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the Socialist

Issue 1163

20-26 January 2022

formerly **Militant**

TOXIC TORIES MUST GO



AND THEIR UNEQUAL PROFIT SYSTEM

- **No trust in Starmer's pro-big business Labour Party**
- **Fight for a new mass workers' party**
- **Join the socialist fightback**

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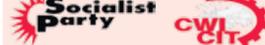
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"The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it."
Karl Marx

Tories on the ropes

Build a workers' alternative



Socialist Party
WHAT WE THINK

Left: Stagecoach workers' strike in south Wales winning a pay rise DAVE REDD Right: PM Johnson under pressure to resign KUHLMANN/MSC/CC

As we go to press, the future of Boris Johnson's prime ministership appears to be hanging by a thinner and thinner thread. The revelations of Downing Street parties in 2020 as millions suffered during the pandemic - against a backdrop of increased suffering ahead, not least from the cost of living crisis - mean his polling is in free fall.

The inquiry into Downing Street parties under lockdown, led by senior civil servant Sue Gray, is expected to report soon. The Financial Times says that "time is up". Significant further heat has now been added with the claim from Johnson's sacked former aide Dominic Cummings that Johnson in fact knew what he "implicitly thought" was a 'work event' was a party - and therefore that he lied to parliament.

Tory MPs are under pressure from Tory members and voters - some MPs report receiving nearly 1,000 emails from angry voters over the weekend 15-16 January. Others report not looking at any emails or social media!

The talk of votes of no confidence and leadership challenges on one side, and Operation Save Big Dog, which largely comprises rushing out policy offers predicted to appeal to the Tory base on the other, are an expression of the deep divisions within the Tory party.

Traditionally the main party of capitalism, in the era of deep capitalist crisis the Tories cannot offer a clear way forward and so remain deeply split, with attempts to shore

up their ever narrower bases of support their only option.

A senior government source told the Guardian that "multiple groups were angry with Johnson: lockdown sceptics, disgruntled ex-ministers and MPs from former Labour red wall seats who judged him to be failing to deliver on the levelling-up agenda."



Traditionally the main party of capitalism, in the era of deep capitalist crisis the Tories cannot offer a clear way forward and so remain deeply split

Who and when?

Questions facing the Tory party include who will replace Johnson - with a contest set to expose and exacerbate splits and, will he go before the May elections or after? This question is particularly pressing for those local Conservative Associations who are preparing to field candidates on 5 May when over 6,000 seats are up for election.

They are faced with confronting voters angry at Johnson and his 'one rule for us and another for those at the top' - and livid about falling living conditions. Figures show that price rises wiped out wage rises completely in November - a real-terms pay cut.

Only now has Keir Starmer's Labour been able to pull ahead in the polls, a reflection of his failure to offer any alternative in the last two years. His priority has been proving to the capitalist class that his New Labour is once again a reliable second eleven for them - ready to form a pro-capitalist government.

In local government, the unwillingness of right-wing Labour to use its powers in the interests of the working class is clearer than clear. From the get-go of the Con-Dem

government in 2010, right-wing Labour councillors have passed on every cut the Tories demanded. They have offered no protection - despite the enormous powers and resources local government holds - to fight the driving down of working-class living standards austerity has meant.

Strike wave

But workers have had enough. A winter strike wave is taking place, as the industrial reports in the Socialist every week make clear: bin workers, transport workers, teachers, health workers, scaffolders, delivery workers, and more.

Long, determined, and bitterly fought disputes are bringing workers into action to defend their pay and conditions against bosses seeking to add to the £250 billion annual transfer from the working class to the bosses since 1980 - through pay cuts, job cuts, speed-ups, privatisation, etc. This fightback needs to be coordinated by the trade union leaders.

But, never mind what befuddled and angry Tory activists do on 5 May - what do these workers do? Trade unionists should discuss standing as no-cuts candidates. They're fighting for workers in the workplace and are best placed to do so in the council chamber: to bring services back in-house, for wage rises that keep up with inflation, for council homes and rent control, and all the things we need so the working class doesn't end up losing out from the political and economic crisis of the bosses' capitalist system.

Want to fight austerity?

Come to the Trade Unionist and Socialist conference

HELEN PATTISON
LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY REGIONAL SECRETARY

The local newspaper in the London Borough of Camden has articles almost every week reporting on the manoeuvring inside the Labour Party. The right-wing has been busy for months, making sure that none of the Labour candidates for the May local elections are anti-austerity.

