

Underpaid and overworked - NHS workers say



PAUL MATTSSON

● 15% now ● Protest 3 July

RHIAN
SOUTH WALES NURSE

NHS staff have been on the Covid front line since last March.

Over 800 healthcare staff have died, and the Boris Johnson government won't even release their names. People went out to work, and they didn't come home.

We should have been protected properly. And the contract for PPE shouldn't have gone to Matt Hancock's mates.

There's been a total disregard for life - right down to the privatised test-and-trace systems that never worked. The UK is the country with the fifth highest Covid death rate - largely the result of underfunding and privatising health and social care services for many years.

We were due for a pay review in April. Nurses are the lowest-paid graduates, but some frontline staff,

like healthcare support workers, go to work for as little as £9.21 an hour. And the government has offered us a 1% pay 'rise' - basically a 'Happy Meal' a week.

In the last year we've tried to keep everyone safe. Now, on 3 July, the NHS's 73rd birthday, we feel it's the right time to make a stand and say - 'enough is enough'.

We want a safer environment for our patients, we want to end privatisation, and we want to be paid in line with our skills and responsibilities.

Nurses United, a grassroots organisation, is backing a 15% rise - a fair ask, really. Unite the Union is backing it, as is the GMB union and Wales Trades Union Congress.

One of our favourite hashtags at the moment is #NHSPay15. It doesn't matter which union you're with, we all need to stand together.

As workers, we need to make our voices heard. We need to say to our union leaders: "This is what we want. We're rejecting this pay offer. We will strike. We're prepared to do this." Then, the pressure

would be applied massively on government.

The NHS is one of the biggest employers in the UK. The union leaders need to be organising. They need to be preparing to mobilise. They need to be ready for a ballot. They need to build to do that, so we can get the pay rise we deserve and the NHS the funding it needs.

- Join the protests in your local area on 3 July - see keepournhspublic.com for details
- For more on NHS see pages 4-5

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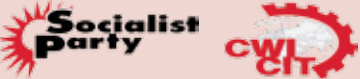
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"The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it."
Karl Marx

G7 vaccine promises fall short

Make vaccine technology public, nationalise big-pharma

ALEX SMITH
LIVERPOOL SOCIALIST PARTY

G7 leaders have pledged to donate 1 billion doses of coronavirus vaccine to poorer countries by the end of 2022. Boris Johnson's Tory government, for its part, has pledged 100 million doses.

The scale of these proposals does not rise to the level of an insult, and that is if they keep their promises!

World Health Organisation (WHO) research shows that it would take 11 billion doses - more than ten times what G7 leaders are proposing - to provide 70% of the world's adult population with two doses each. Even more vaccines would be required if countries begin vaccinating children as well. The head of the United Nations, Antonio Guterres, stated bluntly: "We need more than that".

Despite the immediate need for vaccines, of the 100 million doses Johnson has pledged, his government intends to provide no more than five million by the end of September, 25 million by the end of 2021, and the remainder in 2022. This is in spite of the fact that the UK could donate 20% of its available vaccines right now and still hit its domestic targets!

Following the announcement of the G7 proposal, the WHO's director-general, Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, reiterated that a waiver of the intellectual property rights underpinning vaccines is "essential" to achieve their target of vaccinating 70% of the world's population by next



year's G7 summit. He added: "The [pharma companies] should not be going for high profits."

Ghebreyesus' demand follows recent Oxfam research suggesting that developing countries could be vaccinated against Covid-19 at a cost of just £4.6 billion if pharmaceutical companies waive their intellectual property rights.

Estimates put the cost at ten times that amount without a waiver, with the extra money going straight into shareholders' pockets.

The chief executives of Moderna

and BioNTech have reportedly increased their wealth by at least \$4 billion each in 2020, despite the research and development of the vaccines being heavily state-subsidised.

It is precisely because patent monopolies are so profitable for pharma companies that waivers will not be yielded without a fight.

The current opposition of the British and German governments to the WHO's modest waiver demand demonstrates this, and shows how sick the capitalist system is.

Society has the resources, both

financial and technological, to defeat the Covid-19 pandemic. But under capitalism these vast resources are owned by a tiny elite, and their profits are prioritised over people's health.

That's why it's vital that large pharmaceutical companies are nationalised under democratic worker's control, so that vaccine science can be shared with the primary purpose of helping people not making profit, and the production of vaccines can be democratically planned to meet the needs of all.

Bakers' union consultation

Majority of members vote to break from Labour

53% of members of the BFAWU bakers' union believe that the union should no longer be affiliated to Labour. Just 7% strongly believe that Labour still represents them.

These were the results of a survey of members launched in advance of the union's online conference which was held from 7-12 June.

The consultation was first announced in an article on the union's website last November, following Starmer's victory as Labour leader and the increasing attack on the left in the party, particularly the outrageous suspension of Jeremy Corbyn. However, with a two-thirds majority required for a rule change, the union leadership is not recommending disaffiliation from the Labour Party.

Members of other Labour-affiliated unions would welcome similar consultations. This should be used to fight for a new political vehicle for workers, their families and communities, standing on an anti-cuts

socialist programme opposed to the pro-capitalist consensus represented by Starmer.

It's clear that the BFAWU vote wasn't a vote for non-political trade unionism - 56% of members believed the union should maintain some kind of political link.

The BFAWU has a proud fighting history and has looked to reach out to socialist forces inside and outside Labour, such as in the Fast Food Campaign that has sought to organise low-paid fast food workers.

It now has a mandate to approach all unions - affiliated and non-affiliated to Labour - to call a conference that would be open to the Labour left and socialist organisations like the Socialist Party and those who work with us in Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, to discuss how to organise a political force that can best represent workers and stand up to the stark Covid economic and health consequences for workers.

Left candidate needed for Unite general secretary election



Right lose control in Unison national executive council election

The election results have been announced for the national executive council (NEC) of public sector union Unison, the body that controls and leads the union between conferences.

It is this body that, over many years, has been used to block any real fightback over jobs, pay and conditions, and to witchhunt good, fighting socialists.

The right has lost control of the national executive council with the 'Time for Real Change' group and the Socialist Party taking 41 of the 68 seats, not including those elected who supported Roger McKenzie in the general secretary election. The result shows that the active membership who voted want a fighting and democratic union.

Opportunity

This is now the opportunity to show what a left leadership can do.

Covid has shown the vital need for a fighting democratic union. Unison's membership includes huge numbers of frontline workers, in areas such as health and social care, who have faced massive pressures during the pandemic.

Unison also represents workers in local government who coordinated Covid support, and NHS staff who have been insulted by a derisory 1% pay offer.

The first test will be the immediate election of the presidents of the union, which are elected by the national executive council. Socialist Party members on the NEC call for the left to immediately come together to discuss putting up a full slate for



the elections, due to take place at the first NEC, to ensure that the executive council is run democratically and not left in the pocket of the bureaucracy.

The executive council also elects its delegates to the Trades Union Congress general council, the highest union body in the UK. Too often Unison has filled too many of its seats with highly paid unelected full-time officials. That should end, and only elected officers and members should hold those seats.

This would give the opportunity for the union to link up with other fighting trade unionists in the likes of transport union RMT, where

together they could begin to draw up a fighting programme to ensure that workers are not allowed to continue to pay the price for Covid-19 in terms of their jobs pay and conditions.

The third set of elections is to vote out those who have tried to control the policy and democracy of the union through the executive council sub-committees, by electing chair persons that will act in the interest of members, not the bureaucracy.

The four Socialist Party members who have been elected will play a crucial role in transforming Unison into a democratic, fighting union.

- More on Unison, see page 6

The nomination period for the Unite general secretary election has closed. All four candidates - Steve Turner, Sharon Graham, Howard Beckett and Gerard Coyne - have gained enough branch nominations to get on the ballot paper for the voting, which begins on 5 July. The final reported nominations are: Steve Turner 525, Sharon Graham 349, Howard Beckett 328, Gerard Coyne 196.

As we explained in our article last autumn, and the statement we produced before nominations began, this election is crucial in maintaining Unite as a fighting union on both industrial and political fronts.

Gerard Coyne is a direct representative of big business and the Starmerites, and if he won it would threaten to turn the union sharply to the right. Like many members, we would not meekly accept this but look to work with others on the left to resist such a shift.

There are reports of meetings between Len McCluskey and Turner, Graham and Beckett to agree one candidate to stand against Coyne. However, we do not accept that Steve Turner is the 'candidate of the left', and that Sharon and Howard should merely stand aside to give Turner a free run against Coyne.

Of course, if this did happen, we would not be neutral but give very critical support to Steve Turner.

Steve Turner narrowly won a controversial United Left (UL) hustings last summer, which was far too premature to allow a full and open debate on the left of the union. As well as his narrow lead of nominations, which are claimed to represent 270,000 members, this is being used by UL supporters to argue that he stands the best chance of beating Coyne.

But the very good nominations achieved by Sharon and Howard, collectively more than Turner's total, shows that a big layer of Unite reps, members and activists have no appetite for Steve's more compliant approach both industrially and politically - reflected in him clearly not being prepared to challenge Starmer as Labour leader. His election would still represent a retreat from the position built up under Len McCluskey's leadership.

Sharon Graham's campaign claims that her nominations represent over 250,000 members, many in work-places, while it is clear that Howard Beckett particularly appeals to those members who want the union to oppose Starmer. His nominations equate to 130,000 members.

Despite having the UL electoral machine behind him, Turner's nomination total is half of that achieved by Len McCluskey previously. Therefore, we believe it is Steve who should

step down as a candidate in favour of Sharon or Howard to carry the battle against Coyne. Their programmes and records show that they have a far more combative position and are the best candidates on offer in this election. Actually, faced by just Turner, Coyne could pose as the 'anti-establishment' candidate, which wouldn't be the case if Graham or Beckett stood.

That is why we call again for Sharon and Howard to come together and agree one candidate, on a common programme that can appeal to the fighting members of the union. This could transform the election.

There is a real danger that if they both stand it could let in Turner or, even worse, Coyne. But one of them should stand and give a fighting alternative in the election.

Socialist Party members have worked with supporters of both Sharon and Howard to ensure that in a whole number of Unite branches the nomination of one of them was secured.

In all these cases, our members have received a warm welcome for the idea of one left candidate and the need for a new left in the union. This will be essential, whoever wins the election, either to fight for the carrying out of a left programme should Sharon or Howard win, or to mobilise opposition if not.



WHAT WE STAND FOR

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

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

Our demands include...

PUBLIC SERVICES

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

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

ENVIRONMENT

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

RIGHTS

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

MASS WORKERS' PARTY

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

SOCIALISM AND INTERNATIONALISM

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

Do you agree? Join the fightback!

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Schools need resources to tackle ‘routine’ sexual harassment

HANNAH DAVIES
BLACK COUNTRY SOCIALIST PARTY

As a student support worker in a secondary school, when I read the reports that Ofsted has found that sexual harassment and abuse is “routine” for school students, I was disgusted, but not surprised.

The review found that sexual harassment has become normalised both in person and online. Actions such as ‘upskirting’, rape jokes, unwanted touching, and sharing indecent images are all reported as issues experienced in school and on social media. The review also found that girls, in particular, thought that this treatment was just something they had to live with, and that there wasn’t much use in reporting it.

Systematic failure

I know through my role at work, and personal experiences in secondary school that, unlike the review seems to suggest, this is not something that has just started to happen over the past few years. It has been present for generations. It is a deep systematic failure that Ofsted has only just conducted this review.

I was also appalled to read that the blame is being pinned on teachers saying they “consistently

underestimate” the scale of the problem. As we know, the cuts that schools have had to endure over years have left teachers with unmanageable workloads. Specialised safeguarding, SEND and support staff have been reduced to threadbare numbers, which ultimately puts more of that workload onto remaining staff. The fact that the chief inspector of schools in England finds this news alarming just shows how out of touch these bodies are with the reality of the state of our education system.

Ofsted also included in this review an investigation into the site ‘Everyone’s Invited’, where school students anonymously post about incidents of sexual harassment, assault and abuse they have experienced. (See ‘Sexism in Education: It shouldn’t be like this’ at socialistparty.org.uk)

As it stands, our schools simply do not have the resources and support required to adequately meet these children’s needs. Training all school staff is one thing, but we need the time and funding necessary to take action. We need the resources required to properly educate school students rather than just be instructed to refer them to helplines or websites for advice. That isn’t good enough.



School students take part in a Socialist Students-led walkout against Trump LONDON SP

We call for

- A trade union and student-led inquiry into the true extent of sexual harassment and violence in schools, colleges and universities
- An urgent overhaul and funding of relationship and sex education,

- with training for all education workers, including in primary schools
- Students to be able to discuss and learn about sexism, to report incidents, and to challenge inaction
- An increase in funding for all support services, including local councils, to ensure that victims receive support.

