

NHS IN CRISIS 'IT'S TIME FOR ACTION'



PHOTO: PAUL MATTHEWSON

JOIN PROTESTS ON 3 JULY 15% PAY RISE NOW

BRIAN
BRISTOL NHS WORKER

The Tories' derisory 1% pay offer to NHS staff is only the latest in a long list of injuries that healthcare staff have had to endure. Consistent underfunding is crippling the health service. It seems they want to set it up to fail.

The slashing of funding for student nurses to train removes a massive incentive for people to join the health service. Now, newly qualified nurses have to take on large amounts of debt. This is hardly the solution for a health service in crisis, with over 100,000 vacancies. Managers are being forced to make unsafe decisions every day due to staffing being at critical levels, endangering patients, and forcing staff to work in unsafe environments.

Many healthcare workers are suffering with the effects of the pandemic, both physically and mentally, on a daily basis. Because of understaffing, workers are forced to perform tasks that potentially endanger their professional registration. This stress has to take its toll.

Gestures like clapping for carers show the goodwill the public have for the health service. But it's time for action with more substance.

The government's consistent policy of privatisation of services, to be run for profit rather than need, undermines the efforts of NHS staff.

In Bristol, the privatisation of a large community hospital has left it running at only half capacity, and its limited range of provision doesn't allow it to take patients with high dependency needs. This is creating a bottleneck in the general hospital where patients end up staying for far longer than they normally would.

This is detrimental to the patients and is putting further strain on an already struggling service. A lack of support from our union leaders has led to grassroots health workers mainly taking on the fight themselves.

The NHS day of action on 3 July presents a great opportunity for us to show that we won't allow ourselves to be bystanders in the dismantling of this great institution in the name of profit.

Join the fight. This affects everyone, not just those working in the NHS. We all deserve a top class health service, free to all at the point of access.

- Join the protests in your local area on 3 July - see keepournhspublic.com for details
- For more on NHS see pages 4 and 7

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

Chesham and Amersham by-election Urgent need to build alternative to pro-capitalist politicians



The myth of Johnson's electoral golden touch has been shattered by the Chesham and Amersham by-election. The Tory vote slumped to 36% - having previously never dropped below 50%.

The government's approach to democratic control of planning and building regulations is also summed up by recent events in Ledbury, Hertfordshire. In March, against the opposition of the local town council, the government gave permission for a housing development.

No wonder voters in Chesham voiced their disgust, picking up the half-dead Liberal Democrats, who don't even oppose HS2, as a means to protest against the Tory government.



in turn will accelerate the widening of the already deep splits in the Tory party. For working-class people, however, there is an urgent need to an alternative to the pro-capitalist politicians.

The by-election also illustrated the total lack of appeal of Starmer's pro-capitalist Labour. They got their worst ever by-election result of 622 votes, 1.6%. Starmer's primary purpose has been the systematic obliteration of Corbynism, in order to once again make Labour a reliable party from the point of view of the capitalist class.

This by-election is yet another illustration of the need for the workers' movement to create its own political voice, representing the interests, not of the spivs and speculators, but of the working-class majority. We would argue for such a party to put forward a clear socialist programme - based on the nationalisation of the major corporations and banks - so that all their resources could be harnessed to meet need rather than being squandered on the profits of a few.

Unite general secretary contest: Vote for Sharon Graham



For a fighting programme and the basis for a new open and democratic left in Unite

SOCIALIST PARTY STATEMENT

The Socialist Party is supporting Sharon Graham for Unite general secretary. The ballot opens on 5 July. Many of the most combative workers are increasingly being drawn towards her campaign as they look to resist the growing offensive of the bosses.

We argued throughout the long pre-election period and during the nomination stage for there to be one fighting left candidate. We have not accepted that the United Left (UL) candidate Steve Turner is capable of playing this role.

At the UL hustings last summer, in response to Howard Beckett's attack on Sir Keir Starmer moving Labour to the right, Turner pointedly distanced himself, saying that a Unite general secretary isn't an attack dog but has to be in the background doing deals.

Just before nominations opened, in the Huffington Post on 28 April, Steve Turner criticised the leverage campaign of Sharon's organising and leverage department to supplement the Manchester bus strike by putting pressure on Labour mayor Andy



The most fighting members in the union must unite around Sharon's campaign. This should include those who were attracted to Howard Beckett's campaign

Howard promises a 'blended manifesto'. But how, for example, will the opposite standpoints on Starmer's Labour leadership be merged? Should Unite be prepared to 'pitch campaigns' against right-wing Labour politicians attacking Unite members, or not?

We agree with Sharon's desire to make the union more industrially organised and ready for action, including building and extending shop stewards combines. We also support her promise that Unite should "oppose any local authority, including Labour, if they attempt to force through cuts to jobs and services after Covid-19 and beyond... and support candidates who oppose cuts to Unite members' jobs and services and councils and councillors who fight against them".

These are welcome pledges. In our view, it is important that Sharon's campaign does not attempt to avoid the political issues, but instead confronts the reality of Starmer's pro-capitalist leadership of Labour. This will pose the need for a left, anti-austerity political vehicle for workers that will be attractive to Unite members as they come into collision with the 'Westminster brigade' of Starmer and the cutting Labour councillors.

The fighting programme that is needed is still possible and can win this election. That is why the most fighting members in the union must unite around Sharon's campaign. This should include those who were attracted to Howard's campaign, particularly his opposition to Starmer.

Such an election campaign can become a pole of attraction to all those who want to build on Len McCluskey's leadership rather than retreat from it. It must be the basis for a new fighting and open and democratic left within Unite, which will be necessary whatever the outcome of this election.



Come together behind a left campaign

We argued for Sharon and Howard to come together and unite around one candidate on a militant industrial and political programme. This would have electrified the election campaign.

Therefore, it is a serious mistake that Howard Beckett has withdrawn in order to support Turner. There will be Unite members who genuinely believe that this is necessary in order not to split the vote, given that right-winger Gerard Coyne has succeeded in getting on the ballot paper. But the best way to avoid this would have been for Howard to unite with Sharon. That in turn would have put pressure on Turner to withdraw.

Some argue that Steve Turner is the ordained left candidate after winning most nominations. But a joint candidature of Sharon and Howard Beckett would have had 677 nominations to his 525, with branches representing 380,000 members compared to Turner's tally of 270,000.

Moreover, the most effective way to take on Coyne's populism - his posturing as a 'voice of the ordinary worker' against the machine - is through a fighting programme that can appeal to the broader layers of Unite members, who don't normally vote in the union's elections.

The joint statement of Steve and

A socialist programme for Unite

- No return to partnership with the bosses - maintain the position of not repudiating unofficial action
Workers must not pay the price for Covid. Fight for our lives and livelihoods - for workers' control over workplace safety
Fight to prevent workplace closures and redundancies, including through union inspection of company accounts. Let's see where the profits have gone
Nationalise, under democratic workers' control and management, company plants threatened with closures and widespread redundancies. Integrate these into a socialist plan of production
Unite must take the lead in fighting for coordinated action against the Tories, their cuts and anti-union laws
Use the union's industrial strength to build links and solidarity between its different industrial sectors
Democratise the union - extend the election of officers from just the general secretary, beginning with assistant general secretaries, national industrial sector and equality officers and regional secretaries
For an annual policy conference on a branch delegation basis; biennial elections throughout the union from shop stewards to the executive council
The election of full-time union officials. Union officials to receive a wage no higher than the average workers' wage
Unite should support council candidates inside or outside Labour who commit to refuse to pass on Tory cuts, and urge Unite members in councils to move no-cuts budgets in Labour-run authorities
No to Starmer's revival of New Labour - fight for a mass political vehicle for workers with a socialist programme

Socialist Party WHAT WE STAND FOR

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

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

PUBLIC SERVICES

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

WORK AND INCOME

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

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

ENVIRONMENT

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

RIGHTS

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

MASS WORKERS' PARTY

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

SOCIALISM AND INTERNATIONALISM

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

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Furlough reduction risks job losses

Unions must fight for full pay

MICHAEL MORGAN
COVENTRY SOCIALIST PARTY

Despite the Tory government extending coronavirus restrictions until 19 July, rather than bringing them to an end on 21 June, the furlough scheme will continue to be downgraded and gradually dismantled as planned. This means that from the 1 July the employer will be expected to contribute 10% of workers' wages, and the government will only provide 70%.

Not only is this a slap in the face to workers who are already on 80% of their often-low wages and still expected to pay 100% of their rent, but it will likely lead to job losses. There were 1.2 million more claiming out-of-work benefits in April of this year compared to March 2020. More than that, in the last year alone, 289,000 under-25s were taken off payrolls.

Industries such as hospitality, which a lot of young people work in, will be especially hard hit by the changes. Extended restrictions mean some businesses will remain shut, and will be unwilling, or unable, to pay 10% of wages to retain staff.

The BBC has reported that "record



SOUTHAMPTON SOCIALIST PARTY

numbers of young people are also choosing to stay in education and are not looking for work" - but it has ignored the fact that in many cases young people's choice is between minimum wage, zero-hour contracts and poor working conditions, or further study. They do not have the

opportunities to find well paid and stable employment.

Trade unions must lead the fight for better-paid, more stable jobs for all, a real living wage of £12 an hour as a step towards £15, and full pay for those on furlough and those asked to self-isolate.

Leicestershire engineers' fifth week of strikes against fire and rehire

STEVE SCORE
LEICESTER SOCIALIST PARTY

Service engineers at Brush Electrical Machinery are in the fifth week of their strike against a 'fire and rehire' attack on pay and conditions (see 'Engineers in fourth week of strike action against huge fire-and-rehire attacks' at socialistparty.org.uk).

Unite rep, Dale Clarke, spoke to the Socialist on the picket line: "The management have now moved the goalposts. They issued notices to us last week, saying that we have until 1 July to sign the new contract, or they

will withdraw our right to be rehired. Basically, they are saying 'sign or be sacked'.

"The dispute has been going on since November, but Melrose plc, the company that owned Brush Electrical, is now claiming that they sold us some time between February and June to another company - One Equity Partners. They sold us during a dispute without our knowledge! The new company seems quite happy to continue railroading this through.

"We have to put a stop to fire and rehire, it needs doing at a national level."



