

NHS crisis, mass sackings, violence against women...

PROTESTING IS NOT A CRIME

SARAH SACHS-ELDRIDGE
SOCIALIST PARTY EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

After a year of misery, more Covid cuts are coming. This threatens us all - maybe cuts to a local A&E, more cuts to street-lighting, bus routes disappearing - and greater destitution.

The Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill means the more effective your protest, the more you face the threat of fines or even jail. The Tories plan to build on their Covid powers to, for example, fine a nurse £10,000 for organising a protest.

It's no coincidence that this bill is before Parliament just as workers and young people are organising to fight the derisory NHS pay offer, the disgusting 'fire and rehire' practices rolling out across workplaces, and for students' fee and rent refunds.

There is a huge Covid spending bill - and the Tories are preparing to make us pay it with attacks on our services, jobs, and pay.

The Tory government knows that working-class people will not accept the misery they are offering. In order to try and prevent the inevitable mass protests and strikes, they are trying to beef up the repressive powers of the police. It won't work!

That was shown by the mass



defiance of the ban on the Sarah Everard vigil. This has turned a spotlight on the bill: until then Keir Starmer's Labour planned to abstain!

How can you consider abstaining on an attempt to silence the working class? When you're on the side of the big business capitalist class.

Working-class people can only rely on our own strength to defend our democratic rights and ability to fight austerity - the right to protest, organise, march and strike. The government's retreat on maintaining the ban on protests in the Covid legislation indicates how they can be pushed back.

Now is the time to press ahead!

The trade union leaders must take the lead. Coordinate our protests, starting with NHS workers, linking up with those facing attacks across the public sector, students, and young workers looking down the barrel of unemployment. Socialist Party members are standing in trade union elections to raise this fighting approach that's necessary.

Starmer's rotten role makes clear we also need our own political voice. By campaigning for and standing no-cuts candidates in the 6 May elections, as part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, the Socialist Party is fighting to help bring a new mass workers' party into being (see p4).

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

Mass trade union action needed to defend the right to protest

➤ CONTINUED FROM FRONT

The government factsheet on the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill explains that it will "strengthen police powers to tackle non-violent protests that have a significant disruptive effect on the public or on access to Parliament."

On 17 March, workers involved in a peaceful picket at SAICA Packaging's Edinburgh site were dispersed by Police Scotland after threats of fines and further 'punishment' for anyone orchestrating the dispute.

Strikes and occupations by workers fighting austerity and low pay are effective because they disrupt the bosses and their attacks.

Under this proposed legislation we face a fine of £2,500 for not following police restrictions over how we conduct our protests.

Effective protest that is considered a "public nuisance", will now be a statutory offence rather than a common law offence. Would this include, for example, a workers' factory occupation against closure and the loss of jobs?

The police will have the power to assume protesters have knowledge of conditions set on a protest, making it easier to convict for 'breaches' of their undemocratic restrictions.

The Home Secretary will have the power, through secondary legislation, to define "serious disruption to the activities of an organisation". This sounds like it's aimed at, for example, those strikers in Edinburgh.

Over the weekend of 20 and 21 March thousands across the country marched to say 'Kill the Bill! One of the biggest protests was in Bristol,



Public sector workers took strike action together in 2011 and joined mass protests PAUL MATTHEWSON

where thousands peacefully assembled. Later in the evening, a small number of the protesters were involved in rioting which is being used by Home Secretary Priti Patel to make the case for her repressive legislation.

Police provocation

We do not condone rioting, but video footage of the demonstration shows police violently pushing, shoving and batoning peaceful protesters well before any rioting erupted. The possibility of deliberate provocation is obvious.

Yet Bristol's Labour mayor limited himself to condemning the rioters, without raising any demands for the

police to be held to account for their actions. He claims to oppose the bill, but why didn't he use his position as mayor to mobilise the labour movement to build for the protest, and also to organise democratically accountable stewarding?

Police provocation is not a new risk to the labour movement and should be anticipated as much as the legal attacks on democratic rights. While these new police powers, like previous ones, won't prevent collective working-class action, if passed they aim to undermine it - in big business's interests.

As part of the preparations for the struggle against Covid austerity, the

trade union movement should be co-ordinating protests against this bill, and for democratic community control of the police.

However, even if the bill passes, the Tories are fooling themselves if they think unjust laws can prevent a tsunami of protest. This month is the 30th anniversary of the announcement of the removal of the unjust poll tax law from the statute books by an 18-million strong mass movement of organised civil disobedience, led by the Socialist Party, then called Militant. That movement forced the resignation of the 'Iron Lady' - Maggie Thatcher, but it will be put into the shade by the storms ahead for Johnson.

Police attempt to silence mothers

Following a vigil in Liverpool, a mother has been issued with a £200 fine and been threatened by police to have social services called because she brought her son along. She has said that police had tried to silence her after the event with bullying behaviour.

It is correct for people to protest. Bringing a child along to such protests is a mother's right. It is laughable that when men and women are protesting on the streets to oppose women's oppression, a woman is labelled a 'bad mother' for showing her son his right to protest against injustice.

I have proudly taken my toddler on climate strikes and massive anti-racism demos. I have seen her take in and understand a lot of what is being expressed. My hope is that this will lay the foundations for her to stand up when her rights come under attack in the future.

BHARATHI SUBA
LIVERPOOL SOCIALIST PARTY



PHOTO: ELAINE BRUNSOLL

Police invade student homes

As if we students did not have enough to deal with - facing a lack of university support, and paying extortionate rent for rooms we haven't been able to live in - we now might get a midnight visit from our local bobby. Students at the universities of Sheffield and Manchester are concerned that university bosses may have given police officers keys to their flats to check for any rule-breaking, socialising or flaunting of the Covid guidelines.

A student at Froggatt Halls in Sheffield explained that the police had visited her flat three times within the last month, the first being at 1.30am while she was in bed. Students at Manchester and Leeds also gave similar stories of officers entering their flats unexpectedly and patrolling to search for gatherings, with the officers usually being quite forceful or aggressive.

The universities deny handing keys to officers. But Manchester students have created the Cops Off Campus campaign to ensure police only visit to respond to incidents, and stop searching properties unlawfully.

Socialist Students day of action
21 April 2021

- Visit **socialiststudents.org.uk/join**
- or text your name and school, college or uni to **07749 379 010**



Defying the anti-protest restrictions

● Newcastle

On 21 March around 1,000 people, predominantly young women, came together in Newcastle to protest the new draconian police and crime sentencing bill, and demand an end to violence against women. On arriving at Grey's Monument for a peaceful socially distanced rally, we were told that we were gathering illegally and forced together down a nearby street, away from the much more open plaza as had been planned.

All of us were wearing masks and clearly trying to uphold the two-metre rule, but this was only made more difficult by the harassment of the police. They began warning us, citing regulations, even telling some young women to 'stop being silly' and to move on from the protest.

Despite all this, the demo was energetic and defiant, with a large number of students marching through the streets chanting "Kill the bill" and booing the police who had pushed them away. The Socialist Party had a great presence on the march and our leaflets were incredibly popular, with some shouting out for them as we were going past.

Despite our peaceful march, the police still arrested a few attendees based on no real crime, and without them causing any trouble. We need to make sure we continue to fight against this despicable bill and kick Priti Patel and the rest of the Tories out of Westminster.

DANIEL GILMORE
NEWCASTLE SOCIALIST PARTY

● Brighton

Police and Tory ministers were all over the radio and TV on the morning of 20 March - warning any potential protesters threatening to take to the streets in Brighton that they would make arrests and issue fines.

However, as 2pm arrived, the sea of home-made placards grew - a show of defiance from protesters that they would not be silenced.

Police watched on in vans around the park. They had clearly decided to keep a low profile with only a token presence on the ground. Speakers were cheered when they said they would not be silenced by the police or government, and would defend their right to demonstrate against violence



Socialist Party members in York IAIN DALTON



Socialist Party members join protesters in Brighton GLENN KELLY

against women and racism. Many made the important point that now is the time to come together to unite all struggles in the fight for justice.

While there were a couple of trade union banners on the demo, the organised union presence was still generally absent. Given that the new police bill will be used against workers in struggle, it is vital that the unions do not sit on the side lines and leave this fight to the youth.

Several thousand people spontaneously took to the surrounding streets, taking over and blocking the main roads in and out of Brighton showing how laws against protesting can be resisted with mass action.

Many young people on the demo were the same youth who marched on the Black Lives Matter demos. Now, just a few months later, they are marching against a government trying to silence the right to protest.

GLENN KELLY
BRIGHTON SOCIALIST PARTY

● York

"Kill the bill, kill the bill" - this was the chant from around 150 overwhelmingly young people, marching through York city centre on Wednesday 17 March.

As explained by many of the speakers at the protest, vague terms within the bill, such as "causing annoyance" alongside other provisions, represent a fundamental attack on the right to protest.

People were actively searching us out in the crowd to get copies of our Socialist Party leaflet.

York Socialist Party member Maurice got one of the loudest cheers when he criticised Keir Starmer's lack of opposition to the Tories, including support for the 'spycops' bill last year. He only opposed the police bill following the anger at the repression meted out to the Sarah Everard vigil on Clapham Common.

IAIN DALTON
YORKSHIRE SOCIALIST PARTY

● Leeds

Leeds Socialist Party joined around 400 determined and angry people on 21 March at a demonstration against the government's new police bill. The Socialist Party gave out over 300 leaflets, and met a number of people interested in joining.

Socialist Party member Iain Dalton spoke from the platform and our ideas were met with huge cheers - particularly our call for democratic control of the police and our criticism of Starmer's Labour Party. Iain explained the need for a new workers' party and outlined the reasons for the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition's challenge in the upcoming May election. Afterwards we received several offers of support with leafleting!

JAMES ELLIS
LEEDS SOCIALIST PARTY

● Swansea

For the third time in a week, around 50 mostly young and determined people turned out to the #stopthebill protest in Castle Square on the evening of Friday 19 March. The community-organised protest brought together campaigners for women's rights, Black Lives Matter, climate campaigns, socialists and trade unionists from across the city.

A dozen Swansea Young Socialists and young Socialist Party members attended, armed with our posters and leaflets. Socialist Party members spoke representing Swansea Socialist Party branch, Socialist Students and Swansea Trades Council. They highlighted the reality of the fight we face, and the need to build a united socialist alternative to fight against the capitalist system.

