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the Socialist

Issue 1131

29 April - 5 May 2021

formerly **Militant**

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**INTERNATIONAL WORKERS' DAY 2021:
16-PAGE MAY DAY GREETINGS PULL OUT**

Socialist candidates say
'why you should vote TUSC'

▶▶▶ p4-5,10-11

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The Socialist is written, read, sold and bought by ordinary workers, trade unionists, young people and Socialist Party members. We want you to write for the Socialist.

Send us reports of your workplace and community campaigns, short letters on working-class issues, or ideas for other articles.

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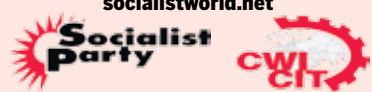
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"The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it."
Karl Marx

Private sector is stealing the NHS



PHOTO: ELAINE BRUNSKILL

HEATHER RAWLING
LEICESTER SOCIALIST PARTY

The private health sector is busy gobbling up NHS money and greedily seeking more. The privatisation of the NHS is gathering pace even though the private sector has failed to deliver on test and trace and PPE during this awful health crisis.

According to the Financial Times, in the early days of the pandemic, government money to the tune of £400 million a month shored up private health providers. The deal paid all their costs, including debt and interest. Spire Healthcare 'grew' its NHS revenues by 50% during 2020. So, rather than the private sector helping out the NHS, it was the NHS that helped out the private sector!

Two-thirds of the capacity paid for in private healthcare was unused. Now that deal has ended and a new £10 billion package has been negotiated with virtually the whole private healthcare market.

With 4.7 million people waiting for treatment in England - 387,000 have

been waiting for more than a year - this new deal is to allegedly reduce the backlog. But the private health providers have disclosed that they will prioritise their private health patients because they are more lucrative.

The chief executive of Spire admits that longer waiting lists encourage people to take out private insurance. So they are being paid to reduce the waiting lists, but their business model prefers that the lists remain long to encourage people to pay for private health care!

The private sector, encouraged by the government, is stealing the NHS from us. An urgent defence should be mounted by the trade union movement. The Trades Union Congress should organise demonstrations to build solidarity for NHS workers.

- Private profiteers out of the NHS
- United mass community mobilisation in support of our NHS to defend services
- 15% pay rise for all health workers

Super League defeated
No trust in billionaire owners - kick them out and reclaim the game

Socialist Party members Lenny Shail, who is a Chelsea fan and was at the Stamford Bridge protest, and Leeds fan Ian Pattison said:

The withdrawal of the six football clubs in England from the Super League - after protests and action by fans, players and other club staff - is rightly celebrated. Fans protested in their hundreds at Leeds, and in their thousands at Chelsea and Arsenal.

Liverpool supporters joined the Leeds protest. And supporters of Arsenal, Aston Villa, Liverpool, Manchester City and West Ham were welcomed at the Chelsea protest.

There was reportedly uproar at a Chelsea staff meeting. And Liverpool players simultaneously voiced their opposition.

Premier League club captains were reportedly planning to meet to oppose the plans. Even the security staff at Chelsea were celebrating the news that all but signals the death of the Super League.

But the billionaire owners who attempted to rob our clubs and game are still in charge. They cannot be trusted and must be removed, along with the rest of their big business mates and structures in football.

Now, democratically elected representatives - of fans, of players and other club staff, their trade unions, the wider workers' movement, and local communities around football clubs - must come together to begin the process of reorganising football. We should have the opportunity to inspect the financial books



Lenny Shail at Stamford Bridge protest

of football clubs, especially the richest that wanted to break away.

Let's see what they really can afford. Football without the billionaire owners could decide to drastically reduce ticket prices, and allow local communities to benefit from club facilities.

And for starters, the new coefficient

rule in the existing Champions League - allowing in the richest clubs based on past performance - must be scrapped. This was only introduced as a sop to the owners of the Super League clubs.

● Arsenal fans in the Socialist Party protested with thousands of others. See page 10

● Generation eviction

Only 2% of landlords who illegally evict tenants are prosecuted, according to Generation Rent, the private renters' campaign organisation.

In England and Wales, a landlord doesn't need a reason to evict tenants but they must first obtain a court eviction notice if a tenant stays beyond the end of their notice period. If they don't, then it is an illegal act.

In 2019-20, 1,040 households were made homeless as a result of an illegal eviction (these figures

underestimate the total as councils only record cases of people who seek their help and qualify for support). Yet between 2016 and 2019 there were an average of only 24

prosecutions a year for unlawful eviction. It means that just 2% of illegal evictions were pursued by the authorities - in effect giving the green light to rogue landlords.

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- Young Engels - foundations of a world view

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● Opposition to Putin

The Committee for a Workers' International (CWI) - the socialist international organisation to which the Socialist Party is affiliated) has posted a new article analysing the opposition movement against Russia's autocratic president, Vladimir Putin.

- See socialistworld.net

Vote TUSC to oppose sleazy capitalism

SARAH SACHS-ELDRIDGE
SOCIALIST PARTY NATIONAL ORGANISER

Tory ministers say they 'can't believe' that Johnson said 'let the bodies pile high in their thousands'. But his catastrophic approach to the pandemic makes it totally believable.

Britain has the world's fifth largest official Covid death toll, with 127,681 deaths. It could have been even worse. But education workers in the NEU and Unison trade unions organised mass resistance to the unsafe full opening of schools in January.

At each point in the pandemic Johnson and the Tories have put the interests of big business and saving the capitalist system first. That's what the Dyson and Greensill episodes reflect - how the Tories in government serve the interests of their big business friends.

The question of how Johnson paid for the decadent redecoration of his Downing Street flat is yet one more example bobbing along on the river of effluent spewing out of Westminster.

What's missing is a political opposition which points out that sleaze is the inevitable result of a rotten capitalist system that puts the profits of a rich minority before the interest of the working-class majority. Based on private ownership of the means of production, capitalism means economic crisis and constant attempts to make the working class pay.

With Starmer's Labour completely reclaimed for big business, there is



PHOTO: WALES TUSC

no alternative from the official opposition. That is the main reason the Tories aren't plunging in the polls.

But the proposed football Super League, a rotten example of the rigging of the system in favour of the billionaires, was defeated when mass anger was turned into protests. Voting socialist in the 6 May elections is the best way to protest at the ballot box.

Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) candidates include trade unionists and community campaigners with records of standing up to the bosses and fighting Tory austerity.

TUSC candidates will make no financial gain by being elected. Among them is TUSC national chair Dave Nellist who, as an MP from 1983 to 1992, only took the average worker's wage and donated the rest of the inflated MP's pay to the workers' movement.

TUSC candidates are pledged to vote against all cuts to jobs and services - but also to use elected positions to help build mass struggle. That includes building a mass working-class party to put forward a socialist alternative to the rotten-to-the-core capitalist system.

39 'postmasters' cleared - now clear the rest

KEVIN PATTISON
WEST YORKSHIRE CWU BRANCH COMMITTEE
(PERSONAL CAPACITY)

The scandal of Post Office workers who were prosecuted by the Post Office when money appeared to go missing through the Fujitsu Horizon computer system has hit the headlines again. 39 of the over 900 who were prosecuted have had their convictions for theft, fraud and false accounting quashed by the Court of Appeal.

The judge said: "The failures of investigation and disclosure were so egregious as to make the prosecution of any of the Horizon cases an affront to the conscience of the court." But that judgment still leaves over 860 with false convictions.

The Communication Workers Union (CWU) has been tireless in championing their cause, and is now calling for a criminal investigation of senior Post Office figures who oversaw the criminalisation of hundreds of staff.

Post Office bosses and Fujitsu knew there were problems with the system, but told each of the 900-plus they prosecuted that they were the only one whose computer showed



Post office workers took strike action in 2013 LEEDS SOCIALIST PARTY

losses. Many who were prosecuted went to jail, and all lost their jobs and businesses.

The Post Office continued to waste money using expensive lawyers to try to defeat the workers, and to get a judge who listened to and accepted the workers' evidence barred from the case.

No-one at the top of the Post Office

has been held to account. CEO Paula Vennells left with £5 million and a CBE for "services to the Post Office and to charity".

The scandal shows the need for trade union oversight, to prevent lives being ruined and millions of public money wasted. We need proper workers' control and management.



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.

- 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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Campaigning for a no-cuts, socialist Liverpool mayor



MARK BEST
SOCIALIST PARTY NATIONAL COMMITTEE

The campaign for a socialist mayor of Liverpool had a busy weekend on 24-25 April, bringing its programme for a no-cuts alternative to workers and young people.

Over the last decade, Labour-run Liverpool council has implemented £420 million of cuts and lost 3,600 jobs directly. This year is more of the same - £15 million lost from the budget and a 4.99% rise in council tax.

It was clear from the BBC North West mayoral hustings, broadcast on Sunday 25 April, that all but one of the candidates are united in their acceptance of more cuts, more austerity and more misery for Liverpool.

It is only Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) candidates and TUSC mayoral candidate Roger

wouldn't even allow its members to freely choose their own candidate.

On the back of the arrests and chaos of the Joe Anderson regime in the council, Robert Jenrick, the Tory secretary of state for housing, communities and local government, has announced that commissioners will be sent in with the power to run parts of the council. This has been done ostensibly to deal with transparency and corruption in the city. But how can you trust the Tories who are mired every day in new stories and accusations of cronyism? Roger Bannister is the only candidate who has said he will fight tooth and nail to get rid of Tory commissioners in this city.

We need a city that is run by and for workers, not run for greed and profit. A workers' mayor on a workers' wage could be a massive platform to aid and mobilise for workers' and young people's struggles against the further attacks to come.

We had teams out over the weekend in the city centre, Garston, Cressington and Kirkdale. We met many people enthused by what we have been saying - that there is an alternative to more Labour-implemented cuts and sleaze. Many had voted for Corbyn, seeing his pro-working class policies as something different but disgusted at the actions of the Labour Party in power in the council.

A vote for Roger Bannister for mayor of Liverpool sends a message, that we have had enough of right-wing Labour politicians, enough of Tory austerity, and that we want a fighting socialist alternative, both here in Liverpool and across the country.

● *BBC North West mayoral hustings can be view on bbc iplayer*

End racist policing

MARIAM KAMISH
TUSC CANDIDATE IN THE SENEDD ELECTIONS

Two young men have died at the hands of police in South Wales since 1 January. The killings of Mohamud Mohammed Hassan in Cardiff and Mouayed Bashir in Newport have brought out big crowds to demand justice.

Despite Covid restrictions, hundreds of brave, mainly young people have closed the streets in front of police stations, and led marches through the city centre determined to make their voices heard.

They rightly say these terrible injustices deserve as much attention as deaths across the Atlantic. Fifteen Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests have taken place in South East Wales so far this year. In Cardiff and Newport, the local community is demanding answers.

From the start, the Socialist Party has demanded the immediate suspension of all the officers involved in the deaths. We call for independent inquiries to include representatives of the families, the local community

and the trade unions, whose only interest is to secure justice. But we also call for democratic community control of the police, to stop these terrible miscarriages of justice happening in the first place.

In April, the Young Socialists organised a protest in Cardiff to build support for Siyanda Mngaza, jailed for trying to defend herself from a brutal, racist attack. There is also the case of 13-year-old Christopher Kapessa whose death in the River Cynon in 2019 was never properly investigated.