Workers on the picket line at Brush Electrical Machinery STEVE SCORE

Oaks Park school strike stands strong against bully bosses

JAMES IVENS
EAST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

Bully bosses looked agitated as Oaks Park High School pickets belted out 'Solidarity Forever' to the peals of a union rep's trumpet on 22 June.

That Tuesday was the second strike day at the council-run secondary in Redbridge, east London. The National Education Union (NEU) is defending a sacked rep and three other staff victimised for exercising 'Section 44' health-and-safety rights.

Assistant heads policed the gates like bouncers. Students filed past a loud and spirited picket line demanding: "Stop the bullying!" The culture under the new head has led to the departure of many longer-standing staff and fear in the workplace.

The borough's Labour council has opposed the union, siding with the bullying senior leadership team. As we go to press, strikers plan to march on Redbridge Town Hall on 23 June. If Labour councillors refuse to stand up for workers, trade unionists should consider standing independent candidates against them.

The strike has caused significant disruption, with classes packed together in the sports hall. This flies in the face of Covid safety as case numbers rise - and underlines management's blasé attitude to student and staff welfare. Bosses even brought back older students with the promise of a free lunch to supervise 'sports day', as cover for the striking staff!



Workers on strike to defend victimised reps JAMES IVENS

Despite the culture of fear and strike-breaking efforts, numbers on the picket line remain strong. But naturally, the bullying is not limited to the staff.

One picket told the strike rally that a senior manager had recently remarked on a student's skirt length: "Don't you have any dignity?" Standing up for herself, the student asked "does it make you uncomfortable, sir?" He reportedly replied: "Extremely!"

School workers were outraged at this sexist attack. They also noted that white students with skirts of the same

length were not subjected to similar comments.

Louise Cuffaro, newly elected to the NEU's national executive committee, joined fellow Socialist Party members on the picket line. "The very solidarity you're feeling here is the solidarity you should be feeling every single day in the staff room!" But "you have to fight to get the time to get the break in the staff room!" The fights against bullying and intolerable workload are fights the NEU must take up nationally.

The next planned strike days are Tuesday 29 June to Thursday 1 July.

Exeter Trades Council backs NHS protests

Exeter Trades Council has agreed to support the demonstration in Exeter on 3 July. The time for clapping our NHS staff is over. Clapping does not put food on the table or pay the rent! The miserable proposed offer of 1% is an insult to staff. With inflation already running at over 2% - this would mean a pay cut. During more than ten years of austerity, many NHS workers have lost over 20% of pay in real terms. There are reports of staff leaving the NHS in droves due to exhaustion and feeling under-valued. Waiting lists stand at a record five million. The Tories and their cronies have made millions. It is time to stand up and defend our NHS!

Exeter Trades Union Council will join with Keep Our Health Public, Health Campaigns Together and NHS Workers Say No, to support the 15% pay demand for NHS staff, fight privatisation and demand safe conditions for everyone in the NHS.

SEAN BROGAN
SECRETARY EXETER TRADES COUNCIL AND SOCIALIST PARTY

Tories deliberately underfund childcare

The cost of childcare is rocketing. Access to places is being squeezed. The funding local authorities receive from the government to deliver free childcare for three and four-year-olds is not enough. And the Tories knew it!

According to the Early Years Alliance, the Tories are paying less than two-thirds what their own figures suggested was needed.

This funding hole is forcing up prices for those not covered by the scheme, leading to a reduction in service quality as providers squeeze costs, and in some cases causing providers to close. Finding a space is increasingly difficult.

Early years childcare needs to be fully funded, publicly owned and access be extended to all parents. Only then will there be high-quality, and affordable childcare for all.

Anti-protest bill breaches human rights

Even Parliament's human rights committee (JCHR) has lambasted the Tories crime and policing bill. Restricting the right to protest will breach human rights laws and criminalise peaceful protesters, it claims.

Giving Home Secretary Priti Patel powers to define 'serious disruption', the JCHR says, is "unacceptable". Clauses such as that allowing protests to be restricted for being too noisy should be scrapped. We say the whole bill should be ditched. It is the Tory government tooling up to crack down on any future opposition to their attacks on workers and young people.

But we can't rely on legal arguments and parliamentary niceties. This government will only listen if we organise mass action. We need to step up the 'kill the bill' protests. And the trade union leaders need to take a lead and mobilise their more than six million members in that fight.

Sacking non-vaccinated care workers will not save lives



Low pay and poor conditions has led to a shortage of care workers WORLDSKILLSUK/CC

GLYNN DOHERTY

The Tories' announcement that care home workers will have to be vaccinated to retain their jobs is a deliberate, if somewhat botched, attempt to distract attention from their appalling safety record on Covid-19. Boris Johnson is trying to crudely hijack and exploit understandable concerns about safety for elderly or sick adults to cause divisions between ordinary people.

As a trade union organiser, I have spent fifteen months supporting workers in the social care sector as they fought their employers for adequate PPE, testing, staffing levels and rest breaks to keep people comfortable and alive.

I have also had to occasionally represent workers who, for reasons I may disagree with but which they nevertheless sincerely hold, refused to wear masks or have tests. A minority don't want the vaccination. Most,

in my experience, because of concerns about the vaccine's potential effect on their current health rather than any, more speculative, anti-vaccination stance in general. Behind this is often a genuine and justified distrust of the Tory government with their horrendous record over Covid, and the inequalities of capitalism.

A populist kneejerk reaction will do nothing to save lives and will, conversely, endanger them.

Staff shortage

There are up to 120,000 social care vacancies in England at any one time, caused by poverty pay levels, atrocious working conditions, and bullying bosses. Adding to this crisis by sacking workers is the height of irresponsibility and stupidity.

Being vaccinated in itself does not necessarily prevent someone being a carrier. Workers who have had the vaccine still need testing. But carers no longer being there at all will cost lives!

Extending these plans to NHS staff, as has been suggested by vaccines minister Nadhim Zahawi, would cause huge, unnecessary disruption to a service already in deep crisis, with chronic understaffing. Any compulsory vaccination could also lead to potential human rights legal actions against the government, costing millions from the public purse.

The unions must get agreements now, from local authorities and the NHS, that workers can be redeployed into non-caring provision roles. However, this may be virtually impossible for workers in the thousands of non-union-recognised employers providing social care for profit.

If health and social care was brought into democratic public ownership, the process of redeployment on equivalent pay, terms and conditions would be entirely possible. It would also enable the provision of adequate PPE and testing required to keep social care workers, and those using the services, safe.

Leicester private healthcare tragedy

JOHN MERRELL
LEICESTER SOCIALIST PARTY

Private healthcare is embedded in the provision of accident and emergency treatment at the Leicester Royal Infirmary. That was the nub of a tragic loss by a mother-to-be reported in the 'Leicester Mercury' in March, summed up by the headline "I was losing my baby, but sent home and told to take a painkiller".

The triage was carried out by a clinician working for DHU Health Care, a so-called community interest company. The mum said she was in and out in five minutes, with no checks carried out, and she was told she would not be admitted to A&E and was advised to go home. Astoundingly the clinician was part of a national triage service organised by 'NHS 111 First' initiative.

The tragedy occurred last September, the mother approached the media because of DHU Health Care's dismissive response to her complaint. "They've admitted they should have referred me but not apologised, and in the same letter said I wasn't in pain or bleeding

heavily, which I was and I told them that I was".

In the 2019 general election Boris Johnson claimed he would finance the building of 40 new hospitals; the claim quickly became a downright lie when it was revealed that only six new hospitals would be built. This included the proposed hospital reconfiguration in Leicester, where three acute care hospitals will be reduced to two, and the Leicester Royal Infirmary will be the centrepiece.

Unbelievably, under the cover of the pandemic, the NHS Trust has forced through the proposals (see 'Save Leicester General Hospital' at socialistparty.org.uk). But not without campaigners winning a commitment to more beds than was originally proposed.

The 'Save Our NHS Leicestershire' campaign group, in which the Socialist Party plays a leading role, believes the trust's proposals do not measure up to the growing needs of Leicester's populace. We will continue to campaign for the health service to meet the needs of Leicester's population. Part of that will be joining the NHS day of action on 3 July.

Outsourced London hospital workers fight for better pay



Workers on the picket line at Royal London Hospital LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

JAKUB KOTWICA
EAST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

Catering workers have walked out for five days at the Royal London Hospital, part of Barts NHS Trust in east London. The strike by members of Unite the Union is taking place across all shifts from 21-25 June. Each day of the strike there are lively picket lines near the front entrance of the hospital. And a rally was organised for Thursday 24 June at 12pm to support the striking workers, who are fighting to level their wages to the same as directly employed NHS workers doing the same job.

Socialist Party members have visited the picket lines every day, including the workers' union branch secretary Len Hockey, and newly elected Unison NEC member Naomi Byron.

Throughout the pandemic, these essential workers worked continuously helping the sickest and most vulnerable. Many of them contracted

Covid which put in danger, not only themselves, but also their families and loved ones. Some of them paid for their dedication with their lives.

Although the Covid-19 pandemic seems to slowly be getting more under control, and despite last year's overwhelming praise for the commitment and value of essential workers, it is apparent that the conditions of their employment is only getting worse. Recently Serco, the private company contracted by Barts to provide catering services, forced on their employees rigid 15-week roster changes that scattered shifts and included split rest days.

As a result, workers have found it impossible to arrange childcare, and some have been prevented from completing college courses. This is taking place on top of the already aggressive use of 'absence triggers' and the abuse of power in allocation of shifts and holiday. All of which workers were enduring throughout the pandemic.

Strikers are asking Barts NHS Trust to support their key workers. On the picket lines they are handing out flyers, asking the community to write directly to senior managers of the trust, and encouraging everybody to take part in the NHS Barts board meeting that takes place on 7 July at 11am.

It is not the first time that outsourced Barts Serco workers have had to go on strike. In September 2017, after 24 days of strike action across four London hospitals, the ancillary workers managed to bring Serco to the negotiating table. Like now, the pickets were alive with chanting, singing, dancing, speeches, and took part in joint action with other strikes in London.

The same determination to fight can see the catering workers win this dispute too.

