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the Socialist

Formerly **Militant**

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CUTS AND CLIMATE CHANGE CAUSE FLOODS

FIGHT TORIES AND PROFIT SYSTEM

photo Elliot Pitt/Twitter

Ross Saunders
Socialist Party Wales

Two storms in a week brought some of the worst floods in living memory to Wales and parts of England and Scotland, killing at least five people and damaging thousands of homes.

Big business didn't send the rain. But the distorted priorities of the profit-obsessed capitalist system are to blame for the misery that ordinary people must endure because of it.

It is also inaccurate to describe Storm Ciara and Storm Dennis simply as natural disasters. The increased frequency of extreme weather phenomena is the result of climate change, driven by a system that sacrifices everything for profit.

No bill should be laid at the door of the residents of houses that have been damaged. If private insurance companies try to wriggle out of paying again, the government should step in. They must not be

allowed to pass on the costs with higher premiums either. Similarly, workers whose workplaces were flooded out must have their wages guaranteed.

The Fire Brigades Union reports that its members have had to suffer funding cuts totalling £140 million in England alone, with equivalent sums cut in other parts of Britain.

Workers' efforts

Workers in the emergency services are stretched past their limit. The efforts they and community members have made to help those hit by the floods have disgraced Boris Johnson. By contrast, Johnson has refused even to visit areas hit by

the storms after being heckled last year.

Infrastructure weakened by years of under-investment has been literally swept away. Rail beds in the South Wales valleys have been washed into rivers, leaving rails suspended in mid-air. Defences erected hastily after the last floods have proved too little, too late.

But it's not that the resources don't exist in society: it's that they're monopolised by a tiny handful. Bosses at the Environment Agency, which is responsible for flood defences, have pocketed £1.5 million in bonuses over the last five years - while only paying many workers just over the minimum

wage. The private companies which own the water industry act in similar fashion.

Working-class communities will never receive full protection until austerity is reversed and the water sector is nationalised, and run under democratic workers' control and management.

Energy and transport too, to ensure meaningful action on climate change, along with the banks and big firms responsible for impoverishing workers and public services. Then a democratic, socialist plan for homes, jobs and the environment could be drawn up democratically by working-class people as a whole.

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"The philosophers have only
interpreted the world, in various
ways; the point is to change it."
Karl Marx

CORONAVIRUS CRISIS SHAKES CHINESE REGIME

Fight for independent workers' organisation and democratic socialism

Clare Doyle
Committee for a Workers' International

Worldwide, the number of dead and infected from novel coronavirus appears to have reached a peak. But fears persist that large numbers could still die because of the impossibility of knowing before the symptoms develop that someone is carrying the virus.

In Britain, nine cases have been diagnosed, including one at an event attended by 250 people including MPs and the minister in charge of buses. But so far no deaths have been reported. In France, there has been at least one death. Elsewhere in Europe, and in the US, there were no reports of deaths at the time of writing.

In the rest of Asia, where there have been a number of deaths, some new cases have been reported. The fate of hundreds of passengers from around the world on the cruise ship Diamond Princess moored off Yokohama, Japan is causing mounting concern.

In China itself, the total number of deaths was aggravated by the slowness of the authorities to react in the initial stages of the outbreak. In the first six weeks of 2020, around 1,800 died and 68,000 were known to be infected.

What looked like a massive 'spike' in the number affected by the newly named Covid-19 at the end of the second week in February was due to a redefinition of what counts as being infected by the virus. The rate of deaths occurring in China is now reported to be slowing. But shortages of basic equipment such as masks are compounding the problem.

In Hong Kong, where anger against the Chinese regime is already at boiling point, there have been mass demonstrations and even strikes by medical staff demanding that the borders with mainland China be fully sealed.

Economic damage

The Covid-19 crisis is far from over. It has already taken a greater toll than the Sars epidemic of 2002-03 which also started in China.

Many events, conferences and sporting fixtures are being postponed. Important parts of the Chinese economy are at a standstill,

with a knock-on effect on industries in other countries, and on world prices of copper, oil and gas. There are justifiable fears for the effects on the health of world capitalism as a whole, which has hardly recovered since the economic crisis of more than a decade ago.

The Chinese economy is second only to the US in size and influence, but even before the present clamp-down in economic activity and trade, its growth rate was slowing. This crisis will put heavy pressure on state resources, with big inroads being made into state coffers.

The way a government reacts to disaster - natural or man-made - can make or break it. China is a vast country, with the biggest population in the world, but one in which a multimillion-person state machine stifles initiative and fears the voice of the people.

A small but very rich elite rules in the name of 'communism' but generally operates according to the laws of the capitalist market. Fearful of losing its position, the plutocracy brooks no democracy or criticism from below, let alone democratic elections or peaceful protests. Last year in Wuhan itself, days of street protests over the siting of an incinerator close to people's houses were violently attacked by state forces.

Regime exacerbates crisis

When, at the end of last year, one lone medical professional attempted to warn the authorities that a potentially deadly epidemic was in the making, his findings were suppressed and doctors in Wuhan were also silenced. Time and resources were not immediately mobilised to contain the virus. It was seven weeks before Wuhan - a city as big as London - and the whole province of Hubei, with a 58 million population, were eventually 'locked down'.

When the whistleblower Dr Li Wenliang himself fell victim to the disease and died on 7 February, popular anger erupted. Even the country's Supreme Court criticised the Wuhan police for punishing Dr Li and seven other doctors who had raised the alarm online.

Millions of postings on Weibo repeated the hashtag "we demand freedom of speech". A well-known revolutionary song from Les Misérables - 'Do You Hear the People Sing?' - went viral as a form of protest at the



authorities over Li's death and their incompetence.

Leading academics and commentators have joined an outcry against the suppression of news and the slowness of the country's president to make any public statements. As so often happens in authoritarian societies, it was lower-ranked officials whose careers came to an abrupt end.

Once it moved into action, many people were impressed by the speed and effectiveness with which it was able to mobilise the human and material resources to build hospitals. Although this was on the basis of bureaucratic command and appalling conditions for those workers, it indicates some of what could be possible

in a socialist planned economy, on the basis of democratic control and decent conditions for workers.

But the question on the minds of many is whether the government's initial denial of the problem and the punishment of those who raised the alarm will have major political consequences?

China's Chernobyl?

Comparisons have been made with the initial bungling and cover-up at the time of the horrific disaster at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant in Ukraine on 26 April 1986. Ukraine was a part of the so-called Soviet Union, being run by a massive, bloated bureaucracy in Moscow.

Privatisation has been extensively carried through. The country's executive is made up of extremely rich oligarchs. Their main concern is to maintain power without an explosion from below.

Anger at the handling of the Coronavirus scandal has brought to the surface a smouldering resentment against the elite's dictatorial rule, hiding behind the so-called Communist Party.

Over recent years there have been countless reported and unreported 'incidents' of workplace and community protests. There have also been explosions of anger against the lack of democracy in local and regional authorities.

In this sense, although Chinese society today has a different character to that of the USSR at the time of Chernobyl, the coronavirus outbreak and the way it is handled could act as a turning point in Chinese politics. The government of Xi Jinping has already been severely discredited.

Protest can go from social media onto the streets of China's vast cities and be reflected in an accession of confidence among workers in the vast factories of this economic giant.

The coming weeks of a grave economic downturn and continued incompetence in dealing with a deadly epidemic could mark the beginning of the end for the present head of state and some of his team. Whether a widespread struggle for democratic rights ensues and an upturn in strikes develops remains to be seen.

Re-tie historic knot

The city of Wuhan is in the heart of China on the banks of the great Yangtse River. It has a proud history.

It is where the first shots were fired in the overthrow of the Chinese empire in 1911. It was the scene of heroic mass strikes and uprisings by workers and peasants during the revolution of 1926-27, betrayed into the hands of Chiang Kai Shek by Stalin.

Its population massively celebrated the elimination of landlordism and capitalism under Mao after the Second World War. Workers in Wuhan also fought for what they saw as workers' democracy at the time of the 'Cultural Revolution' in the 1960s.

Today the people of Wuhan are struggling to find a way of taking on the incompetent and self-interested rulers in Beijing. They, along with all working and young people, need independent trade unions and parties that oppose bureaucratic capitalism with demands for democratic rights - freedom of speech, of assembly, of the press, of organisation (trade unions and parties) - and for elections at local and national level where they can put forward the case for genuine democratic socialism.

A struggle of this nature is vital to cleanse government at all levels of bureaucrats and toadies, and elect representatives who are subject to recall when they fail to implement democratic decisions and who live on the same wage as workers. The fight has to be taken up boldly for the restoration of public ownership - this time, under democratic workers' control and management.

WHAT WE STAND 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) which organises across the world. 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 for an immediate increase in the minimum wage to £12 an hour without exemptions as a step towards a real living wage of at least £15. For an annual increase in the minimum wage linked to average earnings. Scrap zero-hour contracts.
- 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.
- Scrap Universal Credit. For the right to decent benefits, education, training, or a job, without compulsion.

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- 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 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 un-recycled 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 and 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!

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Cinema: Parasite

Brilliant Korean film exposes class inequality

Warning: contains some plot details

Alison Hill

This South Korean film is a brilliant watch, very different from run-of-the-mill Hollywood. It exposes the huge inequality in Korean society, without being clunky.

It's funny, with some impressive performances. You mostly have no idea how it's going to turn out, although the feeling of impending doom builds up as the film progresses. It won't be giving too much away to say that it ends badly for some.

The story begins with the Kim family living in a basement flat, with no money and little food. They have to endure people urinating outside their window and the city fumigators touring the streets. (Dad points out how they can get their flat fumigated for free by leaving the window open.)