- Where allegations are made, ensure a system is in place so that they are properly investigated and action taken. This should involve committees involving representatives of both staff and students
- A socialist alternative to the inequality, sexism and violence of the capitalist profit system

Neonatal leave introduced Unions must fight for extensions and full pay

IAIN DALTON AND TANIS BELSHAM-WRAY
LEEDS SOCIALIST PARTY

The birth of any child is an intense and stressful time for most parents, and that applies even more if babies are born prematurely. With a baby’s body not fully developed, there’s a greater likelihood of the mother having to go through a C-section, along with increased risk of many possible complications for the baby.

When our son was born at 29 weeks, we were exhausted and scared for him, and did not really know what to expect. Our son remained in the hospital for six weeks, a relatively short period of time for a baby born as early as he was. Parents are told to expect their child to be in the hospital until they reach term.

This can swallow up a chunk of parents’ maternity and paternity leave, which usually starts from birth, despite premature babies hitting development milestones based on when they would have reached term rather than their birth date.

Campaign win

Nurses on the unit, knowing the stress that parents go through, were excited about the government’s recent announcement of reform to parental leave arrangements for parents of premature babies, following a consultation launched in July 2019. This wasn’t a sudden gesture of goodwill from the Tories, but followed a 350,000-strong petition, and



Iain, Tanis and their son Eugene

the latest of a series of private members’ bills on the matter launched in parliament the previous month.

The arrangements will mean that parents of all babies who are in a neonatal unit for over a week can get additional paid leave, on top of the usual allowance, for up to 12 additional weeks while their baby is in a neonatal unit, with paid leave of up to £160 a week available. The parents of around 40,000 children a year are expected to

be eligible to benefit from this.

However, 100,000 babies spend time in neonatal units annually: 40,000 premature babies and a further 60,000 babies with complications. Parents of these babies won’t benefit directly due to the one-week qualifying period. The benefit can only be claimed for the second week onwards. Some of the most premature babies can also spend as long as 18 weeks in neonatal units. How are

these parents supposed to cope for the remaining six weeks?

Neonatal leave set at £160 a week, paid for directly by the government, will be around the same level as the maximum statutory parental leave pay. It is over £150 a week less than a worker will earn by working a 35-hour week on the Tories’ current minimum wage. Several parents we spoke to on the ward were struggling to afford the drop in income from

taking paternity leave already.

Bliss, a premature and sick babies charity, which had campaigned for neonatal leave and championed the changes once they were announced, found in a 2013 survey of 1,800 parents that each week-long stay on a neonatal unit costs parents an average of £282 a week.

Even worse, as the nurses on the ward were disappointed to find out, these measures will only be introduced in 2023, with some of the details not yet fully announced.

While many will welcome this as a first step in the direction of providing official neonatal leave, the government proposals fall short of what would really give parents the ability to take leave from work and ensure their baby gets the best start in life, without financial worries.

Rather than allowing Tory ministers to hypocritically try to claim they are the champions of workers’ rights, the trade unions should take a lead on campaigning for fully paid leave. They should call for:

- No delay until 2023, introduce neonatal leave immediately
- Scrap the one-week qualifying period and 12-week cap, allow additional paid leave for as long as babies are in the neonatal ward
- Full pay for parents taking neonatal leave
- Extend maternity and paternity leave to a minimum of one year on full pay

NOW IS THE TIME TO FIGHT FOR THE NHS

LYNN GUNNINGLE
DEVON SOCIALIST PARTY

I first became aware of a problem with our healthcare provision, and the appalling treatment of our NHS workforce, when our 120 year-old hospital was suddenly closed here in Dartmouth in 2017. This came after an expensive, predetermined, deceptive consultation, with only 5% of residents responding, I was not consulted and was only made aware of the closure by a friend.

I became the founder of ‘Heart of the Dart’ - a residents’ action and protest group (formally Women of Dartmouth and District), and in this role I discovered that there was also a plan to sell off our hospital building, despite a charge gifting it to our community as a hospital ‘in perpetuity’ via the deeds of covenant.

The hospital has served this community for 120 years and sits in a prime location, where a few hundred yards away along the riverbank residential properties can command £5 million.

The Trust said the building was not fit for purpose, yet the viability report showed the services to be excellent, and the building to be in good condition!

The loss of so many community hospitals like ours has put

tremendous pressure on our already underfunded NHS. It has left staff exhausted and demoralised, often working unpaid overtime due to staff shortages, and traumatised by what they see as a failure to give the patients the level of safe care required.

One nurse said that the casual acceptance of corridor nursing was the final straw, and moved abroad for better pay and conditions. I know of four staff who have left in just a couple of months. Only yesterday I saw photos of a nurse’s injuries that simply should not happen in a safe, fully staffed environment.

Waiting lists grow

The growing patient waiting lists pre-Covid were already leaving patients and staff members, including one of 30 years service, out of work and out of action for prolonged periods. As waiting lists grow out of control, even nurses and doctors are having to wait for care, referrals and operations themselves, increasing pressure further.

More than 40,000 nurses have left our NHS during the last decade, leaving those who stay overworked, understaffed and, as Covid-19 has shown, totally underequipped.

I believe we all want our NHS staff and carers well-paid, well-trained, well-rested and well-equipped so they can continue to give their best

and live a decent way of life in return. In my eyes that’s the very least we can do. That’s why ‘Heart of the Dart’ and Dartmouth and South Devon residents support the NHS workers’ campaign for a 15% pay rise.

Since losing our NHS hospital provision here in Dartmouth we have had: senior citizens on cold pavements for up to eight hours waiting for ambulances; workmen going into shock after accidents at work; GPs put on hold listening to music during a 999 call; an injured lady driving herself out of town to the nearest hospital, her foot slipping off the peddles as her shoe filled with blood; and now my own friends are dying at home alone without care or comfort, too afraid to admit to being ill or in need of assistance for fear of being shipped out of town never to return. That’s simply not good enough.

The NHS should be celebrated as a legacy that our parents and grandparents fought for and built. It is our NHS, and now is the time to fight for it.

Support our NHS staff in their fight for decent pay, safe conditions and an end to privatisation. Join the protests happening nationwide on 3 July.

- Our protest will take place from 12:00 – 16:00, 3 July at Dartmouth and Kingswear Cottage Hospital



PHOTO MARY FINCH

Save Leicester General Hospital Join 3 July protests

STEVE SCORE
CO-CHAIR SAVE OUR NHS LEICESTERSHIRE AND SOCIALIST PARTY

Leicestershire NHS bosses have made the decision to close Leicester General Hospital, one of the three main acute hospitals in Leicester, selling off most of the land, and also St Mary’s Maternity unit in Melton Mowbray.

This is part of a major ‘reconfiguration’ involving £450 million of new investment in hospital buildings - announced when Boris Johnson falsely claimed the Tories were building ‘40 new hospitals’. The majority of services will now be crammed onto two sites.

The final proposals were not made available to the public until less than half an hour before the decision-making meeting! It follows a public ‘consultation’ held at the end of last year in the midst of lockdown, followed by months of secrecy.

£500,000 was spent on publicity, TV ads, and social media to present their case. But alternative points of view were barely heard, despite our efforts in difficult conditions. Of course, we welcome investment in buildings, but the plans do not meet the needs of local people.

Even the minimal democratic ‘scrutiny’ by local councillors was brushed aside as bosses claimed the decisions would be scrutinised later - but not until after they were finalised!

When plans to reorganise were originally floated, they actually involved a reduction in the overall number of beds. But, under pressure from campaigners, bed numbers were eventually revised upwards, although nowhere near enough to meet the future needs of a growing and ageing population in the area.

The Save Our NHS Leicestershire campaign has consistently raised the fact that there is insufficient hospital capacity already. But these plans will mean a reduction in capacity per head of the population in the future.

Despite a one-year ‘trial’ of a midwife-led maternity unit on the former site of the Leicester General, the threat remains that all maternity services will end up focused on just one hospital.

Save Our NHS Leicestershire will continue to fight to defend and improve local services. Join the protest we are organising on 3 July as part of the national day of action for an NHS workers’ pay rise and against further privatisation.



Protests in London on NHS 70 birthday in 2018 PAUL MATTSSON

Socialist Party to the fore at Unison local government conference

PAUL COUCHMAN
SOUTH EAST REGIONAL DELEGATE (PERSONAL CAPACITY) AND SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBER

At the conference on 13 June, our region had two motions on the agenda, which I moved.

One was on how local authorities can fight the cuts, particularly Labour councils. This motion was composited with a more general motion on local authority funding submitted by the Northern region. The Northern region delegate moved the composite and I spoke first in the debate and effectively seconded it.

Three of the four speakers on this vital motion were Socialist Party members - the only ones to stress the possibilities inherent within local government for a massive campaign against the cuts.

Using the Liverpool City Council stand in the 1980s as an example, we

demand that Unison members' money should only go to councillors and MPs who are prepared to make a stand in defence of public services and public sector workers.

During this debate and throughout the conference, delegate after delegate whose branches are in Labour-controlled councils spoke of the anger and frustration at having to fight cuts imposed by the very party Unison is affiliated to as a union.

The other motion was calling for a serious united industrial campaign against the public sector pay freeze. The motion called on the service group executive to launch a campaign and to press the newly elected national executive council to follow this with a cross-sector campaign.

It also demanded that our general secretary calls for a special meeting of the TUC public services

committee to organise a cross-union campaign. Again, it was members of the Socialist Party that were to the fore in putting forward a strategy during the debate that can defeat the pay freeze. This motion was also carried overwhelmingly.

There was a wide range of motions discussed, covering everything from the Covid pandemic (which understandably dominated the agenda), equalities issues, protecting specific services, pay, facility time, stress and mental health.

Overall, despite the limitations of a virtual event, and the lower number of delegates than usual, the conference was upbeat and positive. Members and activists now have to make sure that the decisions made at the conference are all translated into action.

● See also 'Right lose control in Unison national executive council election' on page 3



Conference in a 'normal' year PAUL MATTHESSON

Redbridge school walkout over victimised union rep

Teachers and support staff working at Oaks Park High School in Redbridge have walked out in defence of their union rep who has been sacked and three other workers (including a pregnant woman) who have been told they will not have jobs in September.

According to their union, the National Education Union (NEU) they have been victimised because they refused to be put in an unsafe workplace at the height of the second wave of the pandemic.

In January, all four, including the union rep, exercised their legal right under section 44 of the health and safety act to refuse to work in an unsafe workplace.

The employer threatened these workers that they were in breach of contract and could face disciplinary action or a cut in their pay if they would not work onsite rather than from home as most school workers across the country were at the time.



EAST LONDON SP

Glenn Kelly, National Education Union (NEU) regional officer, said: "The union believes that the school is seeking to wreak revenge on the union rep and other members

because they were forced to back down over COVID working earlier in the year".

The next strike dates are 22-23 June, 29-30 June and 1 July.

PCS conference 2021 Divide between union leaders and rank-and-file exposed



LONDON SP

DAVE SEMPLE
PCS AND SOCIALIST PARTY SCOTLAND MEMBER

The PCS 2021 annual conference lasted just two days - 13 and 14 June.

This was more than long enough to bring out the differences in policy, strategy and approach between a fast-moving-to-the-right Left Unity leadership, and rank-and-file activists in the Broad Left Network.

The conference was a stage-managed virtual event. The restrictions on motions, and other undemocratic features of the conference, were taken up in the final motion of the conference moved by Socialist Party members Nick Doyle and JP Rosser.

An attempt by the standing orders committee to bury the motion failed and the motion was only very narrowly defeated 54,822 to 61,810 with 4,065 abstentions. It is an indication of how tenuous the position of Left Unity is among the activists layer.

The first motion of the conference was on Covid-19, DVLA, and our members' struggle there for safe working. This got the unanimous backing of conference.

Support was given to other motions on the pandemic including motion A2 from the national executive council, which we supported, but made clear our criticisms of their record over the last 15 months.

Conference then moved on to debating the future of the union, with vastly different visions laid out by Left Unity and the Broad Left Network. The one bureaucratic and virtual, the other calling for a full debate and change based on facts underpinned by a campaigning attitude and commitment to the union's democratic traditions.

The national executive committee motion was carried, but in the debate sharp differences emerged on election of officials. The executive opposed motions which argued for the extension of this democratic demand, with general secretary Mark Serwotka dismissing them as an "old

fashioned mantra". Socialist Workers' Party member Paul Williams, speaking for the executive, also opposed these motions.

A motion calling for the pay of officials to be brought more into line with the pay of members was also opposed by Left Unity, who succeeded in defeating the motion with arguments straight out of the old CPSA right-wing handbook.

