

Our lives, our jobs, our future

NOT SAFE IN TORY HANDS!

- **Organise against the capitalist profit system**

- **Build a new mass party of workers and young people**

- **Fight for socialism**



One law for them and one law for us. Nothing summed that up better than **Dominic Cummings' trip to Barnard Castle during the first Covid lockdown.**

Now the thieves have fallen out. Cummings' revelations in parliament have underlined what we already knew - from day one Johnson's Tories have put the profits and interests of big business and the rich before the health and livelihoods of the rest of us.

'Herd immunity' - the reckless risking of tens of thousands of deaths of ordinary people - was official Tory policy at the beginning of the pandemic. At every crucial stage thousands of people unnecessarily died because the Tories didn't want to upset their friends in the boardrooms by locking down the economy and threatening their profits.

Lucrative Covid contracts have been dished out to those same mates - no questions asked. It's clear that the Tories want to continue with this 'crony capitalist' model for the 'recovery' - contracting out public services in health and other sectors to the private profiteers, and centrally doling out money for infrastructure projects in return for votes.

While workers have had a 20% pay reduction on furlough, lost their jobs, had their wages frozen and their hours cut, and fire and rehire on worse conditions is itself becoming a pandemic - the number of billionaires in the UK has reached its highest level for 33 years! 24 extra 'Covid billionaires' have been created over the last year.

We haven't been able to trust the Tories during the pandemic, and we can't trust them with what lies ahead as they try to make us pay for the Covid crisis. But neither can we have confidence in a Starmer-led Labour Party that has gone along with the Tories' big business agenda at every stage.

Workers and young people need their own party; a new party that can organise to fight on a mass scale for our interests in the way that the Tories and other establishment parties defend the capitalists and their rotten profit system.

The Socialist Party is campaigning in the trade unions, in the communities and among young people for such a party to be built - and for a socialist alternative to the capitalist inequality and injustice that Covid has so visibly laid bare.

the Socialist

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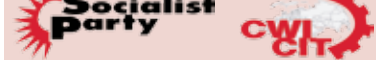
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"The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it."
Karl Marx

Socialist Party
WHAT WE THINK

The Israeli bombardment of Gaza lasted for eleven days, with terrible loss of life and devastation on the ground. The death toll of Gazans was 248, more than a quarter of them children. Residential buildings, hospitals and schools were destroyed. Power, water and sewage infrastructure was hit, adding to the humanitarian catastrophe.

While agreeing to a ceasefire, Israel's government, led by Benjamin Netanyahu, made no commitment to stop its brutal policing methods against Palestinian protests, nor to stop the planned evictions of Palestinian families from their homes in East Jerusalem.

So further provocations and attacks of the outrageous type that preceded the outbreak of war remain at the discretion of the Israeli regime, and the conflict could worsen again at any time.

The Israeli government had met its immediate war aims - a whipping up of nationalism to try to bolster its position and propaganda that it had severely damaged the Hamas leadership in Gaza.

Netanyahu is presently on trial in the Israeli courts on charges of corruption and has failed to achieve a ruling coalition majority in four successive general elections. So he had plenty of reason to encourage a distraction and surge of nationalism.

Oslo failure

For the Palestinians in the occupied territories, the ongoing expansion of Jewish settlements and other Jewish-only infrastructure is reducing and atomising the land on which the 1993 Oslo deal once gave some hope of a Palestinian state.

But none of the mainstream, pro-capitalist Palestinian political parties - including Fatah and Hamas - have a strategy to prevent this process. Likewise, the capitalist powers worldwide that have been involved in the cycles of 'peace' talks have shown their complete inability over decades to offer a way forward.

The Palestinians can only rely on their own struggle against the Israeli ruling class and the occupation, and this will inevitably also mean challenging their own pro-capitalist elite. They need a new intifada, a mass popular uprising, democratically organised and fully under their own control and decision making.

The Palestinian protests that arose in East Jerusalem before the war - against evictions, brutal policing and the storming of the al-Aqsa mosque - were showing the type of actions that need to be built, and achieved some victories.

But when Hamas and other militias in Gaza intervened by firing rockets into Israel, it shifted the struggle onto a different plane, out of the hands of the protest movements. In addition, the rockets, which killed 12 Israelis, helped the Israeli government with its war propaganda among Israeli Jews, as Israeli civilians were the worst hit by them.



PHOTO MARY FINCH

Palestinians need a new socialist intifada

As well as the need for the Palestinians to have democratic control of their own struggle, they also need to build their own mass workers' political party, independent of capitalist interests.

This applies for the Israeli working class too. It needs its own political representation, to be able to put forward, a programme in its own interests, and because only the workers' movement in Israel has an interest in and ability to put forward the programme that is necessary for a genuine Palestinian state to be achieved.

Countering division

An urgent task at present for Israeli workers is to counter the danger posed by the division between Jews and Palestinians which arose during the war, by organising against the far right and sectarianism wherever it is threatened.

The potential power of workers' action was shown in a general strike on 18 May by Palestinians across Israel and the occupied territories in support of the protests against the repression in East Jerusalem and the war on Gaza. Also, thousands of Jews and Arabs demonstrated against their government and the war in Tel Aviv on 22 May, as well as there being protests in other cities.

The workers' movements in Israel and Palestine will need to develop socialist programmes, as decaying and rotten capitalism can only offer inequality and insecurity on both sides of the divide.

Building a socialist Palestine and a socialist Israel will become part of a process of movements across the Middle East turning to the same objective - the removal of capitalism. That will be the only basis for a future that can satisfy the needs and aspirations of all the peoples of the region.

And for the tens of thousands who have taken to the streets in Britain over the last two weeks to protest at Israeli state terror and for Palestinian self-determination - joining the struggle to end capitalism and for a socialist system should be the next step.

Organise for 3 July NHS pay protests



PHOTO ELAINE EVANS

MICK SUTER
SHEFFIELD SAVE OUR NHS CHAIR

Saturday 3 July will be the first opportunity for workers to voice their opposition, on the streets, to the Tory government's shambles dealing with the pandemic - 150,000 Covid deaths, 25,000 in care homes, and the lack of protection to NHS staff with over 250,000 catching Covid. 850 NHS workers have died.

These are the rewards for NHS and other key workers from the Boris Johnson government, while their friends and cronies reap huge profits from public sector contracts through the ongoing privatisation gravy train.

- Insulting 1% pay offer to NHS staff
- Derisory 1.5% pay off to local government workers
- Pay freeze for public sector workers
- Employers' 'fire and rehire'
- Job cuts in education and local government due to reduction in government funding

'Health Campaigns Together', 'Keep Our NHS Public', 'NHS Workers Say No', and 'NHS Staff Voices' have called for nationwide protests. It is important we build for rallies and demonstrations on 3 July to show the anger and opposition.

In Yorkshire and Humberside, we are planning three regional protests in Sheffield, Hull and Leeds. Planning meetings with nurses, NHS staff, trade union councils, civil servants, education workers and health campaigners are taking place to organise these events. The four organisations that have called the protests

have produced leaflets plus resolutions and letters for trade unions. Socialist Party branches are drawing up plans of action. We need to contact the local health groups and find out what plans have been made. If there are no plans in your area, then look to form a steering committee and contact NHS, other trade unions and health campaign groups to participate in building for the protests.

The Socialist Party demands:

- **15% pay rise for all NHS staff**
- **End public sector pay freeze**
- **Reverse privatisation and bring the care sector into the NHS**
- **For mass investment in NHS and social care**
- **Safety is paramount for workers and patients**
- **End employers' 'fire and rehire'**

BUILD THE CAMPAIGN TO PREPARE FOR INDUSTRIAL ACTION

ROGER DAVEY
CHAIR WILTSHIRE AND AVON UNISON HEALTH BRANCH

Following the sacrifice and commitment from NHS staff throughout the pandemic, and if you consider that health workers are now 15% worse off in real terms than we were in 2010 - you could reasonably assume that we would be rewarded with a substantial pay rise.

However, we have been told that the limit of what the government is willing to pay us is a measly 1%. In effect, that workers will have to pay for the Covid crisis not just through our health, but also with further cuts to living standards.

After the financial crisis in 2008, we were made to pay for the crisis caused by the capitalists. This time our message has to be that that someone else has to pay - that someone being the super-rich!

In order to achieve success we need a national and local programme of action that seeks to mobilise workers everywhere. We need to be prepared to take the fight into the workplaces and onto the streets, including building for a national demonstration.

Such a campaign can give real confidence to health workers, and will apply pressure to the Unison leadership to reject any paltry offer from the government, and prepare for a successful ballot for industrial action.

Pass this motion in your local union

- We give full support to the National Health Service and NHS workers. We condemn the derisory pay offer from the Tory government to NHS staff, and agree to support any campaign from NHS unions for a substantial increase in pay within the NHS. This should apply to all NHS workers, including outsourced staff who should be brought in-house to work directly for the health service on NHS pay, pensions, terms and conditions.
- We also condemn the Tory government's public sector pay freeze and the employers' 'fire and rehire' strategy. We call on all relevant unions to campaign in preparation for national coordinated strike action to end the pay freeze and the attempts to lower wages and conditions.
- We call on our national union to work with other unions to call a national demonstration to properly fund the NHS and end privatisation.
- 'Health Campaigns Together', 'Keep Our NHS Public', 'NHS Workers Say No', and NHS Staff Voices' have called for demonstrations and rallies on Saturday 3 July 2021. We agree to play a role in building for a rally and demonstration in ... and calls on all shop stewards, members, delegates and affiliates to support it.

Socialist Party
WHAT WE STAND FOR

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

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

Our demands include...

PUBLIC SERVICES

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

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!
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 today!

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Organise to oppose Tory academisation plans

MARTIN POWELL-DAVIES

CANDIDATE FOR NATIONAL EDUCATION UNION
DEPUTY GENERAL SECRETARY

In April, Education Secretary Gavin Williamson announced that he wants all schools to become academies.

While educators have rightly learned to treat Williamson's ill-considered pronouncements with disdain, his announcement was nevertheless a warning that this government still plans to push further towards doing away entirely with any kind of democratic local control over education through elected local authorities. Academies are schools that receive their funds directly from government and so operate independently of an elected local authority. They can set their own terms and conditions separately to national or local agreements.

A push for further academisation by ministers risks more governing bodies wondering if they should 'jump

before they are pushed' into joining a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT), particularly if the Labour Party leadership's previously firmer opposition to academisation weakens under Starmer.

Meanwhile, the legislation that forces unwanted academy conversion onto schools deemed to have been 'failed' by Ofsted will continue to do its damage. But the tenacious struggle by staff and parents at Moulsecoomb Primary in Brighton to defend their community status shows how firm opposition can - and must - be built and given our full support (see 'Brighton marches to defend Moulsecoomb Primary School' at socialistparty.org.uk).

