

COVID SPREADING POVERTY RISING RICH GET RICHER

ISAI PRIYA

There are many crises facing workers and young people. The health crisis, with our NHS stretched to breaking point, pay cuts, job losses, and poverty.

We have heard many times from Boris Johnson and other right-wing politicians that we are all in this together. But are we? Throughout the pandemic, it has been one rule for them and another for us.

As parents, we have had to fight for food for our children. As workers we have had to fight for health and safety in our workplaces. As young people we see our future destroyed before our eyes.

We have watched MPs allow themselves to claim up to £10,000 for working at home while the rest of us got a 20% pay cut, and public sector workers a pay freeze.

The misery of the pandemic

FIGHT FOR SOCIALISM



clearly isn't universal. Oxfam calculates that the combined wealth of the ten wealthiest men in the world increased by £400 billion from mid-March to the end of 2020 - more than enough to vaccinate everyone in the world against Covid and reverse the increase in poverty it has caused!

The total wealth of billionaires hit £8.8 trillion in December - the same amount the G20 governments have spent on Covid recovery.

The Covid-19 pandemic has graphically exposed the class inequality that exists within capitalism. By 2030, without 'drastic action', half a billion more people than at the start of the pandemic could be living in poverty - 'living' on less than £4 a day.

An urgent fightback is needed to save our lives and livelihoods. We should not be punished for the actions and policies of pro-big business governments and the greed of profit-driven multinational companies.

Take the wealth from the 1% and reinvest it into funding our healthcare, public services and decent jobs and pay for all. Fight for a socialist alternative to the capitalist profit system.

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

Biden, Labour, and the need for a new mass workers' party



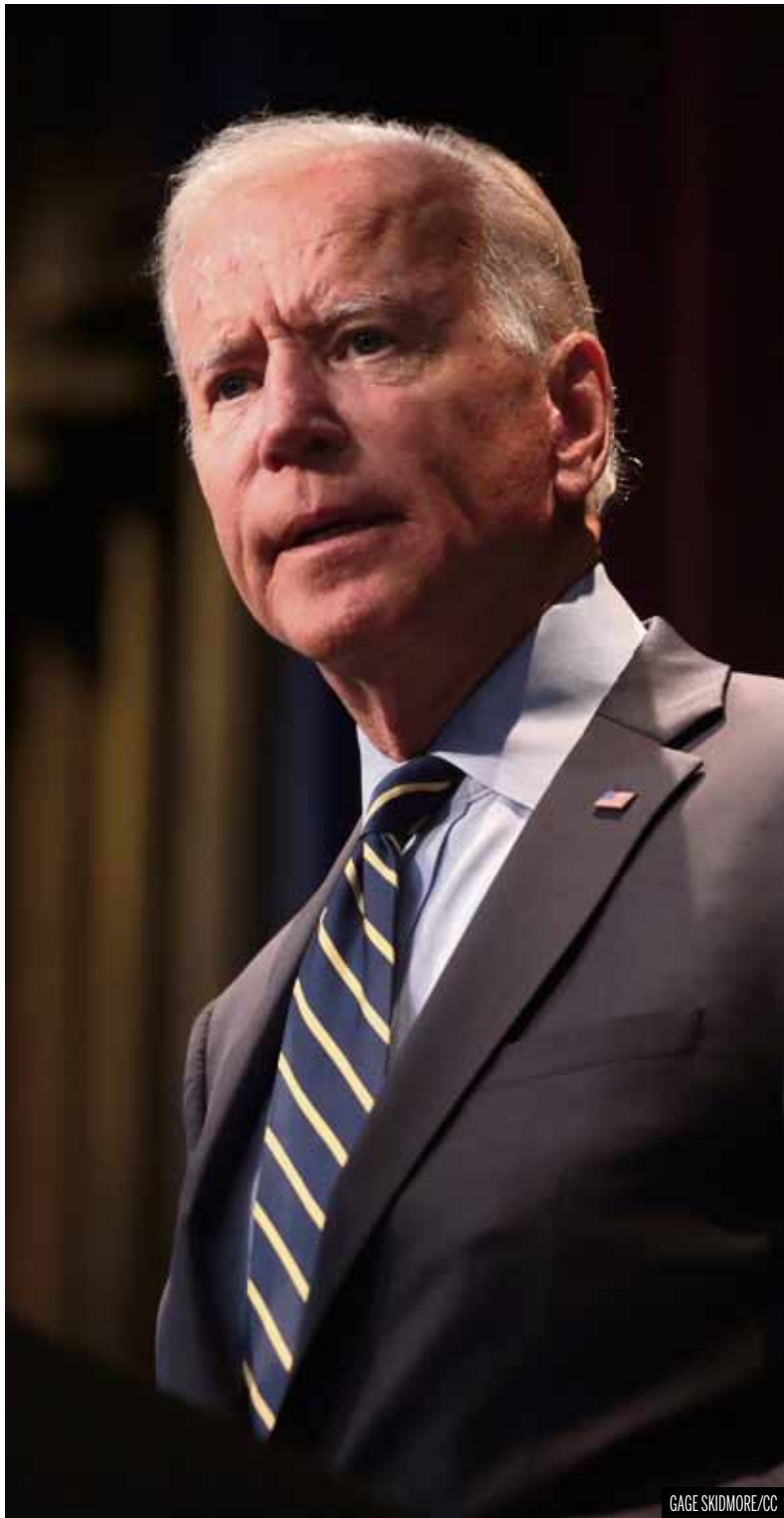
With Trump gone, capitalist governments worldwide are queuing up to establish friendly relations with Joe Biden, the new US president. While it is a bit awkward for Boris Johnson, who was once described by Biden as Trump's "physical and emotional clone", it is clear that Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer thinks he can gain kudos by praising the new presidency to the skies.

He has been joined by Lisa Nandy, shadow foreign secretary, who described Biden as a "woke guy" who "is an inspiration for Labour", who "mentioned the trans community in his victory speech" and "defended the Black Lives Matter movement". After Trump's reactionary, divisive, blatantly sexist and racist presidency, there is undoubtedly widespread relief among workers and young people that he has gone. However, the lavish praise Starmer and co. are heaping on Biden is yet another indication of their desperation to show the capitalist class that - unlike the previous leader Jeremy Corbyn - they can be relied on to defend the interests of the elite.

Billionaire's candidate
Biden was the chosen candidate of the big majority of Wall Street and the billionaires in the US. He got, for example, more than twice as much as Trump in donations from billionaires. His party, the Democrats, has been a party of big business throughout its history and, given the crisis in the Republican Party, is now their favoured choice.

It's true that there is a left wing of the Democrats, as shown by Bernie Sanders running for the Democratic nomination for the second time, describing himself as a 'democratic socialist' and calling for 'political revolution'. However, the Democratic establishment was determined to prevent Sanders winning the nomination, coming behind Biden as - above all - the means of defeating Bernie. Mistakenly, instead of running as an independent as a step towards the development of a workers' party in the US, Sanders then backed Biden.

For Starmer and his ilk Biden is a model. He has a long history of bipartisanship - meaning working together with the Republicans. He has a history of arguing for what would now be called austerity, repeatedly arguing for cuts to welfare. For example, in a speech to the Senate in 1995, he declared: "When I argued



that we should freeze federal spending, I meant Social Security as well. I meant Medicare and Medicaid. I meant veterans' benefits. I meant every single solitary thing in the government." He was also one of those Democrats who, like Blair in Britain, backed to the hilt Bush's launching of the Iraq war.
In sharp contrast to Trump, Biden is preaching unity and making pro-trans rights and anti-racist statements, which will be widely welcomed. But that does not mean his government will act in the interests of working-class Americans of any race, gender or sexuality, including on the issues of police brutality, which sparked the Black Lives Matter movement.

movement erupted in 2014 and did not take action against a number of police killings on her watch.
Three years later, in the final year in office of Barack Obama - the first black US president - there were still over 1,000 police killings, with black men nine times likelier to be killed than other Americans. Against the background of a capitalist system in crisis, poverty among black workers increased while Obama was in power. Between 2007 and 2016, with Obama in office for most of that time, the average wealth of the bottom 99% of Americans dropped by \$4,500, with African Americans worst affected.
Biden is coming to power during a new, even deeper, crisis for world and US capitalism. At this stage he is proposing a bigger bailout package than Obama put forward in 2009; not because he is more radical, but because that meets the needs of the capitalist class at this stage, in order to bail out their system. The Johnson government, and all states around the world who can afford to, have carried out similar measures. However, Biden's package - even if it is passed without amendment - will not be enough to prevent misery for millions of working-class Americans.

Workers have suffered
It was the misery suffered by the working and middle class in the last economic crisis that created the vacuum into which the racist right populism of Trump stepped. Today, in the short term, Biden may have a breathing space as he is 'given a chance'. But, by acting in the interests of capitalism, against the background of the worst economic crisis since the 1930s, he will further fuel the divisions and anger in US society which, if there is no alternative, can be harnessed by the right. A mass workers' party is urgently needed, putting forward a socialist programme, which could begin to cut across the reactionary racism of Trumpism.
The same is true in Britain. The Labour shadow chancellor, Anneliese Dodds, has driven home Starmer's intentions. In her lecture to the City University of London she insisted that a Labour government would be governed by "pragmatism not dogmatism", and would be "responsible". Nationalisation was not mentioned once, and she committed to not even attempt to interfere with the 'independent' functioning of the Bank of England.
If a Starmerite Labour government was to come to power, it could not be clearer that it would act in the interests of capitalism, and enrage all those who suffered as a result, potentially leaving a space for the right. Socialists and left trade unions have a responsibility to learn the lessons of the US and - rather than leave the working-class majority with a choice of different brands of pro-big business politicians - fight for the establishment of a mass workers' party.



Health, Covid and the vaccine: It's a class issue

NICK HART
WOLVERHAMPTON SOCIALIST PARTY

It turns out that having a National Health Service comes in useful during a major pandemic.
So far, the coordination of vaccine rollout by the four national NHS bodies in the UK, and its administration by GP surgeries and hospitals, has allowed five million people to receive their first dose. This is a marked improvement to the fiasco caused by outsourcing test-and-trace and the supply of PPE to a hodgepodge of private companies.
However, the vaccine coverage between different localities remains highly uneven. As some parts of the country have already vaccinated a majority of over-80s, doses are being diverted elsewhere at short notice to allow those regions to catch up.
The Tories set a target of opening 2,700 vaccination centres. At the moment the total nationally is just under half that.
This shows the problems created by the merging of sites by NHS trusts and GP practices, and the outright closure of many local facilities by councils over the last decade due to strains on funds. The Financial Times estimates that 330,000 people without access to a car live more than an hour by public transport from their nearest vaccination centre. Half are in the vulnerable category of over-65.
The infrequent, pricey, and often non-existent bus services experienced by those in rural areas are no accident. They are a direct result of the real-term cuts of over 40% to subsidies for buses since 2010, as calculated by the Campaign for Better Transport. Even those living in better-connected urban areas could be facing a race against time to receive their vaccination.
Many in their 60s living in the most

deprived areas are equally at risk of becoming severely ill or dying from coronavirus as those in their 80s in wealthier areas. If you're on a lower income, you're more likely to suffer from a pre-existing health condition - whether from breathing in dust or chemicals at work, living in damp and draughty housing or suffering obesity due to a lack of time, money and energy to exercise and eat healthily.
All of these factors make it harder to survive coronavirus after contracting it. Health is a class issue, whether you're living in an inner city or a remote village.
Most ordinary people are hoping the current vaccination programme will be successful in countering Covid-19. But keeping the population healthy now and in the long run means fighting not just for a properly funded and publicly run NHS, but for an improvement of working and living conditions across the board.