We were told we should be levelling up not down, need to pay the rate for the job, the officials won't like it and may strike, and we should leave it to the officials who can always donate back money.

This last argument was taken up by Socialist Party member Katrine Williams, who pointed out that Serwotka was elected on this platform. He paid back money for a short period, but this has now apparently stopped and he kept his £100,000 salary.

She pointed out that we need a clear policy which is understood, and applied to everyone, not voluntary ad hoc undertakings which may or may not be kept.

A further major debate was around 2021 pay. The executive motion, which was carried, was described by a delegate as a motion which did little more than "instruct itself to do its job". An alternative pay strategy from Broad Left Network supporters, which was also critical of the national executive committee's handling of the 2020 pay campaign - in reality there was not one - did not get voted on due to standing orders committee manoeuvres.

Some key elections took place at the conference including the election of Alan Dennis, the Broad Left Network secretary, to the union's standing orders committee.

The conference provided further evidence that the Left Unity PCS leadership has no real claim to be a left leadership. This increasingly is true of both what they say and what they do.

Sparks win and defeat construction bosses' deskilling attempts

►► CONTINUED FROM BACK

Over the next weeks, the number of protesting workers grew, and the demonstrations spread to Wales, Scotland, Merseyside, Manchester, Leeds and then Hinkley Point itself. This was followed by a determined walkout by sparks at Whitby Bay hospital.

In March, it seemed that EDF was backing away from the ESO at Hinkley. Then Balfour appeared to be moving away from it. But NG Bailey was refusing to back away and this brought Balfour back on board. The campaign needed to be stepped up.

In April, the weekly protests at the Cardiff University construction site in Maindy Road culminated with a blockade of the site for an hour with deliveries turned away.

On 26 May, after 13 weeks of protesting in different areas, the sparks converged on AWE Burghfield, where nuclear warheads are assembled. In a pincer movement, they defied the police lines and blockaded the massive site at two entrances. Full praise has to go to the electricians on site who refused to cross the protest lines and drove round slowly, helping to back up the traffic for hours.

This was the big signal to NG Bailey and Balfour. The next step would have been to target more of their jobs and, just as with the Besna, an official Unite strike on one of the key sites.

The rank-and-file electricians welcome the commitments that have been secured, including the withdrawal of the ESO and the employment of new apprenticeships. But correctly they add: "However, there is much work to be done" in ensuring ending the threat of deskilling once and for all, as well as tackling issues such as agency labour, direct employment, blacklisting and bogus self-employment. But far better to fight these after a win.

This victory comes after other wins by workers taking action, such as the Manchester bus drivers, who went on an 85-day indefinite strike against 'fire and rehire', and the Thurrock binworkers who defeated pay attacks by their Tory council after six weeks out.

As the employers and their Tory government look to make workers pay for the Covid crisis, the growing action against the bosses' brutal offensive, and especially the increasing number of victories, show that

if the unions give a fighting lead, workers can win. This should be taken up by the unions to build a united fight against the Tory pay freeze in the public sector and the NHS. The fight against Besna in 2011-12 took place at the same time as the massive two million-strong 30 November public sector pensions strike and the sparks joined the picket lines in solidarity.

In Wales, the campaign should continue to pressurise the Welsh government to ensure that lucrative construction contracts for public projects are only awarded to companies that adhere to national agreements and ethical practices - no blacklists or anti-union employers - and they ensure their sub-contractors do the same.

The defeat of ESO ranks with that over the Besna. Many of those sparks have played leading roles this time, and a newer generation has joined the battle. The word needs to be spread round the sites to all trades, who themselves can be targeted for deskilling by greedy bosses looking to protect their profits - we can fight and we can win so get organised in the union!

Engineers in fourth week of strike action against huge fire-and-rehire attacks



Brush picket line 14 June STEVE SCORE

STEVE SCORE
LEICESTER SOCIALIST PARTY

Maintenance engineers at Brush Electrical Machines, based in Ashby-de-la-Zouch in Leicestershire, are now in the fourth week of a 12-week strike against huge attacks on pay terms and conditions by yet another vicious management using 'fire and rehire'.

The Socialist Party supported their picket line and spoke to Dale Clarke the Unite rep: "We are on strike because during Covid the management decided to use fire and rehire to drastically cut our terms and conditions. We have been told take it or leave it.

"We go to everywhere the manufacturer sells their generators, third-world countries, even war zones, offshore in India, the Middle East, where we are four or five to a room. During the pandemic it was business as usual. We were expected to travel the world including places like Brazil and India. We had to quarantine in

solitary confinement for two weeks at a time.

"They have attacked every single part of our contract including cuts in our basic salary, uplifts when we are overseas or offshore in terrible conditions and our holiday breaks when we return from overseas to rest. We will be between ten to fifteen percent a year worse off.

"Venture capitalists Melrose, who own the company, historically have asset-stripped companies, they have just done it to GKN. In 2019 the four directors from Melrose decided to give themselves £42 million bonuses each!

"Unite has calculated they made around £93,000 per employee. They claim our pay is not sustainable, but Brush did make £17.5 million last year in a Covid year!"

● Details for donations to the hardship fund can be obtained by privately messaging their Facebook group "Unite Brush Electrical Machines"

Udaw DHL Long Eaton redundancy pay strike



USDRAW MIDLANDS

Udaw members at DHL Long Eaton in Derbyshire held a 24-hour strike on 10 June in a dispute over inadequate redundancy pay for long-serving workers. Further strike action will take place on 16 June.

The Socialist Party demands:

- Fully funded, publicly run and free education for all
- For unity and solidarity between staff and students
- No to compulsory redundancies
- Abolish university tuition fees now and introduce a living grant
- Support the student rent strike
- For solidarity between UCU members and students

Heather Rawling spoke to Emi Mise, University and College Union (UCU), in a personal capacity

UCU staff have been in dispute with their employer for months over compulsory redundancies and academic freedom. The redundancies have been called, in true Orwellian speak 'restructuring for excellence'. Staff are objecting to the way the vice-chancellor has unilaterally and undemocratically decided to disinvest in certain areas of research.

Initially, 145 colleagues were singled out for compulsory redundancy. Now, 26 have been issued with a redundancy letter. This is certainly not to say the remaining 119 colleagues have kept their jobs - far from it. Those 26 colleagues have all appealed against their redundancy, and it is currently going through the internal appeal process which, from what I hear, is shambolic.

The current student body of University of Leicester issued a statement of no confidence in the vice-chancellor and the executive board in January 2021 in support of university staff.

The UCU leadership organised the ballot period over less than a fortnight which included the Easter Bank Holiday weekend. Even so, there was a 56% turnout and approximately 69% voted for an all-out strike and 80% supported actions short of strike.

redundancies since October last year. But it is also about can we do research in areas that are 'difficult' for management without having our jobs threatened? Can we join unions without having our jobs threatened? 27% of the redundancies are UCU reps, yet they make up less than 1% of staff. It's the very soul of the university that is being fought about, just like in other universities such as Liverpool and Chester."

Picket lines during the three days of strike action at Leicester University, taken on top of action short of a strike, have been lively. On 10 June the picket line ended with a noisy drum-banging march through the campus, followed by a rally, and then a joint online meeting with strikers at Liverpool University.

The Socialist spoke to Gabby Provan, incoming chair of Leicester UCU, on the picket line: "We have been fighting threatened



Marching through the campus STEVE SCORE

WILL BIDEN'S NEW FOREIGN POLICY CHANGE THE DIRECTION OF US IMPERIALISM?

ROBERT BECHERT

COMMITTEE FOR A WORKERS' INTERNATIONAL (CWI)

Biden's first international meetings and visit to Europe as US president were certainly different from Trump's visits, but how much in substance has really changed?

Internationally, Trump's defeat was met with relief by a majority of Nato countries who had hopes of change, especially a more stable and less unpredictable relationship.

Certainly, Biden has made a difference. Just a few months into his presidency it is clear that Biden's approach is less crude, less obviously egotistical, less concerned with promoting the family brand and less mercurial than Trump's, but on a number of key issues, Biden's goals remain the same.

As El Pais reported: "Not one of the 240 measures adopted by Trump to toughen the embargo on Cuba have been rescinded" by Biden.

As is widely acknowledged, a major feature of the current world situation is the dramatic rise of China's unique state capitalist regime, which has up-ended the previous world balance of forces and put the dominance of US imperialism into question.

While not physically present at the recent G7 summit (China's president Xi Jinping will be at the G20 meeting in October), China's growing shadow certainly was, and how the 'older' imperialist powers in G7 should deal with it was a key item on the agenda,

at least in private.

The New York Times put it clearly: "Biden is engineering a sharp shift in policy toward China, focused on gathering allies to counter Beijing's coercive diplomacy around the world and ensuring that China does not gain a permanent advantage in critical technologies.

"At first glance, it seems to adopt much of the Trump administration's conviction that the world's two biggest powers are veering dangerously toward confrontation, a clear change in tone from the Obama years...

"It focuses anew on competing more aggressively with Beijing on technologies vital to long-term economic and military power, after concluding that President Donald J. Trump's approach - a mix of expensive tariffs, efforts to ban Huawei and TikTok, and accusations about sending the 'China virus' to American shores - had failed to change President Xi Jinping's course.

"The result, as Jake Sullivan, President Biden's national security adviser, put it during the campaign last year, is an approach that 'should put less focus on trying to slow China down and more emphasis on trying to run faster ourselves' through increased government investment in research and technologies like semiconductors, artificial intelligence and energy."

While large elements of Trump's policies were based on personal whims, prejudices and family interests, insofar as Trump's general idea of protecting and boosting US

imperialism's position is shared with Biden, especially in regard to China. The central difference is that Biden has returned to the previous administration's policies of trying to establish alliances to defend and advance the interests of the US ruling class rather than Trump's simple 'America First' strategy with its long list of rivals.



In an uncertain world, instability is guaranteed and a relatively declining US imperialism cannot expect its allies to always accept US imperialism's hegemony

The Chinese regime's 'Made in China 2025' economic plan is seen as a major threat to US capitalism's pre-eminence. Thus, one of Biden's earliest measures has been the US Innovation and Competition Act, passed overwhelmingly in the Senate in early June, which asks the US House of Representatives to agree to pour a total of nearly a quarter-trillion dollars of state aid into key sectors of the US economy. The semiconductor industry alone would get \$52 billion

in emergency subsidies.

This policy of the state propping up the US economy will probably mean a further sharpening of international competition even with some of its allies. Against this background Biden's administration aims to re-establish the US's position as leader of alliances, prepared to live with a certain amount of 'give and take'.

Of course this will not be straightforward; even within formal or informal alliances each ruling class will attempt to pursue its own interests and clashes of interest will be the result. Thus it is not certain what will be the outcome of the current talks regarding the full reinstatement of the 2015 Iran nuclear deal and lifting of the extra sanctions Trump imposed on Iran.

Trump had a more simple transactional approach to foreign policy more akin to property deals. For example, Trump accepted Morocco's occupation of Western Sahara in return for Morocco signing a peace deal with Israel. Furthermore, Trump had a wider list of immediate adversaries than the Biden administration currently has.

Clearly Trump aimed to weaken the European Union (EU) as a potential rival by supporting Brexit, exploiting internal EU divisions, and cultivating support among the EU's central and eastern European members.

British empire

But even this was not new. As it grew in strength US imperialism looked to weaken and undermine its rivals, especially Britain and the British Empire.

Thus, despite Boris Johnson's talk of Britain's "indestructible relationship" with the US, it was less than 100 years ago, in December 1925 actually, that the US Army began drawing up 'War Plan Red' to fight Britain. The justification for this was "the expulsion of Red (Britain) from North and South America... and the definite elimination of Red as a strong competitor in foreign trade".

Substitute the US for Britain and this could sound like similar discussions probably taking place within the Chinese regime or, vice versa, in the US regarding China. But there is a big difference now as currently the US is still the world's mightiest military power. However, this does not automatically rule out the possibility of military incidents taking place, for instance in the seas around China where there are competing territorial and other claims.

Alongside China, Trump saw German capitalism, and its domination of Europe, as a challenge to his simple 'America First' policy, especially if it

tried to balance between US and Chinese capitalism.

Biden, on the other hand, has given the current German government a sweetener by dropping some of the sanctions Trump imposed to try to stop the completion of the Nord Stream 2 natural gas pipeline between Russia and Germany. He wants to fully include Germany in his alliance against China.

However, such moves will not eliminate competition and clashes of interests, especially as China is an important market for German capitalism and invests heavily in some EU countries.

Uncertainties

In an uncertain world, instability is guaranteed and a relatively declining US imperialism cannot expect its allies to always accept US imperialism's hegemony.

This means that other ruling classes, including powerful ones, may try to avoid being tied too closely to the US's coat-tails and, especially in relation to China, try not to lose access to the Chinese market and goods.