They live on the edge of the gig economy. Dad has a record of small business failures. The latest family business is to fold pizza boxes (badly) for a young pizza entrepreneur, but again her business is not far from the edge.

The streets are narrow and chaotic. Everyone is struggling to survive.

By contrast, the Parks are living the high life in a house designed by a famous architect - all breeze blocks and glass, without a comfy chair in the place. Their housekeeper does everything including looking after the children, and they have a driver for the Merc - to take Mr Park to work in his high-tech firm.

Excess and hunger

During the first part of the film the Kims gradually infiltrate the Parks' life - all getting jobs in various capacities. As they get paid more money they are able to eat proper meals - first in an all-you-can-eat workers' café, where the Kims run through the long catalogue of failed business ventures which have consigned them to a smelly basement.

There the son Ki-woo exclaims "it's a metaphor" at a large plate of food - just in case you hadn't realised the whole thing is about rich and poor, excess and hunger.

As the story unfolds, more and more of Korean society is exposed. The housekeeper reveals the house has an underground bunker where you can shelter from "North Korean missiles, or creditors." Turns out the housekeeper's husband has lived down there for four years, hiding from loan sharks.

Ki-woo has taken the university entrance exams four times and has done military service. Presumably too poor to go to university, he is living in the damp basement with his parents and sister.

As the black clouds gather, the Parks start noticing that the Kims smell the same - like a "damp rag" - and this becomes a symbol of the class difference between them.



Parasite's protagonists live a squalid underground life while the rich luxuriate
still from Parasite

Eventually the Parks go on a camping trip, with an outdoor projector, leaving the Kims to raid the cocktail cabinet and muse about them. Mr Kim thinks the Parks are nice, but points out later that "money is like an iron, it smooths out the wrinkles."

Later that night the Kims' basement gets flooded in a storm and their neighbourhood is streaming with raw sewage. As the camera pans along the dark, flooded streets, you see a family paddling along in the rain on a door, with a baby and their possessions - a small, outdated, cathode-ray tube TV, in one of the centres of consumer electronics manufacture.

The Kims end up sleeping in a

gym with hundreds of other flooded-out people, while the Parks organise a lavish birthday party for their young son. As the guests turn up in a fleet of posh cars and mill about in the garden, you know it's going to end badly, and you're not disappointed.

There are still a few jokes to come. But you're left thinking about the Kim family, who really care about each other, while the Parks live a fairly vacuous life, occasionally livened up with drink and drugs.

The only solution to inequality which the film identifies is to get a better job. But this is entertainment, not a manifesto. Parasite doesn't pull any punches, and it's definitely worth a watch.



Despite an initial appearance that it's the poor who are parasites on the wealthy, the film shows that in fact it's the reverse

Tessa Warrington

Parasite's director and co-writer, Bong Joon-ho, studied sociology at Yonsei University in Seoul in 1988, where class inequality became a source of interest.

Parallel to characters in the film, he took a job as a tutor to a rich family to pay his way. He was stunned by the difference even between his middle-class background and theirs - they even had a sauna in their home.

The Kims' father finds an article in the paper about several hundred college graduates applying for a security guard job. "This is not an exaggeration," says Bong. "This is actually an article that was published in Korea."

"The poor characters in this film are actually quite smart and capable," he goes on. "You think that with those skills and abilities, they would do pretty well if they had a job, but the issue is, they don't have a job - there is not enough employment for them. And I think that's the economic situation that we face in Korea and also across the world. If we had a proper system set up, they would do perfectly fine."

Left-wing films

Bong was once blacklisted by the South Korean government for his left-wing films, but now statues and museums are proposed to be built in his honour! He is a big fan of British filmmaker Ken Loach, listing Kes as one of his top 50 films of all time, but says: "I don't like these social issues coming out of the film like a nail that's protruding out. I want there to be enjoyment."

The Oscars represent the establishment in the film industry, primarily in the US. But growing pressure from below for racial and class representation has pushed the academy to recognise more films like this.

After all, Bong doesn't depict the poor overthrowing the rich on this occasion. The focus is the domestic sphere; reliance on the poor - housekeepers, drivers, home tutors and so on - to ease the home lives of the rich.

So who are the 'parasites' of the title? There are layered interpretations over the course of the film. But despite an initial appearance that it's the poor who are parasites on the wealthy, the film shows that in fact it's the reverse.

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JAVID'S DEPARTURE FORESHADOWS DEEPER TORY DIVISIONS

Socialist Party
WHAT WE THINK



photo Maurice/CC

Boris Johnson's "peoples' government" lasted as long as his first cabinet reshuffle, as he packed it with ministers who went to fee-paying schools - 65% compared to 7% in the general population. This was also twice as high as Theresa May's cabinet and more even than David Cameron's government of Eton-educated Tory toffs.

Chief among them is the meteoric Rishi Sunak, Winchester College and Oxford, who benefited from Johnson's defenestration of Sajid Javid to rise rapidly through the ranks to become the new chancellor of the exchequer.

The sudden departure of Javid is an indication of the fault-lines and vulnerability underlying the superficial unity and strength of Johnson's government; divisions that will only worsen as the economy stagnates and Brexit creates new economic and political headaches.

Johnson had demanded that Javid sack all his special advisors in a move to assert his own control over the Treasury. This proved too much even for the mainly compliant chancellor; Johnson's own special advisor Dominic Cummings had already had one of Javid's advisors marched out of Downing Street under police escort. Javid was contemptuously known in Number 10 as 'Chino' - chancellor in name only - and Cummings was being reported on Tory social media to be "writing the budget" himself.

So Sajid Javid has become the first

chancellor in 50 years not to deliver a budget - ultimately ditched because he attempted to maintain some semblance of independence of the Treasury from Number 10. His insistence on a 'fiscally prudent' approach of not borrowing for day-to-day spending may have been thought to be curbing Johnson's ability to spend money in the north in order to back up his populist rhetoric and need to be seen to be giving something to former Labour supporting areas.

The prime minister's spokesperson confirmed that the new chancellor had repeated Javid's call for all departments to make 5% cuts "so money could be reprioritised". Otherwise the depth of the continuing capitalist crisis and the effects of austerity on productivity and the performance of the economy does not leave much room for manoeuvre, the Tories having already pledged not to raise income tax, VAT or national insurance.

Any major decisions may now have to be pushed back to a second budget in the autumn, using the excuse that the Johnson loyalist Sunak - a former Goldman Sachs banker and manager of various hedge funds - may need some time to establish himself. What are still certain, however, are the continuing massive cuts being forced on local councils.

The character of the Boris Johnson government is becoming clear as he cements his control, even apparently orchestrating an obedient choral response from his new cabinet. The man who himself refused to be bound by collective responsibility now demands a Trump-style subservience and, as the departure of Sajid Javid indicates, may presage a similar unstable regime as formerly loyal ministers fall out of favour if they fail to fall unconditionally into line.

Welsh Assembly opposes closure Keep pressure on to save Royal Glam A&E

Dave Reid
Socialist Party Wales

The huge pressure on Cwm Taf Morgannwg Health Board to reverse its decision to close the A&E at Royal Glamorgan Hospital has intensified. The Welsh Assembly voted to keep the unit open.

Ten Labour assembly members rebelled and voted for the motion against the instructions of Welsh Labour first minister Mark Drakeford - a humiliating defeat. This was solely down to the pressure of the mass

campaign.

Thousands of people have mobilised to defend their A&E. Over 500 people massed outside the Senedd building in a midweek lobby on 12 February.

The Assembly motion is only advisory and has no binding effect on the health board. But it heaps even greater pressure on the health board executives, who have claimed that there is no option but to close the unit because the sole permanent consultant is retiring in March. A new ad for the post has suddenly appeared.



Demonstrating outside the assembly vote
photo Socialist Party Wales

The A&E should be kept open using locum consultants until sufficient permanent consultants are in place. The health board should make it clear that the unit is permanently safe, to help guarantee the job of any new consultants. And the Welsh government must rip up the South Wales Programme that promised to close the A&E.

The Assembly decision was an amendment from a Labour assembly member to a Tory motion. The fact that the Tories can pose as defenders of the NHS, shows just how far the Welsh Labour government has sunk.

It also is a warning to the labour movement that unless a left alternative is posed to Welsh Labour's austerity policies, then the Tories pose a real threat even in the working-class heartlands of the central valleys.

If Welsh Labour is not pulled back from its disastrous policy of cutting Welsh public services on behalf of the Tories in Westminster, then a new socialist alternative based on the working class will be needed for the elections next year.

East London anti-academy strikes escalate



Picket line at St Bon's school
13 February photo Hannah Sell

Education workers in Newham have escalated their strike action. Workers at St Michael's and St Bon's Catholic schools want to halt plans for academy privatisation. National Education Union members from both schools went to picket St Bon's on 13 February.

It's the first picket line since the latest round of anti-academy strikes started. The schools have

been closed every day of the strike. Unless academisation is halted, both schools will be striking again. And they'll be joined by St Bede's in Romford.

All the schools are part of the same diocese, which is forcing them to join a multi-academy trust against their will.

Ian Pattison
East London Socialist Party

Support Clive Walder



Clive (right) speaking at a Coventry NSSN meeting
photo Socialist Party

Clive, a Unite the Union rep at National Express in Birmingham and National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) national steering committee member, is appealing against his dismissal by the company, which we believe is totally disproportionate.

The date of his appeal hearing will be announced, email protests to travelcare@nationalexpress.com.

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London bus rep dismissal update



Protest in support of Moe outside his hearing photo Socialist Party

In the last issue of the Socialist we reported that London Unite the Union bus rep Moe Muhsin Manir was awaiting a disciplinary hearing on 13 February which could result in dismissal.