Poverty wages: When workers can't afford to self-isolate

CHRIS PARRY
BRISTOL SOUTH SOCIALIST PARTY

The Tories are now floating the idea that maybe if they paid £500 to desperate workers in the gig economy, they might be inclined to self-isolate for two weeks if they contract Covid. It's taken them almost a year to realise that many workers who eke out a living, or struggle to survive these days, cannot afford the luxury of taking any time off.
But it seems unlikely that this scheme will happen anyway. "These people may deliberately get infected to claim the money", declared a Tory spokesperson on the radio!
I'm currently working in three jobs - taxi driving, parcel delivery, and Chinese takeaway deliveries three evenings a week. And I'm still hardly able to make ends meet. I cannot afford to be ill, as I have to be out there hustling seven days a week.
Shared occupancy
Here's something else I've been wondering about. If you have your own property and money in the bank, self-isolation may be possible. But I live in a shared occupancy, where I don't have my own kitchen, bathroom or toilet. Self-isolation isn't so easy for those like me.
THE SOCIALIST PARTY SAYS:

- 100% pay for all workers furloughed, isolating, working from home, or having to stay at home because of workplace or school closures
- 'Insecure' workers should get 100% of their normal income
- Replace the gig economy with secure jobs and guaranteed hours
- A minimum wage of at least £12 an hour as a step towards £15
- Make the £20-a-week increase in Universal Credit permanent and extend it to legacy benefits
- Increase benefits in line with the minimum wage
- Make the bosses and the super-rich pay
- 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.

Fees frozen at £9,250 a year, fight for free education

The Conservative government has announced that it will freeze tuition fees for another year at the current £9,250 per annum level, stating it delivers "better value for students". In a normal year, this would be a slap in the face to any student fighting for lower tuition fees. But to hear this during the Covid-19 pandemic feels more like a kick in the gut. Not only are we being charged almost £10,000 for no in-person teaching, but we are being told it's "better value" for us. Excuse me if I don't see the value in a year of my lab-based degree with no actual labs.
The 2019 Augar report into university funding made several recommendations to the government, the most striking being a call to reduce tuition fees to £7,500 a year. This decrease would be a step in the right direction, but the loss of university income would need to be replaced by increased government spending to ensure no job cuts or course closures.
While tuition fees for the next year

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DVLA Covid outbreak: They only care about output and productivity

DAVE WARREN

SWANSEA AND WEST WALES SOCIALIST PARTY

As a former worker at the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA), I have not been surprised by reports of hundreds of Covid cases among staff. This is a massive government complex, spread over two main sites in Swansea, employing around 5,000 people.

While many are working from home, most of those in lower grades are having to attend work. Outdated IT systems cannot be adapted for homeworking.

Attending work involves using buses in many cases. As in any large office building, everyone knows how easily even ordinary viruses like colds can spread. But Covid puts a new and deadly slant on an old problem.

Sickness punished

The overriding ethos of DVLA is to maintain output and productivity. Its attitude towards everything else, including health and safety, is coloured by this. Sick absence is punished in the same way as misconduct, with formal warnings and dismissal.

In the first lockdown, the chief executive told staff in a circular that they were key workers and should attend work. When workers then attempted to place their children in schools, they were told they were not recognised as key workers, and the schools could not accept their children.

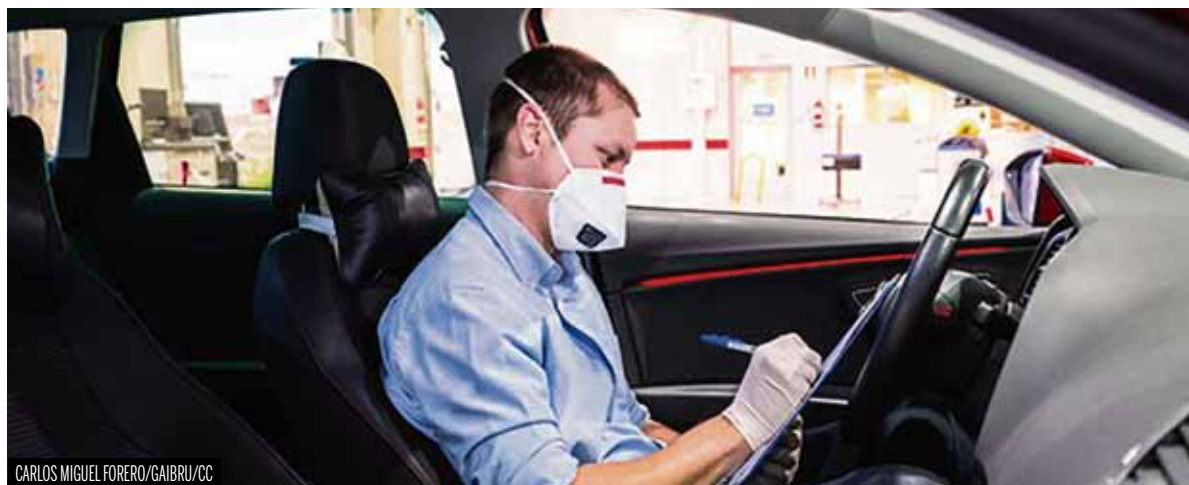


Dave Warren on strike when he worked for DVLA

A week or so later, HR sent out another circular explaining that they were working on a list who would be required to attend work. Eventually, some workers were allowed to stay home on full pay, but this time around these same workers are now being forced to attend work.

The safety of workers cannot be trusted to DVLA or any other government department or agency. The workers themselves should democratically decide on health and safety procedures, and what is considered 'essential work'.

Mark Serwotka, general secretary of the workers' union PCS, says he has intervened with government ministers regarding DVLA. But more is needed. PCS must give a lead now and take collective action to get workers out of an unsafe environment.



CARLOS MIGUEL FORERO/GAIBRU/CC

Jaguar Land Rover: West Midlands superspreader

Despite Covid infections and hospitalisations rising, many workers in non-essential jobs are being forced to travel into work, putting themselves and their families at risk.

Wolves Socialist Party member **Nick Hart** spoke to a worker and **Unite union member** at the Jaguar Land Rover plant in Solihull. Production has continued despite a large proportion of the workforce testing positive.



It's not lockdown is it? People aren't happy. This factory must be the biggest spreader of coronavirus in the West Midlands.

We're under constant pressure from managers to keep cars rolling off the line. To achieve this, the morning and afternoon shifts have been put on 45-hour weeks - instead of the usual 37 - through compulsory

overtime. We're worried this change to shift patterns will become permanent.

The use of overtime, and workers from other sites filling gaps left by people off sick with Covid, means that you have people who are normally on different teams, and living all over the Midlands, mixing together.

On my section, the social distancing and hygiene is fairly good, though in other parts of the factory people have to work close together due to the nature of the job. In spite of these measures, people are still catching Covid - even the office-based managers.

They're so desperate to keep us coming in that we've been given letters to say that we're keyworkers, in case the police stop us while we're travelling to work. We've been given tests, but then told to go back to work

before we know if the result is positive or not!

When people do have to isolate, they still receive their 'basic pay'. But this doesn't take account of the shift allowances they'd normally receive on top.

It's capitalism that's making the bosses want to keep the factory running. But honestly, no amount of money is worth me or my 80-year-old mum catching Covid.

Right now a lot of us are scared. Lockdown should mean lockdown.

• The Socialist Party calls for workers to have democratic control over Covid-related and all other health and safety measures in their workplace. This must include the right to suspend non-essential work, without loss of pay, if it is not possible to work safely while Covid remains at large.

Save Our Square from New Labour gentrification

NANCY TAAFFE

WALTHAM FOREST SOCIALIST PARTY

Community campaign Save Our Square E17 has successfully resisted Waltham Forest Labour council's plans to build a monster block in Walthamstow town square for six years. Now, disgracefully, under the cover of the pandemic, the council wants to drive the plans through.

They think that by scheduling a virtual planning meeting for Wednesday 27 January they will finally put an end to the campaign. They are wrong.

On hearing of this planning committee, Save Our Square jumped into action. Our supporters bombarded the council with objections and requests to speak against the plans on the night.

We produced a model letter to send to councillors and a short video. We also had a banner drop outside the town hall calling on the council to 'unmute democracy'.

We are not against regeneration and housing provision - we want jobs, homes and services. But this model for regeneration, building unaffordable private flats on public land, is a

disaster and does nothing to solve the housing crisis, it makes it worse!

These plans, and other similar developments around London, represent an abject failure of Labour councils to fight austerity. They believe that the council tax revenue from these schemes will make them financially self-sufficient and compensate for the loss of the central government funding. They think that the odd Pizza Express can substitute for the loss of the youth or library service they closed down!

Save Our Square is calling on everyone to watch the planning meeting on the council's YouTube channel at 7pm on Wednesday 27 January - youtube.com/CouncilWalthamForest. If the plans go through we will turn our campaign to the Greater London Authority where these plans have to be rubber stamped.

The Socialist Party will be standing in the elections in London, as part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC), to fight against all cuts, austerity and gentrification (see page 14). I will be standing as part of the campaign to save our square!



PHOTO UVW

Sage care workers strike again: Billionaires refuse to pay up

Care workers from Sage Nursing Home in Golders Green, north London, are on strike again from 4 to 8 February. They are striking for parity with their counterparts in the NHS - a pay rise to £12 an hour and the same level of sick pay and annual leave.

They staged a three-day strike in January. The workers are members of the trade union United Voices of the World (UVW).

Julia, one of the Sage nursing

home care workers, said: "They make you think that you are not a person. It's how they look at you, how they treat you."

Her remarks will no doubt resonate with many care workers. They are fed up with asking for justice, they are now striking for justice!

Bile, another striking care worker, described how difficult it was to take the decision to strike. But they were encouraged by the huge support that they have received.

Sage can easily afford to pay up. Two Sage trustees are billionaire landlords and own a property empire.

A UVW organiser added: "It is pretty rich for these billionaires to say there is no money to pay a living wage, while in the same breath they're hiring a union busting legal consultant with a going rate of £354 per hour."