It's not only in Camden that the Labour Party under Keir Starmer has been preparing for the council elections; a similar process has happened up and down the country.

Jeremy Corbyn is still suspended. There are rumours that he is thinking of launching a political party for the general election. But workers can't wait that long.

Growing numbers of people are being hit by Covid austerity, rising gas prices, and attacks on local services. More than ever, people need an anti-austerity voice in the elections.

A ballot paper with a blue Tory and a red Tory on 5 May isn't really a choice. But a ballot offering a bold anti-austerity voice can ignite local struggle against cuts to services. That's what we'll be discussing at the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) online conference on 6 February.



11am Sunday 6 February on Zoom

Register by entering
Zoom ID: 867 5383 4352
or online visit: bit.ly/3qFIUec

Platform speakers from the constituent components of the TUSC steering committee - the RMT transport workers' union, the Socialist Party, Resist, and the individual members' representatives - will introduce the discussion.

Visit tusc.org.uk to see TUSC's draft platform, core policies and how to stand as a candidate.



Please consider moving this model resolution in your union branch

1. This [union branch] believes that despite talk of "levelling up", it is clear that the Tory government and bosses intend to continue to make working-class people pay for their crises. This includes attacks on jobs, pay, conditions and services, alongside tax hikes and price rises. As part of this, we anticipate further austerity being inflicted in local government, which is responsible for over one-fifth of all public expenditure.
2. We agree that we oppose Labour councils continuing to carry out Tory cuts.
3. [We acknowledge that our union is affiliated to the Labour Party/does not currently have any political affiliation]
4. Nonetheless, this [branch] resolves to encourage our members to consider standing as anti-cuts candidates in the council elections scheduled for May 2022, noting that there is nothing that prevents them standing as candidates, in a personal capacity, for any party which truly supports trade unionist and socialist principles.



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 £15 an hour without exemptions. 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!

Do you agree? Join the fightback!

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Tory vaccine sacking threat set to deepen NHS staffing crisis

HOLLY JOHNSTON
NHS NURSE AND GMB REP

86,000 NHS staff face the sack in April if they do not have the Covid-19 vaccine. There are already nearly 100,000 vacancies in the NHS, with 27,000 staff having left between July and September. Making the vaccines mandatory has the potential to tip an already overwhelmed service and stretched workforce over the edge. We simply cannot afford to haemorrhage staff at the worst time in the history of the NHS.

No doubt some capitalists hope that the current staff shortage crisis could be the final nail in the coffin for the NHS, opening it up for further privatisation. Outsourcing agencies already staff large parts of the NHS, making a profit in the process.

Around 95% of NHS staff are already vaccinated. Introducing mandatory vaccination will not convince the remaining 5%. Instead, the government's policy seeks to divide health workers and deflect blame for its disastrous handling of the pandemic and underfunding of the NHS.

There are many reasons for people's hesitancy to get the vaccine. Speaking to colleagues as a union rep, many anxieties are eased with education and information. Some reasons include cultural and health issues which cannot simply be addressed by being told they are 'wrong'. Others are concerned about having time off with side effects and not being able to afford it, many on precarious zero-hour contracts with no sick pay.

I also have colleagues that are

concerned that the vaccine will 'set-off' their arthritis for example, or worried it will affect their fertility. The government and NHS bosses, who have given us a dismal 3% pay rise - a real-terms pay cut - left us to work through the pandemic with insufficient PPE, and carried out years of cuts and privatisation, are widely hated and distrusted. They are in no position to convince workers to get the vaccine and the threat of the sack makes it worse.



The government's policy seeks to divide health workers and deflect blame for its disastrous handling of the pandemic and underfunding of the NHS

The health unions need to take a lead. This includes making the case to workers of the benefits of widespread vaccination and opposing making it mandatory, as well as stepping up the fight for a 15% pay rise, which in itself would help address the NHS staffing shortage.

The Tories want to capitalise on the divisions over vaccination. The Socialist Party fights for a political programme that unites workers in a struggle for the NHS we need: a 15% pay rise, to bring outsourced NHS workers back in-house, and for a fully funded, publicly owned and democratically run health service.



PHOTO: CHRISTIAN EMMER/CC

Employers use vaccine excuse to attack sick pay

SCOTT JONES
SOCIALIST PARTY IN USDAW

Ikea has become the latest company to cut sick pay for unvaccinated workers who need to self-isolate because of Covid, and in some cases for workers who test positive.

