UCU STRIKE: BOSSES ON THE RUN

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

See more on page 3
May’s EU speech kicks the can down the road

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

What we think

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

In reality the goal of Theresa May’s speech was responding to Jeremy Corbyn’s speech days earlier (see ‘Corbyn’s customs union dividing line: now stand firm for pro-worker Brexit’ at socialistparty.org.uk), and above all aiming to quieten the civil war in the Tory Party. Momentarily it appeared to have achieved that. The same thing happened after her last speech. Within weeks the fighting again reached fever pitch. This is yet another fudge; kicking the can no more than a few paltry metres further down the road.

The pro-Brexit wing of the Tory Party expressed their satisfaction because May reiterated that after Brexit Britain would not be a member of an EU customs union or of the single market. Instead she argued that Britain would be able to maintain a high level of access to the single market by agreeing to continue to follow many of its rules. In addition she acknowledged that in a number of manufacturing sectors Britain would have to pay for associate membership of EU agencies. All of this was immediately dismissed by EU spokespeople as ‘not solving any of the problems’.

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

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

Collapse

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

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

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

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

His speech, however, pointed in a different direction - stating that he would not countenance a deal that left Britain as a passive recipient of rules decided elsewhere by others. He said he would demand “protections, clarifications or exemptions where necessary in relation to privatisation and public service competition directives, state aid and procurement rules, and the posted workers directive.”

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

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

Italy

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

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

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

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

See an article on the Italian election results on socialistworld.net soon
National lecturers’ pension strike continues

Liverpool

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

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

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

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

Currently the university employers are complaining loudly at the amounts they have to put into the fund to allow it to meet its commitments, while keeping 2011, when they put no cash into it.

One way or another, it will have to be allowed to the tiny photocopier room, to discuss how the strike was going.

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

Roger Bannister

Leicester

At 10am on 5 March, in solidarity with the UCU strike, Leicester Socialist Students and a number of other societies made our way into the Fielding Johnson building on our campus, executing our plan to get inside and finding our way through the building to the management office floor. Despite a tumultuous start with security, we well and truly secured our occupation. Through the medium of disruption, very quickly management conceded to a meeting over the demands we issued, but until the meeting we refused to leave and maintained our occupation. No meeting came and the vice-chancellor left the building through the back entrance in the evening. We settled in for the night, not budging an inch and receiving food delivered by the vast number of supporters outside.

Throughout the night, we received and sent messages of solidarity with other student occupations across the country including those in Bristol, Bath and Exeter. Alongside this, we refused offers by the management and security of hot-food paid for by them. We remained in occupation, even having an early morning visit from the vice-chancellor.

We refuse to leave until, at the very least, the meeting has reached a conclusion we are satisfied with. As we go to press striking lecturers rallied outside in solidarity with us!

Taran Spivey

Sheffield

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

The strike was especially strong in the Department of Politics, cancelling all but one seminar on the first day of the strike. To build student support for striking lecturers, Sheffield Socialist Students, in conjunction with other campus left groups, initiated a picket tour for the first day of the strike. Striking lecturers were heartened by chants of “UCU, here we say, we support you all the way!” from 50 enthusiastic students.

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

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

Chris McAndrew

York

At the University of York, the numbers on the physical pickets have grown despite the heavy snow and freezing conditions.

As someone who has joined my lecturers on the pickets, it was warming to give them my solidarity in exchange for all of the support that they have given me during my undergraduate, and now postgraduate, degree.

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

Katie Smith

Leeds

UCU members at Leeds University are still going strong.

Socialist Party members have visited the picket lines every day of the strike - 5 March, the beginning of the third week of the dispute, seeing the largest attendance yet, with a big student mobilisation in support of the strikers.

Leeds Students Support UCU (LSSU), which Socialist Students is taking part in, submitted an open letter signed by over 700 to the vice-chancellor, Sir Alan Langlands, demanding he joins the other VCs supporting their staff and looking for alternative ways to secure the future of the pension scheme.

Although publicly saying he has no influence over the situation, Langlands has imposed ‘double deductions’ for staff taking action short of strike, with staff losing 25% of their pay on non-strike days.

