

END WOMEN'S OPPRESSION NOW!

 **Socialist
Party**

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FIGHT FOR SOCIALISM

1. End austerity now

For women, austerity is a 'quadruple whammy'. As women are the majority in the public sector workforce, the cuts to jobs, wages and pensions hit hard. Women also tend to suffer more when services and benefits are cut, and are left filling in the gaps as state services are withdrawn. As women's economic independence is eroded, the ability to flee domestic violence is threatened. Meanwhile funding for women's refuges has been cut.

a) **Build a mass movement against all cuts. No to cuts in jobs, benefits and public services. Coordinated strike ballots by the trade unions and a mass Saturday demonstration called by the TUC**

b) **Call on Labour councils to reject Tory cuts and set budgets based on need, using their reserves and borrowing powers to fund them**

c) **Tories Out - build mass action to fight for a general election now!**

2. Homes, health, education for all

Lack of affordable housing can force women to stay in abusive relationships. Female street homelessness is rising more quickly than the overall rough sleeping population. Women make up over half of NHS admissions and 77% of the NHS workforce.

a) **A mass building and renovation programme of decent, affordable council housing to ensure homes for all and make it easier for women to leave abusive situations. For councils to use their existing powers to introduce rent control now**

b) **Save our NHS. Invest in publicly owned, democratically run, high quality and free adult, social and children's care. For a socialist NHS - free at the point of use and under democratic control, providing all necessary services including mental health services. Kick out the privatisers**

c) **End the schools funding crisis. 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**

3. Defend living standards

Over a third of the female workforce, representing 3.6 million workers, earns less than £15,000 a year. Poverty pay has a knock-on effect in old age with over 300,000 pensioners condemned to poverty. Almost half of lone parents live in poverty, the majority of them women.

a) **Trade union struggle to increase the minimum wage to £10 an hour without exemptions as an immediate step towards a real living wage. For an annual increase in the minimum wage linked to average earnings. A maximum 35-hour week with no loss of pay. Scrap zero-hour contracts. For employment rights from day one at work.**

b) **Reverse the pension attacks. Increase the state pension by 50% now as a step towards a living pension**

c) **Scrap Universal Credit. Labour councils should use their existing powers to implement payments to make sure no family or individual suffers as a result of this cruel Tory measure. Reverse all benefit cuts**

4. Stop sexual harassment

Nowhere are women safe from sexual harassment – the street, transport, work, at home and in education. More than half of female students have suffered some form of sexual harassment on campus resulting in the victims avoiding lectures and seminars. More than half of women workers have faced sexual harassment in the workplace. Resisting sexual harassment at work is even more difficult on a zero-hour contract.

a) **Build campaigning student unions that challenge sexism. For democratic and accountable elected committees of students and workers to have a say in how incidents are dealt with so decisions are not left in the hands of overpaid and unaccountable university vice-chancellors or boards. Free education would free women from the vulnerability student debt creates**

b) **For trade unions to organise and campaign against sexual harassment including organising strike action to stop sexual harassment in the workplace. Support unions taking action to defend safety measures such as the RMT union's campaign to keep the guards on trains. Scrap zero-hour contracts**

c) **For workers and young people to fight for zero-tolerance to sexism at all levels of society: For quality and informed sex and relationship education which challenges all forms of prejudice, discrimination and harmful gender norms and mass action to expose and challenge state sexism**

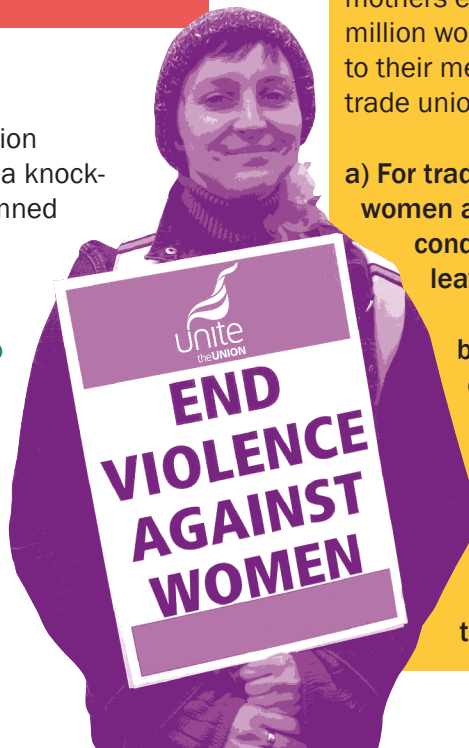
5. Fight workplace discrimination

An estimated 54,000 women a year are sacked by employers as a result of getting pregnant or taking maternity leave. 44% of working mothers earn less than before they became pregnant. The 3.5 million women workers aged 40-50 find employers unsympathetic to their menopause symptoms. Pregnancy and the menopause are trade union issues.

a) **For trade union organisation to stop bosses sacking pregnant women and to ensure that women's pay and terms and conditions are not cut on their return to work after maternity leave**

b) **For a trade union campaign to win improved working conditions including the right to time off work for symptoms of the menopause and for training of trade union health and safety reps to help enforce this**

c) **End period poverty. For free, quality sanitary products to be provided in schools, workplaces and relevant public services. Period dignity requires an end to austerity**



6. Defend domestic violence services

Every week two women are killed by a partner or ex-partner. Every day over 90 women and 94 children are turned away from domestic violence services because of funding cuts, closures and lack of affordable housing. A fundamental change in how society is run is needed to end violence against women altogether.