Moe wants to thank the huge

support that he has received, from his workmates in Abellio to reps and activists across the labour and trade union movement. He is waiting for confirmation of his hearing but we're hopeful of positive news.

Peterborough food workers picket and protest against pay changes

Steve Cawley
Peterborough Socialist Party and Unite Community branch secretary

There was a noisy demonstration outside Peterborough's Pioneer Foods site on the Orton Southgate industrial estate for two hours on 11 February. About 25 demonstrators who defied the cold, rain and hail were mainly off-duty Unite members at Pioneer but also some Peterborough Unite Community members and other Unite members.

We held placards explaining the grievance over the company's proposal to vary the previously set monthly pay - so in the future

pay would be according to changing shift patterns. This could result in a difference of several hundred pounds in monthly pay, especially for any couples both working for Pioneer. As some of our placards said "Find me a landlord who will allow me to pay a different rent each month!"

Support

We had a sound system with an appropriate medley - You can't get me, I'm part of the union, the Red Flag and the Internationale and so on. This enabled a bit of dancing as an anti-freeze mechanism.

Many commercial vehicles passing tooted in support, including

some with international cargo. Other workers on their breaks nearby came to find out about the protest and give support, including the chair of the local Labour Party. The Pioneer Foods Group is a cereal manufacturer with sites in the UK and South Africa and prides itself in its annual reports as having a continuous campaign for efficiency (presumably mainly at the expense of its workforce).

Peterborough has a growing reputation as a low-pay city. Pioneer employs many workers from eastern Europe who have evidently now decided that they need to act collectively if they are to avoid unsustainable pay patterns.

Pioneer Foods are one of the UK's biggest cereal makers



Hackney parking wardens strike for £15 an hour

Parking wardens in Hackney, east London began a two-week strike on 10 February demanding a £15-an-hour wage, improved sick pay and increased annual leave.

Crucially, the campaign is also demanding that the Labour council take the service back in-house from contractor Apcoa. Strikers marched to the town hall and demanded that

the council intervene and take action.

There can be no hiding place for Hackney Labour councillors whose election manifestos promised in-sourcing and the strikers now want to see this happen.

The mayor of Hackney recently addressed the Hackney Unison annual general meeting and talked glowingly of how it is an in-sourcing

council and that he had recently visited picket lines of contracted-out NHS workers.

He was clearly blissfully unaware that the next speaker was Unite regional officer Onay Kasab, invited to discuss the Apcoa strike. The opportunity was taken to remind the mayor of the dispute on his own doorstep but also that he must personally intervene. The meeting agreed a donation of £250 to the strike fund.

■ Donations to the strike fund: Please make cheques payable to Hackney Unite, forward to Onay Kasab, Unite, 33 - 37 Moreland Street EC1V 8BB.

Hackney parking wardens protest outside Hackney town hall photo Socialist Party



UCU: Striking to fight education cuts and marketisation



photo Elaine Brunskill

>continued from back page

The general election result puts an increased urgency for an industrial strategy to win. We do not have the backup option of a government that will legislate for improved working conditions or industrial relations. Instead, the election of a Tory majority under Boris Johnson poses a real threat to the right to strike.

The best way of defending against such attacks is generalising the strike action, linking and coordinating solidarity with other trade unions. Particularly the Communication Workers' Union which has seen its right to strike threatened recently, and rail and transport unions such as the RMT, which are the target of the Tories' new planned anti-union laws.

The National Shop Stewards Network is an important vehicle for building this solidarity.

We also know that this parliament will implement changes to adult education funding which could bring further cuts and redundancies across higher education and further education. Building a fighting

union, linked with other trade unions and student groups, is the best preparation for future struggles which could open up in the sector.

Our union has shown its potential to stand alongside other fighting trade unions and lead the fight-back. We have already begun to win concessions as a result of our strike action so far - but we must persist and be prepared to reject any offer which falls short.

This includes reballoting if necessary to keep up the momentum of the dispute.

Despite the general election result, this isn't a strong Tory government as the reshuffle crisis shows.

There is of course some anxiety related to the pressure that strike action puts on members. However, it is vital that we maintain the pressure in order for negotiations to be successful.

We have the employers on the back foot, but if they think that we can be bullied back into work then they will not feel forced into making concessions.

It is ironic that the very issues at stake - low pay, insecure work and excessive working conditions - are what can make strike action

difficult. That's why it's vital that we stay strong and united, so that we can ensure these issues are addressed.

Local branches should call on support from other unions in their areas and link up with their local trade union councils to appeal for donation to the local strike pay fund.

We are at a crucial juncture and the strength of this action will determine not only victory in the dispute but also the ongoing strategy for the transformation of the union.

UCU is becoming a more combative union in this process. We are developing a new activist layer which now must be organised to facilitate the transformation of the union to a rank-and-file, member-led union, capable of uniting with other trade unions to defend against attacks and transform society.

The rank-and-file activists must be armed with the confidence and strategy to win on the two higher education disputes as a starting point for a fightback across both further and higher education, destroyed by decades of marketisation and austerity.

Socialist Party members in UCU

Sixth-form strikers stand firm for increased funding

Notre Dame, Leeds

National Education Union (NEU) members at Notre Dame sixth-form, along with 34 other sixth-form colleges across the UK, took further strike action on 12 February in their ongoing dispute over funding for the sector and pay. This being the fourth strike day at Notre Dame.

The cuts in the sector have been substantial over the last decade, with 15% fewer teachers and funding cut in real terms by 22%.

This has had a knock on effect in terms of provision, with 81% of

sixth form colleges teaching students in larger class sizes and cuts to courses.

The mood on the picket line at Notre Dame was good, with around a dozen staff joining the picket. They were planning to join the national lobby of parliament called by the NEU on the next day of national strike action, 27 February, and then on 10 March link up with striking academic staff in UCU at Leeds University.

Iain Dalton
Leeds Socialist Party



Notre Dame picket line in Leeds photo Iain Dalton

Havering, east London

The NEU warns that sixth-form colleges could disappear. Funding is £700 million short.

The impact of cuts cannot be underestimated. Teaching foreign languages has been hardest hit, while cuts to science, maths, technology and engineering are almost as severe.

Student support services - including vital mental-health care - and extra-curricular activities are being cut. Class sizes have increased in 81% of colleges.

Today there are half the number of sixth-form colleges there were in 1992, 15% fewer college teachers than 2010, and college workers' pay

has dropped lower than schools.

On the picket line at Havering Sixth-Form College, NEU members said they thought they have been seen as an easy target for government cuts. But they are still determined to strike. Boris Johnson says 'austerity is over', so these workers want that to apply to colleges.

Staff at Havering College are also angry because the college has been hit by a form of academy privatisation. Worse contracts are being imposed on workers, it's the final straw. There could more strikes at this college very soon.

Ian Pattison
East London Socialist Party



Havering picket line in east London photo Ian Pattison

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COULDN'T PAY, WOULDN'T PAY, DIDN'T PAY

The battle to defeat the poll tax

30 years ago the historic struggle against the hated poll tax was reaching its peak. Below is an edited version of a foreword by **Dave Nellist** to the new book “Couldn’t Pay, Wouldn’t Pay, Didn’t Pay” compiled by Eric Segal, secretary of the South East Kent Trade Union Council. Dave, a member of the Socialist Party and its forerunner Militant, was the Labour MP for Coventry South East from 1983-1992 and became the main parliamentary spokesperson for the All Britain Anti-Poll Tax Federation. Here he outlines the most important stages in the battle to defeat the poll tax and its lessons for struggle today.

The battle against the poll tax was the biggest civil disobedience campaign of the 20th century. In a normal year in the 1980s the number of cases (summonses) brought before the magistrates’ courts of England and Wales was about two million. But between April 1990 and September 1993 the number of cases of unwillingness, or inability, to pay the poll tax taken before the magistrates (in just England and Wales) totalled an additional and staggering 25 million.

It is estimated this involved 14 million people, many with multiple summonses. That’s just under one-third of the entire adult population. The sheer volume of cases overwhelmed the legal system; universal enforcement of the poll tax was made impossible, and what had once been described as Margaret Thatcher’s ‘flagship’ policy was sunk.

In November 1990, as Margaret Thatcher was forced to resign, the captain went down with the ship.

How did a government with a 102-seat majority and a seemingly strong, commanding leader, suffer one of the greatest defeats in modern times? Such results are not accidents, they don’t fall from the sky. They require planning and organisation.

The poll tax

The poll tax was introduced in Scotland in April 1989, and England and Wales a year later. It was never risked in Northern Ireland. The poll tax replaced the domestic rates system, which had been a means of raising income for local services based on the size of residential property, so roughly related to income.

The poll tax, however, was a head tax - a flat rate - which meant a millionaire paid the same as the poorest 18-year-old. The poll tax affected young and old, employed and unemployed, the sick and disabled, council tenants and homeowners. It was widely seen as unfair. It was estimated that Thatcher’s own family in Dulwich would save £2,300 a year, while working-class families with adult sons or daughters living at home could have an extra bill of many hundreds of pounds.

Building the campaign

The campaign against the poll tax in Scotland was launched in Edinburgh in December 1987. The new tax in Scotland, and later in England and Wales, was to have the effect of providing a single issue - a lightning rod - for accumulated hatred of Margaret Thatcher and the Tories for the defeat

of the miners, the pauperisation of local services and councils, rising unemployment, the decline of manufacturing employment and industries, and the privatisation of utilities.

In April 1988, a conference of Militant (now Socialist Party) supporters decided to launch anti-poll tax unions throughout Scotland. An opinion poll, some 12 months before the poll tax was actually introduced there, showed 42% would be in favour of a campaign of illegal non-payment. Amongst Labour voters the figure was 57%.