Sick pay cuts will also be implemented at Wessex Water, and last year supermarket Morrisons cut sick pay terms. Others have a 'no job, no job' policy like in social care in England.

While the move has been prompted by rising Covid cases and staff absences, this is just the latest in a long line of attacks on sickness pay in retail, with most supermarket workers not being paid for the first three days of absence already, and then paid

only £96.35-a-week Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) afterwards in most cases. Now companies are using the pandemic to divide the workforce and withhold pay.

At Ikea, unvaccinated workers who do not have mitigating circumstances and test positive will be paid in line with company sick pay, but unvaccinated workers without mitigating circumstances and required to isolate owing to being identified as a close contact, will now receive only the minimum SSP.

But it's unclear who decides what is mitigating or not, is it the bosses?

The shop workers' union Usdaw calls itself the union for Ikea workers, but hasn't said anything about the company stripping unvaccinated workers of proper sick pay.

Such a policy is more likely to push workers towards dangerous conspiracy movements as it is to encourage workers to get vaccinated. Those who may be sceptical about the job or have concerns about side effects, should be properly informed about the benefits and risks instead of being financially penalised, or in some cases forced out of a job. Unions must defend workers and fight divisive policies.

It shows the need for workers' and trade union control and oversight in the workplace to ensure safety and fair and equal treatment of workers. Trade unions must oppose any repressive compulsion of workers to get vaccinated and attacks on those who don't. But it must also fight for democratic, working-class oversight of the pandemic response, to give workers confidence that decisions are being made in the interests of workers' safety and not capitalist profits.

No trust in Tories to keep us safe For democratic workers' control of Covid safety

JON DALE
SECRETARY UNITE NOTTINGHAMSHIRE HEALTH BRANCH (PERSONAL CAPACITY)

The self-isolation period after a positive Covid test has been reduced from seven days to five, with negative lateral flow tests on days five and six. Other Covid restrictions, including face coverings indoors and work from home guidance, are likely to be scrapped on or before 26 January.

Media coverage has highlighted Omicron causing milder illness in vaccinated individuals than during previous Covid waves. Fewer patients are in Intensive Care Units and fewer are dying.

But the Tories cannot be relied on to make decisions based on science; rather their decisions are motivated by profit. Health Secretary Sajid Javid said the reduction in the isolation period aims to "maximise activity in the economy and education" - getting workers back to work and keeping schools open, so parents don't need time off to look after their children.

Profits

Javid said of Boris Johnson: "He made the call around having a further lockdown in the face of that Omicron variant. He made the right call and meant we have been able to have the most open and the most vaxxed economy in Europe."

Tory MPs are united on the need for an 'open economy' - open for exploitation and profit-making. Fewer people are becoming desperately ill, so far, than in earlier waves. But because Omicron is so much more infectious, many more people get exposed to the virus, become unwell and need time off work.

The Office of National Statistics



PHOTO: PAUL MATTHEWSON

estimated 3% of workers were on sickness absence because of Covid in the last week of December. NHS, education, care and other critical services' sickness absence is more than double the normal for this time of year. In the second week of January, over 40,000 NHS staff were off work each day because of Covid symptoms or self-isolation.

There are harrowing descriptions of patients waiting hours for

ambulances, sat in A&E or lying on trolleys waiting to see the one doctor on duty. Deaths and permanent disabilities are resulting from insufficient staff to provide basic care. Health workers face exhaustion and longer-term burnout, forcing many out of their professions.

12 months ago, the grim milestone of 100,000 UK Covid deaths was passed. On 26 January 2021, Boris Johnson said: "We will commemorate

the small acts of kindness, the spirit of volunteering and the daily sacrifice of millions who placed their lives on hold time and again as we fought each new wave of the virus, buying time for our brilliant scientists to come to our aid."

What a stomach-churning hypocrite!

12 months later, even Tory MPs can't pretend he's anything else - as are they for having supported him.

As Omicron spread rapidly before Christmas, the cabinet couldn't agree on public health measures. Reluctantly, the government brought in extra measures in England from 14 December, but had to rely on Labour votes to get them through as 99 Tory MPs voted against.

Tory splits

As the Johnson government hangs by a thread, scientific advice is considered not just alongside concerns about 'keeping the economy open', but Johnson's concerns of keeping his own MPs on side.

The pandemic has shown that Johnson and the Tories cannot be trusted to make decisions to keep us safe, motivated as they are by looking after the profits of the big business bosses they represent. Instead, decisions about what Covid safety measures are required, and when they should be amended or changed, must be made democratically by the working class and trade unions.

