

Tories admit market failure

WE WANT OUR NHS BACK!

- Fully funded
- Publicly owned
- Democratically run



PHOTO MARY FINCH

STEVE SCORE
LEICESTER SOCIALIST PARTY

In the middle of the Covid pandemic, a leaked government draft white paper has revealed the Tories' plans to reorganise the NHS in England. It has been trumpeted in the press as a reversal of "controversial privatisation policies" introduced by David Cameron in 2012, and that the government is 'taking back control' of the NHS.

Despite the heroism of NHS workers, the years of underfunding, understaffing and privatisation of the NHS have left it struggling to cope with Covid. Nine years ago, the Con-Dem coalition government's Health and Social Care Act increased the fragmentation and privatisation in the NHS, and devolved

some of the powers of the health secretary to unelected quangos. But this just continued a process that began with the introduction of the 'internal market' under a previous Tory government and was massively accelerated under Tony Blair's Labour.

The white paper in effect accepts the failure of the 2012 Act - that it increased disintegration in the NHS - and says: "In practice, the NHS has not operated as the market intended by the 2012 Act".

However, is this Tory government really intending to reverse privatisation and increase accountability when it returns powers to the health secretary? Readers of the Socialist will know that will not be the case!

The experience of the government using the pandemic as an excuse to hand over more contracts to big business shows its real intentions. Billions have been handed to profiteering companies for track and trace, PPE, private laboratories, and private hospitals. The white paper says "there will continue to be an important role for voluntary and independent sector providers", in other words private companies.

The document proposes legislation to make 'integrated care systems' statutory bodies in the NHS, including the

participation of 'voluntary and independent sector partners'. These are bodies that are already being developed by NHS England to take over the commissioning of NHS services from the ones set up by the 2012 Act, and will also be part of a further privatisation process.

A few years ago, Leicester Socialist Party members played a key role in a massive campaign to save the Glenfield Children's Heart Centre under threat from the biggest quango of all, NHS England. We won that campaign, but there is no doubt, despite 'independence' from the government, they were working to its plan. Now, through the Save Our NHS Leicestershire campaign, we have been fighting the undemocratic local NHS bodies' plans to reorganise our hospitals, including the closure of one and an inadequate bed provision for the future.

'Bringing back control of the NHS' to this Tory government will not result in real accountability! We need the NHS to be genuinely democratically run by elected and accountable committees including service workers and users. But to do this we also need to reverse all privatisation and have a properly funded and integrated NHS - nationalising private health care, the medical supply industry, and the pharmaceutical companies.

the Socialist formerly Militant

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

TUSC online conference Preparing to build a working-class force for the local elections in May

Over 550 attended the online conference of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) on 7 February in preparation for the local elections in May. Dave Nellist, TUSC national spokesperson, was in the chair. He explained that the conference was meeting "at a pivotal political moment, against the background of a decade of austerity."

Dave introduced contributions from representatives of the component parts of the TUSC steering committee: the transport union RMT, the Socialist Party, Resist, and a representative of individual socialists involved in TUSC.

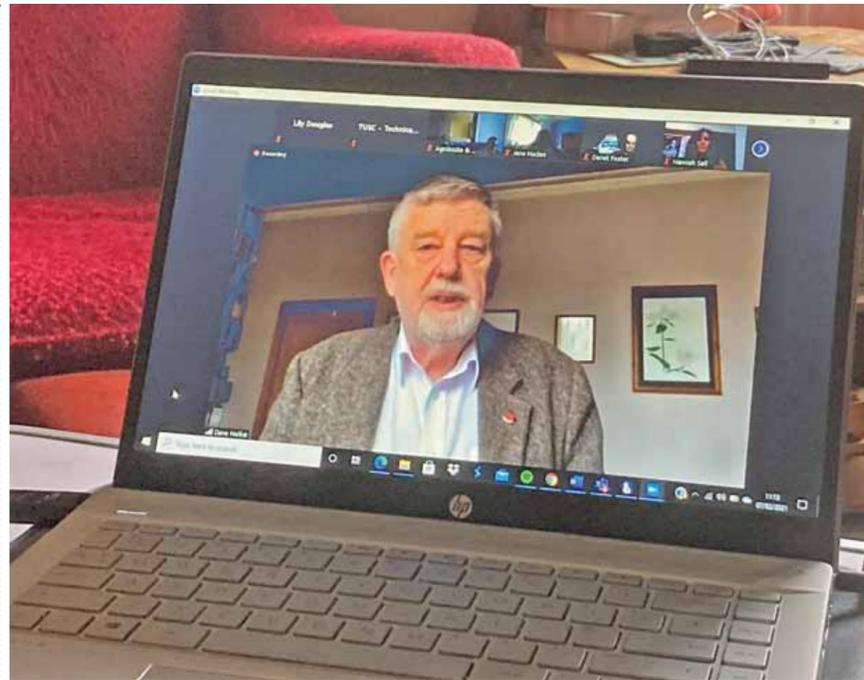
A working-class force Jared Wood, a member of the RMT's national executive committee, spoke first, and explained how it was the railway workers' union that, in 1899, moved a motion calling for the Trades Union Congress to establish a committee, to ensure a more effective representation of working people in parliament.

Jared posed the question: "What force in parliament today is going to prevent the ruling elite imposing the cost of the Covid crisis onto the working class? Who on the left could possibly argue against a project to try and build that force, as the trade unions and socialists did in 1900?"

"There is a massive latent support for a mass party of the working class. We have to build our forces in the



Jared Wood, RMT NEC



Over 550 logged in on Zoom to take part in the conference PAULA MITCHELL



What force in parliament today is going to prevent the ruling elite imposing the cost of the Covid crisis onto the working class?

trade unions. Building support for independent working-class political representation must be one of the priorities of every socialist in every trade union."

Hannah Sell, general secretary of the Socialist Party, said: "Millions of working-class people are never going to forget or forgive what Johnson has made them suffer in the last year. It is incredible that in this situation Starmer's Labour are not ahead in the opinion polls. Why? Because they have not offered any opposition."

"This was summed up by the farce at the start of this year, when trade unionists in education rightly said that it was unsafe for them to go to work in schools. Under pressure, Johnson was forced into a U-turn to shut the normal functioning of schools. Starmer was desperate to have nothing to do with working-class action or the trade unions, and was still refusing to call for the schools to be shut."

"Starmer's every act is designed to show that, like Blair, he is a Labour leader who represents the millionaires not the millions. This includes the systematic annihilation of Corbynism, with the removal of the Labour whip from Corbyn on completely spurious grounds, and the suspension and expulsion of many Labour Party members who have dared to support him."

"This May, we are going to see a significant number of local authority elections in England, plus

parliamentary elections in Scotland and Wales, in a situation where eight out of ten councils that provide social care are facing bankruptcy. Criminally, up until now Labour councils have accepted that they have got no choice but to implement the cuts demanded by the Tory government. We know that is not going to change under Starmer's rule."

Councils could force a U-turn

"This is at a time where the government has spent unprecedented amounts of money. Last year they spent three-and-a-half times the annual spending proposed in the 2019 Labour manifesto. They are not spending money in the interests of the working class, but to prop up their rotten system."

"It has never been clearer, that if Labour councils were to stand up and fight and refuse to implement Tory cuts, to demand more money from central government, they could force this endlessly U-turning bunch of Tories to retreat."

"The Covid crisis and its aftermath mean working-class people are facing some of the hardest battles we have faced in the last century. If we fight without an electoral arm to our struggle, we are fighting with one arm tied behind our back. For all those reasons TUSC is essential."

The conference also heard from Dave Roberts of 'Resist - movement for a people's party.' This is the group

founded by ex-Labour MP Chris Williamson who was driven from the Labour Party as a result of his support for Corbyn. A number of ex-Labour Party candidates and activists are approaching TUSC as they see the need to oppose austerity in May. Pete McLaren, representing those socialists that support TUSC and are not members of a constituent part of the coalition, said: "TUSC is a stepping stone in the process of building a mass working-class political party, and has made tremendous strides in the last 10 years."

Refuse to implement austerity

The conference discussed TUSC's core policy platform for the local elections in May (see tusc.org.uk). Clive Heemsker, national election agent, spoke to introduce the document: "These are eight bullet points, they are not an exhaustive list, or a national manifesto. Instead, it is the minimum commitments anyone who wants to stand under the TUSC banner has to make in order to become a TUSC candidate in this May's elections."

"TUSC is a coalition of organisations and individuals, and the core policies platform is the bottom line of what unites TUSC candidates. To put it simply, if somebody is not prepared to commit to go into the town hall and vote for the council to refuse to implement austerity politics, they cannot be a TUSC candidate."

Three amendments to the policy platform moved at the conference will be discussed at the TUSC steering committee that meets on 24 February when the election platform will be agreed, informed by the discussions at the conference.

Contributions were made from numerous other trade unionists, socialists and community activists. Nancy Taaffe from London outlined how "in Sadiq Khan we have a mini-Kier Starmer" planning further attacks on workers. Onay Kasab listed the many strikes of workers in London against Labour authorities, including those facing 'fire and rehire' in Tower Hamlets, and school transport workers in Hackney. He made the case for these workers to be TUSC candidates in London.

Jim McFarlane, a member of the Unison public sector union national executive committee from Scotland, speaking in a personal capacity, explained how the question of Scottish independence will play a prominent role in May's Scottish parliament elections. Jim highlighted the need for TUSC to stand to expose both Labour and SNP as agents of Tory austerity.

Public transport workers have been among the worst affected by Covid-19 infections in the workplace. Declan Clune, secretary of Southampton and District RMT Bus and Coach branch, outlined the struggle for PPE as well as the planned cuts of public transport budgets by Labour councils. He put forward the need to renationalise bus services along with the other public transport networks, to be run in the interests of the community rather than profit.

Part of TUSC's core platform for the elections is the need for united working-class struggle against racism. "We need candidates who can unify workers and who support good jobs and decent pay, we need a political opposition that can offer workers the economic and political changes we need to get out of this



Deji Olayinka addressing BLM protests in Birmingham BIRMINGHAM SOCIALIST PARTY



If we fight without an electoral arm to our struggle, we are fighting with one arm tied behind our back.



Hannah Sell, Socialist Party general secretary

Would you like to fight austerity and stand under the TUSC banner in May?

Visit tusc.org.uk



WHAT WE STAND FOR

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

As capitalism dominates the globe, the struggle for genuine socialism must be international. The Socialist Party is part of the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI) which organises across the world. Our demands include...

PUBLIC SERVICES

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

WORK AND INCOME

- Trade union struggle for an immediate increase in the minimum wage to £12 an hour without exemptions as a step towards a real living wage of at least £15. For an annual increase in the minimum wage linked to average earnings. Scrap zero-hour contracts. All workers, including part-timers, temps, casual and migrant workers to have trade union rates of pay, employment protection, and sickness and holiday rights from day one of employment. An immediate 50% increase in the state retirement pension, as a step towards a living pension.