GARETH BROMHALL
SWANSEA AND WEST WALES SOCIALIST PARTY



WHAT WE STAND FOR

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

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

Our demands include...

PUBLIC SERVICES

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

WORK AND INCOME

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

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

ENVIRONMENT

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

RIGHTS

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

MASS WORKERS' PARTY

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

SOCIALISM AND INTERNATIONALISM

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

Do you agree? Join the fightback!
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Socialist Party campaigning in Birmingham

Why I am standing for TUSC Working-class people need a voice in the council chamber

AMAMON FLYNN

BIRMINGHAM SOUTH EAST SOCIALIST PARTY

Working-class people need a voice in the council chamber. When the Labour Party was formed a hundred years ago, it did that job. It pulled together workers and fighting trade unionists, and gave them a voice. Not only a candidate to vote for at election time, but a movement to fight in their interests all year around.

For far too long now, the Labour Party and its candidates in council and parliamentary elections have failed to do this. In Birmingham, I have listened to councillors telling the public that there is nothing they can do to oppose cuts in council services and jobs. I would just like to see them try, as Labour councillors in the past did in Liverpool and Poplar.

If our existing councillors are not prepared to defend communities, they must step down and make way for someone that will. I think that if councillors took a stand and built a campaign to demand the funding

required from the government to meet the needs of their communities, workers would stand with them in that fight, and that fight could be won.

That is why I will be standing as a TUSC candidate in May.

SOCIALISM TODAY

Monthly magazine of the Socialist Party

March issue includes...

- Struggle needs electoral arm
- New Start for peace?
- US-Russian treaty won't end threat
- Scotland - national question is a catalyst for challenging capitalism

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Help fund the Socialist Party's stand as part of TUSC

Socialist Party members are already out campaigning for Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) candidates ahead of May's elections. In London it is vital that there is an anti-austerity socialist alternative to Labour Mayor Sadiq Khan and the Labour-dominated Greater London Assembly (GLA) as they continue attacks on workers' jobs, income and working conditions.

That's why TUSC is planning to stand 25 candidates in the London list for the GLA, and candidates in three of the constituency seats - to make sure everyone in London has the opportunity for an anti-austerity candidate. This stand requires a total of £8,000 in deposits. And we still have £1,000 to raise.

In Liverpool it is just as vital that

TUSC stands in the Liverpool city mayoral elections, in opposition to the rotten cuts-making Labour council. To stand in this election TUSC will need to raise a deposit of £5,000. As a component part of the coalition, the Socialist Party needs your fundraising to help us pay our part.

Can you help make sure that we have the necessary funds to put towards TUSC's election deposits? £10, £20, £50, £100 or more, no matter what the amount it all helps to make sure we can fund a real anti-austerity election campaign.

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



Battle for a fighting, anti-austerity Liverpool mayor



PAUL MATTISSON

Liverpool has a rich history of councillors being prepared to mobilise workers, take the fight to a Tory government, and win funding for the city. This was the case in the 1980s when, with the political leadership of Militant, now the Socialist Party, Liverpool defeated Thatcher and won £60 million.

Unfortunately, in the decades since, successive Labour council leaderships and mayors have continued to carry out austerity as instructed by the Tories, with £420 million of cuts in the last decade.

Now, after facing corruption allegations and arrest, Labour's ex-mayor Joe Anderson has stepped down. Determined to prevent a Corbyn-supporting mayoral candidate for Labour in May's elections, Keir Starmer's Labour machine has stepped in and interfered, removing the three candidates originally shortlisted. One of those removed, who has been supported by Corbyn and Unite the union nationally, Anna Rothery, has taken unsuccessful legal action against the Labour Party as a consequence. The courts charged her an outrageous £65,000 in costs.

Amid this turmoil, there have been press reports suggesting that government commissioners could be brought in to take over some of the council's functions. All the more reason for an anti-cuts mayor, backed up by councillors, willing to mobilise Liverpool workers to refuse to be dictated to by the Tories in a city with not a single Conservative councillor.

Socialist Party member and prospective mayoral candidate for the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, Roger Bannister, has written to Anna Rothery. We print the letter here:

Dear Anna,

I am writing to you following your recent legal case, which unfortunately did not result in your being re-included on the Labour Party shortlist of candidates for the Labour nomination in the city's forthcoming mayoral election.

As you are aware, I intend to stand in the election as the candidate of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC). My reason for doing this is to ensure that the electorate has the opportunity to vote for clear anti-austerity policies. For the same reason, TUSC will also be contesting council seats in Liverpool.

You have declared you are a supporter of Jeremy Corbyn, and oppose his continued exclusion from the Parliamentary Labour Party. In my view, your undemocratic exclusion from Labour's shortlist is part of the current Labour leadership's determination to drive Jeremy Corbyn's supporters, and his anti-austerity policies, from the Labour Party.

Many of the policies included in Jeremy Corbyn's 2019 general election manifesto could be implemented by an anti-austerity Liverpool mayor, backed by a team of anti-austerity councillors. To give just a few examples: it would be possible to ensure that any work undertaken by or for Labour councils is done by workers paid at least £10 an hour, to end the use of zero-hour contracts by Labour-led councils and by any company

undertaking work for them, and to deliver a year-on-year above-inflation pay rise to begin to restore lost pay. It would also be possible to end outsourcing and return all outsourced and privatised services to council control, restoring them to an even better standard of service than before (see 'Could councils implement Labour's 2019 pledges?' at tusc.org.uk).

Of course, given the dire state of the city's finances, implementing these policies would need to be combined with a mass campaign, based on the trade unions and the working-class communities, to force the government to increase funding for the city.

There has also been some comment in the media, and amongst local Labour movement activists, that you may consider standing as a left independent candidate given the undemocratic manner in which the Labour Party has handled, and is handling, the selection process. I believe that this would be a positive step to take as far as socialist policies are concerned, and in particular for the working-class people of Liverpool. It would undoubtedly create a campaign for trade unionists and socialist activists to unite around, in a fight for fair treatment for Liverpool.

If you are thinking along those lines I would appreciate the opportunity to discuss this further, if necessary on a confidential basis.

Yours sincerely
Roger Bannister



Fighting NHS privatisation

Keep York urgent care public

YORK NHS WORKER AND SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBER

York hospital is partially privatising its emergency department to Vocare. Vocare already runs out-of-hours GP services in York.

Doctors and nurses working in the department want good mechanisms for patients requiring less input, while there must be oversight of every patient's full journey through A&E. This must not be done by third-party or private organisations.

Workers have formed Keep York Urgent Care Public. We say that the quality of care will be diminished by the involvement of Vocare, which made £3.8 million profit in 2020. Already the minor illness

department is managed by Vocare. Staff fear that they will end up on Vocare contracts, with all the consequences for pay, conditions and training.

A&E consultant Dr Stephen Crane recently addressed York City Council to oppose the trust's plans. A petition against the proposals has attracted over 13,000 signatures.

York Socialist Party members give our full support to NHS workers fighting these proposals. The contracting out of NHS services must end.

The existing Vocare workforce should be brought back into the NHS, alongside support staff in the trust who were transferred into a wholly owned subsidiary in 2019.

Haringey: Hands off our GP practices

NASSO CHRISTOU

HARINGEY TUSC

Socialist Party and Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) supporters joined Keep Our NHS Public, and other local campaigners, including Unite the Union and the local trades union council, for a flash picket event outside the Laurels GP practice in Haringey, north London on 19 March.

Centene Corporation, an American health insurance giant, has acquired the Laurels through its UK subsidiary - Operose Health Ltd. This corporation has so far acquired 49 GP practices in 19 London boroughs covering over 370,000 patients, and 21 further GP practices across the country.

It is now the biggest GP group in the UK. Even the Daily Mail called Centene a 'profit-greedy American health giant'.

Privatisation has to be exposed and challenged. Friday's action alerted the local community and users of

the Laurels. Many were completely unaware that their GP surgery had been sold to a US corporation, and were understandably shocked.

Although in theory these companies have to maintain GP services, they are known to cut jobs and employ lower-paid staff to increase their profits. They have closed GP surgeries, if they are judged to be unprofitable, leaving patients stranded and having to travel long distances.

Their main interest though is to control this key NHS service, with a view to greater profits if private healthcare is expanded, presenting opportunities to make money by harvesting patient data.

This Tory government is rewarding NHS staff with a pay cut for their heroic service during the pandemic. Despite the Tories toe-curling, constant references to 'our NHS', they are selling off as much of it as they can on the quiet.

● No to Tory and Labour NHS pay insults: 15% now! See back page

Shrewsbury Pickets win: Convictions overturned



Campaigners for the Shrewsbury Pickets in 2013 CHRIS GREGORY

The Shrewsbury Pickets have had their convictions overturned. Ancient 'conspiracy' legislation was used to convict them for picketing during the national building strike in 1972. Socialist Party member Marion Lloyd, who is standing to be president of civil service union PCS, said:

"Solidarity and respect to the Shrewsbury Pickets, their families and all those who have campaigned for nearly 50 years to have their

outrageous injustice overturned. We should remember those we have lost during this time, including the heroic Des Warren.

Des, like Ricky Tomlinson, was among six workers who were jailed. There now needs to be an inquiry - headed by the trade unions - into this scandalous framing of innocent workers by the establishment courts, and the subsequent cover-up.

I was a member of PCS's predecessor union CPSPA. It was also targeted by the security services, who sought

to undermine democratic trade unions that fight for their members.

Our movement has to use this victory as a platform to resist all moves by the Tories to limit our right to protest, strike and picket, and fight all attempts by Boris Johnson's government and the bosses to make workers pay the price for the Covid crisis. Be in no doubt - we stand and fight and we fight to win!"

● Read more on the right to protest on pages 1-3

Stop evictions and drop the debts Join London housing day of action - Saturday 17 April

JAMES IVENS

EAST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

Tenants and housing workers in London are fighting back on Saturday 17 April. A day of action on housing will demand: "Stop the evictions! Drop the debts!"

Housing has been a particularly acute problem for working-class and young people during the pandemic. Overcrowded and unaffordable homes have helped drive Covid transmission and impoverishment.

Housing debts have soared. Many tenants are at risk of eviction - legal or not. But whatever the shape of your crisis, it is very much a crisis for huge numbers of tenants.

Even those forced out can still face robbery - one letting firm is suing refugee campaigner Lawanya Ramajeyam for thousands of pounds over a room she had already left! (See 'Multimillion-pound rental firm demands

thousands from homeless asylum seeker' at socialistparty.org.uk.)