● See 'Deal concludes Barts health strike - "We have raised our heads high" at socialistparty.org.uk for more on the previous dispute

Glenfield heart unit in Leicester was saved after protests in 2017 LEICESTER SOCIALIST PARTY



Gateshead: Bosses sack sparks protesting for safety measures



The sacked sparks form a picket line. ELAINE BRUNSKILL

ELAINE BRUNSKILL
NORTH EAST SOCIALIST PARTY

Solidarity to rank-and-file electricians who have been sacked because they downed tools at Amazon's warehouse, under construction at Follingsby Park, Gateshead.

The sparks' walk-out was reportedly against the highly dangerous practice by the electrical contractor SIS Systems of using labourers to connect up electrical work. The sparks are resolute they cannot tolerate this approach. As one picket explained: "We're told if we see something unsafe stop the job, but if you stop the job, they sack you."

There was seething anger that lives were being put at risk for the sake of profit. One spark pointed out: "It's not water we're messing about with, it's electricity. If the work isn't done correctly it can cause fires and kill people." Also, that there was anger that the contractor is prepared to risk

lives for the sake of a few pounds per hour - the difference between the pay of an electrician who has been through an apprenticeship, and an unskilled labourer.

It's an attempt by bosses to drive down wages and conditions.

The picket line outside Amazon's warehouse was very peaceful. However, the police were called by site security. Many of the sacked workers were indignant that the police weren't prepared to do anything against the contractors who were breaking health and safety rules, but were clearly there at the behest of the bosses.

SIS Systems has said that if there are any "issues of threatening behaviour, sabotage or any trouble whatsoever then nobody will be paid by SIS for the week." By far the biggest threat is from unscrupulous SIS Systems who are contemptuous of the health and safety of workers in the warehouse.

DVLA dispute: Escalation needed

DAVE WARREN
PCS MEMBER AND RETIRED DVLA WORKER

The dispute at the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) over Covid safety is now in its third month. The dispute is unusual, in that the leadership of PCS, the union representing the workers, is taking direct responsibility, with regular Zoom meetings for members chaired by the President Fran Heathcote and addressed by General Secretary Mark Serwotka.

This national intervention was prompted by headline media coverage, with over 500 Covid cases since September, including an outbreak at the contact centre in December.

Whereas only a skeleton staff of around 250 was required to attend the workplace during the first wave of the pandemic, over 2,000 of the agency's 5,500-strong workforce had been forced to return in September.

After balloting members in March this year, PCS embarked on a strategy of prolonged targeted strike action, bringing out selected groups of members at different times and paying them £40 a day strike pay.

Originally, the main demand of the union was to drastically reduce the numbers required to attend the workplace, by offering more home-working. However, this has since been amended to focus on a demand for agreement on a phased, controlled return to the workplace.

The employer made an offer in late May, which included a commitment to an agreed timetable to return to the workplace, as well as a one-off financial payment of £200 to all staff, and up to two days leave. It appears that this offer would have been recommended to members to end the dispute, but the offer was withdrawn



The DVLA Swansea. ZWEIFEL/CC

at the last minute due to intervention at government ministerial level.

The targeted action is continuing, with further strikes planned for 28-29 June. Mark Serwotka has pledged that PCS is prepared to fight on for months to come if necessary. In the meantime, DVLA has commenced a unilateral return of staff to the workplace. Unless action is taken to prevent this, there is a danger of another mass Covid outbreak in any third wave of the pandemic.

Supporters of the Broad Left Network, the organisation supported by Socialist Party members in PCS, have consistently put forward suggestions with the aim of supporting and strengthening the action. BLN supporters have advocated:

- Escalating the targeted action to include all DVLA members, linked to a move to an all-out strike if management do not agree to the union's demands
 - Working from home has to be the default position, with the necessary investment in technology to enable this. Any exceptions to be agreed with PCS
 - Challenge DVLA's punitive sick absence regime that treats sick absence, including Covid-related absence, as a disciplinary offence
 - Stop the forced return to the workplace now taking place by deploying collective Section 44 notices
- The PCS leadership has to act now to bring forward a programme for action which builds on the sacrifice of members at DVLA, which prevents management's move to force members back to the workplace, and which brings about a speedy and successful conclusion to the dispute.

haven't even paid back any of the other 80% they owe the government.

"In consultation they then refused to acknowledge the original T&B redundancy enhancements, which they said were superseded by a pay deal from 2010: they were not. There were only enhancements for those on the DHL contracts in this deal. At no time have employees been told that they have lesser redundancy rights. But now members are being offered half of their redundancy when management have had their correct full settlements.

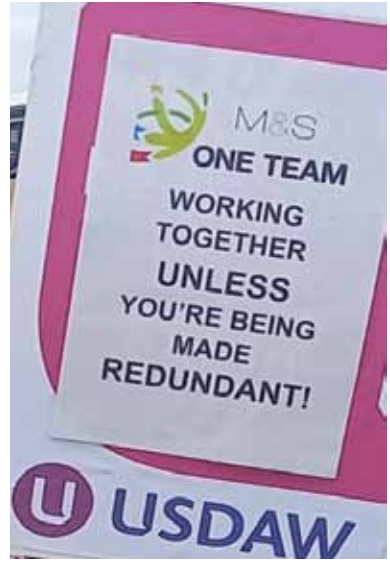
"It's still in dispute and has resulted in two 24-hour strikes - the first in the site's history. M&S and DHL won't even get back round the table with us to negotiate a fair settlement. As a result, the site closes in just four weeks' time. Our members face a lengthy fight to get what they believe is rightfully theirs, while the management on those T&B contracts had protected rights and are trousering huge payoffs. Our members are getting offered half of theirs. It's scandalous and heartbreaking but we fight on."

Warehouse workers fight 50% cut in redundancy pay

Workers at the DHL depot in Long Eaton, Derbyshire, members of Usdaw, have taken two rounds of 24-hour strike action in a dispute over redundancy payments as the site is being shut down. Members of Nottingham Socialist Party have visited the picket line and strikers spoke to the Socialist.

"We are a warehouse that supplies Marks & Spencer with their goods. When the site opened 34 years ago it was run by Tibbett & Britten, but in 2004 we TUPE'd over to Exel Logistics who told us our redundancy rights from T&B would remain unchanged. In 2008 Exel was acquired by DHL.

"In February 2020 we were told we would close, eventually given a closing date of end of July 2021. During lockdown, from March 2020, DHL refused to pay the extra 20% of furlough, and so for nearly a year effectively paid no wages at our site at all. This meant that on top of losing our jobs we were also hammered with a 20% pay cut, while DHL made millions in our absence. We suspect they



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Interview with newly elected Unison NEC member and hospital worker

'Unison needs to use its strength and fight'

The right wing has lost control of the national executive council (NEC) in public sector and health union Unison. As part of this historic result, four Socialist Party members were elected. One of them, hospital worker

Naomi Byron, speaks to the Socialist in a personal capacity.



Why is the Unison NEC result significant and why were you elected?

I think the result is hugely significant. The fact that the majority of members on the NEC were elected on a programme of fighting for action on pay, and other issues, gives me real hope that things will change for the better.

It is the first time the left has had a majority on the NEC since Unison was formed in 1993. The test now will be for all of those elected to stand firm on their election programmes.

I was elected in part because of this mood for change, and also because of my record. I led the campaign which won NHS sick pay for over 300 outsourced staff working at my hospital, and for us to be paid at least the London Living Wage. Our membership among these staff increased by at least a quarter.

When I told members at work I was standing their immediate response was to support me, because they know that I will do what I say. No trade union rep can win every battle. But when you fight for members day in, day out, they know you are in their corner.

I am grateful to my Unison branch committee, which voted unanimously to nominate me, and which has always supported and helped the campaigns for better conditions for ISS staff in every way it can.

What does Unison need to do for health and social care workers, and how can a 15% pay rise be won?

Put simply, Unison needs to lead the fight - on pay, on working conditions, on an end to the understaffing that has led to many NHS workers suffering exhaustion through chronic overwork.

Unison needs to lead the fight for proper funding of the NHS. Waiting lists were sky-high before the pandemic. We need proper investment in enough staff to bring them down. It is painful to see NHS and social care staff, or family members, struggling with health conditions that can be easily treated, but they are at least as far down the waiting list now as they were when the first lockdown started 15 months ago.



PAUL MATTSOON

Unison is the biggest union in health and care. We need to use our strength. The more we show we are prepared to put up a fight, the more people will see that it is worth joining the union and getting active.

I believe that we need to start putting forward a concrete strategy now of building for strike action to demand an NHS pay rise of at least 15% (or £2,000, the Unison position, whichever is bigger), more funding and safe staffing levels. If the NHS pay review body doesn't recommend at least a £2,000 or a 15% increase, Unison needs to announce a consultative ballot for strike action immediately. This would enormously increase the pressure on the government.

The ballot needs to be accompanied by an energetic campaign to explain how a health strike would work, and give as many members as possible the confidence that the union stands with them. If a majority voted

for action, the campaign would need to be stepped up even more, with a proper strike ballot.

This should be further strengthened by reaching out and coordinating with other health unions as well as coordinating the ballots of NHS workers with other similar ones, such as local government.

Unison has the resources to do all this, and to counter the hatred and bile that would immediately be spouted by the government and establishment media about 'greedy' health workers. How greedy to want to be able to pay your rent! There is huge public support for NHS workers.

It's simple: put forward a strategy that can win, explain it to members, and show you are prepared to fight alongside them.

As a first step I would like to see Unison supporting and mobilising for the 3 July day of protest for an NHS pay rise, patient safety and

an end to privatisation. I am proud that my branch, Homerton Hospital Unison, is supporting and helping organise a march through central London that day. We are meeting at midday at University College Hospital, and marching to parliament. If Unison nationally put its resources into supporting these 3 July protests this would help enormously in building an even bigger turnout.

Now the left holds the three new presidents of the union, it should agree that the union should support the day of action, and call on all branches to support it. This would show in action what the start of a new left leadership means.

Outsourced workers in the NHS need the same strategy from Unison. It is fantastic that Unison has included us in the NHS pay campaign, writing to the main companies that provide outsourced services in the NHS, demanding NHS pay and conditions for all their staff who work in the NHS.