- Scrap Universal Credit. For the right to decent benefits, education, training, or a job, without compulsion. Scrap the anti-trade union laws! For fighting trade unions, democratically controlled by their members. Full-time union officials to be regularly elected and receive no more than a worker's wage. Support the National Shop Stewards Network. A 35-hour week with no loss of pay.

ENVIRONMENT

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

RIGHTS

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

MASS WORKERS' PARTY

- For a mass workers' party drawing together workers, young people and activists from workplace, community, environmental, anti-racist and anti-cuts campaigns, to provide a fighting, political alternative to the pro-big business parties.

SOCIALISM AND INTERNATIONALISM

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

Do you agree? Join the fightback!

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GRENFELL: ARE WE ANY CLOSER TO JUSTICE?

PAUL KERSHAW
UNITE HOUSING WORKERS' CHAIR

The government's inquiry into the Grenfell Tower fire disaster in June 2017, in which 72 people died, has resumed. The inquiry has been agonising for the survivors and bereaved.

Fire safety problems are much wider than previously thought. Trade publication Inside Housing concluded: "Nobody knows how many are caught, but the figure will undoubtedly reach into the millions... In the final analysis, almost everyone who lives in a high or medium-rise building may be affected by this crisis in some way."

The much-delayed inquiry was set up by Theresa May to kick the can down the road at a time of mounting anger over the disaster. It started by looking at the firefighters' response, rather than on the nature and causes of the fire.

Many pointed out this was illogical, because the starting point would be what sort of problems the firefighters faced. The corporate media seized on the first phase as an opportunity for critical publicity on the role of firefighters.

Profit-seeking culture

More recent hearings have revealed the cynical profit-seeking culture in the construction industry in lurid detail. But they have received much less coverage. Even Dominic Lawson in the Sunday Times was moved to comment: "It turns out that the depravity, at a corporate level, was worse even than we could have imagined."

The inquiry heard how staff at Kingspan - a company that made some of the combustible material used on Grenfell Tower - joked in 2016 about claims that their product was safe: "All lies mate... all we do is lie in here." QC Richard Millet was right to suggest it was "a pithy summary of Kingspan's culture at the time".

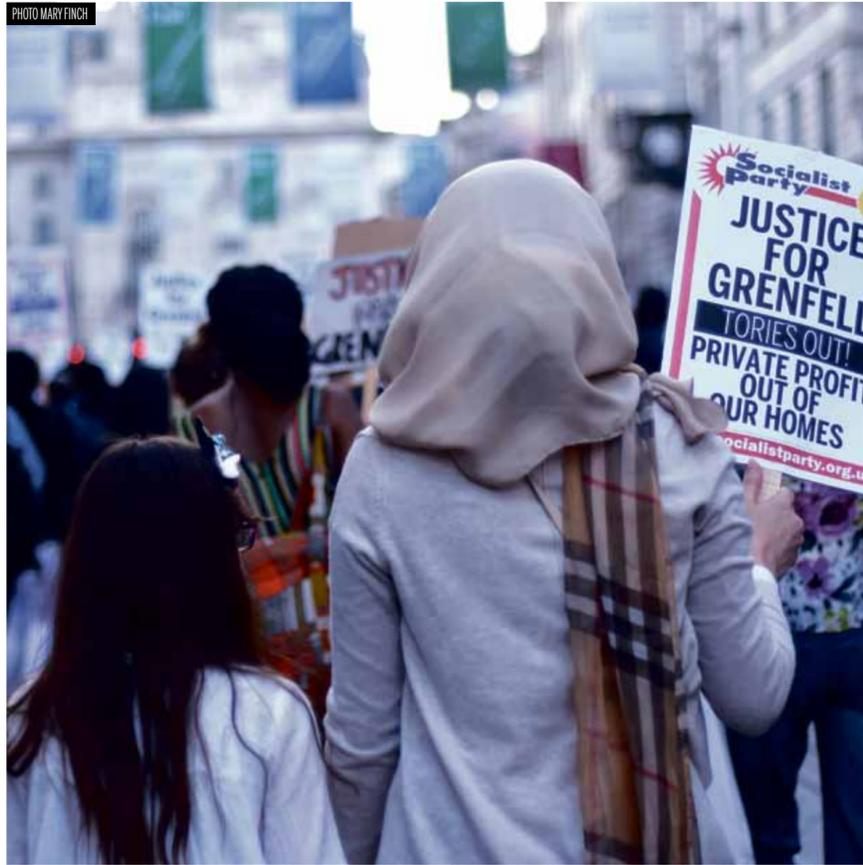
In 2009, Kingspan persuaded the local Tory council that the K15 plastic foam insulation used on Grenfell was of "limited combustibility". Kingspan's technical manager boasted: "We didn't even have to get any real ale down him."

Kingspan threatened to sue the national building control body when it raised doubts about K15. Just weeks after the fire, Kingspan engaged PR firms to lobby the government and set up rigged tests on non-combustible material.

The inquiry counsel commented: "Kingspan, even in... the face of an investigation into fire safety after Grenfell, was doing its best to ensure that the science was secretly perverted for financial gain. That has been... Kingspan's general approach for years. It's still going on... Did you see the aftermath of the Grenfell fire as something of a commercial opportunity?"

Housing association Notting Hill Genesis is using Kingspan's K15 on Zenith House in Colindale in Barnet in north London. Since December 2018, K15 is banned on buildings taller than 18 metres.

PHOTO MARY FINCH



Zenith House is 50 metres tall, but K15 is permitted because the work is deemed 'repairs' rather than 'replacement'. "Even if they are right within the letter of the law, it still feels like they are cutting corners", said one resident.

Residents sounded the alarm when the cladding was spotted stacked in the car park. It was later removed following a request from the London Fire Brigade. The fact the decision to use K15 was taken by a 'not for profit' housing association shows the importance of organising in groups such as the Unite union housing workers-initiated Social Housing Action Campaign.

Another key manufacturer involved, Celotex, falsified fire test results on its RS5000 insulation boards by using fire retardants. Arconic, the US-based manufacturer of the now banned ACM PE cladding panels, knew its product was highly flammable and yet knowingly promoted its sale, taking advantage of the UK's weaker regulatory regime.

Arconic's former UK sales manager, Deborah French, is expected to appear before the resumed inquiry after initially refusing to attend.

A major Arconic shareholder donated nearly £25,000 to Boris Johnson and the Conservative Party. Karim Mussilhy, of the survivors' group Grenfell United, has called on the prime minister to return the money.

"How can we trust this government

to deliver truth, justice and change when they themselves, including the prime minister, take donations from one of Arconic's major shareholders. Right now, Arconic is getting away with not cooperating fully with the inquiry and the government appears not to be doing enough. Is this cosy relationship one of the reasons?"

And the key refurbishment companies - project managers Rydon, architects Studio E, and cladding designers Harley - do not appear to have given any serious consideration of fire safety in the selection and installation of the materials used to clad the tower.

Recommendations

Rydon is also the developer for the Canalside block on the Packington Estate in Islington, north London. After inspecting the building and finding faults, fire-safety experts said a 'waking watch' would be needed. But Rydon has refused to pick up the bill - the equivalent of over £1,500 a month for each flat.

Boris Johnson promised to accept all recommendations from the first phase of the inquiry, but just four out of 46 have been fully implemented. In September, the Tories rejected an amendment to the Fire Safety Bill, which sought to legislate for some of the recommendations - including requiring landlords to share design information with the local fire service, carry out regular inspections of flat doors and lifts, and ensure

evacuation and fire-safety plans for residents.

As a minimum, tenants and resident organisations should demand that these are implemented by landlords. 'Social landlords' should be leading the way.

Since the 2017 Grenfell fire, more and more fire-safety problems have come to light. Massively profitable companies - which often give fat donations to the Tory party - are building sub-standard and unaffordable homes. On this basis, the government's much-trumpeted plans for a building boom will not 'build back better'.

While others suffer, the house-builders are booming. Vistry group reports sales up 20%, and predicts bumper profits of £130 million.

In 2017, Chris Blythe, chief executive of the Chartered Institute of Building, called for the 'nationalisation' of the housing market and the creation of a 'national housebuilding body'. "If we are educating people and looking after their health, does it not make sense that we should close the loop with good housing that promotes health and enables people to take advantage of our investment in their education?"

As well as pressing for full implementation of the findings of the inquiry, the workers' movement should take up the call for nationalisation of the construction industry with minimum compensation based on proven need, and a planning process

based on social need not profit, with full democratic input from local people. This could be the way to deliver a mass programme of much needed high-quality green council homes.

Leaseholders have been left with unmanageable bills and unsafe, unsaleable 'shared ownership' homes. Builders, housing associations and the government have left them to twist in the wind; the claim to be supporting people onto the 'housing ladder' has been revealed to be hollow. They support big capital not individuals trying to house themselves.

A 'shared owner' in Southwark had his flat reposessed because he could not keep up with the bills imposed because of unsafe construction. He only 'owned' the lease on 25% of his flat and has therefore been forced to continue to pay huge bills to cover the rest of the flat. As it lacks a safety certificate it is all but unsaleable and Hyde Housing (his housing association) has refused to buy it back, even at a discount.

Cladding removal

Some Tories have become increasingly concerned at the electoral impact of the government's failure and have called for action. Following a recent vote in Parliament it appears that there will be further proposals to help. But if these amount to loan schemes that place the ultimate costs on leaseholders, they will be inadequate.

There are unconfirmed reports now that the additional cladding funding will be £5 billion, leaving a £10 billion shortfall in relation to the most often-quoted estimate for the total cost in relation to towers.

This leaves aside the problem of risk in low-rise blocks. The fires in Barking (see page 10), Bolton and Worcester Park were shocking reminders that the threat to life doesn't stop when a block is less than 18 metres high.

Leaseholders groups including SHAC will have to discuss organised non-payment of service charges and support for victims who have already lost homes.

The Socialist Party says:

- No establishment stitch-up - for an independent, public inquiry led by the local community and trade unions
- Make homes safe and bill the government - don't make tenants pay for repairs that are not their fault
- Residents should be kept informed and take democratic decisions themselves
- Cuts to local government funding, and councils passing on cuts, must end
- For a mass council house building programme
- Rent caps, reductions and controls
- Nationalise construction under the democratic control of the working class

Question mark over AstraZeneca's vaccine efficacy to protect against new Covid variant

The Johnson government's much-trumpeted Covid vaccine roll-out programme has taken a knock. A research trial in South Africa has suggested the UK's most distributed vaccine - AstraZeneca's - was largely ineffective at preventing mild or moderate disease from the B.1.351 'South African' variant of Covid-19, which has established itself here. The vaccine is thought to prevent serious disease, but more trial results are needed.

A few days before this finding, AstraZeneca said its preliminary studies showed that its vaccine is still effective against the UK B.1.1.7 Covid variant first found in Kent (but less effective than against the original strain), which is rapidly becoming the dominant strain worldwide.