NICK AUVACHE
NORTH LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

Health worker cooperation in the face of the pandemic

MAGGIE FRICKER

UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL SOUTHAMPTON

It was with mixed feelings that I read my thank you letter from the hospital trust this week. Inside was a badge of honour, a lunch break voucher and a one-off extra day's leave.

But it has in fact been an amazing experience working here through Covid. Staff have come together and treated each other as a family. Petty differences have been forgotten, people ask you how you are doing and show little acts of kindness and support. We have made an extraordinary effort to be flexible, to innovate and make things work. Managers have listened and supported staff. We even have consultants turn up in the middle of the night to be part of the 'intensive care proning team'.

It's been a real glimpse of what is possible if we cooperate for the benefit of all. No, I'm not arguing that we're all in it together. The consultants still manage on over £100,000 a year while others are forced to use food banks. And, when this is all over, hospital managers will attempt to make savings at our expense and extend their idea of 'innovation' to make the role of the private sector more permanent.

The bosses' idea of 'giving us a say' is to pinch our ideas, con us to work extra hours, and still not give us a decent pay rise. Our idea of cooperation is a socialist one, where we own and control our services democratically and society's resources are allocated on the basis of need.



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Overwhelmed, underfunded, underpaid, and still fighting for safe PPE

HOLLY JOHNSTON

SHEFFIELD SOCIALIST PARTY AND
NHSPAY15 CAMPAIGN ORGANISER

On the front line we're seeing whole wards being wiped out with staff sickness. In my own trust, at the start of January, there was approximately 9% staff absence. When an area has an outbreak, it brings it to its knees. This is not because of a lack of effort and hard work from staff. We're simply working in an already overwhelmed NHS under a government that doesn't prioritise the safety of workers.

Hospitals across England are getting more and more likely to reach capacity, compounding the difficulties already faced by the shortage of NHS beds in England, which have been halved over the last 30 years.

Around 50,000 staff are off sick with Covid-19 or self-isolating. There are already 100,000 vacancies in the NHS due to the government's lack of funding and not prioritising recruitment and retention of staff. One-third of nurses are considering leaving, with the pandemic highlighting the mental health strain on staff as well as the financial health problems many of us face.

The hospitals are relying on the good will of already exhausted staff to pick up overtime shifts, or on agency workers who are often moved from area to area without being routinely swabbed.

PPE

Unions and other grassroots campaigns have been fighting for Public Health England to update the current PPE guidance. The science available clearly outlines the requirement for higher-level protection in all areas treating suspected and Covid-19 patients, not just for aerosol generating procedures. We now know that Covid-19 is spread by large droplets and small aerosol particles which are generated by coughing, talking and even breathing.

At the beginning of the first wave, we were all geared up for mask fit testing and to wear higher-grade FFP3 masks. However, this quickly changed and we were supplied with just surgical masks and visors. It became evident that the guidance was based on what masks were available rather than what was needed.

NHS trusts should interpret national PPE guidance as the bare minimum level, not the absolute ceiling for PPE. Some trusts have shown it can be done, with Homerton, Plymouth and Southampton, among others, all changing their guidance to ensure safer working conditions.

Healthcare workers are three to four times more likely to contract Covid-19 and the ongoing pressure on the NHS is huge. As many as one in ten that have had Covid-19 face long Covid issues.

It's worrying what the NHS workforce in the future will look like

without urgent prioritisation of funding, a stop to outsourcing and cuts, and better safety for the workers.

At the last count 670 healthcare workers had sadly lost their lives, with the up-to-date data no longer being made available.

Health and Safety England is in the pockets of the bosses. It has come to light that it has been signing off PPE that isn't fit for purpose. That highlights the need for a replacement body under the control of the trade union movement, while also strengthening the argument for a nationalised manufacture and supply chain.

The quality of the PPE has been variable with aprons and gloves in particular ripping upon wearing them. The leadership of the NHS unions

need to fight for what is needed. We know that unions that fight are unions that grow, and activists need to push for a fighting programme which will bring about change and expand union strength in our workplaces.

Vaccine

The vaccine programme is bringing some new hope for many NHS workers, but we must not let the government use this as a reason to be complacent and come out of national lockdowns too soon. The vaccine will help lessen the severity of symptoms in most people, but will not stop you being a carrier for the virus.

We also do not want the vaccine programme to fall into the laps of another Tory crony and become

another private contract. The misinformation and lack of clarity from the government is worrying as it only helps to dissuade people from having the vaccine, potentially reducing the uptake.

Student nurses have been having a particularly rough ride, with first and second years essentially working for free during the pandemic and still having to pay university fees. They are invaluable pairs of hands on the wards and are definitely not upholding their usual supernumerary status. This means that they are being treated as if they are part of the workforce. Some third years are getting paid, but it is dependent on whether individual trusts are willing to issue contracts.

After decades of cuts and privatisation it comes as no surprise that the NHS is already overwhelmed. The true picture of the extent of the damage is yet to be seen. What has become apparent, with more urgency than ever, is the necessity of a party that represents the needs of health workers; one that will bring the NHS into public ownership and control, one that will defend services, fight austerity and oppose pay freezes.



ALBERTO GIULIANI/CC

The Socialist Party demands

- An emergency increase in funding for the NHS and social care
- Full PPE for all staff, for production and distribution to be taken into public ownership under democratic workers' control
- Unions must mobilise for a 15% pay rise for NHS staff
- For the scrapping of training fees and for free emergency training for staff to respond to the pandemic. Reintroduce training bursaries
- For the NHS to take over private healthcare facilities to be run in the interests of all
- Nationalise the big pharmaceutical companies, including the testing labs and vaccine production and distribution
- For a socialist plan of production and workers' control and management of the pandemic response

“We need to use our collective strength”

Martin Powell-Davies to contest NEU deputy general secretary election

I am standing to be National Education Union (NEU) deputy general secretary because our union needs clear and determined leadership if we are going to withstand the serious challenges ahead of us. More than any other candidate, I have the experience, skills and campaigning record that can make us a stronger team.

Years of funding cuts, pressure from school inspectorates Ofsted and Estyn, and ‘exam factory’ conditions have already taken their toll. Now teachers and support staff face further attacks from a government hoping to make us pay for their failures.

Making a stand on safety has shown that we can succeed when we act decisively. I’ll work to win more gains in future.

As deputy general secretary, I will work to build a union that has the confidence, strength and organisation to defend the pay, jobs, safety and working conditions of education staff and, in doing so, defend education as well.

Every candidate will propose changes that could improve our conditions, and pupils’ learning conditions. But the key question is, how can they be won?

The NEU has not been slow to make demands. Our problem has been that they have too often been

ignored by employers and ministers. Our ‘five tests’ for Covid safety were not met - putting our health and safety at risk. For years, we’ve complained about unreasonable workload, but it keeps getting worse and now we face a ‘pay freeze’ - are our demands for improved salaries going to be ignored too?

School safety

Throughout the pandemic I have consistently argued that to defend school safety we would need to use our collective strength. The New Year ‘U-turn’ showed what we could achieve. Now we need to make more gains.

I am standing to be a deputy general secretary who works to bring our union together - in our workplace groups, districts and branches, alongside the staff and other resources paid for by your subs - with a belief that we can, and must, succeed in winning our demands.

As a member of the National Union of Teachers (NUT) national executive from 2010-15 and then NEU London regional secretary from 2016-19, I have experience of working within the union at its highest levels.

I have been active within the NUT, and now the NEU, throughout my working life. I became a science teacher, and soon a local union

officer, in London in the 1980s.

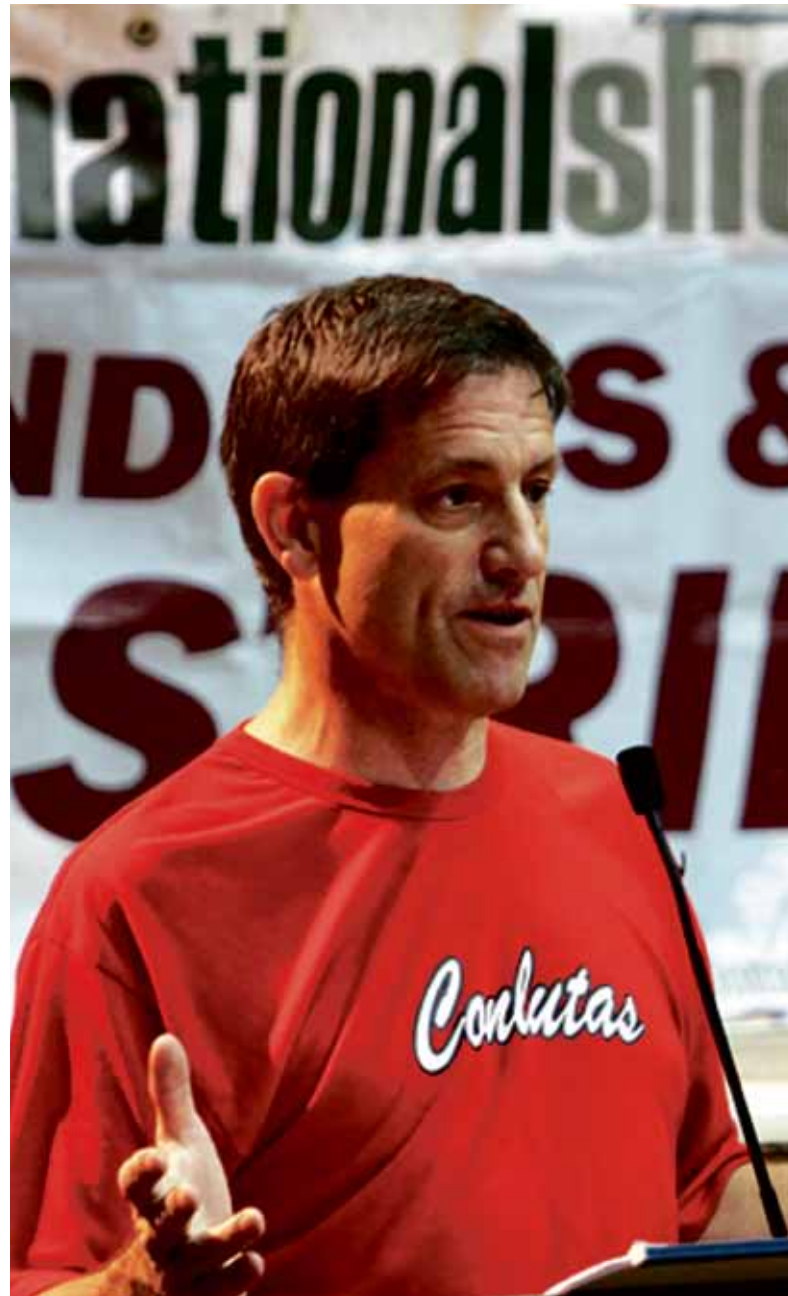
As Lewisham NUT Secretary for over 20 years, I doubled local membership and supported hundreds of colleagues. I have organised many successful campaigns, opposing cuts and academisation, defending pay and workload.

