

NOT A BUDGET FOR THE WORKING CLASS!

• Super-rich laughing all the way to the bank

• Jobs and services still under attack

DAVE REID
SOCIALIST PARTY NATIONAL COMMITTEE

A social tsunami threatens Britain. Two million workers are already officially on the dole and five million more on furlough, facing an uncertain future when the scheme ends. But the Tories are intent on bailing out the rich again.

500,000 are officially living in destitution. Nearly a million renters who have lost their jobs or incomes face eviction as the Tories cut the temporary increase in housing benefit.

And although headline government announcements seemingly spare spending cuts on health and



education, council services are set to be hammered again. Even with a crippling 4% rise in council tax, adult social care services, along with other services, will require an additional £1.6 billion of funding just to stand still, let alone restore the funding axed during the last decade.

Emergency action is needed to protect jobs and wages. But instead, Tory chancellor Rishi Sunak intends to shore up profits and wealth. The government wants to make us pay for the crisis as the economy recovers from the Covid crisis, while the rich laugh all the way to the bank.

The day before the budget, billionaire hedge fund speculator and former boss of the current chancellor, Sir Christopher Hohn, paid himself a dividend of £345 million, one of the largest-ever annual personal payouts in the UK. And the bosses have seen the economic crisis as an opportunity to force down living standards and boost future profits. British Airways, for example, is sitting on billions of pounds of reserves but has used the crisis to fire 42,000 workers and rehire them on permanently reduced wages. Likewise, British Gas is using the

pandemic-induced crisis to 'fire and rehire' its 7,000 engineers on worse pay and conditions (see page 4)

Sunak's tax-free 'freeports' will allow bosses to intensify the exploitation of workers further.

Big business and the wealthy are hoarding the cash that could pay off the debt. Billions were handed out in rip-off contracts for PPE and medical supplies for products that never materialised or were useless - blatant gifts to the Tories' friends and party donors.

Sunak can afford to marginally raise corporation tax and still keep

the lowest tax on profit in the advanced world. Tory reductions in the tax have cost public services £12 billion a year.

The working class needs a political opposition to this one-sided class war being fought by the bosses and the Tories. A sustained campaign can force the Tories to back off from cuts.

But don't hold your breath waiting for Keir Starmer to make the rich pay for the crisis. Labour's right-wing leadership is opposed to taxing the super-profits of the super-rich.

The trade union movement must prepare to lead the fight to defend living standards - involving the unemployed, precarious workers and renters to resist the Tory and bosses' attacks. But it must also back a real political alternative to the two bosses' parties.

A first step would be to support candidates from the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition - which the Socialist Party participates in - who will be making a stand against all cuts in the May elections (see tusc.org.uk).

President of 'big four' Labour-affiliated trade union joins TUSC committee



Amy Murphy addressing trade union activists at a conference of the National Shop Stewards Network PHOTO MARY FINCH

Amy Murphy, the outgoing president of the fourth-biggest Labour Party-affiliated trade union, the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers (Usdaw), has been welcomed as a new member of the national steering committee of the left-wing Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC).

Way forward "So now, more than ever, there is a real need for change. We need an alternative that will politically and socially defend the working class. One which will give a voice to workers, engage with, support, and fight for them, and build on Jeremy Corbyn's socialist ideas. I believe TUSC is the way forward for the working class."

Dave Nellist, a Labour MP from 1983-1992, hailed the significance of Amy's decision: "This follows the news from the president of the bakers' union that, in their consultation with members about whether they want to remain affiliated to the Labour Party, only 9% think that Keir Starmer's Labour is serving their interests now. "TUSC only agreed in September last year that we would resume contesting elections, starting in this May's contests in Scotland, Wales, London and the English councils. "We had wholeheartedly supported Jeremy Corbyn's anti-austerity policies and his defence of working-class people against the 'rigged system' that serves the interests of the billionaires. We saw his leadership of the Labour Party as creating opportunities to achieve working class socialist political representation on a mass basis. "But everything about Starmer's leadership, from his policy retreats praising big business to the continued suspension of Jeremy from the Parliamentary Labour Party, shows that those opportunities are receding. "So candidates standing in the elections in May who endorse Jeremy Corbyn's suspension while agreeing to implement austerity

measures directed from the Tories in Westminster cannot expect to be unchallenged at the ballot box and we are confident that more and more trade unionists will draw that same conclusion."

RMT comment Jared Wood, a national executive committee member of the RMT transport workers' union officially represented on the TUSC steering committee, said: "Ever since the RMT first formally agreed to participate in the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition - at our annual general meeting (AGM) in 2012 - we have always stressed the importance of building widespread trade union support for TUSC if it is to effectively contribute to what our AGM motion described as 'the hard, long-term task of rebuilding political representation for working class people'. Amy joining the steering committee is another important step forward for TUSC."

Another left-wing former Labour MP, Chris Williamson, representing 'Resist: the Movement for a People's Party' on the TUSC steering committee, said: "Amy's decision to join TUSC's national steering committee is a further indication that a political alternative is needed. "Udaw has always been very loyal to the Labour Party, so it is very significant that one of the union's most senior figures has thrown her weight behind TUSC."

"We are building a strong coalition of trade unionists and socialists to give people hope that an alternative to the neoliberal nightmare is possible. People are understandably dissatisfied with the existing political status quo and I'm sure that Amy's decision will encourage others to follow her example."



Around 7,000 British Gas engineers, members of the GMB trade union, are continuing their strike action because the company bosses have refused to withdraw their 'fire and rehire' contract which would leave workers on worse pay and conditions. The engineers remain determined to defeat the plans of this profitable company, as reflected in the nearly four weeks of combined strike action. PHOTO IAIN DALTON

Women's health matters

MARY FINCH WALTHAM FOREST SOCIALIST PARTY

Working-class women have suffered enormously during the pandemic. We've been disproportionately hit by job losses, pay cuts, and the additional burden of home schooling and childcare. But the Tories have recently been forced to make some concessions on women's healthcare and reproductive rights as they attempt to limit face-to-face medical appointments.

Doctors have been able to prescribe the abortion pill over the phone to be taken at home (see socialistparty.org.uk) and a consultation has recently been launched regarding over-the-counter sales of progesterone-only contraceptive pills in pharmacies.

If the outcome is favourable, this would be a positive step. However, the pills should be free in order to guarantee access to all women, not sold at inflated prices as has been the case with the 'morning after' pill.

It has also been announced that the NHS is rolling out a trial of home smear tests. Up to 600,000 smear tests - for cervical cancer - were cancelled in April and May last year because of coronavirus.

Even now that testing has resumed, many women are facing a long wait as the NHS buckles under the pressure of the pandemic. And many more women are avoiding booking their test altogether out of fear of catching coronavirus.

Home tests are less invasive and uncomfortable than the traditional test and a follow-up test will be performed by the GP if abnormal cells are detected. They don't involve the speculum, an instrument used during internal examinations. It's unpleasant and can be extremely painful - and is also a major reason why so many are reluctant to have a smear test. Before the pandemic, around 1.5 million tests were missed annually, mostly due to embarrassment and fear of pain or discomfort.

But it seems the problem with the speculum isn't so much the instrument itself as the way it's used. Medical professionals are often quick to dismiss women in pain as hysterical or exaggerating, and when they do believe women, there's an expectation that they should grit their teeth and bear it. Clinicians simply listening and agreeing to pause or end painful examinations would go a long way to reducing skipped tests.

The accuracy of self-administered smear tests is not yet clear, and must be established before they become more widely used. But if they can accurately detect abnormal cells they, like the other measures which give women more autonomy over their bodies, must be made a permanent option. We cannot allow the small improvements which have been made to disappear when the pandemic ends.

There were calls from workplace reps for a clear regional and national lead to be given by the union to support collective action, particularly in areas where infection rates

are still high and rising.

Numerous speakers pointed out that a return based on a rota system would be much safer, with the reduced numbers allowing for smaller classes and more effective social distancing and ventilation.

Our proposed strategy follows a 'traffic light' approach with schools not re-opening until local case numbers are below 100 infections in every 100,000 and full numbers not returning until they are below 50 - providing proper safety measures are in place.

Testing

The current measures in schools are not adequate. The meeting expressed its concern over the proposed use of lateral flow tests. The Socialist Party has been calling for mass testing of staff and students from the beginning of the pandemic - but this should be done in a well-organised and properly resourced manner using healthcare professionals.

Instead, schools are being told to test all students using the controversial lateral flow tests. There are concerns about these tests' reliability and the ability of students to effectively administer them to themselves. Worse, there were reports of some schools using these tests as an alternative to close contacts isolating following a confirmed case.

Schools are being given a huge logistical challenge by the government - reopen fully and test all students' multiple times - but without being given the required extra resources. It was pointed out by several speakers that the government has consistently failed to provide schools with the time and money needed to make

Schools' safety - teachers demand fighting union strategy



Socialist candidate for teaching union deputy general secretary lays out clear programme

JAMES ELLIS SOCIALIST PARTY AND NATIONAL EDUCATION UNION MEMBER (PERSONAL CAPACITY), LEEDS

Prime Minister Boris Johnson's plan for a reckless 'big-bang' full return of schools on 8 March leaves education staff, students and their families facing the prospect of an unsafe return.