The Socialist Party has played a prominent role speaking at BLM protests and in securing support for Siyanda, Mohamud, Mouayed, and the wider BLM movement from trades councils, trade unions and the Wales Trades Union Congress.

The trade unions are where millions of workers are organised. We call on the trade unions to make their opposition to institutional racism visible by bringing trade union banners out on BLM protests. But also to play their part in fighting to create a new party for workers that



SOCIALIST PARTY WALES

has a political programme to end racism and inequality. Socialist Party members are standing as part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) as part of that process. If you have been fighting for justice in the BLM protests, vote for TUSC on 6 May.

WHY YOU SHOULD VOTE FOR TUSC

330 Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) candidates, of which the Socialist Party is a part, are standing in the elections on 6 May. 307 candidates will contest seats in 95 different local authorities. TUSC is also standing candidates for the Welsh Senedd, Scottish Parliament, Greater London Assembly and city mayor in Bristol and Liverpool.

Find out more at tusc.org.uk

Fed up with crony politicians in it for themselves and their rich mates

CLARE WILKINS
TUSC CANDIDATE FOR NUTHALL AND KIMBERLEY WARD, NOTTINGHAMSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

On the streets people are fed up with Tories and Labour. They are fed up with politicians in it for their own business interests, or career prospects, and all the while making cuts.

They want a politics that is not done to them, but that is theirs. They want councils and councillors that provide services, represent them, and are accountable to them.

63% of voters did not vote in the last local elections in 2017. People we have spoken to campaigning in Nuthall and Kimberley, Nottinghamshire, have said that this was because there was nothing to vote for. Both Tories and Labour have carried out austerity policies and cuts.

The Covid crisis has exacerbated

the effect of these cuts. The Tories have given billions to their friends while giving the working class nothing but harder lives.

Workers need an alternative to the Tories and Labour. The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition is gate-crashing a cosy, exclusive Tory/Labour club in South Nottinghamshire. We need councillors with a political programme and policies to improve the lives of working-class people. Vote for TUSC on 6 May.

EVE OF POLL RALLY
Tuesday 4 May 7pm
on Zoom

● To register visit
tusc.org.uk
● Meeting ID:
836 6197 3766



PHOTO RAGAVAN

To defend the right to protest

AMY SAGE
TUSC CANDIDATE FOR HENBURY AND BRENTRY WARD, BRISTOL CITY COUNCIL

The Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill, is currently paused on its route through parliament. If enacted it would severely undermine the right to protest. It is a clear attempt by the Tories to quash movements that are very likely to erupt over the coming months in reaction to their disastrous response to the Covid pandemic and its economic consequences.

The Tory government fully intends for us to pay for the Covid crisis, with further austerity, job losses and

misery on the horizon. But we must not allow this to happen; we must be able to strike and protest on a mass scale, in order to make it clear that the working class will not pay for this crisis in the same way we did the last one. The police bill would severely undermine our ability to do this.

That is why the Socialist Party, including candidates for the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) standing in the Bristol City Council and mayoral elections, oppose the bill and have attended the 'Kill the Bill' protests.

Tom Baldwin, TUSC candidate for Bristol mayor, is the only one of the nine candidates to put forward this

position. Current mayor, Labour's Marvin Rees, while claiming to oppose the bill, simply condemned the protestors and, even after evidence clearly showed that the police violently attacked protestors, failed to call for the police to be held accountable for their actions. It is blatantly clear that the big political parties are both unwilling and incapable of standing up for the working class and our most fundamental democratic rights. TUSC candidates are the only ones willing to take the fight to the streets, our workplaces and our communities in order to defend our rights. Vote for TUSC on 6 May.

Fighting climate change

ADAM HARMSWORTH
TUSC CANDIDATE FOR EARLSDON WARD, COVENTRY CITY COUNCIL

The local elections are an important chance to put climate change back on the agenda, with the time to prevent irreversible damage slipping away fast.

The Greens and Labour are vying to present themselves as the environmental vote. Many activists were rightly inspired by Corbyn's policies to address climate change; Labour's 2019 manifesto pledges would have transformed Britain's contribution to the fight to save the planet.

But we must be clear that none of that is present in Labour's

local election plans, nor unfortunately with the Green's (see page 10). Many councils have declared a 'climate emergency' but have done nothing to follow it up. Starmer's Labour promises 400,000 green jobs; but where Labour is in power they have cut tens of thousands of council jobs to obey Tory funding cuts!

Meanwhile, Greens in power frequently push for 'clean air zones', which punish less well-off workers for having older cars that pollute more. This bluntly fines workers for not being able to afford to be green enough.

Without serious links to the working class, or an understanding of the role of capitalism, both parties'

To fight for a socialist NHS

MAGGIE FRICKER
NHS WORKER AND TUSC CANDIDATE FOR COXFORD WARD, SOUTHAMPTON CITY COUNCIL

To be honest, us health workers are all pretty pissed off - the feeling of 'they're all the same' is more heartfelt than ever before. Health workers' anger against the Tories is a given, but people are also demanding to know why no alternative is being put to the wrecking of our NHS by underfunding and greedy profiteers milking the service for all they can get!

There is a burning need for us to have leaders who mean what they say, who raise peoples' sights, who see what we see. Imagine if we had socialist class fighters as councillors, who are nurses, care workers and transport workers, who live in our communities and who don't

As for the pay claim - write to your MP, we are told by our unions' leaderships - but MPs all have their noses in the trough - we have no confidence in those currently elected to represent us in parliament or locally.

We have struggled to keep things going through the pandemic, we deserve better, we deserve class fighters who will struggle with us to defend our services and the jobs in our communities, and refuse to make us pay for the economic crisis that has come in the wake of Covid. We need a working-class, socialist alternative. Vote for TUSC on 6 May.

For a future for young people

TOM GIBSON
TUSC CANDIDATE FOR BOLTON AND UNDERCLIFFE WARD, BRADFORD DISTRICT COUNCIL

Youth unemployment is an issue that Conservative and Labour parties seem unwilling to tackle - nationally 582,000 young people aged 16-24 were unemployed between December and February. In the Bradford region alone, which is controlled by a Labour council, 9.8% of the working age population is unemployed, and 6,995 of those are aged between 18 and 24.

We need investment for jobs in sectors like green energy. We need a fairer unemployment system; the pandemic has put so many people out of work and yet the capitalist parties continue to demonise unemployed workers.

Free bus passes for anyone under 25 is a key policy I am campaigning for. This is something Labour supported under Corbyn but has now dropped. In Bradford, under-19-year-olds get reduced prices, but in my opinion this isn't good enough, a single ticket costs £2 and an all-day ticket is £4. A free bus pass would take financial strain off young people and would help environmentally too. We need bus services to be nationalised so they can be run for peoples' needs rather than profit.

Over 600 libraries have been closed since the Tory-Liberal government was elected in 2010. Many of these libraries were in the more deprived areas showing a callous and careless disregard for the education of young

people and the working class. In Bradford before the pandemic, museum workers went on strike against cuts imposed by the Labour council. We need councillors who are on the side of workers fighting for fully funded public services.

I am honoured to be able to stand on a platform alongside many other hard-working candidates for the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition. To fight against the interests of the bosses and for ordinary people, including young people, who have been utterly let down by all the establishment parties.

TUSC is fighting for a socialist future, and part of that future is giving young people the equality and quality of life they deserve. Vote for TUSC on 6 May

For safety and accountable police

BEN GOLDSTONE
WEST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

The murder of Sarah Everard, and the subsequent vigil which took place on Clapham Common on 13 March, showed clearly there is a definite need for socialist change, and politicians that will fight for it.

The implementation of crippling austerity measures imposed by the current Tory government, and dutifully carried out by Labour councils, has created a more unsafe environment for everyone, especially women. Cuts to public transport mean less frequent trains and buses, and fewer attendants at stations. Coupled with the increasing cost of fares, this has meant that public transport is becoming something that working-class people are unable to utilise or afford.

Street and park lighting is also being switched off earlier or altogether. The underfunding of essential public services for women who experience violence, harassment, and abuse has meant that it has become harder for them to have anywhere to turn when they need assistance. We are led to believe that these cuts are unavoidable - but this is not the case - councillors have a choice not to vote for cuts!

The fact that the police attended the socially distanced vigil and acted with such force, dragging women

from the bandstand and arresting them, shows that there needs to be a shift in policing in this country. The police and government exist to maintain the status quo and keep power at the top. The Socialist Party puts forward the need to bring the police force under democratic community control. Our members are standing as part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) in May's elections, including standing for the Greater London Assembly.

Vote for TUSC to fight dangerous austerity and for a socialist alternative.



Goodlord strikers fight fire and rehire as part of day of action



FERDINAND LYONS
EAST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

Unite the Union held a mass picket outside the tenant referencing company Goodlord on 26 April as part of a day of action against 'fire and rehire'.

Goodlord staff are currently on strike over cuts to their pay and conditions, and members of the Unite tech workers' branch, Unite Community branches, Unite housing workers branch, National Shop Stewards Network and Socialist Party members all brought solidarity.

The picket was used as a launch for Unite's national campaign against fire and rehire, with a large new banner to match.

The picket was also attended by Howard Beckett, Unite assistant general secretary, who is leading the new campaign and the ex-Labour leader and Islington North MP Jeremy Corbyn who both addressed the picket.

Corbyn rightly pointed out the working class needs to fight, and the Goodlord strikers represent the best of what the labour movement stands for.

The Socialist Party stands in solidarity with Unite the Union and the Goodlord strikers in demanding the outlawing of fire-and-rehire tactics and for Goodlord to come to the table and meet the strikers' demands and settle the dispute.

Thurrock bin strike in third week



Thurrock picket 27 April DAVE MURRAY

The Thurrock bin workers' strike has entered its third week even more solidly than the first. Spirits are high and the workforce is determined to win. The issue is the proposal to do away with anti-social hours payments which will cut pay by up to £4,000 for a loader and more for drivers.

The implications for refuse workers in other boroughs, for care workers and others who depend on these extra and enhanced payments to make a half-decent wage, are extremely serious. GMB care workers in Thurrock are also entering into dispute with this employer on the same issue.

The refuse workers union, Unite, is due to sit down with the employers this week. If the bosses know what is good for them they will cave in and

do the right thing by these workers. If they don't, notice has been given that the strike will escalate from 10 May, with action starting at 6am rather than 9am, which will lead to a complete shutdown of refuse collections in the borough.

The current partial action has already led to the piling up of rubbish in the streets, and the union will be doing mass leafleting to keep community support for the strike high.

The union is opening up a hardship fund for drivers who will be dropping about £18 a day when the strike goes all out. The whole labour movement needs to get behind this dispute.

DAVE MURRAY
ESSEX SOCIALIST PARTY

PCS ballots members in Jobcentres over safety

SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBERS IN PCS

It is evident that the government is driving ahead to reopen Jobcentres to the public with reckless haste. Ministers are clearly linking public access to Jobcentres with the return to conditionality and sanctions in the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), which had been suspended during the height of the pandemic. So as soon as Johnson's roadmap indicated that non-essential shops could open from 12 April there was pressure to restart face-to-face appointments in the Jobcentres.