Groups including the housing workers' branch of general union Unite, and the Social Housing Action Campaign (Shac), have called the day of action.

Safe, socially distanced protests will take place across the capital. This will include a 12 noon march, with PPE and in groups of six, from the Boundary Estate in Shoreditch, east London.

The Boundary Estate was one of Britain's first council housing schemes, opened in 1900. It was built by the London County Council, the

equivalent of today's Greater London Authority (GLA).

Unfortunately, under right-wing Labour mayor Sadiq Khan's 'London Plan', public land and homes are more and more a thing of the past. Privatisation and unaffordable monster blocks are the order of the day.

That's why London Socialist Party will be participating in the housing day of action. We'll also be fighting to get socialists into City Hall - standing for the GLA as part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC). The Socialist Party says: Stop the evictions! Drop the debts! Cap rents! Build council homes!

Save John Carroll - fight is far from over!

GERAINT THOMAS

NOTTINGHAM SOCIALIST PARTY

Over 50 people gathered for an on-line rally on Saturday 20 March for the 'Save John Carroll Leisure Centre' campaign (savejohncarroll.co.uk), showing our defiance to the council. Nottingham City Council voted to close the centre as part of its £15 million cuts in this year's budget. While some of the 50 Labour councillors abstained or didn't go to the budget meeting, not a single councillor publicly voted against the cuts. The council officer responsible for leisure, David Trimble, declared that we "ran a good campaign" as though we're going to wrap up now. We're not going anywhere!

One of the organisers of the campaign rightly declared that "the council just sees it as another subsidiary cost that they can just cut to balance the books. They don't think about it being a part of the community...they should be fighting for the community to their last penny". Another organiser and worker at the centre, who's been described as "a rare constant in a lot of deprived kids' lives", said that "people can't set up a gym in their back garden...we have nowhere else to go. John Carroll's the heart of our community".

Speakers from the community who use the centre spoke about the vital part the leisure centre, and the now-closed community centre attached to it, play in keeping the diverse

working-class community together. On top of this, the next nearest centre is two buses away.

We're now demanding the overwhelmingly Labour council reverses its decision and puts in the funding that the extremely deprived Radford community needs: not just keep the centre open but invest in it, fix it up, and reopen the community centre. Councillors have a choice not to make cuts. Pressure is being heaped onto councillors, who say they represent the community, from every direction, but this shouldn't be needed.

The Socialist Party believes that campaigns like 'Save John Carroll Leisure Centre' should prepare to stand their own candidates in the elections scheduled for Nottingham in 2023 to defend vital community facilities.

Fighting sexual harassment and gender violence on campus

BEA GARDNER
SOCIALIST STUDENTS

Given the appalling rates of sexual harassment and violence on university, college and school campuses, it is no surprise that young women and students have been at the forefront of recent protests and vigils called in response to the murder of Sarah Everard.

A staggering 97% of young women in the UK have experienced sexual harassment. Many of these incidents will happen in education and learning settings.

A National Education Union survey found that 37% of girls at mixed-sex secondary schools have been sexually harassed at school. On university and college campuses the figure is as high as 70%, with most incidents taking place on campus or in halls of residence.

Instead of facing up to the scale of the problem, education managers and university bosses, like the Metropolitan Police, have tried to conceal the extent of sexual misconduct, including silencing those who speak out.

Over a third of universities have imposed 'gagging orders'- non-disclosure clauses designed to protect capitalist trade secrets - as part of the complaints process. Coventry University management recently threatened disciplinary action against staff whistleblowers for speaking to the press about the sexual misconduct of a senior academic staff member.

A recent report, Unsafe Spaces, found most universities do not even

collect reliable information about reported incidents of sexual assault. Neither have they recruited trained specialists to support those affected, despite university management's own estimation that 15% of female undergraduates (50,000 students) experience sexual abuse each year.

In reality, this figure is far higher, given research from Brook - the youth advisory service - indicates as few as one in ten students report incidences to their university or the police.

We urgently need a trade union and student-led inquiry into the true extent of sexual harassment and violence on campuses, as well as in schools and colleges. The continued reluctance of the government or university bosses to conduct a wide-scale study is part of their attempt to conceal the issue and avoid taking responsibility.

There is a growing mood among young people and students that we should not have to endure or tolerate sexist and misogynistic behaviours on our campuses. This mood has already resulted in a significant increase in official complaints of sexual misconduct. In 2019, formal student complaints to universities of severe sexual assault had risen by 82% in just one year.

Outrageously though, just 2% of students who make formal complaints are satisfied with the reporting process. As long as these procedures are in management's hands, it is clear that reputation and cost-saving will be prioritised over staff and student welfare. The Unsafe Spaces report found university management

chose not to take action in cases of staff-perpetrated sexual abuse due to the financial concerns of losing prestigious academics who bring income to the institution.

Instead of management-led working groups, which only give lip service to tackling sexual harassment, we need democratically organised working groups led by students, staff and specialist support services. Under joint trade union and student oversight, sexual harassment reporting procedures could be transformed.

The same committees could play a vital role in scrutinising implementation and ensuring policies are properly enforced in practice. Trade unions must be at the forefront of organising and campaigning for these demands, with training available to all union reps and staff.

Measures

Some of the practical measures we could implement to improve safety include: accessible and trusted campus wardens; chaperoned night transport; zero-tolerance policies in university facilities; adopting a community bystander training programme, giving anyone witnessing abusive or discriminatory behaviours the confidence to intervene or offer help.

Meanwhile, a considerable investment is needed to end the current crisis in student support which is a devastating consequence of universities' market model. Even during the current pandemic, with the enormous mental health crisis amongst students, universities have been cutting student support to reduce costs.

We must oppose all cuts, austerity and privatisation, which is a political choice, not a necessity.

Personal tutors, often the first people students turn to, are overworked and often have no specialist training.

At the same time, specialist support services in the community have also been decimated by capitalist austerity. The result is students competing to access oversubscribed resources that are chronically underfunded, with substantial waiting lists.

While waiting for help, students are financially reliant on maintenance loan payments, so they stay enrolled, and fall behind or potentially fail years of study, becoming even more in debt. Education should be free, with students in receipt of living grants. Students should also be entitled to Universal Credit if they have had to suspend their studies.

The National Union of Students' (NUS) prevention strategy includes resources to educate students on consent, often in conjunction with university management.

Education and training are important; prejudices, gender stereotyping, and sexist behaviour should be challenged when we see them. However, it has now been over a decade since the first NUS report into sexual violence on UK university campuses, and if anything, the problem is getting worse.

The danger of the 'raising awareness' approach is it reduces the issue to an individual problem or behaviour. In reality, any individual's attitudes are shaped by the economic and social system we live in,

capitalism. Systemic problems require systemic solutions; we need to challenge the root cause of sexist ideas by fundamentally transforming the capitalist institutions which continue to reproduce them, including the education system.

The last ten years have shown raising awareness is not enough: to challenge sexual harassment on campus, we need decisive, united action organised around a programme that includes demands against marketisation, fees and austerity. Recognising that university management



PHOTO IAIN DALTON

Socialist Students is fighting for:

- Democratic oversight of sexual harassment reporting procedures by joint trade union and student-led committees, ensuring procedures are fully implemented
- An end to 'gagging' nondisclosure agreements in cases of sexual assault
- A trade union and student-led inquiry into the true extent of sexual harassment and violence on campuses, as well as in schools and colleges
- Full government funding of support services, campus lighting, safe transport and non-exploitative, affordable housing. Scrap marketisation, fees and debt
- Build a movement for free education - scrap fees and debt and introduce student living grants. Fight for full government funding to provide a safe and free education for all

Join the student fightback
JOIN socialist students
socialiststudents.org.uk/join

A student's experience

RACHEL GAMBLING
ESSEX SOCIALIST PARTY

Sexual harassment at university is often just an accepted norm.

There's the surface level stuff - street harassment, being told you have a nice bum by random middle-aged men that drive by in their cars, unwanted advances from guys on your course or in societies with you. Guys demanding that you dance with them even though you've already said no multiple times. Having your waist felt up by random men in clubs as they move past you. Everyone's familiar with that, so it shouldn't be a surprise to anyone.

The more insidious instances are usually from guys you actually have an initial attraction to.

There are long-term mental health effects to this type of sexual abuse.

I personally ended up in a situation at a party. I still find myself unsure whether the incident actually qualifies as sexual abuse, since I was a willing participant. At least I was

with the amount of alcohol I had in my body. But I wasn't in a position to give consent that night. I wouldn't want to go to the police about it - I don't want to have that event picked apart by people I've never met before.

I was left questioning my recollection of events for months because of a version of events I was given by the perpetrator. I think a lot of women at university end up in situations like these.

Sexual abuse on campuses goes hand-in-hand with psychological abuse so the men can avoid facing consequences for their actions.

With this comes a lot of emotional processing that young women aren't equipped to handle, what with a limited number of mental health resources on campus and an invasive reporting system, through both law enforcement and the universities themselves. They're left processing this information on their own most of the time, and with that comes a deep depression unique to those traumatised by such events.

University of Birmingham: Reclaiming Our Campus

You can't put a price tag on safety

EMILY GRIFFIN
BIRMINGHAM SOCIALIST STUDENTS

On 17 March, Socialist Students at the University of Birmingham (UoB) stood in solidarity with the Reclaim Our Campus protest; a socially distanced vigil recounting the horrific abuse women and other marginalised genders face every day.

With a huge turnout of roughly 1,000 UoB students, we listened to impassioned speeches and testimonies of those who had suffered as a direct result of the university's sexist and capitalist ideals. With speeches lasting well over two hours, it was no surprise that the university has a long way to go to ensure the safety of its students.

Socialist Students stands wholeheartedly with this movement and demands immediate action to be taken by the University of Birmingham. As of the 16 March, there have

been six reported cases of women students being forcibly pulled into cars and assaulted in and around the key student accommodation neighbourhood - all of which the university denied had happened.



The university has ignored survivors, facilitated 'rape culture', and consistently put profits above the safety of its students

And there are hundreds more cases of women being harassed, abused, and made to feel unsafe in their place

of learning. Management has failed us.

In order for 'rape culture' and misogynistic attitudes on campus to be truly eliminated, the day-to-day running of the university has to be taken out of the hands of management. We need democratic trade union and student oversight of reporting procedures and the implementation of measures to help create zero tolerance of harassment and abuse on campus.