The unstable world situation has increased uncertainty. On the one hand there is the continuing impact of Covid, especially now there are regular reports of new variants causing upsurges in infections, most recently in Guangzhou in China.

In addition, the economic situation, notwithstanding the sometimes sharp immediate recoveries from lockdowns, is uncertain. Even before Covid the global economy was slowing down. Now there is increasing discussion among capitalist economists about the danger of 'stagflation', the combination of inflation, slow growth and unemployment.

Tens of millions have been plunged into poverty by Covid's economic impact. Youth unemployment has jumped upwards, while at the same time the numbers working as child labourers has risen. And all this is against the background of increasing evidence of the impact of climate change in region after region.

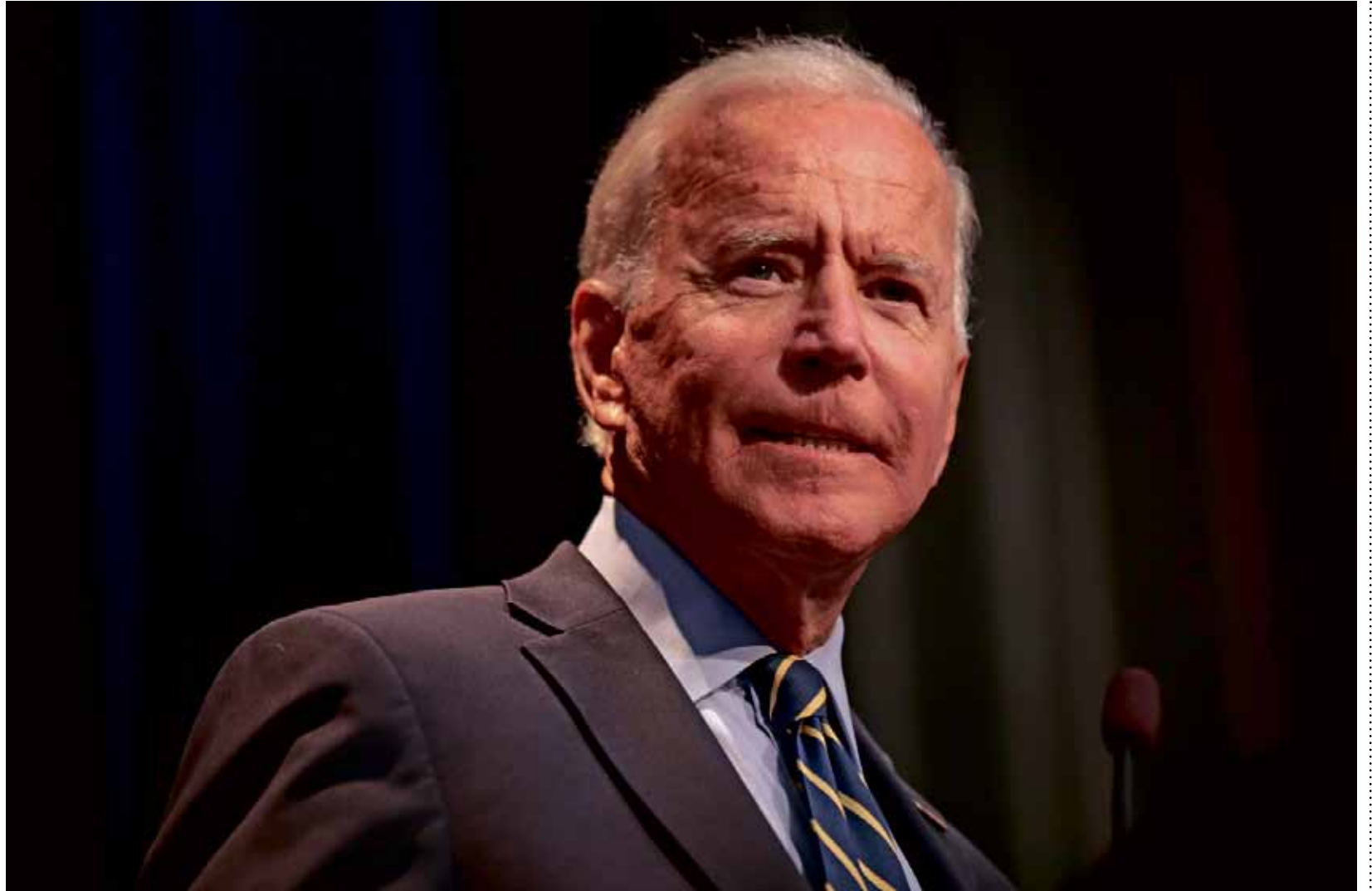
Increased tensions have caused military spending to rise, globally up 2.6% in 2020 to total nearly \$2 trillion. Different regions are seeing mounting conflicts and sometimes fighting between and within states.

While a world war between the superpowers is not posed at this stage, other clashes are entirely possible. Some, like those between Russia and Ukraine, or China and India, could have global implications, while others in West or East Africa have large regional effects.

The Biden administration's



Biden's approach is less crude, less obviously egotistical, less concerned with promoting the family brand and less mercurial than Trump's was, but on a number of key issues, Biden's goals remain the same



All of Biden's talk about upholding 'democracy' and 'human rights' pales besides the overarching geopolitical interests of US imperialism PHOTO GAGE SKIDMORE/CC

response to the recent bombardment of Gaza was typical of previous US administrations. For the first eight days its emphasis was on refusing to criticise the Israeli government's actions and blocking even a token call by the United Nations for a cessation of violence.

Even when Biden finally called for a ceasefire it was without any concrete proposals, something which indicates the inability of the capitalist powers to come up with anything more than a token 'solution' that, in reality, would not deal with the fundamentals of the Israel-Palestine crisis.

'Democracy' and 'rights'

Of course, as is to be expected, there are attempts to cover this up by an increased use of the language of 'democracy' and 'human rights'. Biden tried to set the tone just before the G7 summit, saying that "the United States is back and democracies of the world are standing together to tackle the toughest challenges, and the issues that matter most to our future".

The so-called New Atlantic Charter 2021 that Biden and Johnson grandiosely agreed on 10 June was even clearer, as it opens: "First, we resolve to defend the principles, values, and institutions of democracy and open societies... We will champion transparency, uphold the rule of law, and support civil society and independent media. We will also confront injustice and inequality and defend the inherent dignity and human rights of all individuals."

But, to say the least, these fine words are hardly borne out by the facts. Yes, there is a big Western campaign about the Chinese regime's persecution and control over the Uyghurs and other Muslim minorities in China. Their plight is repeatedly highlighted in the western media but, in contrast, persecution in Muslim countries is ignored if, as with Saudi Arabia and Egypt,

their leaders are friends and allies of US imperialism.

The facts need to be examined, not just the words. One of the first foreign policy decisions that Biden had to take was in regard to the Saudi state's 2018 murder (and then cutting up into pieces) of the Saudi dissident and US resident Jamal Khashoggi in its Istanbul consulate.

Despite the opening words of a US national intelligence report officially published in February this year stating: "We assess that Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman approved an operation in Istanbul, Turkey, to capture or kill Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi" Biden simply refused to even verbally sanction the Crown Prince.

Later, on 17 March, Biden justified this by explaining: "We have never tried to set the tone just before the G7 summit, saying that "the United States is back and democracies of the world are standing together to tackle the toughest challenges, and the issues that matter most to our future".

In other words, rulers allied to the US have a blank cheque so long as they remain allies and reliable. So much for the New Atlantic Charter's words about being willing to "confront injustice and inequality and defend the inherent dignity and human rights of all individuals".

But this is nothing new, it is a long-established practice. Back in 1939, referring to the Nicaraguan ruler who had effectively seized power in 1936, the 'New Deal' President Franklin Roosevelt is alleged to have said: "Somaza may be a son of a bitch, but he's our son of a bitch."

Biden is simply continuing a tradition not just of the US ruling class but of capitalist rulers internationally.

Afghanistan is also somewhere where Biden is following Trump, by finally withdrawing US troops stationed there. In reality, this withdrawal is an admittance of failure. The US is really cutting its losses after a nearly

20-year campaign in which it failed to meet most of its objectives, despite spending huge amounts of money.

According to the US Department of Defense, the total military expenditure in Afghanistan from October 2001 until September 2019 was a staggering \$778 billion.

It is possible that now the Taliban may extend and consolidate their rule and the US may continue to negotiate with them. The fine words of the US, Britain and other Nato countries about 'democratic rights' for Afghans were never seriously implemented and will now be thrown out of the window.

Trump tried to negotiate a deal with the Taliban. He was, in a way, following both Bill Clinton's and George W Bush's US administrations. Before the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the US, they both had negotiated with the Taliban to get them to broaden their government by involving regional warlords, as well as favouring US companies' attempts to construct an oil and gas pipeline from Turkmenistan through Afghanistan to Pakistan.

Afghanistan

Afghanistan is a real example of the hollowness of imperialist promises. It has been devastated by over 40 years of war which the US was deeply involved with.

The wrecking of the country stems from imperialism's sponsorship and arming of the reactionary Mujahedeen who fought the Stalinist regime after the 1979 Russian intervention - an intervention which Marxists opposed, but without supporting the counter-revolution which the Mujahedeen represented.

Eventually, in 1993, the Mujahedeen took over the central government, but the brutality of their short-lived rule led to the Taliban being initially welcomed by some in Kabul and elsewhere. Now, the Afghan

people face the possibility of an even worse situation. The failure of the mission, initially led by the US and Britain, to end the suffering of the Afghan people poses sharply the question that it is only movements of the working class, poor and oppressed that can fundamentally change the situation.

Working-class movements

This question of building such movements is really the key one for working people and youth internationally. It is even more vital now, as the capitalist leaders have no clear idea of what to do. They are unwilling to challenge their own system and instead they react to events, launch plans, etc, but are fundamentally now at the mercy of a world in turmoil.

However, the repeated national and international shocks, crises and unwelcome developments - like Covid - are creating a growing questioning of how countries are run, who really benefits, and what the future is.

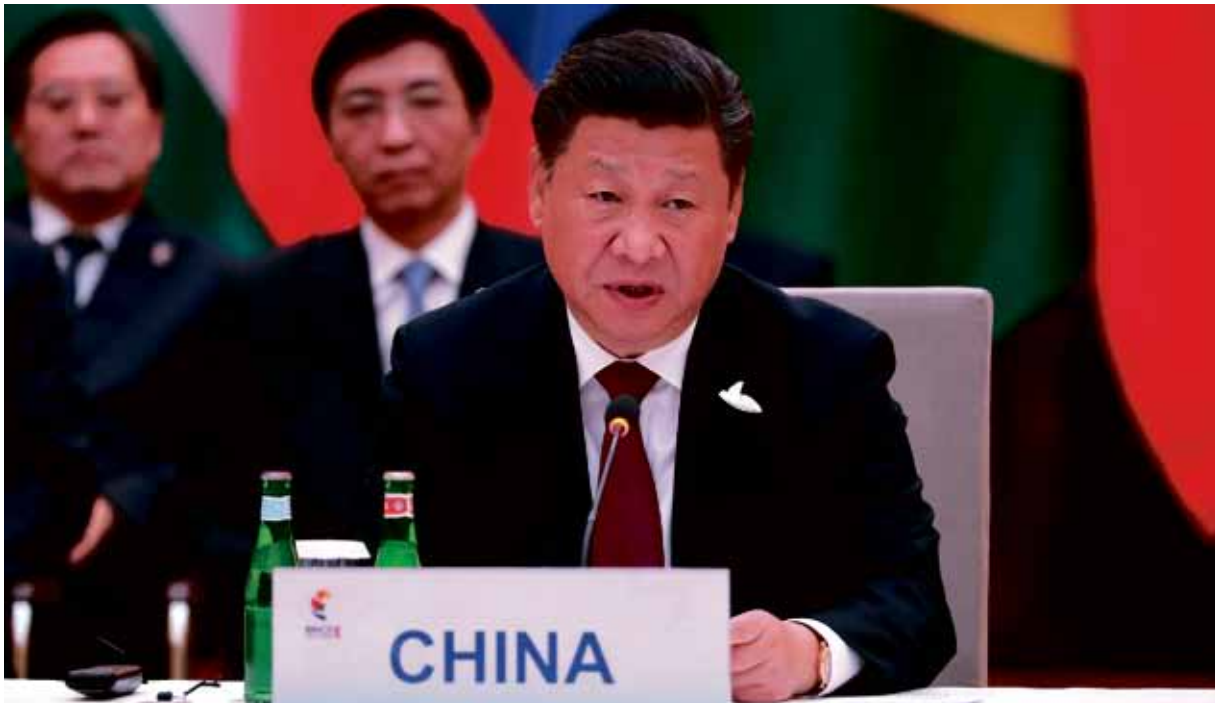
Again and again there are mass movements seeking change. Currently, we especially see them in South America where Chile, Colombia and Peru, which have all recently experienced mass movements that reject the old leaders and parties, and demand fundamental change, an end to the old system.