The number of Covid-19 outbreaks in DWP offices reduced dramatically when, finally, every member of staff was offered the opportunity and the IT kit to work from home, and the majority of staff finally left the offices. It is reckless to bring PCS members back into the workplace, as well as expect the public to travel to appointments, when Covid-19 is still present in our communities.

This has the potential to needlessly spread the virus for work that can be done effectively over the phone, with both PCS members and the public remaining safely at home. This exposes that the rush to fully open the Jobcentres is not about services to the public but how the government wants to return to the normal DWP regime, rather than focusing on paying benefits and supporting people.

The PCS DWP group executive committee has decided to run a consultative ballot over safety from 5 May to oppose the ramping up of face-to-face interviews in Jobcentres, with the focus on individually contacting and emailing members rather than working through our branches.

Broad Left Network members will work flat out to get a 'yes' vote in the ballot while recognising the limitations in the way the group leadership is running the campaign. We have been clear that building up the collective resistance across our branches and members is critical to this campaign. While advice has been issued to members about their health and safety rights, it again leaves members isolated to fight the battles themselves.

What is clear is that there needs to be pressure built up across all the Jobcentres uniting members together. Management may think they can pick on the most vulnerable members health-wise or contract-wise to staff the work.

The best response to this is to organise members together in each workplace to stop individuals being picked off and to tackle safety concerns. Broad Left Network members have been working hard to build in the campaign for safety and help branches organise members' meetings. We see the following demands as the best way of mobilising members together:

- No forced return to the workplace. Any return, and on what basis, in line with agreement with PCS
- Full safety measures to protect all members at home and in the workplace including supportive measures on mental health and stress
- Work coach discretion about how members support individual claimants and by what method, with safety paramount
- End micromanagement
- Permanent jobs for all fixed-term appointment and agency workers
- Stop office closures

- Stop needless extension of opening hours
- PCS DWP group elections start on 29 April. As well as voting for Marion Lloyd for PCS national president and all the Broad Left Network candidates in the national executive council elections we are calling on PCS members in DWP to also vote for Broad Left Network-supported candidates in the DWP group elections:

PRESIDENT: LAIDLAW BEV
VICE-PRESIDENTS: HEEMSKERK RACHEL; SUTER PAUL; WILLIAMS KATRINE
ASSISTANT SECRETARIES:
BURKE DAVE; REES DAVE; SEMPLE DAVE
EDITOR: LOWRY TOM TREASURER: SCOTT EMMA
GEC MEMBERS: FEARN JILL; HAMER PETER;
HEEMSKERK RACHEL; ILESANMI YEMISI; LOWRY TOM; MCKENNA KEVIN; SEMPLE DAVE; REES DAVE; RUSSELL ROB; SCOTT EMMA; SUTER PAUL; TWEEDALE SAORSA-AMATHEIA; WELLS NICOLE; WILLIAMS KATRINE; WORSWICK CRAIG

PCS ballot - Vote Broad Left Network

PCS members are voting in elections for the union's president and national executive committee. It is a postal ballot which closes 13 May. PCS is the union for government workers in the civil service and public and private sectors.

The PCS left rank-and-file group, the Broad Left Network, is standing Socialist Party member Marion Lloyd for president and candidates for vice-presidents and the national executive committee.

The Broad Left Network was formed by socialists to replace the current ineffective union leadership, and has challenged their defeatist approach to the key issues facing the union. These include pay, with no fight back against government attacks, and Covid-19, where, for the most part, a fightback has been left to individual members, and any collective action has been too little and too late. The BLN alternative on these and other issues and the slate for the PCS elections can be found at pcsbln.wordpress.com



PAUL MATTSSON

Usdaw's virtual annual conference - a mockery of union democracy



Conference in a 'normal' year

SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBERS IN USDAW

The last year has been a challenging one for retail workers - some sectors have faced furlough and shop closures in the non-essential sector.

On the other hand, the bulk of the union's membership has been on the frontline - while like-for-like sales are up in many supermarkets from 5% to 8% (excluding fuel, sales of which are expected to bounce back), and shareholders dividends have been protected. Despite being recognised as key workers, supermarket workers are still in some of the lowest paid jobs, with poor terms and conditions.

Usdaw's online Annual Delegate Meeting (ADM) could have been a vital opportunity to discuss and debate the way forward on many of these pressing issues.

However, the chaotic way that cut-down two-day conference proceeded meant lay members' voices were squeezed out. This reflects how Usdaw, like many other unions, has become increasingly top-down over the last year.

This was warned about in advance by the left minority on the outgoing executive council, who opposed cutting down conference from the usual four days, and argued for exploring a delayed conference later in the year.

Both days finished early, with much of that time taken up with waiting for votes rather than debate. Because of the 'lack of time' we were told motions couldn't be moved or seconded and, as it transpired, even debated.

Delegates had to apply to speak over two weeks ahead of the conference, with delays in the postal system

meaning many couldn't send slips in advance to speak. In one of the few conference sessions that took place, five out of six speakers had prepared to speak on a proposition grouped as part of a timetabled debate. Two of those weren't allowed to speak and two were stopped part-way through.

Delegates who attempted to reference back standing orders reports to challenge this were blocked off by the staff running the online systems, meaning the president, who should have decided whether to put these to conference, was unaware of them.

In reality, the only real debate that took place was on the leadership's proposals to close the part-time rate of membership subs to new entrants. Worryingly, this was justified by some on the basis that part-time people won't join.

Undoubtedly, this was supported due to the union's declining membership, down around 50,000 from a peak of 430,000 a few years ago. This is partially due to the effect of repeated lockdowns on union organisation, but also to the ongoing crisis in the sector.

Outrageously, at the same time as this measure, and a 6p increase in subs were voted on, five executive council members not involved in the running of the conference took an expenses-paid visit to Manchester. A new logo was also used at the conference without any discussion with the outgoing executive council. As one person succinctly put it on the Usdaw Forum group on Facebook: "This ADM has only been done for the subs vote."

Despite this, motions opposed by the leadership - where delegates only saw the text of the motion and had no

opportunity to hear it moved, combined with often spurious reasoning for opposition by the leadership - received very substantial minority votes.

These included affiliating to the Campaign Opposing Police Surveillance (COPS), supporting councils passing legal no-cuts budgets and in favour of Usdaw moving a new version of Clause 4 containing nationalisation of the commanding heights of the economy under democratic workers' control and management. These received 33%, 36% and 38% support respectively. The latter we think almost doubled in support since the same issue was discussed back at the 2018 ADM.

Seven Socialist Party members attended the conference as delegates, with two speaking, including Leeds Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) candidate Iain Dalton who explained what measures Labour councils could be taking now to help assist the struggles of retail workers.

Iain also called for the objective in the union's rulebook "to work consistently towards securing the control of the industries in which its members are employed" to be actively fought for, by campaigning for the big retail companies to be nationalised under democratic workers' control.

The right-wing leadership of the union may have won the votes on the day, but the substantial minority votes in the face of the anti-democratic way the online ADM was handled, show that the mood in the union for a more decisive lead is growing. We urge Usdaw members looking for such a lead, to join the Socialist Party and the union's Broad Left.

Irish police aid strike-breaking at Debenhams store in Dublin

MILITANT LEFT (CWI IRELAND)

In the early hours of 23 April, Gardaí (Irish police) at the behest of big business, KPMG/Debenhams, forcibly removed former Debenhams retail workers and their supporters, including Militant Left (CWI Ireland) members, from a loading bay in Parnell Street, central Dublin.

These workers, sacked by Debenhams following its closure, have spent the last year preventing the stock inside the stores from being removed. The Gardaí played a shameful role in aiding trucks driven by scabs to gain access to the bay that was blocked by the picket line.

Barricades were erected and several vans of the Public Order Unit arrived to break the strike. Eventually, they gained access to the loading bay and forcibly dragged workers and supporters out by their arms and legs.

This dispute has laid bare the role of the Gardaí and the Irish State. Legislation that was passed under the guise of Covid-19 has been used since the beginning against the strike, with workers' names being taken by the Gardaí at a number of demonstrations for alleged breaches of the legislation. An injunction was

granted to liquidator KPMG a number of months ago.

After less than an hour, the High Court essentially criminalised the right of these workers to continue their pickets. Workers and supporters were arrested and put in cells following an occupation of the Henry Street store in September. In a number of stores, the Gardaí have already assisted in removing workers and helping trucks get past the picket line. Again, on the night of 23 April, protesters were threatened with fines and imprisonment for breaching Covid legislation.

As socialists, we oppose any increase in state and Gardaí powers. We have seen how they have been used against the working class: movements like Black Lives Matter and protests over the murder of Sarah Everard, in London, and against the Debenhams workers in Ireland. The capitalist state will always act in the interests of the establishment, private property and big business.

Attacks on workers' rights will continue as we are forced to pay the price of the pandemic. It is essential that we transform our trade unions into fighting trade unions that can defend workers from the bosses' attacks.

Devonport tugboat crews strike against rota changes

RYAN ALDRED
SOCIALIST PARTY PLYMOUTH

On 26 April, tugboat crews organised in Unite took a second day of strike action against Serco.

In December, Serco implemented a new rota system, with crews expected to work three weeks on, then three weeks off. The tugboat crews are striking for a return to their previous 'one week on, one week off' system.

This attack highlights the massive health and safety concerns of working under extreme fatigue. Similarly, the new rota has adverse implications for annual leave entitlement. Local reps were invited to re-enter

negotiations with conciliation service Acas after strike action on 9 April, but talks have broken down as it's become apparent that management are not prepared to move from their current position.

Unite national officer Bobby Morton said: "Our members showed great courage in standing up to the management when they first took strike action earlier this month in the long-running dispute which has health and safety at its heart.

"Unlike in previous years, where bosses would try to starve the workforce back to work, Unite has a healthy war chest to provide strike pay to workers taking industrial action. This group of workers are absolutely resolute on this issue."

If Serco refuses to budge, Unite members at the Devonport dockyard in Plymouth will prepare to take four more days of strike action in mid-May to escalate their determined fightback to reinstate their former conditions.

St Mungo's workers walkout



St Mungo's maintenance workers in London are on indefinite strike against victimisation and bullying. One worker says: "Reps, especially health and safety reps who have been supporting members in this pandemic, have been targeted during this restructuring process within St Mungo's and now face redundancy."

HEATHER RAWLING
LEICESTER SOCIALIST PARTY

It hasn't always been like this. Food banks, zero-hour contracts, homelessness crisis, an NHS unable to cope. The landslide 1945 Labour government created the welfare state and transformed the lives of millions of working-class people.

The reforms were largely based on the recommendations of the 1942 Beveridge Report. Improvements in housing, health provision and education had been fought for by the labour movement. Trade unionists had long made demands for nationalisation of the coal, steel and railway industries.

Many of the hard-won gains introduced by the post-war Labour government are long gone.

The pandemic has revealed stark inequalities in today's society. The poorest areas have been hit hardest by Covid, with about twice as many deaths as in the richest areas.

Child poverty is on the rise and those already in 'deep poverty' have seen the biggest reduction in their earnings, either being furloughed, having their hours reduced, or being laid off.

So do we need another Beveridge Report? Is it possible to restore the welfare state to its original mission of caring for people 'from cradle to grave' and creating a safety net to prevent destitution? Or do we want to create something better?