With many parts of the country still seeing dangerously high levels of infection the National Education Union (NEU) is calling for a cautious phased return of schools, dependent on local infection rates, to ensure we do not see another spike in Covid cases.

On 28 February, NEU representatives from around the country attended a meeting called by Socialist Party member Martin Powell-Davies - candidate in the NEU's deputy general secretary election - to discuss a strategy for winning the union's demands.

The mood of education staff at the meeting showed they were worried but also determined to fight, with every speaker expressing dismay at the government's plans and agreeing with the need for concrete action to ensure a safe return.

It was made clear that Johnson is not 'following the science', with even the government's own scientific advisors in SAGE recommending a cautious return, and warning that a full opening of schools could see the R-rate rise by as much as 50%.

There were calls from workplace reps for a clear regional and national lead to be given by the union to support collective action, particularly in areas where infection rates

schools safe, with much of the government's extra funds being diverted to private tuition.

Local councils are similarly woefully underfunded, with many making education cuts even now - as was pointed out by a Tower Hamlets worker currently involved in strike action to save SEN services in the borough.

The mood was summed up by Newham NEU branch secretary Louise Cuffaro who called on the union to back up their demands with action. We should be balloting members now to prepare for a possible spike in cases and should be organising collectively using Section 44 workplace safety legislation in areas where school returns are unsafe.

Martin rightly pointed out that while the NEU has said it will support members who take collective action, in practice it has demonstrated an unwillingness to do so. Schools are under huge political pressure to open and the NEU needs to provide a counterweight to that to ensure safety for all. Martin laid out clear steps that school groups can take to do this alongside lobbying for regional and national coordination.

The mood at the meeting was clear; educators want schools to be open but in a safe and sustainable way. The only way to ensure this is through trade unions making clear demands on the government, backed by the possibility of coordinated workplace action.

If you are an NEU member and agree with this then call a school meeting, lobby your regional officers, and support Martin Powell-Davies' nomination for DGS.

Martin Powell-Davies (above) - Socialist Party member and candidate in the NEU teaching union's deputy general secretary election - gave a robust defence of demanding full Covid safety measures be put in place before full reopening of schools when quizzed on BBC news, 1 March.

Show solidarity - back teachers' action

My profession has suffered attack after attack from the media. Teachers are fast turning into 'public enemy number one' and I'm sick of it.

We are trained professionals who know our students, know our subject, and will make fair judgements. Just like we did last year. Throughout the pandemic, teachers have worked tirelessly (don't believe the 'extended holidays' lie) for our students. We have been forced into unsafe workplaces and as a result many have suffered. Teachers and education staff are not a 'special case' above other key workers, but I do believe that we have been treated particularly terribly by the government and media.

We want schools open more than anyone, but only when it's safe. We care about our students and our communities, and the action we have taken throughout this pandemic has been for the public good. I hope the NEU teaching union continues to fight for safe schools in the face of this government's recklessly fast reopening.

Educational disadvantage is a huge problem and education workers know that more than anyone. Once this pandemic is over, politicians and the media will forget about children's education. We won't.

Don't believe the lies being spread about education staff. Show solidarity and back any teachers taking action.

TEACHER AND SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBER, YORKSHIRE

NEU elections

Support the following Socialist Party members standing in the NEU elections:

Nicky Downes, Sean McCauley, Alex Moore, Sheila Caffrey, Louise Cuffaro for the executive and Martin Powell-Davies for deputy general secretary

see - martin4dgs.co.uk

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HMRC: Pay deal agreed but at what cost?

AN HMRC WORKER
 On 26 February the PCS union HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) pay ballot closed. The turnout was 82.4% with 79.6% for and 20.4% against the deal. The deal is for 13% over three years, with a significant worsening of conditions for a large number of members - the detail of which is still being negotiated!

The result comes as no great surprise to Broad Left Network supporters, including Socialist Party members - who campaigned against the pay deal. With members kept in the dark about negotiations, a ballot with incomplete information, and the Left Unity leadership of the union pushing it and critically offering no fighting alternative, members were left with little choice.

The way these negotiations and the ballot have been handled is scandalous. It has meant that members have voted for changes that will affect them for more than the three-year pay deal - the consequences of which may well be unknown to the membership for some time.

Left Unity (and Socialist View, its dominant force), who lead the union nationally and at group level,

has hailed the high turnout as a step forward for democratic engagement. We would say this was anything but, because the membership has been left in the dark by the employer.

Socialist View not only allowed this to happen but acquiesced. When it became clear that members would not have all the facts needed to make a decision, PCS should have refused to hold the ballot. But Socialist View's intention was to secure a pay deal whatever the cost to the membership.

Broad Left Network members in HMRC are standing in the PCS national and group elections. New leadership is needed. The current leadership is prepared to trade our hard-won terms and conditions for money - this is not a pay rise!

We needed to build a campaign within the union and across the public sector to beat the pay freeze! This pay deal, involving the second largest group of PCS members, has major consequences for our ability to do this.

Nominations in the PCS 2021 President and NEC elections close on 11 March. We list below the Broad Left Network slate and encourage PCS members to support it.

BROAD LEFT NETWORK CANDIDATES
 PRESIDENT: MARION LLOYD (BEIS); VICE PRESIDENTS: FIONA BRITTLE (SCOT GOV), SARAH BROWN (MET POLICE), DAVE SEMPLE (DWP); NATIONAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE: ANDI BRIDGES (HMRC), FIONA BRITTLE (SCOT GOV), ALEX BROWN (HEALTH), SARAH BROWN (MET POLICE), JAIMIE DAVIES (HMRC), KEVIN DENHAM (MET POLICE), ALAN DENNIS (DSE), NICK DOYLE (HMRC), GILL FOXTON (DfE), SUE FRANCIS (BEIS), PAUL GUINNANE (DfE), RACHEL HEENSEKREK (DWP), MARION LLOYD (BEIS), TOM LOWRY (DWP), RACHELLE MCDONOUGH (HMRC), NICK PARKER (BEIS), DAVE REES (DWP), ROB RITCHIE (MET POLICE), JON-PAUL ROSSER (HMRC), DAVE SEMPLE (DWP), PAUL SUTER (DWP), SAORSA-AMATHETHA TWEEDEALE (DWP), KATRINE WILLIAMS (DWP), CRAIG WORSWICK (DWP), COLIN YOUNG (DfE), BOBBY YOUNG (HMRC)

RAF Leeming strike escalates

Over 50 workers on a Babcock Aerospace contract for operational and engineering services at RAF Leeming, north Yorkshire, have been taking discontinuous action since 20 January, escalating to two days of strike action at a time.

Management refuses to accede to the demands for shift pay parity with workers doing similar work at RAF Valley on Anglesey, a difference of up to £5,000 a year. So the workers, organised in Unite, are escalating to three days' strike action a week from 2 March.

Most of the workers are ex-forces, and as one worker told me on the picket line on 23 February: "Striking doesn't come that naturally to us, it's taken quite a lot to force us to get to this point". Another striker explained

more bluntly: "Management don't give a shit about us!"

The workforce remains solid, with a sizeable proportion of those on strike each day joining the picket lines. The position of the workers will be boosted by the newly awarded contract for maintenance of Hawk training jets for the Qatari Emiri Air Force in the hanging directly next to the Babcock workers. This contract pays better rates than those the Babcocks workers are on, and many workers will be considering applying for those jobs.

● *Messages of solidarity can be sent to the shop steward at raf100sqnbabcockstrike@yahoo.com*

● *Donations to the strike fund can be made payable to 'Unite the Union' and forwarded to the Leeds Regional Office, Unite the Union, 55 Call Lane, Leeds, LS1 7BW marked for the attention of the regional secretary (Babcock Aerospace Dispute)*

IAIN DALTON
 SOCIALIST PARTY YORKSHIRE

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 Support the working-class press in 2021

- Calling all trade union branches and committees, community campaigns and student groups!
- Show solidarity and fund the socialist press with a 2021 greeting
- Prices start at £30 for a small box - minimum price negotiable
- £55 for our most popular size, 1/16 of a page or £90 for 1/8 and £170 for 1/4, £300 for 1/2, £500 for a page and a 20% discount until 31 March!
- Visit socialistparty.org.uk/mayday

Sparks force bosses back but fight continues to stamp out deskilling

ROB WILLIAMS
 SOCIALIST PARTY INDUSTRIAL ORGANISER

Rank-and-file construction electricians launched their fight against deskilling at the £22.5 billion Hinkley Point nuclear power station with a number of early morning protests on 24 February.

Socialist Party members and National Shop Stewards Network supporters took part as the 'sparks' demonstrated at EDF Energy in central London, and also protested in Glasgow, Manchester and Newcastle. It appears that a training course for 'electrical support operatives' has now been suspended. This is undoubtedly a fantastic victory and shows what is possible when a fighting lead is given.

But the Unite Electrical and Mechanical Combine has promised that the fight goes on until the bosses "cease their systematic attack on the skill set of electricians and other trades immediately and forever."