Discussing what needs to be done, drawing socialist conclusions, and building socialist movements and organisations that can put such ideas into practice, are key.

Only the breaking of capitalism's grip can open up the possibility of genuine change, of democratically planning the use of the world's resources and talents in the interests of humanity. Then, jamborees like the G7 summit will be seen for what they are, expensive shows where some of the world's rulers meet and issue trite statements.



Only the breaking of capitalism's grip can open up the possibility of genuine change, of democratically planning the use of the world's resources and talents in the interests of humanity



Former president Trump's general idea of protecting and boosting US imperialism's position is shared with Biden, especially in regard to China (President Xi Jinping pictured) PHOTO KREMLIN.RU/CC

International solidarity protests

Leeds ‘greet’s G7

A socially distanced protest calling for global justice, aimed at the G7 meeting in Cornwall, took an unexpected turn on 11 June. As we gathered on the Parkinson Steps, the usual place for demonstrations at Leeds University, we were met by police and security staff.

They claimed that a recent risk assessment deemed it unsafe. One protester said he had been attending protests there for 30 years without a problem. No-one from the University and College Union (UCU) or student groups had been shown the risk assessment, or told of any safety issues.

We suspect that the real reason is the visibility to the passing public. Some drivers hooted their support, and passing students took leaflets and some joined the protest.

We were offered a place round the corner. However, the 100-strong group decided to go ahead with the protest on the steps.

This is no doubt a foretaste of the attack on the right to protest that the movement will face if the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill becomes law.

KEVIN PATTISON

Nottingham stands with movement in Hong Kong

‘Hong Kong to be Free! Revolution Now!’ was the message, in English and Chinese, on black flags and t-shirts of over 250 overwhelmingly young and mainly Chinese people in Nottingham on 12 June.

An exhibition highlighted the fight of Hong Kong people for democracy and freedom under British colonial and Chinese rule for over 100 years, and graphically showed the brutal repression of protest by the Chinese

regime and the democracy movement, particularly since 2014.

The anniversary of the British handover to China in 1997 had become the focal date for protest in Hong Kong. In 2019, millions took to the streets in Hong Kong to stop the imposition of direct rule from China. They faced police violence and arrest and detention.

In 2020 and 2021, the Chinese regime used Covid restrictions as an excuse to prevent protest in Hong Kong, and have been preventing gatherings and issuing fines. So-called ‘dissidents’ can now be detained in China. There is a campaign to release those detained in 2019, and one of them, Agnes Chow, was released on Saturday.

A mass workers’ party in Hong Kong with a socialist programme, and an appeal to workers on the Chinese mainland, can turn the heroic struggles of the Hong Kong people into victory. This is even more urgent as US and China’s rivalry in the region threatens the working class in Hong Kong, China and across the region.

CLARE WILKINS

London support for Palestine struggle

Many of the several thousand young demonstrators on 12 June approached the Socialist Party, often tugging a parent or friend along, wanting to learn more about us, and discuss what can be done.

One north London woman informed us this was her first demonstration, and that her daughter convinced her to come. “I have seen Palestinians suffer since childhood”, she explained, “but my daughter keeps on fighting, so I feel that I have to as well”. Many others told similar stories, displaying the importance of youth participation in the fight for global change.

SARA JURIC



Beth Roper inquest: Train company failures ignored

JAIME DAVIES

CAERPHILLY SOCIALIST PARTY

Two years and six months ago we tragically lost a brilliant comrade and a wonderful friend, Socialist Party member Bethan Roper. Our loss, both personally and on the battlefield of class struggle, is still difficult and painful to come to terms with.

Her family, friends and comrades will always feel it, and will continue to press for action to ensure that Beth’s tragic death could not be repeated. Beth died after being struck by a tree branch when she momentarily leaned her head out of a train to south Wales in 2018.

A coroner’s inquest into the accident has now concluded. But it has only hinted at the many failings of the private companies which dominate the railways.

The train company

The inquest heard that the signs warning passengers not to open windows while the train was moving were small and not clearly displayed. But why was this possible in the first place? ‘Droplight’ windows - still in use on the train that Beth was travelling on - are relics of the 1970s, when people didn’t have to wear seat belts in cars!

The failure to decommission such train carriages, and upgrade to modern ones with safer sliding doors, is indicative of the attitude of private companies running public services. The desire to make profit far surpasses the concern for public safety.

Unsafe features like these are still installed on trains in the 21st century, because train companies have preferred to dish out dividends to shareholders rather than invest in the service to make it safe, efficient and reliable.

Attention was also drawn to the overgrown state of the tracks, which had not been attended to for seven



Beth Roper

years. Tree specialist Julian Forbes-Laird told the inquest that the accident had been “foreseeable”.

The average ash tree can grow up to 14 feet over seven years. This is clear neglect of a duty of care for workers and passengers.

Some press reports have shamefully attempted to let train companies and Network Rail off the hook by foregrounding the fact that Beth and her friends had drunk alcohol on the night when the accident happened. Travelling by public transport when you’ve had a drink is a responsible decision. Safety measures should be in place to ensure one split-second mistake can’t have fatal consequences.

The cutting of corners and failure to invest in the service is why Beth fought for the real socialist nationalisation of rail and other key services - not the sham version offered by Boris Johnson or Mark Drakeford in Wales

- a publicly owned and democratically run, affordable and safe service that would put people’s needs and lives above profits.

Beth has a wonderful legacy. As well as working to aid some of the most vulnerable people in society at the Wales Refugee Council, she was a leading member of the Socialist Party in Cardiff, was active in her union, Unite, and a delegate to Cardiff Trades Union Council.

Beth fought alongside the working class and the trade unions in various disputes against attacks on their livelihoods by the bosses. Beth stood for the socialist transformation of society and against every injustice, and will forever be missed and revered for the role she played during the brilliant life she led.

● See ‘Beth Roper: comrade, friend and fighter’ at socialistparty.org.uk



Tamil Solidarity SENAN

Tamil Solidarity asylum victory

Sri Lanka: Political campaigning now grounds for asylum

UTHAYA SENAN

COMMITTEE FOR A WORKERS’ INTERNATIONAL

In a recent landmark ruling, the Upper Tribunal - responsible for judicial reviews of Home Office decisions - has proposed new ‘country guidance’ used for determining asylum cases of refugees from Sri Lanka. The Home Office often uses outdated country guidance to reject refugee claims.

Among misguided claims from the old guidance was that only high-profile activists are in danger from deportation, and that the Sri Lankan government does not care about other political activists, and that they will be safe in Sri Lanka.

In the past, activists have pointed out that this guidance is based on interviews from Sri Lankan government supporters. This position has let many wrong court decisions be made, and resulted in the deportation of refugees to Sri Lanka.

This was challenged in a recent court case that involved Tamil

Solidarity. The Upper Tribunal ruled in favour of our appeal - agreeing that organisations such as Tamil Solidarity are treated as hostile by the Sri Lankan government.

When Rogan Gunartna - a close ally of the Sri Lankan government, with close connections to Sri Lankan intelligence services - gave evidence, he confirmed that Sri Lanka’s ban is politically motivated, and not based on any security threat.

Secret lists

It is confirmed that the Sri Lanka government sees Britain as a ‘hub of Tamil separatism’, maintains secretive ‘ban’ and ‘watch’ lists, targets key events in Britain, and monitors almost all the leading members of all Tamil organisations. Basic activities, such as taking part in demonstrations and raising money for an organisation, are considered ‘terrorist’ activities by the Sri Lankan government.

Gunartna revealed that the Sri Lankan government maintains

databases of members of Tamil organisation, with the information provided through infiltration of these organisations and details obtained from British agencies. British government collaboration in vilifying Tamil political activists must be further exposed.

Refugees and asylum seekers are sometimes discouraged from political campaigning in Britain, under the threat that it could undermine their asylum claim. But this ruling has been achieved by campaigning. Political campaigning can help win the right to asylum.

The Tories and Labour pretend to champion human rights for Tamils only to secure votes among the Tamil population living in Britain. At the same time, they fully support government policy toward Sri Lanka, and do not question the continuation of British assistance to the regime.

Even this small victory by Tamil Solidarity is being challenged by the Home Office. But we are determined to continue the fight.

Enfield by-election: We need councillors prepared to resist

Vote TUSC in Bush Hill Park on 1 July

North London Socialist Party member John Dolan is standing in the by-election in Bush Hill Park in Enfield on 1 July. John is the candidate for the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC).

We need a voice for the working class. Vote TUSC for a socialist councillor in Enfield to stand up to Tories and Labour, and fight the cuts!

What we’re fighting for:

● **Support NHS and care workers fighting for a pay rise**

NHS and care workers have been on the frontline during the pandemic. They have had a 20% pay cut over the last ten years, so workers are now demanding a 15% pay rise.

But the Tory government has suggested 1%, and Labour has quietly muttered 2%. We stand with the workers fighting for 15%!

● **Council housing, not expensive flats**
● **Make Meridian Water 100% council homes**

The Enfield Labour council is borrowing billions of pounds to buy land for private developers at Meridian Water. Meanwhile, thousands of households pay extortionate rents for overcrowded homes, and thousands sit on the council housing waiting list.

The Meridian Water development must be 100% council homes. The council should introduce rent controls to stop rip off rents.

● **Keep Whitewebbs public**
● **Reinstate weekly bin collection**

The council has given in to the government’s demand for cutbacks and privatisation. That is why Enfield Labour council has reduced bin collections, and plans to lease the council-owned Whitewebbs golf course

and surrounding woodland to a private company.

The council has also hiked council tax. We need councillors prepared to resist.

● **A people’s budget**

Establishment politicians - Tory, Labour and Lib Dem - have carried out cutbacks to our local services. We need politicians prepared to stand up to big business and the rich to demand the funding we need.

John says: “Over the last ten years, austerity has more than halved the funding for the care service I work in. As a trade union representative for public sector union Unison, I know that workers in understaffed services are highly stressed, and struggling to provide the quality services our communities need and deserve.”

We say that the community and trade unions should come together to draw up a budget that meets Enfield’s needs. It’s time to stand up to the government to win back the millions stolen from our communities.

We need councillors who demand that it’s the super-rich billionaires who pay for the crisis, not ordinary working-class people. If elected, John will vote against all cuts and council tax rises.

John is also demanding:

● **Scrap Edmonton incinerator - invest in green energy**

North London Socialist Party
Come to our online public meeting
How can we build a party for the working class - that fights for an NHS pay rise and against council cuts?
● Wednesday 30 June, 7:30pm
● Zoom ID: 562 668 7946

Queues at Socialist Party stall in Cov



Just some of the events where the Socialist newspaper was sold in the past week...

ADAM HARMSWORTH
COVENTRY SOCIALIST PARTY

The Socialist Party is out campaigning against parking charges at University Hospital Coventry, while promoting the NHS protest on 3 July. We have had a fantastic response from the community.

On 5 June, we got around 100 signatures in just two hours. On 12 June, people queued to sign the petition, including a dozen NHS workers. It was non-stop.

That builds on the over 4,000 signatures we already have. People hate the parking charges. All we hear is: “Disgusting; ridiculous; daylight robbery; sick; greedy bastards.”

One woman today told us when she had her baby she had to pay charges of £150. A nurse told us she pays £50 a month to park at work.

It is absolutely clear that the public overwhelmingly rejects the idea of charging to park at the hospital, and the PFI privatisation that brought them about, while they clearly support the NHS and its workers.

- **End all hospital parking charges**
- **End all PFI schemes and privatisation, renationalise the NHS**
- **A 15% pay rise for all NHS workers**
- **For a fully funded, socialist NHS**

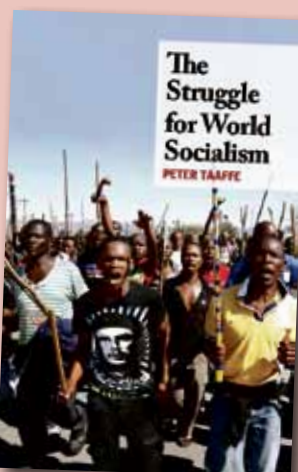
New book - coming soon

The Struggle for World Socialism

Thousands of people, especially the young, have taken to the streets across the world in opposition to the naked greed by the ruling elite, and growing impoverishment of the mass of people. The chasm between the obscenely rich ruling oligarchs and the majority of workers has been brought into sharp relief in the terrible pandemic.

Many, in all walks of life, are searching for a new way forward. Socialist change is in the air. Could this be the beginnings of the coming socialist revolution?