I am still a teacher and local NEU officer today, now in north west England, experiencing the pressures on members at first hand. I am regularly invited to put our case across to the press and media.



Every candidate will propose changes that could improve our conditions, and pupils’ learning conditions. But the key question is, how can they be won?

In short, my record shows that I can be a deputy general secretary that can be relied on to provide clear leadership.



Martin (above) addressing fellow trade unionists PHOTO MARY FINCH

What I stand for:

- A union that builds the workplace strength that ensures we are a force to be reckoned with. Launch union-wide training for NEU reps and officers on how to successfully win collectively
- Reverse the privatisation of education. Oppose academisation. Campaign for local authority supply pools. Return all schools to democratic local control, staffed under nationally agreed pay and conditions
- A union that supports NEU reps and officers to defend members, individually and collectively. Improve our strategies for organising, recruiting and training reps, and advising our caseworkers
- A union leading the battle against discrimination and inequality in schools and communities - end performance pay. Educate and organise against racism, sexism, disability discrimination and LGBT+ oppression
- Action to protect the health, safety and welfare of staff, and our communities, from Covid-19. Coordinate ballots for action short of strike action and strike action to win union demands
- A union that recruits and organises all education workers working in our schools and colleges. Win negotiating rights for support staff colleagues. Provide supply staff with the support they need
- No to a pay freeze, no to cuts - fund schools and colleges to fully meet needs. Bring the public sector unions together to defend members’ incomes, conditions and jobs
- A genuinely democratic union - where members are ‘listened to’, not just ‘talked at’. Build a vibrant inclusive union that values its staff but is led by its elected representatives, its national executive members, local officers and workplace reps
- End excessive workload - and end the high stakes testing that drives so much of it. Win a national contract that sets a limit on overall working hours, not just ‘directed time’
- A deputy general secretary that stays in touch with the problems that members are facing. I will be listening to you. I will not accept more than a teacher’s salary for carrying out my role

Schools: ‘We have to fight for everything’

The National Education Union (NEU) forced another massive government U-turn in January - delaying the unsafe full reopening of schools. But the fight over safety, workload, pay and jobs is not over. Below, two teachers explain the ongoing struggles.

LOUISE CUFFARO

NEWHAM NEU BRANCH SECRETARY

When the government gave in and closed the schools, it never really closed them. They have remained open to vulnerable children and children of key workers.

But now they have extended the definition of ‘key worker’ and ‘vulnerable’. ‘Vulnerable’ now includes those who don’t have access to on-line learning.

It shows up again that the government never fulfilled its promise to provide laptops or other technology to children who need it. In Newham, almost every child can be counted as vulnerable - in an overcrowded home, no access to a laptop, sharing a phone with siblings.

Newham Council had planned to end their provision of free school meals. Under pressure from campaigners it will now continue.

You have to fight for absolutely everything. Why are we fighting a Labour council for free school meals?

Union pressure

We have spent the whole week trying to hold back the push to open nurseries more fully to pupils. The government left out nurseries and special schools when they finally U-turned and ‘closed’ primary and secondary schools. Our pressure has lowered the numbers attending.

The situation for nurseries is complicated. Each nursery’s funding is



Louise addressing striking NEU members at Little Ilford secondary school PHOTO JAMES IVENS

based on the number of children attending their nursery on the census day, Thursday 21 January.

Funding for nurseries, even outside of Covid, is a massive problem. Many nurseries could cease to exist.

In the National Education Union (NEU), we have been campaigning on this for some time. But everything is being exposed by Covid.

Through the health and safety and risk assessments we had won, the local authority was mostly agreeing with us for nurseries to do the same as other schools - and only have key

worker and vulnerable children. Then, all of a sudden, there was this huge push.

NEU members in nurseries began contacting us. They said headteachers were telling them that they are being pressured by the local authority officers to get as many children in as possible for the census day. The council was telling the NEU one thing, and the nurseries another.

Finally, on Wednesday evening before census day, the Department for Education, under pressure from unions, agreed that they would top

up the funding for children not present. By that time it was too late as the drive to increase numbers had already happened.

We recruited more members to the union that week, especially in nursery schools. Nurseries that are attached to primary schools are more likely to have an active NEU group, and so are more likely to have restricted the numbers attending.

And we have been recruiting workplace reps in the five or six standalone nursery schools in Newham. We have got them organised and are

now looking to survey our members over whether to take action to ensure that nurseries are not fully open.

The government has now finally admitted that this new variant could be more fatal and more transmissible. I have been dealing with members in nurseries who are over 60. They don’t feel safe working with limited numbers of key worker and vulnerable children, let alone having all children in. We need to protect members like this in our workplaces as well as in the wider community.

Industrial action ballot to ensure a safe full return of schools

MARTIN POWELL-DAVIES

CANDIDATE IN THE NEU DEPUTY GENERAL SECRETARY ELECTION (SEE STATEMENT OPPOSITE)

The damage caused by the privatisation of most supply teaching has left many agency staff at severe financial risk. Too many agencies will not even agree to furlough.

Schools should not be looking to save money at the expense of supply teachers, especially not those where a long-term engagement had previously been agreed. Department for Education guidance confirms that agency staff can be used for remote and face-to-face teaching.

Support staff are under some of the greatest pressure. Some school rotas insist that support staff are in school all the time, while teachers are more likely to be allowed to work from home.

We must insist on equality of treatment. The new joint-union checklist says: “Systems should be in place to ensure a fair balance across the whole staff in respect of working from home and working on site”.

Some schools are using the lockdown as an opportunity to launch restructuring proposals where support staff jobs are particularly at threat. Collective action will be needed to oppose cuts and defend education and jobs.

Many schools recognise the difficult and stressful circumstances in which educators and pupils are working.

But some poor managers still seem unable to prevent themselves putting staff under unacceptable pressure through unreasonable workload demands and/or inappropriate monitoring of online learning.

Once again, a collective response is the best way.

Government guidance in January risked turning lateral-flow testing into a mechanism that would help to increase transmission rates instead of cutting them.

If staff or students were found to be a close contact of a positive case, they could agree to continue to attend school, rather than self-isolate. Instead, they would take daily lateral-flow tests to make sure that they remain ‘negative’.

Unsafe proposal

Such a suggestion would have obvious attractions to staff and parents as it appears to provide a safe way to ensure teaching and learning is not disrupted. But it was absolutely not a safe proposal. Any member of staff pressured like this should seek

urgent union advice.

Yes, the lateral-flow tests can be useful to detect additional asymptomatic positive cases, that might otherwise have gone unnoticed, but they are absolutely not reliable enough to be used as an alternative to isolation.

The education unions - NEU, GMB, Unison and Unite - have agreed a joint ‘checklist for partial opening’. I have produced a summary at mpd-nut.com.

NEU joint general secretaries, Kevin Courtney and Mary Boustead, say the union “will back every workplace group that feels the need to take action”. They mention two forms of action to make sure the checklist is stuck to:

- 1) Moving quickly towards a ballot for industrial action
- 2) Union backing for members

who use Section 44 of the Employment Rights Act 1996 - refusing to work in an unsafe workplace

As the New Year U-turn showed, we can make gains when we stand together across a workplace, or a group of workplaces. But we are even stronger when we act together as a whole union.

With the NHS still under huge pressure, none of us knows how long this period of ‘partial reopening’ will need to last. But it’s clear that the government wants to try and fully open schools as soon as they can.

We must again make clear that full opening must be only when it’s safe to do so. If we launch a ballot for national action now, it could help make sure we have the safeguard of an action mandate in place. It might be needed to oppose an unsafe return.



NEU members in Newham taking action over student numbers PHOTO JAMES IVENS

Ten years since the ‘Arab Spring’

KEY LESSONS FOR BUILDING NEW REVOLUTIONARY SOCIALIST PARTIES

JUDY BEISHON

SOCIALIST PARTY EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

The year 2011 began with mass protests spreading across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) which shook the ground beneath the feet of the region's many autocratic regimes. The decades-long dictators - Ben Ali in Tunisia and Hosni Mubarak in Egypt - who had appeared firmly entrenched, were swept out of power by magnificent movements of young people and workers that inspired others around the world to struggle for their demands.

The initial trigger was the tragedy of Tunisian fruit seller Mohamed Bouazizi, who set himself alight in protest at his daily struggle for a living income and against police abuse.

There followed an immense eruption of anger by working people and the poor, against poverty, inequality, corruption, repression and humiliation.

In particular, high unemployment - Bouazazi lived in Sidi Bouzid where the unemployment rate was officially 30% - low wages and the escalating cost of food and other basic goods, fuelled the discontent. It was so universal across the region that the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt were followed by uprisings in Yemen, Bahrain, Libya and Syria.

While the news of Mubarak's fall was being greeted by working people in Egypt and across the globe, members of the CWI (Committee for a Workers' International, which the Socialist Party in England and Wales is part of) were on the streets of Cairo with an Arabic language leaflet putting forward some important steps to consolidate the victory.

It urged "no trust in the military chiefs and no participation in any government with leaders or officials of the Mubarak dictatorship". This was a key issue, because the military leaders were moving quickly to take the helm, giving false assurances to the protesters that they would oversee the desired fundamental change.

The CWI leaflet fully supported the need to secure democratic rights, including political freedom and the right of trade unions to organise and take industrial action; and called for "trial before popular courts of all those involved in the Mubarak police regime's repression and corruption".

How could all this be done? By "urgent formation of democratic committees of action in the workplaces and neighbourhoods - particularly in working-class and poor neighbourhoods - to coordinate removal of all remnants of the old regime, maintain order and supplies and, most importantly, be the basis for a government

of representatives of workers and the poor".

Such a government would need to take the main industries and services into public ownership and break completely with capitalism - a system only offering a nightmare existence for much of humanity.

Moves to create local committees of activists were taking place, as were important steps forward in building independent trade unions. But these developments alone were not sufficient; also they were outpaced by the determined steps taken by the military leaders and other representatives of capitalism to resecure their system.

History has shown that no capitalist class - whether its type of government and state rule is brutal or more benign - will simply hand power over to the majority in society when faced with rebellion. Without concrete steps to remove "all remnants of the old regime", as the CWI argued for, capitalist rule inevitably continued in Egypt and Tunisia, with just changes of government and personnel being implemented at the top.

With no mass workers' party in existence to offer an alternative, the Egyptian general election in 2012 led to the Muslim Brotherhood forming a capitalist government, headed by president Mohamed Morsi, that was never going to satisfy the demands of the revolution.

Counter-revolution

After one year, after massive protest demonstrations, it was removed in a military coup, which paved the way for today's military-led, authoritarian regime headed by Abdel Fattah al-Sisi. Based on decaying capitalism, his regime has only delivered an even worse situation for working-class and middle-class people than existed under Mubarak.

Less than a quarter of Egyptians recently surveyed in a Guardian-YouGov poll said that their lives are better now than ten years ago. Fearful of the next revolution, al-Sisi has stepped up imprisonments and killings of people opposing the regime.