For too long the university has ignored survivors, facilitated 'rape culture', and consistently put profits above the safety of its students. We demand better funding and signposting for victim support services, a commitment of concrete action to be taken against perpetrators, and better lighting around campus and accommodation at night. You can't put a price tag on the safety of women students.

'A Fighting Programme for Women's Rights and Socialism'

Socialist Party new publication
£1 including postage, from
leftbooks.co.uk

Justice for Blessing Olusegun

Following the vigils for Sarah Everard, the chairs of Southwark and Lewisham trades councils issued a joint statement. As well as raising questions about police action regarding the serving police officer charged with Sarah's murder, and the brutal police behaviour at the Clapham Common vigil, the statement also referred to the death of Blessing Olusegun.

Blessing was a 21-year-old business student from London who went to Bexhill on a one-week placement as a carer to help elderly people with

dementia and other mental health issues.

She was found dead on Bexhill beach near Galley Hill on Friday 18 September 2020 with her shoes and phone nearby her body. The police are treating her death as non-suspicious.

However, Blessing's mother, Esther Abe, is demanding to know why her daughter died.

The joint statement asks: "Why have the police, MPs and media maintained their silence? We need justice for Blessing and her family.

We need fairness and we need democratic accountability of the police and government."

The petition regarding Blessing Olusegun's case can be found at: www.change.org/p/government-justice-for-blessing

The statement also called for discussion and plans as to how traunions can be more vocal and instrumental in challenging violence and sexism in the workplace, while also ensuring there is equal attention given to black women and men. The case of Unite fighting sexual harassment in a mainly male workforce, Woolwich Ferry, is a serious and effective example of what can be done to act together for safety and equality.

Film Review: Moxie

A springboard for discussion about sexism in schools

AMY SAGE
BRISTOL SOCIALIST PARTY

Netflix's new film Moxie, based upon a book of the same name, might provide a springboard for further discussions around sexism in schools but does not, as one reviewer put it "offer a blueprint for a revolution."

Vivian, fed up with the blatant sexism in her school and the 'boys will be boys' attitude taken by its staff, is inspired by new girl Lucy who is not afraid to point it out. After discovering her Mum's Riot Grrrl gear - a subculture that combines feminism with punk music - she starts an anonymous 'zine' which quickly grows into a small-scale 'revolution' throughout the school.

The film's premise is an interesting one and offers a fresh take on films of a similar nature which tackle sexism and misogyny in American high schools. One example from the film is the annual list published on social media which rates the school's girls against criteria including 'best ass' or 'most bangable': a label which feels even more despicable at the film's conclusion.

Moxie certainly does a good job of highlighting the many issues girls face at school, particularly around gaslighting and sexual harassment, but unfortunately falls short in bringing attention to the broader social issues that cause them.

The discrimination, sexism and abuse faced by women are rooted in the inequalities inherent within the capitalist system.

Outdated gender norms are perpetuated by the big businesses that own and control the media, beauty and fashion industries. To them, women's bodies are simply

yet another commodity to be exploited for profit.

In order to fight against the women's oppression Moxie draws attention to, we must also fight capitalism. This fight requires the involvement of all members of the working class, men included. While Moxie does, in Vivian's love interest Seth, show that men can very much be a part of the feminist movement, it does not make any attempt to link the movement to the broader fight against capitalism.

Moxie also fails in its effort to be truly inclusive. Attempting to show that the feminist movement should be intersectional, casting black, Asian, trans and disabled actors into key roles, the film ultimately centres around a white protagonist, making their inclusion at times feel no more than a token gesture.

Yes, there are some attempts to highlight the various forms of double oppression faced by different groups of women, pointing out, for instance, that a black female being voted as 'best ass' perpetuates the objectification of black women's bodies based upon racial stereotypes. However, Moxie fails to really explore these any further and instead, at times, goes backward by relying on tired Hollywood tropes such as the 'sassy' black friend, or the shy Chinese girl with the overbearing Mum.

Ultimately, Moxie is an interesting watch that does tackle an important and pervasive problem and, for young girls dealing with sexism in their own schools, provides a useful starting point for discussion.

However, anyone watching this film expecting something truly impactful or revolutionary is bound to be disappointed.

- Moxie can be viewed on Netflix



150th anniversary of the Paris Commune

WHEN THE WORKING CLASS ‘STORMED HEAVEN’

THEO SHARIEFF

SOCIALIST PARTY NATIONAL COMMITTEE

The birth of the Paris Commune marked the first time in history when the working class took political power directly into its own hands. Karl Marx at the time described it as a “new point of departure of worldwide significance”. Its lifespan was brief. Only 72 days separated the date of 18 March 1871, when the working class of Paris first took power, and 28 May, the final day of the ‘bloody week’ which saw the Commune overrun and the revolution brutally drowned in blood on the orders of the capitalist government in Versailles.

Despite its brevity, the Paris Commune not only provided a crucial case study for Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in outlining the potential of the working class to take over the day-to-day running of society, but also invaluable lessons for socialists in how to successfully achieve the overthrow of capitalism and its replacement with a new socialist society on a lasting basis.

It also provided crucial lessons for revolutionaries in the lead-up to the October 1917 revolution in Russia 46 years later. As one of the co-leaders of the 1917 revolution, Leon Trotsky wrote following the unfolding of the 1905 revolution - the ‘dress rehearsal’ for the 1917 Russian revolution: “For us, the history of the Commune is now not just a great dramatic moment in the international struggle for liberation; it is a direct and immediate lesson.”

Birth of the commune

The background to the Paris Commune, as has been the case with a number of revolutions throughout history, was a devastating war, on this occasion between French and Prussian imperialism.

Following the restoration of the Bonaparte dynasty in France in 1851 and the beginning of the Second Empire, Paris led the French economy in a period of capitalist economic growth. The rapid growth of industry

in and around Paris delivered massive wealth and luxury to the capitalist class who owned and controlled industry and finance.

But with riches for this select few came poverty and destitution for the majority at the time, the workers and urban poor. Migrants from all over France poured into Paris during the 1850s and 60s looking to escape the poverty of the provinces.

Once in Paris, however, they only found further misery. Many remained underemployed or unemployed. Workers were squeezed into rooming houses in the central districts of Paris, or in shacks in the suburbs where industry was mainly concentrated. Disease in the workers’ districts was rife, with only a fifth of buildings in Paris having running water. One quarter of Paris’s population were classified as poor at the time, with tens of thousands reliant day-to-day on charity in order to survive.

Workers’ opposition

As prices increased rapidly over wages and inequality deepened, so too did working-class opposition to Napoleon III’s regime. Although trade unions were still illegal in France at the time, hundreds of workers’ associations were created in the struggle over wages and conditions. By 1869, there were an estimated 165 workers’ associations in Paris with around 160,000 members.

The deepening opposition to his regime was a key factor in compelling Napoleon III to declare war with Prussia on 19 July 1870. Napoleon hoped that by securing a victory militarily over Prussia, he could secure a victory politically over the growing influence of republican and socialist opponents to his brutal regime at home, thereby strengthening the rule of the wealthy elite in France over the toiling masses.

The gamble of war was a disastrous miscalculation however. The French army was riven by divisions between the privileged caste of officers, on the one hand, and workers and peasants, who made up the ranks, on the other.

Its war mobilisation was limited by the still slow development of French

infrastructure which was no match for the army of Prussia.

The defeat of France on 2 September marked a turning point - the end of the Second Empire and the declaration of the Third Republic, which immediately faced the challenge of a Prussian army within France marching towards the capital. A so-called ‘Government of National Defence’ (GND) was formed, made up of various pro-capitalist ministers and headed by military leader Louis-Jules Trochu, a man who, in his own words, was committed to “God, family and property”.



Conscription and the professional standing army were both abolished. All elected officials of the Commune were subject to immediate recall, and salaries capped

The war, as Trotsky explained, completely shook the consciousness of the French and in particular the Parisian working class to the core. A key factor was the growth of the Paris-based National Guard during the war. This was mostly made up of poor workers who joined in order to receive a daily allowance of 1.5 francs a day. Its company officers and commanders, far from the class-based hierarchy of the regular army, were elected directly by national guardsmen and almost exclusively from the working-class neighbourhoods of Paris.

The strengthening of the National Guard meant a strengthening of the confidence of the working class to struggle - both in defence of its own class interests against the bosses and in defence of the Third Republic.

While Prussian armies laid siege to Paris from September onwards, it was the armed workers who the French ruling class feared the most.

Anger was further stoked with the announcement by the GND that it was considering surrendering to the Prussian army. Nationwide elections to the National Assembly in February, which delivered the monarchist minister Adolphe Thiers at the head of the new government, further added to fears of a monarchist restoration.

It was on the 10 March, when the ministers of the National Assembly relocated to Versailles, that the task of defending the capital from the invading Prussian forces fell to the working class. An attempt by the Versailles army under the command of Thiers



Communards on the barricades during the 1871 working-class uprising in Paris

to seize National Guard canons at Montmartre on the 18 March sparked an insurrection. This thwarted the attempt to disarm the workers and seized the main centres of state power in Paris, including the Prefecture of Police. Flying a red flag from the Hotel de Ville city hall, the central committee of the National Guard that evening met and declared that it had taken power.

In contrast to the October 1917 revolution in Russia, the seizure of power by the working class in Paris in March 1871 was not consciously led by a revolutionary party capable of leading the struggle for power through to the end.

Rather, it was the events themselves, in particular the abandoning of Paris by the pro-capitalist government, which compelled the working class, ready or not, to take power in Paris in March 1871. As the central committee of the National Guard proclaimed on 18 March: “The proletarians of Paris, amidst the failures and treasons of the ruling classes, have understood that the hour has struck for them to save the situation by taking into their own hands the direction of public affairs...”

Immediate measures were taken by

the leadership of the Commune to alleviate the desperate situation facing the Parisian working class and poor. It immediately banned the eviction of renters unable to pay their rent. Debts of struggling workers were cancelled. A survey was ordered by the Commune into workplaces recently shut down to be reopened and run as workers’ cooperatives to alleviate unemployment. Night baking, which had been a bane of the lives of many workers, was banned. Of the privileged who remained in Paris, the Commune demanded that they turn over any empty properties they owned to alleviate the city’s housing crisis.