In this third book on the history



of the work of the Socialist Party, Peter Taaffe outlines a Marxist and Trotskyist analysis of developments in the global capitalist system, including the political events that flow from them, from the financial crash of 2007-08 through to 2019.

Numerous examples of successful trade union and political class battles bring to life not only the kind of organisation and audacity that can win against the bosses now, but also help workers hone the kind of methods and organisation that can ultimately bring about fundamental socialist change.

National finance meeting

We want funds to get socialist message out

CHRIS NEWBY

SOCIALIST PARTY NATIONAL FIGHTING FUND ORGANISER

We held a very enthusiastic national online meeting for Socialist Party finance organisers on 13 June, with 50 members taking part. There was a lively discussion about how we can increase the finances of the Socialist Party, so that we are as prepared as possible for the stormy events that are opening up. We need to produce leaflets, posters, placards and copies of the Socialist to make sure we get our socialist message out as widely as possible.

The meeting really reflected the amount of campaign activity that Socialist Party members are involved in. While 2020 was very difficult for our members to publicly campaign, we still visited picket lines and attended protests like Black Lives Matter.

And with the easing of lockdown, most Socialist Party branches are able to do regular campaign stalls. Mike from Hull said after moving their regular campaign stall from the city centre to a local shopping area, sales of the Socialist and donations increased - one person donated £20. Heather from Leicester reported on regular sales of the Socialist to

workers at the SPS factory - started from our members regularly visiting the picket line during their victorious strike.

New Socialist Party members are already taking part in campaign and fundraising activity. And over £220 was donated to our fighting fund at this meeting.

It is vital that as many of our members as possible are involved in improving the finances - selling the Socialist, raising fighting fund or increasing our regular membership subs. And organisers in every Socialist Party branch can help make sure that finance is seen as a top priority.

AREA		\$ RECEIVED		\$ TARGET		Q2: APRIL-JUNE 2021										DEADLINE: 30 JUNE 2021	
Northern	1,371	750															183%
South West	2,716	1,800															151%
London	5,802	4,600															126%
Southern & SE	2,742	2,350															117%
Wales	2,443	2,300															106%
Yorkshire	2,552	2,550															100%
East Midlands	1,713	1,850															93%
North West	1,040	1,150															90%
West Midlands	1,813	2,600													70%		
Eastern	547	1,200											46%				
Other	542	3,850	14%														
TOTAL	23,282	25,000															93%

Fund the fightback
DONATE TODAY
● Visit socialistparty.org.uk/donate

Protests in Colombia, 1 May 2021 REMUX/CC

Readers' comments

● A truly capitalist donation

The G7's pledge to donate 1 billion vaccine doses isn't as generous as the media is painting it. Truthfully, it makes me sick. The G7 countries have been actively blocking efforts to suspend vaccine patents for months! Had they been lifted, far more facilities could have been producing far more vaccines across the world months ago.

The G7 put the wishes of pharma giants first, risking so many lives especially in poorer areas of the world. Millions of preventable illnesses and deaths were not prevented. This vaccine donation is too little too late, a truly capitalist donation.

ADAM HARMSWORTH
COVENTRY

● Iraq war crimes

I am pleased mass-murderer Ratko Mladic has been sent to jail. Such a pity the USA and its allies are exempt from any punishment. Blair, Mandelson and Alistair Campbell walk free and are fawned on by the BBC.

The civilian death toll of the Iraq war has been estimated at a minimum of 110,000 and is probably much higher.

The fake story of 'weapons of mass destruction' was used to convince members of the Parliamentary Labour Party to vote for war.

Blairites still crow about Blair's election victory, but 110,000 deaths was not in his manifesto.

DEREK MCMILLAN
WEST SUSSEX

● Crony NHS Chief?

I read that the NHS needs a new top person as the present one is resigning. Who has declared she would like the job?

None other than Baroness Dido Harding, wife of a Tory MP. But that is not her only qualification. She ran the test-and-trace system that managed to spend £35 billion with absolutely no discernible effect! She also lead the telecommunications giant TalkTalk when it accidentally gave out the details of many thousands of its customers to scammers and spammers across the known world.

Boris Johnson, apparently, is strongly minded to accept her gracious offer!

MIKE CLEVERLEY
WALTHAM FOREST

● Long live the Colombia strike

Thousands of people have united to try to find the key to open a new door to lead us away from poverty and suffering, to let us care for the unconsidered, and to have the bravery to demand what is just.

The trigger to our strike was a tax reform that imposed extreme changes to our community, specifically to the lower class of our country, evidenced in the implementation of new rent payments and an increase in VAT. Taxes are also being added to agricultural supplies, household supplies and petrol, as well as an increase in transport prices and new toll collections on routes into the big cities. All of this is done without any improvements in the living conditions of the majority of the population.

Health reforms attempt to convert the whole system into an exclusively private service, leaving people standing on the edge of an abyss, while the Covid health emergency continues.

The indignation is huge. There are no guarantees of work, education, or health. The only guarantees are the ones that include extra obligations from the citizens. So, even though the tax reforms have been withdrawn, the movement continues.

The government has militarized the country. To gain control they have planted the seed of fear and look to manufacture confrontations with protesters, including a series of violent attacks against peaceful civilians translated into murders, destruction of personal property, and disappearances.

Today our heroes are not the same as yesterday. Today our heroes are the civilians, students, professors, doctors, indigenous groups, farmers, people displaced by violence, truckers and everyone else that has been affected for the crisis.

We want guarantees in education, a job, a plan to eradicate poverty, and an end to the eradicate gang wars that haven't already stopped.

Long live the national strike!

DAVID
COLOMBIA

WHAT'S YOUR VIEW?

● editors@socialistparty.org.uk

or, if you're not online, write to the
Socialist Inbox, PO Box 1398,
Enfield EN1 9GT

Books that inspired me: The Ragged-Trousered Philanthropists

"A scathing, humorous and urgent call to arms in the fight for socialism"



Workers today still face similar issues to those faced by the 'ragged-trouserred philanthropists' at the beginning of the 20th century JORGE ROYAN/CC

AKILA
BIRMINGHAM SOUTH EAST SOCIALIST PARTY

'The Ragged-Trousered Philanthropists' by Robert Tressell, published in 1914, portrays with compassion the plight of the working class in the early 1900s. However, he does not idealise the working class either: the workmen in this tale are depicted 'warts and all'. Mingled with empathy, the author's rage at the inaction, ignorance, and complicity of some workers in the capitalist system is inescapable.

Although the settings alternate between various buildings where the workmen are labouring, much of the action takes place in a house called 'The Cave'. Under the thumb of bosses Rushton & Co., the workmen renovating The Cave are under huge pressure to cut corners, scrimp and rush the job with as few hands as possible.

All this is to the detriment of their very survival; as soon as the job is complete, the impending 'slaughter' will leave them unemployed, semi-starved and desperately wandering the streets in search of work.

With few workplace rights, the workmen toil in dangerous conditions, afraid to speak out against their bullying employer for fear of getting the sack. They trudge through town between different jobs, doing

hazardous work which frequently leads to collisions with the public. In such collisions, workmen are often left clinging on to the top of a ladder for dear life, if not killed.

Era of industrial struggle

The lead up to the Edwardian era, in which the narrative takes place, saw waves of industrial action. The working class, concentrated in the urban workplaces due to the industrial revolution, engaged in numerous strikes over pay, conditions and safety. Notable movements included the 1889 east London dock strike over pay, and the 'Great Unrest' of 1910 onwards in which mass industrial action took place. Tressell himself was a politically active member of the Social Democratic Federation, which described itself as 'Marxist'.

Tressell's workmen, however, are in a tangle of political confusion; some are at varying stages of political enlightenment, as their fellow worker, Frank Owen, attempts to convince them of the need for socialism. It is no easy task. Some are openly hostile, others wilfully ignorant, and many seemingly want to believe capitalism is the only way forward, perhaps afraid to catch a glimpse of their own collective power.

The Cave doubles as a mock lecture

theatre in which Owen and others patiently overcome these obstacles. The socialists make clear the link between the crisis of capitalism and the destitution of the working class. For instance, they expand on the crisis of overproduction, the result of the capitalist profit drive where workers are paid so little that they cannot buy back what they produce and production routinely ceases, forcing them into unemployment.

In his 'Great Oration', Barrington, another converted socialist and a labourer, describes the abundance of wealth already produced by the working class, even under the chaos of capitalism, and explains how it could be fairly distributed for the benefit of all under socialism. To the amazement of some of the workmen, Owen explains the source of poverty through the 'money trick', where workers are paid less than the value of what they produce and capitalists keep the difference as profit.



The socialists make clear the link between the crisis of capitalism and the destitution of the working class.

Despite their destitution, some workmen cling to their deeply entrenched views: that capitalism cannot be overcome, that enjoyment of life is not for 'the likes of them', and that the running of society should be left to their 'betters'.

The workmen frequently turn on each other, rather than the bosses, a problem caused by the divide-and-rule tactics of the capitalists. Workers are paid different rates to do the same job, with higher-paid workers often laid off with the slightest excuse, watched like a hawk by the bullying manager, Hunter. Yet as the story progresses, even the most stubborn workmen run out of ways to disagree with the arguments for socialism.

Although the conditions of the working class have improved since the book was published, many of us can still identify with the 'struggle for life' described in Tressell's book. Tressell puts before us the possibility of a socialist society in which abundance, enjoyment of work and stability are available to all. More than just a brilliant work of fiction, *The Ragged-Trousered Philanthropists* is a scathing, humorous and urgent call to arms in the fight for socialism. The burning issues of profiteering and unstable work have not gone away. With the rise of the gig economy and, more recently, the Covid pandemic, they have returned with a vengeance. This shows that Tressell's call to arms is as urgent now as it was then.

● *'The Ragged-Trousered Philanthropists'* by Robert Tressell, Grant Richards, available to buy online.

Who represents the Palestinians?

The eleven-day Israeli air bombardment of the Gaza Strip and retaliatory Hamas rockets fired into Israel, ended with a shaky ceasefire and both sides claiming victory. Although suffering large numbers of casualties, Hamas, the Islamist organisation which controls Gaza, emerged strengthened in popularity among Palestinians, while Palestinian Authority (PA) leader Mahmoud Abbas, the 'acceptable face' of Palestine for Western governments, has little support in the West Bank.

In our ongoing series on Palestinian self-determination, **Niall Mulholland** addresses the question: what do these contending Palestinian forces represent? And, can either of them lead Palestinians to win genuine independent statehood?

In a vastly unequal military struggle, Hamas fired over 4,000 largely 'homemade' rockets at Israeli cities and towns in the recent conflict, while the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) responded with devastating modern missile attacks. At least 248 Palestinians were killed in the short war, nearly half of them women and children.

Although the vast majority of Hamas's rockets that could have hit urban areas were repelled by Israel's 'Iron Dome' defence system, by hitting deep inside Israel and killing a dozen people Hamas was able to shift 'the balance of fear'.

This was the fourth war between Israel and Hamas since 2009. While Hamas reportedly lost many of its fighters in the May conflict, and much of its system of tunnels in Gaza used to ferry arms and launch attacks, its standing among Palestinians has been bolstered. Many Palestinians credit Hamas and other Palestinian militias for fighting back against brutal Israeli oppression and attacks, in sharp contrast to the craven, corrupt PA leaders who provided no resistance.

Hamas and the PA

Hamas presented itself as the defender of the Palestinians facing expulsion from their homes in the East Jerusalem neighbourhood of Sheikh Jarrah and as the protector of al-Aqsa Mosque, which was under siege from Israeli forces.

While this raised Hamas's prestige among Palestinians, in sharp contrast, the Palestinian Authority looked impotent in the face of Israeli attacks.

"If a group like Hamas, with simple rockets and maybe 20,000 fighters, can stand up to Israel, with its advanced weaponry and its F-35 rockets, and inflict suffering upon Israel, that's a symbolic victory, at least", Mkhaimar Abusada, a professor of politics at Gaza's al-Azhar university told the Financial Times.

Hamas is designated a 'terrorist group' by Israel, the US and the EU. Following its election win over the West's favoured Palestinian leadership, Fatah, in the January 2006 Palestinian parliamentary elections, Gaza and its two million people have been subject to a cruel Israeli and

Egyptian blockade for 14 years.

Until this May's conflict, Hamas's support was declining, but it is now in the ascendant among Palestinians. Yet Hamas still has many critics among Palestinians in Gaza and elsewhere due to its years of mismanagement and authoritarian rule. In fact, Hamas was only ever able to gain wider support for its form of radical Islam due to the historic failures of the secular, nationalist Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO).