But the titanic events of 2011 showed that when the majority in society rise up and fight back together - as conditions today are laying the basis for again - no amount of state force can hold them back.

In Tunisia too, life for most people hasn't improved over the last decade. The western capitalist media paints that country as having had a fairly successful transition from dictatorship to democracy, and notes the existence of a trade union movement that even under Ben Ali was independent of the regime.

But the limited freedoms won by the 2011 revolution are being eroded,



It's essential that workers' movements stay independent of all capitalist interests and resolutely oppose them



Revolutionary demonstrators in Cairo's Tahir Square mass on top of an Egyptian armoured vehicle in January 2011 PHOTO RAMY RAOOF/CC IN RUSSIA

and protests have reemerged against unemployment - at a higher rate now compared with 2010 - and declining living standards.

Recently, working-class areas in Tunis, Tunisia's capital, have seen an eruption of angry young people on the streets, against the backdrop of mass unemployment and crumbling services.

The hopes for fundamental change that drove the 2011 uprising have been destroyed by the failure of the numerous line-ups of capitalist governments since then to solve any of the acute problems: poverty, corruption, regional disparities, terrorism and more.

Not surprisingly, there are now mixed moods, with some expressing utter despair and thinking that democracy and stability aren't compatible. This is reflected in increased support for a party led by a supporter of Ben Ali's regime, the Free Constitutional Party.

As well as the shattered hopes in Egypt and Tunisia, counter-revolutionary developments over the last decade have included the revolt in Bahrain being crushed with the aid of military force from Saudi Arabia and other Gulf regimes, and the terrible civil wars in Yemen, Syria and Libya. The interventions of various imperialist powers around the world,

attempting to promote their own interests, have played a major role in worsening those wars.

There were also the conquests by Isis, which although now largely reversed, have not eliminated the threat posed by its right-wing jihadism and terrorist methods.

Renewed struggles

However, the period since 2011 has also encompassed new protests and movements in the region. A tremendous revolutionary movement took place in Sudan in 2018-19 which led to the removal of president Omar al-Bashir.

Nine days before his fall from power, president Bouteflika had been forced out of office in Algeria after an extensive protest movement swept across that country.

Massive discontent erupted in Lebanon in 2019, and large-scale protests have been ongoing there, with the anger increased following the corruption and failings surrounding the terrible explosion in Beirut's port last August.

A wave of working-class revolt arose in Iran in 2018 and more struggles have taken place there since, including in recent weeks. In addition, smaller-scale movements have taken place in Iraq, Jordan and Morocco.

The term 'Arab Spring' was from the

start only a short-hand expression, because the 2011 revolts included non-Arab participants. Over the last decade non-Arab struggles in the region have been added to, especially with the protests in Iran, a majority Persian country.

All the uprisings stem from the increasingly intolerable conditions endured by workers and the poor across the region, with the largely young-in-age populations facing virtually no prospect of securing a decent living.

With the economies in crisis, living standards for the majority are being driven into the dirt, made worse by the elites' immense creaming off of wealth, the austerity edicts of the International Monetary Fund, the effects of climate change, and now the added horror of lost jobs and lives due to Covid-19.

A January 2021 report by the World Bank stated: "The income shock from the pandemic is expected to increase the number of people below the \$5.50 per day poverty line in the region [MENA] by tens of millions this year".

So conditions for the mass of people are desperate and rage will continue to spill over into revolts and revolutions. One lesson learnt from the 2011 events that has been apparent since then in protesters' slogans, is that it's not enough to just remove a president or government.



But the titanic events of 2011 showed that when the majority in society rise up and fight back together - as conditions today are laying the basis for again - no amount of state force can hold them back

power - through general strike action - to bring the capitalist class to its knees.

It was common for activists during the 2011 uprisings to view the idea of building political parties as unattractive, because of the political and bureaucratic degeneration of left and workers' parties in previous periods. But the uprisings and revolutions in the MENA countries over the last decade show the limits of spontaneous, disorganised movements, and the need for workers to organise well, industrially and politically, at local, regional and national level.

To help guard against political degeneration, their organisations need structures that enable discussion and debate at all levels - and decision-making by elected representatives who are fully accountable to those who elect them. This means that rank-and-file members must be able to correct or recall their representatives at any time if they consider it necessary.

Organising against brutal, despotic regimes is, by its very nature, work under difficult conditions. There are valuable lessons to be learnt from history, including from the methods and structures adopted by the Bolshevik party in the years before 1917 in Russia, when under repressive, draconian Tsarism. Today, electronic communication can be a great help but isn't a panacea, especially as authoritarian regimes can disrupt it.

Alongside the need for mass workers' parties, preparation is needed for them to become armed with revolutionary socialist ideas, vital for unifying the movements around the common goal of real, fundamental change, and democratically discussing and mapping out the steps needed to achieve it.

Plenty of guidance can be gained from studying past revolutions, from the 1871 Paris Commune (which has its 150th anniversary this year), to the Russian revolution in 1917 which succeeded in overthrowing capitalism, and later revolutions during the 20th century: in China, Spain, Chile and Portugal, to name a few.

Important lessons from history include how to deal with capitalist

states' military and security forces. In Egypt's 2011 revolution the army leaders found the rank-and-file soldiers to be unreliable for countering the protesters, as coming from working-class backgrounds they were sympathetic to the calls made to support the movement. The CWI leaflet mentioned above advocated the formation of democratic rank-and-file committees in the armed forces and police to ensure the officers couldn't use those forces against the revolution.

Invaluable political and organisational guidance will also be learnt by reading and discussing Marxist writings, especially by Lenin, Trotsky, Engels and Marx himself, who all based their ideas on Marxist analysis of capitalism and previous societies, and on the workers' struggles during their lifetimes and before.

'Permanent revolution'

Trotsky's theory of 'permanent revolution' is highly relevant to the MENA region today, as it explains why the capitalist classes in the economically less developed countries can't introduce the capitalist 'democracy' of the more developed countries.

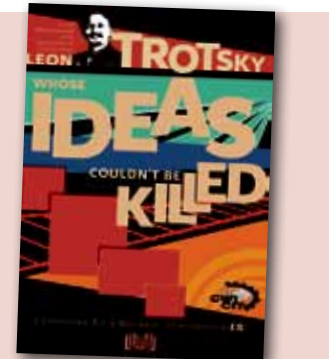
A Marxist approach is also essential to avoid the serious error of left or workers' organisations advocating 'popular fronts', or alliances, with pro-capitalists, in effect tail-ending them, as happened at times in both Egypt and Tunisia during the events of 2011-12.

On the contrary, it's essential that workers' movements stay independent of all capitalist interests and resolutely oppose them. The full force of the movements need to be directed at bringing about genuinely democratic and revolutionary constituent assemblies, where representatives of workers, small farmers, young people and the poor can agree a programme for the transformation of society on a socialist basis.

Only then will it be possible for the many million dreams of a better future to be turned into reality, and for the ordinary people of the region to share out the wealth and build new societies based on cooperation, environmental sustainability and the well-being of all.

This is a must read for workers and youth who want to find out about Trotskyism, and the relevance of Marxist ideas today - revolutionary ideas that are invaluable in the struggle to build the socialist forces necessary to end the misery and chaos of capitalism. Don't delay - order your copy today.

● £8 including postage. Order at leftbooks.co.uk



Merseyside: DHL workers at Burton's Biscuits strike against half-baked pay deal and bullying bosses



DAVE WALSH
LIVERPOOL SOCIALIST PARTY

DHL workers on the Burton's Biscuits contract on Merseyside are in dispute with their employer over pay, but also because of bullying behaviour by management. This includes a number of dismissals that can all be traced back to the conduct of one particular manager.

I spoke with some of the workers on their picket line on 20 January, who told me the disciplinary procedures were a sham and the company was sending a message that it doesn't negotiate. The most recent dismissal was of a shop steward with 24 years' service and the Unite union saw this as the final straw.

One of the striking workers kindly gave a report to Liverpool Trades Council's Zoom meeting on 21 January. He told us there has been a toxic atmosphere in the workplace for a

long time, but that trade union talks seemed to be making progress. However, the company reverted back to its negative culture last year, and relations have deteriorated sharply over recent months.

Unite were in talks with the company over last April's pay rise throughout 2020 and this culminated in strike action just before Christmas. The company then asked for the action to be suspended to allow it to come back with a significantly improved offer. But that didn't happen, and the angry workforce immediately returned to the picket line with two days of action and a further six days have been announced for early February.

Workers are angry and determined to make a stand. They managed to turn two lorries away on their last picket and they've received tremendous messages of support from union branches.

Unison NEC elections United left challenge needed to fight slaughter of jobs and services



SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBERS IN UNISON

Just weeks after the general secretary election, Unison members are beginning the process of electing the union's national executive council (NEC), the lay members' leadership of the union. This is more important than ever, in order to challenge the new general secretary Christina McAnea. It is crucial that the left in the union stand a united slate of candidates on a fighting programme as members work on the front line in the pandemic.

McAnea takes office during a major economic crisis in which the government are already seeking to make public sector workers pay the price. Not only are they expected to take another pay freeze, but councils up and down the country, of every party stripe, will vote for another slaughter of jobs and services.

Despite denying that she was the continuity candidate of the previous right-wing incumbent, Dave Prentis, within hours of being elected McAnea revealed where she stood politically.

When asked what she thought of Sir Keir Starmer's leadership of the Labour Party, she replied: "He's done a good job so far." This comment came just a few days after Starmer had insisted that schools should remain open, which would have pushed 200,000 Unison school workers into unsafe workplaces.

However, mass opposition by members of Unison and the National Education Union put huge pressure on both unions' leaderships to ensure support for members who refused to go into schools, which forced the government into a U-turn.

In the same interview, McAnea was happy to take a swipe at unions calling for strike action but had not a single word to say of her plans to lead a fight to defend the union's 1.3 million members. That is why the forthcoming NEC elections are a chance for the union members to elect a

fighting leadership that can force the union to fight on these issues.

McAnea and her supporters will make a grave mistake if they believe that she has an overwhelming mandate to continue the inaction and retreats of the Prentis years. Not only did just 5% of the total membership vote for her, she also failed to win a majority of the members who voted. The scale of the Covid crisis means that there will be no 'business as usual'.

Current Socialist Party NEC members Hugo Pierre, April Ashley and Socialist Party Scotland Jim McFarlane will be standing for re-election. They will be joined by Adrian O'Malley for the national health service seat which he came within 300 votes of winning last time, along with Naomi Byron in London, Tom Hunt in the East Midlands and John Malcolm in the North East.

Vital lessons

It is vital that the left learns the lessons from the general secretary election, when Hugo Pierre approached the other two candidates, Roger McKenzie and Paul Holmes, to agree one candidate to take on McAnea. Unfortunately, they didn't engage in the discussion that was needed. But an agreed left slate is vital for the NEC election. We will therefore also be calling for a vote for the existing NEC members who were elected in 2019 on the Unison Action left slate as is the usual practice to try and secure the biggest left presence on the NEC.