The protests sent a clear message to the electrical contractors that an attempt to deskill the trade, and thereby attack pay, terms and conditions, as they tried to do a decade ago in the Besna dispute, will be met with the same ferocious struggle of protests and walkouts that defeated the bosses then. Two of the Besna companies, NG Baileys and Balfour Beatty, are now at the forefront of the latest dispute.

The electricians are determined that the same old story of making workers pay for the bosses' profits by using deskilling to attack wages and terms and conditions must be defeated.

This is more vital than ever during Covid and the economic crisis. This pandemic has decisively shown that militant union organisation on the sites is the only way to ensure workers' health and safety as well as defend living standards.



Unite has come out forcefully against the bosses' plans. In its statement it says: "The matter has been raised directly with the client EDF who have reacted to Unite's concerns. All training in this area has been postponed until the problem has been resolved. The disputed standards relate to cabling and containment work the 'bread and butter' work for electricians on new build construction projects. Unite was alerted to the substandard training standards at an early stage. There are no electricians working at Hinkley Point C, currently undertaking cabling and containment work, as this phase of the project is yet to begin. Due to the early intervention of Unite, the training of any worker or apprentice at Hinkley has not been disrupted as no one has begun to be trained on the ECTIB's defective training standards."

Unite general secretary Len McCluskey said: "Unite defeated the Besna agreement then and we will defeat this latest attempt to deskill electricians. Our message to the industry is clear. Unite and its electrical membership will oppose any and all efforts to weaken the skill set of the trade which will undermine the industry by introducing non-skilled operatives."

The sparks are determined that any suspension of training has to be permanently ended and, the promise of 500 electrical apprenticeships be honoured at Hinkley. The fight continues, with weekly protests at NG Baileys and Balfour Beatty sites and will escalate up to and including strike action until this attack is defeated.

IT workers walkout against 'fire and rehire'



FERDY LYONS
 EAST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

IT workers at the tenant-referencing company Goodlord in east London were out on strike on 1 March against the company's fire-and-rehire scheme.

The strikers, members of Unite, are employed on rolling fixed-term contracts. When Goodlord, nicknamed 'badlord', offered them their new contracts, a 20% pay cut had been

applied. The workers are calling for the restoration of their previous terms and conditions of the London Living Wage.

There was a great mood on the picket line. One striker, Scott, said: "We know it's having an effect on their business... we're going to stay out until management come to the table". Others discussed the next steps with great optimism.

The CEO of the company came through the picket and seemed

Reinstate victimised bus driver Declan Clune

SUE ATKINS
 PRESIDENT, SOUTHAMPTON TRADES COUNCIL

Declan Clune, secretary of the Southampton District Bus and Coach Branch of the RMT and Socialist Party member, was sacked on 26 February by Bluestar Bus company, on the spurious grounds of "bringing the company into disrepute". His crime? In line with health and safety regulations, as branch secretary he reported a bus collision with a railway bridge that the company denies.

This report was entirely necessary as it became clear there had been several incidents of the bridge being struck. All attempts to get the collision dealt with by Bluestar failed.

It is company policy to report all incidents of bridge strikes, and this policy was adhered to by Declan once it became known that the managers at Bluestar had not followed through on their responsibilities.

This is in reality an attack by management who also want to attack wages, terms and conditions to boost their profits.

Declan and the trade union are seen as an obstacle to this agenda. Declan's real crime is to have built the union branch, been at the forefront of a successful strike for better pay, and fought for the health and safety of both drivers and passengers during the Covid pandemic.

Under the cover of Covid, this attack on the trade union movement is happening up and down the country and is endemic in the bus industry.

We demand the full reinstatement of Declan to his job as a bus driver



Declan Clune supporting a campaign to save a theatre and jobs SOUTHAMPTON SP

and we are building support from the labour movement - an injury to one is an injury to all.

The Southampton District Bus and Coach RMT branch has passed a motion declaring the branch is in dispute with Bluestar Bus and agreeing to:

- Discuss plans around potential balloting of members within Bluestar for action
- Launch a public campaign through this branch and the RMT Wessex Region to bring news of this dispute and the actions of Bluestar managers into the public domain
- Discuss this campaign with the RMT Wessex Region to discuss and debate strategy to ensure an effective and widely fought campaign
- Open discussion and debate within our union at RMT Wessex Region, RMT National Bus Workers Committee, TUC and local trades councils around a national campaign highlighting the anti-trade union attacks by employers and the poor terms and conditions currently existing within the bus industry nationally
- The resolution to be sent to the Southampton and South West Hampshire Trades Union Council to ask for their support and engagement in the campaign
- Contact councils in the area where Bluestar operates and make them aware of the poor health and safety attitudes of the company and the way in which they treat trade union officials

● Please send messages of support to southamptondbc@rmt.org.uk
 ● Donate to Declan's Go Fund Me campaign at <https://bit.ly/3kD6Pq9>

Victory for Judith, defend Moe

Socialist Party member Moe Muhsin Manir, a Unite bus driver rep, is in a disciplinary on a gross misconduct charge at the Abellio Walworth garage in South London.

In December, at neighbouring Battersea, the same company had sacked another Unite rep, Judith Katera.

But we are delighted to report that after a fantastic campaign, Judith has been reinstated!

This shows that union-busting can be defeated. As usual, bosses target union reps to more easily attack workers.

● See socialistparty.org.uk for more and for updates

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Manchester indefintite bus strike against 'fire and rehire'



Socialist Party members supported the hundreds of bus drivers in Manchester who are on strike over proposed changes by private company Go North West. The picket line at Queens Road was big, loud and solid.

Unite union, which represents the 400 drivers at the firm, said the company planned to "fire and rehire its workers on vastly inferior contracts." 82% of the workers voted to strike.

Unite rep Lawrence Chapple-Gill said: "There were some things that we were working on with the company prior to Christmas, which amounted to over £1 million that we offered up as a contribution towards the turnaround plan."

Unite regional secretary Ritchie James says: "Unite gave Go North West the opportunity to withdraw its fire and rehire plans following the overwhelming vote for strike action, sadly it spurned this opportunity."

"As a consequence, Unite has had no option but to call its members out on strike."

"This will inevitably cause a great deal of disruption throughout Greater Manchester and beyond, but I hope that passengers appreciate that Unite took this action as a last resort."

"If Go Ahead were allowed to implement its fire and rehire policies it would result in our members, who have been in the frontline since the pandemic began, having to work longer for far less money.

The indefinite strike continues.

- See also back page

A FIGHTING PROGRAMME FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND SOCIALISM

The Covid pandemic has shone a spotlight on all forms of inequality in capitalist society. If you live in a poor area you are twice as likely to die from Covid than if you live in a rich one. The lowest paid are more than twice as likely as the highest paid to lose their jobs. The poorest have seen their incomes fall while those of the rich have risen. Poverty and discrimination have combined to make black, Asian and minority ethnic people especially vulnerable.

The pre-existing gender inequality in society has meant that women, particularly working-class women, have been especially hit by the economic and social consequences of the pandemic. Our jobs, pay, hours and working conditions, as well as the services we rely on, have all come under attack.

Our levels of stress and anxiety have gone through the roof as we've worried about catching the virus; losing our jobs; having our hours cut; surviving on lower incomes; juggling childcare and care of other family members, work and home-schooling; surviving lockdown, and been concerned about what kind of future we will have in a society that puts the profits of the super-rich before the needs of the majority.

A major battle is brewing as the Tories and the big business interests they represent prepare to offload the Covid bill onto working-class people. We can't sit back while our lives and livelihoods come under attack, and the rights that have been fought for and won over decades are pushed back. We need urgently to get organised and fight back.

But Covid has also revealed that the organisations which were created to defend our interests have not brought their full potential to bear. At the beginning of the pandemic, many of the trade union leaders appeared to give up the struggle entirely. But where workers have organised together over workplace safety, such as in the schools, it has been possible to put

pressure on the trade union leaders and make gains.

Building fighting trade union organisations will be central to preparing the fight back that will be needed to defend the rights of women and the whole working class in the face of the onslaught that is to come.

Covid has also dramatically exposed the failings and rottenness of a capitalist system based on profit, inequality and exploitation. It has shown the need for a root-and-branch transformation of the way that society is organised and structured.

Public ownership

We believe that socialism, where the major companies are publicly owned and controlled, and the economy is democratically planned in the interests of the majority, not a super-rich, profit-hungry minority, is the only viable alternative to the capitalist system, and the only guarantee that what we win through struggle will not be taken away again in the future.

Yet it is precisely at this time that the Labour Party under Keir Starmer has moved away from defending the interests of working-class people. It has abandoned Jeremy Corbyn's programme that gave a glimpse of a political alternative to this failed system.

This poses the need for building a new mass workers' party that can bring together trade unionists, young people, community campaigners and socialists to offer a real alternative to working-class people.

This programme has been drawn up as a campaigning platform: to take into the workplaces and the trade unions, into the universities and colleges, and into local communities and campaign groups. As part of our broader programme to end capitalism, this is a fighting programme to defend the gains that women have made and to win what is necessary to live a life free from inequality, poverty, discrimination and oppression.

Working hours that suit us

While many workers are compelled to work long hours, others can't get the hours they need to survive financially. This is especially true for women in part-time work, many of whom would like to work more hours. At the same time, many women are forced to take on multiple jobs in order to try and make ends meet.