In truth, the post-war welfare state was not ideal. There was still poverty, and there was still homelessness. We had a National Health Service but the pharmaceutical industry was left in private hands. Even so, it was a huge improvement on the past.

However, the welfare state was created at the beginning of one of the biggest and most sustained economic booms the world has ever seen. That is not the situation today. Capitalism as a system is in deep crisis. The world economy was heading for recession even before the pandemic. Covid has merely accelerated underlying processes. In 2020, the UK economy recorded its worst economic performance for over 300 years - worse than the slump after the First World War and the Spanish flu.

The original report outlining a universal welfare state was written by a liberal, William Beveridge, and published during the Second World War. It promised to overcome what he patronisingly called the 'five giants' of Want, Disease, Ignorance, Squalor and Idleness.

But why would a liberal pen such as a report? It was written when the Labour Party was in coalition with the Conservative Party. The two main classes in society - the ruling class owners of finance and big business, and the working class - had different reasons for supporting it.

The Great Depression of the 1930s had caused mass unemployment and deprivation for many. Governments acted in the interests of the ruling class. They sought to make the working class pay for the collapse in world trade as they erected trade barriers. The 1931 National Government issued

POVERTY INCREASING. WELFARE STATE IN CRISIS

Do we need a new Beveridge Report?



The pandemic has revealed stark inequalities in today's society

an emergency budget involving drastic cuts in public spending and wages, and a rise in taxation.

The effects on the industrial areas of Britain were immediate and devastating. By the end of 1930, unemployment had more than doubled from 1 million to 2.5 million. Unemployment benefits were severely means-tested and limited to 15 weeks. Many became destitute.

The cruel and barbaric workhouse system was abolished in 1930, but many workhouses - renamed Public Assistance Institutions - continued under the control of local county councils. At the outbreak of World War Two almost 100,000 people were accommodated in the former workhouses, including 5,629 children.

The soldiers of the Second World War were poorly nourished and not as fit for battle as the ruling capitalist class would have preferred. But they didn't just need fit soldiers to defend British interests around the world, they needed a fit workforce to mine the coal, manufacture the steel and produce goods to sell globally. Moreover, the ruling class was concerned that the extreme poverty that they had inflicted to save their economic system might provoke rebellion and revolution.

The report recommended that proposals for the future should not be limited by "sectional interests". A "revolutionary moment in the world's history is a time for revolutions, not for patching". But I don't think Beveridge had in mind a socialist revolution! Rather, these reforms were to head off any revolutionary movements.

The capitalist class and their representatives in parliament were terrified of a post-war revolutionary wave around Europe. Many of them welcomed the Beveridge recommendations. The Times called the report "a momentous document which should and must exercise a profound and immediate influence on the direction of social change in Britain".

However, Winston Churchill and the Conservative Party opposed much of the implementation of the Beveridge Report, including voting against the founding of the NHS.

Churchill was in favour of postponing the implementation of Beveridge until the end of the Second World War and 'the financial situation was known'. Only 29% of the public agreed when parliament voted for postponement.

Workers gave their verdict on Churchill in 1945 when they elected a Labour government with a massive majority.

The working class saw in the report promises of a brighter future. Those that survived the war wanted well-paid jobs, decent homes, and better living standards after the sacrifices they had made. The Labour manifesto promised to address Beveridge's five 'giants'.

Want

The Beveridge Report aimed to provide a comprehensive system of social insurance 'from cradle to grave'. He was opposed to the hated and degrading means testing - a mainstay of the Poor Law for the destitute pre-1945. Workers would now pay a flat-rate weekly contribution and, in return, benefits would be paid to the unemployed, the sick, the retired and the widowed. Family Allowance - a payment for each child - was introduced and paid directly to the mother. Workhouses were finally abolished.

However, the proposals were flawed in many ways: they discriminated against women and there was still the idea of the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor. Benefits were inadequate and at mere subsistence level. They bore no relation to the cost of living. But in a situation of almost full employment during the post-war boom they did provide a safety net for many working-class people.

However, as the post-war boom came to an end in the mid-1970s, successive governments looked to restore capitalist profitability at the expense

of the working class. Years of cuts and austerity have decimated the benefit system. In July 2020, 5.6 million relied on the hated Universal Credit for their income. £257.33 per month for single claimants under 25. £324.84 per month for single claimants aged 25 or over isn't even subsistence. The overall effect has been to plunge people already on low incomes into rent arrears and debt and, in some cases, homelessness.

In the 1930s there were soup kitchens. Today we have food banks. In February 2021 there were over 2,200 food banks in the UK. Means testing increasingly underpins the benefit system, eroding the universalism of the original welfare state.

The Socialist Party says:

- No to all cuts in jobs, public services and benefits
- Defend our pensions. 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
- A shorter working week with no loss of pay

Disease

The National Health Service Act of 1946 gave everyone free health care at the point of entry. Labour's minister of health, left-winger Nye Bevan, came up against fierce opposition from the upper echelons of the medical profession and 'stuffed their mouths with gold' to overcome their resistance. From its birth, the NHS has existed side by side with private medicine.

Today, big business and private



medicine have made huge inroads into healthcare. The Private Finance Initiative is crippling the NHS: an initial £13 billion investment by private companies could cost the NHS £80 billion over 30 years.

Many services, such as cleaning and catering, have been outsourced to private companies, and this process has accelerated during Covid. There are charges for dental treatment and the opticians. Even before the pandemic there were 100,000 unfilled posts as pay has been frozen and the NHS has been starved of funds. The NHS is not safe in Tory hands.

The Socialist Party says:

- Reverse privatisation of the NHS. Bring all outsourced workers and services in-house on permanent contracts
- Abolish PFI and all associated debts
- Kick out the private contractors
- A 15% pay rise for all health workers
- A socialist NHS to provide for everyone's health needs, free at the point of use and under the democratic control of health workers and users

Ignorance

The 1944 Education Act was implemented by the Labour government in 1947. It raised the school leaving age to 15. All local authorities had to provide primary, secondary and further education. Prior to that, most working-class children remained in elementary school until aged 14.

However, the 11+ exam remained, creating a three-tier secondary school system of grammar, technical and secondary schools. At age 11, children were allocated to a school according to their 11+ results. They would be trained for their future working life as academics and professionals, typists and draughtsmen, and factory hands.

Comprehensive education was later introduced by a Labour government, although grammar schools still existed in some parts of the country and 'public' schools still educate the children of the rich.

Maintenance grants for university students, although means tested, were paid by the state as well as tuition fees.

Following on from the marketisation of universities, education is gradually being privatised as academy trusts take over many schools, creaming off funds for managers and threatening education staff's pay and conditions.

The Socialist Party says:

- Free, public and democratically run high-quality education available to all at any age
- End the marketisation of university education. Abolish tuition fees and introduce a living grant
- No to academies and free schools
- Free, publicly funded nursery education for all children who require it



Squalor

Fresh in people's memories was the empty promise of building homes fit for heroes after the First World War. 1.2 million new houses were built from 1945 to 1951, when the programme officially ended: 156,623 of the homes were prefabs. Twelve new towns were also planned to reduce overcrowding. However, the 1951 census revealed that there was approximately the same level of homelessness as in 1931. There were 750,000 fewer houses than was needed and many slums still existed.

The Socialist Party says:

- Implement a massive building programme of publicly owned housing on an environmentally sustainable basis to provide good quality homes with low rents
- Nationalise the banks and building companies under democratic workers' control and management



The heroes of the pandemic are the key workers, the health and care workers who risked their lives and some made the ultimate sacrifice

Idleness

The 1945 Labour government nationalised steel, iron, gas, coal, electricity and railways, which helped to keep unemployment rates low. However, these were all ailing industries that had suffered chronic lack of investment going back decades. Yet they were vital industries to the post-war economy.

The government paid massive amounts of compensation to the owners of these industries and left the original bosses in charge.

All of these industries are now in private hands, sold off at knock-down prices to profiteers.

The Socialist Party says:

- Renationalise all privatised industries under democratic workers' control and management. Compensation paid only on the basis of proven need
- Organise a 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 £15. For an annual increase in the minimum wage linked to average earnings
- Scrap zero-hour contracts. Workers' rights from day one of employment
- Fully fund a public scheme of socially useful and environmentally friendly jobs on decent rates of pay



The war against the Covid pandemic has exposed the weaknesses of capitalism on a world scale. Over 150,000 have died in the UK, over 3 million worldwide. Many deaths were preventable. Failure to lockdown early enough, failures of effective test and trace, lack of PPE, inadequate benefits to enable people to self-isolate, inadequate workplace health and safety - all this contributed to the death toll.

Government spending in the financial year 2020/21 was £394 billion, the highest figure outside of war time. But the capitalist class and its political representatives will attempt to make the working class and the poorer sections of society pay. Furlough is coming to an end in October as well as the top up to Universal Credit. Local councils are passing on public spending cuts to workers.

We cannot let this happen. The heroes of the pandemic are the key workers, the health and care workers who risked their lives and some made the ultimate sacrifice. Capitalism will not offer us a decent future. We need socialism. To achieve that, we need a mass working-class party that can bring together workers in struggle. United on a socialist programme, workers have the potential economic and social power to end capitalism. By nationalising the banks and finance institutions, and big business, under democratic workers' control and management, a socialist government would lay the basis for democratically planning the economy and society and creating a welfare state that genuinely cares and looks after its people from cradle to grave.

Join the fightback

JOIN THE SOCIALISTS

- Visit socialistparty.org.uk/join or call 020 8988 8777
- or text your name and postcode to 07761 818 206

to find out more about joining us today!



Why the Greens are not an anti-austerity alternative

NICK CHAFFEY
SOCIALIST PARTY NATIONAL COMMITTEE

With Keir Starmer swinging Labour sharply to the right, support for the Green Party in the polls has risen in recent months. But what do they do when in power? Recent events in Brighton show they offer no alternative to austerity.

The fact that the Green's budget was voted for by the Labour and Tory councillors in Brighton tells you enough. Smaller-in-scale cuts are still cuts: another £1 million and 30 more jobs cut this year, with a further round of £10-13 million cuts next year shows that the Green Party has no strategy to confront austerity or capitalist crisis.

Out campaigning for the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) in the by-election in Holligdean and Stanmer, we have met a lot of anger at cuts, the impossible level of rents, and the impact of Covid austerity on jobs and poverty. Benefit claimants rose from 5,880 in March 2020 to

14,000 by the end of the year. Youth unemployment has risen 180%.

Councils face an urgent task to meet the needs of working-class communities hit hardest by the pandemic, including the vulnerable, the young and the elderly.

Rather than fight for a no-cuts budget and demand the government funding needed, the Greens supported the transfer of the local domestic violence service RISE, and its £5 million budget, to a corporate housing organisation with no experience in the field. Surely bringing this service back in-house would have been the better option, alongside other privatised services?

Voted against own budget

The Brighton Green Party ran the council from 2011 to 2015, but has learnt nothing from that experience which led to six Green councillors opposed to cuts voting against their own budget.

As TUSC outlined at the time, and continues to reiterate now, the only

way to reverse the cuts is to set a budget based on the needs of Brighton, drawn up by the council trade unions and local communities, and demand that the government fund it. Launching a programme of building affordable council housing, setting rent controls in the city and building mass tenants' organisations would be hugely popular.