Instead of allowing further academisation, educators, parents and unions need to step up our calls for the return of schools to genuine democratic local control where they can work together in meaningful partnership, funded to fully meet needs, and with all staff employed under nationally agreed pay and conditions.



Socialist Students join protests against academisation in 2016 LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

Five reasons to oppose an academy transfer:

● Becoming an academy doesn't improve educational attainment

The academisation of schools has been just one aspect of a global drive to break up state education and impose an education market of competing chains of schools. In England, Ofsted, SATs and exam league tables have been the weapons used to unfairly grade and compare both schools and school students, creating a culture of 'failure' instead of genuine school improvement.

Research has consistently shown that academisation does not result in improved educational attainment. The results of a four-year evaluation by researchers at the UCL Institute of Education concluded that: "there is no positive impact on the attainment and progress scores of pupils in MATs when compared to equivalent non-MAT schools". It also noted that "pupils in larger MATs did worse, particularly in secondary schools".

● Academisation and the 'market' in education have increased inequality

Instead of encouraging genuine school improvement, through sharing of good practice, reduced workload, better training and support,

and funding to meet needs, the marketisation of schools has done the opposite.

The pressure of league tables and Ofsted gradings has encouraged schools to 'game the system', changing their intake to improve results at the expense of their 'competitors', rather than genuinely improving education for all. "Two-thirds of academy chains perform below the national average for all state schools on key measures of attainment for disadvantaged young people," according to research from the Sutton Trust.

Fragmentation, and the undermining of national pay and conditions and facility time arrangements has also increased inequality for staff. The British Journal of Sociology has found that academies are more likely than other schools to employ teachers who are unqualified, and the government's own data shows that pay inequality is greater for staff working in academies than in schools under local authority control.

● Becoming an academy will not protect your school from budget cuts

Just as in the NHS, imposing a market on schools was supposedly meant to improve 'efficiency'. The lack of accountability that comes with privatisation instead risks spending being diverted to cronyism and pay rises for those at the top.

Overall, the break-up of state education has been a mechanism to cheapen the cost of education, both

by making it easier to cut local authority services, and by driving down staffing costs. Fragmentation of education into many different employers has helped to weaken trade union organisation and undermine nationally agreed pay and conditions.

While, in the initial drive to encourage academy transfers under Tony Blair, financial incentives were provided to encourage schools to convert, academisation is certainly no longer a way for governors to protect themselves from budget cuts. In fact, without the support of a local authority, an academy leaves itself more exposed. The most recent National Audit Office report into schools' financial sustainability - last compiled in 2016 - confirmed that a greater proportion of academies were running annual deficits than local authority maintained schools.

● Being an academy doesn't increase educational 'freedom'

Academisation was sold to schools as a way of giving them 'freedom' from the 'bureaucracy' of a local authority. Certainly, when schools are returned to local democratic control, it must also be done in a way that ensures there is a genuine voice for schools, staff, parents, unions and the wider community.

In reality, academisation has provided no genuine 'freedom' at all. Instead it has allowed greater government centralisation and the growth of unaccountable MATs where parent, staff and student voices are rarely heard.

Once converted, schools become a commodity that can be transferred from one MAT business to another. If parents and governors want to change their mind and return to local authority maintained status, it's too late. The current

legislation means that a decision to become an academy is irreversible. What's more, once that transfer has happened, the government is entitled to then transfer a school to a new trust, without any further say by staff, parents and governors. Over a thousand academies have been 'rebrokered' to new trusts in the last five years.

● Schools will do far better in partnerships without becoming academies

The real solution to ending the chaotic and damaging fragmentation of state education in England is to return all schools to democratic local control. But, until then, remaining maintained schools need to resist the pressure to convert, and develop their own school partnerships instead.

While educational research continues to show that the academisation

is failing, it also shows that what really works is genuine partnership between local schools within a local authority.

For example, the successful school improvement initiatives around the London Challenge from 2003-2011 were based on local support for teaching and learning, not academisation.

Of course, if local authority services and education budgets continue to be cut, then the resources needed to meet all students' needs, and to develop genuine partnership and school improvement, will be even harder to find. That's why, in opposing academisation, we also have to fight for education funding and oppose cuts to local authority services.

We must make clear that academisation doesn't provide any way forward. In fact, it is part of a deliberate strategy to help governments drive down the costs of education. Instead, we have to organise to defend all schools fighting academisation and demand a return of all schools to democratic local control, funded to meet the needs of all.

Pimlico academy head quits, but struggle goes on

Pupils, staff and parents at Pimlico Academy in south west London have scored another victory for collective action. This follows protests by pupils at the end of March against racist uniform policies, and staff in the National Education Union (NEU) passing a motion of no-confidence in the head.

Head teacher Daniel Smith has now resigned less than a year into the job, and he is not the first Pimlico head to leave in disgrace: in 2014 Jo Shuter faced a teaching ban for misuse of the academies funds

(see 'Academy schools have become business ventures' at socialistparty.org.uk). A day after Smith departed, staff in NEU received the result of their industrial action ballot with 85% voting in favour of strike action. The head may be gone, but staff still have demands on bullying management, and strikes could still take place.

Parents of the school's students have a protest planned for 31 May, to celebrate the victory and to stand in solidarity with staff in their ongoing battle.

Great British Railways shake-up offers no end to profiteering

Nationalise the whole railway system

'TOM WOODCOCK'

RMT HEALTH AND SAFETY REPRESENTATIVE

The Tories have announced there is to be a reorganisation of Britain's national railway system, which will see the biggest shake-up since privatisation in the 1990s. Privatisation is widely accepted as having turned an underfunded public service into a highly subsidised private racketeering exercise. That is not set to change. Rather, shareholders are set to shore up a more stable revenue.

Currently, Britain's railways are a complicated web of different organisations: the government's Department for Transport which specifies the train services required; Network Rail - the arms-length government-owned company which owns and maintains the infrastructure; Train Operating Companies (TOCs) which are granted franchises to run the train services, and three Rolling Stock Leasing Companies (ROSCOs) - private firms which own the trains themselves and hire them to the TOCs. Beyond these headline organisations there are an array of outsourcing firms and contractors who carry out cleaning, maintenance and other tasks.

Profit

Each organisation from Network Rail downwards takes its cut, adding unnecessary additional expense to satisfy their shareholders' demands for profits.

The lust for profits within our railways brought about the creation of a body of railway lawyers, hundreds strong, whose only job is to apportion blame for train delays in order to avoid their respective organisation footing the bill. This is hardly surprising as, by levying fines against those responsible for each minute of delay instead of working collectively to try to resolve problems, the capitalists involved will try to pass the buck to someone else.

So disastrous has been the



Train guards in RMT union took strike action in 2017 to defend the role of guards on trains from attacks by bosses ROB WILLIAMS

privatisation of the country's railways, the industry has been on life support since day one. For instance, when privatisation commenced the railways received around £1 billion in subsidies; today that figure is over £4 billion. What exactly have these private companies brought to the table? Very little it seems, yet as more and more taxpayers' cash is pumped in they have been leeching off eye-watering sums of money as they take their cut.

According to transport workers'

union RMT, since 1997 TOCs have trousered £3.2 billion in franchise dividend payments, and the three ROSCOs extract on average £260 million every year. Every penny of this windfall should have been re-invested in the railways.

Missed opportunity

Therefore, the government's plans to re-organise the railways, with a view to eliminating waste, provided an ideal opportunity to renationalise the railways and sweep away all of

the spivs and profiteers from our national railway system.

This is not going to happen. In fact, the profiteering is set to continue, this time with even less risk for the TOC shareholders, as they are to be paid a guaranteed sum as a management fee rather than relying on revenue from fares. Great British Railways will subsume Network Rail and the TOCs, and will aim to provide a unified organisation, which the government claims will offer some more flexible ticketing options for the more

71% of British TOC franchises are foreign-owned, many by national governments with their own nationalised railways! Numerous polls show a majority of the British public support renationalisation of the railways. That's why the RMT union has a policy to fight for the genuine renationalisation of rail.

● Anti-racist activist Sasha Johnson shot

Sasha Johnson, a London-based black activist, was shot in the head in the early hours of 23 May. Sasha was a prominent figure during the Black Lives Matter protests in the summer of 2020, and is now a member of the Taking The Initiative Party (TTIP).

Reports say that four men entered the garden of a party in south London and discharged a firearm, but police say there is "nothing to suggest" it was "a targeted attack". TTIP report that Sasha had recently received death threats but the police have dismissed these threats as "not credible". TTIP adds "Surely, to end up in hospital having sustained a bullet shot to the head, makes a death threat more credible."

Sasha spoke to the Socialist during the Black Lives Matter protests in



Sasha Johnson AMNON COHEN

June 2020; she said: "I'm fed up of oppression and the working class feels the same. We have to challenge all injustice. We won't accept lip service from the councillors and the police, who say they support us but who stop their pants in the street."

"We have to start our own system, as the working class we are working to survive. We have to dismantle the system to get equality."

At the time of publishing Sasha remains in hospital in a critical condition. We hope that Sasha makes a full recovery to join us in the working-class struggle against injustice.

● Britain's drone strike secrets

Does the Ministry of Defence (MOD) deploy drones to carry out air-strikes outside of formal armed conflict?

This is a question raised after a number of drone strikes killing British citizens abroad.

Even MPs can't get an answer, because the MOD refuses to share its targeting guidelines. Apparently, important information cannot be released because a senior US official wants it redacted. If elected politicians don't have oversight of the use of Britain's nine 'Reapers', and soon to be another 16 Protector drones, who does?

● Covid data cover-up

From 17 May, the government no longer required secondary school children to wear face coverings in school. You would presume this was a safe move, approved by public health officials.

However, a Public Health England report published on 13 May had a page missing. Journalists at the Observer report that data on the spread of the new Covid variant in schools

flexible workforce emerging in the post-pandemic period.

The government report says nothing about the rampant profiteering by parasitic ROSCOs and others that is bleeding the industry dry. However, the implications for railway workers are clear: staff costs are to be driven down, which will inevitably bring the employers into bitter conflict with the rail unions. TOC and Network Rail workers are already subject to a two-year pay freeze: These proposals are guaranteed to pour petrol on the flames.



For socialists the only option is immediate nationalisation of the whole railway system under workers' control and management

For socialists the only option is immediate nationalisation of the whole railway system under democratic workers' control and management, with minimum compensation for the former owners, every penny of which should be granted only on the basis of proven need.

We do not have any need for TOCs, ROSCOs, contractors or any other parasitic organisations which serve no purpose than to extract profits from the railway system at the expense of the community as a whole.