Iain Dalton

Newcastle

In the second week of strike action the mood in Newcastle was defiant. Strikers weathered blizzard conditions - they are determined to win. To help keep warm there was music and dancing. The previous week, to help keep their spirits up, they’d had a bake off.

A constant stream of passing students wished the strikers well. But it’s not just students who are supporting the strike. Bus drivers and ambulance crew have beeped as they pass.

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Bradford

Bradford was one of four universities where UCU members joined the dispute over the USS pensions scheme on 6 March.

Staff here had to ballot after narrowly missing out on reaching the 50% turnout threshold imposed by the Tories’ latest anti-union laws.

UCU members told us that picketing numbers were up on previous strikes. Many staff were incensed that management is intending to impose 100% wage deductions for staff who won’t reschedule lectures.

Some students joined the picket lines, chanting: ‘What do we want? Pensions! Where do we want them? When we retire!’ Socialist Party members got a warm reception from pickets, grateful to welcome support on a cold, windy day.

Iain Dalton

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

By Scott Jones
Southampton Socialist Party

The snow has now mostly melted away. But the chaos is still fresh in our minds. It’s true the weather was severe, particularly in Scotland. But it had been the bosses’ callous pursuit of profit and the inability of Britain’s averagely-paid infrastructure workers to respond to the need that was truly harrowing.

The bosses, of course, have nothing to lose. Their power is entrenched in the system of private property and the rulers of the world’s richest country have absolute authority to impose whatever they wish. They do not own the weather, nor do they own the people they exploit.

However, it also showed the capacity of the people to organise. Low-paid workers across Britain were forced to risk their lives to defend the right of others to move due to some homes relying to pay workers who couldn’t make it.

Big businesses including Lidl, B&Q, Marks & Spencer, KFC and McDonald’s forced staff to come in to keep their stores open in order to maintain their profits. The bosses are the only reason their restaurant did not eventually close was due to agitation from workers.

Unions organised at six KFCs in London, West London borough council passed a motion that all workers should be paid the national living wage as KFC workers took action. The number of KFC workers taking action last year has risen significantly, and this is a welcome development.

Meanwhile, on the rails, many rail users in and around Southampton experienced a very cold and windy day. The weather certainly didn’t make things any easier but the bosses and managers of the industry tried everything to make life even worse for the workers. Credit to those who held their ground and stood up to the bosses.

So what’s next? A council leader suspended. An MP arrested. The Attorney General suspended. A boycott on one company. The bosses’ ruthless pursuit of profit and the inability of Britain’s averagely-paid infrastructure workers to respond to the need that was truly harrowing.

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

By Scott Jones

High street retailers Toys R Us and Maplin have gone under, with a number of other familiar names like Mothercare contacted to follow. At least 3,200 jobs could go as a result of these companies entering administration. This pain thousands more shop workers, mostly women, on a scrap heap which already includes - among others - denominant who lost their jobs when the Woolworths retail chain went into liquidation in 1983. And just last year, BHS, once the high street icon, hit the scrap heap which already includes - among others - denominant who lost their jobs when the Woolworths retail chain went into liquidation in 1983.

The BHS collapse meant the loss of a high street icon, and the jobs of many members of retail and distribution union Usdaw. Following this, Usdaw conference passed a resolution calling on the government to bring companies to a similar situation into public ownership. But where the justice has made to the bosses, is the government going to make call for public ownership and no firings? It’s nine to one every time. There is enough money in some of these companies, particularly at Christmas, to give new jobs. The 30% discount selling speaks volumes. There is enough money in some of these companies, particularly at Christmas, to give new jobs. The 30% discount selling speaks volumes. There is enough money in some of these companies, particularly at Christmas, to give new jobs. The 30% discount selling speaks volumes. There is enough money in some of these companies, particularly at Christmas, to give new jobs. The 30% discount selling speaks volumes. 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There is enough money in some of these companies, particularly at Christmas, to give New York.


Women’s income inequality is worst in their countries, followed by finance, according to figures reported to the government’s pay gap website. Over 85% of companies pay women less than men, Financial Times report.