Steps were also taken to dismantle the brutal apparatus of state repression. Conscription and the professional standing army were both abolished. All elected officials of the Commune were subject to immediate recall, and salaries capped. The average wage of all municipal employees was set at the modest sum of 6,000 francs a year.

Despite the fleeing of government officials and employees to Versailles, workers organised to ensure the continued functioning of society. Streets

were cleaned and rubbish was regularly collected. Day-to-day life for workers and poor was transformed. Residents of the working-class neighbourhoods now frequented the streets of the ‘beaux quartiers’ (rich neighbourhoods).

There was an explosion of new political newspapers, pamphlets, posters and literature being published as workers engaged in hopeful discussion about the building of a new kind of society.

Workers participating in political clubs, which had exploded in the later days of the Second Empire, regularly gathered to discuss the political life of the Commune. It was widely expected that officials representing the Commune attend such meetings to hear and discuss the thoughts and concerns of the masses. And women played a key role in the construction and defence of the Commune, including militarily, providing care to wounded Communards and occupying and fighting on the barricades themselves.

Despite these major gains, a fatal error of the leaders of both the National Guard and the Commune was to leave the key levers of the French

economy in the hands of the capitalist enemy.

This was chiefly demonstrated by the attitude the leadership of the Commune took towards the Bank of France, which was based in Paris. Measures to take the Bank and the other commanding heights of industry and finance into democratic public ownership could have provided the basis to begin to meet the social needs not just of workers in Paris, but also for a political appeal to workers, poor and peasants all across France to join the revolution.

And with Paris at that stage decisively controlled by the working class, the process would most likely have been relatively bloodless. Instead, the Commune sent its delegate for finance to the Bank to politely request a loan of 700,000 francs! With the financial sector left in private hands, in the hands of the class enemy, Thiers was granted access to a huge payment of 258 million francs in credit in order to reconstruct his army at Versailles to crush the Paris Commune.

Many leaders of the Commune mistakenly believed that by respecting ‘legality’, they could conciliate with and eventually pacify the capitalist class and its state machine. It was to this end that the elected leaders of the Commune worked in each arrondissement (local administrative district) with the ‘legal’ government appointed mayors and deputies, many of whom were not supporters of the Commune. This further frustrated the attempts of the leadership of the Commune to organise the revolution.

Time was slipping through the fingers of the leaders. Meanwhile, at Versailles, an army was being raised and prepared to put an end to the Commune with force. Thiers spread propaganda throughout the army and the rest of France about the assortment of “ex-convicts, drunks, and dregs of society” who had come to rule the French capital and needed dealing with, as did the capitalist class and media elsewhere in Europe.

A revolutionary party

The Commune brought to the fore all the different ideas at the time about how to best transform society in the interests of working people. The followers of anarchist Pierre Joseph Proudhon and socialist Auguste Blanqui, in both the leadership of the Commune and many workers’ organisations across Paris, believed that a new society would simply ‘evolve’ across France following the example set by the Paris Commune into a federation of similar communes across France.

Karl Marx, however, fought for a completely different approach. Understanding that the ruling class would never allow their power to simply be reformed away, Marx argued

for the need for decisive economic and political measures to break the power of the capitalist class as a prerequisite to constructing a new society run by and for the working class.

Aside from measures to seize the economic levers of power, this meant action taken against the military forces of capitalist and monarchist reaction. Marx argued for an immediate pursuit of Thiers’ weak and defeated army while the balance of military forces remained in favour of the Communards. The forces of the National Guard, estimated at 120,000 at the beginning of the Commune, could have inflicted a fatal blow to Thiers’ army in its path of retreat to Versailles.

But such decisive action was impossible without the existence of a revolutionary party capable of leading the working class to victory. From day one, a dual government existed between the council of the Commune and the central committee of the National Guard, butting heads and floundering at every key stage of the battle.

The bloody week

It was during the final days of the Commune, with the wolf of Thiers’ army at the door, that the absence of a revolutionary party was perhaps most graphically demonstrated. National Guard soldiers received conflicting orders from the Commune’s Delegate for War and the Central Committee of the National Guard. In the confusion, Communards spent precious time in mid-May demolishing old symbols of the Empire, including the Vendôme Column and even Adolphe Thiers’ house! While no doubt cathartic, these did nothing to halt the advance of Thiers’ forces towards Paris.

Without a guiding organisation and strategy, the forward momentum which carried the Commune in its early weeks rapidly lost its energy. Shelling of Paris intensified after 12 April, and after further weeks of skirmishes, Thiers’ army eventually penetrated the Western walls of Paris on 21 May. So began the bloody week, one of the most vicious episodes of capitalist reaction in history.

Communards for a week heroically resisted Thiers’ murderous army which recaptured Paris street by street, building by building. Unlike the repression which followed the June 1848 revolution, executions were carried out by the army in the open in order to inflict maximum terror possible in the hearts of the masses who dared to struggle against the power and privilege of the French ruling class.

Thousands of men, women and even children were dragged from their homes and executed in the street. People were shot for having the wrong type of accent when interrogated by Versailles troops. It is estimated

as many as 40,000 were possibly murdered that week alone, while 38,000 were taken prisoner.

For Marx and Engels, the bloody conclusion of the Commune demonstrated that in the struggle for power, the working class could not simply ‘pick up and use’ the capitalist state machine ready-made, but instead would need to smash the old repressive state apparatus and replace it with a new state to serve and defend the interests of the working class and oppressed majority in society.

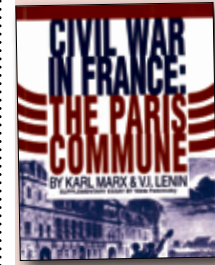


As Marx critically remarked: “But the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made [capitalist] state machinery, and wield it for its own purposes”

Despite the bloody ending of the Commune, the heroism and courage demonstrated in those two months by the working class in Paris still serves as an inspiration to anyone struggling for a new society. And the lessons it provides for revolutionaries are as relevant and fresh as ever: of the need for the construction of a revolutionary party capable of living up to the historic task of overturning capitalism and building a new socialist society on a lasting basis in Britain and internationally.

Available from Left Books

leftbooks.co.uk
020 8988 8777



Civil War in France: The Paris Commune by Karl Marx and V.I. Lenin (3 copies left)
£10 - including postage.

The Civil War in France by Karl Marx
Introduction by Friedrich Engels, 91 pages.
- £3.50 including postage.
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Speakers:

- Cécile Rimboud (Gauche Révolutionnaire, CWI France)
- Peter Taaffe (CWI & Socialist Party)
- Steve Hollasky (CWI Germany)
- Tony Sanois (CWI secretary)
- chaired by Bea Gardner

online rally and discussion
28 March, 3pm
youtube.com/cwimedia

No let up as sparks continue protests against deskilling

Swansea
On 17 March, for the second time in a fortnight, Unite electricians lobbied construction workers entering the large NG Bailey's Indoor Arena site.

Swansea Trades Council and Swansea Socialist Party members again joined the protest in solidarity. This was much appreciated by the Unite members.

Our leaflets were snapped up and workers in other trades expressed concern that if deskilling of sparks was successful then they could be next in line.

Younger workers, unsure at first about how to respond, were largely supportive after discussing with the Unite full-time officer and the other protesters.

This action by the sparks has definitely been a topic of discussion on the site because the few who refused a leaflet said they already had one from the last time we leafleted and had been talking about it with the other lads on site.

During the quiet periods, some of the sparks from Cardiff engaged in some friendly banter with the Swansea members, but ultimately agreed that whoever won the Swans v Bluebirds derby we would all be winners if we defeat these employers attack on our terms and conditions.

ALEC THRAVES
VICE-PRESIDENT, SWANSEA TRADES COUNCIL AND SOCIALIST PARTY

London

The sparks took the fight against deskilling to the upmarket streets of Covent Garden and the Royal Opera House. The job is run by NG Bailey,



Swansea ALEC THRAVES

Goodlord workers continue all-out strike

FERDINAND LYONS
EAST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

Tenant-referencing workers at the tech firm Goodlord were out on strike again on 18 and 19 March against the company's attempts at slashing wages using fire and rehire.

Once again, there was a mass picket outside their offices in East London, with members of the Unite tech workers branch, two Unite Community branches, Unite Housing

one of the main companies behind the Electrical Service Operator (ESO) grade that threatens to have 70% of electricians' work done by unskilled and cheaper labour to boost the bosses' profits.

This was one of four protests organised in a campaign that is building, and there are signs that the bosses are being pushed back.

Unite EC member Frank Morris told protesting electricians that EDF at Hinkley Point is moving, but the likes of NG Baileys and Balfours haven't withdrawn the threat of ESO, so the fight has to continue.

Frank told Reel News: "Twenty five years ago, Balfour Beatty rewired the Opera House and then blacklisted its entire workforce, and 25 years later they're still at it." As one of the sparks said: "If we show solidarity and unity, we've got these companies on the run."

ROB WILLIAMS
HACKNEY SOCIALIST PARTY

Motherwell

There was a determined mood at the 20-strong Scottish Unite rank-and-file protest outside the offices of NG Bailey at Strathclyde Park. Growing anger at the cost-cutting and deskilling practices of Bailey and Balfour construction companies was evident.

There was strong support for the calling of national industrial action to deal with the profiteering bosses, on wages, terms and conditions, and the race to the bottom. The next steps in turning the weekly protests into a national campaign, including industrial action, are vital.

PHILIP STOTT
SOCIALIST PARTY SCOTLAND

Engineering workers strike against 'fire and rehire' in Leciester



STEVE SCORE

STEVE SCORE
LEICESTER SOCIALIST PARTY

Workers at SPS Technologies in Leicester have taken strike action against the company's 'fire and rehire' assault on their terms and conditions. These attacks could mean them losing up to £3,000 a year. The engineering company supplies parts to the aerospace industry and is using the Covid-19 sparked downturn as justification.

It is owned by the multibillion-dollar US Precision Castparts Corporation, whose holding company is Berkshire Hathaway, which has one of the richest men in the world - Warren Buffet - as its CEO.

Socialist Party members supported the picket lines, along with Kumaran Bose, Trade Unionist and

Socialist Coalition (TUSC) candidate in the North Evington by-election, and spoke to the Unite members. A large number of workers are involved in the picket lines, attending in shifts. They expressed anger at the company and the fact that the managing director is not taking a cut in his inflated salary, while they would have to struggle to pay their bills and mortgages on significantly less.