71% of British TOC franchises are foreign-owned, many by national governments with their own nationalised railways! Numerous polls show a majority of the British public support renationalisation of the railways. That's why the RMT union has a policy to fight for the genuine renationalisation of rail.

was now missing from what they saw in the 'pre-print'.

More evidence that the government puts profit ahead of health, and why we need democratic, trade union-led control of Covid safety.

● Bashir brings BBC attacks

Martin Bashir, when employed as a BBC journalist, used falsified documents in an interview with Princess Diana. Dishonest capitalist journalism is widespread across media.

The Tories will undoubtedly try to use these revelations to further attack the BBC in an attempt to drive it more to the right and pressure it to perform increasingly as a mouthpiece for the Tory government.

(See 'This is the BBC: fight the cuts - and the capitalist media' at socialistparty.org.uk)

Martin Powell-Davies is standing for deputy general secretary of NEU, and your branch of NEU can nominate him, nominations are open now.
For more info visit martin4dgs.co.uk

CWU elections: Vote for a fighting, campaigning, socialist EC member

GARY CLARK
CWU PEC AND NEC CANDIDATE, AND
SOCIALIST PARTY SCOTLAND

This has been an extremely challenging time for all of us in the Communication Workers Union (CWU). We have come through this and are now electing the new national executive committee (NEC) which will be leading the union for the next period.

I strongly believe we are going to face unprecedented challenges which we need to adapt to and ensure the CWU is prepared to fight for its members.

In Royal Mail, we have now got a new national agreement after a tremendous and long campaign, where we collectively took on and saw off the latest CEO. But now is not the time to sit back. We must keep pushing ahead for the benefit of all our members.

The agreement includes a 2.7% followed by a 1% pay rise which our members have welcomed and now is the time to push ahead on pay. We must demand and campaign for all our members to achieve a real living wage of £15 an hour basic plus allowances, including London weighting.

We have also seen Royal Mail dragging its feet when it comes to a 35-hour week. This must stop, and we must push ahead with this at pace, with an implementation date by 2022, and if management refuse, we must meet this with a campaign and, if needed, action from us.

For years now we have been raising the issue of management's bullying culture, demanding that this bullying behaviour be dealt with through recent national agreements, but managers continue bullying our members regardless. When we do get action, the majority of times managers are just moved sideways rather than disciplined. This must now stop. Words must be backed by action.

Politically we have seen the Labour Party move decisively to the right and back to the Tony Blair era. The Corbyn days are now over and



PAUL MATTESSON

this clearly should fundamentally change our relationship with the Labour Party.

Our members will rightly be asking how can we support a party that does not support us? We have seen certain Labour figurers attacking us publicly.

I am calling for the CWU to only support candidates who support us in the CWU. Whether that is from within or outside the Labour Party.

Some will say this will see us outside the Labour Party and we will not be able to get support from people in parliament, but there are several unions which are not affiliated to the Labour Party at present.

We should be calling on the unions to call a conference to discuss political representation for workers, including building a new workers' party as Labour has deserted us again.

We must also demand renationalisation of both Royal Mail and British Telecoms and make sure our members on strike are supported.

I will only take the average postie's wage and put the rest back into the movement. I will be a fighting, campaigning, socialist postal executive committee and NEC member who keeps in constant touch with the most important people, the CWU members.

RMT: Support Alan Pottage for assistant general secretary

SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBERS IN RMT

Socialist Party members in the RMT are supporting Alan Pottage in the assistant general secretary election, called to replace Mick Lynch, who has been elected as general secretary.

The announcement of a major reorganisation of national rail services (see page 5) as well as the failure of Transport for London to agree a funding deal with the government, raise the spectre of redundancies and cost cutting by attacking pensions and pay.

Already the national rail industry has imposed a two-year pay freeze. In response to this, RMT has adopted a fighting programme of resisting job cuts and defending the pay and conditions of transport workers across rail, maritime and road transport sectors.

The challenge facing the union leadership now is to mobilise the membership and put that programme into action. Alan Pottage understands that challenge, and has a record

of the kind of militant, organised trade unionism

necessary to deliver it. Importantly, Alan has always defended the concept of a members-led union.

Socialist Party members will welcome any opportunity to discuss the building of Alan's campaign and, crucially, the programme he stands on. The focus has to be giving a lead to the 80,000 RMT members who understand the threat presented by the government at this time. We need

our national officers to lead from the front and ensure that rallies and branch meetings are taking place in every region to bring members together at this time.

We need a commitment to coordinate, as far as possible, fights to defend pensions, resist job cuts and bust the pay freeze in every sector. This approach needs to be taken into the wider trade union movement, with RMT in the vanguard.

The RMT has been to the fore in the fight for independent working-class political representation over the last two decades, including the development of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition and supporting Jeremy Corbyn. This legacy of former RMT leader Bob Crow must be defended.

We also need officers who will respect the democratic control of the membership, through their elected national executive, not just once a year at AGMs, but as a method of ensuring that our union is led by the membership at all times.

We look forwards to working with Alan and seeking to promote these policies in RMT.



NUJ leadership pushes through subs increase but left lands blows at conference

CWI MEMBERS IN THE NUJ

The National Union of Journalists (NUJ) held its online delegates meeting (conference) on 21 and 22 May, with mixed results for the left. A key debate was over a proposed rise in members' union subs. The national executive committee argued that "without a subs increase, the NUJ will be left with no choice but to seek to join a larger, general union - the fate of several other small craft unions".

There is no doubt that the union faces a serious financial situation, but the thrust of the leadership's argument is that members, most of whom get low-medium pay and are in precarious work, have to stump up more subs. These are already among the highest subs levels for unions. The leadership rejected an addendum to their motion that called for higher-paid members to pay higher subs.

The left of the union argued for years that a serious campaigning drive was needed to recruit new members, particularly from new areas of media and the freelancers. This is the key to sustaining the NUJ, along with the union fighting strenuously for its members' interests in the workplace.

The national executive committee proposals barely mentioned recruitment. Instead, they conducted a months-long scaremongering campaign and succeeded in getting their vote through at conference.

Their allies from the Irish executive committee put forward a motion

calling for the removal of a two-thirds majority needed to change subs levels. Speakers against included Niall Mulholland (London Magazine branch and Socialist Party member), who argued that this was an attempt to make raising subs a matter of routine, and marked a weakening of union democracy.

Like the executive committee's motion, it would not end the crisis of the NUJ's future viability, as many members would leave the union, unable to pay rising subs, and potential lower-paid members would be put off from joining. Importantly, delegates rejected scrapping the two-thirds rule on raising subs.

Moreover, delegates also agreed to do away with the need for a proposer and seconder to allow people to join the union, which is antiquated and unnecessarily bureaucratic. It is vital that the union opens up further in order to recruit, and not put up barriers.

National executive committee member Anton McCabe, a Militant Left supporter (CWI Ireland), spoke on recent threats against journalists in Northern Ireland: "This union will not accept attacks on or abuse of our members. That was shown by the response to the killing of Lyra McKee and the response of our members in Northern Ireland to threats before Christmas.

"Women journalists are particularly under threat. There have been vile threats to Patricia Devlin and Allison Morris in Northern Ireland. That

poison is also crossing the Irish Sea, with Amy Fenton in Cumbria having to flee her home."

Niall Mulholland moved a similar motion from London Magazine, seconded by Felicity McCall's (Ireland North West) powerful testimony of attacks against her during the 'Troubles'. It called upon the NUJ to support initiatives by trade unionists in the north of Ireland "against intimidation and attacks, including from paramilitaries, and from state coercion; and for a society based upon the common interests of all working-class people." This was passed overwhelmingly.

Some progress was made at conference regarding anti-racist campaigning. But the leadership successfully argued against amendments to its motion on Palestine/Israel, which would have committed the union to taking more concrete solidarity action without illusions in capitalist right-wing politicians and establishment institutions.

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Metroline London bus workers win huge victory

SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBERS IN UNITE

Bus workers employed by Metroline in London have won a tremendous victory in the battle against the imposition of 'remote sign-on' (RSO).

The company had intended to introduce trials of the measure, which the union warned had huge pay and safety implications, as well as representing the beginning of the 'Uberisation' of the job.

The campaign had already secured a six-month moratorium on the introduction of RSO while a review took place. However, the Unite union warned that the remit of the review appeared to be more about how it

should be introduced than whether it should be introduced at all.

The union issued notice for strike action, leading to further talks, following which a proposal was hammered out. This proposal was then discussed by shop stewards who agreed to put the proposal to the members. The proposal means no introduction of RSO, either on current or future contracts or routes. This will remain in place until 31 December 2022, following which, if the employer wishes to revisit the issue, it must consult with Unite.

Garage-by-garage consultation was undertaken, with the result that over 70% of members voted to accept. This is a huge victory. Before the campaign instigated by Unite,



TAVO JOHNSON/CW

Thurrock refuse workers beat council and bin pay cut

ESSEX SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBERS

Striking Thurrock bin workers have beaten Tory Thurrock Council. Around 90 workers in the waste and recycling department had been on strike since the 13 April and were fighting pay cuts of between £1,200 and £3,800 a year. But the council has now made changes to the original proposal which means members will not have a reduction to their pay. The workers will return to work on Monday 24 May.

Socialist Party members supported the strike throughout and morale on the picket lines (right) was extremely high. After only two days, mountains of rubbish were piled up at the drop-off points the council had arranged in place of the house-to-house collections. Unite's compliance team had leafleted around the estates getting widespread support from the public.

Strikers realised that they are holding the line for refuse workers around the country, and also for workers in care and other services in their own authority. This victory will give a boost to others fighting similar attacks.

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Goodlord sacks strikers - fight the penny-pinching, bullying bosses!



Goodlord mass picket, including occupying the company courtyard, 25 May LONDON SP



Property services company Goodlord, where workers have been on indefinite strike since 22 February, sacked the striking workers on 19 May. The company was trying to impose a pay cut, and has now ignored the legal protection against dismissal for strikers in the 12 weeks after a ballot. Therefore, the strikers have an extremely strong case for claiming unfair dismissal, and Unite has pledged to support them in this, starting with a mass picket outside the Goodlord offices on 25 May.

The members of Unite's London Digital and Tech branch reballedot on 26 April and voted overwhelmingly to continue their action. This ballot cited new issues, including the dismissal of strikers whose fixed-term contracts ended while on strike,

the hostile environment strikers have been subjected to by the company, and the use of agency workers to undermine the effectiveness of their action.

The workers are currently discussing what action to take next, and Unite has said it will "consider all legal options to bring Goodlord to account for its breach of hard-won trade union rights."

Solidarity with the Goodlord workers in their fight against the Goodlord bosses!