Budget airline EasyJet has a pay gap of 46%. The same attitudes to underpay workers - research shows, on average corporation pays 26% less than women.

Nine in ten murdered women killed by domestic violence

There were 86 women murdered in England, Wales and Northern Ireland in 2016, according to Women’s Aid. Of these, 84 died at the hands of a partner or ex-partner. In a third of all domestic violence cases, the relationship was still ongoing at the time of the murder.

Figures collected by Counting Dead Women suggest a woman in England, Wales and Northern Ireland dies from domestic violence every 49 hours between January and September in the UK. In the year to March 2017, 1,130 women and 71,000 women were victims of domestic violence in the UK.

Socialist Party members play a leading role in campaigning against sexual violence, and in 2013, the Socialist Party launched the ‘Kids’ Anti- Slashers’ campaign.

One in ten women working currently harassed at work

A University of Sydney study published in March found that one in ten women under 40 in Australia are experiencing ongoing harassment at work. A third also feel their boss believes they are being harassed.

International Women’s Day 2018

Women’s opposition is far from beaten. The headlines can often seem grim. But, following in the footsteps of generations of women and workers before, the struggle for women’s liberation is alive and well. See our International Women’s Day statement, ‘Capitalism oppresses women - fight for socialism’, pages 8 to 10.
Whole lotta shakin’ goin’ on in Merseyside DOO dispute

Hugh Caffrey

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

Cost-cutting management, in cahoots with the Tory government and local Labour councils, want to axe the role of safety-critical guards and move to driver-only operation (DOO), which is both unwanted and unsafe. Arriva refuses to even meet with the RMT union, while paying scabs bonuses for crossing picket lines. Merseyrail, under the direction of local Labour councillors, continues to spin and posture while city region mayor Steve Rotheram fools no one with his continued pretence that it’s nothing to do with him.

Support

The mood of pickets was high because of overwhelming public support for them and for renationalising the railways. Pickets at Birkenhead Central were pleased that Jeremy Corbyn has retweeted campaign material by the RMT about the need to keep the guards - the first time he has supported the guards’ dispute. But they were even more pleased that ‘Elvis’ joined the picket line (see photo). Socialist Party members distributed a leaflet encouraging RMT members to consider standing for the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition in May’s council elections against the Labour politicians driving DOO, with several strikers saying they were interested in doing so.

Hull workers united against bosses

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

Called by Hull Trades Council, the rally and demonstration through the pedestrian areas of the city centre was supported by striking workers, fellow trade unionists and members of the public. A bucket collection of passers-by added to the donations already raised by local trade unions. Hull National Education Union (NEU) has already donated £1,000 and East Riding NEU has donated £250. Other unions meeting this week have promised money.

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

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

Mick Whale
Hull Trades Council president

FCC Environment strike solid

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

This is an inspirational strike by Unison members who are battling to win decent sick-pay for all of the workers at the Wilmington plant in Hull. A feature of the dispute is the solidarity from council bin workers from Hull and the East Riding councils. Not one council bin wagon has crossed the picket line.

The picket line has been well supported by trade unionists. Labour council candidates have also visited the picket line, as has Councillor Alan Clarke, the portfolio holder for waste collection in Hull, and Emma Hardy, MP for Hull West and Hessle. This support has been welcomed, but the strikers need Councillor Clarke to put pressure on FCC to meet the just demands of the strikers. Workers will increasingly wonder why Hull Labour council is contracting its recycling out to such a company.

FCC is a multinational company with an HQ in Madrid. It has made huge profits but clearly doesn’t care a jot for its workforce. The striking workers know they are in for a long struggle but are determined to carry on until they win.

Please send messages of support to Adrian Kennett (secretary of Hull Unison) and Mick Whale (secretary of Hull Trades Council). Cheques should be made payable to Hull Unison.

Both messages and cheques should be sent to Unison, Town Hall Chambers 39, Alfred Gelder Street, Hull HU1 2AG

Email hullnut@hullnut.karoo.co.uk and a.kennett@unionhull.org.uk

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Unite London Print Branch sends solidarity on International Women’s Day and greetings to TUC women’s conference - for real equality - and a world without oppression and harassment

Tommy Murphy - secretary  Mick Cotter - chair

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

Marion Lloyd
PCS NEC and chair Left Unity

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

Feedback indicates solid support for Left Unity motions to the annual meetings.