'Workplace flexibility' has for the most part been a one-way process

for the benefit of the bosses and their profits. Zero-hour contracts make it almost impossible to combine work and childcare. And during the pandemic women workers have been more likely than male workers to have had their hours cut.

The pandemic has shown that many jobs can be done in flexible locations and at flexible times, but this must not be abused by the bosses.

We say:

- No cuts in working hours unless requested by workers themselves
- For the right to flexible working hours that put the needs of workers first

- Remote working should be a right but never compulsory
- End zero-hour contracts. Full employment rights from day one at work
- A maximum 35-hour week with no loss of pay

Fight for jobs and pay

Because of historic discrimination, and because they still have the main responsibility for caring for children and other family members, women tend to be concentrated in low-paid, part-time, and often precarious jobs. They are especially likely to be working in sectors such as hospitality and retail which have been severely affected by the Covid-19 pandemic.

At the same time, despite what the Tories say, austerity has not gone away. Both Labour and Tory local councils continue to pass on Tory-imposed cuts and privatisation.

We say:

- Trade unions in organised workplaces must fight to defend every job under threat. Extend unionisation to unorganised sectors
- The financial books of any large company threatening job losses should be open to trade union scrutiny. If the money is genuinely not there, or the company refuses to back off, it should be brought into public ownership, under democratic workers' control
- Local councils should stand up to the Tories and refuse to carry out cuts to jobs and services. They should use their reserves and borrowing powers to immediately fund necessary jobs and services, and wage a campaign, together

Because they make up a large proportion of workers in local authority-funded services, women have borne the brunt of job losses. Even the Tory chair of the all-parliamentary group on women and work has had to admit that we are on the "brink of a bloodbath" as far as women's jobs are concerned.

Even before the pandemic women workers earned, on average, 17% less than male workers – the equivalent of two months free work a year! The situation for part-time women workers is even worse.

with the trade unions and local communities, to demand that the government comes up with the money that is needed

- For a shorter working week with no loss of pay. Share out the work
- A guaranteed job or training on decent pay for anyone losing their job
- Implement a mass programme of publicly funded, socially and environmentally necessary jobs on decent pay
- Equal pay for work of equal value
- Immediately increase the minimum wage to £12 an hour (£15 in London) as a step towards £15 for all – no exemptions
- Extend furlough on 100% pay for those workplaces unable to fully open safely because of Covid

Childcare is critical

Covid has brought into sharp relief the importance of childcare to the lives of millions of working women and the disastrous state of the privatised care sector. Lockdown and home schooling have exposed how women are still responsible for the bulk of childcare in families. In a third of cases where women have had their hours or jobs cut during the pandemic, it has been because of childcare difficulties - 44% for black women.

Childcare was already a problem before Covid-19 struck. It is the most expensive in Europe. Government subsidies don't cover the full cost of

care and supply is patchy. Now, up to a quarter of providers in the private sector are threatening to close because they say they can't make sufficient profits. Closures are more likely in working-class areas where parents can't afford to make up the difference when fees go up.

And of course, 98% of childcare workers are women – underpaid, overworked, undervalued, and now facing huge job losses. Cuts have also led to increased ratios of carers to children and compromised safety and quality of care.

We say:

- Bring privatised childcare into the public sector under the democratic control of elected committees of parents and childcare workers
- Full public funding of a network of quality, flexible childcare that meets the needs of parents,

children and childcare workers. This must be available from birth and include pre and after-school and holiday care

- The right to flexible parental and carers' leave on full pay
- Childcare is a workplace issue. Trade unions must make fighting on these demands a priority

A guaranteed income we can live on

As unemployment has shot up, more and more people have experienced firsthand just how threadbare and punitive the benefit system has become after years of cuts and privatisation. It is clear that Universal Credit is not fit for purpose. The fact that a third of those claiming benefits are in work is an indictment of the low-paying, exploitative economic system we live in and shows the urgent need for a decent minimum wage.

Because of the kind of jobs they

are employed in, and because of caring responsibilities, women are more likely to rely on a failing benefit system that entrenches poverty and inequality throughout their lives, including in old age. At 40%, the gender pension gap is more than double the gender pay gap.

This can be exacerbated by student debt. Because of interest payments on loans, low pay and career breaks can mean that women end up paying back more in the long run.

We say:

- Immediately increase benefits to levels we can live on, uprated annually in line with the cost of living
- Maintain the £20-a-week Universal Credit (UC) increase and extend it to legacy benefits. End the five-week wait for UC and cancel all related debts. UC should not just be paid to the highest earner
- Scrap the benefit cap, the two child limit and the bedroom tax. No more sanctions or punitive disability assessments carried out by private companies
- Reverse the pension attacks. Increase the pension by 50% now as a step towards a living pension
- A guaranteed income for carers and anyone who is unable to work, linked to a decent minimum wage
- An immediate increase in child benefit of £10 a week. Universal child benefit and maternity benefit that reflect the real cost of pregnancy and bringing up children available to all
- Increase statutory sick pay to the equivalent of a minimum wage of £15 an hour
- Scrap tuition fees. Cancel student debt

End workplace discrimination

Every year 54,000 women are sacked for being pregnant. This has worsened during the pandemic with pregnant women often being singled out when jobs or hours are cut. Pregnant women have also been placed under pressure by employers to continue working, even on the front line, putting their lives and health, and that of their unborn children, at risk. Many who have questioned these risks have been threatened with pay cuts and job losses.

We say:

- Trade unions must organise to ensure workplace safety relating to Covid and to stop bosses sacking pregnant women, or cutting their pay or terms and conditions when returning to work after maternity leave
- A minimum of one year's maternity and paternity leave on full pay
- Organise a trade union campaign to win improved working conditions, including the right to paid time off work for symptoms of the menopause
- End period poverty. Free, quality sanitary products to be provided in workplaces as well as in schools and relevant public places
- No to sexist dress codes

Build fighting trade unions

With almost 6.5 million members, trade unions are the main vehicle for fighting for women's rights at work. They also potentially have a broader role to play in campaigning for decent services and benefits, and for the building of a new mass workers' political party that can fight for our interests.

Women make up more than half of trade union members. During the pandemic, the membership of several unions has gone up as workers have seen the need for collective organisation to defend their safety, jobs, pay and conditions. Some of the biggest increases in membership have been in sectors where women predominate such as in social care and education.

The growth has been most spectacular where unions have, under pressure from members, taken a fighting stance, such as the National Education Union over school safety. Many of those joining unions during the pandemic are not sitting on the sidelines but becoming trade union reps and getting active.

We say:

- Build fighting trade unions, democratically controlled by the members
- Full-time union officials to be regularly elected and receive no more than a workers' wage
- Fight for trade union meetings to be held at times and in venues convenient for women workers
- Guaranteed paid facility time to enable trade union reps to adequately represent their members
- Trade unions should convene a 'council of war' to stop the employers offensive to make us pay for the crisis

The trade union leaders should organise a conference together with socialist organisations, community, environmental, anti-cuts, women's and anti-racist campaigns etc, to discuss how a new mass workers' party can be built

▶▶▶ CONTINUED OVERLEAF



Women working for Glasgow city council won £500 million in equal pay claims after taking strike action, alongside men, in 2018. PUBLIC SERVICES INTERNATIONAL/CC

Violence against women – the other pandemic

One in four women will experience domestic abuse at some time in their lives. On average, two women a week are killed by a partner or ex-partner. In the first Covid lockdown this horrific figure more than doubled. The number of women searching for advice or support skyrocketed.

Legal support for women experiencing violence and abuse is clearly important. But so is ensuring that the economic resources are available to help women escape abuse. Women who lose their jobs, have their hours reduced, or their benefits cut may find it harder to leave a violent or abusive relationship. Cuts and closures of refuges have resulted in 60% of women who have sought help being turned away. Lack of social housing means more difficulty in finding permanent accommodation.

Black, Asian and minority ethnic

women, and LGBT+ women experiencing abuse may have specific needs that are not always met by existing services. Migrant women with no recourse to public funds are currently excluded from support and some may face deportation if they report or leave an abuser.

Although it mainly happens in a domestic setting, intimate partner violence and abuse nonetheless impacts women at work. It can affect work attendance and performance rates. Women may need to request a change of workplace in order to avoid an abuser.

Specialist resources for women experiencing rape and sexual assault have been seriously effected by cuts and closures. In addition, they face enormous obstacles from the way that the criminal justice system is organised and run.

We say:

- Fully fund services and support for all women affected by domestic violence, rape and abuse, including refuges and permanent, affordable social housing
- Services must be specialised, publicly funded and democratically controlled by service workers and users and open to all women
- Full access to legal aid
- Paid childcare and leave for attending court and other legal appointments
- Specialist training, under democratic control, for all workers and bodies coming into contact with abused women

- Community and working-class accountability of the police and the judicial system
- Additional public funding and control of specialist support to challenge the attitudes and behaviour of perpetrators of domestic abuse
- Paid leave on full pay for workers experiencing domestic abuse
- Training for all trade union reps and staff, including managers, regarding domestic abuse
- The right of victims of abuse to transfer workplace, where feasible
- No disciplinary action with regards to absence, or detriment to pay and conditions, for those experiencing domestic abuse

Fight for the services we need

Austerity and privatisation have devastated local services. Central government funding was halved from 2010-2018 resulting in an 8% cut in social care budgets. Because women are more likely to be carers, they are disproportionately affected by cuts and the outsourcing of care of the elderly, the disabled, children's services, etc.