The anti-poll tax unions mushroomed. In Glasgow three months later, 350 delegates from 105 anti-poll tax groups agreed to set up the Strathclyde Anti-Poll Tax Federation. The confidence of those building the anti-poll tax unions with the strategy of non-payment was well placed. By the end of 1989, one million of the nearly four million adult population in Scotland had refused or delayed payment.

Don't pay, don't collect

The poll tax was made unworkable by grafting together the millions unable to pay with millions more unwilling to pay. ‘Don’t pay, don’t collect’ was the slogan from the beginning of the campaign. And the strategy of mass non-payment and non-collection was campaigned for, almost singularly, by the anti-poll tax federations in Scotland, and later in England and Wales, following the lead given by the Militant.

Many supported non-registration as a way of ‘hiding’ from the tax, and it did remove a million or more from the electoral register. But it was only useful as a precursor of preparation for non-payment, not a viable strategy in its own right.

Then as now, with battles against local council service cuts, Labour leaders restricted their opposition to parliamentary speeches. Those involved in, and especially leading, the anti-poll tax movement understood that major social issues are not resolved in parliament - where no matter how good the speeches, governments rarely listen - but outside, by real social forces.

Should we break the law?

The Labour leaders opposed any strategy which involved refusing to obey the law. But there are two types of law - those we all accept that keep society in check (laws giving pedestrians right of way on a zebra crossing, through to laws against murder) and naked class laws, such



“We can stop the poll tax”, reading the Militant newspaper photo Dave Sinclair



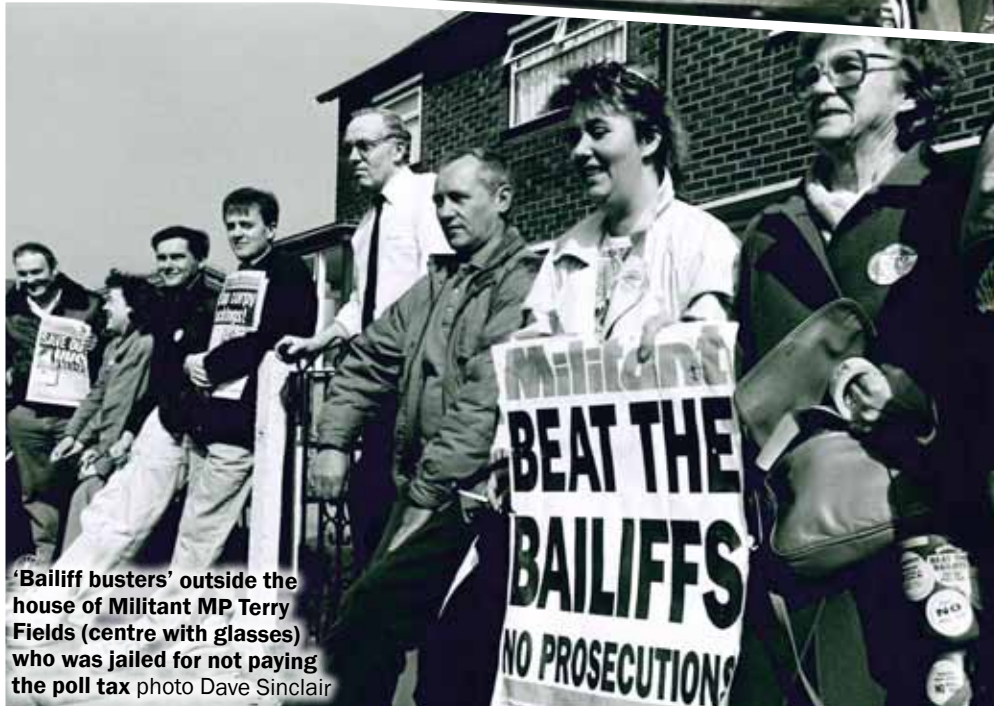
Anti-poll tax demonstration photo Dave Sinclair



photo Militant



Militant-led Labour Party Young Socialists campaigning against the poll tax photo Militant



‘Bailiff busters’ outside the house of Militant MP Terry Fields (centre with glasses) who was jailed for not paying the poll tax photo Dave Sinclair

as the restriction of union rights to organise industrial action - or taxes, like the poll tax, blatantly designed to benefit the rich at the expense of the rest.

If preceding generations hadn’t had the courage to break laws that declared trade unions illegal, we wouldn’t have many of the gains trade unions have subsequently won for us. We had no qualms about building mass resistance to the poll tax, even if that meant breaking the law.

Many on the left also thought the strategy of illegal mass non-payment could not succeed. The Socialist Workers Party leader, Tony Cliff, dismissed the tactic in a speech at Newcastle Polytechnic in May 1989, saying: “Not paying the poll tax is like getting on a bus and not paying your fare; all that will happen is you’ll get thrown off”!

Those of us already fully involved in preparing the anti-poll tax struggle had more confidence in working people. And, as it turned out, not just in areas traditionally thought of as working-class. As one newspaper correspondent later commented: “I knew Margaret Thatcher was done for when I read that, according to official figures, one-third of the people in Tunbridge Wells aren’t paying”!

Campaign in England and Wales

The campaign against the poll tax in England started small. Some felt Margaret Thatcher couldn’t be beaten - she’d beaten Argentina in the Falklands war and defeated the miners, so how could we win over a tax?

In Coventry the campaign started, like in many other towns and cities, as we gathered outside the Council House and ceremoniously and defiantly burnt the registration forms in dustbins.

MP and Militant supporter Terry Fields and myself regularly raised the issue throughout 1989 in the House of Commons in speeches and in questions, linked to dozens of meetings we were speaking at out of hundreds that were organised nationally.

At the Labour Party conference in October 1989, a dramatic incident was seen by millions on TV news bulletins. Christine McVicar, a delegate from Glasgow Shettleston Labour Party, tore up her poll tax payment book at the conference rostrum as she moved a resolution calling for Labour to back the mass campaign of non-payment.

She defiantly declared to the conference: “Without the Tolpuddle trade unionists and the suffragettes breaking the law, we wouldn’t be here at this conference... I’m ripping up my poll tax book not as an individual but as part of a mass campaign of non-payment”!

The following month the All Britain Anti-Poll Tax Federation was founded at a conference of 2,000 delegates. The federation was to play the decisive role in the coming battle. The protest grew as 1990 opened with hundreds,

sometimes thousands, gathered outside town halls to protest.

The poll tax ‘riots’

Mass demonstrations were organised on 31 March, 1990, the day before 35 million adults were due to get their bills. 200,000 demonstrated in London and a further 40,000 in Glasgow. The divorce between the vibrant campaign organised from below, and the passive opposition of trade union and Labour leaders organised from above, was sharply illustrated a few days later when on 4 April the Trade Union Congress held a rally against the poll tax in a hall that would hold 3,000, but only 800 (mainly union officials) turned up.

The march in Glasgow was entirely peaceful, but the activities and strategy of the police in London led to violent clashes between them and some protesters which the media played up as riots. But that didn’t dent the anti-Tory mood across the country.

At the beginning of April, a few days after the so-called poll tax riots of Trafalgar Square, Labour had an opinion poll lead of 23%! But Labour’s leader, Neil Kinnock, then spent much of his time over the next months and years expelling the leaders of the poll tax rebellion, and ended up squandering that lead. By December, it was the Tories who were ahead by 8% and Neil Kinnock lost the subsequent general election in 1992.

In 1990, the campaign against the poll tax continued to grow. An All Britain Anti-Poll Tax Federation trade union conference was called in June 1990 and attracted 1,287 delegates from 651 organisations representing 870,000 workers.

The battle moves to the courts

As well as on the streets, in marches, demonstrations and lobbies, the struggle moved crucially to the courts. Two weeks after the date that the first poll tax payment fell due, if it wasn’t received, local councils were legally entitled to begin court proceedings, obtaining ‘liability orders’ calling in the whole year’s debt. If no payment was then received, councils could invoke more draconian enforcement.

By June and July, court cases from liability orders were in their hundreds of thousands, and the millions who did not pay ground down the judicial system.

Hundreds of activists developed the skills of an obscure court role, the ‘McKenzie friend’. As thousands were summoned to the courts, facing the magistrates and the council officials without the benefit of legal representation, hundreds and hundreds of ordinary working-class people stepped up to the role, trained by the briefing notes provided by the All Britain Anti-Poll Tax Federation and, in particular, the poll tax Legal Group.

Competitions grew as to who could keep the magistrates busy (or, even, entertained) the longest. So in hundreds of courts, at best, magistrates

continued on page 10



If preceding generations hadn’t broken laws that declared trade unions illegal, we wouldn’t have many of the gains trade unions have won for us

>continued from page 9

were hearing a few dozen cases a day. But liability orders were obtained, and more punitive enforcement began.

Bailiffs

After obtaining a liability order, legislation allowed councils to invoke deductions from earnings or certain state benefits. If non-payment persisted, the bailiffs were sent in to seize property for sale (known in Scotland as warrant sales or 'poundings'). The final sanction was imprisonment for up to three months.

The use of sheriff's officers (bailiffs in Scotland) began as early as July 1989. One of the first cases was against Jeanette McGinn, a widow from Rutherglen in Glasgow, who had refused to register for the poll tax and not paid the £50 fine. When the sheriff's officers gave notice they were coming to her home to seize her property, she telephoned the Strathclyde Anti-Poll Tax Federation office, which organised buses and minibuses from all over the city and region to take hundreds of protesters to her home.

The council backed down. Similar tactics were later used in England and Wales, as local anti-poll tax unions developed 'bailiff busters'.