But we know that asking for what is right doesn't mean you will get it. If that worked, many thousands of outsourced workers would already be on NHS pay and conditions and working directly for the NHS.

Just like on NHS pay, Unison needs a strategy to win NHS pay and conditions for outsourced workers and, ultimately, for us all to be brought back in-house so that we can be sure to keep them.

The outsourced workers who have won these things - NHS pay in several hospitals in Liverpool; NHS pay and conditions in Tameside; being brought back in-house in Imperial Trust in London, and in two East Lancashire Hospitals, just to give a few examples - all have one thing in common: they were prepared to strike to win these victories.

Until Unison and other unions put enough resources into coordinating the struggles of outsourced workers, these victories will be bit by bit. We could win so much more with a strategy to coordinate the fight nationally, and clearly state Unison's intention to organise a strike if our demands are not met.

No one, particularly health workers, takes strike action lightly. But so many are so angry at how they have been treated by the government that they are prepared to do it. It isn't just pay that is at stake, it is the future of our NHS.

The government plan is to run it into the ground, and then let it fall apart. If we don't take a stand now, it will only become more difficult later.

In social care, Unison needs to lead a similar fight. There have been important battles where staff have stood up and demanded proper PPE and won. Resources need to be put in to bring workers from the care sector together, and coordinate a fight for a real minimum wage of £15 an hour, proper jobs with proper contracts, and to bring the whole sector back into public ownership so it can be run by public bodies which are more accountable, with proper standards of care.

NSSN conference 2021: When given a lead workers will fight

SCOTT JONES

Up to 200 striking workers, trade union reps, campaigners and socialists met virtually on 20 June as the National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) held its 2021 summer conference.

The NSSN conference is the biggest annual event that brings together fighting rank-and-file union members with campaigners. This year it included many workers in dispute, education workers, health staff and more.

NSSN national chair **Rob Williams** kicked off the conference, pointing out that if workers are given a lead then they will fight, as they have shown throughout the pandemic, forcing their union into action in some cases and leading action of their own.

Those workers who have fought, and are still fighting, made up most of the contributions to the meeting.

Tony, Unite rep and bin worker in Thurrock, talked about their victory over the Tory council. 90 workers in the waste and recycling department walked out throughout April and May fighting pay cuts of between £1,200 and £3,800 a year. But the council has now agreed changes to the original proposal, which means members will not have a reduction in their pay.

Kathy Smith, another local government worker and member of Unite, whose members have taken multiple rounds of strike action in Bromley, told the conference how just the threat of strike action forced bosses back in the libraries, following the action taken previously.

Jared Wood, RMT national executive council member for London, laid out the coming battles in transport, in particular the fight with Transport for London, which is planning a tsunami of cuts and attacks on workers and the transport system.



We have not accepted the closure of GKN in Birmingham and the fight continues

Another London transport worker, **Mark** at Woolwich Ferry, reiterated the points Jared made and told conference of the disputes that have taken place on the ferry. Workers there have recently walked out over a victimised rep taking seven days action in May and June. The ferry has seen a number of disputes in the last few years, provoked by "poor employment relations". The current action has forced bosses into talks.

Mike Hirst, speaking from Unite NE/Sec 2 branch and Hull Trades Council, talked about the looming threat of freeports and what they will mean for workers pay, terms and conditions.

At previous NSSN meetings, workers at the GKN Automotive plant in Birmingham have spoken about the looming threat of closure and redundancies. This time **Rich** gave an update on the campaign, saying loud and clear: "We have not accepted the closure of GKN in Birmingham and the fight continues to keep the site open."



NSSN joins the sparks



NSSN supporting victimised union reps including Socialist Party member Declan Clune



Thurrock bin workers

Dave Smith, secretary of the Blacklist Support Group, fighting blacklisting particularly in the construction industry, spoke about the recent victory electricians won against deskilling. The 'sparks', as they are known, were supported all the way by the NSSN and the Socialist Party, including blockading the Atomic Weapons Establishment near Reading.

Elaine Brunskill from the North East reported that following the sparks victory, there was a walkout in Gateshead, and the workers have now scandalously been sacked for this. The site is being built for Amazon and Elaine explained: "The sparks downed tools over dangerous working practices by the electrical contractors SIS systems. The sparks are absolutely resolute." (See more on page 6)

Workers asked the meeting for support and solidarity - one of the key roles of the NSSN, in disputes. **Mark Evans**, Unison branch secretary in Carmarthenshire, speaking in a personal capacity, reported on the campaign for union recognition at an 'arms-length' waste disposal company, "100% owned by the council".

Mark also talked about the reality of 'social partnership' between the Welsh Labour government and the tops of the trade unions, despite the record of cuts by the government. The unions need to fight: "The unions don't win anything just through negotiation."

Ozzy, a Unite member from the Midlands, wished solidarity to his fellow union members at Brush Electrical Machines in Leicestershire, who are now in the fifth week of a 12-week strike against huge attacks on pay, terms and conditions by yet another vicious management using 'fire and rehire'.

This is an attack being used by many employers against workers, and was a regular theme of the conference. **James** from the Socialist Party in Oxford asked for solidarity for journalists fighting 'fire and rehire' at a local newspaper there.

Joanne McNeill, is a member of the national executive of the University and College Union (UCU). Her branch members have just finished 14 days of strike action at the University of Liverpool. Speaking in a personal capacity, Joanne appealed for support for the dispute. The university is trying to sack 47 academics, who during the pandemic worked in the NHS, for allegedly "dropping research standards, basically not bringing in enough grant money during the pandemic". Now the workers, supported by students, are taking part in action short of a strike by refusing to mark work.

Socialist Party member **Bea Gardner**, a UCU member and branch officer at Southampton University, also spoke about the dozens of branches in higher and further education which are also currently in dispute, "successfully smashing the Tory anti-union laws and thresholds which is a sign of determination to resist these attacks." Bea reiterated that when a lead is given workers will fight.

A **St Mungo's housing worker** in London asked for support against the battle against bullying bosses and management who are also using the pandemic to "carry out attacks on

employees." The workers are now in the ninth week of action.

Len Hockey, chair of Unite Barts Health workers branch in east London, talked about his members, low-paid Serco caterers, who are striking at the Royal London Hospital, fighting for better pay and parity with directly employed NHS cleaners (see page 5). His branch is holding a protest on 3 July as part of a day of action, with actions taking place right across the UK.

Martin Powell-Davies, a teacher and National Education Union rep, reminded conference of the huge fight and victory by teachers at the start of the year to delay the unsafe reopening of schools, using Section 44 legislation collectively, and warned that "those issues have not gone away, and people's minds are also returning to the issues that were always there before the pandemic, which will come back with a vengeance: excessive workload, job losses, lack of funding and so on."



People's minds are also returning to the issues that were always there before the pandemic, which will come back with a vengeance

Another of the many disputes taking place in the private sector is a strike against inadequate redundancy pay at DHL in Long Eaton in Derbyshire, which supplies M&S with goods and products. **Ken** spoke about the dispute and how they have organised action through their union Usdaw. The site is due to close in July 2021. But as well as the bosses refusing to pay furlough and making the workers redundant, the companies are now offering only half the redundancy pay anticipated.

Alex Smith, assistant secretary of Liverpool Trades Council and a Unite member, appealed for support for Youth Fight for Jobs. The organisation was founded in 2009 to fight youth unemployment, made worse by Tory austerity. Youth Fight for Jobs is back in action to fight the coming post-Covid onslaught: "We want to do everything we possibly can to get young people involved in the trade union movement and are planning rallies for when the furlough scheme ends."

NSSN national secretary **Linda Taaffe** spoke about the need for political representation for working-class people and for workers to have their own party. She ended by saying: "The contributions of all those conducting battles show that the spirit of resistance is alive and kicking and it reflects the class battles against the bosses who want to grind everyone into the ground." The NSSN will be there helping to coordinate the fightback.

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TUSC calls for local 'People's Budget' campaigns

The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) All-Britain Steering Committee is calling on all local TUSC groups, individual members, supporters and affiliated groups in areas where they are active, to begin to lay plans for the year ahead - focusing on local 'People's Budget' campaigns.

The June meeting of the steering committee agreed that developing and promoting a local people's budget could form the basis of a vibrant electoral challenge in the council elections scheduled for May 2022. There are over 200 councils with elections then.

The committee also agreed that other areas where there are no elections in May 2022 should not wait either. As society prepares to move on from the Covid pandemic a People's Budget campaign could play a central role in bringing trade union branches, campaigns and community groups together to fight at a local level for what communities will need, not what Tory austerity will demand.

The role councils could play

Contrary to the impression given by the establishment mainstream media - which reduces 'politics' to games at Westminster (and, sometimes, the devolved parliaments) - the decisions taken by locally elected councils are central to the provision of many services that directly affect the daily lives of millions.

The Tories have made deep cuts to councils' funding in the past decade, but local authorities still account for

over one-fifth of all public spending, with powers over housing, education support, adult social care, sports and leisure facilities, youth provision, transport, recycling and rubbish collection, libraries, children's centres, community grants, environmental planning, and many other services.

Most current councillors, including, unfortunately, the majority of Labour's 6,300 or so local councillors, see their role as administrators of austerity, not as campaigners for more and better services. A local People's Budget, however, could set a different agenda, based on what the community needs, and illustrate the need for a different type of councillor too.

That applies to all councils, but particularly to the 120 or so Labour-led councils which could make such a difference if they chose too. Their combined spending power is actually greater than the state budgets of 16 EU countries!

A glimpse of what is possible

Earlier this year the TUSC steering committee published a report examining the policy pledges made in Labour's 2019 general election manifesto under Jeremy Corbyn's

leadership, which councils have the legal powers to implement today if they had the political will to do so. The report identifies 46 separate policies which councils could carry out, immediately, transforming peoples' lives.

These range from breakfast clubs and free school meals for all primary school pupils; local replacements for the Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA) for 16-18 year-olds in education; free bus travel for under-25s; a council house building programme; rent controls for licensed landlords; the end of '15-minute maximum' home care visits; to a mass home insulation energy efficiency programme to fight climate change.