The Tory government's rush to reopen the economy and 'return to normality', by creating vaccine 'herd immunity' among the population, now looks compromised. The original AstraZeneca trial was too small, especially in older age groups, dosage production mistakes were made during the trial and it was insufficiently trialled outside the UK before being marketed.

South Africa trials

Shabir Madhi, lead researcher of Covid vaccine trials in South Africa, had previously commented: "It took a lot of convincing both for Novavax as well as for AstraZeneca vaccine for their sponsors to eventually agree to bring studies to South Africa. And the studies were largely led directly by us in South Africa. We also had to convince funders to support the studies

in South Africa...

This is just to emphasise that companies were not rushing to Africa to get their Covid-19 vaccines evaluated on the continent. On the contrary, there seems to be little incentive for them to do their studies here, as it's not seen as a market that will provide a return on their investments."

Both Novavax and Johnson & Johnson have said their vaccines were less effective against the strain in clinical trials conducted in South Africa. Shabir Madhi says the Novavax vaccine efficacy was 60% in people living without HIV in South Africa compared with 89% in the UK, following two doses. Both Novavax and Johnson & Johnson claim their vaccines offer complete protection against severe disease and death in relation to Covid-19.

Pfizer reckons that its own preliminary studies show that its vaccine, which was the first to be licensed in the UK, is effective against variants in the UK, South Africa and elsewhere. Moderna also says laboratory tests showed its vaccine to still be effective against the South African strain.

However, these are preliminary findings. How effective they will be in the field is still undetermined. The virus is continually changing so it's likely that, as with seasonal flu, a booster or annual vaccine jab will be required.

These developments show that relying solely on vaccines is insufficient in controlling the Covid pandemic. It reinforces having effective controls ie, test, trace, isolate and support, to break the cycle of Covid transmission, something the



PHOTO WHISPY/HISTORY/CC

Johnson government with its late, big business-run and piecemeal measures has failed to achieve.

New variants will continue to arise, especially where the virus spreads rapidly like the UK, Brazil and South Africa.

The fact that the South African variant is now established in the UK and the UK variant has now been found in over 55 countries, shows that unless the pandemic is tackled globally - with affordable vaccination programmes available in low-income countries - then Covid will bite back in the high-income

capitalist nations.

Therein lays the fundamental contradiction of capitalism. Namely, trade and economic activity and population movements are global but capitalism remains confined to individual competing nation states and ruling classes seeking profit and accumulating wealth.

Tackling health pandemics - along with global warming, poverty and inequality and many other world problems - can only be achieved through internationalism and cooperation. Capitalism cannot do that; that's why socialism is a necessity for survival.

Big Energy piles on the misery

Energy regulator Ofgem has raised the price cap on what gas and electricity companies can charge 15 million households by between £87 and £96 a year (£1,156 or £1,138) - a 9% increase - from 1 April. The price cap is the maximum energy companies can charge consumers.

This sizeable price rise comes at a time when many households' incomes have been pummeled by the effects of the pandemic, including wage and job cuts.

It also will hit poor households at exactly the same time as Chancellor Rishi Sunak is planning to claw back the £20 pandemic increase in Universal Credit. Before the pandemic hit us, 'fuel poverty' was already affecting over 10% of households in the UK.

Industry-friendly Ofgem boss Jonathan Brearley blithely told customers that "if they want to avoid the increase in April they should shop around for a cheaper deal".

But £23 of this increase is energy companies clawing back costs incurred from unpaid consumer bills.

Energy companies are also accused of passing on to consumers the Climate Change Levy - the government's environment tax - and the cost of installing smart meters (even though companies save administration costs).

The nationalisation of 'big energy', which could mean clean energy generation and lower household fuel bills, is long overdue.

news in brief

Benefiting from Covid

UK companies still operating final salary (or 'defined-benefit') pension schemes are anticipated to receive a £60 billion windfall as pension liabilities are expected to fall due to the impact of the pandemic on life expectancy.

Economic modelling suggests the pandemic and its effects on the NHS (including treatment delays) and the economy, will reduce life expectancy by about seven months from a typical retiree. This amounts to 1.5-3.5% of pension costs (between £25 billion to £60 billion), about half of the supposed £120 billion total shortfall on UK defined-benefit schemes.

NHS decay

A leaked government document suggests that the Johnson government is considering paring back the parasitic role of private companies in the NHS. This can't come a moment too soon as the crisis in dentistry shows.

NHS dental patients have been told to pay for private treatment or wait two years for appointments according to Healthwatch England.

The watchdog says one patient was offered a private treatment costing £1,700 instead of charging the £60 NHS tariff. But if that wasn't bad enough, some patients were told to buy their own dental repair kits and treat themselves!

When thieves fall out...

Tory Chancellor Rishi Sunak is being pushed by the bosses of big high street retailers like Tesco, B&Q, Morrisons, Waterstones, and others, to impose an online sales tax on mega internet sellers like Amazon, whose UK sales jumped by 51% last year to nearly £20 billion. It's estimated that £1 in every £20 spent by shoppers ends up with Amazon.

However, Amazon pays substantially less in business rates on its out-of-town warehouses. Its rates liabilities are estimated at only 0.37% of turnover compared to 2.3% for the likes of high street retailers.

Tesco et al say an online sales levy of 1% on annual revenues greater than £1 million could lead to a 20% reduction in business rates.

But while some small retail outlets have been stuffed by high rates combined with collapsing footfall, they are hardly in the same league as big players such as Tesco and Morrisons who have enjoyed sales increases and rising profits, while forcing tough job cuts and inferior contracts on its workforce.

Perhaps, it would be best for all round if these giant traders were nationalised!

Hackney schools workers to strike

Members of the Unite union and the National Education Union will be taking strike action at Colvestone and Thomas Fairchild Schools in Hackney, London on 10, 11 and 12 February over job losses and reorganisation.

This follows a refusal by the schools to enter into any meaningful negotiations. The unions participated in the consultation process - only to find that not a single area of concern was addressed. The unions have also laid blame at the door of Hackney Council, which has the ability to intervene but is failing to do so.

The unions have pointed to the fact that following job losses, the new structure at the school will be unworkable. Staff are furious that the finance committee allowed the situation to reach this point and that staff must now pay for this blunder with their jobs, but also that while jobs are lost, the federation recruited to the position of head of school.

Unite regional officer **Onay Kasab**

stated: "The schools have told parents that the strike may cause minimal disruption over three days. That is nothing compared to the long-term disruption which will be caused by the reorganisation and job losses. It is short-sighted beyond belief that a school cuts jobs during a pandemic - exactly at a time when absence levels due to sickness are likely to be high.

The reality is that the cuts are unnecessary. The process allows for the council to accept that the deficit is carried over. This is all we are asking for - don't cut now. Instead, carry the deficit over and let us see where we are after the summer - this is where the council should and must step in."

"To unnecessarily cause unemployment during the pandemic is cruel and heartless."

"We are taking strike action because despite the pandemic, the employers are not stepping back. We cannot step back - we will step forward to defend jobs, schools and education."

York couriers call on council for protection from "fear of dismissal"

ETHAN BRADLEY
IWGB COURIERS AND LOGISTICS BRANCH
AND YORK IWGB

Key-working couriers are currently locked in a battle against York city council in a bid to protect our income - and jobs. Gig economy riders, who have worked throughout the pandemic delivering meals, groceries and medicines, have seen incomes plunge rapidly.

We are lobbying to win city-centre access throughout the day. These areas are typically fully pedestrianised, but as local couriers' union York IWGB argues, these restrictions are not taken into account by companies - and this leaves us under constant fear of dismissal.

These gig-employers - including Deliveroo, UberEats and Just Eat - misclassify couriers as self-employed contractors, rather than as workers. They exploit this legal loophole to deny couriers basic rights, such as holiday pay and minimum wage entitlement.

It also allows them to sack riders with no due process, no appeal, and no right to union representation. The union's national 'Clapped and Scrapped' campaign has detailed many cases of riders being left suddenly unable to support themselves



and their families and facing extreme hardship.

To justify these terminations, the companies claim that riders failed to meet delivery targets. York's rigid and inflexible restrictions - and similar restrictions elsewhere - leave the unenviable choice between risking a £50 police fine (which can currently wipe out a day's income) and risking

Presidential candidate Marion Lloyd says:



"This has been a year when we've had to fight for our lives and livelihoods.

Our reps and members have worked tirelessly throughout the whole of this pandemic. Our reps have balanced their trade union role to keep everyone safe, with at the same time meeting the demands of their official work. And our members, despite the circumstances, and at no small risk to themselves, continue to deliver key services to the public.

I believe that we need a leadership in PCS that reflects the inspirational and brave role our reps and members have demonstrated. Regrettably, on too many occasions our leadership has failed us.

If I am elected president, I promise you that the NEC will never allow senior officers to park and water down our full pay claim as they did in 2020. This show of weakness not only let down our members but gave confidence to the employer to continue the attacks on our pay, and led directly to the HMRC management proposal to link pay increases to a worsening of conditions.

If we do not respond to the attacks that the employer has already embarked upon, despite the platitudes about how indispensable the public sector workforce is, then these attacks will only increase. The public sector pay 'pause' is just the start.

I recognise that many of our members think that we are very lucky given the circumstances that many other families face - illness and sadly, in some cases, deaths, redundancy and job loss as well as poverty and worry. But a high proportion of PCS members are facing these issues too, and we must unite and campaign to put in place the best possible pay and working conditions for all of us.

If we just 'accept our lot' then the Tory government will feel emboldened to make the public sector and all of those key workers pay the price. The pay freeze will be just the beginning - job losses, office closures, privatisations, attacks on our working conditions have not been 'paused'. Our union is there to support us and we need a leadership prepared to do that, to be bold and unwavering and build confidence that anything is possible.

With a firm, militant programme, and a serious approach to the other unions for coordinated action, we can take on the Tories and win.

The work that reps and members have undertaken to protect our safety, jobs, and terms and conditions is inspirational. It gives me the confidence that under a new leadership, with a fresh approach based on our collective strength, PCS can regain its fighting culture and win for members.

I am a member of the Socialist Party and the Broad Left Network. I am standing for PCS president and urge support for all BLN candidates."

PCS union elections Vote for rank-and-file socialist Broad Left Network candidates

PCS, the union for civil service and public sector workers, has begun the 2021 elections for its president and national executive committee (NEC). The Broad Left Network (BLN) - a PCS rank-and-file socialist group is standing candidates.

Socialist Party members are active

in the BLN, which was formed following criticisms of Left Unity over its undemocratic behaviour and failures as the leadership of PCS.

The PCS election is at a critical stage - the securing of nominations. The BLN slate is reproduced below along with a summary of key issues in the union.

Between now and 11 March PCS branches will hold their annual general meetings.

Members have the right to nominate candidates for president and NEC, and we are calling on socialists to nominate and support Marion Lloyd for president, and the rest of the BLN slate.