Such a stand would receive massive support and put this weak government under enormous pressure to retreat. It would light a torch for others to follow across the country.

We have found enthusiasm for our programme from many of the people we have discussed with in recent weeks. Our candidate, young worker Rob Somerton-Jones, has won support from many angry young people who are getting politically active.

Brighton has seen huge Black Lives Matter protests and weeks of 'Kill the Bill' demos for the right to protest. There has been a huge response in support of RISE, strikes at



Protesting against Brighton Green council cutting Rise, the city's domestic violence service

Brighton University against job cuts, and a determined campaign to stop the academisation of Moulsecoomb primary school.

Brighton has a fighting tradition that is clearly visible. A fight by the council now that united all this

anger, focused around a needs budget that set out to tackle these issues, would get a tremendous repose. But only socialist policies point the way forward.

As we have said before: you need to be red to be green.

Don't go into the water - it's full of shit!

DAVE CARR
EAST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

In the blockbuster movie 'Jaws', where a small coastal community is menaced by a great white shark, the film's tag-line is: "Don't go into the water".

Today, in Britain, that warning should be resurrected. Not because of a lurking marine monster, but because our waterways are being choked by an even bigger threat - raw sewage!

The scale of this pollution is staggering, with thousands of tonnes of it being illegally discharged by

privately owned water companies (more than 400,000 discharges last year).

The water quality of Britain's rivers and lakes has catastrophically slumped in the last five years. According to the government's Environment Agency (EA), all of our rivers and lakes are polluted beyond legal limits. Yet the EA has only prosecuted 174 cases of illegal discharges in the last decade.

As well as privately owned water companies continuing to dump raw untreated sewage into rivers, this ecological disaster is also due to fertiliser run-off - typically from

mega-farms - and illegal chemical discharges from businesses.

According to environmentalist George Monbiot: "The entire river [Wye] stinks of chicken shit, from the ten million birds being reared in the catchment."

Privatised

The highly profitable water industry, privatised by the Tory Thatcher government, extracts so much groundwater that feeds our rivers that many chalk streams and rivers face extinction.

Of course, it's easier for the water companies to extract groundwater than spend money repairing water infrastructure (three billion litres of water is lost through leaking pipes every day), repairing and replacing

old sewage systems, and building new reservoirs (dozens have been sold off following privatisation).

Tory government cuts have meant the EA and its parent Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs aren't sufficiently monitoring or prosecuting illegal discharges of chemicals from companies and agribusiness. In 2016, 97% of rivers were described as being in good chemical health. In 2019, the figure was 0%!

And this river pollution doesn't only mean dead fish. Toxic chemicals leaking into the environment have been linked to an increase of cases of human diseases.

After 4,000 people signed a petition, Oxford City council applied for a section of the river Thames to have 'bathing water status' in order to stop

Thames Water discharging raw sewage into it. In 2019, in Oxford, raw sewage was dumped into the Thames on the equivalent of 82 days.

In 2018 the Tory government set out its 25-year plan to clean up the environment, including 'clean and plentiful water'. However, none of its targets are likely to be achieved. The best that can be hoped for is that this policy paper is recycled!

Private ownership of the water industry has been an unmitigated disaster and threatens public health. It must be renationalised with no compensation to fat-cat shareholders. But given the connivance of capitalist governments with the polluters, it's also abundantly clear we need a workers' government to protect the interests of the majority.

What councils can do to protect the environment

The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) is standing over 300 candidates in the elections on 6 May. Protecting the environment will be a key issue in the various election campaigns. Below is an edited version of a statement produced by TUSC on the question of a green manifesto for councils

The question of councils taking decisive action on climate change is closely tied to the question of opposing and reversing years of cuts in council budgets.

However, there are a range of measures open to councils on environmental matters that can help promote the issue of climate change in limited but practical ways, and build local support for campaigns to secure the public investment for the social housing, transport, community-based and climate projects needed to support and revive working-class communities.

Many of the council powers in relation to climate and the environment have been applied in a limited way and the extent of some of these powers are largely untested.

Climate emergency

Two-thirds of local councils (district, county, unitary and metropolitan) have declared a climate emergency. But it is vital that climate emergency announcements are not just lip service and lead to real action.

Elected councillors, trade unions, environmental groups and campaigners' efforts will be fundamental to holding councils accountable through public pressure to translate paper targets into concrete action.

Although the Climate Change Act did not include a statutory duty for local authorities to set carbon reduction targets, again, public pressure will be needed for councils to set targets based on the carbon footprint not just of council-run services but capturing total emissions for their area.

This is the starting point for drawing up local climate emergency plans. But individual councils will

need to link up to campaign for the funding needed for climate action.

Councils can ensure they buy green energy for their premises and ensure their pension funds disinvest from fossil fuels.

The chronic underfunding, legal market testing obligations and a deregulated transport system are serious obstacles to extending a green, affordable and integrated system of local public transport.

But councils still have powers over emissions from buses and taxi licensing and road building schemes. They have responsibilities for road maintenance and for creating usable and safe cycle routes.

Councils could use their borrowing powers to fund the development of tram networks, electric charging points and, of equal importance, funding a programme of energy efficiency through the street-by-street insulation of every home in their council area: with the advantage of reducing domestic energy use, reducing fuel bills and creating much needed jobs.

Councils will need to take the lead in monitoring and reducing air pollution and could work with the union Unite and Hazards UK which have produced important practical and campaign advice.

Not all local authority land is registered, but will be by 2025. Despite the sale of council land in recent years, councils retain a high level of land ownership. This opens up the

prospect of improving parks, nature reserves, sport facilities, local farmer and food markets, tree planting programmes and accessible public green spaces.

Councils have powers in enforcing environmental standards in public and private housing and buildings. The Green Building Council confirms that local authorities are not restricted in their ability to require energy efficiency standards above building regulations. These powers can be enforced in new builds and the social housing programmes for which TUSC stands.

TUSC's platform

The fight against the continued privatising of local services and bringing services back under public council control is an important part of the TUSC election platform. Councils have powers in setting conditions for procurement and the regulation of contracts with suppliers which should cover good employment conditions, union recognition, service standards - and environmental and ethical practices.

TUSC councillors would work with trade unions to build support for a public campaign to oppose and reverse cuts in council budgets and draw up local climate emergency plans that create jobs and reduce emissions.

While many of these council powers will need to be tested in practice, they will need to be accompanied by



Campaigners in Oxford are simultaneously fighting for their right to swim in the Thames and demanding an end to sewage dumping in it
ASTACUPPIS GOULD/CC

a mobilisation of public support for campaigns, alongside other councils wherever possible, to reverse the endless cuts in the living standards

of working-class families and secure the funding for social and climate projects as part of the socialist alternative offered by TUSC.



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

The crowd defended our rights

Waltham Forest Council has privatised Walthamstow market on a Sunday to a business called Sunday Social. Turns out Sunday Social isn't so social.

The boss of this group bowled over to where we were doing our election campaign activity. He told us that we never had a licence and had to go. He said that he'd take us to court if we didn't go right there and then.

A crowd formed, people who see us all

the time began to defend our right to be there. We started to get rid of more leaflets and sell more copies of the Socialist. The boss man then started on them.

When one friendly passer-by started quoting the law as to our right to be there, this aggressive bloke accused him of knowing nothing and being a 'binman'. The passing friendly bloke said: "So what if I am a binman, binmen keep the market clean, and are more knowledgeable and respectful of this space than you."

A bigger crowd formed. The boss man went to get the market police. A worker in the local park, who I know from walking round there with my dad, stopped, and

started saying to us: "Don't go, don't be bullied".

The whole thing was bizarre, but it showed the consciousness about public space. What felt great was the amount of people who recognise us as part of the local community, and our right to be there.

NANCY TAAFFE
WALTHAM FOREST, EAST LONDON

Thousands protest at Arsenal to say 'owners out'

The mood was angry and defiant. The message was clear: "We want Kroenke [Arsenal's owner] out."

More than 2,500 Arsenal fans, predominantly young, gathered before our home Premier League game against Everton on 23 April to protest the club's despicable role in the short-lived Super League. With the acrid smell of red smoke bombs filling the air, hundreds of homemade signs and placards were on display.

Socialist Party members gave out more than 200 leaflets that said: "Super League

defeated. No trust in billionaire owners. Kick them out. Reclaim the game." They were enthusiastically received, with some fans asking for two or three at a time.

Fans of the 'big six' and others are simply not going to let those responsible get away with it without consequences. Widespread revulsion and anger across Europe can lead to a radical, far-reaching movement to ensure fundamental change in club ownership.

JOHN VINER
ARSENAL FAN

Another Socialist Party member and Arsenal fan at the protest said:

"High on the list of fan grievances was Arsenal's recent decision to make 55 staff members redundant, including beloved mascot Gunnersaurus. These redundancies came immediately after receiving £3.6 million for winning the 2020 FA Cup, and qualifying for the Europa League, which also comes with more TV money and cash prizes.

"Although the Super League plans have fallen apart, many Arsenal fans and others feel that cancellation and apologies aren't enough. The only way to make sure that the Super League stays dead, is to take our clubs back from the billionaires."

Super League defeated, see page 3

LGBT+ hustings: missed opportunity

The Stonewall Cymru/Wales hustings was unfortunately a missed opportunity for LGBT+ people to really hold candidates to account. It was very stage-managed with no questions taken.

Unfortunately, Stonewall Cymru refused the appeal by Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) Wales to include a candidate in the panel. This is despite TUSC standing in every region in Wales, and Stonewall Cymru's LGBT manifesto containing demands that TUSC Wales fights for. We would have liked the opportunity to explain how we would achieve it.

Will the other parties lead a fight in the Welsh Parliament to demand extra funding from Westminster, like TUSC Wales is calling for? Or will they pay for LGBT+ services by making budget cuts elsewhere - aren't they just 'robbing Peter to pay RuPaul'?

The Tory candidate claimed that trans

rights conflicted with other people's rights. This was not challenged by the other candidates. TUSC regrets that we were not given the opportunity to do so, and put forward our programme of a united fight for services for all.

You can read more about TUSC Wales' support for LGBT+ rights and our campaign at tuscwales.org.uk.

BEN GOLIGHTLY
CARDIFF

Tory and Labour cronies

It is a good thing that the Conservative government is facing an attack on cronyism. Whatever the Tories do, they will continue to be tainted.

If they vote for an inquiry, their dirty linen gets washed in public. If they vote against, they will correctly be accused of a cover-up.

Unite the Union supports 'insourcing'. Outsourcing services has been a uniform disaster, except for the cronies who have been lining their pockets at the expense of public services. Making money while

others suffer is very much the 'greed and capitalism' which Boris Johnson worships.

If socialists are to be seen as serious opponents of cronyism, then the actions of any and every politician, including Labour, must be subject to scrutiny. Tony Blair was accused of 'a culture of cronyism' when it was revealed that four government ministries refused to obey rules ostensibly drawn up to avoid the jobs being awarded to political allies.

Tony Blair is a millionaire many times over. He provides advice for some of the most appalling regimes in the world, most notably Kazakhstan. Blair gave the regime damage-limitation advice following the December 2011 Zhanaozen massacre.

DEREK MCILLAN
DURRINGTON, WEST SUSSEX

A political alternative for black and Asian people

Socialist Party, as part of Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC), recognises the disproportionate way black and Asian

people are affected by the pandemic, and within the capitalist system itself.