- a) **Build local and national campaigns to fight cuts including calling on councils to set no-cuts budgets - the prerequisite for providing women with a means to escape domestic violence**
- b) **Back the Women's Lives Matter campaign appeal to John McDonnell to pledge that an incoming Labour government would replenish any reserves a Labour council used to avoid cuts to domestic violence services and refuges now and underwrite borrowing made for the same purpose**
- c) **Fight for democratic and accountable services specialised to suit the needs those fleeing domestic violence. Privatised services should be council-run with democratic accountability to and by service workers and users**

7. Real justice for victims of violence

It is estimated that in Britain only 15% of all rapes are reported to the police, and only 7% of those result in conviction. Of all the women killed globally almost half are killed by their partners or family members.

- a) **Increased and improved services to help those women affected by domestic violence, rape and abuse, including paid time off from work to access support**
- b) **Re-instate access to legal aid. Increase the threshold for legal aid so that all women can access it for divorce cases. No to enforced mediation**
- c) **Take the courts out of the hands of the 1%! Campaign for police accountability and the election of judges under democratic control by the working class**

8. For the right to choose

Although the 1967 Abortion Act was an important victory, women are still denied the real right to choose when and whether to have children. In Northern Ireland a mass movement and an independent working-class political voice is needed to fight for access to safe, free and legal abortion. The housing crisis, low pay and lack of affordable childcare can make having children a more difficult choice. Austerity means that 37% of children will be living in poverty by 2024.

- a) **Mass struggle, led by the trade unions, to defend the right to free, safe and legal abortion. End the need for two doctors' signatures. End the Northern Ireland exception**
- b) **Access to free fertility treatment on the NHS for all who need it.**

Nationalise big Pharma and fund research into safer, more effective contraception and the right to fertility treatment on the NHS - no to rationing of IVF.

- c) **End maternal and child poverty. Reinstating pregnancy grants, maternity and child benefit for all and end the government's two-child policy on tax credits and Universal Credit. Raise benefit levels to reflect the real cost of pregnancy, childbirth and bringing up a child. Fight for free, flexible childcare. For the right to paid parental leave**

9. Build fighting mass organisations

Women need fighting trade unions and an independent working class political voice against austerity and fighting for jobs and better pay and terms and conditions. For the trade unions, the basic organisations of the working class in which our collective interests are counterposed to the bosses, this starts with a programme of fighting cuts, resisting the anti-trade union laws, and building democratic and inclusive structures. This is the main way that more women can be drawn into union activism.

- a) **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. Organise militant trade unionists with the National Shop Stewards Network**
- b) **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.**
- c) **Fight for Labour to be transformed: deselect the Blairites!**

10. Fight for socialism

Ending violence, discrimination and oppression against women requires a fundamental transformation in the way that society is structured and organised. Through democratic workers' control and management of the major banks and corporations - moving away from a system based on inequality and exploitation to one founded on equality and co-operation - it would be possible to not just end the economic problems which women face, but to prepare the ground for eliminating sexism and cultural oppression too. Movements towards collective action by workers, including the vital building of a mass workers' party will be critical steps in the struggle for socialism.

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

A socialist programme to end women's oppression

In the era of austerity and capitalist crisis, women are struggling against their oppression. Women are taking action - marching, striking, getting organised.

The weak and divided Tory government has not yet launched a major offensive against women's legal rights as it would provoke a mass opposition movement. But that is not to say that women's rights and conditions are not under enormous attack. It's estimated that 86% of the burden of austerity falls on women. But women are fighting back.

In Glasgow, a strike for equal pay for the home care workers in October 2018 delivered a £500 million settlement. At the victory rally, the mainly women workforce recognised the importance of the support they had, especially the solidarity action by the mainly male refuse workers.

Women Against State Pension Inequality (Wasp women) organise to challenge Tory changes to the state pension age that disproportionately impact women born in the 1950s.

In many other struggles and strikes women are often to the fore - in housing campaigns, in the climate strikes, against schools funding cuts, and fighting cuts, closures and privatisation of public services from respite care to youth services to refuge closures.

The 'MeToo' hashtag has brought wide attention to sexual harassment on campuses, at work, on the streets. The Google workers' global walkout showed how the potential anger on this issue to be channelled into workers' action.

It is a mistake to do anything that exacerbates divisions in the working class - along the lines of gender, sexuality, etc - as the proponents of identity politics do. The defenders of capitalism already use division to weaken our struggles against their exploitation and oppression. Instead we fight for the maximum unity of the working class in struggle around a socialist programme.

All women suffer sexism in class society. Working-class women suffer doubly - as women and as workers. But what makes working-class women most important is that they are part of the class that has the potential to be the agent of socialist change to end the capitalist system and, therefore, to end the inequality, racism, homophobia and sexism which are inherent in capitalism.

We propose this ten-point programme for discussion on what is necessary to end women's oppression.

Get in touch to tell us what you think!



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