Trade unions must fight for:

- Full pay if off work with infection or self-isolating - including for self-employed and gig economy workers
- Social and mental health support for all where needed
- Safe workplaces with sufficient ventilation, CO2 monitoring and FFP2 masks
- Workers' health and safety reps to decide where it is safe to work
- Fully funded NHS, education and public services

● Shoddy PPE and illegal profiteering cronyism

£299 million of PPE brought by the government during the pandemic has gone out of date. The early days of the pandemic were marked by health and care workers' struggles for face masks and other PPE. Now, two years on, the government is suggesting those workers could be asked to use the out-of-date products.

£17.3 billion of PPE contracts were awarded between March and July 2020 to private companies. Many of those were awarded using the government's 'VIP lane' - now deemed illegal by a High Court judge. The

system allowed politicians to refer firms to be given contracts. A referral made a supplier ten times more likely to get a deal, according to the National Audit Office.

How much profit has been made from this aspect of the pandemic alone? To supply high-quality PPE for all during the pandemic, the Socialist Party raised the need for the nationalisation of the PPE manufacturing and supply industries. By doing this, production and distribution could be planned democratically to meet need rather than make profits.



PHOTO: SIMON DAVIES/DFID/CC

● Our energy bill pain, their decade of dividends

9% of households spend one pound in every ten of their income on energy bills. This is set to rise to 27% in April when the planned energy price cap is lifted. The average bill is set to jump from £1,277 to £2,000 a year.

Energy company SSE has advised its customers to do star jumps. E-on has sent 30,000 customers a pair of socks to replace the heating they can no longer afford.

Meanwhile, oil and gas companies have handed shareholders almost £200 billion in the last ten years,

according to think tank Common Wealth. This figure dwarfs the £20 billion being passed on to households in Britain, driving increasing numbers into debt and poverty.

Common Wealth goes on to call for a 'windfall tax' on these companies. That's a start, but why not nationalise these companies under democratic workers' control, to prevent future market failures for which the working class are asked to pay?

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99% of humanity are worse off because of Covid-19

4 seconds One person dies every four seconds as a consequence of inequality

Capitalist inequality kills

These are some of the findings of the Oxfam report 'Inequality Kills: The unparalleled action needed to combat unprecedented inequality in the wake of Covid-19'.

The report concludes with the need for "systemic solutions" for a more equal world, "ensuring that the market, the private sector, and globalisation do not produce greater inequality in the first place."

The fact is, capitalism, an economic system based on private ownership of wealth and the pursuit of profit, has inequality hardwired into its DNA.

The report's suggestion to "tax rich people" is a start, but not enough. What's needed is the nationalisation of the top companies and banks, to be run under democratic workers' control and management as part of a socialist plan, coordinated internationally.

10 richest

The wealth of the ten richest people has doubled since the pandemic began

Join the fightback

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- or text your name and postcode to 07761 818 206 to find out more about joining us today!

Bus driver Tracey Scholes reinstated at Go North West

DAVE BEALE
LANCASHIRE SOCIALIST PARTY

Bus driver Tracey Scholes has been reinstated at Go North West. The campaign won after supporters of Unite member Tracey were out in full force on 11 January to demand her reinstatement against the blind intransigence of management. Thousands also signed the petition calling for Tracey's reinstatement, and over a thousand people wrote to the CEO of parent company Go Ahead.

Tracey faced dismissal from her job after the bus company repositioned

its wing mirrors resulting in five-foot tall Tracey being physically unable to operate some buses. Following an appeal, Tracey still faced dismissal from her job unless she accepted losing five hours in pay a week. She carried on fighting. Unite pledged to launch an unrelenting campaign to support Tracey in the event that Go Ahead refused to reinstate her.

Sharon Graham said: "Tracey Scholes was the first woman bus driver at the Manchester depot. Her appointment broke the mould for women in the bus industry. She has given 34 years of unblemished service."

Whether the attack on Tracey was a product of arrogant local management or a result of wider and deliberate management provocation, it sits in the context of an ongoing struggle between aggressive and anti-union bus employers and Unite's growing militancy and ability to win disputes in the bus sector, and more generally.

This comes at the same depot where there was 85 days of strike action last year.

Sharon Graham's leadership, and Unite's newly formed combine in the bus sector, open up new and substantial possibilities for winning cases like this, but also for pushing back the major employers in the sector as part of a coordinated national Unite strategy on pay, conditions and jobs. However, not until the reregulation and nationalisation of the bus sector is achieved will there be a service with a real guarantee to protect workers' rights and serve the community.