- Sign the petition: organise.network/campaigns/teamup-stop-using-goodlord
- Messages of support to grefstaff@gmail.com, messages of protest to tom@goodlord.co.uk and Twitter @sogoodlord

'Fire and rehire' attempts spread - coordinated fightback needed

The fight against the workplace epidemic of bosses using 'fire and rehire' continues, with engineers at the Weetabix's factories in Kettering and Corby in Northamptonshire planning to walk out over pay and conditions. Workers and unions say they are being made to accept new contracts that could mean some of them losing up to £5,000 a year. The Unite ballot for strike action opens on 27 May and closes on 3 June.

Argos is also threatening hundreds of its workers with fire and rehire. Among the proposed changes are reducing employer pension contributions, leaving staff to pay more to

maintain the same benefit. Workers will also get up to four fewer days annual holiday. And those getting company car allowances will see the amount slashed by up to £3,000 a year. Some staff could be down £4,000 a year.

Unite is also coordinating industrial action at a Jacobs Douwe Egberts coffee plant in Banbury over fire-and-rehire plans.

Recently, Unite members and bus drivers at Go North West defeated fire-and-rehire attempts there following determined strike action, showing the plans can be defeated when workers and their unions fight back.

Cadent Gas plans 200 job losses

JOHN MERRELL
LEICESTER SOCIALIST PARTY

Cadent Gas has announced 200 redundancies, the closure of its Hinckley site, and the transfer of the remaining staff to a new site at Ansty, Coventry.

Cadent acquired five gas distribution regions from National Grid in 2017. Previously, Unison's national leadership had allowed the National Grid to create a two-tier workforce (permanent and temporary) at the lowest grades, on the assurance that the temporary staff would act as a 'buffer' against future redundancies. Cadent has rendered that assurance to dust by getting rid of most if not all the temporary staff.

As many staff live locally and do not have their own means of transport, both announcements threaten their livelihoods. Cadent claims it

will be seeking voluntary redundancies but the scale of dismissal will make compulsory redundancies inevitable.

Unison's long-standing policy of opposing compulsory redundancies is about to be severely tested. The local leadership must urgently convene a members' meeting to put forward a winning strategy to defend jobs and to facilitate all members transferring to the new site.



WHERE NOW FOR THE SCOTTISH INDEPENDENCE MOVEMENT?

6 May 2021 saw the election of a majority of MSPs to the Scottish parliament committed to a second referendum on Scottish independence. Is an independent Scotland now inevitable? How will Boris Johnson and the Tories respond? Should socialists and the workers' movement fight to lead the struggle for self-determination for Scotland? **Philip Stott**, national secretary, Socialist Party Scotland, writes:

The phrase 'Disunited Kingdom' is in increasing use by the 'august' journals of capitalism. A quick Google search will find many examples - the Times, Sunday Times, and the FT included. As the Economist magazine described, in November 2020: "The union of the United Kingdom... is unwell. For 20 years the tension between unionism and separatism has been contained by the devolution settlement, under which parliaments in Edinburgh, Cardiff and Belfast make laws. That system will come under assault from all sides."

The centrifugal forces pulling apart the 'United' Kingdom are rooted in British capitalism's long-term decline. Devolution, designed to mitigate against this tendency, has failed. Today the capitalist elite is wrestling with a growing threat to its class interests.

Boris Johnson has hurriedly set up a 'Cabinet Union Strategy Committee' to counter the threat of the UK's disintegration - an outcome that would be a nightmare scenario for the economic, strategic and geopolitical interests of the ruling class.

Support for Welsh independence has grown to record levels recently. The 100th anniversary of the creation of the Northern Ireland state, this year, comes at a time of increasing demands by nationalists for a border poll on the reunification of Ireland, amid overwhelming opposition among unionists. The 6 May election outcome in Scotland will not have calmed the nerves of British capitalism.

The widely predicted Holyrood pro-independence majority came to pass. 72 of the 129 seats are now held by Scottish National party (SNP) and Scottish Green MSPs. The SNP itself won a massive 62 of the 73 first-past-the-post constituencies and

the largest number of votes for any party in the 21-year history of Scottish devolution. Both parties were elected on a manifesto commitment of delivering a second independence referendum.

First Minister Nicola Sturgeon has made clear that legislation for independence will be laid before the Scottish parliament. She has challenged Boris Johnson to take the Scottish parliament to court if he wants to prevent it.

In response, the Tories have made clear that they will not allow a 'section 30 order' to be granted that would allow a 'legal' referendum. A major collision is being prepared between the Scottish working class and young people - a majority of whom support independence - and the capitalist establishment.

Kick the can

However, this confrontation may be delayed for a while yet. Ironically, neither side - Johnson, obviously but also Sturgeon - wants an indyref any time soon.

Indeed, Scotland's first minister made clear throughout the election campaign that there would be no question of a referendum until "after the recovery from the pandemic was secured".

The earliest the SNP would bring a referendum bill to Holyrood, she said, would be the first half of 2022. And an actual referendum vote not before 2023.

Why kick the can down the road? Well, it's not Covid. The Scottish elections - themselves a national plebiscite with a record turnout - took place largely during severe pandemic restrictions. The real reason is time to build support for independence to a high-enough level - often referred to by nationalist politicians as being

around 60% - before being confident

about winning a majority.

The SNP leadership has had its fingers burned before. In March 2017, in the wake of the Brexit referendum, the SNP brought a motion to parliament asking for a section 30 to hold indyref2. This was refused by then Tory PM Theresa May. Sturgeon put the request on ice following the loss of one-third of the SNP Westminster parliamentary group in the June 2017 general election.

The Scottish elections were marked by extreme polarisation over the national question. 50% voted for the pro-independence bloc (SNP, Greens and Alba) while 50% backed the pro-union tripartite (Tories, Labour, Lib Dems). This is a direct reflection of the current polling on independence.

While a majority of the working class, and around 70% of under 30-year-olds, say they will vote 'yes' in a second referendum, the over-50s are largely opposed. Even among workers there is a division. Not surprisingly, the SNP's pro-capitalist prognosis for an independent Scotland is incapable of overcoming the doubts of a layer of workers.

The 2018 SNP-initiated 'growth commission' - their economic case for independence - pledged the holding down of public spending for up to ten years: a recipe for savage cuts to public spending after independence.

In reality, these 'still on the table' proposals are to the right of the pandemic-driven emergency tax and spending measures of the current Tory government.

The SNP leaders are long-term opponents of public ownership of the profiteering, privatised energy companies. In response to the 2014 North Sea oil price collapse, they demanded tax cuts for the oil and gas multinationals which have made billions, while axing tens of thousands of oil



Scotland's First Minister Nicola Sturgeon. The pro-big business policies of the SNP are its Achilles' heel PHOTO:ARCTICCIRCLE/CC



Socialist Party Scotland members campaigning for democratic rights, linked to the ending of capitalism, during the 2014 Scottish independence referendum

workers' jobs and attacking wages and conditions.

Nicola Sturgeon is also continuing to insist that an independent capitalist Scotland would use the sterling currency with interest rates set by the Bank of England and with the monarch retained as head of state. Yet, the desires of many working-class people attracted to independence are for a break with austerity and wealth inequality, not a continuation of the status quo.

Socialist Party Scotland has consistently warned that the SNP leadership is a barrier to winning a majority for independence. It cannot answer the genuine fears of workers on any of the key issues: jobs, pensions, living standards etc.

Sturgeon, the Scottish Greens, et al, also refuse to pledge that companies threatening to leave Scotland under independence would be brought into public ownership - a key response to answer the 'Project Fear' campaign.

The same applies to the threat of a flight of capital by the finance houses. Such blackmail can only be answered by a socialist Scottish government nationalising the banks and implementing capital controls.

It is precisely the building of a new mass workers' party in Scotland that is a vital task to help lead a mass working-class movement for self-determination. A vision of an independent socialist Scotland that would reverse all austerity, increase the minimum wage to £15 an hour, end all anti-union legislation and implement a programme of public ownership would gain mass support.

Project Fear

The pro-big business policies of the SNP are its Achilles' heel. A return to Project Fear and attempts to divide the working class will be ruthlessly used by the Tories, right-wing Labour and the capitalist class.

To that end, the British ruling class and the capitalist media, etc, can, and will, use British and English nationalism to undercut support for independence. The 'plight' of English people living in Scotland - the largest minority - and other non-Scottish minorities can be used.

Sectarianism will also play a role in Scotland. Elements of the loyalist community in Scotland have already been involved in mobilisations against independence, flowing from fears of what the break-up of the UK would mean for Northern Ireland.

It is essential that the workers' movement puts forward a policy of overcoming attempts to divide the working class. A programme for class unity and opposition to sectarianism and racism, including the call for a voluntary socialist confederation of Scotland with England, Wales and Ireland, is vital in that regard.

Left to the SNP leaders - and many on the Scottish left who tail-end them - there are dangers that divisions will open up among the working class in Scotland.

While the sticks of economic blackmail and 'divide and rule' will be used relentlessly by the capitalist class, they are also flexible enough to use other methods as well. The powers to allow for a legal referendum lie with Westminster, and at present Johnson is still saying no.

However, the fact that Sturgeon has kicked the can of indyref2 down the road for a year or so gives space for the Tories to implement new tactics to try to undercut backing for



Putting the class issues to the fore while defending the right to self-determination, the workers' movement can cut across attempts by reactionary forces to divide the working class

independence. Primary among those is to highlight the success of the vaccine roll-out as an example of what can be done on an all-UK basis. This may now be quickly followed by announcements of UK government investment into Scotland for major projects, possibly including road, rail, construction of freeways, and so forth.

The repatriation of powers from the EU back to Westminster following Brexit can allow Johnson to bypass Scottish local authorities and the Scottish government to do this. Also possible is the offer of more powers for Scotland, over tax and spending for example.

At some point, however, Holyrood will vote for legislation requesting a section 30 order. If Westminster refuses, the Scottish government has pledged to go ahead anyway. At that point it's possible that legal action will be pursued by one side or another, all the way to the Supreme Court.

One possible scenario is that the UK government simply refuses a section 30 order and allows the Scottish government to go ahead with an 'advisory' referendum. Such a referendum would almost certainly be boycotted by the pro-union side in an effort to delegitimise it and ignore its outcome.

Even now, pressure for the Scottish government to organise a referendum and, should there be a majority, then demand negotiations on the terms of independence is growing. Sturgeon has refused point blank to support the idea of a 'wildcat' referendum.

For her, only the 'gold standard' example of 2014 - an agreed referendum between the two governments - can lead to independence.

For the SNP leadership readmittance of Scotland into the bosses' EU is critically important. And only an 'internationally recognised' referendum process can open the door to that.