In recent anti-racist protests, we have seen black and Asian youth fighting the inequality within the system. In workplaces, we are seeing workers coming out to fight for better pay and conditions.

We are now seeing more black and Asian people looking for a real alternative, including in the ballot box, that will improve their lives and livelihoods.

Voting for the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) in the upcoming election is an opportunity to vote against cuts, to send a message that we want an alternative to the current miserable conditions facing ordinary people.

Traditionally, black and Asian people have seen Labour as the party for them. But the Labour Party, under Keir Starmer, is not a party that represents our interests. It is turning more and more towards big business and the capitalists.

One in five Labour MPs are now black or minority ethnic. But that's not enough. It is the policies that they stand on that matter.

TUSC stands for a decent future for all: an end to low pay and insecure jobs and for more funding for youth services, NHS and schools.

TUSC is based on the working class and it is therefore not surprising that there are a number of black and Asian workers and young people standing as candidates.

It is an example of how a real fighting socialist programme can encourage black and Asian people to be involved in the fightback.

CAMMILLA MNGAZA
BLACK COUNTRY

Derby Labour regrets cuts and promises more

The leader of Labour group on Derby Council was on the radio. He explained that when Labour controlled the council, they 'had' to make cuts in jobs and services to balance the books. He said they balanced the books, and had a lot of reserves when they handed over power to the Tories.

With hindsight, he said Labour should have used the reserves to save services and jobs back then. He then went onto explain Labour's manifesto, and not a

word was mentioned about using today's reserves to save jobs and services!

CHARLIE TAYLOR
DERBY

Billionaires get richer, millions question system

The world billionaires increased their wealth to sickening levels from \$8.04 trillion in March 2020 to \$12.39 trillion in March 2021 - a 54% increase. Millions of workers have lost their jobs, or suffer poverty wages, while disease and hunger stalk the world all over.

The International Monetary Fund has warned about 'social cohesion' - a serious questioning of the capitalistic system and the capitalist class's rule. Millions of youth and workers are looking for a change to the anarchy of capitalism. Only rational socialist planning, on a world scale, can provide the security and resources for all, with peace and harmony across the planet.

BILL MURRAY
BIRMINGHAM

Socialist Student action marks the way for a national student movement for free education

THEO SHARIEFF
SOCIALIST STUDENTS NATIONAL ORGANISER

Socialist Students were out in force on Wednesday 21 April across the country campaigning for tuition fee and rent refunds for students, and for free education.

Across 26 different campuses, Socialist Students held lively campaign stalls, open-air meetings and protests to discuss with students how we can build the campaign on our local campuses, and link up with students in struggle across the country.

Even though face-to-face teaching has yet again been delayed on campuses, meaning some universities were quieter than they would usually be after the Easter holidays, hundreds of students across the country put their names to petitions demanding fee refunds and signed up to get involved with Socialist Students.

The further delay to campus reopening has only fuelled student anger and added to the feeling that once again, students have been left behind. Socialist Students lays the

blame for this delay at the feet of university management and the Tories, who thanks to years of cuts have collectively failed to make our campuses safe for students and staff.

There was widespread agreement that we need to build a national student movement to fight for all this. Students this year have gone to battle against marketisation using rent strikes.

Students have won various levels of rebates from universities, also winning tens of millions of pounds of emergency funding for universities from government.

But imagine how much further we could go if actions across different campuses were linked and coordinated nationally!

Socialist Students has laid down the marker for what is needed to end the crisis facing students and staff on the university campuses - a new national student movement to fight for free education, to scrap fees, for a cancellation of student debt, and for the introduction of living grants for students.



UAL Socialist Students showing solidarity with striking Goodlord workers (see page 6)



Southampton - signing up students to demand fee and rent refunds on 21 April

Nottingham

Our campaigning at Nottingham Trent University (NTU), as part of the Socialist Students day of action, had a very good response. Students who had seen it advertised came along to help leaflet and campaign with us for the first time. While speaking to students about tuition fees and rent refunds, it was clear there was anger about the situation that we have been left in, many talking about the need for a protest on campus to demand refunds.

Due to mounting pressure by rent strike groups, NTU, along with some other universities, has eventually given some rent reductions. But as one student said, many are in private accommodation and have not yet got concessions.

At some points there were queues to sign our petition to refund fees, and quite a few students agreed to attend the follow-up Zoom meeting on the 25 April. Socialist Students now has enough signatures to start an official society at NTU.

There was definitely a mood among students that it's necessary to continue the fight for these concessions by protesting, with a lot agreeing that a campaign to return to free education was needed. And that they wanted to take it further and push for socialism.

JAKE GEORGE
NOTTINGHAM TRENT SOCIALIST STUDENTS

University of the Arts London

Since the beginning of the pandemic, students across campuses at the University of the Arts London (UAL) have been left feeling misled and short-changed. We handed over tuition fees and signed onto

courses with the assurance that we would be provided with practical and hands-on learning, with free and regular access to the vital training and facilities.

In the light of continuing gains made by the collective action and struggles of many students throughout the last year, it is clear now more than ever that student action must be taken in order for our discontent to be heard and demands met.

Since the beginning of the academic year UAL Socialist Students has been gaining support and momentum, and on the 21 April we called for a campus protest to be held outside Central St Martins College of Art.

Our demands were that the university refund tuition fees for the years affected by the pandemic, and that it is vital that these funds are made up for by the government, as a stepping stone within the wider struggle for free education and against Tory cuts. It is imperative that students fight now, otherwise we will face footing the bill of the impending economic crisis.

STANLEY HARRIS
UAL SOCIALIST STUDENTS

York

On 21 April, members of the Socialist Party and Young Socialists gathered in St Helen's Square alongside speakers from the Independent Workers' Union of Great Britain, York Student Solidarity Network and others, to demand free education and to speak of their experiences within an increasingly corporatised education system.

A persistent theme was the crisis in youth mental health, with speakers highlighting the devastating consequences of privatisation and cuts to healthcare, exacerbated by mishandling of the Covid pandemic. Also highlighted was the systematic denial and cover-up of sexual

harassment and violence at all levels of education.

Connections were made with other struggles, as youth unemployment fuels the gig economy and students are increasingly forced to work alongside their studies. Those present were also reminded of the necessity of opposing the new anti-protest bill, so that our voices may continue to be heard on these and other issues.

ALISTAIR MANSFIELD
YORK SOCIALIST STUDENTS

Leeds

Students from Leeds colleges and universities and Socialist Party members rallied at Leeds University Union on 21 April to fight for tuition fee refunds for the year.

With many people enjoying nearby outdoor seating areas, we managed to approach a lot of these and give them information about what we were up to. There was a lot of footfall through the campus, and people were receptive to our efforts in fighting for tuition fee refunds. Kat, a Leeds Socialist Party member, managed to do four interviews with local radio stations and a segment was featured on the ITV news website.

ALICE HENNIGAN
LEEDS SOCIALIST STUDENTS

Join the student fightback: join...



- Visit socialiststudents.org.uk/join
- or call **020 8988 8761**
- or text your name and school, college or uni to **07749 379 010**

South West regional conference shows that socialist ideas can grow

ROBIN CLAPP
SOCIALIST PARTY SOUTH WEST REGIONAL SECRETARY

Socialist Party members from 29 towns, cities and even villages gathered over Zoom for the Socialist Party South West region conference on 18 April.

Hannah Sell, Socialist Party general secretary, introduced the first session with an analysis of the current volatile political situation in Britain and internationally. This prompted a wide-ranging and rich discussion that dealt with the crisis in working-class political representation, impending battles in BT, the lessons of the British Gas workers' defeat over 'fire and rehire', and the dangerous situation smouldering in Northern Ireland.

Recruitment

In the afternoon, we reviewed the work of the Socialist Party in the last year, a uniquely challenging one that had nevertheless seen us recruit 56 new members in the region. Stand-out contributions from young workers Joe and Henry highlighted the role that the Socialist Party had played in arming them both with a programme and the confidence to go out and recruit others.

Both sessions were chaired by members who had joined since December 2019 and are now branch secretaries. New party branches are beginning to flourish in Dorset, North West Somerset, and Cornwall,

and we were very pleased to have representation at the conference from visitors in Swindon.

Reports were given about the successful trade union work we have helped to initiate, with several regional National Shop Stewards Network meetings being held over the last year. We have also been the catalyst through our work in various trades councils for the launching of regular regional 'key workers summits'.

With another 26 new members already signed up since January, and a group of at least ten more who want to join following further discussion, there is plenty to do. Standing as part of the nearly 60 candidates in the local elections under the banner of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC), members appreciated the few hours at conference to stand back and acknowledge the strides forward we have made.

Discussing ideas is important, formulating perspectives and tactics indispensable, but matching words with deeds determines whether a party is serious about succeeding. To that end the conference finished on a triumphant note with the announcement that the meticulously planned fighting fund appeal had yielded a colossal £3,505 in donations.

Despite working in often challenging and inhospitable geographical areas of Tory terrain, South West members continue to demonstrate that in this period socialist ideas can be popular everywhere.

● To get Socialist ideas out there, we need to have the funds - socialistparty.org.uk/donate

Congratulations to members of the South West region of the Socialist Party who have already smashed through their fighting fund target thanks to over £2,000 already paid in from the £3,500 pledged at their regional conference. Socialist Party members' in the Northern region are also very close to reaching their target having raised over £700 at a regional public meeting.

With the easing of lockdown, more and more Socialist Party activists are starting up their regular campaign stalls and getting a really good response. We are the only ones putting forward a real alternative. The Socialist Party is confident that we've got the ideas and the programme to fight austerity, cuts and the misery of capitalism.

But for us to get our ideas out there, we need to have the funds. The Socialist Party branch in Stevenage raised £12.55 campaigning for a decent pay rise for NHS and care workers. Campaigning on the same issue in Pontypridd raised £37.40. Socialist Party members in Mansfield raised £17.60 on their public stall while campaigning in the elections as part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition.

These are just a few of the reports we have received from recent Socialist Party campaigning activity.

Surrey Socialist Party is continuing to get a good response to the Socialist Party election appeal, sending in a further £100. We also received a £10 donation from Mick Clarks who says: "I have something to vote for now."

AREA	\$ RECEIVED	\$ TARGET	Q2: APRIL-JUNE 2021	DEADLINE: 30 JUNE 2021
South West	2,043	1,800		114%
Northern	739	750		99%
North West	433	1,150	38%	
Wales	831	2,300	36%	
London	1,575	4,600	34%	
Southern & SE	574	2,350	24%	
East Midlands	322	1,850	17%	
West Midlands	333	2,600	13%	
Eastern	145	1,200	12%	
Yorkshire	110	2,550	4%	
Other	145	3,850	4%	
TOTAL	7,250	25,000	29%	

Covid pandemic

India's health system in meltdown under Modi's misrule



A patient seriously ill with Covid is stretchered into an overwhelmed hospital facility

An unmitigated public health disaster is gripping India. The daily number of people infected with Covid-19 has exceeded 350,000 for a week - the highest of any country since the pandemic began. Health services have been overwhelmed. Dead bodies are lying outside hospitals. Patients are dying from a lack of oxygen supplies, forcing relatives to scour the black market to obtain scarce and exorbitantly priced bottles. Meanwhile, the Modi-led Hindu-nationalist BJP government isn't addressing the shortages of medical supplies by intervening in capitalist manufacturing. Instead, it has allowed unmasked and non-socially distanced mass election rallies and religious gatherings to take place, thereby spreading the pandemic.