The Covid pandemic has also

brought into focus the dramatic housing situation with millions forced to live in cramped and inadequate homes, in temporary accommodation or, in the most extreme cases, on the streets.

Cuts to public transport make life more difficult for all working-class people, but especially for working-class women.

We say:

- Reverse all privatisation and cuts to local services
- Fight the cuts. If local councillors are not prepared to fight austerity, they should stand down for trade unionists, community campaigners and socialists who are
- Massively increase public spending on the services we need, democratically controlled by workers and service users
- Fund the building of at least one million quality council homes every year
- Fully fund an environmentally friendly, integrated and democratically planned public transport system



Fighting sexual harassment

The #Metoo campaign highlighted just how widespread sexual harassment is in society. More than half of women say they have been sexually harassed at work. Many women in low-paid, precarious jobs feel that they have no choice but to put up with the harassment for fear of losing their jobs. Even when harassment is reported the measures in place to deal with it are often unclear and ineffective.

Recent research estimates that at least 50,000 incidents of sexual

harassment and violence occur on UK university campuses every year. A National Union of Students survey in 2015 found one in five students experience sexual harassment during freshers week alone.

37% of girls and young women report experiencing sexual harassment at school. Many schools do not have adequate safeguards and procedures in place and just one in five teachers receive training for dealing with sexual harassment.

We say:

- Trade unions must organise and campaign against sexual harassment in workplaces, including schools, colleges and universities. This means not only ensuring that adequate procedures are in place for dealing with sexual harassment but that they are actually implemented in practice.

- Training must be available for all trade union reps and staff
- Fully fund university campus support services for students and staff experiencing harassment and abuse
- Joint committees of trade unions and students in universities to oversee safety and sexual harassment procedures

Women's health matters

Years of underfunding and privatisation have left the NHS in no fit state to adequately face the Covid pandemic. Shortages of staff and beds have resulted in the cancellation of non-Covid treatment and operations, and lengthening waiting lists.

Before the pandemic there was a shortage of 2,500 midwives. This doubled during the coronavirus outbreak to leave one in five posts unfilled.

Covid has also aggravated an already serious mental health crisis,

with women suffering especially from increased anxiety and depression, and self-harm amongst young women and girls escalating. Cuts to services mean that they are not getting the support they desperately need.

In addition, a number of scandals in hospital trusts have exposed not just the consequences of cuts and privatisation but a sexist culture existing in parts of the NHS which has had an adverse effect on women's health.

We say:

- Massively increase spending on the NHS, including maternity and mental health services. Fund research into all aspects of women's health
- End privatisation. Bring all

- privatised and outsourced services into the NHS
- Nationalise big Pharma. Free prescriptions for all
- For a socialist NHS, democratically run by elected and accountable committees including service workers and users

A woman's right to choose

It should be the right of all women to decide when or whether to have children. On the one hand, this means access to contraception, abortion, fertility services and sex education. On the other, it means ensuring that the resources are available for childcare, local services, decent housing and a guaranteed income that can enable children to be brought up free from poverty. There should be no barriers based on outmoded gender norms.

We say:

- No more cuts and closures of sexual health services. Full access to a wide choice of free, safe contraception, including sterilisation if requested
- Publicly funded and democratically controlled research into safer, more effective contraception
- Free abortion on demand
- The abortion pill to continue to be available at home on request as has been the case during the Covid pandemic
- Access to free fertility treatment on the NHS for all who need it
- Increase research into the prevention of infertility
- Inclusive, quality health, relationship and sex education in schools

Take the wealth off the 1%

Having said for years there was no alternative to austerity, the Tories have suddenly found nearly £300 billion during the Covid crisis. We need to organise to make sure that women and the working class in general are not made to pay the price for that spending through future attacks on our living standards and services. The money already exists to increase funding on the things we need. Just a one-off wealth tax of 5% on net assets over £500,000 would immediately

raise more than £260 billion. That would be just a first step. By taking into public ownership the top 150 companies and banks and financial institutions which dominate the economy, running them under democratic working-class control and management, as part of a socialist planned economy, the resources could be released and society organised to ensure that the programme that has been outlined here could become a reality.

End discrimination, sexism and abuse – fight for socialism

Discrimination, sexism and abuse are rooted in inequality and outdated ideas about gender roles. They can affect all women in society but working-class women are doubly oppressed as women and as workers.

Campaigns to raise awareness, educate, and change attitudes can have some effect. But we live in an unequal society - where a small minority owns the wealth; where exploiting women in low-paid, precarious jobs generates enormous profits for the capitalists; where the unpaid work that women do in the home saves capitalism billions of pounds every year.

Private companies which dominate and control the media, beauty, fashion, leisure and other industries continue to reflect and promote traditional expectations and norms about how women and men should look and behave, often turning women's bodies into commodities to make a profit.

Capitalism is based on inequality and competition. The capitalists and the politicians who represent them are prepared to resort to the use of power, force and violence to defend their interests and control - against protesters, strikers and in wars, for example. Those values have an impact more broadly in society and how we relate to each other.

As long as the capitalist system remains in place, discrimination, sexism and abuse will continue. The basis for ending them can only be brought about by a different system with alternative values, based on equality, cooperation and solidarity, in which the major companies are publicly owned and society is democratically planned in the interests of the majority - socialism.

The working class, because of the economic exploitation workers of all genders face in the workplace and the potential power they have to unite and act together to hit the profits of the capitalists, is central to changing society. Building a party based on the working class, with a programme for fundamental socialist change will be key.

This is what the Socialist Party is campaigning for. Join us in the fight for a future, here and internationally, free from inequality, poverty, exploitation, discrimination and oppression.



A history of International Women's Day

Struggle, solidarity, socialism

TANIS BELSHAM-WRAY
LEEDS SOCIALIST PARTY

8 March this year marks the 110th anniversary of International Women's Day (IWD). Over the years there's been a sustained attempt to remove the socialist origin of the day and for it to become a day of individual celebrations.

Although it is not a bad thing to raise awareness of individual achievements of women throughout history, it's important that this day continues to play the role of bringing together socialists and trade unionists to fight against both women's oppression and against capitalism.

International Women's Day was proposed by Marxists: Clara Zetkin and others at the Second International Women's conference in Copenhagen in August 1910. The first IWD was subsequently held on 8 March 1911 with demonstrations in Austria, Denmark, Germany and Switzerland. Women's suffrage was a key issue of the day but not the only one.

Internationally, in a whole number of countries, there had been a rise in the movement for the vote and also an increased militancy amongst women workers. In Britain, the late 1880s saw the birth of 'new unionism' and the growth of 'general', more militant unions organising amongst 'unskilled' workers.

More women were in the workplace, especially in textiles, clothing, tobacco, clerical work and some sections of manufacturing. Although they still only made up roughly 10% of the total trade union membership, they played a vital role in the organisation of unskilled labour.

In the Bryant and May match girls strike in 1888, 1,400 women workers went out on strike for safe working conditions, a shorter working day and better pay. In 1906, there was a strike of non-unionised Jute workers in Dundee. In 1910, Cradley Heath women chainmaker's took strike action over low pay and poor working



Women on the march during the 1984-85 miners' strike

conditions. This is to name only a few of the disputes at the time.

Women workers did not just campaign on workplace issues, but also played a key role in the suffrage movement. In Lancashire, tens of thousands of textile workers supported the campaign to win the vote. They saw the vote not just as something for middle-class women who would more than likely vote Tory or Liberal, but as a weapon to change their living conditions. They wanted to fight for equal pay, birth control, improved working conditions and educational opportunities.

Trade unions

Through these struggles women were brought into trade unions and the political movement. They were seen as part of the same movement, not two separate struggles.

This was also the case on an international level. On 8 March 1908, 15,000 garment workers marched in New York demanding the right to vote and also a shorter working week and improved working conditions.

This protest was followed by the 1909-10 'Uprising of the 20,000'. This was a strike of workers in shirtwaist factories in New York - the largest strike of female workers in the US at that time. The 1908 protest inspired the Socialist Party of America to call a national women's day, which may have been the inspiration for Clara Zetkin and other socialists to call for an International Women's Day to

unite these movements on a global level.

International Women's Day has historically been a day of struggle. The most well-known was in 1917 when textile workers in St Petersburg in Russia walked out on unofficial strike action calling for 'bread and herrings' on the back of food shortages and poor living conditions.

These women also called for the metalworkers to go out on strike, not just over bread but also against Russia's involvement in World War One. This led to the 'February Revolution' (IWD was 23 February according to the calendar used in Russia at the time).

In more recent times we've seen the day become a focal point for struggle again. Since 2017, there have been large protests and some strikes in opposition to violence against women and to defend and improve abortion rights.

In the US, on the back on the women's marches in January 2017, IWD saw large protests against the Trump administration. In 2018, 5.3 million workers went on strike in Spain over gender inequality and sexual discrimination. This is to name but a few of the global movements.