Unfortunately, the supporters of the general secretary election campaign of Paul Holmes, (who attacked the Socialist Party for standing in the election, claiming they wanted to build UnisonAction) announced four weeks before the general secretary election result that they were leaving UnisonAction and were setting up a new organisation called 'The Members Team'.

In the same letter, they demanded

that a meeting of the steering committee be called, not to agree an NEC election campaign but to vote to dissolve itself! They have not indicated that they will not stand even against existing left NEC members. In another development it appears that those who claimed to be on the left and backed Roger McKenzie campaign have also put up candidates against existing lefts on the NEC, which will only serve to strengthen McAnea.

With both these candidates having presented themselves as lefts in the general secretary election, with the backing respectively of John McDonnell (for Paul Holmes) and Jeremy Corbyn (for Roger McKenzie), this would indicate that they are not serious about building a clear left challenge to the Prentis-continuity leadership.

Never has it been more important for the Unison left to provide a political and industrial alternative to the leadership's acceptance of Starmer's programme, both on a national and local stage. The NEC election will be taking place just as Labour councils draw up cuts budgets. McAnea is speaking this week at an online rally as Croydon council, on the back of entering bankruptcy last November, unleashes a brutal cuts offensive.

Socialist Party candidates call for Unison to demand that Labour councils such as this refuse to pass on Tory cuts and build a mass movement of defiance with local authority unions and the community.

We believe that supporting anti-cuts candidates in the May elections is a vital step in building a new fighting political vehicle for workers. But, unfortunately, this is in contrast to the approach of the Holmes' Members Team.

This is why it is crucial that Socialist Party members remain a key element on the Unison NEC. But it is also vital that a unified left slate is put to Unison members in the NEC election.

British Gas engineers continue strike against fire-and-rehire plans

Leicester

"This is a pivotal moment for workers in this country. If this happens at British Gas, if they are allowed to fire and rehire their workforce on worse terms and conditions, the contract of employment for every worker in the country is not worth the paper it's written on.

"You need to support this because you could be next. There are companies watching what is going on at British Gas at the moment with keen intent, because if it goes through here, they will be coming for you next."

Paul Carvell, British Gas engineers' GMB union shop steward, spoke to the Socialist on the picket line at Aylestone Road, Leicester during their ongoing strike action.

"The company thought we would be wilting by now, but the opposite is happening. We are getting more and more support and media coverage. Trade unionists are seeing what is happening, and are realising this could be a tactic used by other employers."

After an 89% vote for strike action, British Gas engineers are carrying through their ten days of strike action announced so far. These workers have kept people's homes warm throughout the pandemic and have been rewarded with a vicious attack

on their hard-won conditions. Many have worked for British Gas for decades, but their loyalty to their customers in not matched by their profiteering bosses. Essential workers who are risking their health are seeing big business and the Tory government treat them with contempt. And at the same time, the GMB union has revealed British Gas board members have raked in £37 million from outside work.

The trade union movement as a whole needs to stand up and fight like these workers. We need to campaign for privatised industries to be renationalised under democratic control in order that they can be planned for the benefit of all.

STEVE SCORE

LEICESTER SOCIALIST PARTY

Southampton

GMB strikers protested in Southampton on 25 January at the brutal threat to fire and rehire British Gas workers if they don't sign new contracts that attack their pay and working conditions. Engineers were angry at the threat to their futures: "They want us to work an extra 156 hours a year for no extra money. It's come as a big shock to everyone. This strike is about the threat of being fired, if they get away with this who is next?"

NICK CHAFFEY

SOUTHAMPTON SOCIALIST PARTY

Scunthorpe steel scaffolders walkout

The British Steel site in Scunthorpe was disrupted as scaffolders at the plant, employed by contractor Brand Energy, began strike action on 25-26 January in a dispute over pay.

The 50-plus scaffolders, who are members of union Unite, are responsible for the maintenance of over 500 scaffolding structures at the Scunthorpe site.

The workers are striking to be paid in line with the national agreement for the engineering construction industry (NAECI) known as the Blue Book. There is a difference of £2 an hour less than the scaffs are getting paid now, let alone the NAECI rate! But since 2019, Brand Energy has refused to engage with Unite over the pay dispute, resulting in a 100% Yes vote for strike action with six days of walkouts called over the next three weeks.

The striking scaffs maintained socially distanced picket lines of six at both main gates of the steelworks. They complained that Brand Energy are a multi-billion dollar, American multi-national company yet not only

won't pay the rate for the job, but penny-pinch on workers' welfare as well. Pickets told of having to eat their dinners in their cars because of no canteen facilities and of rat infested cabins built for 6 with 12 workers in. One said: "We had to choose between Covid and Weil's disease!"

The dispute is made more complex as Brand Energy will lose the scaffolding contract on 15 February when it will transfer to Activo. But now there are rumours that Activo could pull out because they put their bid in based on old pay rates £3 an hour less than the scaffs are getting paid now, let alone the NAECI rate!

What the workers' strike action has showed is that they won't roll over any longer. One picket said "I've worked here 15 years and it's the first time we've all stuck together." If the matter is not resolved before the contract is transferred, Unite will begin balloting for fresh industrial action with Activo, once the contract transfers.

ALISTAIR TICE

YORKSHIRE SOCIALIST PARTY

Low-paid hospital workers' strike

Two disputes by low-paid hospital workers in Birmingham and Reading are taking place. Heartlands hospital workers in Birmingham work directly for the NHS, and those at the Royal Berkshire are contracted to Kingdom Services Group. But both are frontline NHS workers and are continuing their action into February.

The 23 security guards in the Unite union at Reading hospital are striking

over the failure of their employer to make a decent pay offer for 2020.

The Birmingham NHS Heartlands porters in Unison are currently taking strike action about the proposed imposition of a new rota. The proposed rota impacts on workers' health and wellbeing, their caring responsibilities, work/life balance, and results in a significant cut in wages for many.

Outrageously, their reward is attacks from management. We call for all outsourced workers to be brought back in-house and for a 15% pay rise for all NHS workers, as well as defeating the Tory public sector pay freeze.

Solidarity with Mohamud Hassan meeting We need working-class democratic control of the police



ROSS SAUNDERS

SOCIALIST PARTY WALES

On Thursday 21 January, nearly 70 people attended an online meeting hosted by Socialist Party Wales in solidarity with Mohamud Hassan, who died shortly after leaving police custody in Cardiff. Four days of protests followed Mohamud's death. These were supported and leafleted by Socialist Party members (See 'Cardiff: Protests erupt at death of Mohamud Mohammed Hassan' at socialistparty.org.uk).

There was intense discussion at the protests and in the meeting about what must be done to end the outrageous injustice of police racism and violence. There are calls for renewed protests if the 'Independent Office for Police Conduct' investigation attempts to whitewash Mohamud's death.

Bianca Ali, who is facing fines of £1,000 by police for organising the protests, spoke first at the meeting: "Mohamud was perfectly healthy when he went into custody, but when he came out he was beaten and bruised. He went home, went to sleep, and never woke up again. The protests gave the community a platform, and made it possible for voices that never make it onto the mainstream news to be heard. Minor reforms of the police aren't going

to be enough. These problems are deep-rooted in the system, and putting officers on sensitivity training, for example, isn't going to change anything."

Socialist Party member Camilla Mngaza spoke about the campaign she has built to free her daughter Siyanda from prison: "Over 1,700 people have died in police custody but not a single officer has been prosecuted for fifty years. I am a parent of a daughter who has been wrongfully jailed because of the failures of the police, but I cannot imagine what Mohamud's family are going through. It is terrible to lose a child, but so much more painful in this way."

"There are so many of these incidents at the hands of the police and we are sick of it. My daughter is in jail, but it was she who was the victim of a racially motivated attack. We need major change. We need to talk about the need for democratic control of the police so that our communities are no longer ignored."

Socialist Party member Deji Olayinka brought condolences and reported on the brutal police tactics at the solidarity demonstration in London on the Saturday following Mohamud's death. "We must urgently discuss what needs to change to stop another life being taken from us. Today's police are not the fair and neutral protectors that they are portrayed as by the establishment. In too many

cases they are the ones bringing the violence and causing the suffering, targeting especially those who are poorer and from ethnic minorities.

"Officers in Cardiff have been filmed smirking and laughing at protesters, and one even nodded when he was asked if they had killed Mohamud. All of the bodycam and CCTV footage should be released, but there are cases where we've got footage of police officers acting outrageously, and they still don't get punished."

"It cannot go on that the police remain unaccountable to the ordinary people they claim to protect."

"We don't need the fake democratic control by overpaid politicians, but real democratic control by ordinary working-class people in the community exercised by committees made up of trade unionists, community organisers and others, with power over the hiring and firing of police officers and the day-to-day running of operations."

"Our police are not just institutionally racist, they are institutionally designed to oppress the working class. They are unaccountable because big business relies on the police to break up strikes and protests to protect their profits. We've got to fundamentally change society, take the power of the state into the hands of workers, and fight for a socialist transformation that would organise society according to peoples' needs."



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Mass protests in Russia against Putin regime



Anti-Putin sentiment was reflected in chants of 'Ykhadi!' (get out!) on the 23 January demos PHOTO BOGOMOLOV/PC

CLAIRE DOYLE

COMMITTEE FOR A WORKERS' INTERNATIONAL (CWI)

Mass anti-government demonstrations took place throughout Russia on 23 January, with tens of thousands of protesters on the streets, confronting the brutal forces of Vladimir Putin's dictatorial regime. Some 3,000 demonstrators were arrested nationwide.

This 'coming out', called by Putin's arch nemesis, Alexei Navalny, braved the extreme cold and the riot police batons.

Navalny himself came back to Russia on 17 January from Germany, where he had been recovering from an attempted assassination attempt by Putin's agents last August.

He was arrested at the Moscow airport to which his plane was diverted - away from the supporters who turned out to greet him. He was charged the next day with violating his parole by being in Germany!

Navalny is due to appear in court on 2 February charged with embezzlement, which few believe to have substance. He could face many years in prison.

What has angered the authorities as much as his defiant return to Russia has been a two-hour video he launched a couple of days later. It reveals footage of Putin's secret 'palace' on the Black Sea built with €1.35 billion of taxpayers' money. The film was watched at least 80 million times in the first few days of its appearance.

Demonstrators have gone further than demanding Navalny's release and that charges against him be dropped. The cry is now widely heard

of 'Ykhadi!' (get out!) addressed to Putin, just as it has been in Belarus against the self-declared president, Lukashenko.

"Those who have been demonstrating today," said a long-standing friend of the CWI in St Petersburg, "have seen what happened to protesters who came onto the streets in Belarus and know it can happen to them... One swallow does not mean the summer has arrived; but it is a herald!"