Foundation of Israel

The creation of Israel in 1948 saw the forced mass expulsions of Palestinians and military victories by Israel over neighbouring Arab states. Millions of Palestinians were left in refugee camps across the region or under oppressive Israeli rule. The Palestinian's plight became a running sore throughout the Middle East, and an issue no Arab ruler could ignore.

The PLO was created in 1964 at an Arab Summit, with the aim of the 'liberation of Palestine' from Israeli rule. From the start, the Arab regimes sought to control the movement, balancing between the demands of the Arab street for the Palestinians' right to a homeland, with the strategic and economic interests of the ruling elites in the Middle East.

The growing loss of confidence in the ability and willingness of Arab governments to win back Palestinian land was confirmed in the humiliating Arab military defeat in the 'Six-Day War' in June 1967. This left an expanded Israel in control of the Golan Heights and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and Gaza.

In the aftermath, many of the Palestinian guerrilla groups - Fedayeen - including the left-wing Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and the Palestinian National Liberation Movement (Fatah), founded in 1957-8 by Yasser Arafat (who came to dominate the PLO from 1968 onwards), followed a strategy of 'armed struggle'. This mainly saw guerrilla attacks on Israeli-held territory.

Apart from highlighting the ongoing oppression of Palestinians, these Fedayeen operations had little effect on its much more powerful military adversary, and allowed Israeli governments to rally the Jewish

population around the country's 'defence'.

The PLO leadership's reliance on the capitalist Arab states was rewarded with betrayal and suppression. When the PLO was seen to become too powerful in Jordan, in 1970, King Hussein ordered the army to attack the 'state within a state'. Several thousand PLO fighters were killed and expelled from Jordan in the conflict known as 'Black September'.

Each Arab ruling elite pursued its own cynical strategy and tactics toward Israel, and regarded the PLO as so much 'small change' in their calculations. Declared a 'terrorist organisation' by the Israeli government, the PLO was peripheral or excluded from various failed 'peace initiatives' in the 1970s and 1980s.

With the background of profound changes in the world balance of forces following the collapse of the USSR and other Stalinist states, the Arafat leadership, like other national liberation movements, shifted to the right and entered a negotiated 'peace process' in the hope of being able to collaborate with one or more of the western imperialist powers.

Oslo Accords

Under pressure from US imperialism, the PLO leadership recognised the right of the state of Israel to exist and renounced all forms of terrorism. A tortuous talks process eventually lead to the 1993 agreement, the 'Oslo peace accords', between Yasser Arafat and Israeli prime minister, Yitzhak Rabin, which entailed 'limited autonomy' for the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank and Gaza.

At the time, hopes were raised among Palestinians that an independent state could emerge from this process.

However, the Israeli ruling class never had any intention of allowing a viable independent Palestinian state on its borders. Since the 1993 agreement, the territory on which to base a Palestinian state has been reduced to a patchwork, carved up by illegal settlements and other methods by the Israeli state.

On the basis of capitalism, the PA elite grew rich while the mass of Palestinians are only offered inequality, poverty and oppression.

The Oslo Accords were no solution for Israelis either. The Israeli population is stuck in a 'bloody trap', (as revolutionary socialist Leon Trotsky warned would be the case in the 1930s), of seemingly endless wars, surrounded by hostile Arab states, and facing huge social and economic inequalities at home.

From this desperate situation facing Palestinians, Hamas was able to win wider support. Hamas (Islamic Resistance Movement) was founded in 1987, soon after the First Intifada



PHOTO TU SENAN

- a mass uprising by Palestinians in the Occupied Territories - broke out.

Hamas was an offshoot of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. Its brand of radical Islamic resistance was able to gain wider appeal among Palestinians desperate at their plight, and because of the failed policies over decades of the secular, nationalist PLO, and its main faction, Fatah. Hamas won further support by creating a welfare network and by being prepared to militarily resist Israeli aggression.

To begin with, Israeli governments tolerated Hamas's growing support as a counterweight to the secular, nationalist PLO. This 'divide and rule' policy helped keep Palestinian resistance weakened and fragmented.

Conflict within Israel

Hamas won the 2006 Palestinian legislative election and became the ruling party in the Gaza Strip in 2007 following a short 'civil war' with the Palestinian Authority forces.

There have been no new elections since then. President Abbas indefinitely postponed a legislative election scheduled for 22 May 2021, probably because he feared Hamas would win.

However, during the May conflict, for the first time in its history, the Israeli state was simultaneously facing multiple fronts: Gaza, East Jerusalem, the occupied West Bank and in Israel's 'mixed cities', where the clashes included Jewish militias attacking Palestinians, with reprisals against Jews and the burning of synagogues.

Palestinians make up around

one-fifth of the Israeli population, mostly living in Arab-majority towns and cities but there are also mixed cities where Palestinians live alongside Jews. The arrival of ideologically driven Jews who want to 'judaize' mixed urban areas has turned some of these areas into intercommunal flashpoints.

Increasingly, Palestinians are resisting on different fronts for equal rights, dignity, freedom and a transformation of their living conditions. The general strike called for Palestinian areas on 18 May was an impressive expression of solidarity.

Such mass mobilisations, with democratic structures, are the way forward to end the oppression of Palestinians.

The sclerotic, corrupt Palestinian Authority, and authoritarian Hamas, which also bases itself on capitalism and whose Islamic appeal means its support will wax and wane, cannot offer a lasting solution to the Palestinians.

Through mass revolutionary struggles in all Palestinian areas, linked to their own party with a socialist programme, the working class and poor can successfully resist Israeli oppression. This will have a profound effect on Israeli society, provoking splits along class lines, and rally support among the masses of the Middle East to the Palestinian cause and for socialist change.

A genuinely independent socialist Palestinian state, alongside a socialist Israel, as part of a wider socialist federation on a free and equal basis, would end the nightmare of oppression, war and poverty.

SOCIALISM TODAY

Magazine of the Socialist Party

June issue includes...

- Israel-Palestine: There is no capitalist solution
- Wider impact: Repercussions in the Middle East
- China bubble: Can it avoid crisis?

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Birmingham Clean Air Zone a tax on the poor

We need affordable, publicly owned public transport

TED WOODLEY

BIRMINGHAM NORTH SOCIALIST PARTY

In Birmingham a new tax has been forced on the city that will hit the poorest hardest, takes no account of income or ability to pay, and which is causing growing anger among the community. We have a Labour council doing the Tories' dirty work and handing the bill to the working class instead of fighting back.

On 1 June the city council introduced the Birmingham Clean Air Zone (CAZ) which requires drivers of older and more polluting vehicles to pay an £8 charge to use the roads in central Birmingham.

The CAZ is supposedly an attempt to drive down the levels of air pollution in the city, in particular the 'fine air particles' which can cause numerous very serious diseases such as strokes and cancer. Birmingham suffers from very high levels of these pollutants in its air, at the maximum limit as recommended by the World Health Organisation.

The city council had been threatened with a £60 million fine if they did not introduce the CAZ to improve air quality. Now workers with older, less expensive cars will foot the bill. But even the city council's own feasibility study found that introducing a daily charge on motorists would not lead to significantly cleaner air.

Public Health England has reported that air pollution causes an estimated 1,460 excess deaths each year in Birmingham and the surrounding areas. A Kings College London study in 2019 showed that pollution caused the shortening of lives of children and specifically named north Birmingham suburb Erdington as a pollution hotspot, with as many as 91 deaths attributed to pollution in 2011.

However, all this shoddy scheme will do is cause inconvenience and financial hardship to a minority of drivers while emissions and congestion continue apace.

There are looming climate and public health crises. Socialists have always argued that there needs to be an urgent shift from cars to public transport, cycling and walking. To facilitate the necessary change there needs to be a massive improvement in the public transport options on offer.

After many decades of local campaigning, and inaction by Labour and Tory governments, the Camp Hill line is finally being reopened for passenger rail services and the Metro is to be extended. But without a serious plan to tackle overuse of cars across the entire city and address the continuing long-term decline in bus usage, the impact on traffic levels will be insufficient to effectively deal with the problems.



Immediate steps should be significant investment in bus and cycle infrastructure

Immediate steps should be significant investment in bus and cycle infrastructure. Make public transport free to all, and increase the frequency and reliability of buses with security measures such as additional on-board staff and safer bus stations. There should be massive investment in electric buses, and a push towards demand-responsive bus services which are more flexible to people's needs. Renationalisation of the bus network should be a first step - an industry which has been bailed out by the state during Covid, despite racking up massive profits while overseeing continuous decline in ridership.

As well as expanding and improving public transport, we need to

replace the remaining petrol and diesel vehicles with affordable hybrid or fully electric vehicles in the shortest time possible. This could be done by nationalising the electric vehicle industry under workers' control and management, and retooling the existing car plants to produce electric vehicles.

There are now two classes of motorist in Birmingham: those who are allowed to drive freely, and those who are not. To make matters worse, the council has placed the onus on the motorist to take the initiative in paying the daily charge. Should they forget, or fail to pay for any other reason, they are liable for a £120 fine!

We now have the spectacle of local Tory politicians like the West Midlands Mayor Andy Street opportunistically arguing against the implementation of his own party's

scheme. Northfield Tory MP Gary Sambrook jumps on the bandwagon and writes "this impacts our poorer residents the most who cannot afford to buy shiny new cars." However, nobody should be fooled into believing that Sambrook holds any sympathies for the suffering of the poor - this character was one of the 318 Tory MPs who shamefully voted down feeding 1.4m of the poorest children during the school holidays last year.

So where is the opposition from Labour? Judging from the comments of Preet Gill, MP for Birmingham Edgbaston, we shouldn't expect much! She supports the CAZ and described it as a "bold, new idea". Since they've been running the city, Birmingham's Labour councillors have sacked 12,000 council employees, tried and failed to cut bin workers' pay, attacked the homecare workers, and

closed down countless local services.

What is crystal clear is that working-class people in Birmingham have no party that will stand up for us in the council chamber, or in Westminster. Despite receiving millions of pounds in funding from trade unions, the leadership of the Labour Party wants to prove that it can be relied on to look after the interests of British capitalism. Keir Starmer has made it clear that he is shredding what remains of Jeremy Corbyn's radical manifesto of 2017 to this end.

This isn't good enough; the unions should no longer hand over their members' money to a party which is battling for the opposite side. We need a new mass workers' party which will take urgent measures to clean up the environment and make sure that it is the rich and the elite of society who foot the bill.



LEWISCLARKE/CC

● Johnson's G7 hypocrisy

We may all say things we don't mean when we want to impress our peers in a sun-drenched luxury hotel in Cornwall.

In trying to impress his fellow political leaders at the G7 summit, Johnson said: "What's gone wrong with this pandemic, what risks being a lasting scar, is the inequalities that have been entrenched."

Maybe the champagne had gone to his head.

Workers know the truth, especially those who have been working on the frontline during the pandemic, like those in the NHS fighting for a pay rise, or those facing the public sector pay-freeze. That Johnson and his mates in Cornwall have presided over a pandemic that has killed millions, further impoverished billions,

and enriched the world's super-rich.

Bizarrely, Johnson said that Britain should build back better "in a more gender-neutral, a more feminine, way". What that means is anyone's guess. Supposedly it was a nod to the G7's pledge to invest more in girls' education in developing countries. But Johnson cut the UK's foreign aid budget by £4 billion this year, including cutting the UK's contribution to the girls' education scheme. Is that more feminine?

What the political representatives of the rich say to impress each other on holiday in sunny Cornwall, and what they do in the shady corridors of power, is another matter. To truly challenge inequality, the working class needs to get its hands on the vast wealth in society. This means nationalising the banks and big companies under democratic workers' control and management as part of a socialist planned economy to meet the needs of all.



PAUL MATTSSON

● Pandemic homeless

The so-called eviction ban ended at the end of May. But a legal ban on evictions, even when enforced, did not prevent tens of thousands becoming homeless during the pandemic. Over 130,000 households in England were made homeless during the first year of the pandemic, a series of freedom of information requests by the Observer found.

Many of these households would

have found themselves no longer able to stay with family or friends during the periods of lockdown, revealing the extent of 'hidden homelessness' or 'sofa surfing'. Others would have come to the end of their tenancy, unable to find or afford new accommodation, or be fleeing domestic abuse.

What is needed is a re-introduction of the legal ban on evictions, but also a huge investment in the building of council homes, and a strengthening of tenants' right to secure tenancies. (Read more: 'Housing crisis: what now and after the pandemic?' at socialistparty.org.uk)

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WOMEN'S HEALTH MATTERS

MARY FINCH

WALTHAM FOREST SOCIALIST PARTY

The Cumberlege review last year was just one example of the devastating impact of the 'gender health gap'. Thousands of women are still suffering agonising pain from pelvic mesh implanted to alleviate incontinence. Many of those who had surgery to fully remove the mesh later found out they had been lied to, and that some mesh had been left behind.