Even just a selection of these policies could form the basis of a People's Budget to present to the local council. But inviting local trade union branches, campaign groups, community organisations, student groups and others to contribute would undoubtedly come up with more ideas, and lay the basis for a campaign for the local council to implement them now, using their reserves and borrowing powers to temporarily finance them while launching a mass campaign locally and nationally for permanent funding from central government.

How councils could use their powers to temporarily maintain a 'balanced budget' while fighting for proper resources from the government, has been explained in previous TUSC documents (see tusc.org.uk).

But what is most needed is a will to fight - or to stand aside for those who have got the determination to do so.

What steps can groups take?

TUSC groups should look to meet and begin to lay out plans to host a People's Budget conference before the end of 2021, to draw together the local set of demands and campaign issues to take to the council ahead of their 2022-23 budget-setting meeting, which will take place in January or February 2022.

After deciding on a date for the People's Budget conference, a plan of action should be discussed and drawn up to build for it, by contacting trade union branches, campaign groups, community groups, residents associations and so on, to take part - co-hosting if they wish, but certainly inviting them to contribute with their ideas and proposals for what is needed in the local area.

The council unions will themselves be examining the council's initial proposals for the 2022-23 budget, while many community groups with full or part-funding from the local council - or users of council-funded facilities or services - will be discussing their own finances and plans in the autumn period as councils start their budget consultations.

People's Budget campaigns can play an important role everywhere in organising a local fightback to the efforts the pro-capitalist politicians will make to pass the costs of the Covid pandemic onto the shoulders of working-class people. But in areas with local council elections next year - covering a bigger range of councils than in 2021 - they could be central in pulling together the broadest possible anti-austerity electoral challenge.



SCOTT JONES

Youth Fight For Jobs: more urgent than ever

ADAM HARMSWORTH
COVENTRY SOCIALIST PARTY

Young workers and students across the country are building up the Youth Fight For Jobs (YFFJ) campaign at a time when it is so clearly and urgently needed.

YFFJ was founded in 2009 as the burden of the 2007-8 financial crisis was placed on workers and especially youth. Now, more than a decade of austerity has left the future of the next generation in peril.

Millions of kids grow up in poverty, are laden with student debt or penniless from phoney apprenticeships, and then are marched into insecure, unskilled minimum wage jobs on zero-hour contracts. That's no future.

On top of that, the Tories' decisions throughout the pandemic have left the idea of skilled and well-paid jobs as just a pipe dream for more young workers. The ending of the government's pittance furlough scheme and lack of job support threatens hundreds of thousands of redundancies.

Bosses' slash jobs

Many big companies could, in fact, have afforded to keep the jobs, but they chose to sack workers rather than take a hit to their bloated profits. The super-rich '1%' hoards more wealth than it has ever held, while a quarter of all long-term unemployed are aged 16-24.

With a government - and a weak Labour opposition - only interested in protecting the bosses, we urgently need a fightback to get secure, socially useful, well-paid jobs, and to make



Youth Fight For jobs will appeal to all young people interested in defending their future PHOTOTU SENAN

the bosses pay. That's what Youth Fight For Jobs will campaign for in the struggle ahead.

Socialist Party and Young Socialist members will be helping organise YFFJ groups across the country. A meeting of the campaign group's steering committee in July will really kick start post-lockdown activity.

YFFJ works with and appeals to the trade unions to develop this fight. As the biggest workers'

organisations, the unions hold immense potential power and could win jobs for all, and more.

Recent victories, like the Unite sparks' protests over a deskilling threat and the Thurrock bin workers victory against pay cuts, show that potential, but these struggles also clearly show the bosses are on the offensive. We won't get decent jobs for young people only by defending the jobs we have, but by fighting for a

better future.

Youth Fight For Jobs will appeal to all young people interested in defending their future. Whether you're a school student, a university student, an apprentice, a worker, or stuck in unemployment, you have a stake in the fight for jobs. Join this campaign and help organise the fightback!

• youthfightforjobs.com

London Socialist Party young members' day school

Young members of the Socialist Party met in Hyde Park, London, on Saturday 14 June to discuss the issues facing young people in the city and the youth campaigns that we can launch over the summer.

The plenary session was an informal discussion on youth perspectives. We talked about the prospects for youth unemployment, the housing crisis facing young people in London, and the need for a fighting political voice for workers and young people.

The political discussion set the scene well for the rest of the meeting, as we split into two groups to discuss theory and practical tasks.

While some of us did a campaign stall by the entrance of the park to sell the Socialist newspaper, another group remained in the park for a discussion on Leon Trotsky's 'Transitional Programme' and its application today. We sold several copies of the Socialist.

The final session focused on youth campaigns, including the Youth Fight for Jobs campaign (see opposite), and what demands we should raise in our campaigns.

As well as organising more park meetings, we are planning to do more youth stalls and other activities in London's boroughs to meet with young people who want to fight for jobs, education and homes for all.

BERKAY KARTAV

LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY ORGANISER

'Socialism is the hope of the world'

NIALL MULHOLLAND
SOCIALIST PARTY AND LONDON CLARION CYCLE CLUB MEMBER

On 13 June, the annual general meeting of the National Clarion Cycle Club took the decision to support a motion from Tuxford Clarion that outrageously removed a "divisive" reference in its constitution to socialism. The amended version expresses a banal commitment to "fairness, equality, inclusion and diversity".

This trampling on the founding principles of the 126 year-old cycle club provoked uproar from local Clarion clubs. They point to the lack of open and widespread discussion about the Tuxford motion prior to the AGM, which was held after a year of lockdowns, and question the democratic process. Only 14 out of 28 clubs were registered to vote at the AGM, which was held on Zoom.

The first Clarion cycling club was founded in 1894 and took its name from the popular socialist weekly newspaper, Clarion. The aim was to "combine the pleasures of cycling with the propaganda of socialism".

The Clarion cycling clubs spread quickly throughout the country, offering working-class people an escape from long working hours and poor living conditions. Between the wars, Clarion racing teams travelled abroad to compete in 'Workers'

Olympiads', and several Clarion members were killed fighting against Franco's fascists in the Spanish revolution.

Shamefully, the current national Clarion leadership, seemingly embarrassed by the word 'socialism', did not defend Clarion's constitution. Yet mention of socialism has not prevented new growth in membership of Clarion in recent years.

As with other parts of the wider working-class, trade union, labour and cooperative movements, including cultural and sporting wings, over the last decades, a middle-class and reactionary assault against the practice and idea of working-class solidarity, and the goal of socialism, has taken place.

Clarion clubs are discussing what to do next. Some are mooting leaving the National Clarion and setting up a new national body.

An earlier 2006 breakaway, the 'National Clarion Cycling Club 1895', pledges "to protect the founders' commitment" to combine cycling with socialism. Local Clarion clubs, such as London Clarion, proudly keep 'socialism' in their own constitution.

Despite the 'cuckoos-in-the-nest' in National Clarion, the determination of local clubs means the Clarion ideal that "socialism is the hope of the world" will steadfastly remain.

Fighting Fund target smashed!

But we still need more campaign funds

Congratulations to all Socialist Party members and supporters for making sure that we have already broken through the fighting fund target for this campaign quarter.

But we can't afford to let up. We urge everyone to continue their fundraising efforts.

There has been no let-up in the government and bosses attacks on our living standards and democratic rights, but workers have shown that they're prepared to stand up and fight.

The pages of the Socialist are full of examples of the important part

that our members play in supporting workers in struggle, from building a democratic fighting left within Unison, to campaigning against parking charges at University Hospital, Coventry.

Moreover, Socialist Party branches have already been holding regular campaign stalls on a host of local, national and international issues in many towns and cities across England and Wales.

We need the resources to get our socialist message out as widely as possible. We have already produced 1,000's of Socialist Party leaflets and

we are also producing hundreds of posters and placards for the various protests and demos across England and Wales for the day of action on NHS pay on 3 July. All this costs money.

Can your branch organise extra campaign stalls in the next week? If you can't manage a campaign stall, can you do a sale outside a workplace or a transport hub?

Rush any money that you raise into the Socialist Party offices (you can pay online at socialistparty.org.uk/donate) and make sure it reaches us by 12 noon on Friday 2 July when the quarter closes.

CHRIS NEWBY



SOCIALIST PARTY FIGHTING FUND

AREA	£ RECEIVED	£ TARGET	Q2: APRIL-JUNE 2021	DEADLINE: 30 JUNE 2021
Northern	1,627	750		217%
South West	2,836	1,800		158%
London	6,051	4,600		132%
Southern & SE	2,836	2,350		121%
Wales	2,731	2,300		119%
Yorkshire	2,622	2,550		103%
East Midlands	1,804	1,850		97%
North West	1,053	1,150		92%
West Midlands	1,938	2,600		75%
Eastern	647	1,200		46%
Other	1,362	3,850		35%
TOTAL	25,506	25,000		102%

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Book review: Shuggie Bain

'An unsentimental depiction of the brutality and inhumanity of capitalism'

EILEEN HUNTER
NUNEATON SOCIALIST PARTY

'Shuggie Bain,' written by Douglas Stuart, is a novel that at times makes the reader stop and reflect. You feel the pain of young Shuggie growing up in Thatcher's 1980s, a pain felt by working-class communities including in now ex-mining villages like mine.

If you are under 30 and you want to find out how Thatcher's economic policies affected the working class, especially single parents and men who lost their jobs in heavy industry, then this book will provide an unsentimental depiction of the brutality and inhumanity of capitalism. For those of us who lived through these times and in those communities, we are reminded of the honourable way we fought against this new era of brutal capitalism.

Stuart, like Steinbeck before him in *Grapes of Wrath*, contrasts capitalism's inhumanity with the sublime efforts of the characters, such as Shuggie and his mother Agnes, to defy their bleak surroundings and create moments of sheer delight.

Stuart takes us on a grand adventure with Agnes and Shuggie: "Along the pit road in the middle of the night, the peat bogs are pitch-black, and everything is silent but for the low gurgle of burn water and song of bog toads... It all seemed less ominous to her now, less of a sucking black hole meant to keep her stuck."

We sing Agnes' happy song, 'I beg your pardon, I never promised you a rose garden,' as they approach their destination, a roundabout, and we feel Shuggie's epicurean connection the following morning as he views his front garden: "The transformation of the small plot that was once brown dirt and waist-high grass was a waving ocean of colour. Dozens of healthy, fat flowers waved in the breeze: peach, cream, and scarlet roses, all dancing and bobbing like happy balloons."