They have been on the picket line at the same time that, elsewhere in the city, British Gas engineers have also been out against the fire-and-rehire attack on them. Far from being 'all in it together', it is clear this tactic is becoming a generalised attack by bosses on workers' living standards under the cover of the pandemic.

Tony Cattermole, Unite Convenor, said: "This is our second of four

one-day strikes. We don't accept the new terms and conditions that are part of the company's fire and rehire. We are talking and want to reach agreement. But it is disappointing, because last year we had 200 redundancies and we have worked all through the pandemic. They have been after our terms and conditions for four years. Why choose to do it now? Clearly the managing director has made the pandemic his excuse.

"We hope it doesn't come to it, but after the four days of action we are planning an eight-week solid strike. "Fire and rehire is a scare tactic. I feel sorry for those who aren't in the union and don't have our support. We had about 180 members here before this; now another 30 have joined. Through strength and solidarity, we are able to fight this."

Preparing to organise workers in Enfield

JOSH ASKER
NORTH LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

The National Shop Stewards Network in Enfield hosted an online meeting on 22 March. It brought together 24 trade unionists to discuss how to organise workers in the London borough.

Figures show that 40% of workers in Enfield earn less than the London living wage of £10.85 an hour. Arif Bektas, speaking for the Turkish and Kurdish organisation Day-mer, estimated there are 10,000 workers from that background in the borough, many earning poverty wages.

Day-mer is in the process of working with Unite the Union in North London to organise these workers. Onay Kasab from Unite listed recent victories of workers in London, including Hackney parking wardens and school cleaners winning the London living wage through collective action.

The meeting heard from transport workers in London: RMT underground worker Lewis Peacock outlined Labour mayor Sadiq Khan's planned attacks on workers, and victimised bus driver and Unite rep Moe Manir explained the bus workers' struggle for safety during the pandemic.

Workers in the public sector also spoke. Kathy Smith, who helped to organise Unite workers win their eight month strike in Bromley libraries, explained the need for local authority workers to coordinate action with health workers on the issue of pay, as well as to defend services.

Many of the trade unionists in the

meeting are preparing to stand as candidates for the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition in this May's elections on the London list for the Greater London Assembly (GLA), and in Enfield's by-elections. The point was made that workers' industrial struggle would be strengthened by a force in the councils and the GLA standing up for the working class.

Speakers reaffirmed their commitment to build the trade unions in Enfield, by organising the currently unorganised, and to forge links between existing trade union branches with the aspiration of establishing an Enfield trade union council.

Get all the latest union news...



with the
NSSN bulletin
shopstewards.net

PCS elections: increased support for Broad Left Network

KATRINE WILLIAMS
PCS DWP GROUP VICE PRESIDENT (PERSONAL CAPACITY)

Nominations for the PCS union president and national executive elections closed on 11 March. Details of branch nominations have now been published and these show increased support for the Broad Left Network - left rank-and-file group supported by Socialist Party members.

The Broad Left Network presidential candidate, Socialist Party member Marion Lloyd, received 42 nominations from all parts of the union. Incumbent president Fran Heathcote received 70 nominations and the other candidate Bev Laidlaw 19.

The 2020 PCS elections were cancelled at the nominations stage - a decision which Broad Left Network supporters opposed. The 42 nominations secured by Marion Lloyd this year is an increase on her 2020 total of 40. This contrasts with nominations for her opponents which have not increased.

From the nominations, both in

terms of the number and spread across the union's membership groups, it is clear that Marion Lloyd is the candidate best placed to challenge Heathcote. It is also clear that her increased nominations reflect a mood in the union for a fresh approach - for a leadership that gives members the confidence and the means to fight on the issues that matter to them.

We call upon activists to unite behind Marion's candidacy and the full Broad Left Network slate for a union democratically controlled through its elected lay structures, and a leadership which will actively coordinate across the union our fight on Covid-19 safety, pay, jobs, pensions and office closures.

- The PCS postal ballot for president and national executive opens Thursday 22 April and closes Thursday 13 May.
- Support Marion Lloyd for PCS president. Support the Broad Left Network-supported slate of candidates for the PCS national executive. For more information see pcsbln.wordpress.com.



PAUL MATTSSON

● Support victimised bus driver reps and Socialist Party members Declan and Moe

Moe Muhsin Manir, Unite Walworth garage rep, bus driver on the C10 London bus route and Socialist Party member, sacked by Abellio and Declan Clune, Bluestar bus driver, part of Go Ahead South Coast, and RMT rep, are still fighting their dismissals.

They are both speaking at a joint

National Shop Stewards Network and Southampton and South West Hampshire Trades Council meeting on Wednesday 24 March on Zoom (Meeting ID: 764 535 2620 and Passcode: STUC2020). See next week's issue of the Socialist for a report and donate to their fundraising campaigns at gofundme.com.

MAY DAY GREETINGS

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



Sleep-ins ruling must lead to a huge campaign for social care workers' rights



WORLDSKILLS UK/CC

GLYNN DOHERTY

The decision by the Supreme Court that the hours social care workers have to spend at work away from their homes on so-called 'sleep-ins' don't attract the minimum wage is a blow to the many thousands of low-paid workers in this sector. But it is also another warning to the unions that relying on the courts to achieve key objectives is a pointless strategy doomed to failure in all but the rarest of cases.

The judiciary is not independent. For the most part, it protects the interests of the capitalist economic system. If the decision had been in favour of workers, the estimates are that it could have cost social care providers £400 million. This is why the ruling came out in favour of Men-cap and against the workers.

Sleep-in staff are those who are

working on-call at night in homes and other establishments - sleeping on the premises - to deal with residents and service users who wake up and need assistance. They do not get a full night's sleep but are constantly waiting for the cough or alarm that could signal someone's in trouble.

The court ruled staff couldn't be paid the minimum wage while they are not awake, even though they have to be on the premises. However, if anything goes wrong, they can be disciplined and even prevented from working in care again if they don't respond. How is this not working?!

The unions will undoubtedly now call on the government for a change in the law, but unless this is backed up by a huge campaign it is likely to fall on deaf ears. The Socialist Party is demanding that a campaign be launched immediately.

Beal High school strike as management refuse to negotiate over fair sick pay scheme

Beal High school in Redbridge east London faces a six-day shutdown just two weeks after reopening. Members of the National Education Union (NEU) have overwhelmingly voted to strike following the school's refusal to renegotiate a fair sickness pay policy.

Unlike most of Redbridge schools, staff employed after 2016 at Beal High are not entitled to the nationally agreed sick pay scheme for teachers and support staff, and staff who are off sick (even if signed off by a doctor or hospital) are treated the same as workers facing disciplinary action.

Glenn Kelly, National Education

Union (NEU) regional officer, said: "How can it be right that a teacher working alongside a colleague doing the same job is entitled to less sick pay? How can it be right that a worker unfortunate enough to become unwell can be treated like they are a bad teacher or one who has done something wrong?"

The first day of strike action is due to take place on the 25 March involving 146 teachers and support workers at the school.

Glenn added: "For three months we have been asking the school management to meet to try and negotiate a fair scheme, and for three months

they have ignored us. It appears that they would rather that pupils and parents schooling is disrupted than try to resolve the situation."

- Please support the following Socialist Party members standing in the NEU executive elections: Nicky Downes, Sean McCauley, Alex Moore, Sheila Caffrey and Louise Cuffaro





DO YOU HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY?

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

THE SOCIALIST INBOX

● Tory government - seriously annoying

The new Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill contains provisions for people to be punished for causing “serious annoyance”. I understand the measures are far-reaching and could incur a sentence of up to ten years.

Critics have complained about the loose definition of what constitutes a “nuisance group”, “serious disruption to life”, “serious annoyance” and “unacceptable noise” levels.

As my life is seriously disrupted by government measures, and I am seriously annoyed by the nuisance group that runs the country in its own interests, would I have recourse to law or will it only apply to the labour movement, women taking part in vigils, environmentalists and striking workers?

SUE POWELL
GLOUCESTER

in positions of power and influence. Her previous actions have proved that first and foremost she is a copper and defender of the status quo, now playing an active personal role in stifling dissent to protect the Tory government.

We don’t just need more women in positions such as this. We need women who place themselves at the standpoint of women and the working class.

CLIVE WALDER
BIRMINGHAM

● Abolish the Lords

Tory health minister Lord James Bethell says nurses are “well-paid for the job” and in a secure role with “other benefits”. He has certainly benefited from his birth and connections.

Educated at the exclusive Harrow public school, Bethell went on to run a public relations firm, picking up contracts for HS2 and Private Finance Initiatives. His great-grandfather was a Barclays Bank director, Liberal MP, and then made the 1st Baron of Romford.

James, the 5th Baron Romford, was elected to the House of Lords - by 47 Tory hereditary peers.

JON DALE
CHESTERFIELD

● End gender pay inequality

Outrageously, the Supreme Court has ruled that care workers on sleep-ins are not eligible for the minimum wage (see page 11).

Most care workers are women. Like the derisory 1% pay offer for NHS staff, this is yet another example of the way in which work in sectors in which women predominate continues to be devalued.

Since the death of Sarah Everard, many are asking questions about what can be done to eliminate violence against women. A decent pay rise for the lowest paid workers would be a start. Gender pay inequality reinforces reactionary ideas about women’s second-class status which underpin sexist and abusive behaviour. And low pay can trap women in violent relationships.

The trade union leaders should get off their knees and start leading action for decent pay rises for all low-paid workers.

CAROL EDGE
WALTHAM CROSS

● Turkey - protection for women withdrawn

On 20 March, Turkey’s President Tayyip Erdogan decided to withdraw from the European treaty protecting women from violence. This move is a huge setback for



Protesting against violence against women in Cardiff PHOTO SOCIALIST PARTY WALES

women and encourages both inequality and abuse. With women’s equality being on everyone’s mind right now in the UK, any form of silence and inaction from political bodies is at a high cost that Turkish women can no longer afford.

BERFIN GARIP
NORTH LONDON

● Bristol SEV ban

Bristol City Council is consulting on whether to ban “sexual entertainment venues” (SEV’s) in the city after councillors voted in favour of the proposal earlier this month. If the proposal passes the final voting stage, this would make Bristol the biggest city to ban lap-dancing and strip clubs.

Those who voted for the proposal have argued that SEV’s are linked to incidents of violence against women and that strip clubs “feed the very attitudes that lead to harassment, abuse and ultimately violence against all women and girls”.