110 years after the first IWD, women are still struggling under capitalism as the Socialist Party's programme for women's rights and socialism on the previous pages shows.

The time to fight back is now. Women now make up majority of trade union membership in Britain. Ending the oppression of women will require a united struggle of the working class against austerity and capitalism.

As we've seen in recent strikes - such as those of the Glasgow care workers over equal pay, the Birmingham care workers and the workers who took strike action against 'fire and rehire' at Labour-run Tower Hamlet's Council, and many others - women are already drawing these conclusions.

We need those women and others who will be drawn into struggle in the coming months and years to join the Socialist Party and fight for a socialist alternative in Britain and internationally.

• See CWI statement 'Women's struggles in a time of covid crisis' at socialistworld.net

CHAIR: ISAI PRIVA, SOCIALIST PARTY NATIONAL COMMITTEE; SPEAKERS: RASHMI, NEW SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE INDIA, MEMBER OF THE CHENNAI COMMITTEE; CARAH DANIEL, MILITANT LEFT, IRELAND, CENTRAL COMMITTEE; SHERI HAMILTON, MARXIST WORKERS PARTY SOUTH AFRICA, EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE; PAMELA MEZA LOBOS, SOCIALISMO REVOLUCIONARIO, CHILE; CLAIRE BAYLER, INDEPENDENT SOCIALIST GROUP US, EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE; LEILA MESSAOUDI, GAUCHE REVOLUTIONNAIRE GENERAL SECRETARY AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT COUNCILLOR; CLARE DOYLE, CWI INTERNATIONAL SECRETARIAT; HELEN PATTISON, SOCIALIST PARTY LONDON REGIONAL SECRETARY

Why we need socialists in London city hall

MAX BACHARACH
HACKNEY SOCIALIST PARTY

London was put into 'major incident' status on 8 January, with Covid-19 infection rates and hospital admissions soaring. Frontline workers have consistently paid the price. 57 Transport for London (TfL) staff, mostly bus drivers keeping the city moving, have lost their lives so far. They have had to fight for basic safety for a year and some, including Socialist Party members, have been suspended as a result.

A recent RMT survey found 60% of bus workers thought their employers, the private contractors who run London's 700 bus routes, "had taken no additional steps to protect staff safety since the emergence of the more infectious strain of Covid-19".

This is a shocking stain on Labour Mayor Sadiq Khan, who is also chair of TfL. We all remember him making the most of his dad being an ex-bus driver when running for office - but where's his love for workers now? In October, deep into the corona crisis, Khan agreed a government 'support' package of violent cuts to TfL services and staff pensions.

And now Khan announces plans to hike Londoners' council tax by a whopping £100 a year. This is in a city of millionaires and billionaires, who Khan has openly courted. How exactly are workers and families, facing wage cuts, furlough and mass redundancies, supposed to find the cash?

With Khan firmly in the pocket of



Campaigning in Enfield, London against the cuts ENFIELD TUSC

big business, there is the urgent need for working-class political representation in London. The Socialist Party is preparing to stand as part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) in the Greater London Assembly elections in May.

It is an opportunity to challenge the Tories, Labour cutters and the capitalists they serve, at a time of intense class anger. London bus drivers represented by Unite are striking over cuts and conditions, and more

industrial action will surely follow (see back page). TUSC supports these and all strikes in the interests of workers' lives and livelihoods.

The Socialist Party is calling for a campaign to get socialists into city hall. We are appealing to all workers in struggle, the trade unions and other community activists to join our campaign. To stand as candidates, and to help raise the £20,000 needed to stand for London mayor. The fight-back begins here.

Labour surrenders to Tories in Devon

SEAN BROGAN
DEVON SOCIALIST PARTY

Devon County Council majority Tory group has passed a budget with a 4.99% rise in the council tax. This is the maximum allowed under government rules, and is a tax that hits those on low incomes. Was it opposed? Yes, but this was left to the Liberal councillors.

The opposition response from Labour group leader, Cllr Hannaford was: "As a responsible opposition, after careful consideration and discussion, we recognise and acknowledged this strongly... We will be supporting and voting for the budget this year".

Even the Liberals' plans were to take £6.15 million out of council reserves. The degeneration of the leaders of the

Labour Party is there for all to see. Ten years of austerity has seen the closure of youth facilities, community hospitals, and an endless reduction of resources. What do most Labour politicians do but hold up their hands in surrender? The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition is mounting a challenge in Devon and urges others to unite with us to make a fighting stand against all cuts.

Determined to smash the fighting fund target to fuel election challenge in May

Congratulations to our members in East Midlands, who along with Wales and the South West have now exceeded their fighting fund target. We are very close to reaching the target nationally, and it is vital that we continue raising funds to have the best possible Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition anti-austerity election campaigns across England and Wales.

Our members and supporters have shown their determination by donating to the Socialist Party election appeal. This week we have

received £50 from Sue Atkins in Southampton, £50 from Nick Doyle in Portsmouth, £200 from Helen and Mark Kerr in Stevenage, and £200 from Bill Reed in West London. It is important that we get this appeal out as widely as possible. Who do you know who you could ask for a donation?

As well as donating to the election appeal, our members and supporters are doing what fundraising they can to reach their fighting fund target. Kevin Pattison from Leeds branch has sent in £32 of

paper extras from the regular sales of the Socialist, and Nigel Gilbert in Worcestershire branch has donated £40 he has saved by not travelling to meetings. We urge all our members and supporters to do all they can to help us smash through the Socialist Party's fighting fund target.

Help fund the fightback
DONATE
socialistparty.org.uk/donate



Stop domestic abuse service closures in Brighton

PHOEBE RIMMER
BRIGHTON SOCIALIST PARTY

Brighton and Hove council is removing funding from domestic abuse services at a time they are most needed. Reports of domestic abuse cases rose 9% throughout the first UK lockdown, and this rise has continued in the lockdowns that followed. It is an expected tragedy: those who are vulnerable have been trapped in homes with their abusers. But although it was predictable, lack of support was not inevitable.

Organisations like RISE, based in Brighton, offer extensive support for victims of domestic abuse. Yet Brighton and Hove Council has decided not to offer RISE the £5 million, seven-year contract to continue its important work.

According to RISE, the council has instead favoured organisations such as Stonewater Ltd and Victim Support. This is no time to be limiting services or disposing of the decades of expertise which RISE provides, including its specialised support for LGBTQ+ and BAME individuals.

It is these continued cuts to such socially valuable services that are a detriment to our communities. We

cannot allow economic considerations to take precedence over human welfare, which has proven to be the case with this government far too often.

The Socialist Party stood with RISE on the 27 February on Brighton beach, protesting against the cuts. As we all chanted, holding signs, there was a shared, daunting feeling of 'what happens now? What happens to the people that rely on this service?' It is members of our community, our friends, our family, who will be affected. It is crucial that these services, like the many others under threat, are protected.

Services like those which RISE provides should not be subject to local authority bidding wars with service providers competing for who can do the work cheapest. They must be publicly owned and run with the democratic oversight of workers, service users and the community. They also need to be fully funded. Brighton and Hove Labour and Green councillors need to increase spending on these vital services, and demand the money from the government to pay for it.

● Find more information and to support the campaign visit rise.org.uk



BRIGHTON SOCIALIST PARTY

Socialist Students conference

Preparing for mass student struggle for free education

CORINTHIA WARD
BIRMINGHAM SOCIALIST PARTY

If just one thing could be taken from the Socialist Students conference on 28 February it was that Socialist Students has remained the most organised student group across the country.

It has maintained activity on and off the campus despite the complications and obstacles of Covid. This conference was a platform to take note, gear up and get ready for the year ahead.

Over 100 students and young workers from across the country came together to discuss the political and economic situation facing youth in the UK. The conference heard from students from Bangor to Birmingham, from Southampton to York - and everywhere in between - showing the reach of the organisation.

Oisín Mulholland, Swansea University, reported on the combined efforts of Welsh Socialist Students groups leading rent strikes which, so far, helped win rent refunds for students who have not returned to their university accommodation because of Covid.

The campaign has secured £40 million from the Welsh government for universities. Oisín made it clear that while this is a victory, it is not the final goal, but instead should be

used to inspire confidence in students everywhere to push demands further.

Adam Powell-Davies, Oxford University, talked about the need for a political voice for students. One which supports free education, backs student demands for rent refunds, invests in higher education, mental health services and defends staff on campus.

Keir Starmer has exposed his neoliberal agenda - defending big business rather than students during the last year. This is one of the reasons why Adam has chosen to stand as a part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition in the upcoming May council elections.

Political representation

Michael Adaramoye, an international speaker from the Youth Rights Campaign in Nigeria, shared how Nigerian youth played a role in the in the End SARS protests which exploded in October 2020. These protests saw a wave of young people fight against poverty, inequality and government corruption.

Saraankan spoke from Young Revolutionary Socialists, a youth-led South Asian campaign group which fights against state oppression and for the right of young people to have access to education. He explained the crucial role of building international

solidarity and linking the struggle for education and quality of life for young people on a global scale.

Other contributions ranged from the role Socialist Students can play in building the Black Lives Matter movement, to linking student and workers' movements together - drawing lessons and inspiration from the events in France 1968.