Deindustrialisation

This book is an emotional roller-coaster, such is the life lived by those depicted. Stuart understands that the 'tough Glaswegian' stereotype of what it meant to be a man had been shattered with the wholesale closure of the shipyards and the mines. Men became shadows of their former selves. Stuart shows them in the club at the end of Pithead Road, remembering their honourable fight in their titanic struggle to save their pits and communities in the miners' strike of 1984-85. Today, many of the miners' welfare clubs have gone, and the men have nowhere to reminisce or celebrate their lives.

The novel is set in the 1980s when many LGBT+ people came of age during the era of Section 28, a homophobic law passed in 1988 by a Conservative government that stopped



councils and schools "promoting the teaching of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship."

As Shuggie struggles with why he is bullied and doesn't act like the other boys, we see him as the others do, in his attempts to try and understand his own sexual identity. Not only were these discussions banned in schools, but Tory Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher said at the time: "Children who need to be taught to respect traditional moral values are being taught that they have an inalienable right to be gay. All of those children are being cheated of a sound start in life."

In *The Militant*, the Socialist Party's predecessor, we fought against this intolerance and I remember setting up the first Gay/Straight Alliance with my students in school. We were actively passing motions for all trade unions to rally and protest. This led to mass protests by LGBT+ campaigners, supported by workers as depicted in the film 'Pride'. Ultimately, the law was stopped in Scotland in 2000 and in the rest of the United Kingdom in 2003.

I particularly liked the way Stuart plays with time in the book. We start at the end in 1992 and transcend into a bedroom in 1982. Here Agnes

dreams of dancing and escaping her parents' high rise flat. Not easy as a single parent with three children.



Stuart contrasts capitalism's inhumanity with the sublime efforts of the characters, such as Shuggie and his mother Agnes, to defy their bleak surroundings and create moments of sheer delight

This book takes us to the Monday post office queue with all the other single parents whose benefits were paid every week on an order book. This at least offered some hope over the weekend. Now, in 2021, those extra allowances, as recognition of your additional financial hardship as a single parent, have been stripped away and replaced with the struggle to get through a month on a flat rate of Universal Credit.

No holds are barred by Stuart in

the darkest moments. It's a rare gift for an author to allow the reader to feel both the sunshine and, as Shuggie and Agnes experience the dark side of family life, the impact of misogyny, sexism and poverty.

As Stuart powerfully demonstrates, Agnes is: "Brought low by the men in her life as she is burnt up by her alcoholism. Those who love her most recoil from the flames. But then, as with Saint Agnes, she rises again in hope, steps out of her own ashes every morning, and tries once more to get sober."

Shuggie Bain is a Booker prize winner and many reviews look forward to Stuart's next book. Some want to know what happened to Shuggie after 1992. I'd like to think he turned a corner, saw a Socialist Party campaign stall, bought a paper, and fought back with us, organising to get rid of this rotten capitalist system.

The sign of a great read is that you know when you finish, you will want to read it again. As I walk around my pit village on a midsummer evening, I admire the beautiful blooming barmy roses, and I can't help but smile as I think of Shuggie and Agnes.

• 'Shuggie Bain' by Douglas Stuart, Picador, £8.99

In defence of Militant

Peter Taaffe, political secretary of the Socialist Party, wrote the following letter to the *Observer* on 7 June 2021.

Simon Tisdall's assertion (*Observer* 6/6/21) that Xi Jinping's speech "would not have been out of place at a Militant Tendency meeting circa 1976", is both scandalous and risible.

Xi's regime is a dictatorial one-party regime. It represses workers and political opposition. It is moving from its Stalinist origins to an equally undemocratic form of state capitalism.

In stark contrast, Militant, now the Socialist Party, stands for real, liberating, democratic socialism.

In the 1970s - and even right up to today - Militant's ideas have frightened the representatives of capitalism and their shadows in the labour movement. 'Circa 1976' and beyond we were attracting support in the unprecedented mass rallies in the Albert Hall, and when that became too small, we had to move to Alexandra Palace.

We not only shook to its foundations the right wing in the Labour Party but organised some of the biggest workers' movements, like the Liverpool City Council campaign in the 1980s, and later the anti-poll tax mass non-payment campaign, which confined the poll tax to the dustbin of history and, with it, Thatcher herself.

We stand for real democratic socialism, in opposition to bureaucratic autocracy and to crisis-ridden, out-moded capitalism.

We are fighting for power to be vested in the democratic organisations of working people, whether in Britain, China, or elsewhere in the world.



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

Northern Ireland and Brexit

Crisis in DUP leadership deepens



Edwin Poots, leader of the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), the largest party in Northern Ireland, has resigned just three weeks after he won the position. This is the latest twist in the ongoing crisis in the North in the aftermath of Brexit and the creation of the 'Irish Sea border'.

Poots was forced to resign after an internal revolt in the DUP over concessions he made to keep the power-sharing Northern Ireland Assembly in place. He agreed to appoint a new DUP first minister, alongside Sinn Féin's deputy first minister, and appeared to concede to Sinn Féin's call for the quick introduction of Irish language legislation that was agreed upon previously.

A new DUP leadership contest has confirmed as leader the sole candidate, Sir Jeffrey Donaldson - the

Stormont assembly member who was narrowly defeated by Poots in the previous leadership contest.

Following the election of a new leader, the DUP, along with Sinn Féin, has just seven days to re-nominate a new first minister and deputy first minister. Otherwise, Stormont will collapse again, with a likely new election in October.

The current infighting among a small cabal of DUP public representatives reflects a deeper malaise in Northern Ireland's unionist camp and, specifically, the DUP's calamitous mishandling of the Brexit crisis.

'Be careful what you wish for' is the ancient phrase which immediately springs to mind when looking at the Brexit crisis and the Johnson-negotiated Northern Ireland Protocol. By avoiding a 'hard land' border between Northern Ireland and the Irish republic, to prevent renewed sectarianism, the protocol has instead imposed a 'hard sea' border between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK, and has renewed sectarianism!

Initially, Johnson's Brexit treaty with the EU was hailed by former first minister Arlene Foster and the DUP leadership as a 'fantastic opportunity' for Northern Ireland's commercial sector. But this sanguine take on Tory Brexit has rapidly transformed into a perceived existential threat to unionism and the Protestant population itself.

This fear was the trigger for days of

sectarian rioting in Belfast and other cities in April this year, along with the heightened presence of the Protestant paramilitary Ulster Defence Association, which in turn provoked a leadership crisis in the DUP.

Moreover, the hailed 'business opportunities' have instead led to disruptions in food supplies and warnings of workplace closures and job losses as employers weigh the impact of additional administrative costs and dislocated supply chains.

As Donal O'Cofaigh Northern Ireland Cross-Community Labour councillor and Militant Left member writes: "The difficulties facing the political elite are serious. The fundamental problems remain. The economy remains in the doldrums; austerity cuts will continue to bite; changing demographics, the full consequences of Brexit and the move towards independence in Scotland are all raising tensions and divisions over the national question..."

"Against heightening tensions and efforts from bourgeois and petit-bourgeois politicians from all sides to exploit divisions to their own ends, it is more vital than ever that workers in the North of Ireland stand united behind a socialist, internationalist platform.

"Whenever an election to Stormont comes, it is vital that there is a platform of socialists standing on a genuinely cross-community basis to offer an alternative to the sectarian politics of division and failure. Vital to that end will be the role of trade union activists, who must seek all means to push their organisations to chart a course for our class towards real lasting peace and socialism. Part of that process is the need to form a new mass party of the working class."

● **Read Donal's article - 'DUP sacks its leader - another twist in Northern Ireland's post-Brexit turmoil' - in full on socialistworld.net**



The state has betrayed rape victims PHOTO PAUL MATSSON

Tory review won't deliver justice for rape victims

SARAH SACHS ELDRIDGE
SOCIALIST PARTY NATIONAL ORGANISER

'Rape has been decriminalised'. This was a 2019 assessment of a situation where just 1.6% of rapes result in someone being charged. Each year around 128,000 people are victims of rape but only just over 2,000 charges are made. This was a factor in the outpouring of anger that followed the killing of Sarah Everard in March this year.

Lack of confidence in the police and justice system contribute to a situation where fewer than 20% of victims of rape report it.

One factor in this is a well-founded fear of how difficult and traumatic the experience of pursuing the perpetrator would be given the treatment of those who report rapes to the police.

There have also been suggestions that the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) has set a secret conviction rate target and that this has led to prosecutors dropping what they consider to be weaker or more challenging cases.

Given the scale of this crisis, it might be reasonable to expect action. But this Tory government does not respond with urgency to the needs of ordinary people no matter how clear the evidence is - as the catastrophic dealing with the pandemic has shown.

Instead, the government has, after a process already lasting two years, come forward with a review of the situation and a commitment to... consultations, a pilot and a small amount of spending. For example, as part of Operation Soteria a handful of police forces will now test whether the balance should be shifted away from investigating the credibility of complainants to focusing on the suspects!

This is not a pandemic story - the figures had been falling well before that. Tory Home Secretary Priti Patel signed the foreword to the review which says they are "deeply

ashamed" of the situation facing rape victims. So she should be. Tory cuts are a huge factor in the situation but are not dealt with in the review.

Since 2010, the CPS budget has been cut by 25% with an accompanying 30% reduction in staff. Police forces in England and Wales lost 21,732 officers between March 2010 and March 2018 - 15% of their total number. And the cuts to legal aid have been devastating. But there are other factors too.



This Tory government does not respond with urgency to the needs of ordinary people no matter how clear the evidence is

This review is not going to deliver justice for rape victims. The horrific rape figures themselves indicate levels of harassment, violence and abuse that are systemic. They are ultimately the consequence of the inequality, including sexism, at the heart of the capitalist system which the Tories defend.

Capitalism is based on the exploitation of the majority by a tiny handful of big business bosses. The police and justice system are ultimately necessary for the maintenance of that system and reflect its inequality and oppression.