Navalny

Navalny has networks of supporters and campaigners across the vast Russian Federation. While unable to establish a party as such, they challenge all pro-Putin candidates by supporting almost anyone who stands against them.

Navalny and his team have completely stolen the show from the traditional opposition parties, including the tame 'Communist Party' of Gennady Zhyuganov, and the so-called Liberal Democratic Party, also led by a veteran politician, Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, and which is neither liberal nor democratic.

Navalny's campaign, if it gets into full swing, can inflict heavy blows on Putin's United Russia party in parliamentary elections due in September.

Navalny's outlook is not anti-capitalist, he has no affinity to socialism. His support has come mainly from the middle layers in society. He is against the rule of oligarchs and for basic democratic freedoms to create a 'clean' capitalism, but there can be no such thing.

To date there has been little or no organised or spontaneous

involvement of Russia's still vast and highly exploited working class in the democracy movement. Nevertheless, Navalny's challenge to the Putin regime is gaining widespread popularity among the youth. It is attractive to all those who suffer the daily depredations and difficulties of life in today's Russia. It underlines the need for building strong organisations in the workplaces and a democratic party of workers.

Concrete demands would include an end to mass arrests and arbitrary sentencing, and the freeing of all political prisoners. Freedom of the press, speech, assembly and organisation should apply at all times and surveillance and spying by the FSB (secret police) must end. The right to organise trade unions must be fought for and established.

Change

The working class and youth will want to use democratic rights to organise, to win change, which will bring them into conflict with the 'liberal' capitalists and create conditions for the growth of genuine socialist ideas.

The elimination of oligarchic capitalism cannot be completed without the involvement of workers and their elected representatives in a major struggle between the classes.

A party based on the working class with a programme to retake industry and the banks into public ownership under democratic workers' control and management is needed to renew the struggle for genuine socialism - not the bureaucratic deformations of Stalinism.

● Read article in full on socialistworld.net

Help fund a challenge to
austerity at the ballot box
- donate today!



The Socialist Party needs cash to contest upcoming elections PHOTO TU SENAN

ISAI PRIYA

SOCIALIST PARTY NATIONAL TREASURER

With the fourth highest death rate in the world, and the worst in Europe, it is no secret that the Tory government's handling of the pandemic has been terrible. But that is not the only cause of the current suffering. It is also a consequence of years of our public services being cut and privatised by both Tory and New Labour governments.

For example, the total number of NHS hospital beds has more than halved over the past 30 years, leaving the UK with fewer hospital beds per person than other European countries - 2.7 hospital beds per 1,000 people, compared with an EU average of 4.6. In February 2020, 81% of critical care beds were already occupied.

We entered the Covid-19 pandemic with healthcare and services already at breaking point. Many deaths could have been avoided if the NHS hadn't been starved of vital funding during years of austerity.

Austerity is a political choice, and the pro-capitalist politicians that carry it through are not acting in the interests of working-class or young people.

The election of Sir Keir Starmer as Labour leader means there is no longer an anti-austerity voice in the leadership of the Labour Party. Starmer has consistently defended the interests of the capitalist elite. The urgent task facing working-class and young people is the question of political representation - to be able to elect MPs and councillors who vote against cuts and put forward a socialist programme.

This year, as a result of the postponement of last year's elections, there will be the most local

authority elections ever to take place on one day, alongside elections to the Scottish parliament and the Welsh Senedd. They will represent an important opportunity for the working class to voice its anger at everything we have suffered during the pandemic.

The Socialist Party has a proud record of fighting alongside working-class and young people in struggle. We have campaigned against the closure of hospitals, against evictions, job losses and much more. We are involved in workers' struggles in our workplaces and communities.

Workers' voice

We have also been campaigning for political representation for these workers' struggles in elections. We participate in the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC), an electoral coalition with the RMT transport workers' union, ex-Labour MP Chris Williamson and others (see pages 14-16).

The Socialist Party will be participating in TUSC's electoral challenge to offer a real choice at the ballot box. To offer a chance for workers to vote against cuts, and as an opportunity to put forward a socialist programme. This is as part of the task to develop a new mass party of the working class.

Every quarter we have a fighting fund target of £25,000 to help finance our campaigning work. We have decided that we will use a large part of the fighting fund raised this quarter to help finance the election campaign.

If you agree we need a socialist electoral challenge, and support the Socialist Party to stand in the election as part of TUSC, then donate to us today!

● socialistparty.org.uk/donate

TV Review: It's a Sin

MICHAEL JOHNSON

SOCIALIST PARTY LGBT+ CAUCUS

I remember the first time I heard about being gay outside of jokes in the playground. It was looking at pictures of Kaposi's sarcoma patients in a science textbook page on HIV/Aids. For many people in my generation this will ring true.

For many LGBT+ people around the world, HIV/Aids became almost synonymous with homosexuality; it was a 'gay plague'. The virus' discovery was seized upon by right-wing conservatives to push 'traditional family values'. People's feelings of shame forced them back into the closet, and divisive ideas of 'deserving' and 'undeserving' people with HIV were used to justify government policy.

This period, and these issues, have now been dramatised in Russell T Davies' 'It's a Sin', a five-part television series exploring the Aids crisis in Britain between 1981 and 1991 from the point of view of five friends.

From initial rumours and whispered conversations about HIV, the series takes the viewer up to the heights of the epidemic.

The series explores the prejudice LGBT people faced at the time, and shows how this worsened over the course of the epidemic. Characters deal with being disowned by their families, fearing the loss of their jobs, mortgages and lifestyles, alongside funerals being refused, partners banned from funeral services and patients being detained and isolated against their will.

Sadly, these were not dramatic inventions for the series, but are instead based on real events that only served to heighten the crisis. People often hid their diagnosis or symptoms for fear of encountering prejudice, and turned to desperate 'cures' such as drinking battery acid.

This desperation was certainly heightened by the actions of pharmaceutical companies; the show highlights their lack of interest in

anything other than profit. Price gouging took precedence over patients, and this sadly still continues today. PrEP, a preventative medication, costs \$2,000 a month in the US, far beyond the means of most people at risk. And we can see from the current twists and turns around Covid-19 vaccines that HIV/Aids-medication is not the only virus where drug companies put money before people's lives.

However, It's a Sin doesn't only focus on the horrors of the epidemic. It also shows the work of members of the LGBT+ community and wider society in fighting prejudice, corporate greed, and government inaction.

Protests such as 'die-ins' forced action that otherwise might not have happened, leading to major changes and positive developments in patient treatment, and not just for those with HIV/Aids. It showed the power working-class people can have in changing society, even during a health crisis - an important lesson for today.

The Socialist Party's forerunner Militant boldly campaigned during the Aids crisis for mass education, free from moralising, to promote safe

sex, including free condoms for all. We campaigned for proper funding for the NHS to research, prevent and treat HIV/Aids; nationalisation of the drug companies under democratic workers' control and management; and to tackle the underfunding of vital services that could support LGBT+ people, those with HIV/Aids, and the wider working class.

While we are thankfully far from the horror of some of the scenes in It's a Sin, sadly many of these demands are still needed today for the fight against HIV/Aids. The Socialist Party continues to fight for a health service that puts patients before profit, alongside tackling discrimination and prejudice in society.

But to truly tackle the prejudice and discrimination this series so effectively shows to be at the heart of the Aids crisis, we must end the profit-driven capitalist system that fosters LGBTphobia and oppression to divide working people and maintain its rule.

● *It's a Sin can be streamed in full on All4 or viewed Fridays 9pm on Channel 4, last episode to air 19 February*

TV review: The Hidden Story of Disabled Britain

DEREK MCMILLAN

Cerrie Burnell and her team have produced a landmark documentary on the subject of disability.

She herself faced horrific discrimination when she first became a CBeebies presenter and was confronted with the reality of prejudice against disabled people.

The documentary traces the development of prejudice from the eugenics movement so beloved of Dominic Cummings and Adolf Hitler. The clear concept of segregation was to prevent inferior humans from breeding.

This lived on beyond the Nazi era, with special schools for special students, exclusion of disabled people from public transport and the organised patronising of disabled people by charities.

The movement against this led to access to mainstream education for a number of disabled students. One campaigner recalled pupils who had no disabilities chanting "we want to be with our friends". Unanswerable.

Access to public transport for people in wheelchairs is now the norm, but that access is patchy at best, and the poor provision is a denial of civil rights - actually no different from the Alabama bus company refusing a seat to Rosa Parks.

It is ludicrous and insulting that people with disabilities are expected to rely on charities - Chris Tarrant was shown making a self-righteous defence of his patronising attitude.

Disabled people have suffered disproportionately from cuts in public spending and from the impact of the pandemic. Attitudes need to change and this first-class documentary will help.

The prejudice against people with disabilities is a major alibi for the Tories to justify refusing them basic civil rights, and refusing to spend public money on improving facilities and improving access. It is also a means to 'divide and rule'.

● *The Hidden Story of Disabled Britain is on BBC Two on iPlayer*



Readers' comments

It's a Sin. Watch it. Brutally realistic about the 80s and what it was like. What the other pandemic was like then. The Militant pamphlet at the time 'Out and Proud' was great. Ground-breaking at the time on the left.

TONY SAUNOIS

It's a Sin. The words so many of us LGBTQIA people would've heard growing up, and some to this very day! Episode one done, and loved

it! I'm sure there'll be tears as the episodes progress. Series like this remind me how far we've moved forward in society. A chronicle of four friends during a decade in which everything changed, including the rise of AIDS.

JOSIE PERES

It's a Sin. Yes, the existence of a profit-hungry pharmaceutical 'industry' is a sin against humanity. There are many more points to make. But we have to point to the need for nationalisation under democratic working-class control and management as

part of a wider programme of nationalisation towards a democratic socialist planned economy.

SARAH SACHS ELDRIDGE

Just watched it in entirety, a reminder of being 16 in 1987 and the apocalyptic government announcements and doom. Excellent acting and heart-wrenching.

CALVIN FOWLER

It was absolutely brilliant, I was a student nurse at that time and my best friend was a gay guy. The story was very close to my truth at the time. So

hard to watch knowing the results, but a fantastic story to tell. Honest, sometimes too honest, but also a great watch.

JULIE CLEVERLY

Watching the whole series of It's a Sin - moving. What a generation had to go through.