While the recognition that the objectification of women and their bodies is linked to the oppression of, and violence towards women, is welcome, closing these venues without any support for the self-employed women who work there to find alternative employment risks pushing over 100 women into poverty.

Many of these women have already suffered financially as a result of not being able to work during the lockdown. There is also the risk that banning these venues will simply push the business underground, where it would be unregulated and could lead to further exploitation of vulnerable women.

The proposal is also revealing of the powers councils currently have to address the gender-based violence Bristol city council is attempting to tackle. All councils have had the power to limit the number of

SEV’s in their cities since 2010, but Bristol is thought to be one of only seven councils willing to exercise this power.

And finally, the ban does nothing to tackle the rapes and assaults linked to Bristol’s other nightclubs, nor does it do anything to address the structural causes of the objectification and commodification of women and the gender-based violence this can lead to; an unequal capitalist society which promotes and perpetuates sexism and abuse.

AMY SAGE
BRISTOL

● Justice march

Over 100,000 Australians recently demonstrated across the country on the March4Justice, demanding an end to sexual violence against women. The demonstrations took place in capital cities across the country, including a large rally at Parliament House in Canberra on 9 March.

Capturing the anger directed at the Australian Prime Minister, one sign read: “So I have to be your wife or daughter for my rights to matter?” Socialists stand with those marching for justice, and we also point to the need for a new society as the only way to rid ourselves of sexism and other forms of discrimination.

The catalyst for the protests has been the crisis plaguing the government Scott Morrison leads. Former Liberal Party staffer Brittany Higgins opened the floodgates of anger when revealing that, after reporting an alleged sexual assault by another staffer, she was treated as a political problem. Since then others have come forward.

Reports then emerged that a senior minister in the government was the subject of an historic rape allegation. The minister has since been revealed as Attorney

General Christian Porter. He denies the allegations and is on leave. The woman tragically took her own life, and the allegation was never formalised with police.

As no police investigation can proceed, there have been calls for an independent investigation to determine if Porter is a fit and proper person to act as Australia’s first law officer. The government has resisted these calls, and now Porter has launched a defamation case against the journalist who broke the story.

With the government in management mode and refusing to acknowledge and act on the issues at hand, people took to the streets to demand change.

The crisis facing the current government underlines the urgent need to build a new party that stands for the rights of women, people of colour, workers, and the environment. We must link up our struggles behind the common banner of socialism. Ultimately, only socialism offers a lasting way forward.

SASHA DOYLE
MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA

● Dented shield

Government financial support for clinically vulnerable people who are shielding at home will be withdrawn from 1 April. This means that unless clinically vulnerable people are receiving furlough payments or able to work from home, they will have little option but to return to work and risk being infected with the Covid virus.

The government brags that its vaccine roll-out means that around 25 million people have had at least one shot of a Covid vaccine, and infection rates are falling. But that still leaves over half the population unvaccinated and infection rates aren’t falling uniformly. It’s also well known that workplaces are a key hub for transmission

of the virus into households.

It’s therefore irresponsible that the government, no doubt wanting to rein in its record public spending deficit, is putting 575,000 people (ONS figures) in the Covid firing line.

SIMON CARTER
EAST LONDON

● Zoomed out

As a lifelong Labour member, I am totally disgusted and disillusioned by the latest discriminatory decision by the Labour machine concerning the local council elections. Because the elections did not take place last year owing to the pandemic, candidates were already in place. But not all now wish to stand, so short-listing and selection meetings were hurriedly put in place and Zoom meetings arranged.

However, loyal members, most long-standing and hard-working, were suddenly barred from taking part in new selections. Most were not even told that these meetings were taking place, only members with email addresses. I personally argued that the members could perhaps phone in their choice but no, it had to be done by email.

My branch alone had five regularly attending members barred from the meetings, although members who have never attended meetings could take part and make their choice. The Labour Party members banned from our selection Zoom meeting have worked hard for years getting people to vote Labour.

Despite everything now expected to be done on an app, there are still many people who do not have this advantage and should not be left out.

LABOUR PARTY MEMBER,
YORKSHIRE

Socialist Party regional conferences meet online

● Yorkshire

PHIL CULSHAW,
HULL SOCIALIST PARTY

75 people attended the inspirational Yorkshire Socialist Party regional conference on 21 March. Mick Whale welcomed members and congratulated them on the work undertaken that had seen the party recruit and strengthen in this difficult pandemic year.

Hannah Sell, Socialist Party general secretary, introduced the morning discussion on the demands and programme the party should raise in this new period. Discussion focused on how members could be activists in their communities and workplaces and, through dialogue, create a bridge from people’s daily struggles to the ideas of socialism.

A transport worker explained how in response to their company’s refusal of a pay rise, they had unionised their fellow drivers. After balloting for industrial action, the company conceded a 2.2% rise nationally and a 4% rise for the fully unionised site, demonstrating militancy works.

● West Midlands

RICHARD GINGELL
BIRMINGHAM NORTH SOCIALIST PARTY

On 20 March, over 70 people from the West Midlands region of the Socialist Party got together online for the first regional conference of the year.

Hannah Sell started the discussion on the situation in Britain and how we expect events to develop, inspiring some passionate and thought provoking conversation that set the tone for the rest of the day.

day’s work does not mean a fair day’s pay.

A YouTube video had been created to celebrate the work of the Yorkshire branches. It showed members supporting workers in struggle on picket lines and protests such as Black Lives Matter and Reclaim the Streets (See ‘Yorkshire Socialist Party 2020 21’ at youtube.com).

In the afternoon the conference broke into workshops focusing on publications and social media, recruitment and integration, industrial disputes, and raising finance. The conference then reconvened for the final discussion on building the party in Yorkshire and the election of a regional leadership. The financial appeal raised £1,305.

In the afternoon we split into three groups with distinct but related tasks. The first to discuss recruiting to the Socialist Party, the second to consider strategies and share ideas on developing our social media, and the third to look out how we sell and use the Socialist newspaper. I’m excited to see how members will take the conversations that were had, and build on them going forward.

To finish off the afternoon we had a lively discussion about the upcoming end of lockdown and the steps we can take to build the party further, leveraging the upcoming elections and ultimately spread our message.

A key takeaway for me from this part of the session was the reminder of the importance of looking within as well as without. As well as adding to our numbers, we also have a duty to raise each other up and help one another learn and hone the skills that will be needed in the events ahead.

Finally, while socialist change will be made by people, those people still need resources which need funding. To that end, I’m very proud to report we raised a phenomenal £2,565 for the fighting fund. To me this really showcases the eagerness of Socialist Party members to get us in the best possible shape for when we are able to get back to our street campaigning more widely again. A very well done to all!



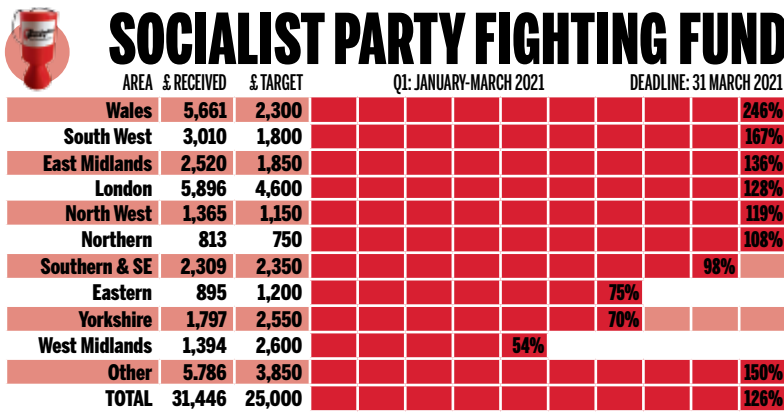
At the Yorkshire conference, a nurse explained the angry mood among fellow NHS workers over pay PHOTO LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

● Socialist EP

Socialist Party member in Bournemouth, **Daniel White**, has produced a Socialist Party EP.

It is available for download for £4.99, with the proceeds going towards the Socialist Party fighting fund.

●Download by searching ‘Socialist Party EP’ at bandcamp.com



Online meeting -
Ending violence against women, the socialist approach

HANNAH DAVIS
BLACK COUNTRY SOCIALIST PARTY

Women’s rights, and our oppression under the capitalist system, have been thrust into the spotlight by the events of the last few weeks.

From International Women’s Day, to the murder of Sarah Everard and then the horrific, yet all too familiar, acts of police violence at vigils held for her. Across the media, and at demonstrations, women have not just shared their stories, but begun to point the finger at the system that has done nothing to change the inequality we experience.

The Socialist Party held a virtual meeting on Friday 19 March entitled ‘Ending violence against women, the socialist approach’. There was a fantastic turnout with over 120 participants.

Police violence

We discussed the police violence at recent vigils, but attendees also contributed on a range of other issues - from cuts to vital local services such as childcare and housing, to the way the capitalist media perpetuates and reinforces the oppression of women. In addition, Boris Johnson’s recent proposal to put plain-clothed police officers in nightclubs was strongly criticised.

There were contributions about ‘spycops’ scandals, where women activists have been spied on by police officers falsely developing personal relationships with them. Students also spoke about safety on campuses, commenting on the silencing of victims, and the lack of support for those who seek it.

Crucially, the meeting did not just highlight the struggles women face, but put forward how a socialist programme, including building the trade unions, and fighting for a socialist planned economy, would offer solutions.

Members from several unions including the National Education Union and PCS civil servants’ union, spoke about how, through collective action, workers can fight for women’s rights and against discrimination in the workplace.

The meeting was an important opportunity to politicise the women’s struggle. To ensure that women are not just presented with the issues we are already aware of, but to show how through workers’ struggle and socialism, there is a real alternative to oppression.

LESSONS OF THE 2011 PENSIONS STRIKE: WHEN WORKERS SHOWED THEIR POWER

In 2011, trade unionists demonstrated in their hundreds of thousands on 26 March and then took strike action against the Tory-led government in defence of their pensions and against public service cuts. Paula Mitchell, Socialist Party executive committee member, looks at the dispute ten years on and its lessons for today

A human tide, all chanting, cheering, blowing whistles, waving trade union flags and holding placards. A great teeming mass of people flooded the streets of London on 26 March 2011 for perhaps the biggest trade union-led demonstration in British history, the ‘march for an alternative’ to austerity.

It took contingents two hours to get over Waterloo Bridge to the start of the demo, a walk which would normally take ten minutes. It took just one union contingent an hour to walk past an individual Socialist Party stall, it was so huge.

