventry Socialist Party

A protest was held in Coventry on 25 February to stand in solidarity with [the people of Eastern Ghouta, Syria](#) - where 500 have been killed recently by bombing with many more injured.

At short notice around 65 people assembled, many originally from Syria. Speakers spoke passionately about the situation facing people - with millions displaced from their homes, families separated and lives shattered.

It was pointed out by speakers that the so-called international community has abandoned the people of Syria. The various governments, whether that be the UK, US or Russia, are busy vying for influence at the expense of ordinary people in the region.

But there is another kind of international community, which stands in solidarity with workers and the poor in Syria.

As our leaflet said: "We need to build mass movements of ordinary people both here in the UK, and across the Middle East.

"These need to provide solidarity to those affected while at the same time being armed with a socialist programme for revolutionary change that can cut across national, religious and ethnic divides, to build a society that puts an end to the chaos of capitalism and imperialism."

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 1 March 2018 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

After Weinstein: fighting sexual harassment in entertainment

James Ivens, Equity arts policy and campaign working party member (personal capacity)

Following the exposure of appalling, systemic sexual harassment and assault in show business, entertainers' union Equity has launched a campaign.

The speed of response and many of the proposals in Equity's '[Agenda for Change](#)' report are very welcome. But it says little on the fundamental issues: collective action, and the structural power imbalance arts workers face.

A few years ago I was a deputy - Equity's name for workplace reps - on a performance at a well-known outer London theatre. Several members complained about inappropriate behaviour including groping by the head of the venue.

I suggested to my members that I have a word with him, mentioning no names, to get him to stop.

But at the time he was dangling over us the possibility of finding funding to tour the show. This would have meant extending the precarious employment of the whole company by weeks or maybe more.

Fears

Understandably, despite my arguing for it, my members asked me to take no action, fearing he might withdraw the offer. It never materialised, of course.

This same venue head, by the way, had tried to have me sacked after I asked cast and crew not to use the tube in solidarity with ongoing strikes. The show director, a fellow Equity member, refused to sack me. But both episodes show the disproportionate power arts managers can wield.

Equity's report asks casting directors, agents, workplaces, drama schools and so on to formulate and publicise anti-harassment policies. This has been standard practice in other industries for some time. It is long overdue in entertainment.

The union also makes its own commitments, all good. These include updating union contracts, challenging the scope of 'non-disclosure agreements', special training for deputies, and an "awareness" campaign.

Using the current post-Weinstein and Spacey embarrassment at the top of the industry to push for more robust anti-harassment policy is important. And Equity's report does recognise that "it should not be up to brave individuals to make a difference."

However - aside from encouraging members not to be "bystanders" to harassment but to "call it out," and appealing to the consciences of industry chiefs - there is no strategy for enforcement.

Trade unionists should challenge harassment and bullying. And their union should back them in doing so - as the report also promises. But it is not enough, as it implies, to limit this to legal action.

Court cases can be distressing and difficult to prove. And the process is long. Artists may well have moved on to multiple different gigs before it concludes.

For arts workers to have confidence in fighting these very serious issues requires more than vague promises of "support."

For example, last year in south London, [Woolwich Ferry workers walked out against sexual harassment](#) and bullying. This collective response won concrete action against the offending manager.

And as well as lobbying Westminster for stronger anti-harassment laws, the union should campaign for a funding and ownership structure that takes the power off the bosses.

A massive expansion in arts funding, and publicly owned, democratically controlled arts facilities, could help free entertainers from dependency on the impresarios.

Equity's new 'arts policy and campaign working party' should include principles like this in its proposals to the union's governing council.

The Socialist inbox

Do you have something to say?

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

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

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

Snow chaos

Hearing stories of rail workers going above and beyond their duties during the recent disruption, only to find that their efforts are not appreciated.

Minimal preparation despite the clear warnings, lack of coordination between companies, when decisions were made they were not communicated clearly and fully.

Lack of clear decision-making from managers - although it must be said there is a dire shortage of managers; train crew stranded, contacting their company but calls remaining unanswered for over an hour; train crew instructed to terminate service short of home depot and informed staff would be on hand to assist passengers; on arrival no assistance for passengers and train crew pay for taxi to home depot.

Driver rings to say roads dangerous, so will not be in; supervisor offers to send a taxi, informed again that that would be equally dangerous. Driver stranded far from home depot, had to be assisted by a manager from another firm. Driver stranded in Reading unable to get contact with supervisor, pays for taxi to London.

An Aslef member, Worcestershire

Jailed TUSC agent writes

Last month, TUSC activist Chris Fernandez began a 15-month prison sentence. His alleged crime was 'misleading' local residents who chose to sign papers allowing TUSC candidates to stand in local elections.

The prosecution attacked Chris for showing nominators a petition against closing a local pool to explain TUSC's anti-cuts approach. As TUSC national election agent Clive Heemskerk put it, this was a "vindictive political prosecution" aimed at subduing anti-establishment voices.