The SNP leaders naively believe that the class interests of capitalism in Britain, Spain, Belgium, Italy, etc, can be reconciled with the break-up of the UK and the inevitable impact that would have for secessionist movements throughout Europe.

However, among the pro-independence movement in Scotland the demands for a mass movement to defy Westminster will only grow. While an indyref2 is still some way off, the street demonstrations will return following lockdown and they are likely to be large events.

Former SNP leader Alex Salmond's launch of Alba just before the Scottish elections reflected that layer of the indy movement which wants to move faster than the extremely cautious SNP leadership.

After failing to win a seat in the election on 6 May, it's an open question whether Alba can develop. What is not in question is that a new pro-independence party will emerge at some point, reflecting these splits in the independence movement over how to overcome the opposition of capitalism to Scottish self-determination.

Workers' movement

For the workers' movement the national question is a critical issue. The trade unions have two key tasks. Firstly, fight to lead a mass movement for democratic rights and a second indyref.

This should be done separately from the SNP leadership. Demands like 'march, strike and occupy for indyref2', and 'for an end to austerity, jobs losses and in defence of workers' rights' should be championed. By putting the class issues to the fore while defending the right to self-determination, the workers' movement can cut across attempts by reactionary forces to divide the working class.

Secondly, the trade unions must urgently organise a conference to discuss building a new mass workers' party in Scotland to help organise mass struggle for democratic rights and for socialism - and to fight for a voluntary socialist federation of Scotland with England, Wales and Ireland.

The SNP has been nothing but a conveyor belt for Tory austerity over the past decade. In an independent Scotland it would rule for big business and the billionaires.

For a big majority of young people and growing sections of the working class, independence is linked to a struggle to change the way they live. They will increasingly reject the SNP leadership's refusal to build a mass movement that they fear getting out of their control.

Socialist Party Scotland and the Scottish Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, in contrast, are fighting to mobilise the largest possible movement of the working class to win the right to decide.

We understand that the struggle for democratic rights under capitalism is linked to the fight to end the profit-driven system itself. Mass struggle for indyref2 and for an independent socialist Scotland is the way forward.

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For the second weekend running, Socialist Party members participated in massive protests condemning Israeli state brutality against the Palestinians. These included demonstrations in London, Newcastle, Teesside, Liverpool, Manchester, Leeds, Hull, Sheffield, Nottingham, Birmingham, Coventry, Lichfield, Northampton, Cardiff, Gloucester and Bristol. We carry several reports here.

● London

Despite the ceasefire, Londoners' anger at Israel's state terror showed no sign of abatement. 200,000 protesters gathered at Embankment and marched to Hyde Park.

Once again the Socialist Party had a strong showing on the demonstration. From our stands at the start and end of the march, we took our vision - for an end to the conflict through mass struggle and a socialist programme - to the masses of people passing by.

Our placards were distributed in great numbers, and could be seen all over the demonstration. Our marching contingent's call for workers' unity resonated through the crowd.

Thousands of people took our leaflets, with many stopping to discuss our approach in more detail. The climax of this was at the end when we took to the megaphone to spread the word about our approach for a new socialist intifada.

The mood was electric. Our gazebo was deluged by unprecedented numbers of protesters wanting to sign our petition, find out more, and donate to the Socialist Party's fighting fund.

The response we encountered demonstrated resoundingly the simmering dissatisfaction with capitalism, a growing understanding that such injustice is a natural consequence of it, and an increasing appetite for socialism.

JOE PETERSEN-CAMP

● Coventry

Over 500 protesters attended the lively demo in Coventry organised by the trade union council. The protest went on well over three hours, and included two marches round the city centre. Chants echoed round the streets.

When Socialist Party member Dave Nellist spoke to the crowd, he pointed out that not one of the 54 Coventry councillors came to the protest. The only presence from Labour was a statement from Coventry South MP Zarah Sultana. She had also been the only presence from the Labour Party at the previous week's protest.

The Socialist Party stall was bustling the entire time. Protesters came over to grab placards, until we ran out, sign our petition, buy the Socialist, take and read our leaflets, and discuss the crisis with us. We sold over 30 copies of the Socialist, and a few people told us that they wanted to join the Socialist Party there and then.

There were a lot of young people at the event, some told us it was their

Stop Israeli state terror against Palestinians

HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS JOIN SOLIDARITY PROTESTS

first-ever protest. We saw this at the 'Kill the Bill' protest a few weeks ago, and Black Lives Matter protests last summer.

Young people have grown up with only austerity, attacks on their rights, and chaotic imperialism, and want to fight for a better world. More and more are drawing the conclusion that the route to a better world, where Palestinians can be truly liberated, is through socialism.

ADAM HARMSWORTH

● Gloucester

1,000 people marched through Gloucester. The organisers thanked people for coming together, and thanked the Socialist Party for supporting the event. This was the biggest demonstration in Gloucester since the anti-cuts demo a decade ago.

Gloucestershire Socialist Party helped to build for the demo, and three of our members spoke from the platform, one as president of Gloucester Trades Council, the body that coordinates the unions in Gloucester. Our demands got a great response.

The same cannot be said for local Tory MP Richard Graham. Having previously enjoyed a reputation for being 'pro-Palestine', he discovered that the largely young Asian crowd saw through his hypocrisy. Several turned their backs when he spoke, and when he criticised "throwing statues into water", he was duly drowned out by chants.

JAMES COLLETT

● Birmingham

Socialist Party members attended the 2,000-strong demo. People from across Birmingham travelled to Victoria Square to show their anger.

The crowd was energised. A large number of young people came out to protest, and many protesters had personal connections to the issue.

Attendees were keen to speak to Socialist Party members about the connection between the situation in Palestine and the situation in the UK. Protesters were extremely receptive to ideas about a socialist programme of change - both locally and in the Middle East.

There was an impromptu march through the city centre, which drew attention from many more people in the city. Lots of people asked when and where the next demonstration would be, eager to continue the struggle.

ELLA DOYLE



The crowd at the London Socialist Party gazebo THEO SHARIEFF

● Bristol

What started as a small march from the mosque on Stapleton Road soon swelled to a noisy march of 3,000. Unlike the protest seven days previously, which was confined to the city centre, this march cut through local communities on its way to College Green and City Hall.

The overwhelming mood was of righting the wrongs done to the Palestinian people, and demanding an end to Israeli state aggression. The march was awash with flags, chanting and hooting car horns.

ROGER THOMAS

● Nottingham

The protest grew from 150 people to 300 as it marched from the forest to Old Market Square. People in the crowd that we spoke to agreed with the Socialist Party on the need to build mass working-class movements of Palestinians and Israelis to end Israeli state brutality, and that the working class was the only force that could end the brutality permanently.

● Liverpool

Two protests against Israeli attacks on Palestine were organised in Liverpool. One by the Palestine Solidarity Campaign, and one by students and other young people.

This latter one was by far the best attended. 200 people gathered around a large, outstretched Palestinian flag.

An impromptu march from the main shopping street to Williamson Square, ended up outside BBC Radio Merseyside, protesting about biased BBC reporting on the issue. And many more young people joined the protest after it had begun.

ROGER BANNISTER

● Lichfield

The quiet cathedral city of Lichfield in Staffordshire saw a protest of 30 people on Sunday 23 May. A key reason for the protest was a disgraceful recent tweet by local MP Michael Fabricant describing pro-Palestine protesters as "primitives... trying to bring to London what they do in the Middle East".

Socialist Party members were invited to address the protest, putting forward our position of mass struggle by Palestinian and Israeli workers to end occupation and conflict in the region. And a third of the protesters bought a copy of the Socialist.

NICK HART

● Teesside

Several hundred people protested. Two women had a homemade Angela Davis poster, making the connection between Black Lives Matter and the situation in Palestine. They said it was the same struggle.

A mum and two young children were chalking slogans. She was saying her son had become interested in wider issues. The children were a bit nervous about attending a protest, as they had heard they were all violent. But they wanted to come and show their support.

CATHRYN GATHERCOLE

● Newcastle

"We are thousands, we are millions! All of us are Palestinians!"

In Newcastle, 500 joined waves of protests across the planet. Our Socialist Party stall attracted a lot of attention. People were interested in hearing our distinct socialist message - 26 protesters bought a copy of the Socialist.

One young Muslim woman we spoke to told us she was concerned about the potential for antisemitism, and agreed when we put forward the need for Palestinian and Israeli workers to reach out and fight their common enemy - pro-capitalist bosses and politicians.

ELAINE BRUNSKILL

● Hull

Over 200 gathered in Victoria Square for a rally jointly organised by Hull Trades Union Council (TUC). Hull Socialist Party placards and leaflets were eagerly taken.

Socialist Party member Mike Whale, president of Hull TUC, spoke



MARY FINCH

at the protest. He outlined Hull TUC policy - taking up the social justice issues facing Palestinian and Jewish workers as a way to promote solidarity, and for them to build a mass movement to end the Israeli state terror and oppression.

Many of the young speakers spoke passionately, expressing their anger spoke to told us she was concerned about the potential for antisemitism, and agreed when we put forward the need for Palestinian and Israeli workers to reach out and fight their common enemy - pro-capitalist bosses and politicians.

PHIL CULSHAW

● Northampton

350 people marched. This demonstration was larger and more enthusiastic than the previous week. Northampton Socialist Party branch will be holding a meeting to discuss what can be done beyond the protests.

KATIE SIMPSON

Even where protests didn't take place, Socialist Party members were campaigning on the issue.

● Carlisle

In Carlisle, we had a very lively campaign stall. Many young people and ordinary working-class folk chose to come over and talk to us, sign our petition and take leaflets outlining our programme for Israel-Palestine. Several of them thanked us for what we were doing, and wanted to discuss with us further.

Unlike many cities, there has been no big demo in Carlisle. However, we were able to show that there is considerable support here for the Palestinian people.

ROBERT CHARLESWORTH

● North London

Our youth campaign stall outside the Conel College in Seven Sisters, north London, received a great response. Dozens of college students and other passers-by saw us campaigning and signed our petition.

We are definitely going to hold more youth stalls outside colleges across London to meet young people who want to fight for jobs, homes, services and a future for all. Ten people bought a copy of the Socialist, and we raised another £25 for our fighting fund.

BERKAY KARTAV

Cladding anger builds - protest on 5 June



PETE MASON

PETE MASON

CHAIR, BARKING REACH RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION

Three-quarters of cladding systems on new medium-rise buildings use combustible materials. Now residents trapped in fire-risk buildings are taking to the streets to protest outside the salerooms of builders and developers who refuse to rectify the problem.

Networks of angry residents have sprung up. The government has doubled down on its refusal to legislate to ensure that leaseholders, facing bankruptcy or a lifetime of debt, will not end up paying.