Imprisonment

The first to be threatened with jailing in England was 74-year-old Cyril Mundin, in Northampton, in October 1990. Cyril had been a paratrooper on D-Day, so a certain amount of press interest was inevitable.

Hundreds marched to the court in his support. A Sunday newspaper, the News of the World, sent 'Captain Cash' to pay the fine, so that Cyril wasn't sent to prison! But Rupert Murdoch's paper couldn't (and wouldn't) pay all the outstanding poll tax bills! And so the jailings began. Pensioners were sent to three-month maximum security prisons such as Durham. In the first 18 months, 117 people were imprisoned by 40 councils. At least ten pensioners received sentences totalling 366 days.

Every jailing was challenged in the High Court by judicial review, whereby a senior judge was asked to review the procedures by which the imprisonment decision was arrived at. Many cases were won and dozens were released.

Labour's reaction

Initially, 30 Labour MPs signed their refusal to pay, which would have meant their imprisonment. Only one, in fact, went the whole distance - Liverpool Broadgreen MP Terry Fields, who was imprisoned in July 1991 and served 58 days in Walton prison in Liverpool. Thousands demonstrated outside.

The Labour leadership was vicious. Neil Kinnock condemned advocates of organised mass non-payment of the poll tax as "toytown revolutionaries". At the next national executive committee of the Labour

Party following Terry's release from prison, Roy Hattersley and Clare Short proposed Terry's and my expulsion - Terry for going to prison, and 'bringing the Labour Party into disrepute', and me for being next in line. Labour later closed down the Labour Party Young Socialists for its role in supporting the campaign. The motion at the October 1993 Labour Party conference was moved by one Tom Watson!

The poll tax is defeated

Eight months after the poll tax was introduced in England and Wales, in November 1990, Margaret Thatcher was forced to resign and John Major replaced her. We had not only moved the government on policy, we'd removed a prime minister!

The poll tax was abolished on 21 March 1991, one week short of one year! Though legal proceedings against non-payers continued for many months and years.

What were some of the lessons learned? Well perhaps the most important was, struggle works! As the late, lamented Bob Crow, leader of the transport union RMT, famously said: "If you fight you won't always win. But if you don't fight you will always lose". And in the case of the poll tax the struggle of those unable to pay united with those unwilling to pay, welded with a confident strategy and tactics, led to an historic victory.

It was an organised mass struggle, not individuals left to fight or suffer alone, that made the battle against the poll tax so seminal in the 20th century. We could have won more quickly had the trade unions had a policy of non-implementation, which we had called for since 1987 with the slogan "don't pay, don't collect".

But we did win, and it was because Margaret Thatcher and the political establishment in Britain made two fundamental mistakes. Instead of their previous tactics of taking on one section of the Labour movement at a time in separate struggles, they introduced a tax that attacked the whole of the working class at the same time, making solidarity even easier to achieve. And they mistook the timid leadership of the Labour Party and trade unions for the determination of the working class once roused in struggle.

It's one thing to make laws, another to implement them - a lesson the establishment doesn't want working-class people to remember. It also illustrates what Marxists have often argued: that general election results are merely snapshots of the mood of the country on a particular day, not set in stone for a whole parliamentary term.

Even large government majorities can be ephemeral when working people are roused in anger and have organisations with a leadership determined to resist injustice - a point worth remembering even now with Boris Johnson's 80-seat Tory majority, the largest since Margaret Thatcher's in 1987.

Better to break the law than break the poor

Imprisoned poll tax fighters meant business

Eric Segal is a member of the Socialist Party and secretary of the South East Kent Trade Union Council. He was a leading activist in the Kent Anti-Poll Tax Federation, and was jailed for 30 days in 1991 for non payment of the poll tax.

The anti-poll tax struggle provided incontrovertible evidence that the state in Britain is not some benevolent, impartial institution. The role the courts played in legitimising and then enforcing the poll tax legislation cut through the illusion that fairness and reasonableness uphold the rule of law.

What more evidence do you need when you look at the part the police played in backing up the bailiffs who were sent by the courts to force their way into homes to take the possessions of working-class people? Or the way they policed the anti-poll tax demonstrations or jailed those who, in the words of MP Terry Fields, would rather break the law than break the poor?

The battle against the poll tax showed that the state is used as a vehicle to maintain and defend the dominant interests of the capitalist class - contrary to the view held by academics and the reformist right wing of the labour and trade union movement.

Prison is a part of the state machinery. Imprisonment for political activity is not new, and prison has long been known to be the university of revolutionaries. We understood that it was likely that, alongside those who simply could not pay the poll tax, the jailing of anti-poll tax campaigners would be part of the mass campaign to stop the tax. We knew that the Tory government would not hesitate to use all the resources to defend its class.

“Those of us who were prepared to go to jail did so in the knowledge that we were supported by our class”

The election to a position in the Kent Anti-Poll Tax Federation was conditional on the understanding that it could result in imprisonment for non payment. We had to show that we were deadly serious in our determination to break this unfair tax and bring down Thatcher. In other words, we meant business.

Our slogan, 'pay no poll tax', showed the clear difference between us and the leaders of the trade unions and Labour Party in our determination to break the tax. The key was that this was a mass movement led and organised by the working class with a clear perspective.

It was not the demonstrations alone that won or the 'riots' that took place when the police attacked peaceful demonstrators in Trafalgar Square. It was the sustained and organised campaign of civil disobedience, the mass non-payment campaign proposed and initiated by Militant supporters. At its height, 18 million people were defying the law and refusing to pay. It was the organisation of that movement and clear ongoing tactics and strategy that succeeded.

Those of us in the leadership of the anti-poll tax unions who were prepared to go to jail did so in the knowledge that we were supported by our class. We were not individuals looking for martyrdom, but we were prepared to take the fight into the belly of the institutions of the state.

Couldn't Pay, Wouldn't Pay, Didn't Pay



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Burning poll tax registration forms in Hackney, London photo Militant



Militant-led Labour Party Young Socialists campaigning against the poll tax photo Militant



photo Jeff Smith

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Labour Party and trans rights

United working-class fight needed for rights and resources for all

Sarah Sachs-Eldridge
Socialist Party executive committee

The Labour Campaign for Trans Rights (LCTR) has intervened in the party's leadership contest, calling on candidates to back its 12-point pledge. Rebecca Long-Bailey and Lisa Nandy have done so.

The oppression trans people suffer must be fought. 81% of trans people fear and avoid certain social or public situations, such as gyms, public toilets and shops. The struggle by trans workers and young people has been significant in raising the need for solidarity. The LCTR pledges show discussion is needed on what form that should take.

While LCTR raises some positive demands, it also unfortunately calls on Labour to "organise and fight" against organisations it considers "transphobic" such as Woman's Place UK (WPUK) and LGB Alliance, and for expulsions. However, defeating divisive ideas requires offering a way to unite and fight all discrimination.

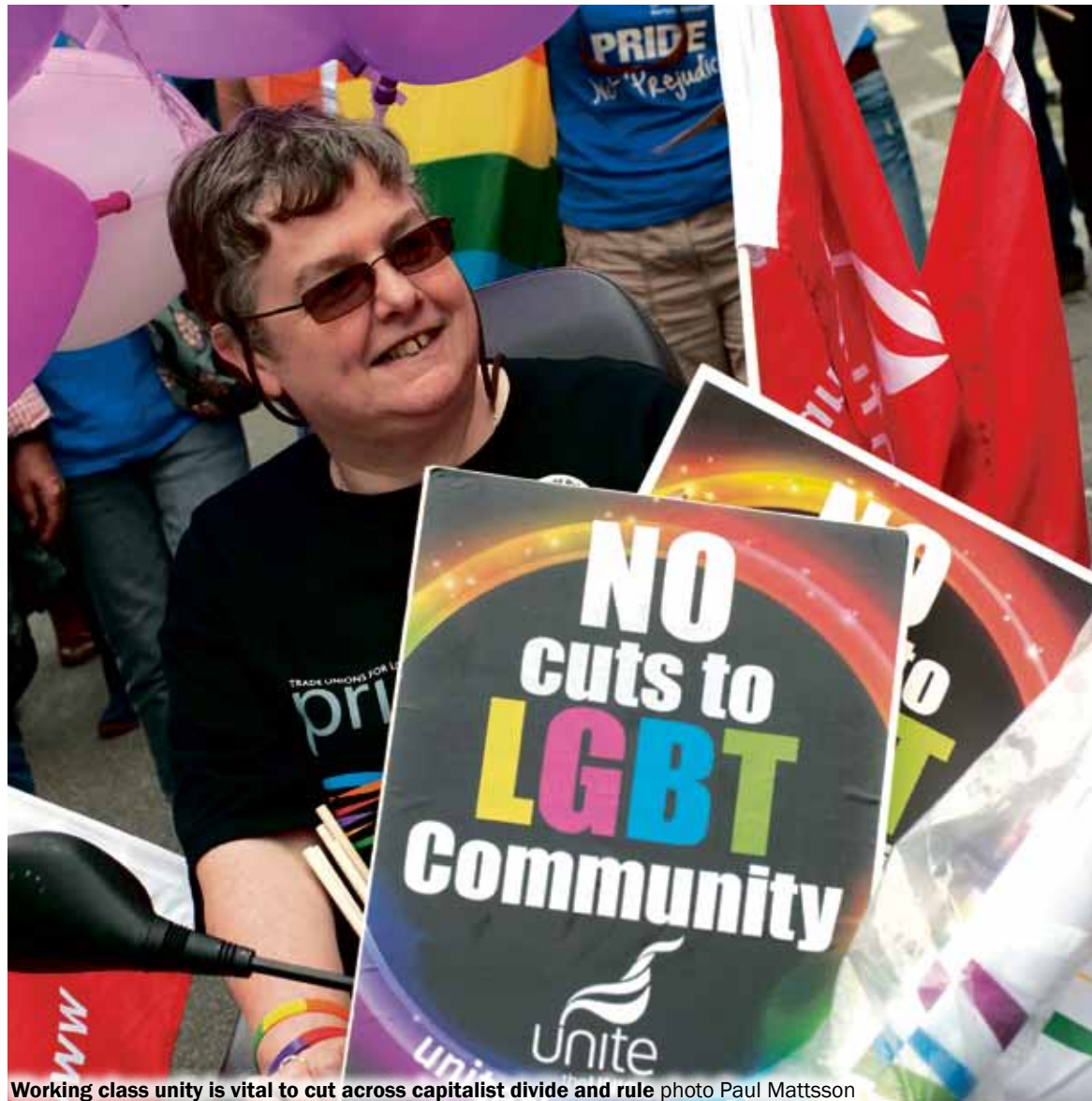
If Labour is to be transformed into a party that can defend trans rights specifically, and fight all discrimination, it must have an understanding of the origins of oppression that lie within unequal class society - and flowing from that the central role of the working class in ending it.