Three-quarters of a million people: from seasoned fighters in unions such as the transport union RMT and civil service union PCS, to middle-aged women health workers on their first ever demonstration; from students to pensioners.

Overwhelmingly they were trade unionists, every one of them representing tens and hundreds of others in their workplaces, families and communities, all united in a fight for their jobs and services.

The coming to power of the Tory-Liberal Democrat ‘Con-Dem’ coalition government in 2010 ushered in a period of savage cuts as the political representatives of capitalism set out to make the working class pay for the economic crisis of 2007-08.

Warning

In a clear warning of what the Tories intend to follow their emergency Covid spending, in 2010, after an initial period of spending to rescue the banking system and big business, capitalist governments turned to austerity to pass the bill onto working-class and young people.

All the capitalist establishment leaders and their wise commentators that had written off the trade unions were shocked by the March demonstration. The potential power of the trade unions to defeat the Con-Dems and stop austerity in its tracks was writ large.

But appallingly, in the subsequent ten years the Tories got their way. The 700,000 job losses of the Covid crisis, and millions of furloughed workers struggling on 20% less pay, come on top of a decade of devastating austerity.

The Tories took a massive axe to the public sector, and all over the country Labour councillors wielded it for them. A million jobs were hacked from public services. Public sector workers endured a pay freeze. Benefits were slashed and tens of disabled people died every week as a result, as well as many other benefit claimants subjected to cruel sanctions.

Towns and cities were ‘socially cleansed’ as public land was handed to private developers to build tiny expensive flats. Libraries, Sure Start centres, leisure centres and other public amenities were closed. Schools lost staff and resources; colleges lost whole courses. The NHS entered the Covid crisis with a 100,000 shortage of nurses and 80,000 fewer beds than in 2010.

But it didn’t have to be like this. The March 2011 demo could and should have been the beginning of a mass fight that could have changed history.

In the Socialist newspaper on 19 May 2010, following the formation of the ConDem government, the Socialist Party explained there would inevitably be struggles of working-class people and an explosive situation among young people:

“The first step needs to be a campaign for a massive national trade union-led demonstration against all cuts in public services. This needs to be linked to the development of local anti-cuts committees to bring together the different campaigns in preparation for the mass movement that will be necessary. In Britain, as in other countries, the need for general strike action, probably initially across the public sector, will be posed at a certain stage. This needs to be linked to arguing the case for a socialist alternative to capitalism.”

Trade Union Congress

Struggles, including massive demonstrations and general strikes, erupted around Europe. The National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN), in which the Socialist Party plays a leading role, lobbied the Trades Union Congress (TUC) to call a national demo. As the TUC dragged its feet, the NSSN and left-led unions called regional demonstrations in October 2010.

In November, a National Union of Students demonstration

brought 50,000 young people out onto the streets against a rise in tuition fees, ending in an occupation of the Tories’ HQ in Millbank Tower. Youth Fight for Jobs and Education, supported by the Socialist Party, leafleted the protest calling for walk-outs. In the weeks after, further education college students walked out and university students occupied.

In local areas, campaigns sprang up to defend libraries, nurseries and homes. The Socialist Party drew on the lessons of Liverpool in the 1980s, and called on Labour councils not to pass on cuts. Hundreds of people protested and invaded council chambers calling on councillors to stand up to the Tories.

Inspired by the Arab Spring that swept dictators from power in Tunisia and Egypt, occupations of squares spread across the world, including in London outside St Paul’s Cathedral. This movement raised the idea of the 99% against the 1%.

Power of the unions

It is understandable that many people, especially young people, did not understand about the latent power in unions, following decades of ‘partnership’ with the bosses and the low level of strikes. The Socialist Party had to patiently explain the potential power of the organised working class throughout these developments, and put demands and exerted pressure wherever we could inside the trade unions for the leaders to act.

Eventually, the TUC called the demo on 26 March. The scale of it shocked the organisers almost as much as it shocked the Tories. The pressure was on them now - what needed to be done next?

On that demo, the Socialist Party and NSSN called for the next step to be a public sector general strike. At the rally in Hyde Park, the loudest cheers came for those speakers, such as Len McCluskey, Unite general secretary, who called for coordinated strike action.

At the NSSN stage hundreds of workers stopped to hear speeches about how a one-day public sector general strike could attract millions towards the trade union movement, as the force in society with the power to stop the cuts.

However, Brendan Barber, then general secretary of the TUC, in a foretaste of the role he was to play, did not make any proposals from the platform on what the next steps should be.

The right-wing leaders of the TUC and big trade unions



acceded to the mantra from big business and the Tories that there was no alternative to austerity. They had no confidence in union members to fight, and in fact wanted to hold back a struggle believing it could harm the chances of a Labour government being elected.

In reality, the reason why Labour wasn’t elected in the 2015 general election was because of its total failure to put forward any alternative to austerity. At that stage, led by Ed Miliband, Labour’s craven position was a continuation of the cuts and privatisation programme of Tony Blair. The only whisper of opposition was that the cuts were “too far, too fast.”

What none of them reckoned on was the willingness of workers to struggle. The March demo was followed by pressure from below in the unions and by steps taken by the leaders of some of the more left-leaning trade unions. In June, the PCS civil service union went on strike alongside the teaching unions - including the Association of Teachers and Lecturers, on its first strike in its 127-year history.

Pensions became the unifying factor. The government planned to steal £2.8 billion from mainly low-paid workers, and expected them to work until the age of 68.

On 30 November 2011 two million struck in an historic public sector pensions strike. Marches and rallies around the country were huge - 4,000 marched in Taunton in Somerset! On thousands of picket lines and hundreds of demos, workers were stepping forward to be counted, in a display of their potential power. And everywhere the same discussion - what next, how can we win?

Clear strategy

The Socialist Party got a great reception for our clear strategy, arguing that the next step should be a general strike, public and private sector together. But instead of harnessing this potential, right-wing union leaders, together with the Blairite Labour Party, set out to betray the movement, breaking it up through sectional negotiations about tiny concessions instead of a common struggle.

The TUC general council in December was lobbied by the NSSN. But over Christmas leaders of big unions like Unison said they were up for the deal.

PCS Left Unity - which at that stage was the socialist group in the union in which Socialist Party members played a leading role - organised a special fightback conference in January 2012 to try to build a ‘coalition of the willing’. Further action was taken by PCS, University and College Union, Unite, the RMT and also the prison officers’ union POA despite its no-strike ban.

But the betrayal of the leaders of the big unions opened the doors to the government to drive though the rest of their austerity plans. Two of the three leaders who signed the heads of agreement were given knighthoods.

Many people learned about the potential power of the unions through 2011. But the capitulation

at the end of that year led to demoralisation and confusion. Further confusion was expressed by campaigners involved in many of the anti-cuts alliances when Labour councils did the Tories’ bidding year after year.

At the behest of other forces such as the Socialist Workers’ Party, who argued for a so-called ‘broad’ campaign, Labour councillors spoke from platforms without facing demands or criticism, and sat in anti-cuts meetings alongside workers they were sacking or local people whose services they were closing!

We too wanted a broad campaign - of all people who were against cuts, not just in words but in deeds.

This is why the Socialist Party was a founding part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) in 2010, alongside the late RMT general secretary Bob Crow. It was formed to offer an electoral banner to all those who wanted to stand against the cutters and privatisers, and who pledged to vote against cuts in the council chamber.

The immense anger against austerity didn’t go away of course, especially as its implementation intensified. Battles took place at a local level. Following a fragmentation of working-class votes as people sought out how to punish cutting Labour politicians - voting for the Green Party and even Ukip - the anger found political expression in the election of Jeremy Corbyn to the Labour leadership in 2015.

Mighty movement

These are the main lessons from the mighty movement of 2011. The organised working class flexed its muscles and stood up ready to fight, but was let down by its leaders both industrially and politically.

In 2021, with Corbynism defeated and Keir Starmer at the helm of the Labour Party, the need for a new working-class party is posed once again. A step in this direction is the raft of workers and campaigners again standing in the local authority elections this May under the banner of TUSC.

And with trade union leaders again having capitulated to the demands of big business and the Tories, this time for national unity in the Covid pandemic, it is clear that a serious strategy to fight to prevent the working class paying for crisis once again has to include fighting to transform the trade unions.

This is why Socialist Party members are standing, alongside others willing to fight on this clear platform, in union elections currently taking place in the PCS, National Education Union and Unison.

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the Socialist

Issue 1126

25-31 March 2021

formerly **Militant**

Tories 1% and Labour's £500 are pay insults

NHS PAY: 15% NOW



WALES NHS NURSE

NHS staff are seething about the Tories 1% pay 'rise'. Now the Labour-controlled Welsh government has announced a one-off £500 bonus for NHS workers. Nationally, Labour is suggesting only a 2.1% pay rise - no less of an insult than the Tories' 1%.

Westminster and the devolved governments are seriously underestimating NHS workers' anger if they think single-figure increases and one-off bonuses are enough. Obviously we welcome the bonus, but we will not be sidetracked from the fight for a 15% pay rise.

NHS workers did an estimated 1,000,000 unpaid overtime hours during the pandemic. Is £500 going to make up for that?

Our wages have gone down in value by around 20% in the last decade. A one-off bonus will not reverse that.

It won't improve recruitment and retention, and will soon be swallowed up by rising living costs. It won't change the fact that most NHS workers have to do second jobs, agency and bank shifts on top of their full-time hours.

Even this measly offer from Labour isn't out of the goodness of their hearts. This is the same Welsh Labour government that lied about PPE shortages during the first Covid wave.

The Welsh Government has the power to award a 15% pay rise to NHS workers. The trade union movement should be putting pressure on the Welsh government to pay up and raise a challenge to Westminster to provide the funds for 15% across the board.

NHS workers in England and Wales will continue to fight for an immediate 15% pay rise, and for any bonuses to be paid equally across the UK. Even that is only the beginning of what we must fight for to retain the NHS.

- **An immediate 15% pay rise for all health and care staff**
- **Unions must organise for strike action**
- **Reverse privatisation. Scrap the Private Finance Initiative. Cancel PFI debt. Bring all outsourced workers and services in-house on permanent contracts**
- **A fully publicly funded NHS and care system, free at the point of use**
- **A socialist NHS - democratically run by elected committees, including service workers and users**
- **We can't trust pro-privatisation, pro-austerity, anti-working-class politicians. For a new mass workers' party**

• NHS - see more on page 5