We had two successful protests outside the Bellway Homes showrooms

on the Barking Riverside estate in east London, where a fire took place in 2019. We were joined by New Providence Wharf residents, who suffered a fire on 5 May (see 'Canary Wharf fire' at socialistparty.org.uk), and residents from three other estates.

Now our call for nationwide protests on 5 June, outside the sales offices of builders and developers, has received a big echo. Plans are being laid in London, Manchester, Birmingham, Cardiff, Ipswich and Southend. More than 50 attended a planning meeting.

We demand that the government should pay, and builders and developers should remediate without charging residents.

Palestine protesters donate to fund socialist material

CHRIS NEWBY

SOCIALIST PARTY NATIONAL FIGHTING FUND ORGANISER

On the demonstrations and protests against Israeli state attacks on the Palestinians, Socialist Party members received a tremendous response to our message: 'End the occupation - for a Palestinian socialist intifada.'

I was on the mass demonstration in London, and it was clear that people were keen to discuss what we had to say. Leaflets were snatched out of our hands.

All our placards were taken well before the demo marched off. Lots of protesters made a donation for one.

Protesters recognised the need to donate to make sure we had the resources to produce all our material.

Over £900 fighting fund was raised on the London demonstration, with someone donating a £50 note.

On protests in other towns and cities, our Socialist Party stalls all received good donations to help fund our socialist message - £151 in Coventry, £26 in Northampton, £39 in Birmingham, £37 in Hull, £33 in Sheffield, £54 in Newcastle and £23 in Lichfield.

It is clear people want to hear our socialist message. Don't let up on your fundraising to make sure we have the resources to get our message out as widely as possible.

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

AREA	£ RECEIVED	£ TARGET	Q2: APRIL-JUNE 2021	DEADLINE: 30 JUNE 2021
Northern	1,168	750		156%
South West	2,499	1,800		139%
London	4,447	4,600		97%
Southern & SE	2,195	2,350		93%
North West	849	1,150		74%
Wales	1,589	2,300	69%	
Yorkshire	1,501	2,550	59%	
East Midlands	883	1,850	48%	
Eastern	435	1,200	36%	
West Midlands	833	2,600	32%	
Other	505	3,850	13%	
TOTAL	16,905	25,000	68%	

Leicester protest against arms supplies to Israel

HEATHER RAWLING
LEICESTER SOCIALIST PARTY

Not many people in Leicester knew that Israel-based international defence electronics company UAV Tactical Systems had a factory at Meridian Business Park, Leicester, until Palestine Action Leicester (PAL) organised a rooftop protest there.

UAV is a subsidiary of Elbit Systems, an Israeli-based defence company, and Thales, a French aerospace company. It is believed that the Leicester-based factory makes and supports the operation of Unmanned Aircraft Systems, ie combat drones, for the Israeli government, and that these were being used to bomb Gaza.

That is not all they do. Citizen Lab has published a detailed report showing that Ethiopian dissidents and journalists in the US, UK and other countries were targeted by sophisticated commercial spyware sold and operated by Cyberbit, which, until last year, was a subsidiary of Elbit Systems.

PAL direct action protesters got inside the factory gates on 19 May, and climbed onto its roof. Their aim was to disrupt production and the operation of the drones. Police and the fire service attended. The fire appliance later withdrew.

The Fire Brigades Union said it "supports the right to protest... Union officials immediately reminded senior managers that as firefighters, we are, and remain, a proud humanitarian service and our role does not involve law enforcement. Once the safety of those involved had been confirmed, Fire Brigades Union members withdrew from the incident."

Leicestershire brigade chair, Graham Vaux, added that "the Fire Brigades Union stands in support of Palestinian solidarity and the right to protest."

However, a fire appliance did later attend the site with a station manager in attendance. The aerial ladder platform was used to enable the police to talk to the roof protesters. Two protesters have since been arrested for attempting to get water to the roof protesters.

PAL has done a good job in alerting trade unionists to what is happening in Leicester. I agree with stopping military equipment going to the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) to repress Palestinians.

Dockers' solidarity

Italian dockers have already shown the way. A cargo ship loaded with high-precision rockets destined for the IDF was shipped, semi-clandestinely, to the port of Genoa in Italy. Dockworkers in Livorno, mobilised to block this arms trafficking.

However, we also have to consider the jobs of the workers in this lethal industry. I attended the protest on Wednesday and was unhappy with two large banners demanding "Shut Elbit Down", without any demand for alternative work or employment for the workers in the industry. Their support in blocking Israeli state terror is important. But defence workers may be alienated if their livelihoods are at risk.

The Lucas Aerospace (defence industry) trade union shop stewards showed the way in the 1970s when they came up with a viable plan to use their skills for the benefit of humanity and not its destruction. Nationalise the defence industry and let



The Elbit Systems weapons factory in Leicester, targeted by pro-Palestinian protesters PHOTO HEATHER RAWLING

the working class decide what should be produced and how it should be used.

Elbit employs nearly 14,000 employees worldwide. If these workers refused to supply the Israeli government, that could make a huge difference. If dockers refused to load weapons and military equipment, that would also limit the capacity of the Israeli government to inflict damage on the Palestinian people.

So any demand to prevent arms, military equipment and technology being used by the Israeli state needs to appeal directly to the workforce.

An alternative use of their skills could be advanced to protect their jobs and for the benefit of humanity. A skilful approach is needed to unite the Elbit workers and other workers in opposition to Israeli state terrorism.

- **Stop the supply of arms and military equipment being used by the Israeli state to repress Palestinians**
- **Nationalise the defence industry under democratic workers' control and management**
- **Trade union control over what is produced, for the benefit of humanity**

Heather adds:

After six days, the protest has ended. The police tactic of trying to starve the protesters down had failed due to the determination of the protest and the increasing support from workers in Leicester. But, eventually, police dragged the rooftop protesters down.

The protesters showed bravery and tenacity. A more lasting solution to the Israeli state terror is needed, but this act of solidarity helped mobilise workers against the Israeli state.

- **A protest has been called for Sunday 30 May at 2pm Jubilee Square, Leicester**

Mexico City subway train collapse - negligence, corruption and capitalism

ASHLEY ROGERS
INDEPENDENT SOCIALIST GROUP (USA)

An overpass carrying a subway train collapsed in Mexico City on 3 May, killing at least 26 people and injuring 80. The train was travelling on an elevated portion of Line 12 when a section near Olivos Station collapsed onto traffic below.

This incident marks the worst disaster in the history of Mexico City's subway system, the second biggest in North America, which carries four million passengers a day.

Days later, protesters marched to the site of the collapse, chanting 'Negligence and corruption kill!' and 'Let the state fall, not the metro!' Only a mass movement of workers and youth, with the crucial involvement of unionised metro workers, has the power to demand and win the response workers and victims need.

Line 12 - the 'Golden Line' - was the most recent addition to the subway network, announced by then-mayor Marcelo Ebrard in 2007. On its completion in 2012, President Felipe Calderón hailed it as "an engineering feat that competes with the best in the world." The massive investment



The collapsed Line 12 PHOTO SECRETARIAT FOR COMPREHENSIVE RISK MANAGEMENT AND CIVIL PROTECTION OF MEXICO CITY/CC

was used to justify a fare hike under Ebrard's successor, Miguel Ángel Mancera.

Yet only two years after the line opened - and only two months after the fare hike - subway director Joel Ortega admitted in a news conference that Line 12 had become too dangerous to ride.

While the line was closed for a year and a half for repairs, Mancera moved swiftly to find scapegoats, disqualifying 33 officials involved in the incident from public service in 2014, and issuing arrest warrants for six officials, including project head Enrique Horcasitas, in 2015.

Horcasitas was accused of using

his position to give the contract to construction firm ICA, where his brother is a member of the board of directors.

Yet while Mancera was quick to prosecute minor politicians, the three firms that constructed Line 12 faced no repercussions for their involvement under his term.

While ICA built much of Line 12, the construction company Carso, owned by Mexico's richest man, Carlos Slim, was in charge of the section that collapsed on 3 May.

Against recommendations from Grupo Riobóo, the engineering firm that designed many of the previous subway expansions, Carso decided against using concrete for the beams of the overpass, preferring to design them out of steel, to cut costs and increase profits by using Carso's steel subsidiary Swecomex.

Following the magnitude 7.1 Puebla earthquake in 2017, locals noted that the section near Olivos Station had suffered serious structural damage, and the line was again closed. Officials continued to neglect necessary repairs and locals expressed fears that the structure was in danger of collapse.

Fernando Espino Arévalo, head

of the Metro Workers Union (STM), stated that a number of problems on Line 12 were reported to authorities throughout the line's operation, including vibrating support columns on elevated portions of track.

However, the STM's warnings about Line 12 and their calls to take over maintenance of the line were both ignored. According to Jesús Urban, secretary general of the STM, damage at the section that collapsed was reported six months ago, but their warnings were ignored and subsequent maintenance work was inadequate.

The subway bridge collapse is another horrible example of how the capitalist drive to profit off of human needs like transportation and health care will always come before safety and human life.

The working people of Mexico are the only group with the power to root out corruption, end austerity, and build a movement for safe, efficient, and free mass transportation. Only a revolutionary socialist party in Mexico can lead the fight for public services that benefit everyone as part of the struggle for socialism.

- **This article can be read in full on socialistworld.net**

Get up, stand up - don't give up the fight!

The life and legacy of Bob Marley

Forty years ago, on 21 May 1981, the island of Jamaica came to a halt as the celebrated reggae musician and political activist Bob Marley was given a state funeral. **Hugo Pierre**, Socialist Party member and black members' rep on Unison's national executive council (personal capacity), looks at the political backdrop which shaped Marley's music.

The opening track of the final album *Burnin'* (1973) by the original line-up of The Wailers, which included Bob Marley, articulated the militancy of oppressed black youth in Jamaica and in the UK, and reflected some of the preceding civil rights movement in the US.

The track 'Get Up Stand Up' is used as a chant that could have come from any demonstration against racism and brutality from Kingston to Harlem, to London, to Johannesburg during the 1960s and 70s.

Bob Marley drew on his experiences to put together an album that articulated the revolutionary mood in many black communities, and also the colonial revolution sweeping through much of the developing world, including Jamaica.

Jamaica had become independent in 1962, but under capitalism was forced into a slavish relationship with its ex-colonial masters. Many could no longer support living in the countryside in poverty and moved to Jamaica's capital Kingston, where they usually ended up in the sprawling shanty town of Trenchtown.

Once there, the conditions were often worse than those they left, having no ready access to even subsistence farming. Bob Marley, and fellow Wailer Bunny Livingston, moved as teenagers to Trenchtown to finish their education.