After the Socialist's article explaining the case and appeal for messages of support, Chris has written back. Read more at socialistparty.org.uk, 'Outrageous sentence for TUSC agent in "misleading electors" court case'.

Number: A5447ED

Name: Chris Fernandez

Wing: E 216

I would just like to thank your paper for its article of support and for all your readers' letters which really lift me. I cannot reply to all of them, but over time I will try.

I have never been in trouble with the police in my life. It was my first time in court and my first time in prison.

It is tough in here. I get one and a half hours out of my cell. However, I have put down for education, work and use of gym which are outside of association time. The prison officers are OK, but I think under a lot of pressure.

I was proud of TUSC's campaign against the closure of Moorways swimming pool and took a petition along with me to show it as an example of what we had done. I never asked people to sign it. I do think this is political, but I will not be broken by this and I will still campaign for a socialist society.

I have been discussing the ideas of socialism with different inmates. I had to tell them my side of the story as they thought I was an MP done for fiddling taxes, but not now they say they see me as a political prisoner.

Also thanks to the TUSC national steering committee and the Socialist Party for their support.

This has also affected my wife Magdalena as she is now on her own. Socialist Party members and friends are helping her. She has been a bedrock of support to me.

Yours in solidarity, Chris Fernandez

P.S. I have now been moved to E wing. If letters have been sent to B wing I should still get them.

- Chris Fernandez (21-12-1957), A5447ED, E wing, HMP Nottingham, 112 Perry Road, Sherwood, Nottingham NG5 3AG - your envelope should include your name and address on the back

Audio version of this document

[To hear an audio version of this document click here.](#)

What the Socialist Party stands for

The Socialist Party fights for socialism – a democratic society run for the needs of all and not the profits of a few. We also oppose every cut, fighting in our day-to-day campaigning for every possible improvement for working class people.

The organised working class has the potential power to stop the cuts and transform society.

As capitalism dominates the globe, the struggle for genuine socialism must be international.

The Socialist Party is part of the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI), a socialist international that organises in over 40 countries.

Our demands include:

Public services

- No to ALL cuts in jobs, public services and benefits. Defend our pensions.
- No to privatisation and the Private Finance Initiative (PFI). Renationalise all privatised utilities and services, with compensation paid only on the basis of proven need.
- Fully fund all services and run them under accountable, democratic committees that include representatives of service workers and users.
- Free, publicly run, good quality education, available to all at any age. Abolish university tuition fees now and introduce a living grant. No to academies and 'free schools'!
- A socialist NHS to provide for everyone's health needs - free at the point of use and under democratic control. Kick out private contractors!
- Keep council housing publicly owned. For a massive building programme of publicly owned housing, on an environmentally sustainable basis, to provide good quality homes with low rents.

Work and income

- Trade union struggle to increase the minimum wage to £10 an hour without exemptions as an immediate step towards a real living wage. For an annual increase in the minimum wage linked to average earnings.
- All workers, including part-timers, temps, casual and migrant workers to have trade union rates of pay, employment protection, and sickness and holiday rights from day one of employment.
- An immediate 50% increase in the state retirement pension, as a step towards a living pension.
- Reject 'workfare'. For the right to decent benefits, education, training, or a job, without compulsion.
- Scrap the anti-trade union laws! For fighting trade unions, democratically controlled by their members. Full-time union officials to be regularly elected and receive no more than a worker's wage. Support the National Shop Stewards Network.
- A maximum 35-hour week with no loss of pay.

Environment

- Major research and investment into replacing fossil fuels with renewable energy and into ending the problems of early obsolescence and unrecycled waste.
- Public ownership of the energy generating industries. No to nuclear power. No to Trident.
- A democratically planned, low-fare, publicly-owned transport system, as part of an overall plan against environmental pollution.

Rights

- Oppose discrimination on the grounds of race, gender, disability, sexuality, age, and all other forms of prejudice.
- Repeal all laws that trample over civil liberties. For the right to protest! End police harassment.
- Defend abortion rights. For a woman's right to choose when and whether to have children.
- For the right to asylum. No to racist immigration laws.
- For the right to vote at 16.

Mass workers' party

- For a mass workers' party drawing together workers, young people and activists from workplace, community, environmental, anti-racist and anti-cuts campaigns, to provide a fighting, political alternative to the pro-big business parties.
- Fight for Labour to be transformed into such a party: deselect the Blairites!

Socialism and internationalism

- No to imperialist wars and occupations.
- Tax the super-rich! For a socialist government to take into public ownership the top 150 companies and the banking system that dominate the British economy, and run them under democratic working-class control and management. Compensation to be paid only on the basis of proven need.
- A democratic socialist plan of production based on the interests of the overwhelming majority of people, and in a way that safeguards the environment.
- No to the bosses' neoliberal European Union and single market. For a socialist Europe and a socialist world!

Audio version of this document

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<http://www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/27005>