Yuvraj of New Socialist Alternative (CWI, India) reports on this disaster, and why socialism is the only alternative.

India's health system has failed to scale up in order to handle the current surge. Instead, it is simply melting down under the sheer pressure. Patients' families being made to desperately look out for beds is commonplace. Some families have travelled as far as 500 kilometres with patients in a desperate search for beds. Medicines, oxygen, and all kinds of supplies, are running short.

Doctors, nurses and medical staff are reeling under this acute pressure. Making matters worse, fires have broken out at hospitals.

The failure of the health system is, in brief, the failure of the capitalist system and the ruling political elites serving its agenda.

Reckless implementation of neoliberalism over the past three decades has seen the healthcare system largely privatised. And a conscious policy of underfunding of the public health care system has seen it cut to the bone. The control of resources, under private ownership, has meant they are only put to use when profits are guaranteed.

At the start of the pandemic private hospitals kept aloof. They later joined with the public sector making their resources available - but only at prices that were simply beyond the reach of even the middle class.

The interplay of market forces serves the needs of capital but only at the cost of society. Take the example of critical medical supplies. India does have a relatively large-scale capacity to produce most of these supplies. It is the third largest pharmaceutical industry in the

world by volume. But despite such a mammoth manufacturing capacity, we see acute shortage of drugs and a consequent hefty pricing for them.

The pharmaceutical industry in India is mainly geared towards exports and has been manufacturing primarily for its global clients, ie global pharmaceutical giants. The capitalist state largely doesn't interfere with the interests of private capital. Consequently, this manufacturing base could not be utilised to produce the medicines or other supplies needed to deal with the Covid crisis.

One of the BJP-ruled states hosted Kumbha Mela - a large religious gathering that saw gatherings of literally thousands of devotees crowding together. These crowds, mainly from northern India, are potential voters for the BJP's Hindu nationalist agenda. Needless to say, Kumbha Mela became a Covid superspreader event, infecting hundreds of thousands. The massive election rallies in West Bengal (eastern state), hosted by the BJP and including the PM, have also contributed to spreading the disease.

Take the case of the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine, for example. Building upon India's pharmaceutical manufacturing strength, the Serum Institute of India was selected for manufacturing the vaccine. Serum now manufactures millions of doses and supplies them worldwide.

Last year, prime minister Narendra Modi visited its plant and attempted to portray it as a nationalist endeavour. But all his pretences have now fallen flat. The pricing of the vaccine

in India is now the highest in the world, costing Rs.600 (around \$8) per dose. And this is when the company could make a profit even at price of \$2, as stated by the owner of Serum itself.

BJP, the ruling party, now epitomises all the ugliness one could imagine of capitalist politics. While the government relentlessly preaches people to follow social distancing, the BJP has shamelessly flaunted even basic protocols when it came to mass gatherings, for its own political benefit.

The state and established political parties have thus been preoccupied promoting their own agenda or serving the interests of their masters, ie the capitalist class, while thousands are left to perish.

This is the ugly face of capitalism and hence the need to overthrow capitalism and replace it with socialism - a system based on public ownership of large-scale industry, with democratic planning of production geared to serving the needs of society.

How partition of Ireland derailed a revolutionary struggle for national and social liberation

The recent street disturbances in Northern Ireland, albeit on a far smaller scale compared to the decades of the ‘Troubles’, showed that the ‘power sharing’ arrangements of the 1998 Good Friday Agreement have failed to bring about a resolution of the ‘Irish national question’ or end the sectarian divide, under capitalism. A pivotal event in this enduring sectarian divide was the partition of the country, which the British ruling class engineered 100 years ago in 1921 in order to cut across a developing working-class socialist movement. **Niall Mulholland** of the Committee for a Workers’ International (CWI) explains how partition came about.

On 24 May 1921, elections to the new Parliament of Northern Ireland saw the Ulster Unionist Party win two-thirds of the votes cast and three-quarters of the seats in the Assembly. The creation of Northern Ireland (in the northeast of the country made up of six counties, with a Protestant majority) was followed a few months later by the birth of the Free State (26 counties, with an overwhelmingly Catholic population). As the great Irish workers’ leader, James Connolly, forewarned in 1914, the partition of Ireland would be accompanied by “a carnival of reaction”. Both states were born out of counter-revolution, sectarian pogroms and military rule. From the outset, they were impoverished and church-ridden capitalist states. The Catholic minority in the North were subject to institutionalised discrimination and state repression.

Was this division the inevitable outcome of supposed age-old animosities between Catholics and Protestants?

The 17th and 18th century ‘plantation’ of Protestants, mainly from Scotland to Ulster, who were given lands confiscated from the rebellious native Irish Catholics, was a colonial policy of ‘divide and rule’. However, the United Irishmen’s 1798 rebellion, led by northern Protestants radicalised by the American and French revolutions, illustrated that “Protestant, Catholic and Dissenter” could unite against repressive colonial rule. After the heroic ‘98 rebellion was put down with great bloodshed, the Act of Union saw the Irish parliament in Dublin abolished. Nevertheless, under the heel of colonial exploitation, religious persecution and famine, resistance in Ireland continued, taking both ‘constitutional’ and physical-force forms.

The question of Irish self-rule came onto the agenda for decades prior to World War One. By the 1880s, the Home Rule party, representing

the growing middle class in the south of Ireland, held the balance of power in the House of Commons.

In April 1886, Prime Minister William Gladstone introduced his first Home Rule Bill. Although it provided for the most limited form of self-government, the Ulster bosses saw it as a threat to their prosperity.

Following the Act of Union, industry in the mainly Protestant north east, such as the linen mills, engineering and later shipbuilding were prospering, and depended on Britain and the Empire for their markets.

Ulster Unionist bosses formed an alliance with the Conservative Party. The 1886 Bill was lost in the Commons and another Home Rule bill was defeated in the House of Lords in 1893.



British imperialism’s greatest fear was the possibility of the struggle against colonial rule in Ireland converging with the politically radicalised working class in Britain

Unionist bosses also cemented links with the reactionary Protestant Orange Order - formed in 1795 as a bulwark against the United Irishmen - and carried out a systematic policy of discrimination against Catholics.

Despite their political differences, Home Rule-supporting bosses in the south and Ulster unionist employers were both alarmed by the rise of the labour and trade union movement.

The 1907 Belfast dockers’ strike resulted in the formation of the Irish Transport and General Workers’ Union two years’ later. In 1913, the Dublin employers locked out 25,000

workers, which ended in stalemate. The Irish Citizen Army was formed during the lockout, to defend strikers from police attacks, and was fashioned by James Connolly as a revolutionary socialist militia.

At the same time, the Home Rule crisis continued. After the 1910 Westminster elections, the British Liberal government was dependent on the votes of the parliamentary Home Rule party. In 1911, the powers of the House of Lords were limited by an Act of Parliament, opening the way for Irish home rule.

Unionists began organising and drilling for what became known as the Ulster Volunteer Force. When the Liberal government in London made a precautionary move against Unionist resistance, using the British army in Ireland, they were met with a mutiny of British army officers at the Curragh barracks.

The Irish National Volunteers were formed at the end of 1913 and controlled by an uneasy alliance of Sinn Féin supporters, members of the secret Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB) and John Redmond’s United Irish League.

Civil war seemed to threaten until the outbreak of World War One. The unionists were promised by the British government that participation in the war would secure Ulster against Home Rule. The Redmonites were told that sending workers to the killing fields of Flanders for the “rights of small nations” would bring post-war home rule to Ireland.

The Volunteers split, with a minority under Sinn Féin and IRB influence opposing participation in the war. Connolly’s Citizen Army took the same attitude. These forces led the 1916 Easter rising. The revolt failed but British brutality, particularly the executions of the rising’s leaders, including Connolly, radicalised the nationalist population.

In February 1917, republicans put up an independent candidate in a by-election in North Roscommon who easily defeated the Redmonite



A mural in Derry depicting the 1960s civil rights movement - the beginning of the ‘Troubles’ in Northern Ireland. Partition by the British ruling class created the Frankenstein monster of sectarianism, that has turned upon its maker
PHOTO SUZANNE MISCHYSYN/CCC

candidate. The Irish Volunteers’ numbers mushroomed to between 50,000 to 60,000. Sinn Féin grew rapidly, with Eamonn de Valera, the most senior surviving commandant of Easter 1916, at its head. The leadership was, in effect, a coalition of nationalists of varying political views and class interests.

Absence of leadership

With James Connolly dead, the labour movement leadership did not take an independent class position on the national question. They allowed middle-class nationalists to lead the struggle for national liberation.

Yet the power of the working class was on display. When the British government announced in early 1918 that conscription would be introduced in Ireland, the Irish Trade Union Congress and Labour Party called a successful general strike on 23 April and halted British plans.

In February 1917, republicans put up an independent candidate in a by-election in North Roscommon who easily defeated the Redmonite

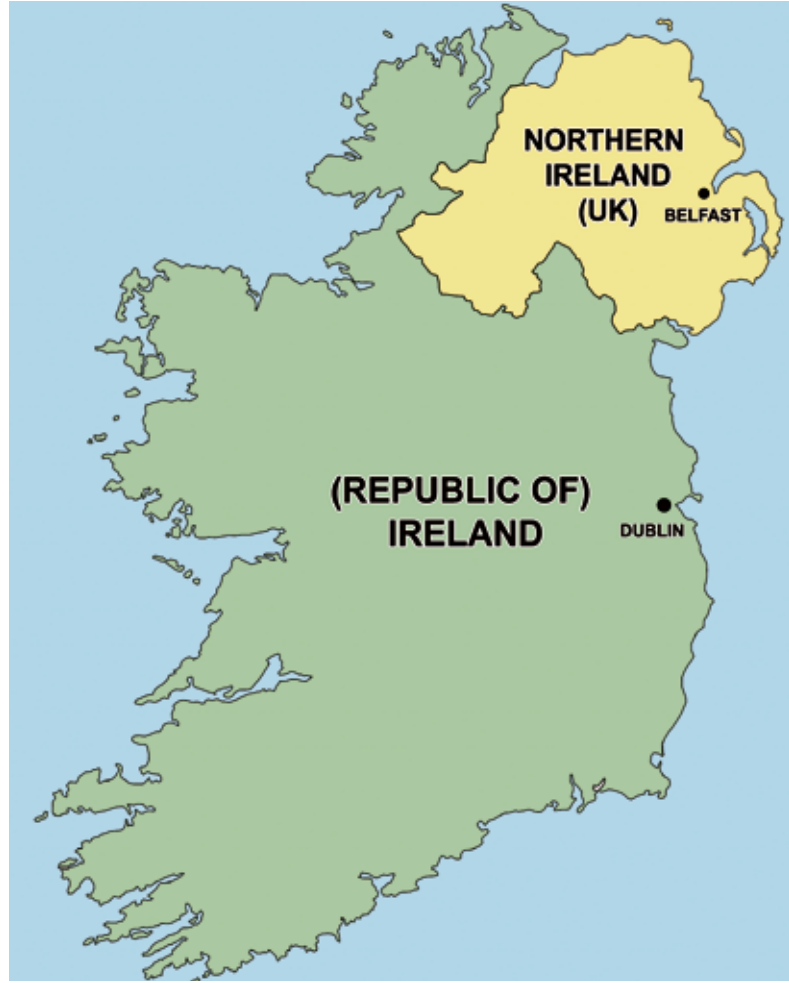
the Royal Irish Constabulary. Michael Collins, the Volunteers’ Director of Organisation and Intelligence, ordered the obtaining of arms and ammunition. The Volunteers now became the ‘army of the Irish Republic’ - the IRA.