Marley quickly came under the influence of the developing Rastafarian movement through his musical connections with its philosophy of 'Pan-Africanism' and reverence for Haile Selassie I, the Ethiopian emperor.

The movement was brutally repressed in Jamaica (its founding base) under colonial rule, with beatings, torture and even executions. This continued after independence, with the state-sponsored murder of several Rastafarians during what became known as the Coral Gardens Massacre (Bad Friday) in 1963.

The endemic poverty and repression fuelled Marley's opposition to injustice and inequality. His mother moved to the US and Marley visited her there on at least two occasions. On his return from one visit he even took on the look of the Black Power movement by wearing his hair in an 'afro'.

He was also the victim of the ruthless Jamaican record industry, where artists, including himself, were treated as factory fodder. If they tried to become independent they would be isolated from radio-play by the big players.

Radicalism

Increasingly Marley's work reflected political concerns. He had been jailed in Kingston for a month on cannabis charges. The songs on the album 'Catch a Fire' reflect the strong anti-imperialist stance and the plight of the urban poor.

A new political movement was organising the urban and rural poor. Under the leadership of Michael Manley, the left-wing People's National Party proposed a radical programme to eradicate illiteracy, the appalling health conditions, and slum housing, and for job creation. The elections of 1972 saw Manley elected and Marley played a role in

this election campaign.

Manley began to put his reforms into action. He also made international connections to protect Jamaica's bauxite (the raw material producing aluminium) production. His international ambitions for the 'non-aligned' world led him to forge ties with Castro's Cuba and take an anti-imperialist stance on the war in Angola against South African backed forces.

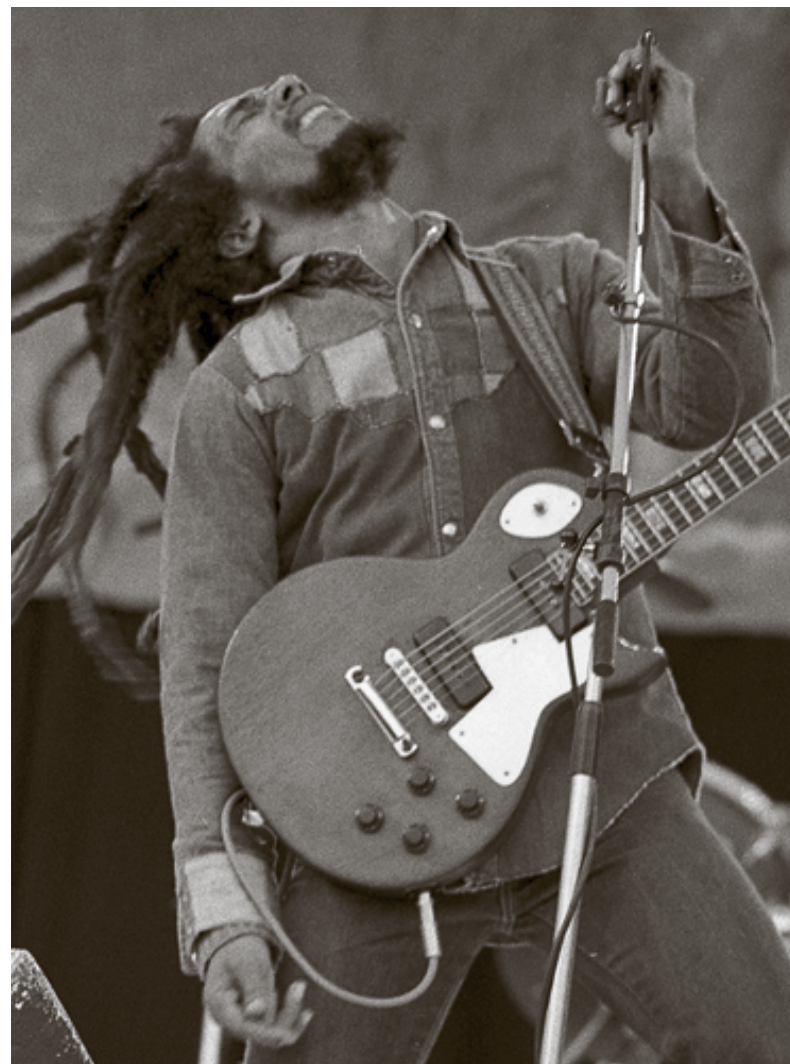
All of this brought Manley into conflict with US imperialism, so much so that arch right-winger Henry Kissinger, the US secretary of state, went to Jamaica to warn Manley off this relationship in 1975.

When Manley stuck to his grounds, Jamaica was flooded with guns by the CIA, the US spy agency. This led to petty criminals developing into political gangs backing the right-wing leader of the Jamaican Labour Party, Edward Seaga.

Bob Marley had now become an international superstar and a committed Rastafarian, who evangelised his beliefs in 'black unity' and peace at his concerts. His music mobilised the militancy of black youth, especially in the UK, wanting to fight racism and oppression, but channelled it into a spiritual solution rather than a political programme for action.

His song 'Rat Race' shows how he attempted to distance himself from politicians. However, his links to Manley's radical programme put him on the CIA's hit list.

Just days before the 'Smile Jamaica' concert, aimed at calming down the political violence in 1976, he, along with his wife Rita, his band manager



Bob Marley in concert in Dublin, 1980 PHOTO MONOSNAPS/CC

and an employee, were the victims of an assassination attempt.

Manley won the snap election of 1976 and continued with his reforms. Manley's radical social reformism had the potential to popularise the ideas of socialist change, particularly among a militant generation of black youth.

Black members of the Labour Party Young Socialists, under the leadership of Militant supporters (the forerunner of the Socialist Party) seized the opportunity and organised a solidarity campaign aimed at doing exactly that in the UK.

Programme

The founding conference in 1978 adopted 'A Fighting Programme for Black Youth'. The charter called for a minimum wage, work or full pay, an end to racist education and for a fully comprehensive system, an end to racist policing and police harassment, nationalisation of any company threatening closure, and the nationalisation of the economy under democratic control to implement socialist policies.

This campaign mobilised hundreds of black youth and warned Michael Manley of the potential danger of not going further to end capitalism in Jamaica. Unfortunately, Manley did not heed those warnings.

As the Jamaican economy was battered by the world recession of the mid-1970s, Manley went to newly elected US President, Democrat Jimmy Carter, for aid. Instead of aid, Manley was forced into 'economic restructuring' by the International Monetary Fund, resulting in cuts

to the reform programme and increased economic hardship. Manley subsequently lost the 1979 election.

Bob Marley's 'musical revolution' continued to proselytise Rastafarianism with 'Exodus', 'Kaya', 'Survival' and 'Uprising'. These cemented his musical legacy before his untimely death from cancer at the age of just 36.

His stand against injustice, racism and poverty are still a rallying cry across the world today. His spiritual movement is now an international phenomenon. But for socialists, the lessons of the period provide inspiration for a new generation of youth to learn the lessons: namely, that only a working-class movement with a socialist programme can end racism, neocolonial exploitation, poverty and war.

BLACK WORKERS' CHARTER

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

● **Search Black Workers' Charter: A programme to fight racism at socialistparty.org.uk**



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

TV review: Three Families is excellent. But protest movement is missing

JULIA LEONARD
WEST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

‘Three Families’ is a two-part series that deals with the issue of access to abortion in Northern Ireland. It is a sensitive portrayal of the problems faced by three individuals who are pregnant and in desperate need of a termination, and the lack of any real choices available to them.

It graphically shows the problems of trying to keep an unwanted pregnancy secret in a small community where entrenched opinions hold sway. However, it does show that attitudes are beginning to change. In the Republic of Ireland, campaigners fought to repeal restrictive anti-abortion laws, and campaigners in Northern Ireland have been fighting for abortion rights.

The programme clearly highlights the hypocrisy of those who say they protect the right to life, while condemning women to horrific suffering. A young girl has been in an abusive relationship, and her partner says if she goes ahead with the pregnancy he will “kick the baby out of her”, and tell everyone she is a slag. Another woman goes through a full-term pregnancy knowing her baby has no chance of survival, and is in such agony throughout that she has to take morphine to dull her pain.

The third woman has such severe mental health problems that she is at serious risk, and is physically unable to make the journey to England for a termination, although she could afford to do so. Her baby dies, and she still has to wait days to be admitted to hospital and induced.

Three Families shows the ridiculous situation where the mother of the young girl is charged with procuring abortion pills under the 1861 Offences Against the Person Act. She did this in order to protect her vulnerable young daughter, and to ensure she could go on to university.

It is an excellent and thought-provoking portrayal of the misery that women are forced to endure. Many women seeking to terminate a



pregnancy have been forced into the hands of illegal unsafe abortionists, or to travel to countries where abortion is easier to access.

However, by concentrating only on very extreme cases - a young underage girl in an abusive relationship, and two women whose babies were unable to survive after being born - it does not fully support the argument of a woman’s right to choose.

In two of the cases an abortion should have been possible, even under the very restricted laws - fatal foetal abnormality and severe threat to mental health - but the women were faced with doctors misinterpreting the rules, and refusing to help them.

In 2017, the Northern Ireland Assembly collapsed. With no government in Northern Ireland, the Westminster government imposed legislation to legalise abortion up to 12 weeks.

This is being resisted by some assembly members. The Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) has just elected a new leader, Edwin Poots, who is on the religious fundamentalist wing of the party.

Note of caution

The programme shows the jubilation of women who have campaigned for a change in the law, in one case for over 50 years. But the closing credits sound a note of caution.

Termination is only legal for up to 12 weeks gestation. And the new law faces strong opposition.

A year after its introduction, the Northern Ireland Department of Health acknowledged the legality of abortions, but said that it was not required to commission the relevant services! Without well-funded, easy-to-access services, the new legislation will be of no use to women

seeking an abortion.

In many cases, nothing has changed. Women face the prospect of travel out of Northern Ireland, and paying the high cost of treatment, plus the additional cost of travel and accommodation.

Three Families ends on quite a downbeat note, and does not highlight the continuing struggles that campaigners are involved in to secure change.

It must be the right of all women to choose when and whether to have children. This means free access to contraception, abortion, fertility services and sex education. If women decide to have children, they should have access to good quality free childcare, and all the local services required to give those children a good start in life.

● *Three Families* is available on BBC iPlayer

US right to abortion under threat: Mass campaign to support the right to choose must be built

The US Supreme Court has agreed to consider a Mississippi law banning most abortions after the 15th week of pregnancy. This could potentially mark a serious attack on the right to abortion in the US.

A constitutional right to abortion was affirmed in 1973 through the ‘Roe v Wade’ case. If the Mississippi ban, which has been blocked by lower courts, was to be upheld, that would represent a devastating blow to the right to abortion.