Nominations for the 2018-19 NEC and chair Left Unity indicate continued support for the national executive committee (the Democracy Alliance slate). This includes Janice Godrich for president and Fran Heathcote for vice-president.

Ballot papers for the union’s national executive election will be sent out in mid-April.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Local Labour politicians have joined the picket line (see photo)!

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The Socialist Inbox
Do you have something to say?
Send your news, views and criticism in no more than 150 words to editors@socialistparty.org.uk or if you’re not online, Socialist Inbox, PO Box 24697, London E11 1YD

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN’S DAY

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

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

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

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

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

And thinking of my co-workers who changed their plans to ensure our service users were never abandoned.

- or if you’re not online, Socialist Inbox, PO Box 24697, London E11 1YD

must be cautious of the “given” and remember that in a “democratic” system it is a right.
Denise Tooley-Onkonkwo Mansfield

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

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

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

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

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

Moir McLeod

Vote ‘given’?
It’s difficult as a woman to be faced by your own oppression. I find myself all straight-backed and indignant even thinking about it. Even more so when we are told that it was 100 years since some women were “given” the vote. Given! Like it was a nice box of chocolates for just being us!

We struggled, we fought, we campaigned. We debated, we suffered… We weren’t given it, we demanded and took it.

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

Nadia Bromley Derby

Women’s prison
The local paper in Whistable reported on a “cooked solicitor and his wife” who stole several thousand pounds from clients. The woman was spared jail because of the effect on the couple’s children.

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

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

This year, in marking International Women’s Day, the effects of sending women, especially mothers, to prison should be highlighted.

In 2007 the Prison Reform Trust estimated 18,000 children are separated from their mothers each year by sending women to prison.

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

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

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

Delia Hazrat Whitstable

Alienation, misogyny
Iain Dato’s article in the last Socialist, “What’s behind the surge in eating disorders?”, made important points about the material hurdles capitalism puts in the way of healthy eating. But it’s also worth expanding on his point about “the general context of misogyny and alienation under capitalism.”

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

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

Women are shouldering 85% of benefit cuts, according to a 2016 report by the Fair Deal for Women charity coalition. Austerity is scrapping public sector jobs - mainly women’s. It is closing women’s refuges. Prominent figures and institutions continue to attack women’s rights and social standing worldwide.

So are these figures any wonder? Capitalist society robs ordinary people of full control of their lives in every sphere, from work to home and beyond.

Manxists call it ‘alienation’. It is doubly true for women due to capitalism’s enduring sexism, part of its foundations.

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

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

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

Art Clements
Manor Park, east London

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CAPTURERS OF WOMEN: FIGHT FOR SOCIALISM!

International Women's Day 2018

This year the young women of the past century dawned, with the twenty first century dawned, when the lives of women - fight for women's rights. This is the inevitable result of women fighting against racism and every form of oppression, not least the light of women's rights.

This is why International Women's Day, every year, a century after it was first initiated in the United States, is more important than ever. Attempts to undermine the rights of women - in capitalist countries, as the result of the capitalist class people, millions of women and men will be taking part in strike action called by Solidarity

ecretariat of the Socialist Party's sister party in Spain) plays a leading role.

The final death knell to the fairy tale of women's progress in Europe was the 2008 world economic crisis. The aftermath of the world economic crisis has been shattered by the growing prosperity and gender discrimination which remains embedded in such a society, among those with less power than them. Sexual oppression is deeply intrinsic to the structures of capitalism and in its current form, is more changeable: for the majority of humankind, it did not exist. Male dominance over women has been maintained for 10,000 years. It is intrinsically linked to the structures of the family nonetheless, in different ways. In Europe were the sick, and children and children and children have been hurt by the inequality of class society.