Royal Mail: Unofficial walkouts foreshadow bigger battle to come on pay and workload

CWU MEMBER

A number of Royal Mail delivery offices have taken unofficial industrial action since the New Year, all of which are linked to major national issues taking place within Royal Mail since the 'Pathway to Change' national agreement.

The Pathway to Change was supposed to herald a way forward in what has been a difficult period, where CEO Rico Back was removed, and joint activity was agreed to move to new ways of working. It was set to bring in a shorter working week of 37 hours, leading to 35 hours a week, which would also see a pay rise for part-time members.

Just prior to Christmas, a leaked email came into the hands of the Communication Workers Union (CWU) which said that temporary and agency staff were to be told on

Christmas Eve that they were no longer required. This was without any discussions with the CWU at any level, which is against all national agreements with the union. This was met with a series of meetings up and down the country, and a strong reaction, which forced Royal Mail back. But this was clearly a signal that management are planning something, and that we should get ready to prepare ourselves for a potential battle again.

Since then, Invergoron delivery office has taken unofficial industrial action in defence of a temporary member whose contract was ended. The solidarity action forced Royal Mail back and the member now has a permanent contract.

All members have been under huge pressure over the pandemic due to the number of members off sick or isolating, and this is linked to

a massive increase in parcels. Workload has now reached breaking point at a large number of offices. Amesbury and Frinton delivery offices took action recently over the issue, and this is just the tip of the iceberg.

A record £600 million has just been paid out to shareholders, an example of what privatisation has meant for the service.

We are about to enter negotiations over pay from April 2022, and this is clear, with inflation and utility bills now soaring, a substantial pay award is now due. We need to take a strong stance and demand £15 an hour as a minimum, and a 35-hour week too. If they can shell out £600 million to shareholders then they can afford it. Royal Mail workers in the CWU must now start preparing for a potential battle with the management.

Newham college strike solid against bully privatisers

JAMES IVENS
LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

Strikers are ready to go the distance and beat 'academisation' at Newham Sixth Form College (NewVlc) in east London. Action restarted on 11 January after the Christmas break.

The strike is solid, with all but one department out. Its scale has forced management to close for all student functions except exams. The mood on the picket line is determination to see this through.

The National Education Union (NEU) won a stonking 98% vote for strikes against a bullying culture and privatisation before the first walkouts last term. As a result of leading a fight, the college's NEU group has grown to over 100.

Principal and 'chief executive' Mandeep Gill is starting to show the strain. Pickets reported that on 10 January he forced staff to endure an unhinged, one-way rant against the

strike at a compulsory after-hours meeting.

It only helped the union's cause. But reps and strikers will nonetheless be holding an open meeting for all staff, to put the other side that Gill doesn't want them to hear.

This is not likely to be a quick battle. Newham NEU has fought multiple struggles to stop privately run 'academies'. The experience is that education bosses with pound signs in their eyes can take a while to defeat.

Certainly, the boss at NewVlc seems happy to waste staff and students' time. January talks at conciliation service Acas resulted in his surprise claim that governors instructed him to withdraw an offered moratorium on privatisation... in mid-December.

Management has been in communication with the union repeatedly in that time. There was no mention of this rather important development.

Some pickets speculated that the governors themselves may be unaware of their apparent instruction to the principal.

Newham NEU secretary and executive and Socialist Party member Louise Cuffaro has led earlier campaigns that won Newham's right-wing Labour council to an official anti-academies position. Two Labour councillors came to the 11 January rally to offer the council's support.

This is very welcome. But will the local authority offer more than fine words? Will Mayor Rokhsana Fiaz get on the phone to NewVlc management and tell them to stop? Will the council write to all staff, parents and students opposing the move?

Will the mayor and councillors stand with strikers on the picket lines? Will they demand space in the Newham Recorder? Socialist Party members made these proposals - we hope Newham Council takes its anti-academy policy seriously.

Coventry bin strike continues in face of Labour council's stunts and lies

MICHAEL MORGAN
COVENTRY SOCIALIST PARTY

Socialist Party members have continued to show support for striking bin workers in Coventry as the Labour council continues its campaign of disinformation and lies about bin workers' pay. The union has also agreed to go 'all out' from 31 January, meaning there won't be any collections during February and March unless the council offers a fair deal to the workers.