The Broad Left Network programme

Socialist Party members in PCS support the Broad Left Network in the PCS 2021 elections. Here are some of the issues of importance in the union and the list of BLN candidates:

- Covid-19. Members safety is paramount. Work from home - exceptions only with union agreement. Prioritise mental health, wellbeing and stress levels. Collective union response to health and safety threats
- Homeworking to improve work-life balance - not to close offices and save money
- National campaign against the pay freeze and attacks on pensions. Better pay - no trading of conditions
- End privatisations - bring back outsourced work. Protect jobs and conditions
- Defend lay democracy and control - no to the NEC stage-managed 2021 conference - yes to an inclusive and listening union
- Build the future of the union around a fighting programme - not by mergers and restructuring. Use our collective strength to win for members

PCS Broad Left Network election candidates - vote for the following

President	Lloyd Marion: (BEIS) (pictured left)	
Vice presidents	Brittle Fiona: (Scot Gov), Brown Sarah: (Met Police), Semple Dave: (DWP)	
National executive committee	Bartlett Dave: MOJ	Borland Rebecca: Home Office
Brittle Fiona: Scot Gov	Brown Alex: Health	Brown Sarah: Met Police
Denman Kevin: Met Police	Dennis Alan: DSG	Foxton Gill: DfE
Francis Sue: BEIS	Guinnane Paul: DfE	Heemskerk Rachel: DWP
Lloyd Marion: BEIS	Lowry Tom: DWP	Parker Nick: BEIS
Rees Dave: DWP	Ritchie Rob: Met Police	Semple Dave: DWP
Suter Paul: DWP	Tweeddale Saorsa-Amatheia: DWP	Williams Katrine: DWP
Worswick Craig: DWP	Young Colin: DfE	

Why we are supporting the Broad Left Network

"I am proud to support BLN in the national elections as I believe we need to go back to being an activist and member-led union. I believe that BLN has the programme that can achieve this and gain the successes our members deserve."

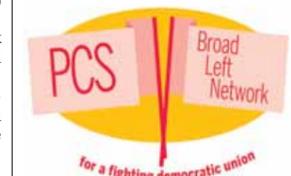
SARAH BROWN, MET POLICE GROUP PRESIDENT (PERSONAL CAPACITY)

"Covid-19 has a disproportionate impact on our disabled members. PCS states that equality is at the heart of everything we do, yet in the move to a predominantly virtual organising world, where the needs of disabled members and activists should have been at the forefront of protecting and promoting our members interests during the pandemic, PCS was found wanting. I am supporting the BLN in this year's elections as I have seen first-hand the leadership and dedication its activists have had in landing agreements to ensure that every safeguard that needed to be put in place for disabled members, whether they were working remotely or from their offices, was put in place."

ROB BOWERS, DSG GROUP

"Marion has provided invaluable support, by listening and discussing through issues I have faced as a rep and negotiator, to find the best means to defend members and make real progress. It is refreshing to have someone prepared to discuss and who considers all avenues, including how to mobilise our members' anger to bring maximum pressure on management in talks to get results."

KATRINE WILLIAMS, DWP GROUP VICE-PRESIDENT (PERSONAL CAPACITY)



Get all the latest union news...

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Court workers to ballot in fight for safety

DAVE BARTLETT
MINISTRY OF JUSTICE (MOJ) PCS GROUP EXECUTIVE
(PERSONAL CAPACITY)

A couple of months ago the chief executive of HM Courts and Tribunals Service (HMCTS) put out on the internal web extracts from a poem about the NHS, which was meant to inspire us. It went: "These are the people who mop the floor, fill the jug, make the cast, and give us the jab, and these are the hands that feel your head".

If a poem was written about those who run HMCTS it might say: "These are the people who create the mess, fill the lists, make the change and pay us nothing, who make us shake our head"

As there is no end in sight to the pandemic, workers in the courts, who are classed as essential workers, are fed up and stressed, continue to be paid peanuts, and are wondering whether this day is the one where our luck runs out and we pick up the virus.

Management says the workplace is safe. The facts say otherwise. In January alone, 533 Covid-related cases were reported, and that's on top of 1,500 Covid-related cases since last August, to say nothing of an increasing number of jurors and professionals being unfit for work.

Management says the 'recovery programme' - the HMCTS target to catch up on the backlog - is essential to business needs, but refuses to recognise reality. As Covid continues to wreak havoc in our communities, HMCTS needs to understand and



accept that court buildings are not exempt from the pandemic. Indeed, the figures suggest we are a net contributor to outbreaks.

Footfall must be reduced in our buildings, which means reducing the number of court sittings to an absolute minimum to provide a circuit break on the virus transmission. We need to suspend the recovery plan, including increased capacity, until there is an agreed timetable for safe resumption, and there needs to be a voluntary agreement on workplace attendance to undertake work that cannot be done remotely.

As a result of management's refusal to recognise reality, PCS MOJ Group is now undertaking a consultative ballot of HMCTS workers to look at industrial action to protect the safety and health of our members.

The chief executive hoped that the poem would help us to forget about our problems, but in reality it's become a timely reminder that enough is enough.

I urge all members in HMCTS to vote 'yes' in the ballot and equip the union to make demands and win what is needed to protect all of us.

Fight together against the Tories' and Bosses' Covid offensive



Sunday 14 February 12-2pm

Zoom Meeting ID: 844 4470 8960 • Passcode: 889162

Visit shopstewards.net for more

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 Magazine of the Socialist Party
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BLACK WORKERS' CHARTER: A PROGRAMME TO FIGHT RACISM

SOCIALIST PARTY BLACK & ASIAN GROUP MEMBERS

The black and Asian group of the Socialist Party is producing a Black Workers' Charter to start a discussion about the demands needed to fight for the rights of black and Asian people, and what programme is needed to end racial discrimination.

Racism exists in all aspects of the lives of black and Asian people in the UK. The recent global movement around Black Lives Matter (BLM), sparked by the brutal murder of George Floyd, revealed the depth of anger against it.

In the UK, numerous mass protests saw thousands and thousands

of mainly working-class young people, from all backgrounds, coming onto the streets to demand justice for black people brutally murdered by the police, and to express opposition to racism.

Globally, the BLM protests are the most recent ground-shaking anti-racist movement. There have been many previous waves of anti-racist struggle, including the tremendous civil rights movement of the 1950s, 60s and early 70s, which impacted the lives of black people worldwide.

Such powerful movements led to legal improvements, such as the Race Relations Act of 1968 in Britain. This was meant to stop wage inequality, and other racist discrimination. But racism still exists and affects our lives.

Race and class inequality

The black and Asian population in Britain have been disproportionately affected by the economic crisis of 2007-08. And figures already suggest that black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) groups are going to be hit harder by the current economic crisis.

Whether it is unemployment, lack of housing, or poverty, black people have been at the forefront in suffering attacks on their jobs and living conditions, as well as discrimination at the hands of the police and legal system.

Covid

Covid-19 has further exposed the class and race inequality that exists within capitalism. The Institute for Fiscal Studies found that black men are 4.2 times more likely to die of the disease than white men.

The equivalent figure for Bangladeshi and Pakistani men was 3.6, and for Indian men 2.4, with similar proportions for women. BAME groups have suffered greater repression during the pandemic, being almost 50% more likely to be arrested under coronavirus laws than white people.

The disproportionate effects of the pandemic on BAME people are not accidental.

A third of all working-age people from a black African background are

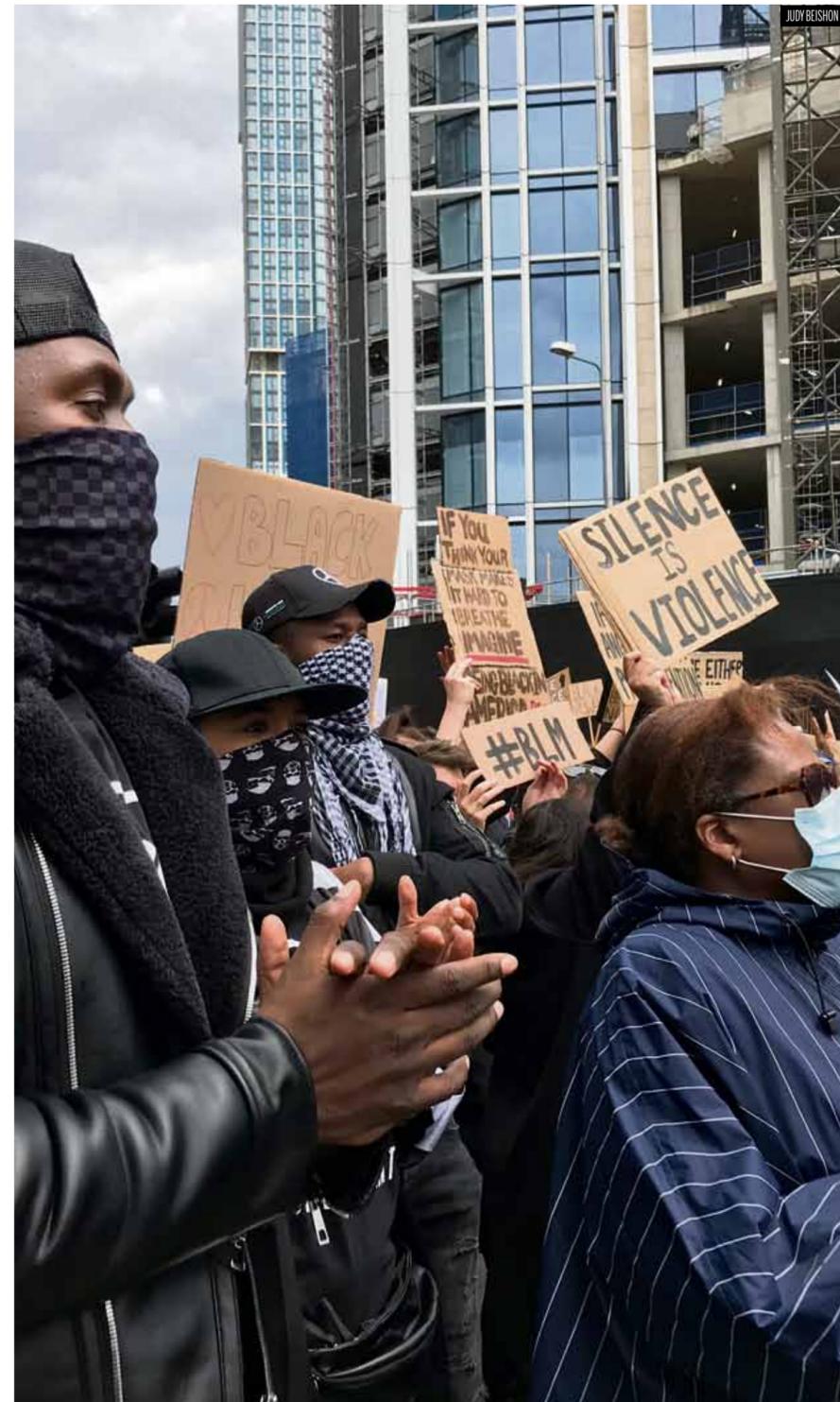
key workers. In the NHS, for example, around 40% of doctors and 20% of nurses are from a BAME background.