Others, who took supposedly safe medication to treat epilepsy, or used hormonal pregnancy tests, suffered miscarriages and birth defects in their children as a result. These women weren't told about the possible side effects, and they were systematically dismissed and lied to for decades when they raised concerns about them.

More than a dozen women and more than 40 babies have died in the last 20 years while in the care of Shrewsbury and Telford NHS trust. In total, over 1,800 potentially preventable instances of injuries, deaths and stillbirths were identified.

Women treated at the trust often weren't given a choice in how their baby was delivered. They were pressured to have a 'natural' vaginal birth as part of a drive to keep C-section numbers low. Staff ignored national guidelines for safe delivery, administering oxytocin and using forceps to ensure a vaginal birth even when it was clear that these actions were putting patients in danger.

Women's views ignored

Perhaps the most terrifying part of the investigation is that it's not exclusive to the Shrewsbury and Telford trust. A study earlier this year found that 14% of women who have given birth at least once were overruled in decisions and planning for their birth. 30% said their opinions weren't sought at all.

As a result the Tories have felt forced to announce a long-overdue consultation on women's experiences of the healthcare system.

Having presided over ten years of brutal cuts which have decimated services that save women's lives, like domestic violence refuges, and left the NHS chronically underfunded, it's clear they're not doing this out of a genuine concern for women's health.

Decades of struggle have improved social attitudes towards women, but sexist ideas have not been eradicated. Institutions such as the NHS will inevitably reflect attitudes such as sexism and racism which exist in wider capitalist society.

These attitudes, in addition to underfunding, can affect the quality of care women receive. Many of us can still be treated as if we are lying, exaggerating or even suffering from mental health problems like anxiety when reporting painful symptoms. For black, Asian and minority ethnic women these attitudes can be compounded by racist stereotyping.

Austerity has played a role in this.



The trade unions have a critical role to play today in fighting cuts, privatisation and sexism in the NHS PHOTO PAUL MATTHESSON

All NHS services are severely underfunded and understaffed, leaving overworked staff desperately trying to care for patients in impossible conditions. There's a shortage of 2,500 midwives, and eight out of ten midwives believe their NHS trust doesn't have enough resources to provide a safe service.

But even without cuts, there is systematically a lower standard of healthcare for women. Most clinical trials use a majority of male participants, so numerous illnesses aren't recognised or understood in women because the symptoms present differently. And conditions like endometriosis that primarily affect women are chronically underfunded, similarly meaning they're not fully understood and are underdiagnosed.

Extensive funding for research into conditions which primarily affect women is needed and scientific research into conditions which affect people irrespective of gender should include an equal gender balance in all clinical trials. We should also demand that the resources health workers use, such as medical text books, reflect their patients' races and ethnicities.

There has been a general tendency towards assuming that women are less reasonable and able to accurately report any symptoms of illness. This is especially the case with pain – it can often be seen as a part of life and something women just have to put up with. There's a widely acknowledged stigma around C-sections for this reason. Women who choose this option are often made to feel they are taking the easy way out.

Ultimately this is rooted in sexist ideas that have historically considered women's essential role in society to be that of reproducers and caregivers – that women were

built for giving birth, and opting for a C-section is avoiding 'what comes naturally'. By extension, women's bodies were built to tolerate incredible amounts of pain, and therefore women who report being in pain are lying or hysterically exaggerating tolerable symptoms.

Breastfeeding is treated in much the same way. There is definite evidence that breastfeeding boosts a baby's immune system. But the overwhelming pressure placed on women to exclusively breastfeed, and the judgement when they choose not to or are unable to, is disproportionate to the benefits of breast milk over formula.

Involuntarily giving up breastfeeding is often associated with feelings of shame and inadequacy. It can have a serious impact on mental health – women who plan to breastfeed, but aren't able to, are twice as likely to develop postnatal depression.

At the same time, though, women are routinely harassed for breastfeeding publicly, and 44% of local councils have cut or closed specialist services that supported women with breastfeeding.

All parents should have access to unbiased, evidence-based information about options for giving birth and feeding their baby, and receive support without judgement whatever their choice. There should be genuine zero tolerance of harassment of breastfeeding parents.

All cuts to maternity services, including specialist breastfeeding clinics, must be reversed as part of a massive investment in the whole NHS.

Women are also still fighting to genuinely have the right to choose. The NHS began offering telephone appointments to access the abortion pill during lockdown, halving the

average waiting time and reducing major complications by two-thirds. Despite this the Tories are consulting on whether to go back to face-to-face only appointments.

Access to fertility services is limited and often a postcode lottery, as there's no standardisation across the NHS for wait times or eligibility. Some local trusts only offer these services to women over the age of 35 because of the lower chance of natural conception. Others are only open to women under the age of 35 for the exact same reason!

Right to choose

Everyone should have the right to choose when, whether and how to have children. There should be full funding and equal access to fertility services regardless of location, and access to free and safe abortion and contraception on demand.

But many working-class people put off having children or decide not to have them at all because of poverty and instability. The Socialist Party says that in order to give women real choice, we also need a mass programme of council house building, wages we can live on and an end to zero-hour contracts, and free childcare.



There's a shortage of 2,500 midwives, and eight out of ten midwives believe their NHS trust doesn't have enough resources to provide a safe service

Women know that unequal treatment in the healthcare system is a problem. But it's seen as something to be dealt with individually because there's no clear lead on how to fight for better standards of care.

The trade unions have a critical role to play today in fighting cuts, privatisation and sexism in the NHS. The inspirational protests of nurses across the country over the insulting 1% pay offer from the Tories demonstrate the huge anger that exists among healthcare workers. A determined battle for a 15% pay increase should be linked to fighting all other attacks on the NHS.

Unions can and should campaign for training for healthcare workers to root out sexist attitudes, with the democratic oversight of the workers' movement.

They could demand funding for research into women's health, and ensure all healthcare workers properly understand conditions that primarily affect women and how conditions that affect all genders present differently in women.

The private ownership of the big pharmaceuticals industry, in which the primary motivation is profit, means that health is not prioritised. This situation points to the need for democratic public ownership which requires united working-class struggle to win.

Democratic control of the NHS by workers and service users would mean women and healthcare workers could decide together which services are needed.

Medical professionals could be properly held to account for decisions made about women's healthcare under the democratic control of workers, rather than individual women being forced to battle for a second opinion or referral to a specialist.

That means socialism – taking the wealth and our public services out of the hands of a super-rich minority. The working class holds enormous potential power to overthrow capitalism, and replace it with a democratically planned economy.

Ending the chaotic market system and unequal class relations would lay the basis for ending sexism in the whole of society.

A Fighting Programme for Women's Rights and Socialism

Socialist Party pamphlet

email: info@socialistparty.org.uk



£1/£2 solidarity price

socialistparty.org.uk



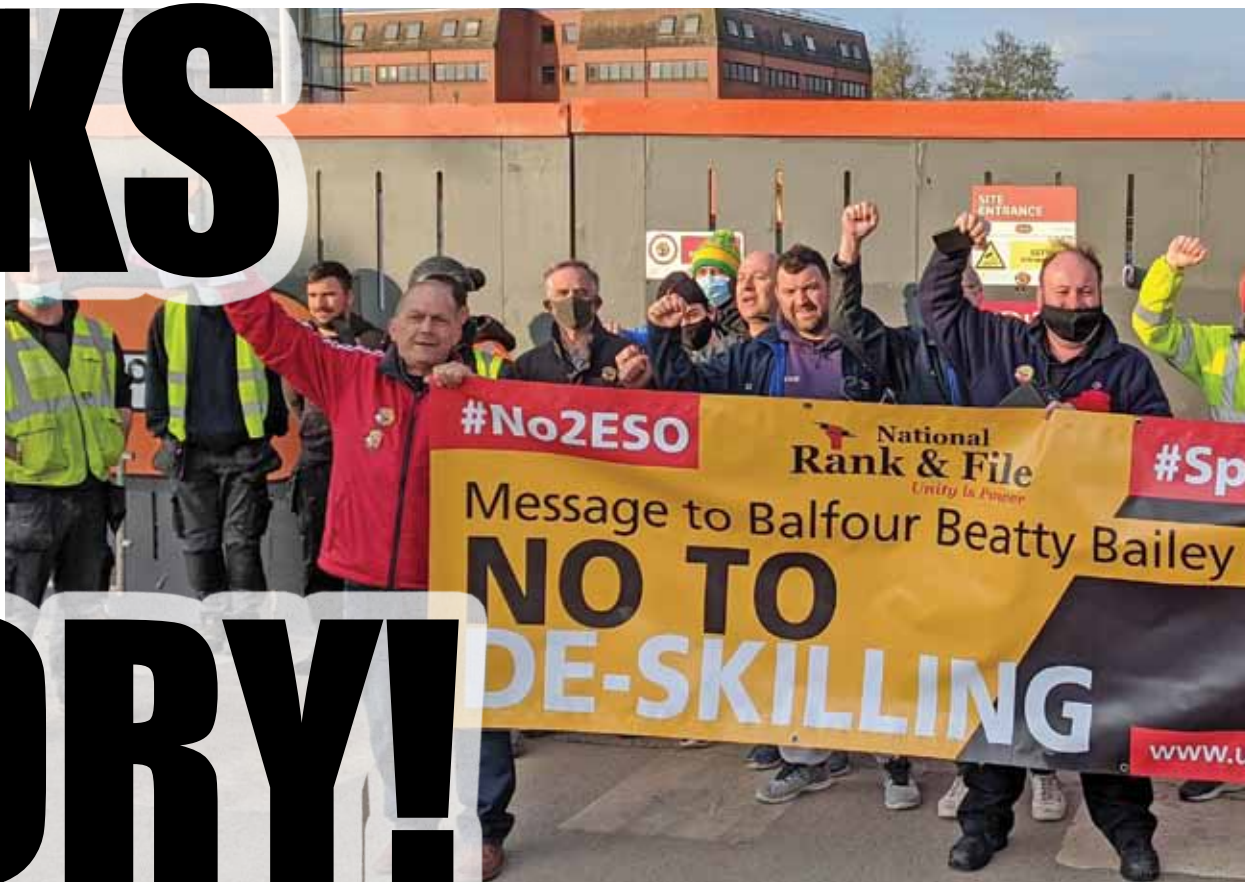
the Socialist

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SPARKS WIN VICTORY!



RANK-AND-FILE ACTION PAYS - COME TO NSSN CONFERENCE

ROB WILLIAMS

SOCIALIST PARTY WORKPLACE AND
TRADE UNION ORGANISER

The 'sparks', rank-and-file construction electricians in Unite, have yet again defeated the deskilling agenda of the big electrical contractors.

EDF Energy, Balfour Beatty and NG Bailey opened up their offensive almost a decade to the day when workers kicked off their ultimately successful six-month fight against the 'Besna' contract, the last main attempt by the bosses to attack wages in the electrical trade in this way.

Employers see deskilling, employing workers who are not fully trained electricians, as a way of driving down wages and conditions in an industry already plagued by low pay, sub-contractors, agencies and umbrella companies.

It threatens not just the livelihoods of fully trained electricians,

but also fire safety in the buildings being built. Things have come to a head over the attempts to deskill at the enormous Hinkley Point nuclear power site in Somerset.

As the sparks explain in the Unite Electrical Mechanical Combine statement, they discovered that training standards had been drawn up for a new electrical service operative (ESO) grade, specifically for the massive Hinkley Point C nuclear power plant, but threatening to become a norm throughout the industry.

Instead of the promised 600 electrical apprenticeships, this would have seen containment and cabling work being carried out by cheaper, unskilled labour. The sparks estimated that this would have seen up to 70% of their work deskilled.

Just as with the Besna struggle, the rank-and-file sparks launched a campaign of direct action, though this time bravely battling with the difficulties of the severe Covid lockdown rules.

These were being strictly applied by the Tory government, with protesters being arrested on protests over NHS pay and the murder of Sarah Everard. On a few occasions, police also tried to break up legal strikes. No wonder the #NO2ESO protests took place behind face-masks - for safety's sake and to avoid arrest!

The Socialist Party and the National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) have given support and solidarity right through the sparks' struggle. There has been a weekly Socialist Party bulletin, giving reports from the protests.

We were there on 24 February, when, at a few hours' notice, the first protest took place outside EDF Energy's HQ near Victoria Station in London. It was short and sharp but the warning was laid down: back off or we step up the fight!

►► READ WHAT HAPPENED NEXT
AND HOW THE SPARKS WON
ON PAGE 7

 **nationalshop
stewardsnetwork**

2021 NSSN CONFERENCE VIA ZOOM

zoom ID
839 3135 8284

11am SUNDAY 20 JUNE



Speakers include the sparks!

Email info@shopstewards.net
for info

**shop
stewards
.net**

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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