Gender Recognition Act

In 2016 the Tories launched a review into the Gender Recognition Act 2004 which included the right of trans people to self-identify. Nearly four years on, the Tories have produced no reform and the 'debate' on the GRA has been falsely framed as a question of irreconcilable, competing rights between women and trans people. Unfortunately this has been the approach of the leadership of WPUK and others.

The Socialist Party opposes all forms of discrimination and defends trans people's rights, including to self-identify and to public services. We also recognise that women's services are under enormous threat - from Tory cuts and the Labour councils who implement them.

A recent study found that 64% of those who seek shelter in a domestic violence refuge are turned away due to lack of funding. The Women's Lives Matter campaign calls on the Labour candidates to demand that Labour councils take a stand, refuse to make cuts and fight for the money the Tories have stolen from our councils to defend services for all.



Working class unity is vital to cut across capitalist divide and rule photo Paul Mattsson

Unfortunately, this is not the approach of the Labour Campaign for Trans Rights or the groups which have emerged to oppose GRA reform. WPUK is led by some senior figures in the trade union movement. But in its five founding demands does not point to a way to, or even the need to, fight austerity - of which the overwhelming burden falls on women. WPUK instead sows illusions in the government's ability to protect women's spaces.

In August 2017, the National Union of Teachers vice-president who became a leading member of WPUK wrote that granting self-identity was "likely to impact on society's ability to plan for and accommodate the needs of its population and the way it attempts to even out inequality".

But this society's ability to meet the needs of the different sections of the population comes down to who has the power to make such decisions - which class. Capitalist

society is composed of classes and based on the exploitation of the working-class majority by the capitalist minority, the boss class.

Capitalism and inequality

The capitalist class is unable to 'even out inequality' because the system it defends is an unequal system that prioritises profits over our needs. It also has an interest in dividing the working class on race, religious, sexual orientation and gender lines to make it easier to maintain its rule.

The working class is not homogenous but made up of different layers and sections who suffer different forms of oppression alongside class exploitation. But what makes the working class so important is its role in production - workers make everything and without them the bosses can't make their profits.

The working class has the potential power therefore to replace capitalism with a socialist

alternative based on democratic planning of the economy to meet the needs of all.

In its effort to weaken working-class collective struggle, and to undermine our demands and aspirations, the capitalist class has always sought to divide workers. It is a huge mistake of trade union and labour movement activists to assist them in this. Instead, it is necessary to draw out and build a united movement based on fighting all cuts, and for services and rights for all.

With regard to domestic violence services and refuges this starts with fighting for no cuts, no closures, but also adequate funding and an expansion of services for all who need them with decisions being made by democratic and accountable bodies of service users, service workers and the wider working class through the trade unions. This would lay the basis for meeting the needs of all groups of service users, and



It is democratic debate and testing ideas in the fight against cuts and for rights that are needed - not denunciations and proscriptions

democratically negotiating and resolving any potential conflicts.

In a survey of domestic violence service providers by Stonewall, participants emphasised how thorough risk assessment processes are key to safeguarding against an incident of a violent man attempting to access services, while ensuring that all women receive the support they need.

The six-million strong trade unions, as the main mass organisations of the working class, can and have played a key role in fighting for the rights and public services of those who suffer oppression and discrimination under capitalism - from equal pay, abortion rights, legal rights for LGBT+ people, challenging racism, and more.

The trade unions and mass workers' parties have the potential to bring together all sections of the working class in struggle - if they develop a programme of fighting for rights and services for all.

It is democratic debate and testing ideas in the fight against cuts and for rights that are needed - not denunciations and proscriptions.

WPUK is attempting to appeal to women who want to save their services - with a programme that is seen by many as anti-trans rights, rather than fighting the attacks of the Tories and the bosses.

But exposing this approach for the dead end it is requires offering a socialist struggle alternative, not bans and 'no-platforming' of groups and individuals which will be used by the pro-capitalist right in the party against the fighting pro-working-class members.

The rate of LGBT+ hate crime per capita rose by 144% between 2013-14 and 2017-18. It is urgent that the labour and trade union movement takes the lead in building a movement against all forms of discrimination and for a socialist society in which we can be truly liberated from the backward ideas on which class society rests.

Chris Newby
The Socialist campaign organiser

How can we make sure the Socialist newspaper gets into as many hands as possible? Every week the Socialist produces unrivalled coverage of workers' struggles.

But the Socialist Party goes further than that. We participate in those struggles and put forward a strategy to ensure they can succeed.

The Socialist explains why we need to fight for socialist ideas and how and why we need to change society.

When workers involved in struggle see us on picket lines, protests and campaigning in the city centres, they are keen to buy our paper. For example, 82 copies were sold at our campaign stall in Pontypriid against the threat to the Royal Glamorgan A&E (see page 5) and 80 people bought a copy over two stalls in Walthamstow campaigning for council housing and rent controls (see below).

We are asking every member and supporter, what can you do to increase the sales of the Socialist?

One new young member in Brighton is showing the way. He asked for five regular copies of the Socialist every week to sell. Last week he was selling the Socialist at an Extinction Rebellion meeting, the climate strike and another environment protest at Gatwick airport.

In Nottingham, you'll now see Socialist sellers outside Queen's Medical centre. In Leeds, you'll see the Socialist newspaper outside the council offices.

At our regular weekly meeting in Swansea, everyone is asked to take

Socialist sellers

The Socialist Unrivalled coverage with ideas to change society



photo Elaine Brunskill

two to three papers to try to sell. One young member in Southampton visited some friends in Cambridge. She took copies of the Socialist with her and sold six.

We want to hear about the response to the Socialist in the

Waltham Forest, London: How dare they

This is going to be a hard fight. How dare the Labour council build blocks in the middle of Priory Court estate, on the grass that kids play basketball and where people can sit on hot days.

On 16 February, the Socialist Party

Socialist! Please send us short reports of your campaign activity to editors@socialistparty.org.uk.

You don't have to be a member of the Socialist Party to sell the Socialist. Contact us and we can send you some copies to sell.

knocked doors on Priory Court to oppose this. We gave our leaflet out and sold the Socialist.

The Socialist Party fought the mass stock transfer of council estates to arms-length companies in the 1990s and 2000s. We call for them all to be brought back to the council, massively invested in and democratically run by the working class.

Nancy Taaffe

Leicester: From dawn till dusk

We were out from dawn till dusk spreading socialist ideas on 13 February.

We covered 18 workplaces, handing out leaflets for a lobby of the council's budget-setting meeting and a Socialist Party meeting discussing the role of trade unions.

Being bold pays off, we went in to ask for union members to give our leaflets to. The security guards take our material every time.

In the afternoon the latest edition of the Socialist was delivered, hot off the press. We took it to the Royal Mail depot.

We gave solidarity to the Communication Workers Union (CWU) in their dispute against redundancy plans. We invited them to speak at our meeting.

Finally, we had a Socialist Students stall and meeting, building support for the University and College Union (UCU) strike (see back and page 7). Socialists aim to link workers and students together in action and both students and union reps were at our meeting.

Tessa Warrington



photo Niall Mulholland

Stop Newham council cuts and gentrification

- No to £45 million more cuts
- Save Queen's Market and Hamara Ghar
- Stop the sell-off of council assets

Lois Austin
East London Socialist Party

Newham's mayor has announced £45 million more cuts. Rokhsana Fiaz prefers to call them 'savings', but the reality is that more services will close, jobs will be lost and council-owned assets sold off.

Newham is just about the poorest borough in London. Already services have been cut to the bone. We say enough is enough.

Newham council should refuse to carry out the cuts, and instead use its reserves to set a budget which meets our borough's needs.

The council are 'consulting' on the future of Queen's Market and Green Street. The first phase of consultation is about winning a £2 million payment from City Hall - to be matched by funding from the council.

Any money to do up the Green Street area is welcome. But this is the beginning of a council plan to gentrify the Green Street area, push

out the traders and sell off council assets.

A second consultation will happen later in the year. Council papers talk about 'reviewing' council land and assets - i.e. handing community resources to private companies.

The council is proposing a 'consultation' on the future of Hamara Ghar sheltered accommodation. Why do we need a consultation on the future of Hamara Ghar?

It is a quality council-owned service. Its future should not be up for discussion.

Our community has to say loud and clear, we will fight any threat to Hamara Ghar. It must remain council owned. The residents should say 'we are not moving.'

More sheltered accommodation, Terry Waite House in Canning Town, is under threat. This council was supposed to be different from former Labour mayor Robin Wales - who carried through cuts to services and sold off public assets - and the Tories.