Given that under Trump the political balance of the Supreme Court was tipped 6-3 in favour of right-wing conservatives, reversing Roe v Wade cannot be ruled out.

Right-wing Republican-controlled states have systematically legislated to erode access to abortion facilities and create obstacles to obtaining a termination. This has particularly hit poor, minority and immigrant women, who cannot afford to travel out of state. 10 states already have ‘trigger laws’ ready to ban almost all abortions.

US women’s jobs and livelihoods have been especially hit by the Covid pandemic. A mass movement needs to be built, involving the workers’ organisations, that combines defending the right to abortion with pressure to ensure that the minimal measures in Biden’s American Families Plan on childcare, parental leave etc, are implemented and extended, guaranteeing the right to a decent job, a \$15 an hour minimum wage and the resources needed to bring up children free from poverty.

Film review: Nomadland

Sombre poem on human connection and solidarity



DAN SMART
BRISTOL NORTH SOCIALIST PARTY

After the Great Recession of 2008 hit, the factory at the heart of Empire was shut down. Fern, a widow in her sixties, is suddenly compelled to leave the town she built her life around, taking off in her van into the icy Nevada desert.

The actual US town of Empire was home to a small population, until it boomed in the 1950s in the harsh beauty of the surroundings. But the closure of the plant in 2011 decimated the population, with workers having no other source of income. The chief operating officer of Empire Mining Company observed: “It’s like a bomb went off and they all evacuated.”

Fern is forced to live in her van and get a job at an Amazon warehouse. The cold realities of this life are starkly portrayed in Nomadland.

An opportunity is missed, however, to criticise the brutal exploitation of Amazon. The multinational was recently made to admit that workers often have no option but to pee in bottles on the job, due to their working conditions. Owner Jeff Bezos increased his wealth by an obscene \$86 billion during the pandemic.

Echoing the movements of people for agricultural work in the Great Depression of the 1930s - depicted in John Steinbeck’s novel The Grapes of Wrath - this story follows those who have worked all their lives for everything to be dismantled by the vicissitudes of capitalism. Communities, work, family and the places they knew and loved are lost.

Through her resilience, Fern finds a brighter alternative in a community of people who have experienced similar struggles to herself, and are likewise seeking a home and meaning. The film is based on the nonfiction book ‘Nomadland: Surviving America in the 21st Century’, documenting the lives of older transient workers living in vans following the recession.

The organiser of the group Fern discovers proclaims: “If society was throwing us away, we workhorses would have to gather together and take care of each other... The way I see it is the Titanic is sinking and economic times are changing, and it’s my goal to get as many people into the lifeboats as I can.”

As Fern heads south, the climate becomes warmer, reflected in the solace she finds in others, sharing their struggles and supporting each

other. This lifestyle is no utopia however, having to learn how to adapt to the travails of a life without basic amenities - ranging from changing a tyre on the van to managing your own waste. Living the nomadic life for Fern - travelling from temporary job to job - is her response to capitalism being unable to provide security for those in older age.

Nomadland is a sombre poem on human connection and solidarity, in the shadow of neoliberal decay. A meditation on the impact of a system which has failed those who have worked hard all their lives, and are coming to terms with the loss of all they had built.

While the lingering feeling of this film is one of hope found in community, it could have gone further in exploring how this can be harnessed to build resistance and systemic change. The strength Fern finds in others, however, is moving, giving her the courage to take to the road against powerful economic forces, as symbolised by the looming mountains beyond her former home in the ruins of Empire.

● *Nomadland* can be seen in cinemas and streamed on the Disney+ platform

Lancaster Greens do deal with Tories

BRENT KENNEDY
CARLISLE SOCIALIST PARTY

Last week brought more reminders that stopping global heating is incompatible with the capitalist profit motive. Even as transport and energy move to decarbonise, the petrochemical corporations are using their oil to ramp up the production of single-use plastics, in which the big banks invest 100 times more than in recycling.

The Tories are licensing new oil and gas fields in the North Sea. After their ten-year ‘voluntary phaseout’ of digging peat produced no change, they’ve extended it again until 2024.

Meanwhile the Greens, having recently benefited from Labour’s decline by getting more councillors elected, now lead Lancaster city council - dependent on Tory support. The deal was that the Tories got the chairs of the council committees and the Green Party leader got to be the figurehead.

As the leader of the Tories explained: “The Conservative group shares many similar core values and vision”, including “prudent economics”. In other words, being prepared to carry out Tory government cuts to local jobs, wages and services. Four of the five ex-Labour ‘Ecosocialists’ are backing this, with one being

elected deputy leader of the council with Tory votes.

Lancaster Labour councillors have tried to score points over this deal with the Tories, but Labour ran Cumbria county council in an open coalition with the Tories for four years, and now with the Lib-Dems, implementing Tory cuts.

Why did the Greens leave the so-called ‘Progressive Alliance’ with Labour and the Lib-Dems in Lancaster? Because the Greens’ Caroline Jackson didn’t like Labour’s Dr Lewis’s ‘leadership style’! But where are the fundamental political differences? How does this help mobilise the local working class to fight for permanent, well-paid jobs in renewable or public services?

Faced with the return of the Labour Party to Blairism nationally under Starmer, some former Corbynistas have joined the Greens. But because the Greens ‘can’t wait for socialism’ and so choose to operate within capitalism, they are forced to follow the logic of capitalist economics and politics. For all the well-meaning local ‘projects’ and a superficially different ‘style’, it’s impossible to protect the environment from climate change - let alone workers’ living standards and public services - by getting into bed with the politicians who represent the interests of the banks and big business.



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



CHRISTIAN EMMER/CC

● Capitalism’s Covid inequality

The 15 May issue of The Economist featured a briefing article trying to estimate the death toll from Covid over the last year. Its conclusion was that death tolls in almost every country were much higher than has been reported. Based on analysing excess death data, and statistical modelling, they give a global death toll of around ten million, roughly three times the official rate.

But these unrecorded Covid deaths are much more prominent in poorer countries around the world. In richer OECD countries it estimates the death toll to be 1.17 times the official rate, whereas in Egypt it reckons it was 13 times that rate!

But, incredibly, The Economist goes on to claim in an editorial in the same issue: “The most important insight from our work

is that Covid-19 has been harder on the poor than anyone knew”! Perhaps The Economist didn’t realise this, but in the Socialist we’ve read reports from members in the Committee for a Workers’ International from all around the world about the devastating impact of the pandemic on workers and the poor.

In reality, this reflects the capitalists and their journals waking up to just how deeply the pandemic has revealed the glaring inequality around the world, which is also reflected in their support for Keynesian-type policies to shore up their system. For socialists though, such information is further confirmation that this rotten system, which continually fails the working class, needs to be replaced with a socialist society based on meeting the needs of workers and the poor.

IAIN DALTON
LEEDS



Students protest LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

● School uniform protest wins

“Pupils at our local high school organised a protest outside the gates after learning about a classmate being refused permission to wear a baseball cap and hoodie to maintain her dignity in school, due to hair loss from illness, as it was against policy!

“This was instigated by other 13-year-old classmates, resulting in around 50 people, some with placards, assembling outside the gates to fight for her. They were planning to repeat this every day until the policy changed. As a result of the pressure, the decision was reversed.”

Socialist Party member Alan Alberny, from Clowne in north east Derbyshire, quoting from a school student after their success.

● Posh Labour

Sir Starmer actively supports the ‘fencing-off and night closure’ of Primrose Hill, a park in north London, to stop local rich residents being disturbed by noisy peasants.

Posh Labour or what?
WALLY KENNEDY
WEST LONDON



Primrose Hill, north London OLIJFF/CC

● Marching for democratic rights

As a freeborn man, on 1 May I joined the small peaceful group of responsible citizens that demonstrated in Southend High Street against the proposed law that will take away my freedom to demonstrate.

After months of confinement it was good to be out in the crowds of shoppers, feel the sun on my face, breathe the air, and shout my truths at the top of my voice. It was good to meet up with old friends and to stand in solidarity with comrades that see things the same way as I do.

As a low-level political activist for many years taking an interest in the world and the country that I live in, I recall when Thatcherism set about smashing union power and how ready, willing and vicious the law was to destroy the unions’ democratic rights. This has contributed to the low-wage injustice that we have today.

If these proposals become law, children growing up today will be living with a more dangerous and hostile authoritarian establishment than we already have.
BOB CHAPMAN
ESSEX

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the Socialist

Issue 1135

27 May - 2 June 2021

formerly **Militant**

Young people and workers unite

FIGHT FOR THE RIGHT TO PROTEST

Fight the capitalist profit system

HELEN PATTISON

WEST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

The Tory government is preparing to recoup the billions of pounds it has been forced to spend during the Covid crisis. Step one is the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill. Step two will be a fresh round of mass austerity, from the NHS to poverty wages, cuts to local services to benefits, and more.

The government knows its attacks will provoke mass protests and struggle, so it is laying down its defences now with the biggest curtailment of the right to protest in a generation.

It's not a coincidence that the last time

this bill was amended, was under Margaret Thatcher, who made the organised working class her enemy and pushed millions into poverty.

That said - the growing anger that already exists in society will not be so easily stopped. Covid has helped expose the rottenness of capitalism, which means misery for millions of ordinary people.

There has been mass protest already, against inequality, oppression and poverty. From all those who took a stand against the bombardment of Gaza by the Israeli government and their move towards a new war, to the protests last year as part of the Black Lives Matter movement, where working-class youth flowed onto the streets to protest racism from

both the US and UK governments, and for a real alternative. As well as this, there has been a wave of strong and combative strikes against workplace victimisation and 'fire-and-rehire' tactics (see pages 6-7). And the movement against sexism and women's oppression.

While these movements might remain unfinished, they have also shown the strength of working-class people when we organise on a mass scale.

Black Lives Matter gave confidence to the students at Pimlico Academy to protest against a racist uniform policy and bullying headteacher. They have changed the uniform policy and the headteacher has left (see page 4).

The National Education Union forced the closure of the schools at the beginning of the

year, keeping staff and students safe from growing Covid rates. Last year, the weak Tory government was forced to U-turn on its disastrous A-level algorithm.

The right to organise and protest links all of these struggles. As does the need to stand up to capitalism, a system which whips up and relies on oppression at every turn.

Throughout the last year, capitalism has shown how little it has to offer. It failed to stop the spread of Covid, provide PPE, and the NHS struggled to cope on its shoestring budget. It failed to adequately support people during the lockdowns and let the virus surge through overcrowded neighbourhoods. We need a socialist system which puts the needs of ordinary people before the profits of a few.

A SOCIALIST RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC CRISIS

▶▶▶ socialistparty.org.uk/coronavirus

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

▶▶▶ see column on p3



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