The abysmal role of the National Union of Students in failing to organise a national campaign to defend student interests during the pandemic was also made clear. Covid has further exposed how the marketisation of universities has been detrimental to the quality of education, fuelled attacks on staff jobs, and loaded debt onto working-class youth.

With no national leadership taking up the issue of free quality education, and with the potential of universities opening up again, Socialist Students will give an organised expression to the anger of young people. It will build for a day of action when universities are set to return, on 21 April, and raise the demand for mass student struggle as part of a national student strike.

The conference ended by electing a steering committee to lead the work over the course of the next year, and elected Michael Morgan from the University of Warwick as national chair.



MARY FINCH

Swansea Black Lives Matter protest against racist police brutality

CHARLIE WELLS
SWANSEA SOCIALIST PARTY

Eleven members of the Socialist Party and Socialist Students from Swansea and the surrounding area attended a Black Lives Matter (BLM) demonstration, wearing masks and socially distancing, on 27 February. The protest swelled to 100, angry at the police brutality and racism in South Wales.

There has been a heightening of tensions between the BAME community and police in South Wales after the deaths of Mohamud Mohammed Hassan in Cardiff and Moyied Bashir in Newport, both of which happened immediately after interactions with police.

Prior to these events, the conduct of police in South Wales towards BAME people had been called into question. Campaigns such as the Free Sianda movement had already shone a light on racist policing in South Wales.

The protest heard speakers from the local BAME community, who wished to express their feelings about the role of the police and insidious practices such as stop and search, which disproportionately target



SWANSEA SOCIALIST PARTY

BAME people. The event concluded with a moment's silence in order to demonstrate solidarity with the wider BLM movement, and with the individuals who have been victims of police brutality and harassment.

As a result of the right-wing far-mongering which has been whipped up surrounding the rise of the BLM movement, there was a small right-wing counter-protest. However, the

brave young organisers of the BLM event stood proudly and did not allow the calls of 'all lives matter' or the accusations of being 'cultural marxists' deter them from making their voices heard.

Young people all across Wales are showing that we will not allow our rights to be trampled upon by the police. We are willing to fight and protest in order to defend those rights.

Union fight to save musicians' livelihoods

HENRY HOARE-EXLEY
BRIGHTON SOCIALIST PARTY

The Covid-19 crisis has forced society to shut down, and music venues, which have not opened at all since last March, are no exception. A musician's main sources of income are typically touring and gigging but, due to venue closures, many musicians are struggling financially, relying solely on income from streaming.

To earn the hourly minimum wage an artist's music must be streamed 3,114 times. In context, the minimum wage working 40 hours a week 46.4 weeks of the year would require 5,779,584 streams. Still, this is only enough to support one person, for bands and groups a lot more streams are needed. Poverty has never been a stranger to most musicians, and now many face having to abandon the industry or take up multiple jobs.

Over time, more and more artists come from privileged backgrounds, usually privately educated, because they don't need to worry about income. Gentrification means artists can no longer live in city centres, leaving areas previously rich in culture drained.

Some think this makes sense, that musicians are not productive

members of society and that music is a hobby. Art is the heart of all humanity; without the capabilities of creative expression there is no humanity and we become no more than products of labour here to serve the capitalist machine.

On 15 March UMAW (Union of Musicians and Allied Workers) will be protesting outside Spotify offices globally, asking that the union's demands are met. This includes a pay increase to 1p per stream. The Socialist Party supports the union taking action. We demand democratic public ownership of the streaming industry, as well as demanding that the arts should be funded and subsidised by the government as a social good. Action must be taken now if we are to prevent the loss of music, drama, dance and creativity.

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'Casino capitalism' - driving another potential financial Armageddon

ROBIN CLAPP

SOCIALIST PARTY NATIONAL COMMITTEE

Across the globe at least 2.4 million people have now died from contracting Covid-19. Livelihoods have been wrecked and economies have crashed, with the world economy shrinking by over 4% and the UK suffering a fall in gross domestic product (GDP - total economic output) of 9.9% in 2020, the steepest collapse in over 300 years.

Yet for the self-proclaimed financial wizards, the pandemic has provided rich pickings. Wealth inequality has widened further as the asset-driven boom in shares, housing and crypto-currencies has seen the super-rich enjoy huge surges in paper profits.

There continues to be an extraordinary expansion in major stockmarkets as asset prices soar. After the financial crash and global recession of 2007-2009, it took several years for stock markets to recover lost ground. Yet, propelled by historically low interest rates and the prodigious sums of central bank generated income pumped into economies through Quantitative Easing (QE), an unrelenting search for yield (profit) has seen the price of stocks rocket upwards, bearing no link to increased real values expressed by GDP growth.



Hedge funds and companies... see little purpose in investing in productive capital when vast paper profits can apparently be conjured out of thin air...

Where once financial markets were seen as places where business and governments could raise capital for productive investment, now debt-fuelled finance drives markets further into the stratosphere, providing speculators with new gambling opportunities, but also dangerous fuel for another potential financial Armageddon.

Multitudes of financial bubbles endanger the world economy, combining to create a cocktail of risk

expressed through inflated share prices, foreign currency speculations, emerging markets mayhem, commodities, junk bonds and parasitic debt-purchased company takeovers.

The IMF warns that 40% of corporate debt in eight major capitalist countries would be impossible to service in the event of another economic crash even half as serious as that of 2008-2009, while daily turnover on the world's foreign currency exchanges is almost one hundred times the value of commodities being traded.

'Weapons of mass financial destruction'

Borrowing and debt continue to plaster over the deep structural problems of global capitalism. QE money has largely ended up in the pockets of traders, hedge funds and companies that see little purpose in investing in productive capital when vast paper profits can apparently be conjured out of thin air through speculative dabbling in the casino that now masquerades as modern capitalism.

Revolutionary socialist Karl Marx long ago explained that new capital (surplus value) can only be produced through exploiting workers' labour-power and producing commodities for exchange. Capitalism's historic purpose was to then plough back into production a proportion of that surplus value as investment capital, thus increasing productivity growth.

Now, however, whole sections of the capitalist class prefer to transform themselves into speculators. Hence the increased movement of even sections of traditional industrial capital into shady and opaque get-rich-quick scams, rarely questioned by shareholders as long as dividends keep flowing.

More companies are priced today at more than 100 times their earnings than at any previous point in history, leading veteran investor Jeremy Grantham to warn in January that "The long, long bull market since 2009 has finally matured into a fully fledged epic bubble."

This era is characterised by an unprecedented growth in what Marx called 'fictitious capital'.

This traditionally included stocks, shares and other forms of financial security, but today is dominated by increasingly complex electronic financial products such as derivatives, securitised assets and foreign



currency-held mortgages.

Paper money and cheque money (money of account) may still act as lubricants in circulation, but increasingly fictitious capital plays the dominant role. Over 90% of financial transactions through the electronic stock exchanges no longer have the remotest bearing on real commodity exchange, ie, real value.

These and other obscure financial instruments, unknown in Marx's day, were famously condemned by US billionaire Warren Buffet who charged derivatives with being 'weapons of mass financial destruction' that triggered the 2007 US sub-prime housing meltdown.

The unproductive merry-go-round of finance capital

While many workers may scratch their heads and ask how derivatives, collateralised debt obligations (CDOs) and Credit-Default Swaps work, it's sobering to learn that prior to 2007 a proper understanding of CDOs - which are structured bundles of sliced-up IOUs made available to investors by banks - would have required reading 30,000 pages of documentation. Few capitalists understood their destructive potential and fewer still cared while the sun shone.

The notional value of all derivatives reached \$863 trillion in 2006 - eleven times greater than real world capitalist output! When they turned sour as the US housing market collapsed, due to reckless lending by banks to workers who could not afford their mortgage repayments (the sub-prime housing crisis), these

'credit slips' held by a myriad of institutions around the world became instantly toxic, unleashing a contagion that penetrated into the real economy triggering the 'Great Recession' of 2008-2009.

Derivatives were largely unregulated before 2007. The credit rating agencies, nominally independent but in hock to finance capitalism, failed to distinguish between good investments and dodgy ones.

Credit Default Swaps, which are supposed to act as insurance policies, a hedge against risk that investors buy to protect themselves should a company default on its loans, routinely enabled speculators to stack bets on the same mortgage securities. That's equivalent to permitting several separate parties to buy insurance on the same house!

The notorious act of 'short-selling' where investors borrow shares and immediately sell them, hoping they can buy again later at a lower price, return them to the lender and pocket the difference, is typical of the disease of greed that pervades the City of London and elsewhere.

An alphabet soup of new asset-backed securities are constantly being marketed, such is the absurd and wholly unproductive merry-go-round that is finance capital today. These barely contribute a fraction of real value to the world economy, but load up more and more explosive under the foundations of capitalism.

Marx wryly commented that "Business is always thoroughly sound and the campaign in full swing, until the collapse suddenly overcomes them", words the capitalists would sour as the US housing market collapsed, due to reckless lending by banks to workers who could not afford their mortgage repayments (the sub-prime housing crisis), these

that speculation, like poverty, is

woven into the very warp and weft of capitalism.