Climate strikers have Valentine's Day message 'Roses are red, violets are blue, BP and Shell - we're coming for you'



Cardiff photo Joe Fathallah

Leicester: Energetic youth want to strike with workers

'Roses are red, violets are blue, BP and Shell - we're coming for you!' This was the chant of young people marching through Leicester city centre.

The hard work put into coordinating the event by the young organisers was clear. Students were stewarding, leading chants, handing out badges and collecting contact details from attendees.

Young Socialists and Socialist Party members went down to support. Our slogan was 'build working-class struggle for socialist change to end climate change'. All our leaflets were taken.

We marched with the students to their rally. Speakers talked about fighting for a Green New Deal, with green jobs for energy workers.

Imran Mulla, a WQE college student, explained how climate activists had been listed as 'extremists' by the Tories' 'Prevent' scheme. This showed the rich and powerful fear an organised movement.

Leicester Young Socialists held a meeting after the march and four of the organisers came along. They wanted to discuss the way forward for the climate movement and how to build and widen the strikes.

The organisers were keen to link up with workers. The Socialist Party was able to put them in contact with University and College Union (UCU) strikers, re-starting their action on 20 February (see pages 6-7).

The National Education Union is striking again at WQE college, part of the national sixth-form strike against cuts (see pages 6-7). Young Socialists will be supporting their pickets, linking up with the climate strike organisers to unite workers and youth in action.

Tessa Warrington

Swansea: This is political!

Socialist Students and Young Socialists helped organise the February Youth Strike for Climate in Swansea. The monthly events still draw together young people and students.

Socialist Students and Young Socialists have helped build, prepare and run the climate strikes for a year now. And our slogan 'socialist change not climate change' was well received.

Scandalously, a small group of much older activists from Extinction Rebellion (XR) tried to use their banner to cover up the Young Socialists and trade union council banners. The latter co-hosted the event.

XR insist that these protests be 'apolitical'. But Socialist Students and Young Socialists rally speakers went down a storm when they called for workers' control and a democratic planned economy to save the planet.

Lots of young activists liked what we said. Several young protesters joined our discussion afterwards, including one joining the Socialist Party.

Gareth Bromhall

Cardiff: Capitalism blamed

150 young people marched from Cardiff City Hall to the National Assembly, where school students made passionate speeches on the megaphone.

The Socialist Party's analysis - placing the blame for environmental destruction firmly at the door of the capitalist system putting the need for profit above all else, and calling for democratic economic planning to head off the impending disaster - went down well.

Joe Fathallah

Sheffield: Real action to reach carbon target

The Sheffield protest was smaller than the last demo, when the UCU were on strike before the general election. But it was really good to see 400 young people not discouraged by Tory government (it's all they've ever known) and take to the streets to fight climate change.

Dozens signed our Socialist Party petition to Sheffield City Council demanding real action to achieve their stated aim of becoming carbon neutral by 2030.

■ Use council and mayoral powers to regulate bus services - we say regulation could be used as a step towards nationalisation and public ownership - to provide cheap, environmentally friendly public transport

■ Bring recycling services in-house

■ Scrap Amey PFI scheme that has axed thousands of roadside trees

Alistair Tice

Scotland: Escalate the strikes for the climate summit

Hundreds braved torrential rain in Glasgow for the climate strike.

Glasgow Socialist Students member Oisín Duncan spoke at the rally. He called for a mass strike in every school and college during the COP26 climate summit in the city in November.

Oisín raised the need for socialist change to end climate change. This includes nationalisation of the oil, gas and wider energy sector and a new workers party to fight for socialist policies.

Matt Dobson



London photo Ian Pattison

London climate stewards use undemocratic methods Socialist Students says democratise the movement

Helen Pattison
London Socialist Party

1,000 people was a slightly smaller turnout than some of the climate strikes, but the London protest still had a lot of energy, marching off quickly.

At first, the demonstration marched to the Home Office, but this wasn't actually explained to the majority of students. On previous protest, students have had to fight for the demonstration to go to Downing Street so students could oppose the prime minister.

Discussions are constantly happening on the demos and in classrooms in between the strikes, including whether we need to challenge the capitalist profit motive with socialist ideas to win.

Socialist Students is clear: a mass movement is necessary, one that challenges the drive by big business for profit at the expense of the environment.

Sadly some unelected stewards didn't agree. They told protesters

where to go, without any democratic discussion or debate.

Scandalously, stewards removed Socialist Students placards from people, so students had to defend their right to carry them. The stewards wanted to stop Socialist Students' open mic.

For a year students have been taking action and protesting in Parliament Square. But the structures for democratic discussion in the movement are missing.

Many of the demonstrations have turned into mass student assemblies, about tactics and political demands, thanks to Socialist Students' open mic. But students need the chance to put forward their ideas in between strikes as well.

That's why Socialist Students calls for the building of school students unions. They could democratically organise this movement and give students a voice and space to discuss the next steps.

Despite the anti-democratic actions of the stewards, 34 protesters bought a copy of the Socialist and nine wanted to know more about joining the Socialist Party.

YEMEN'S DESPERATE CIVIL WAR FUELLED BY IMPERIALISM AND REGIONAL POWERS

Only unified, revolutionary movement of working class and poor can end the turmoil

This article on Yemen by Socialist Party national committee member **Elaine Brunskill** is the fifth and final article of the series in the Socialist on countries experiencing wars and upheavals in the Middle East. Readers can view the other contributions to the series on socialistparty.org.uk

Yemen, bordered by Saudi Arabia and Oman, is the poorest of countries in the Arab world and has been ravaged by a continuing bloody civil war. Conditions are barbaric, leading Unicef to report: "No place in Yemen is safe for children", with at least one child dying every ten minutes.

Malnutrition is at an all-time high, with almost two million children acutely malnourished.

Figures published in 2018 by the United Nations (UN) highlight that at least 6,660 civilians have been killed, and that alongside the fighting a partial blockade has left 22 million in need of humanitarian aid. All this has created the conditions for an outbreak of cholera, which has affected 1.1 million people.

'Arab Spring'

Earlier, in 2011, inspired by the 'Arab Spring' uprisings and movements throughout north Africa, there were mass street protests in Yemen against high unemployment, poverty and government corruption. People were incensed by President Ali Abdullah Saleh's attempt to change the constitution to allow him to remain in power.

In 2014, the government's decision to slash fuel subsidies created a backlash, resulting in widespread protests.

The price of petrol increased by 60%, and diesel by 95%. Spiralling costs had knock-on effects, including farmers no longer ploughing their fields because of diesel prices, which led to sky-rocketing food prices.

In a country where almost 12.5



Protesters in central London demanding an end to UK government-approved arms sales to the murderous Saudi Arabia regime photo Alisdare Hickson/CC

million people, more than half the population, were already living in poverty, it was estimated that the decision to cut fuel subsidies pushed a further 500,000 below the headline.

Houthi rebellion

By September 2014 rebel Houthis had taken control of Sana'a, Yemen's capital city, forcing the government to flee. Houthis are Zaidi Shiite Muslims and the Houthi movement began in the early 1990s to "promote a Zaidi revival" and oppose Saudi influence.

A former MP, Hussein Badr al-Din al-Houthi, became its leader and in 2004 led an uprising against Ali Abdullah Saleh, but was soon killed by Yemeni government forces. Shiite Muslims are the minority in the Islamic world and Zaidis are a minority of this minority.

Initially, the Houthi were greeted with optimism by many Yemenis. However, as they began to consolidate their regime by the use of brutal repression, the situation in Sana'a has become desperate.

The Economist reports that Houthi militia have closed cafes, where men and women used to freely mix, and private primary schools have been told they must enforce the segregation of boys and girls (state schools already did). Also, on

a weekly basis, civil servants, university lecturers, and police are required to attend cultural sessions, where they must swear their allegiance to the Houthi movement.

Failure to do this convincingly can lead to being sent to indoctrination camps.

Yemen, like other Middle Eastern countries, has been subject to shifting patterns of alliances, and is awash with contradictions.

In an attempt to regain power that he had lost as a consequence of the 2011 Arab Spring, former president, Ali Abdullah Saleh, opportunistically sided with the Houthi rebels, who he had previously opposed.

This unity was fragile. In a later televised speech, in a bid to make peace with Saudi Arabia, Saleh called on Yemenis to rise up against the Houthi. This resulted in him being attacked and killed by Houthi fighters.

In 2015 Saudi Arabia formed a coalition of Arab states to defeat the Houthi and restore Yemen's government. This coalition has both weapons and intelligence supplied by the US.

Hypocritically, the UK government (the port city of Aden was a British colony for 130 years until

1967) boasts of being a major aid donor to Yemen, but is also the second largest exporter of weapons to the Saudi-led coalition. It has been estimated by the UN High Commission for Human Rights that Saudi-led air attacks account for almost two-thirds of reported civilian deaths.

Role of Saudi Arabia

The chaos created by civil war has been exacerbated by Saudi Arabia's involvement. Yemen's healthcare system is on the brink of collapse, and many Yemenis are too poor to access the centres which remain open. According to the UN many deaths are hidden, because very few families report home deaths.

Also, it has been estimated that over three million Yemenis have been forced out of their homes, seeking asylum elsewhere in the country, and a further 280,000 have fled the country. Al Jazeera news reported that those who are internally displaced are faced with wholly inadequate supplies of food and shelter.

To further add to this misery, Saudi Arabia has pressured aid groups to leave rebel-controlled areas of Yemen, citing the safety of aid workers. Yet in 2016 the Saudi regime's

bombing of a hospital run by Doctors Without Borders was responsible for 15 deaths, including staff members of the charity.

US imperialism also casts a long shadow across the Middle East, and since the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 the region has been in turmoil.