Fighting for justice - and an end to violence against women - includes fighting austerity, challenging sexism, and raising the demand for community and working-class control of the police and the judicial system. Necessary for this is the building of mass working-class organisations - fighting trade unions and a new mass workers' party with a socialist programme to meet the needs of all.



Edwin Poots PHOTO DEPT OF HEALTH/CC

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Women and the criminal 'injustice' system

AMY SAGE
PROBATION WORKER

In April of this year, the Ministry of Justice released a report responding to the 'growing mental health crisis' for women in prison. It revealed that there was a 13% rise in the number of self-harm incidents among female prisoners and a 16% increase in incidents requiring hospitalisation. While this is an increase for the sixth consecutive year, the impact of the Covid pandemic, which has seen prisoners confined to their cells for up to 23 hours a day, with limited visitation from family, has undoubtedly contributed to this.

However, these figures are also revealing of a system that uses prison, and the criminal justice system more broadly, to deal with the very problems it creates. Capitalism is criminogenic; not only does the capitalist system promote the idea that success is measured by monetary gain, simultaneously restricting legitimate means to obtaining it, encouraging the use of so-called 'deviant' means, but the poverty, inequality and misery capitalism causes drives people into finding ways to address these problems, sometimes resulting in criminal activity.

Poverty

The 'poverty to prison pipeline' under capitalism is perfectly summed up in the book 'The Rich get Richer and the Poor get Prison', which describes how, at every stage of the criminal justice process, from criminalisation right through to sentencing, the wealthy are 'weeded out' so that the vast majority of those who end up in prison are likely to be poor.

Furthermore, contrary to what we are led to believe, most of those who receive a prison sentence pose little or no threat to the public: of the 47,000 people sent to prison in 2020, 65% committed a non-violent offence. This is particularly pronounced for female prisoners, for whom the figure is 80%.



Due to decades of cuts to both staff and services, prisons have become little more than 'holding pens', with extremely limited access to education, training or employment opportunities

It is also likely that those who pass through the criminal justice system are experiencing some form of mental illness, drug addiction or require support for a problem that could be more effectively dealt with by rehabilitation or early intervention services. Again, this is especially true for female offenders.

Women in Prison, a charity that



Probation workers on strike against privatisation in 2013 PHOTO: PAUL MATTSSON

supports women affected by the criminal justice system, reports that 70% of women in prison are domestic abuse survivors, 53% experienced either emotional, physical or sexual abuse as a child, and they are five times more likely to have a mental illness when compared to women in the general population.

It is widely known that women commit fewer crimes than men: of the 1.52 million people who passed through the criminal justice system in 2019, only 26% were female. Unfortunately, this has meant that female offenders have become marginalised in a system designed for men, by men. This has contributed to and exacerbated the issues that have driven female offenders to criminal activity.

In 2007, the Corston report looked into the treatment of female prisoners. It noted a number of key issues, including the fact that, due to the small number of female prisons, female prisoners are often placed far

away from their friends and families, to the detriment of maintaining relationships, receiving visits and resettling back into the community. It also noted the lack of proper facilities, which prevent female prisoners from maintaining self-care, and the limited access to hygiene and sanitary products.

Inspection after inspection has revealed that, even 14 years on, conditions have not improved. Take HMP Peterborough, where an inmate, who was in prison for shoplifting food after her benefit payments had been delayed and was suffering from mental health problems, was forced to clean up after her own miscarriage! It's not surprising that many female prisoners report a worsening of existing mental health issues. Furthermore, the imprisonment of women does not just affect the individual, but does immeasurable harm to their families. Almost 60% of female prisoners have a child under the age of 18, with 95% of these being

forced into care or to live with their relatives as a result of their mother's imprisonment.

While there are a very small minority of female offenders who genuinely pose a risk to society, prison, or at least prison in its current form, is not the correct way in which to deal with these women. Countless research has revealed that prison does not work. Prisons do not deter crime and they certainly do not rehabilitate offenders. Due to decades of cuts to both staff and services, prisons have become little more than 'holding pens', with extremely limited access to education, training or employment opportunities. The recidivism rate in England and Wales remains persistently high, particularly for women, with 58% of female prisoners returning to prison within the first year of release.

Budget cuts

Despite all this, the Tories continue to shift criminal justice policy further and further towards a 'punitive state', whereby harsh 'tough on crime' policies increasingly push out any alternatives that attempt to provide solutions outside of the criminal justice system. For instance, they are pushing forward with plans to create 500 more prison spaces for women while simultaneously cutting the budgets of services traditionally used as early interventions to prevent women from entering into the criminal justice system in the first place. Additionally, the increasing trend towards privatisation removes any incentive to divert at-risk women towards non-criminal justice interventions.

So, what do socialists propose as an alternative? First and foremost, we must stop using prison and other forms of criminal punishment as ways to deal with the problems caused by the capitalist system. We must fight for full and proper funding for those services that can help at-risk females change their lives in meaningful ways so they are not forced to resort to crime. We must also resist attempts by the ruling class to push 'tough on crime' policies, including the Police, Crime and Sentencing Bill which proposes broader police powers and the introduction of longer prison sentences for certain offences. And, ultimately, we must fight for a socialist society where the problems of capitalism are eliminated and we no longer have to resort to locking vulnerable people in cages.

A Fighting Programme for Women's Rights and Socialism

Socialist Party pamphlet

email: info@socialistparty.org.uk



Are Biden's immigration policies a break with Trump's?

In the fourth article of our continuing series on the new Biden administration, the **Independent Socialist Group** (CWI, USA) critically examines the new president's immigration policies.

During the presidential election campaign, Joe Biden and other Democratic Party politicians promised to "undo the damage" of the Trump regime, including pledges to overhaul Trump's immigration policies.

During Trump's presidency, the US/Mexico border wall, the 'Muslim ban', and family separation dominated the headlines and sparked protests, but many other sinister policies of Trump and the Republicans were largely ignored.

Whether it was making the legal immigration process more difficult, using public health as an excuse for denying asylum to the vulnerable, or creating new departments to demonise immigrants with criminal records, everything about the Trump administration's immigration policy was a clear attack on immigrants' rights. However, the Biden administration's immigration policies are also severely harming immigrants. Biden ending the 'remain in Mexico' policy and terminating the wealth test for migrants are positive developments. But while these orders come as welcome news, the Biden administration has not taken a much different approach from the violent anti-immigrant policies of Obama, Trump, and numerous presidents before them.

In fact, the Biden administration has continued or strengthened policies that were at the heart of Trump's disastrous immigration agenda.

During the 2020 elections, Biden made ending construction of Trump's border wall a centrepiece of his campaign.

Yet Alejandro Mayorkas - Biden's appointed Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), and a major architect of Obama's deportation machine - and the Department of Justice, have left open the possibility of continuing to build the border wall to 'fill in the gaps'.

Despite Biden adamantly claiming that his administration is going to "withdraw the lawsuits" and is "not going to confiscate the land" of people living along the US-Mexico border to make room for the border wall, about 130 'eminent domain' cases (government expropriation of private property for public use) remain active in Texas's southern district court.

And these are not old, forgotten cases; the vast majority of them were active as recently as 21 March, three months after Biden issued an executive order that supposedly put a stop to the border wall. Biden's most basic



immigration promise has yet to be met. And this is merely the tip of the iceberg.

Another extension of Trump-era policy is the continued use of 'Title 42', a provision of the 1944 Public Health Service Act, which allows for deporting and/or turning away recent migrants and asylum seekers who are coming from countries impacted by a communicable disease (in this case, Covid-19). This order has been used to turn away migrants as quickly as possible, all under the guise of 'public health'.

Since March 2020, Customs and Border Protection has carried out over 640,000 expulsions under Title 42, usually ignoring the legal requirement to first check the risk threat to returnees.

Immigrants and asylum seekers aren't any more likely to spread Covid-19 than students, logistic workers, and others who are crossing the border for 'essential reasons'. The wide application of this provision has allowed the Biden administration to slow or stop the majority of immigration.

Not only has the Biden administration continued to use and defend Title 42, but Biden has increased its use. In December 2020 (the last full month of the Trump administration), Trump used Title 42 to deport 60,596 people. This April, Biden deported an astronomical 109,963 people under the provision.

Rather than reversing this policy, the new administration has doubled down on its use, while assuring the public that it's more focused on 'humane' treatment of migrants and asylum seekers than its predecessor.

Since Biden took office, the corporate media has tended to cover immigration less and less, despite the

fact that many Trump-era policies that were previously front-page news are still continuing.

This stems from the fact that US capitalism, in general, wants a stable administration with minimal controversy as it reels from continuous crises. This is evidenced by the fact that many news outlets have praised the administration for the fact that Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) deportations hit a record low in April, but the Biden administration is using other means to deport immigrants, like Title 42.

Biased judges

Another area of significant concern is the appointment of immigration court judges. The new administration's first slate of immigration court appointees (17 in total) all received their initial offers during the Trump presidency, further solidifying that Biden has not posed, or even considered, a serious change in immigration policy.

To make matters worse, the majority of these appointees have experienced working for ICE and as prosecutors, while none have any experience defending migrants.

This preference for judges whose experience is solely in enforcing deportations reveals how stacked the deck is against migrants. Capitalism uses immigration as a source of cheaper labour, suppressing wages by pitting native-born workers against immigrants as well as taking advantage of economic insecurity.

Methods of control, like the looming threat of deportation, are used to prevent workers from asserting their rights. Corporations routinely threaten undocumented workers with deportation when they attempt to unionise or attempt any form of

collective action.

This administration is no stranger to the tactic of 'rebranding' facilities and institutions it previously pledged to get rid of entirely.

In March, it was reported that family detention centres would be re-named as 'family reception centres'.

Despite the shift to softer language, the nature of these facilities hasn't changed. They remain cramped, with little room to move and with migrants forced to sleep in rows on the floor.

This is similar to how inmates are routinely exploited for their labour in the private, for-profit prison system, detainees in ICE facilities are paid just \$1 per day for their labour.

The administration has also taken the controversial step of reopening child migrant facilities (nothing but a fancy term for putting kids in prison-like conditions) created under the Trump administration, even after Biden broadly vowed while campaigning during the presidential election to end the detention of migrant children.

For years, immigration activists have fought against these facilities. Many activists have compared them to concentration or internment camps.