These essential workers have been working throughout the peaks of the pandemic, providing vital services. Key workers in Britain have been let down by the Tory government and the capitalist system that failed to provide them adequate and sufficient support, pay or PPE.

The most deprived areas have twice the coronavirus death rate of the least deprived. Low pay, overcrowded accommodation and cuts to services all play a part. The key factors that have emerged as responsible for inequalities in death rates, during the pandemic, are inequalities in society as a whole.

In 2019, black people were 56% more likely than the national average to be in the 'persistent low income' category. Asian people were twice as likely. And a higher proportion of BAME workers are in what gets called 'low-skilled' jobs than the average.

The tragedy of the Grenfell fire (see page 4) saw BAME communities disproportionately affected by continuous government neglect. Years of being ignored, sidelined and left behind saw working-class families killed.



Discrimination in numbers

- Black people are nine times more likely to be stopped and searched by police in England and Wales than white people
- The prosecution and sentencing rate for black people is three times higher than white people
- The unemployment rate for

BAME groups is 6.3%, versus 3.6% for people from a white background

- Black school leavers with A-levels are on average paid 14.3% less than their white peers
- On average, black workers with degrees earn 23.1% less than white workers
- Black people were more than four times as likely to be detained under the Mental Health Act as white people, in the year up to March 2019

MARY FINCH



JUDY BEISHON

Can't have capitalism without racism

Racism and the injustice of discrimination taking place in all aspects of our lives need to be opposed. This means fighting for all the reforms and changes needed to improve the conditions facing black, Asian and other minorities.

To fight for a society free from racism means challenging the very core of the system that we live in. Key leaders of the civil rights movement, including Martin Luther King, Malcolm X and Huey P Newton, all travelled down the road towards believing that the fight against racism and for black liberation could not be achieved under capitalism.

They all drew the conclusion that "you can't have capitalism without racism". The Socialist Party agrees.

Who owns wealth?

Capitalism is a system based on the exploitation of workers in order to maximise the profits of a few. Today, a tiny group of people, in Britain and worldwide, own and control industry, science and technology, and harness them in order to make vast fortunes.

Globally eight people own as much wealth as the poorest half of humanity - the greatest polarisation between rich and poor in human history. In Britain, the majority of us have faced endless austerity, while a tiny handful are raking it in. For example, the CEOs of the 100 biggest stock-market-listed companies collect an obscene 73 times the average wage of their workers.

The Covid-19 pandemic has

Inequality in housing

- 44% of black African and 40% of black Caribbean households rent social housing
- Homelessness among BAME households rose 48% in five years from 2012-17
- Surveys found that 33% of private landlords were less likely to rent to someone that did not hold a British passport

revealed who runs society, who the essential and key workers are. It is not the CEOs, but the workers in transport, healthcare, schools, retail, hospitality, etc. It is the vast majority of us.

BAME, women and young people are disproportionately concentrated in low-paid jobs, and are exploited further by the capitalist system. We need to build a mass movement that unites the working class around a common programme.

Capitalism offers no hope of a decent future for the 99%. It is an unequal, oppressive and discriminatory system, and divides us on the basis of race, gender, sexuality, etc. It survives by keeping us divided.

Working class

As socialists, we say that it is the working class that is the force in society that can get rid of capitalism. Class exploitation unites workers of all backgrounds.

Together we have the power to fundamentally change this rotten system. We, as the working class, have enormous potential power through our ability to withdraw our labour and stop the flow of profits to the bosses.

Covid-19 pandemic has brought misery for the working class, but it has also revealed our collective strength. It is essential to link the fight against racism, and other forms of oppression, to the fight against class exploitation and capitalism.

It is only through this that we can fundamentally change society - socialist change - free of all exploitation, oppression and discrimination.

revealed who runs society, who the essential and key workers are. It is not the CEOs, but the workers in transport, healthcare, schools, retail, hospitality, etc. It is the vast majority of us.

Covid-19 crisis and the death of BAME people

- Hold the government accountable for preventable deaths related to coronavirus
- A community and workers-led inquiry into the mishandling of the Covid-19 crisis and PPE shortages
- No workers should be punished for the Covid-19 pandemic. No cuts and job losses. For mass investment into jobs, homes and services for all
- Take the wealth of the 1% - introduce a 50% levy on the hoarded wealth of big business

In workplaces

- We demand that the trade union movement fights against the racism which remains endemic in our workplaces
- Job security - no forced redundancies. Trade union action to fight any job losses and cuts in the workforce
- End the race pay gap. A Trades Union Congress (TUC) study found that black workers with the same qualifications as other workers are more likely to be employed at lower rates of pay. For an equal rate of pay for the job
- Fair reporting systems, free from judgement. Any type of racial abuse, verbal or physical, needs to be reported and acted on by management immediately. All incidents must be recorded, and the log of incidents to be reviewed by elected shop stewards and the trade unions.
- Regular public data must be made available showing the number of staff experiencing grievances, or facing disciplinary by ethnicity
- All workplaces to organise anti-racism training for all staff, and mandatory "unconscious bias" training for managers - overseen by elected shop stewards and trade unions
- Ensure election of equality officers in trade union branches
- Trade union oversight over the recruitment and promotion process
- Defend the right to protest. Scrap the anti-trade union laws and the anti-democratic legislation

Democratic control of the police

- End stop and search. Democratic control of policing by trade unions and communities
- End police brutality.

Demilitarisation of the police - stop the use of horses, tear gas and rubber bullets. Abolish the Territorial Support Group (TSG) and all similar paramilitary units

In healthcare

- Independent workers' and community inquiries into police violence
- Oppose privatisation and selling of prisons. Instead they should be controlled democratically by workers and communities
- Reverse all privatisation. Scrap the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) and cancel all PFI debts
- Massive investment into our NHS - for a fully funded National Health Service and care system, free at the point of use
- Scrap prescription charges in England, and all dental and health charges
- Stop double taxing migrants - no to the NHS surcharge
- More mental health support and refugee centres

Nationalise the private healthcare sector, care homes, the medical supply industry and the pharmaceutical companies - integrate them into the NHS

On immigration

- End the hostile environment - end all racist immigration laws. For community and trade union oversight of border controls
- Justice for the Windrush generation - immediate compensation for all the victims
- Grant all refugees and asylum seekers the right to work

the private healthcare sector, care homes, the medical supply industry and the pharmaceutical companies - integrate them into the NHS

for a mass programme of building council houses, no to evictions

Fight for socialism

- We can't control what we don't own. A democratic socialist plan of production based on the interests of the overwhelming majority of people
- No trust in capitalist politicians. Join the fight to build a mass democratic workers' party to represent our interests and fight for these demands
- Help us to build a mass movement to smash racism. Please appeal for support for the charter in your workplace, youth group, union, and among the wider working class



Covid and pregnancy

No to workplace discrimination

Fight for safety and a fully funded NHS

CORINTHIA WARD
NORTH BIRMINGHAM SOCIALIST PARTY

Expecting a baby should be an exciting time for parents. However, for many the past year of the Covid pandemic has dampened what should have been a joyous occasion.

Missing the important support of family and friends and not being able to meet other mothers in local groups or classes are just the more obvious sacrifices mothers have had to make in the course of the pandemic. These alone are enough to cause emotional strain on pregnant women - especially if it's a complicated or significant pregnancy.

Then you come to scans, hospital appointments and birth. One of the issues around pregnancy during Covid which made the headlines was how many partners were excluded from these, with the mother having to attend them alone.

Various petitions calling for partners to be allowed in with mothers have popped up, gathering hundreds of thousands of signatures. Stories have been shared by women who had to attend scans alone, where they sadly found they had lost their baby, while their partner waited in the hospital car park to find out the news.

Government hypocrisy

In Zoom mother meeting groups, women have made it clear that they can see through the double standards and hypocrisy of the government. In between the lockdowns, a couple could go to the shops or sit and have a coffee, but afterwards the women would have to attend an appointment solo.

It was obvious that while the NHS midwifery staff were trying to take Covid seriously, the government was pushing 'eat out to help out' and kept schools open, risking lives.

In December 2020, there was a glimmer of hope that things might change. As a way to fob off responsibility, the government gave new guidance to NHS trusts to allow partners into all scans and appointments. But many trusts across the country have not implemented this due to the new strain and the dramatic rise in cases. Many couples have ended up having to fork out at least £60 for private scans, just to be able to have the experience they needed.

Being pregnant and working during Covid has also brought more complications and stress. Once a woman is 28 weeks pregnant she is classed as at-risk due to a weakened immune system, and under government guidelines she should self-isolate. Under such circumstances, if an employer is unable to make



reasonable adjustments so that the woman can work safely from home, they should suspend her on full pay until she starts her maternity leave.

However, women make up a large number of key workers, particularly in health and social care, where home working is harder to arrange. Investigations by the TUC show that, since the Covid-19 crisis began, one in four women and new mums have experienced discrimination or unfair treatment at work, including being singled out for redundancy or furlough.

Workplace discrimination

This is backed by the many stories being shared on mother internet forums. These expose how employers have pressured women to drop their hours, go on sick pay, use holiday pay or start their maternity leave early. Some have even been put on furlough at 80% of their wages rather than their full entitlement of maternity pay.

Sadly, maternity discrimination in the workplace is not an isolated event during the pandemic. The 2016 Equality and Human Rights

Commission report found that four in ten employers agreed that pregnancy in the workplace puts 'an unnecessary cost burden' on the workplace, and that one in four employers describe enhanced protection for new mums as 'unreasonable'.

The trade unions need to be central in the struggle to protect pregnant women in the workplace. The response of National Education Union members on school safety at the beginning of the year is just a taste of what can be achieved when workers are mobilised.

But it is not just workplace conditions and pay which have affected pregnant women. Both before and during Covid, concerns have also been raised about how the staffing crisis in the NHS and privatisation are putting at risk the safety of pregnant women and newborn babies.

In 2019, the Royal College of Midwives reported that there was a shortage of 2,500 midwives in England. The shortage on NHS maternity units has doubled since the start of the coronavirus outbreak - one in five midwifery posts are now unfilled.

The recently published Ockenden report into the deaths and serious injuries of mothers and babies at the maternity units in Shropshire and Telford Hospital NHS Trust revealed a serious lack of transparency and accountability.

Fully fund our NHS

As part of the fight for women's health, we need to demand an end to privatisation and a fully funded NHS under the democratic control of workers and service users. To reverse the staffing crisis, training for midwives must be free, with a living grant, and all NHS staff should have an immediate pay rise of 15%.

And these demands should be linked to the need to build a new mass workers' party which fights in the interest of all workers, including for the services that are needed to ensure that pregnancy and birth are safe, both physically and mentally.