In Yemen this has been exacerbated by US operations within their borders against both al-Qa'ida and Isis. Alongside air attacks the US has admitted to deploying small numbers of troops on the ground within Yemen.

Adding to this toxic mix, in September 2019 al-Qa'ida forces in Southern Yemen seized control of a district in the Abyan province, which is the home town of the exiled Saudi-backed Yemeni President Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi. Al-Qa'ida has also launched attacks on Houthi rebels whom it regards as infidels.

Currently, Iran has been accused of arming Houthi rebels. Despite evidence to support this claim Iran denies this, but has suggested it is willing to send military advisors to support the Houthis.

Regional 'cold war'

From Saudi Arabia's point of view, events in Yemen are regarded as part of their 'cold war' with Iran. Last year's drone attacks on Saudi Arabia's Aramco oil refinery were claimed by the Houthi rebels. But the US and UK governments, and the Saudi regime, say Iran's revolutionary guards were behind the sophisticated attacks.

For Yemenis, the civil war has brought misery and despair. They face attacks on all sides, and should not put their trust into any of the current key players who all have their own imperialist or sectarian agenda.

Ultimately, for the working class and poor, there is a need to build their own forces to cut across religious, tribal, and other sectarian divides. This needs to be done in their local communities, within trade unions, and with the development of a mass workers' party which fights for a socialist programme which can begin to develop a way forward for the masses.

Presently, such developments, amid the carnage of an ongoing civil war, may seem to be an impossible scenario. However, in 2017 over 100 security guards protested outside the parliament buildings demanding more than one year's unpaid wages.

They had been employed by energy giant Total and G4S prior to these companies abandoning most of their economic activities in Yemen in 2015. Their campaign was supported by the Socialist Party and the National Shop Stewards Network in Britain, and by the Committee for a Workers' International.

Moreover, the spark for future changes could swiftly develop on the back of future revolutionary waves across the Middle East, building on the 2011 Arab Spring.

This has occurred in countries such as Lebanon, which had previously endured 15 years of civil war, but today is seeing youthful, non-sectarian mass protests against a rotten and corrupt capitalist establishment.

Unite union executive council elections

Build a fighting trade union movement



Kevin Parslow Secretary Unite LE1228 (personal capacity)

The Tories can be defeated if trade unions take action in defence of jobs, services and the right to strike itself

Balloting for the Unite union's executive council (EC) elections will be held between 25 March and 29 April. Socialist Party members in the union are supporting the United Left list of candidates or 'slate'.

One of our members, Mick Joyce, is standing in the engineering, manufacturing and steel sector. Mick has a great record as a shop steward, leading the successful strike at Kone in Gateshead in 2015. The full slate is at unitedleft.org.uk.

The key task facing the new EC will be strengthening more militant path taken by the union since the election of Len McCluskey as general secretary in 2010.

In this time, Len has refused to write 'repudiation letters' to employers disavowing unofficial industrial action (a policy first proposed by Socialist Party members in Unite).

The union has also taken out the words 'within the law' from its rules, removing a potential constraint to the pursuit of disputes. Unite organises substantially more ballots and strikes than all other unions combined.

This support for workers has been underlined by victories this year at Bromley Libraries against outsourcer GLL and in the Hackney Council SEND transport dispute, both in London. The Birmingham bin workers' victory last year is another recent example of a determined defence of workers' rights (articles on these disputes can be read at socialistparty.org.uk).

However, where Unite has fallen short is in building a generalised campaign against successive Tory-led governments and their austerity programme.

While Unite was at the forefront during the pensions dispute of



The Tories can be defeated if trade unions take action in defence of jobs, services and the right to strike itself

2011-12 - and continued action in some sectors after some other unions had pulled out - organising a determined national campaign of political and industrial struggles has been lacking.

Yet this is what workers will be demanding if we are to halt the proposals of Johnson's Tory government, given their majority in parliament, which include more anti-union laws, specifically targeted at Unite members in transport alongside the rail unions.

But the Tories can be defeated if trade unions take action in defence of jobs, services and the right to strike itself.

Fight the Blairites

Politically, Unite backed Jeremy Corbyn as Labour leader, and generally defended him from the attacks of the right. Now, Unite must actively oppose any moves to the right inside Labour.

Unite should have actively pushed with Labour for mandatory re-selection of Labour MPs - again, a policy proposed at Unite's policy conference by a Socialist Party member - as a warning shot against the Blairites actively opposed to Corbyn and the Labour membership.

Socialist Party members have been to the fore in fighting for Unite to demand that Labour councils refuse to implement Tory cuts. We played a central role in the London and Eastern regional committee passing a motion supporting the

anti-cuts stand of Enfield Labour councillor Tolga Aramaz.

The newly-elected EC, and Unite members as a whole, will be faced with the likely retirement of Len McCluskey in the next couple of years. Already a number of candidates on the left have been touted as his successor.

The United Left will have an election process to choose its candidate but others may decide to run independently. This may pose problems if the right wing within the union chooses to stand a candidate.

In the 2017 election, right-wing Gerard Coyne, then the West Midlands regional secretary, came

within 6,000 votes of winning in a union of over a million workers. Any right-wing candidate would stand a chance of success against a split candidacy. This would be a huge blow to the development of a fighting trade union movement.

Socialist Party members in Unite recently discussed our attitude to the general secretary candidates. While not yet endorsing any candidate, we concluded that candidates need to put forward a programme to enthuse and mobilise the union's membership to struggle against capitalism and its political representatives. That would be decisive for the workers in Unite.

Our programme includes the following demands:

- No return to partnership with the bosses
- Fight to prevent workplace closures and redundancies - including union inspection of company accounts. Let's see where the profits have gone. Nationalise, under democratic workers' control and management, company plants threatened with closures and widespread redundancies. Integrate these into a socialist plan of production
- Maintain the position of not repudiating unofficial action
- Unite must take the lead in fighting for coordinated action against the Tories, their cuts and anti-union laws
- Unite should call for the Trade Union Congress (TUC) and other unions to oppose the Tories' planned new anti-union laws targeted at rail and transport unions. If the TUC does not act, Unite must approach the other willing unions, especially those in rail and transport, and including the Communication Workers Union. A date must be named for a Saturday demonstration, in London, built for by a campaign of rallies throughout the country to give confidence to workers to take industrial action
- Use the union's industrial strength to build links and solidarity between its different industrial sectors
- Democratise the union - extend the election of officers from just the general secretary, beginning with assistant general secretaries, national industrial sector and equality officers and regional secretaries. For an annual policy conference on a branch delegation basis; biennial elections throughout the union from shop stewards to EC. The election of full-time union officials. Union officials to receive a wage no higher than the average workers' wage
- Fight to transform the Labour Party - a refoundation as a mass anti-austerity, workers' party with a socialist programme and repealing all Tory anti-union laws. Enact Unite's policy of supporting mandatory re-selection
- Unite must call on Labour councillors to stop passing on Tory cuts and urge Unite members in councils to move no-cuts budgets in Labour-run authorities

EDUCATION WORKERS STRIKE BACK

photo Gary Freeman



Socialist Party members in UCU

The first wave of strike action in November 2019, involving 48,000 University and College Union (UCU) members in higher education saw some of our strongest ever picket lines.

Combining the two disputes - pay/conditions and pensions - maximised the impact of the action and brought members affected by different aspects of marketisation together under one banner.

The strength of this action is reflected by the 14 institutions that met the anti-union 50% voting turnout threshold in reballots, meaning that they can also now join in this

round of action.

The bold and fighting strategy displayed in last term's eight-days of action (as well as the 2018 pensions strike) has attracted new members to the union, particularly those most exploited by management.

The action, which highlights different aspects of exploitation at universities, has also received wide support from students - many also affected by poor pay and working conditions - with many student unions voting to endorse and support the strikes.

As a result of the action, bosses' organisation UCEA was forced to the negotiating table and has now accepted that pay inequality, workload and casualisation are national

as well as local issues. This sets a new precedent and means that we can negotiate on these issues nationally. But we still have a long way to go. The recent offer made by UCEA fell woefully short of any meaningful change from the point of the employer.

Management claim it is unaffordable to increase pay, but university income, surpluses and reserves have all increased. The increased workload, reliance on casualised staff and below-inflation pay rises are all part of the bosses' deliberate strategy to slash staffing costs while increasing 'productivity'.

A victory on pay is the most concrete way of ensuring the university management conceded

to improving staff conditions and our share of income. This is the most concrete of the 'four fights' demand and is the one where the least progress has been made.

Winning on pay would provide a lead to workers in other sectors wanting to fight low and stagnant pay. As part of this we call upon the UCU to work with other education unions to call a national education demo.

This should be in defence of education, linking our campaign with students, education unions, parents and school students. Just last week, thousands of National Education Union members were on strike in sixth-form colleges in relation to pay and working conditions.

>continued on page 7

CWU: Build for a massive Yes vote in Royal Mail



photo Paul Mattsson

The Communication Workers Union (CWU) is rebaloting members in Royal Mail over management bullying and the company reneging on the 'Four Pillars' agreement - which established employment, standard of living and retirement security, and a shorter working week.

Last year the High Court dismissed the appeal by the CWU against the scandalous decision to stop postal workers taking national strike, despite winning its strike ballot with an incredible 97% yes vote on a 76% turnout.

Gary Clark, Socialist Party member and branch secretary of CWU Scotland no.2 branch, says: "To be clear management are out to destroy the power of the CWU and must feel strengthened by the election of the Tory government. And we are clearly in for the fight of our lives.

"We must now get another massive Yes vote and get our members up for the battle ahead."

The CWU is organising gate meetings at Royal Mail depots around the country on 25 February.

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