And while it is true that the Trump administration served as architect to the policy of family separation, Democrats and most mainstream media outlets have notably ignored or underplayed the inconvenient fact that the facilities themselves were constructed during the earlier Obama-Biden administration.

One reporter noted that Biden would allow the children into the country but "they're also immediately going to be put into deportation proceedings."

In a clear attack on the right to seek asylum, Vice-President Kamala Harris spoke in Guatemala, telling undocumented migrants "do not come" to the US, despite US imperialism being a driving cause of migration from Central America.

Make no mistake, kinder rhetoric when deporting migrants does nothing to soften the real dangers migrants and asylum seekers face. Only the working class, both native-born and immigrant, can win real change using our power.

The Independent Socialist Group calls for a mass movement, organised and coordinated by the labour movement, socialist organisations, and progressive groups, which can:

- Coordinate the formation of democratic committees to organise defence against deportations and ICE raids
- Organise mass rallies, meetings, and marches to fight against anti-immigrant racism
- Fight for the abolition of ICE and the dismantling of migrant camps, the immediate recognition and legalisation of all undocumented immigrants living in the US, and the right to asylum
- Organise union drives in all industries to win representation and protections for all workers
- Build stronger links to workers organisations and movements outside of the US to coordinate international strategy
- Build a workers' party to challenge the pro-capitalist duopoly of Democrat and Republican parties and fight for policies that can defeat border militarisation, raise wages, and defend the rights of all workers.

Iran's presidential election Urgent need to build an independent workers' party



Striking Haft Tappeh sugar cane workers last year PHOTO MOHAMMED ANGHAR/FARSI NEWS AGENCY/CCTV

ROBERT BECHERT
COMMITTEE FOR A WORKERS' INTERNATIONAL (CWI)

Ebrahim Raisi's election as president, openly described in Iran as 'engineered', revealed the regime's weak popular support.

Facing a rising tide of opposition, especially the growth of independent workers' organisations leading struggles and repeated mass protests, the conservative 'principalists' mainly running the Iranian regime hoped that Raisi, with his bloody record of presiding over thousands of executions, would be a 'strong' leader.

They were also fearful of showing more divisions within the ruling caste or creating opportunities for their 'reformist' opponents in this election. The conservatives wanted to show that the regime was solid, and had sidelined both critics within the elite and general opponents.

This was tied to a more fundamental fear that a more 'open' election could have created space for protests and demands for genuinely free elections. In particular, the spectre of a movement like the 2009 Green Movement developing again struck fear into the regime because Iran is different now.

Ordinary Iranians' disappointment with the results of the two 'reformist' presidencies of Khatami and now the outgoing Rouhani, has posed more sharply that struggle is needed to win change.

The November 2019 protests showed how mass demonstrations could rapidly spread across Iran, and the growing workers' movement meant that new protests concerning elections could have a different character to previous ones.

Any development of significant workers' protests would pose the question of a general strike, something which has a history in Iran. Strikes, including general strikes,

alongside mass demonstrations, played a key role in the 1978-79 revolution against the Shah's regime.

Thus, the conservatives moved to ensure that Raisi, heavily defeated when he scored 38.5% in the 2017 presidential election, this time faced no serious opposition.

The 'Guardian Council', effectively appointed by Iran's inviolable 'Supreme Leader', used its power to block the overwhelming majority of would-be candidates from standing.

Not only were practically all candidates from the 'reformist' wing of the elite barred from standing, so were 'conservative' candidates backed by the powerful Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps - as was Ahmadinejad, a previous president, now regarded as a loose cannon by his former conservative allies.

Blatant rigging

This rigging was so blatant that the 'Supreme Leader', Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, felt the need to make a show of asking the Guardian Council to reverse its decision and allow other candidates to run but, as was to be expected, this was rejected.

While he may try to emphasise, or even repeat, elements of his ruthless past, Raisi has a weak popular base.

Raisi was elected on a minority vote, winning just under 18 million votes from the 59.3 million-strong electorate. The turnout of just under 29 million was the lowest ever percentage, 48.8%, in presidential elections in Islamic Republic's history.

In 2017, 41 million voted, a 70% turnout, and the mildly 'reformist' Rouhani won 23 million votes, 57% of the vote. This time, in the capital Tehran, just 26% voted, compared with 72.9% in 2013 and 73.3% in 2017.

Significantly, in this election the number of blank or void ballots, 4.16 million - 14% of the total, was higher than any of the votes for the three

losing candidates. Some 34,543,106 of the 59,310,307 electorate either didn't vote or spoiled their ballot, a sign of Raisi's narrow popular base.

Raisi downplayed his role in the executions of thousands of opponents in 1988, and in numerous other instances of repression and executions. He tried to adopt a populist approach often repeating: "I've not only known poverty, I've tasted poverty" - while promising to act against corruption and build "a government of the people for a strong Iran."

Despite continuing repression of activists, sections of workers took advantage of the election campaign to press their demands. At the end of May, oil workers held protests with some calling for strike action. Actions to secure unpaid wages have continued.

In a situation of economic and social crisis, worsened by the Covid pandemic which has killed over 83,000 Iranians, Raisi and the regime will be put to the test. The fact that now the 'principalists' formally control all the levers of power means they will be held responsible for what happens.

While he may try to emphasise, or even repeat, elements of his ruthless past, Raisi has a weak popular base. As the Shah of Iran found out in the 1978-79 revolution, a repressive state apparatus can only go so far against a determined mass movement.

It is possible that Raisi will want outgoing president Rouhani to complete negotiations about the US re-joining the 2015 nuclear deal and thereby get a lifting of the sanctions imposed by Trump.

The New York Times has reported that the wording of a deal was agreed weeks before the election. Clearly, Raisi and the principalists hope that lifting the sanctions, which the Financial Times describes as "possibly the harshest sanctions ever levied on a sovereign state", will ease the

pressure on them and enable them to give a few concessions to the long-suffering Iranian population.

While that would give the regime a bit more room to manoeuvre, especially alongside a continued increase in the oil export price, it would not solve the fundamental issues facing the mass of Iranians or prevent struggles developing.

The development of the workers' movement is partly against the background of a combination of a general crisis of capitalist development, sanctions, and Covid that has produced a dire economic situation.

Inflation has rocketed since 2017 and is currently around 46%. Alongside this, large-scale unemployment has continued; youth unemployment has averaged 22% over the eight years of Rouhani's tenure.

But while these are key factors in the background to the struggles that have developed, they are not the only ones. Apart from the serious economic issues, there have been movements against oppression, for democratic rights and, increasingly, against what many see as a corrupt elite.

Workers' demands

A joint May Day statement issued by workers, pensioners' and other organisations argued, among other points, that "today, the absence of workers' organisations in all workplaces, regions and on a national level, is felt more than ever, and demands immediate and inclusive efforts to establish such independent organisations".

In such structures, all organisations representing the interests of the Iranian working class could unite to organise, debate and coordinate the struggles.

Many are looking for an alternative. The election's low turnout, as was also the case in the even-lower participation in last year's

parliamentary election, also showed the widespread disappointment with 'reformists'.

There is a search for an alternative. The western imperialist powers will try to intervene and influence the opposition. They will hypocritically denounce Raisi, while keeping close ties with the brutal Saudi dictatorship.

The London Times denounced Raisi as "the Butcher of Tehran", but never used such terms to describe the right-wing Chilean dictator Pinochet who was probably responsible for more deaths after he seized power in a bloody coup. The workers' movement needs to be aware of 'false friends' and develop its own independent programme.

Already in some of the protests that have taken place there have been demands for workers' control of workplaces, while more general slogans against the regime have also been aired.

This makes it more urgent to start discussion on the foundation of an independent workers' party and on what its programme should be. Such a party is necessary to unite the struggles of the workers and youth, and keep them independent from capitalist forces.

But to do this successfully it would need to argue for a socialist programme that can mobilise the working class and poor to break with the capitalist system.

Iran is facing a new period. Raisi does not have majority support. This gives the workers movement the possibility of getting a wider echo, not just within the majority not supporting the rulers, but also even among some of those who voted for Raisi.

However, to achieve this, a socialist programme is needed alongside the building of the nucleus of organisations to be ready to act when the opportunity to struggle presents itself.

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BUILDING BACK BETTER?

■ FIGHT FOR A ■ ■ SOCIALIST ■ ■ RECOVERY ■

THEO SHARIEFF
SOCIALIST PARTY YOUTH ORGANISER

As society slowly emerges from lockdown, Boris Johnson and the Tories are busy preaching that they plan to 'build back better'.

The Tories claim this means upping investment in Northern towns and cities, 'levelling them up', and laying the basis for a 'green industrial revolution'. Labour, in true Starmerite fashion, has launched its 'Stronger Together' campaign, once again tailending the Tories.

But, far from the fairy tale picture of a healthy and vibrant capitalist

system capable of delivering these things, the reality is much grimmer. Britain is predicted to emerge from the pandemic with the worst economic scarring of the G7 countries, with productivity and wages at historic lows. Capitalism in Britain is in a deep and intractable crisis.

This means that a fight is on. The bosses once again want to make us, the majority, pay for the crisis with our jobs, our services, and our futures. Already this process has begun with the 25-plus employers who have engaged in the 'fire and rehire' of their workers - firing them only to rehire them on worse pay and conditions.

In anticipation of workers' and youth resistance, the Tories are bringing in the new anti-protest bill to give more repressive legal powers to the police. It's crucial the trade unions, with over six million members in workplaces across the country, prepare now for the fight of our lives against the coming bosses' offensive. Not only to repel the attacks, but to fight for an economic recovery in the interests of working-class and young people - not one which just lines the pockets of the rich like the so-called recovery post-2008.

To achieve this will mean the development of a new mass party for workers and youth, that brings

together the trade unions, community campaigns and young protesters, and is armed with a bold socialist political programme. One which includes: decent wages, socially useful job creation, council house building, and an end to all cuts - all linked to the need for public ownership in order to make the rich pay for it.

These demands go together with a vision of an alternative kind of society, one that exists outside of the straightjacket of capitalism, which can provide all of these things on a lasting basis - a socialist society. Join us in the fight for a socialist recovery.

Join the fightback

JOIN THE SOCIALISTS

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

07761 818 206

to find out more today!



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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