A clash between IRA men of Cork No 2 Brigade and the military in Fermoy on 7 September opened the ‘War of Independence’.

This was a largely rural guerrilla struggle against British colonial brutality. Throughout the war, strong class tensions existed within the republican movement. Sinn Féin leaders were mainly from the middle and lower-middle classes. Most IRA fighters were urban workers and the rural poor, and many instinctively wanted social and national liberation.

The British ruling class was also deeply concerned by rising industrial struggles. In 1919, an engineers’ and transport workers’ strikes in Belfast assumed general strike proportions. The power of the organised working class was on display again on 12 April 1920, when the Irish Congress of Trade Unions and Labour Party called a general strike in support of political prisoners on hunger strike.

Thousands of British troops were poured into the country to augment



movement throughout Ireland and Britain.

Faced with a drawn-out guerrilla campaign, international condemnation of British brutality, an economic slump following World War One, restive populations in other parts of the Empire, and waves of industrial and social unrest across Ireland and Britain, the Westminster government moved towards imposing a ‘constitutional settlement’ in Ireland, exploiting the sectarian conflict in the North.

Government of Ireland Act

In December 1920 the Government of Ireland Act was passed, stipulating two separate parliaments, one in the North, one in the South.

The Act was foisted on Ireland by British imperialism primarily in order to divide and disorientate the workers’ movement. British imperialism also wanted to hold onto the industrialised north east and maintain vital naval bases.

Unionists grudgingly accepted the Act because most of Ulster would still be part of the United Kingdom and they had a secure Protestant majority in the six counties (65% Protestant, 35% Catholic).

Northern Catholics were isolated and terrorised in Northern Ireland as the reactionary Unionist state consolidated itself. The May 1921 elections to the new Northern Ireland parliament resulted in the Ulster Unionist Party winning 40 out of 52 seats. The republican movement rejected the Act and continued to meet as the Dáil.

By mid-1921, both the British government and IRA realised that they had reached a military stalemate. A truce was called in July 1921. De Valera led a delegation to negotiations held in London but he rejected the offer of token independence.

In October, a new delegation led by the anti-socialist Arthur Griffith went to negotiate with Prime Minister Lloyd George.

The PM threatened that if they

did not sign the treaty the British would embark on a course of all-out war “within three days”. Griffith and other compromising middle-class republican leaders agreed to the British terms.

Only the working class could have led a successful struggle against imperialism. The middle-class Sinn Féin leaders had no perspective for the mobilisation of the workers, let alone Protestant workers. This was the role of the labour movement but its leadership had abjectly failed to carry it out from 1918 onwards.

On 6 December 1921, the Sinn Féin delegation to Downing Street put their names on the Anglo-Irish Treaty, accepting the creation of the border between Northern Ireland and the Irish Free State.

Many rank-and-file working-class republicans who had led the guerrilla struggle felt betrayed. The Catholic church and the Irish bosses’-owned newspapers framed the Anglo-Irish Treaty as a choice between peace and a return to stability or a resumption of guerrilla warfare.

The Dáil Éireann narrowly voted 64-57 in favour of the treaty on 7 January 1922. Bitterly fought general elections in June saw more pro-Treaty than anti-Treaty TDs (MPs) elected.

The IRA split, with the majority rejecting the Treaty. The pro-Treaty section formed the new Free State army. Anti-Treaty forces established a separate headquarters in the Four Courts building in Dublin. A tense standoff ensued. Using British artillery, the Free State bombarded the Four Courts and a civil war began.

The Free State conducted a ruthless military campaign. 77 IRA members were executed. While the anti-Treaty IRA involved the most radical volunteers, overall it was dominated by pro-capitalist leaders, like Eamon de Valera, who mainly wanted better

terms with Britain. The civil war ended in April 1923, with the anti-Treaty IRA defeated. When de Valera led a section of the defeated anti-Treatyites into the Dáil in 1927, Sinn Féin and the IRA split.

Legacy of partition

The effects of the civil war lasted for decades in the south, as the successor parties of the pro- and anti-Treaty sides, Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil, dominated Irish politics. They presided over an impoverished state, mass emigration and domination of everyday life by the Catholic Church.

In the North, the institutional discrimination and repression of Catholics finally exploded into the civil rights struggle in the late 1960s. Brutal state repression and the failure of the reformist labour and trade union movement to offer a lead saw a generation of Catholic working-class youth turn to the individual terror campaign of the Provisional IRA.

After nearly 30 years of conflict, a negotiated settlement led to the Good Friday Agreement in 1998 and the power-sharing Northern Ireland Assembly was established. But under capitalism, nothing has been fundamentally resolved and sectarian divisions remain.

Contentious issues, such as Brexit, the ‘east-west’ Irish Sea customs border, demographic changes and calls for a ‘border poll’ (a referendum on whether Northern Ireland should remain in the UK or join the Irish Republic), as well as the failure of the ‘peace dividend’ to find its way to Protestant and Catholic working-class areas, underscore the inherently volatile and unstable Northern Ireland entity.

Yet the tradition of workers’ action and unity against sectarianism is also alive. Bus workers walked off the job after facing physical attacks during riots in mainly loyalist areas over Easter.

As the painful lessons of partition show, developing working-class unity and creating an independent party of the working class with a socialist programme is essential.

A socialist Ireland, with full rights guaranteed for the Protestant population, as part of a socialist federation of Ireland, Scotland, England and Wales, on a voluntary and equal basis, and a socialist Europe, can finally overcome the bitter divisions.

● See also ‘Troubled Times’ published in 1995 by the late CWI member, Peter Hadden. The book (currently out of print) deals with the reasons for partition and the role of class struggle in Irish history. It can be read online at marxists.org



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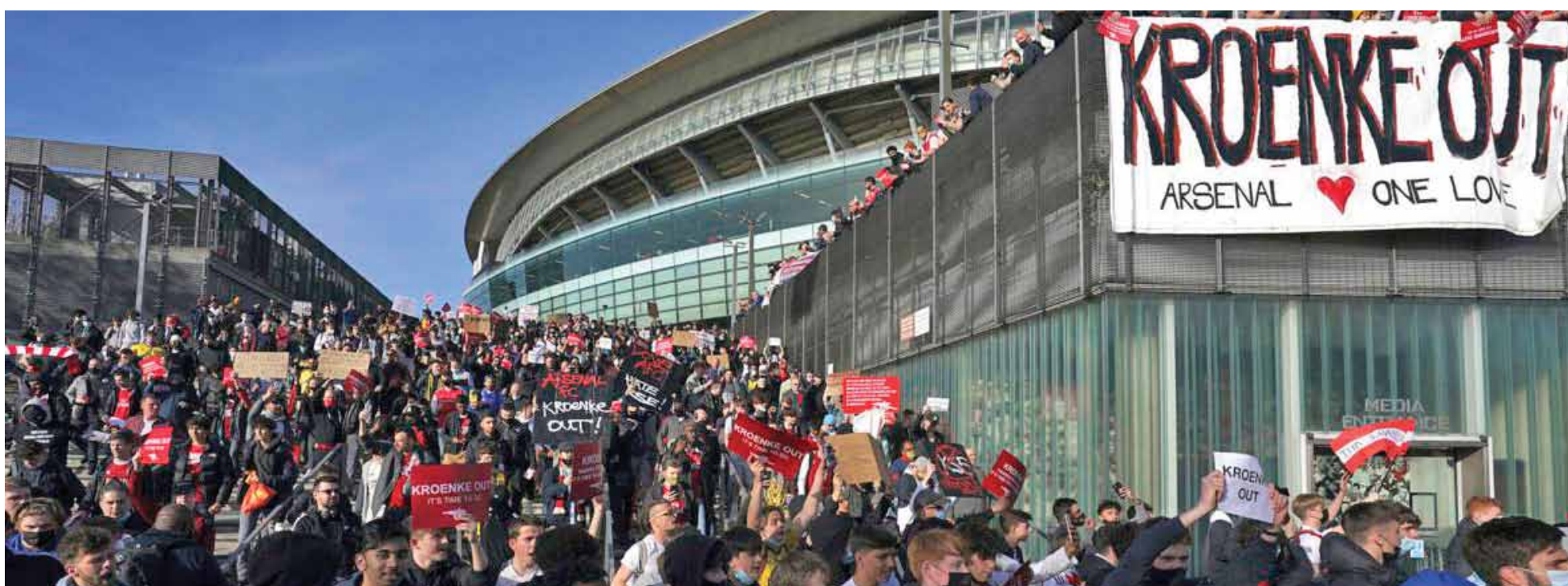
Issue 1131

29 April - 5 May 2021

formerly **Militant**

Super league defeated

PROTESTING WORKS



UNITE TO DEFEND THE RIGHT TO PROTEST

NICK HART
BLACK COUNTRY SOCIALIST PARTY

The past fortnight has been a perfect example of the power of protest. Football supporters gathering in their thousands outside stadiums defeated the plans for a money-grabbing European Super League barely two days after they were first made public.

The lessons of these demonstrations won't have been lost on the millions of working-class fans who agree with them. As former player Ian Wright put it, just imagine what could be achieved if the same energy went towards stamping out racism and inequality.

No wonder then that the Tories want to criminalise protest. The Police, Crime, Courts and Sentencing Bill could see football fans protesting against greedy owners, NHS workers marching for a living pay rise or women demanding an end to harassment jailed for up to ten years if they're judged to have caused "serious annoyance".

The police will have the power to impose times, routes and maximum noise levels on demonstrations. And if you're taking part in them as a striking worker, you'll have had to jump through hoops on ballot thresholds and picketing that form part of the most restrictive trade union laws in Europe.

It's not hard to see why the Tories are

bringing in these new laws. The budget has promised a further £16 billion worth of cuts, below-inflation pay rises for key workers, and a phasing out of furlough and other measures which have so far prevented mass destitution on the back of the pandemic.

The ruling class want to make ordinary people pay for this crisis, but at the same time fear the uproar this could create. As the relief at the vaccine being rolled out and the better aspects of normal life returning turns to anger at job losses and 'fire and rehire', the Tories could face an enormous backlash.

However, this won't come from the Labour Party, which to begin with didn't even oppose the anti-protest bill. No wonder, when Keir

Starmer's intention is to become a prime minister who acts in the interests of big business, and Labour councillors are repeatedly voting to cut public services.

That's why we need to build a new mass workers' party that backs protests rather than trying to ban them.

The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition is standing over 300 candidates on Thursday 6 May as a first step towards creating that political alternative.

If you agree, join us in building a socialist organisation that doesn't just fight for the right to protest, but for an end to the problems created by capitalism which we find ourselves protesting against.

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

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