Sexual oppression is deeply ingrained, but it is inseparable from such a society, among those with less power than them. Virtually every capitalist institution - from the media, to the major corporations, to parliaments, to companies, including a complete ban on abortion. Following the appalling death of Sandra Bland in prison in 2015, after she was released from arrest, she has been a groundswell of rage. The movement against the oppression that women - like the par-
Continued from previous page

against their own specific oppression and sexual harassment.

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

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

Socialist feminism

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

For the countless millions of people facing sexual harassment in their workplace worldwide, the single thing that would most empower them to fight back would be to part of a collective organisation involving a majority of their workmates - a fighting trade union - prepared to back them up. On a broader scale the working class needs mass parties, politically armed with a socialist programme, which puts fighting for gender equality at the centre of their programme, that safeguards the environment and lays the basis for establishing genuine equality for all in a world without class division and war.

We fight for:

- No to all discrimination on the grounds of race, gender, disability, sexuality, age, and all other forms of prejudice
- For a mass campaign, spearheaded by the workers' movement, against sexual harassment, violence and all forms of sexual discrimination
- For fighting trade unions, democratically controlled by their members
- For mass parties of the working class with socialist programmes, including the fight for gender equality

A mass struggle for equal pay, as part of the fight for a living wage for all linked to a shorter working week with no loss of pay
- No to all cuts. Decent jobs, pay, and housing for all. For massive expansion of public services
- For maternity and child benefits that reflect the real cost of bringing up a child
- The right to paid parental leave
- The provision of high-quality flexible public childcare facilities available to every child
- For a woman's right to choose.
- Freely available high-quality contraception and fertility treatment for all who want it. For the right to abortion on demand
- Public ownership of the pharmaceutical industry
- Bringing the major corporations and banks into public ownership under democratic workers control and management, with compensation paid only on the basis of proven need
- A democratic socialist plan of production based on the interests of the overwhelming majority of people, implemented in a way that safeguards the environment and lays the basis for establishing genuine equality for all in a world without class division and war.

WHAT YOU THOUGHT
AFTER WEINSTEIN: FIGHTING SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN ENTERTAINMENT

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

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

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

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

I suggested to my members that I have a word with him, mentioning no names, to get him to stop. But at the time he was dangling over us the possibility of finding funding to tour the show. This would have meant extending the precarious employment of the whole company by weeks or maybe more.

Fears

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

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

Equity's report asks casting directors to challenge harassment and bullying. And their union should back them in doing so - as the report also promises. However, it is not enough, as it implies, to limit this to legal action. Court cases can be frustrating and difficult to prove. And the process is long. Artists may well have moved on to multiple different gigs before it concludes.

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

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

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

A massive expansion in arts funding and, publicly owned, democratically controlled arts facilities, could help free entertainers from dependency on the impresarios. Equity's new 'arts policy and campaign working party' should include principles like this in its proposals to the union's governing council.

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

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

Trade unionists should challenge harassment and bullying. And their union should back them in doing so - as the report also promises. However, it is not enough, as it implies, to limit this to legal action. Court cases can be frustrating and difficult to prove. And the process is long. Artists may well have moved on to multiple different gigs before it concludes.

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The Socialist communications team writing for this article of support and for all your readers' letters which really lift me. I cannot reply to all of them, but over time I will try.

I have never been in trouble with the police in my life. It was my first time in court and my first time in prison. It is tough in here. I get one and a half hours out of my cell. However, I have put down for education, work and use of gym which are outside of association time. The prison officers are OK, but I think under a lot of pressure.

I was proud of TUSC's campaign against the closure of Moorsways swimming pool and took a petition along with me to show it as an example of what we had done. I never asked people to sign it, I do think this is political, but I will not be broken by this and I will still campaign for a socialist society. I have been discussing the ideas of socialism with different inmates. I had to tell them my side of the story as they thought I was an MP done for fiddling taxes, but now they say they see me as a political prisoner. Also thanks to the TUSC national steering committee and the Socialist Party for their support. This has also affected my wife Magdalena as she is now on her own. Socialist Party members and friends are helping her. She has been a bedrock of support to me.