SOCIALISM: THE PODCAST
Weekly on all major podcast platforms

London fire victims lobby Tory mayoral candidate

PETE MASON
EAST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

When Tory London mayoral candidate Shaun Bailey tweeted his opposition to a levy on building firms to solve the desperate problem of flammable cladding, residents in housing with unsafe cladding, and those already victims of fires, were furious and organised a virtual lobby.

In 2019, two years after the Grenfell tragedy, wood-framed Richmond House in Worcester Park, South West London was completely destroyed by a fire. Resident Jennifer Frame, who organised the lobby, explains: "23 families lost our homes and everything we owned. The London Fire Brigade arrived within nine minutes, but every floor of the building was already ablaze. Despite the efforts of 125 firefighters, every home was destroyed."

A fire in Bellway-built Samuel Garside House in Barking East London also took place in the summer of 2019, destroying 20 flats and displacing 79 families. Flames spread in minutes, residents fled barefoot, lost everything they owned, and faced psychological trauma.

Profits over safety

Neither building qualified for the government's Building Safety Fund. "If a builder sold you a faulty building, they should pay for remediation," Bailey stated, "the same as if you bought a faulty pair of shoes". His argument is that a few bad apples caused the cladding scandal. In fact, it is a systemic problem of the multi-billion pound big builders maximising their profits at the expense of safety (see page 4).

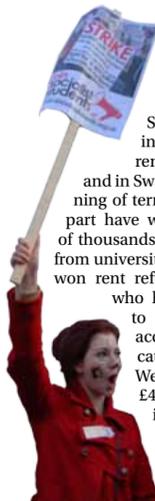
Jennifer countered: "Berkeley group says Richmond House 'performed' as it should". I added that Bellway stated it had no legal duty to repair the building after the fire. They still refuse to admit fault.

"This is not buying faulty shoes", Jennifer added, "it's like a car with faulty brakes, putting your life in danger". Bailey argued that a general levy on building firms would threaten their profits and they would refuse to build. In other words, they hold the capital city to ransom.

These big building firms should be brought into democratic public ownership, to build the thousands of safe council homes the city needs, and employ workers organised in their trade unions on secure contracts with decent rates of pay.

I pointed out that Bellway made £662 million profit in 2019. Jennifer added that Berkeley group made, "£2.3 billion profits in the three years since Grenfell". These hugely profitable building firms should be made to pay for these defective buildings, not the leaseholders.

Why you should come to Socialist Students online conference



OISIN MULHOLLAND
SWANSEA SOCIALIST STUDENTS

Socialist Students in Wales initiated rent strikes in Bangor and in Swansea at the beginning of term. Students taking part have withheld hundreds of thousands of pounds of rent from universities. So far we have won rent refunds for students who have not returned to their university accommodation because of Covid-19. We have also won £40 million in funding from the Welsh government for universities.

But this is still not enough. It

doesn't cover the shortfall in university budgets because of Covid-19, and it doesn't cover the cost of giving a rent rebate to all students. This is something we are still fighting for.

Socialist Students is organising on the ground - leading and supporting rent strikes. We are playing an influential role in the student movement at a time when it is crucial. Moving into a period of economic crisis, workers and young people are

going to be asked to pay the price. Socialist Students can play an influential role in the ongoing campaigns against cuts on campuses, and against all attacks on workers and young people.

Come to Socialist Students conference to help build the network of socialists in schools, colleges and universities - to fight for free education and a decent future for young people.

Socialist Students online conference

Sunday 28 February 1pm

- Register for zoom details at cutt.ly/GkfZLCh

Why I joined the Socialist Party

• It's helped me to me feel empowered to push harder and to shout louder

HOLLY JOHNSTON
SHEFFIELD SOCIALIST PARTY

I've been a nurse in the NHS for 17 years, and have first-hand experience of privatisation, attacks on pay and working conditions, and dangerously underfunded services. As an ex-Labour member, I realised that we both the Tories and the Labour Party were playing a role in undermining our NHS.

I became one of the lead campaigners for #NHSPay15 in July 2020. As soon as I'd started to publicise our

protest, Alistair Tice (Socialist Party organiser in Yorkshire) got in touch with me. From that point on the Sheffield branch was unwavering in its support, advice, encouragement and mentorship.

The experience and knowledge of Socialist Party members were invaluable to our campaigning. We had many conversations, and as I discovered more about the Socialist Party, I realised that the party aligned to what I had been seeking all along.

Since joining, the party has

continued to support the actions, campaigns and events that I have organised. The party has helped me develop politically, and made me feel empowered to push harder and to shout louder in order to grow the campaigns around pay and PPE.

Despite the various lockdowns of 2020, I could see the party recruiting new members from all walks of life. If you are disillusioned with the establishment, if you want to fight for decent jobs and decent services as capitalism attacks our class - then join the Socialist Party!

• The current system is failing millions of people

LUKE
GLOUCESTERSHIRE SOCIALIST PARTY

While a few years ago I would have thought it unimaginable, I recently joined the Socialist Party. The last 18 months have been an extremely transformative time. My world view has drastically changed and is continuing to evolve.

It wasn't that long ago I would have described myself as a fiscally conservative libertarian who was socially liberal. Only two years ago I was on the other side arguing how real communism has never been achieved and is therefore impossible.

I'm a university student in my final year studying politics and economics, which I also studied at school. Looking

back, there was huge bias within the economic curriculum which led me down the path of the right. During the 2015 and 2017 elections I would have voted Conservative if I had been old enough, and enjoyed debating with people using the basic economic theory I'd been taught. I looked down on those who hadn't taken the subject. In reality, I was taught just one side's theory, and there is a lot of evidence to disprove the ideas we were taught such as 'free markets are great, planned economies are terrible' and that 'trade unions and an increased minimum wage are bad for society'.

Thankfully, I've now grown up and have a broader world view. I've always been political though, and have always seen that we need radical

change. I've never thought that Labour or the Conservatives were options for real change, and that we are distracted by trying to pick between those two while not considering actual options for change.

When I was younger, I looked to the right and failed to find answers I was looking for. Then over the last few years I've slowly shifted left and arrived at socialism. I'm always happy to admit how wrong I used to be. But I think it means I am well-placed to engage with those with right-wing views and to change their minds.

I believe that the current system is failing millions of people. But too many people are either almost oblivious to it, or at least choose to ignore it. I believe we're in need of real change rather than switching between the same two parties, neither of whom make any difference.

I would encourage anyone who wants to take part in meaningful political struggle against the dehumanising effects of capitalism, locally and internationally, to join the Socialist Party.

Ex-Labour socialists preparing to stand for TUSC in Devon



RYAN HALL
SOCIALIST PARTY DEVON AND NEWTON ABBOT TOWN COUNCILLOR

An alternative to Starmer's Labour is needed now more than ever. 28 people, including current and ex-Labour members, councillors, and a former Labour parliamentary candidate attended the online launch of Devon Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition's (TUSC) local election challenge on 1 February.

Dave Nellist introduced the discussion by outlining TUSC, its history and aims to the meeting. We need TUSC councillors across the

country to fight cuts implemented by Tories and Labour, supporting strikes and being a voice for the working class in the council chambers.

As a councillor myself, who has just left the Labour Party, I am looking forward to standing as a TUSC candidate, and campaigning with others across Devon.

Since the successful launch of TUSC in Devon, another current Labour councillor and a former Labour parliamentary candidate have come forward interested in standing for TUSC on a socialist program. When the elections come, we are ready!



Bristol North Fighting Fund Zoom Quiz

- Friday 19 February at 7pm
- Zoom ID: 810 5554 6355

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North West	601	1,150	52%	
Southern & SE	1,128	2,350	48%	
London	1,978	4,600	43%	
Northern	313	750	42%	
East Midlands	701	1,850	38%	
West Midlands	835	2,600	32%	
Yorkshire	703	2,550	28%	
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Starmer ditches Labour movement tradition for cheap trick



BRENT KENNEDY
CUMBRIA SOCIALIST PARTY

Keir Starmer's 'new management' Labour has just taken a further right turn away from the traditions of the labour movement. In place of working-class solidarity and socialism he wants to compete with Boris Johnson and Nigel Farage in nationalist flag-waving to win votes.

Starmer lied that he would keep Jeremy Corbyn's manifesto policies in order to dupe party members to vote for him as leader. But now he has abandoned them without offering any alternative but 'competence'. That's why Boris Johnson remains in office despite all the chaos, deaths, recession and U-turns.

Labour faces losses in the coming May elections. Devoid of policies which might upset the Tory press, he's desperately waving the union flag like a magic wand.

His research department, aided by a private brand agency, has spent much time and money to discover that working people in former safe seats appear to be confused about "what we stand for, and what our purpose is, but also who we represent" (short answer - running capitalism).

Voices from focus groups: "He needs to stop sitting on the fence", "not being forthright and honest about where we want to be", Labour is "two different parties under one name".

So a meeting with party officials has come up with a cunning plan of how to win back working-class voters: "The use of the flag, veterans, dressing smartly at the war

memorial, etc, give voters a sense of authentic value realignment".

Within an hour, senior officials sent out the message: "Please prioritise the union jack (sic) header images, not the plain red ones." And with one WhatsApp message a century of struggle by generations of workers for social improvement and equality was administratively discarded. Will it now be illegal to sing the Red Flag?

Authentic? This stinks of opportunism. One staffer present reported: "They don't believe any of this stuff; they're saying whatever they think will get them votes."

They suddenly want to pose with veterans? What if those ex-service men and women are homeless - will they build them council houses like in the 1950s and 1960s? If they have been made redundant by cost-cutting Labour councils, will they and their mates now get their jobs back?

If they are being exploited on low wages and rubbish conditions by an outsourcing company privatised by Blair-Brown, will it be nationalised to raise wages and conditions? If they suffer chronic health problems, will they now be cared for with dignity without the need for charity? If these veterans and their workmates are union members, will Starmer finally repeal Thatcher's anti-union laws and stop spying on them?

Cumbria Socialist Party has several members who are ex-servicemen. They will be sickened by this cheap trick to politically exploit them and their comrades. They joined us to build a genuine workers' party and fight for socialism.



DO YOU HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY?

- Send your news, views and criticism, in not more than 150 words, to editors@socialistparty.org.uk - or if you're not online, PO Box 1398, Enfield EN1 9GT
- We reserve the right to shorten and edit letters. For legal reasons, we need your full name, address and phone number - but confidentiality will be respected if requested

THE SOCIALIST INBOX

• Plymouth rent strike campaign

Plymouth student rent strikers are now estimated to be withholding over £800,000 in rent against student landlords across the city and, as this number grows, so does the power of the movement.

We had a productive meeting with University of Plymouth Students' Union and though they wouldn't fully endorse the rent strike, due to us encouraging students to withhold their rent, they were supportive. We have proposed co-writing a letter to the government to challenge it on its lack of support, and we intend to contact the University and College Union and other unions represented on campus to assist in putting this letter together.