GLENN KELLY

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TUSC is up and running for May elections

Recently, a series of meetings have relaunched the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) anti-austerity electoral challenge to the pro-cuts establishment parties, including Starmer’s Blairite Labour Party. The following reports all indicate enthusiasm to mount a left-wing electoral challenge in the forthcoming council and mayoral elections in England. TUSC was initiated by the RMT transport union, and along with other trade unionists and socialists, the Socialist Party is a core component of the coalition. **See tusc.org.uk for more details.**

London: Making a stand against Khan’s cuts

Over 90 trade unionists, socialists and community campaigners attended an open online TUSC meeting on 20 January to discuss the Greater London Authority (GLA) elections in London this May. This included Socialist Party members, RMT transport union members and a number of ex-Labour Party members, as well as a former and a current Labour councillor. TUSC’s anti-cuts and pro-worker policies could be just the remedy for people ravaged by a decade of Tory austerity leading to growing inequality, which has widened during the Covid crisis. It was great to see a lot of young people attend the meeting. The Tories offer young people no future. Last year, youth unemployment rose 14% in just three months, and when Transport for London’s (TfL) financial crisis hit, the Tories wanted to remove free travel for under-18s. Socialist Party London secretary Helen Pattison addressed the need for an

anti-austerity challenge against London Mayor Sadiq Khan’s plans for massive cuts to TfL, rising council tax and his failure to address the housing crisis. A TUSC mayoral candidate would not only offer an anti-austerity alternative to working-class people in London, but also show Khan his attacks will be challenged. RMT national executive member for London Transport Jared Wood, addressed the importance of fighting to defend workers’ pay and conditions. Many transport workers had been badly affected by the employers’ mishandling of PPE, resulting in unnecessary deaths in the industry. Already, many union members are opposed to Khan’s austerity plans, - indicated by a resolution passed by the London Underground Engineering branch which demanded that, unless Khan backs down from TfL cuts, other candidates should be approached to stand for mayor.

Nancy Taaffe, chair of anti-cuts community campaign Save Our Square (See page 4), raised the issue of affordable housing, stating that the mass building of council housing - a key TUSC policy - is necessary as working-class people are no longer able to afford to live in the boroughs in which they were raised. This was echoed by numerous contributors. Labour’s attempt to secure votes by occupying ground right-of-centre lacked appeal and younger voters in particular were alienated by it. The Socialist Party will continue to work with trade unionists who agree that we must fight cuts. This meeting showed an appetite for anti-establishment politics, reflecting a public mood angry about the effects of capitalism and hungry for an end to austerity. **ELLEN KENVON-PEERS**
SOUTH EAST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY



TUSC national chair Dave Nellist PHOTO PAUL MATTSSON

Nottingham and South Notts – challenging a new cuts agenda

On 23 January, an online launch meeting was held for the Nottingham and South Nottinghamshire county area of TUSC. Chairing the meeting was Jean Thorpe, Socialist Party member, council worker and Unison branch chair (in a personal capacity). She introduced Dave Nellist - former Labour MP and national chair of TUSC. Dave gave a thought-provoking speech, setting out why there needs to be an independent, working-class challenge to the ‘different shades of establishment’ represented by the major political parties. He outlined TUSC’s plans to stand candidates in the May council elections, and discussed some of the key policies TUSC is fighting for, most notably opposing all council cuts. This is particularly relevant, given that Nottingham City Council has proposed another round of brutal cuts for March (partially as a result of the failure of Robin Hood Energy), including removing a further 272 jobs, closing one children’s centre, the Missing Children’s Team, and making ‘savings’ of £3.2 million from the

adult social care budget. This is after 13 years of successive cuts; in fact, three years ago a councillor said they were ‘cutting into the bone’, as Jean Thorpe described later in the discussion. Dave also talked about the ‘political vacuum’ since Keir Starmer was appointed Labour leader, highlighting not only Labour’s various failings during the Covid crisis, but the complicity of certain trade union leaders. He warned that this vacuum was not guaranteed to be filled by the left. The meeting was optimistic, citing not only the hard work to be done, but also the opportunities for real change. The meeting concluded with the aim of forming a steering committee for 3 February. **PIXEL MOORE**
NOTTINGHAM SOCIALIST PARTY

● If you live in Nottingham city or the county and are interested in getting involved with TUSC or standing as a candidate, please contact nottmsnotttusc@yahoo.co.uk and for more information visit tusc.org.uk.

Why I’m leaving Labour and campaigning for TUSC

NASSO CHRISTOU
ENFIELD, NORTH LONDON

From the start of his leadership, Starmer appointed MPs to his shadow cabinet who voted for benefit cuts and war. He is now conducting a McCarthyite witch-hunt, suspending and expelling socialists from the party on the slimmest of excuses, and is continuing to withhold the whip from Jeremy Corbyn. Our Labour Party meetings have been distorted and disrupted by diktats from central office that ban us from democratic debate and any form of dissent. This is Starmer’s very clear signal that he will ditch his pledges and the manifesto as soon as he can.



Our Labour Party meetings have been distorted and disrupted by diktats from central office that ban us from democratic debate...

Lack of fight

Had the Campaign Group of Labour MPs resigned the whip en masse in support of Jeremy, we could have had a meaningful fightback within the party, and a reason for the many socialists who are leaving the party in disgust, to stay and fight. Instead of a fightback, we have fear of expulsions and frantic manoeuvring to keep even the most basic democratic rights and prevent expulsions. Staying in the Labour Party for the forthcoming elections means being represented by, and campaigning for, politicians who have cynically used the issue of antisemitism to undermine Jeremy’s leadership, to smear the left, and to deliberately lose the election.

I am leaving the Labour Party and will be campaigning for the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC), standing on a socialist programme at the next elections. The same policies we campaigned for at the last election with Jeremy. Thousands joined the Labour Party when Jeremy became leader to campaign for socialist policies. As leader in 2017, he led Labour to achieve the biggest vote gain in a general election for any party since 1945 on a socialist programme! If we unite and fight for a progressive programme, we can offer a real alternative to the Tories. The Tories, with very little opposition, have hugely mismanaged the pandemic. Over 100,000 people are



Starmer’s Blairite Labour Party 2.0 has gagged members fighting for socialist policies PHOTO PAUL MATTSSON

dead. The Tories put profits before people, failing to lock down in time, and relaxing lockdowns too soon. Starmer has been entirely ineffective against the Tories, determined to have a consensus approach to the Tories while he attacks members of his own party, eager to establish himself as a safe pair of hands for the bosses. As a result of the lockdowns people

now understand who the key workers really are, and the terrible conditions most of them face. They see the important and complex role of teachers and their importance to society. **Systemic poverty** The school meals campaign and constant references in the media to food charities has exposed the appalling level of poverty in this very

rich country. Through the Black Lives Matter movement masses of people are now aware of the embedded and continuing discrimination in this country. We would be failing all these people if, as socialists, all we offered was a Starmer, Tory-lite government with minor reforms to keep this unjust system rolling along - for the few not the many!

Councillors in Surrey resign from Labour and look to stand independently



Keir Starmer does not want the party to be an opposition to the Tories, in fact he comes across as their cheerleader

members of the shadow cabinet for voting against the bill. Labour’s 2019 manifesto stated that “Labour will end and reverse privatisation in the NHS in the next parliament”, and yet Keir Starmer felt it was appropriate to appoint a lobbyist for the private health sector as his director of communications. Furthermore, instead of uniting

the party, Keir Starmer has endorsed the decision to suspend Jeremy Corbyn. As a result, a number of Constituency Labour Parties (CLPs) have passed motions of no confidence in Keir Starmer and David Evans, general secretary of the Labour Party. The final straw, which led us to leave the Labour Party, has been the suppression of free speech, debate and democracy in the party. Evans issued emails preventing CLPs from tabling motions showing solidarity with Jeremy Corbyn or calling for the restoration of the whip. CLPs and members have been threatened with suspension if they exercise their democratic right to table these ‘forbidden’ motions or even discuss the topics concerning them. Cllr Veena Siva says: “We were elected by voters who support the policies in Labour’s manifesto, and we cannot in good conscience

Launching Northampton TUSC from scratch

Earlier this month, members of Northampton Socialist Party hosted the first TUSC steering committee in Northamptonshire, beginning the process of building a real electoral choice. We needed to bring as many trade unionists and fighting socialists into the steering committee as possible. First, we did our best to find contact details for local trade union branches and sent

emails to trade unions advertising the meeting. There were only a few responders, so we needed to be bolder. Two members of our Socialist Party branch who are Unite union members, raised the subject with their local Unite branch in one of its regular Zoom meetings. They were unapologetically upfront in raising the subject of TUSC and the need

for a political voice for working-class people in Tory-run Northampton. This picked the interest of several Unite branch members. The Unite branch secretary agreed to attend the first committee meeting. **Bakers’ union** Having followed events (over Covid safety and a pay claim) at sandwich maker Greencore, in Northampton, we knew

there would be a number of Bfawu members, the bakers’ union, looking for a new political home. Sure enough, when we spoke with regional organiser George Atwell he was already aware of some shop stewards who would be interested in being a part of TUSC. Two baker’s union shop stewards joined the meeting. The discussion was energetic and

incredibly productive. A steering committee was agreed and roles allocated. Boldness and enthusiasm paid off. Now we are busy building for our public meeting on 4 February where all prospective candidates and supporters will be encouraged to take part in an exciting new challenge to a rotten Tory council. **KATIE SIMPSON**
NORTHAMPTON SOCIALIST PARTY

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the Socialist

Issue 1118

28 January - 3 February 2021

formerly **Militant**

Come to the TUSC local elections conference - 7 February



LENNY SHAIL

SOCIALIST PARTY NATIONAL COMMITTEE

The Covid crisis has revealed many things about our society - including how the vast wealth that exists in the UK can be drawn upon to serve public needs when sufficient pressure is applied.

The Tory government - despite being based on Thatcher's 'the free market rules' ideology - has made U-turn after U-turn against the background of growing anger and public outcry.

So many things ridiculed before as impossible or not realistic have been enacted, even if sometimes in a limited and incomplete way. At the start of the spring lockdown the government, in effect, nationalised the railways and other forms of transport to keep the system going. Over the course of one weekend councils were instructed to provide accommodation for all those living on the streets.

Now, it is true, homelessness is rising again and private companies are still embedded in the transport system.

But nonetheless such measures have demonstrated that, when under pressure, even a government of the rich can be forced into making huge

FIGHTING BACK AGAINST STARMER'S NEW, 'NEW LABOUR' - INCLUDING AT THE BALLOT BOX!

concessions in the interests of ordinary people.

And local councils could play a leading role in building that pressure - if there were councillors in them prepared to fight!

Labour leads over 120 councils, with a combined spending power greater than the state budgets of 16 EU countries.

But Starmer's Labour cannot be trusted to stand up for ordinary people. That is why the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) is preparing to stand across the UK this May in the many elections taking place.

Even one councillor in a local authority taking a stand, if they used their position in the council chamber to appeal to those outside, could give confidence to local trade unionists and community campaigners to fight.

A network of rebel councillors across the country could have an even bigger impact in fighting for what is needed to meet the Covid crisis.

● **Come to the TUSC local elections conference to be held on Zoom on Sunday 7 February to help organise a fightback at the ballot box this May - or whenever the elections take place.**

● Zoom link
● Meeting ID: 828 9659 5909
● Passcode: 645766

A SOCIALIST RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC CRISIS

▶▶▶ socialistparty.org.uk/coronavirus

WHAT WE STAND FOR: THE SOCIALIST PARTY'S MAIN DEMANDS

▶▶▶ see column on p3