Yours in solidarity,
Chris Fernandez

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Do you have something to say?
Salford NURSERIES CONSULTATION DELAYED AS MAYOR PLEDGES TO ‘FIGHT FOR THE FIVE’

Mhairi Black
Labour MP, Political Secretary to Mayor

48 fully staffed units from the Hands Off HRI campaign linked to the fiercely cold and snowy weather as fans to mobilise against a chance from Manchester to London to meet with Labour leader and shadow health secretary Jonathan Ashworth on 28 March. We had a local ITV reporter with us to report on the day, and the BBC also showed footage of the campaigners in their local news.

Furthermore, after making this pledge, Denton and other support

Counselling nurses have called a...
Eastern Gouta, outside Damascus, is “hell on earth,” according to United Nations (UN) chief Antonio Guterres. Nearly 400,000 civilians have been under siege in this rebel enclave since 2013. The day after the UN decision to organise a ceasefire, bombing continued.

Over 700 people have been killed and many thousands wounded in recent weeks. A doctor told the BBC his hospital has “no electricity, no medication, no oxygen, no medical aid, no antibiotics”.

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

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

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

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

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

The conflict revolves around how global and regional powers will secure peace have stepped up the war. The subsequent focus on fighting Isis and Russia’s military intervention in Syria since the autumn of 2015, restored Bashar al-Assad’s regime.

**Influence**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Read article in full on socialistworld.net
Japan - toxic legacy of the Fukushima disaster

In September last year, a court ruling forced Tepco to pay meagre additional compensation of 375 million yen (£2.5 million) to 42 evacuees - on top of the 500 million yen (£3.3 million) that a court had already ordered both the state and Tepco to pay out to the victims in compensation, due to the failure of both to enforce or implement safety measures.

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

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

Despite massive opposition to nuclear power, plants in Fukushima prefecture - which houses more reactors than any of Japan’s 47 prefectures - have seen multiple reactors owned by the Kansai Electric Power Company (Kepco) resume operation. The anti-nuclear movement has already drawn huge numbers from across many sections of society; from young people, to trade unions, and citizens’ groups.

The Fukushima disaster highlighted how the interests of big business will always take precedence over human life

For the class struggle in Japan, the need to link the anti-nuclear power movement to the need to break with capitalism will be vital.

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

As capitalism dominates the globe, the struggle for genuine socialism must be international. The Socialist Party is part of the Committee for a Workers’ International (CWI), a socialist international that organises in over 40 countries.

Our demands include:

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

- **WORK AND INCOME**
  - Trade union struggle to increase the minimum wage to £10 an hour without exemptions as an immediate step towards a real living wage. For an annual increase in the minimum wage linked to average earnings. 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.
  - Reject ‘workfare’. For the right to decent benefits, education, training, or a job, without compulsion. Scrap the anti-trade union laws! For fighting trade unions, democratically controlled by their members. Full-time union officials to be regularly elected and receive no more than a worker’s wage. Support the National Shop Stewards Network.
  - A maximum 35-hour week with no loss of pay.

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

- **RIGHTS**
  - Oppose discrimination on the grounds of race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and all other forms of prejudice.
  - Repeal all laws that trample on 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.
  - Fight to the bosses’ neoliberal European Union and single market. For a socialist Europe and a socialist world!

Join the fightback! Join the Socialists!

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Alison Hill

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

It’s time to put a stop to these companies bleeding the NHS dry.

The Socialist Party campaigns not just to defend the NHS, but to rebuild it without the vultures of big business flying around.

No to privatisation and PFI.

Renationalise all privatised health services, including social care. Nationalise the big pharmaceutical and other big health companies, with compensation paid only on the basis of proven need.

Fully fund all services and run them under accountable, democratic committees that include representatives of service workers and users.

For a massive programme of recruitment and training to staff the NHS properly with workers on good wages and conditions.

For a socialist NHS to provide for everyone’s health needs - free at the point of use and under democratic control.

Build the fightback!

For an urgent meeting of the Trade Union Congress, trade unions and Labour Party to set a date for the next national Saturday demonstration, bringing together the issues of the NHS crisis, austerity and pay - bring forward the march planned for 12 May.

Coordinate strike ballots and action over pay across different unions.

Get the Tories out! For a programme of mass action to force a general election.