Rise of the crypto-currencies

The fabled 'animal spirits' of the hedge funds and assorted entrepreneurial bandits know no limits. The world's top 15 private hedge fund managers raked in \$23.2 billion last year through investing aggressively and using derivatives and leverage to make money for their millionaire clients.

New forms of speculation emerge like weeds, such as the rise of crypto-currencies. These digital currencies perform none of the functions that Marx attributed to money. Bitcoin and others are neither a universal equivalent, a medium of exchange, a unit of account, nor a reliable store of value.

Reliant on 'blockchain' technology, which is a shared database of transactions, the network is secured by individuals called 'miners' who use high-powered computers to verify transactions, with bitcoin offered as the reward.

Its price has skyrocketed to over \$50,000 in the last days, as investors pour into the market trying to 'earn' easy money. Nouriel Roubini, a professor of economics who forecast the 2007 financial crash, has warned that the bubble will eventually burst, wittingly saying the Flintstones had a more stable monetary system when they exchanged shells!

But siren voices, led by Tesla boss Elon Musk, briefly the world's richest capitalist and certainly one of the system's most arrogant, have talked up its price by calling it the monetary system of the future.

Its evangels ignore its wildly unpredictable price swings and its minimal utility in being able to perform only five transactions per second, compared to the visa network which executes 24,000 per second.

A staggering amount of energy is consumed by bitcoin computer mining, now equivalent to the total annual energy usage of Japan. Any rigorous carbon tax applied to bitcoin would wipe out this frothy speculative mania.

Socialism - the only antidote to ruinous, parasitic capitalism

Only the tech giants - Apple, Amazon, Facebook, Google and Netflix - have really prospered in the last year. Capitalism generally is drowning in debt with worldwide public, private and consumer debt already exceeding \$199 trillion by 2016. The emergency governmental bailouts of the last year have added innumerable noughts to this escalating ledger.

Productivity growth in the US and elsewhere is historically low. Meanwhile, capitalists withhold investment in productive fields, preferring to hoard their profits while instead reaping short-term easy gains from what they see as the 'always a winner' virtual magic roulette wheel.

Tomorrow, however, this turbo-charged speculative model will bring only further chaos, as bubbles burst, a new downturn strikes, and the underlying structural weaknesses of capitalism are laid bare.

Only the international socialist transformation of society can provide an antidote to this market madness.

1981: New Cross Massacre

'THIRTEEN DEAD, NOTHING SAID!'

APRIL ASHLEY

UNISON NATIONAL EXECUTIVE COUNCIL, BLACK MEMBERS' REP (FEMALE) (PERSONAL CAPACITY)

On 2 March 1981, 20,000 young black people demonstrated in London against police and Tory government failures over the deadly New Cross fire which occurred on 18 January of that year.

The 'New Cross Massacre', as it was termed in the black community, was an outrageous and shocking attack which enraged the whole community. 13 black youths aged 14-22 lost their lives at a party believed to be firebombed by racists.

It was a birthday party, as portrayed in Steve McQueen's 'Lovers Rock' film (see BBC iPlayer), and therefore felt very personal and direct. 27 other people were seriously injured and one of the survivors killed himself two years later.

The march was an historic event, the biggest demonstration of black workers in Britain at that time. It was the first demonstration that I and many young black people had ever attended. It marked the political awakening of many black youth.

Huge mobilisation

The 'Black People's Day of Action', as it was called, saw coaches coming from all over Britain to demonstrate against the police and the Thatcher government who were completely silent over the deaths. School students jumped school and college gates, and workers left work, to attend the march as people were determined to protest against the police.

The community was furious as it felt disrespected, ignored, and treated as if their lives didn't matter since the government did not offer any condolences to the victims' families. "13 dead nothing said", was one of the main chants of the demonstration.

The establishment papers were also silent and supported the initial police view that partygoers had caused the fire themselves!

The march signalled that young black people were fighting back against terrible police racism, who used the 'sus' laws ('suspicious persons' stop and search), to harass and oppress young black people.

It was a powerful march as black youth swept over Blackfriars Bridge where police deployed snatch squads to grab youth from the crowds, and then tried to provoke the demonstration by stopping the march with riot shields despite previously agreeing the route.

I remember the power and solidarity of thousands of young black people with rough and ready homemade placards angrily demanding justice and an end to racist attacks.

The march pushed through the police lines of riot shields and was overwhelmingly peaceful despite the media headlines, such as "Day the blacks ran riot in London" (the Sun) and "Rampage of a mob" (Daily Express), to describe the minor



Militant supporters (forerunner of the Socialist Party) on an anti-racist demo in 1978. Militant supporters were also active in the left-wing (Jamaican) People's National Party (UK section) PHOTO MILITANT

kirmishes provoked by the police.

No one was ever charged in connection with the fire and the inquests returned an open verdict. The case remains unsolved and so led to a complete lack of faith in the official investigation, very much like the Grenfell inquiry.



The community was furious as it felt disrespected, ignored, and treated as if their lives didn't matter...

The demonstration was in the era when the fascist National Front (NF) was very active and carrying out violent racist attacks. A few years earlier the NF had claimed responsibility for the burning down of the Albany Empire theatre (which had hosted anti-racist gigs) in Deptford. They had tried to march in Lewisham but were driven off the streets in a mass movement of the local community, Labour Party members (largely the Labour Party Young Socialists), trade unionists and socialists in the 'Battle of Lewisham' in 1977.

Tory prime minister Margaret Thatcher was in power presiding over the 1980s recession as she began to destroy manufacturing industry with her capitalist monetarist policies, which led to over 3 million people unemployed. It was a period

characterised by mass youth unemployment, with black youth hit the hardest. Nearly 30% of black workers were unemployed at this time.

Therefore, black youth felt under siege on all sides, with mass unemployment, police racism and fascist attacks - they had to fight back. A month later this anger exploded into the Brixton Riots.

40 years after the New Cross Massacre we are still fighting poverty, unemployment and police racism. Those involved in the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, following the killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis, are the inheritors of the militant black youth marching across Blackfriars Bridge.

'No Justice, No Peace!' is the new battle cry in the fight against racism and social inequality. Police racism is just as bad today, with black youth nine times more likely to be stopped and searched than white youth. And still black people are dying in the hands of police, including Mohamad Hassan in Cardiff and Moyied Bashir in Newport, south Wales.

Many people are asking why, after 40 years, little has changed for black youth. Social conditions have worsened with Covid-19 further exposing the shocking racial inequalities: black men are four times more likely to die of the disease than white men.

The 'Black People's Day of Action' on 2 March 1981 was not only demonstrating against police racism but also marching against the hated Thatcher and her capitalist policies, which were destroying the lives of black youth and deepening poverty for all workers.

Similarly, the BLM demonstrations, with black and white youth, are marches against racist discrimination and police brutality, but also against social inequalities which have a disproportionate impact on the black community.

But how can we end racism? The Socialist Party Black Workers' Charter charts the statistics of racism but also discusses a programme to end it. Black youth are very open to discuss the fight against capitalism, the role of the working class, and the fight for socialism. Join us in the discussion.

• See 'Black Workers' Charter: A programme to fight racism' at socialistparty.org.uk



The edition of Militant (precursor of the Socialist) following the historic Black People's Day of Action march

£1/£2 solidarity price

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BUS WORKERS UNDER ATTACK AND FIGHTING BACK



ROB WILLIAMS
SOCIALIST PARTY INDUSTRIAL ORGANISER

After being told that they are key workers, bravely transporting NHS staff and other key workers during the pandemic, bus workers are increasingly having to strike back against the bosses' attacks.

They risked their lives and, tragically, some lost their lives but it hasn't stopped the private bus companies moving to cut wages. Some such as Manchester's Go Ahead have done so through the brutal 'fire-and-rehire' offensive

that has seen workers attacked from British Airways to British Gas.

Bus worker trade union reps have had to defend themselves against victimisation. RMT transport union rep in Hampshire, Declan Clune, has been sacked.

Unite union rep Moe Muhsin Manir in London, who led the successful campaign last year on bus safety during Covid, is fighting for his job.

His fellow rep, Judith Katera, has won her reinstatement after being sacked in December. This is a tremendous victory, showing that it's possible to stop union-busting, which

attacks reps today in order to go for their members tomorrow.

But bus drivers are up for the fight. The workers in Manchester started indefinite strike action on 28 February.

Two thousand bus drivers in three subsidiaries of RATP in London are currently taking action for a second week, as Metroline drivers are balloted for strike action over 'remote sign-on' - another route to attack workers. In RATP, the owner is looking to play workers in the three companies off against each other, while attacking pay and terms and conditions.

But this goes to the root of the issue for many drivers - that bus services have been privatised and are owned by parasitic companies. In London, 18 bus companies employ nearly 25,000 workers - all on different contracts. This makes it far easier for the greedy profit-driven bosses to attack drivers.

The Socialist Party demands that all bus services are renationalised as part of a socialist publicly owned, environmentally friendly, transport service that is run by transport workers in the interests of the majority of society.

• See pages 7 and 12 for more

A SOCIALIST RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC CRISIS
▶▶ socialistparty.org.uk/coronavirus

WHAT WE STAND FOR: THE SOCIALIST PARTY'S MAIN DEMANDS
▶▶ see column on p3

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