We have also had support from the local council, who passed a motion supporting all the core demands of the rent strike and calling on the government to reimburse student landlords, so that their tenants are not the ones that have to suffer.

While it is largely symbolic and not the outright support we hoped for, this has shown us and our strikers that we are not a loud minority, we are the justified majority, and the added publicity has had a massive positive impact on the morale of strikers across the city.

We will now be seeing what practical support the council can provide, such as subsidising public transport for students or clamping down on landlords who provide student accommodation that isn't fit for purpose.

We have launched our Covid care package programme, providing small (£15) parcels for those either in isolation or simply unable to provide for themselves due to the financial strain of the pandemic. This has been received with great success, and the number of people applying for the scheme has shown us how much this movement is needed.

While currently the price of these packages is coming out of organisers' own pockets, we have already secured some funding from the council. We also hope to be addressing the societies forum, which is a meeting of committee members from every university student society. We plan to address the forum asking for societies to come behind the rent strike to expand its reach to more students.

We will also be seeking financial support from the £20,000 fund which is set aside each year to help societies grow which we will be appealing for societies to use to assist with our care package programme.

Universities should be looking out for their students and ensuring that no one is left needing to choose between feeding themselves or paying their rent. This government has given students so little financial support.

AVA KEELING
PLYMOUTH RENT STRIKE COMMITTEE



• "Capitalism is a virus"

It will not come as a surprise to socialists that the rich have done very nicely out of the pandemic, while the conditions of the poor have deteriorated. This has been confirmed by Oxfam.

Its report "The Inequality Virus" states: "The coronavirus pandemic has the potential to lead to an increase in inequality in almost every country at once, the first time this has happened since records began. The virus has exposed, fed off and increased existing inequalities of wealth, gender and race. Over two million

people have died, and hundreds of millions of people are being forced into poverty while many of the richest - individuals and corporations - are thriving. Billionaire fortunes returned to their pre-pandemic highs in just nine months, while recovery for the world's poorest people could take over a decade."

The report contrasts the poverty experienced by many frontline workers combating the pandemic with the way the rich avoided feeling the pinch. It highlights with facts and figures the unequal consequences for the rich and the poor.

Capitalism is a virus. Socialism is a vaccine.

DEREK MCMILLAN
EAST GRINSTEAD, WEST SUSSEX

• Brum porters need a new workers' party

Just to add to the article in issue 1118 about the strike by Heartlands Hospital porters in Birmingham. The NHS trust had clearly planned this in advance and ensured that they had enough 'bank' porters who were on the shift pattern to minimise the effects of any industrial action.

The trust chair is Jacqui Smith, former Blairite home secretary, who was caught claiming expenses for a pornographic DVD her partner bought. A union-busting trust chair who has no concern for workers, and who defrauds the public purse is welcome in the Labour Party, but socialists, whether they be Corbynistas or members of the Socialist Party or other left organisations, are not.

That's why we need the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition and why we need to build a new workers' party.

CLIVE WALDER
BIRMINGHAM



• Tory LGBT+ history month hypocrites

Through their website and various social media, the Conservative Party would like to wish us a happy LGBT+ history month. It is sickening hypocrisy when much of that history has been LGBT+ people fighting the Tories to get their rights!

Just last September the Tories blocked any move towards gender self-identity, a cornerstone of trans and non-binary rights, despite their own public consultation returning massively in favour of self-ID. Months before that they threatened to restrict existing trans rights.

Meanwhile, their ten-year-long attack on the NHS has starved funding from gender identity clinics, leading to up to a three-year waiting time. The clinics are essential to allow trans people to medically transition.

This is only the latest in a string of reactionary moves by the Tories that

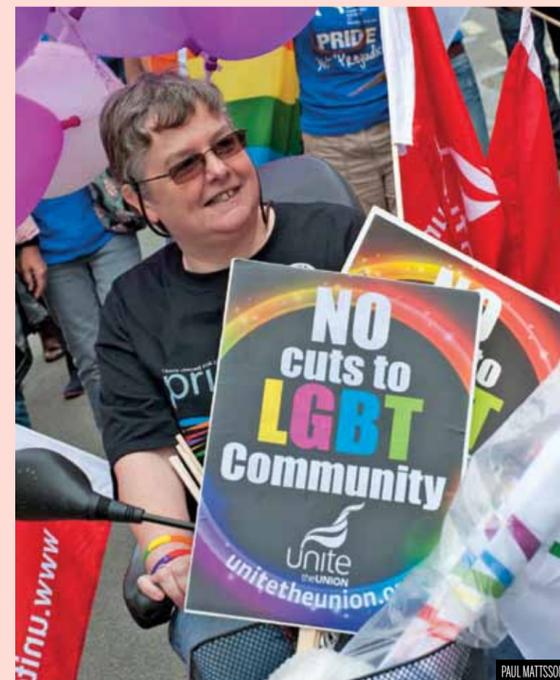
makes the 'celebration' of LGBT+ history almost laughable. Under Thatcher's leadership they brought in Section 28, a clause banning teaching the "acceptability of homosexuality" in schools. Just two decades ago they opposed it being repealed.

Many Tories opposed legalising same-sex adoption, civil partnership, marriage, and the gender recognition act. Plenty have made public their disgust towards gay and trans people in particular.

Add to this the devastating cuts to funding for LGBT+ charities and refugees since they came to power in 2010. This record across decades has caused immense harm. It has encouraged repression and attacks against us, and prevented many leading normal lives.

So we'll celebrate LGBT+ history month, but we'll remember it as the long and ongoing history of struggle of LGBT+ people for the rights and freedoms we need to be ourselves.

ADAM HARMSWORTH
COVENTRY



Book that inspired me: God's bits of wood

CHRIS NEWBY
HACKNEY SOCIALIST PARTY

This is a tremendous dramatised account of the successful five-month-long strike of railway workers on the Dakar to Niger railway between 1947 and 1948. This brilliant novel had a big impact on me as it was the first novel I had read on workers' struggles in Africa, and was written by one of the participants in the strike.

Ousmane Sembene was born and grew up in Senegal, and after various jobs worked on the Dakar to Niger railway line, where he participated in the strike. He then moved to France, where he worked at a Citroën factory in Paris, and then on the docks in Marseille, becoming active in the French trade union movement.

He joined the communist-led CGT (trade union federation) and the Communist Party, helping to lead a strike to hinder the shipment of weapons for the French colonial war in Vietnam.

What I love about this book is the real feel you get for the development of the strike, but also what life was like for the local population. His description of every little detail, including the colours and smells, make you feel like you are there.

But it is the detail of how the

colonial power attempts to defeat this strike that really resonates. Anyone who has participated in a strike, particularly one that lasts a long time, will appreciate all the different pressures that are brought to bear on workers and their families. The striking workers particularly struggled over the lack of food, but also felt pressure from the people who are reliant on the train service to survive.

You get a real feel for the different arguments that rage during such a dispute. One of the more hard-hitting descriptions is the mass workers' court that is set up to try one of the main strike breakers. While no direct action arises against this strike breaker, he is so shamed in front of the whole community that there are no further strike breakers in this area for the remainder of the strike.

One particularly crude example of how the colonial power attempts to undermine the strike is when one of the French managers, Isnard, tries to bribe one of the main trade union leaders, Doudou.

Doudou remembers a previous argument he has had with Isnard over the white workers getting a ten-minute tea break while the local workers didn't get anything. Isnard was told that he needed to make himself white if he wanted the tea break! So

when Isnard tries to bribe Doudou with three million francs Doudou responds by saying: "Three million francs is a lot of money for a Negro lathe operator, but even three million francs won't make me white. I would rather have the ten minutes for tea and remain a Negro."

What is also a big feature in the book is the role that women play in the struggle. On the first morning of the strike the troops are sent to try to force the opening of the main workshop. But, as well as the strikers, the troops are faced with a band of angry women armed with anything they could lay their hands on, and they are forced into a retreat.

Another battle follows after some of the women kill a ram that is owned by one of the local dignitaries for desperately needed food after the ram had eaten all the food they had left. Again the army is called, but again it is forced to retreat by the women in the local community.

Perhaps the most important action is when the women organise a three-day march to Dakar to support the strike. While a lot of doubts and arguments rage throughout the march, the women eventually reach Dakar and a huge rally is held in their honour.

The march and rally have the effect of galvanising other workers into supporting the strike and coming out on strike as well. You really see a developing understanding in the local communities of the role that women can play in workers' struggles.

This really is a marvellous, inspirational novel and I would urge anyone who hasn't yet done so to read it.

• 'God's bits of wood' by Ousmane Sembene, Heinemann, £10.20



The Dakar to Niger railway today. In 1947 railroad workers successfully struck for several months to obtain equal rights YAAMBOO/CC

Myanmar coup - For a workers-led struggle for democracy and socialism!

CWI MALAYSIA REPORTERS

The sounds of the striking pots and pans were heard across the streets of the city of Yangon, in Myanmar in protest at the military coup d'état on 1 February. Residents in the main capital are showing their dissatisfaction and anger towards everything that is wrong in their country. There are now protests and strikes, from a younger layer of activists, including doctors, nurses and teachers who are currently leading the civil disobedience movement.

Aung Sang Suu Kyi, the deposed state counsellor (prime minister), is now once again being held prisoner. Less than three months ago her National League for Democracy (NLD) won a landslide victory in Myanmar's general election.

The commander-in-chief of the Myanmar Armed Forces (Tatmadaw), Min Aung Hlaing, has taken over as the country's de facto leader. He declared on the military-controlled Myawaddy TV that there would now be military rule for a year, with the vague promise of a new general election.

This coup overturns the constitution the military itself introduced in 2011, when Myanmar was finally handed over to a 'civilian' government under a quasi-democratic political structure, with an uneasy power-sharing between the NLD and the military.

Although the military bureaucracy was automatically awarded 25% of the parliamentary seats under that constitution, and had significant control over key executive positions, the conflict that existed inside the

government between the military leaders and the NLD could no longer be tolerated and ignored.

In the end, the military used the NLD's weakness and the criticism it received - for instance, from Human Rights Watch, which pointed to an unfair and biased electoral process - as an excuse to grab power.

Despite protests from opposition parties questioning the integrity of the November 2020 election - which excluded a significant part of the population, especially from the conflict areas around the borders of Myanmar - Aung San Suu Kyi's NLD achieved a sweeping victory; whereas the military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) saw a decrease in its vote from the previous election.

Inaction of NLD

But Suu Kyi had always maintained a strategy of cooperation with the military and rejected any criticisms or actions against them. Attending the International Court of Justice in 2019, she outrageously defended the genocide of the Rohingya people in Rakhine state carried out by the Myanmar military. This meant she rapidly went from being the feted democratic icon of the West to becoming an international pariah.

Despite popular demands to amend the existing constitution, which gives too much power to the military leaders, the NLD had largely remained silent on that issue. Even with a majority in parliament and with full authority to make legislation, the NLD continued with its non-confrontational approach. This received widespread criticism among the country's activists.



Deposed NLD leader Aung Sang Suu Kyi is paying the price for courting the military chiefs PHOTO KREMLIN/RU/C

The NLD leaders instead focused on bringing in foreign investment in an attempt to develop a stable capitalist economy, while letting the military enjoy effective government control. The NLD leaders had no confidence that their mass support could overcome the military tops. They feared that if they mobilised mass support it could get 'out of control' and threaten their pro-capitalist project. Now the working people of Myanmar are going to pay the price of this failure.

Ever since the end of the military's

direct rule, in 2011, and the transition to a free-market-friendly parliamentary democracy, the remaining military figures in politics, with their control over major assets, contributed to the unstable nature of capitalist development in Myanmar.

The influx of foreign capital and the implementation of policies that create competition between the big capitalists have led to major conflicts among the capitalist class in Myanmar.

The military's diminishing support for its political representation in the USDP, and growing competition with a new section of capitalists powered by the 'free market', has now driven the military to carry out a complete takeover.

International reaction

The impotent UN Security Council, holding an emergency meeting, expressed "deep concern" over the coup d'état. The regional Association of South East Asian Nations response has been to stick with its policy of 'non-interference'.

Capitalists around the world have a vested interest in maintaining stability in Myanmar in order to continue the plunder of its natural resources and labour.

This is US president Joe Biden's first big foreign policy test. He has eschewed Trump's previous 'isolationist' policy and instead is seeking to assert 'America's democratic values'. In all likelihood the US administration will simply review its aid programmes and impose some sanctions on Myanmar's generals. US military intervention is highly unlikely.

On the other hand, predictably, China's president Xi Jinping has adopted a more conciliatory tone towards the generals and urges the

'international community' to avoid any further escalation of tension and focus on 'stability'.

China has close ties with Myanmar, with mega-infrastructure projects lined up for years to come. Myanmar is an important location where China could bypass the naval trade route in the Straits of Malacca and open a land path to India. Myanmar has a vital role in China's massive 'Belt and Road Initiative'.

Xi Jinping will use this incident to create an even bigger wedge between Myanmar and the US-led capitalist bloc to further weaken the latter's influence in the region.

The Myanmar military regime will now be more dependent on China for aid and economic opportunity as it chooses to retreat on its promise to open up its economy.

Min Aung Hlaing and the military bureaucracy will be swift to move against any rebellious action from the masses with violence and brutal repression, as was often done in the past. Additionally, they will try to divide the people along ethnic lines and continue to oppress different ethnic minorities, over 30% of the population, by fanning the flames of nationalism.

It is hypocritical that now, after the military coup, Aung San Suu Kyi is crying out to the people to protest against the brutal military regime which she previously failed to challenge.

But given the widespread anger among the Myanmar people, they are taking to the streets in their mass, as they did in 1988. However, Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD leadership have proved to be incapable of fulfilling the people's aspirations for a free and democratic Myanmar.

The policy adopted by Aung San Suu Kyi and her party offers no way



Mass workers' action, such as a general strike, like the heroic protest movement in August 1988, would immediately incapacitate the military regime ...

forward for the working masses and youth. In Myanmar's situation, as in many other neocolonial nations, the struggle for democracy is intertwined with the struggle against the capitalist system as a whole.

The peculiarity of capitalism's growth in Myanmar, with a history of brutal military rule and constant imperialist intervention, means it will never provide for the basic needs of the country's population.

Liberal representatives such as Aung San Suu Kyi are entirely unable to challenge the international capitalist forces and deliver even basic advancement for the people of Myanmar.

Socialist alternative

On the contrary, the task of eliminating poverty in the cities, towns and villages across the country, and establishing fundamental freedoms, democratic rights and a solution to the questions of national and democratic rights in Myanmar, falls on the shoulders of the working class. It requires the building of a party with a mass base and a clear socialist programme to unify the suffering masses of Myanmar and to defeat both military rule and capitalism in the country.

Trade union leaders, opposition organisations and left forces should join hands at this moment to fight this seizure of power by the military.

Mass workers' action, such as a general strike, like the heroic protest movement in August 1988, would immediately incapacitate the military regime and could appeal to many in the nearly 70% of the population living in the countryside.

Combat organisations need to be set up in the workplaces, colleges and neighbourhoods of town and country. Representatives need to be elected from these bodies to link up on a regional and national level, and they should be subject to immediate recall if they go against the wishes of those who elect them.

An appeal would have to be made to the ranks of the army and police to join the fight against dictatorship and against capitalism - local and international.

The battle must be waged now to build a genuine socialist alternative to the corrupt and decaying capitalist system in Myanmar - not a repeat of the post-1962 regime modelled on Stalinism, but one based on genuine workers' democracy.

Such a revolution would have an appeal across the region and be the basis for the formation of a confederation of socialist states in South-East Asia and beyond.

• The earlier version of this updated article can be read in full on socialistworld.net

Turkey: Bogaziçi university students protest appointment of government loyalist as rector



Students demanding the removal of an Erdogan loyalist installed at Bogaziçi University

DILAN KAFKAS
CWI TÜRKİYE

Demonstrations have been continuing at Bogaziçi University since January 2021. Students and university staff are resisting President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's appointment of a government loyalist, Melih Bulu, as rector.

The reason for appointing a rector at Bogaziçi University is that there is a strong leftist student community there. The students, who have been the target of the AKP (Justice and Development Party) government for a while, took action against the Turkish army's operation against the Kurds in Syria in 2018. Appointing an AKP rector at the university shows that Erdogan wants to have control over any possible protest.

This anti-democratic manoeuvre echoes the dismissal of pro-Kurdish HDP (People's Democratic Party) mayors and the appointment of trustees to replace them. In addition, it is a continuation of the dismissal of thousands of civil servants and academics by decrees since 2016.

All students who participated in the protest movements against Melih Bulu's appointment, including rallies and demonstrations, were arrested during night raids of their homes. They were abused and beaten because they defended democracy in the face of repression. Even today, the university is surrounded by snipers, and 'anti-terrorist' crackdowns

are carried out against students protesting. As solidarity with students grew in the country, police arrested 159 protesters.

Recently, as part of the protests, four students hung a painting covered with an LGBT flag at the University of Mecca. The AKP accused students of "deviance" and "incitement to hatred" and they were arrested. The AKP government uses all means to end the protests, incite public hatred of these students, and insult LGBT people.

Living standards

President Erdogan and his party fear that these protests against his authoritarian rule will get bigger as the social situation in the country gets worse. According to official figures, unemployment is over 15%, and the rate of inflation is estimated to be above 30%. The living standards of the population are falling sharply day by day.

The march of hundreds of miners in Kayseri demanding an increase in their salaries is another example of social discontent. Students must unite with the working class, the only revolutionary class in society because of its role in production and distribution.

The students have been supported from the beginning by HDP MPs and the TIP (Workers Party of Turkey).

The Republican People's Party (CHP), which describes itself as 'social-democratic', has shown its

limitations as the largest opposition party to the AKP. Indeed, most of its deputies, representatives, and spokespeople have not taken the trouble to support the students.

CHP spokesman, Faik Öztrak, tweeted against LGBT students about their work of art, calling it a "vile provocation" and an attack on the "sacred values of humanity". The CHP continues to play the role of supporting Erdogan's regime. It is no hope for the students and workers of Turkey!

These attacks show the need to build a new mass workers' party. It is time for Turkey's left to fill the political vacuum by building for socialism and fighting for the rights of workers, students, and oppressed minorities (Kurdish, Alevi, LGBT, etc.). The HDP should also be part of the process of forming a new mass workers' party.

Erdogan's pro-capital policies target both the working class and the youth. The capitalists, a minority in society, get richer and richer while workers suffer.

Today's students are tomorrow's workers! Workers and students must support each other and together fight for socialism, against authoritarian regimes, and against capitalism.

The Committee for a Workers'

International (CWI) stands in solidarity with Bogaziçi University students and university staff.

• Melih Bulu must resign immediately. The detainees must be released

• Universities should be democratically controlled by university staff and students

• Students and youth must unite with trade unions and the working class and knit together a mass struggle against Erdogan on a socialist programme

• No trust in capitalist parties! Workers and young people need their own organisation and own mass party

• Fight for socialism - against poverty, oppression, and capitalist crisis



Thousands have taken to the streets in Myanmar to protest despite the ruling junta blocking the internet and social media

£1/£2 solidarity price

socialistparty.org.uk



the Socialist

Issue 1120

11-17 February 2021

formerly **Militant**

STRIKING BRITISH GAS WORKERS FIGHTING TO WIN

STEVE SCORE
LEICESTER SOCIALIST PARTY

British Gas engineers were out on the picket lines and protesting around the country again on 5 February - the day they were meant to have signed the new contracts which are a huge attack on their terms and conditions. They are not accepting them! They have been consistently picketing since the strike began and the support in Leicester from passers-by has never been better.

Paul Carvell, GMB steward said: "5,000 engineers are being dismissed and re-engaged on poorer terms and conditions.

"Today is D-Day: You were meant to have signed by 12 o'clock. A week ago, Chris O'Shea (CEO of Centrica, British Gas' holding company) said people who signed the new contract now would get the best deal and those that don't will get a worse one. But now he has swung 180 degrees under pressure. Yesterday he said if you have signed and there is a better deal you will get the better one.

"The strike and the support is getting stronger. O'Shea is making catastrophic mistakes. Payroll emailed everyone telling them what money would be deducted in their wages in February which only further infuriated the engineers. They take weeks to pay you overtime they owe but can deduct strike days almost immediately.

"He has been dragged before a parliamentary committee and questioned on 'fire and rehire' and Acas is now involved. GMB always wished to get a negotiated outcome but will not accept this despicable tactic of 'fire and rehire' being used."

The Socialist Party says:

- Stop 'fire and rehire'
- Renationalise British Gas under democratic workers' control



Leicester STEVE SCORE



Sidcup ISAIA PRIVA

Come to National Shop Stewards Network Zoom public meeting:
Fight together against the Tories and bosses' Covid offensive

2021 has started with a bang, with teachers and school support staff in the National Education Union and Unison forcing Boris Johnson's Tory government to retreat on the reopening of schools. The Tories have also had to U-turn over their proposed review of employment laws and regulations post-Brexit.

Unions now need to come together immediately to draw on this template to fight for workplace safety in all sectors, and to stop the offensive by the Tories and the bosses to make workers pay for the Covid crisis with our lives and livelihoods. This includes Johnson's public sector pay freeze.

We've also seen workers in British Gas striking, the latest to confront vicious bosses' 'fire and rehire' measures. Many other workers are taking action as well.

The NSSN will continue to play our part in this struggle. Come to our meeting to discuss how we can build the fight for our lives and livelihoods. We will be hearing from workers and union reps involved in the increasing number of disputes.

14 February 12-2pm
Zoom Meeting ID:
844 4470 8960
Passcode: 889162