The public have continued to show support for the strike, with plenty of honking cars and kind words passing by the picket. On a Socialist Party stall, we talked to the public about the strike, with many seeing how the council was at fault in the dispute. Many found the council's suggestion to take your black bags to their drop-off points by bike if you can't drive

ridiculous and offensive. Many of the public also wonder what their council tax pays for, and the workers have been right to point out that council taxpayers in Coventry are paying more, for less, now.

One van was sent to collect bin bags from a care home to opportunistically paint management in a good light in the local press. Workers pointed out that the total salary of those in the van would be more than £500,000. Surely if they can afford that for a photo opportunity, they can afford to give the bin workers more than a poverty wage!

Many on the picket line feel that the Labour council is 'Labour by name, Tory by policy', and see the need for an alternative beyond Labour. This is why we will work as part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) and stand against right-wing Labour councils, and we would encourage bin workers to vote for and stand as anti-cuts candidates in the local elections.



Waltham Forest bin workers' protest (above)

Waltham Forest bin workers in Unite and GMB unions protested on the steps of the town hall on 13 January against bad pay and conditions. Labour councils take note: the working class has had enough of your austerity and contempt!

Local Socialist Party members joined in solidarity and addressed the demo, calling for support for

trade union action and anti-austerity workers' candidates in elections.

Eastbourne bin strike wins 19% pay rise

A long-running Eastbourne bin strike ended on 18 January in a 'massive win for GMB members' as workers, who had taken six days of strike action, have won a 19% total pay rise. Their hourly rate will reach a minimum of £13.50 an hour.

RMT night-tube strike continues



London Underground night-tube workers in the RMT union are continuing their strike action over detrimental changes to their working hours, and have escalated that action this year, striking every weekend until June. Socialist Party members and National Shop Steward Network supporters joined picket lines including Seven Sisters on 14 January. Read more at socialistparty.org.uk

Sheffield Just Eat striking couriers speak about the longest gig economy strike



Just Eat takeaway food delivery drivers have been striking against pay cuts in Sheffield since 6 December in what has become the longest continuous such action in the gig economy in the UK. Parirs, chair of the Sheffield couriers branch of the IWGB union, and Khalil, a member of the strike committee, spoke at a recent Sheffield Socialist Party meeting and answered questions about their strike.

to £3.40, and cuts most of the other distance-based delivery rates.

Why have the Sheffield drivers opposed this restructure?

Obviously we're losing money and have to work longer to pay the bills when petrol, energy and food costs are going through the roof. When we were informed about these pay cuts on a Stuart Zoom meeting, the Sheffield drivers kicked off, so Stuart delayed the new pay structure for us, supposedly "to help us understand it better", until 6 December when we started our strike action.

What do couriers do?

We register to work on delivery apps from which we pick up jobs to deliver food from takeaways and restaurants to customers' homes.

How are you employed?

Effectively our employer is an app, or more than one app. We are all self-employed and use our own cars, insurance, petrol, etc. We get no sick pay, no holiday pay. We have no workers' rights.

What is Stuart?

Stuart Delivery is the logistics company that supply drivers to deliver Just Eat food orders. It is part of the French-owned DPD logistics multinational company. During the pandemic and lockdown, online deliveries soared. Stuart's profits went up 80% in 2020, but it paid no corporation tax.

The CEO Damien Bon became a 'pandemic millionaire' with a 1,000% salary and bonus increase in 2020 to £2.2 million!

What are the pay cuts?

Stuart's new pay structure was introduced around the country outside of London in October. It cuts the base rate of pay from £4.50 for a delivery

their own supporters' WhatsApp group as well.

Is the strike spreading?

Yes, so far there have been protests and strikes against the pay cuts in Chesterfield, Huddersfield, Blackpool and Sunderland. And there was a big Stuart drivers' protest in Liverpool about another issue. We are prepared to drive anywhere in the country to help spread the strike. And when we've won against Stuart, we want to get other couriers who work for Uber Eats and Deliveroo organised as well because their rates are even worse.

What do you hope to achieve?

Our demands are obviously to stop the pay cut. But we also want a pay rise to £6 minimum per delivery, and paid waiting times. We also want Stuart to recognise the IWGB union to represent us. So far, Stuart won't recognise the union, but our strike action has got them rattled and forced face-to-face meetings with us, which has never happened before.

What can Socialist Party members do to help?

You can support us by joining the pickets at McDonald's, get your trade union branch to donate to our strike fund, and help spread the strike by making contact with couriers in other cities and towns around the country, and even around the world!

Postscript:

Stuart has now conceded on two of the drivers' demands, simplifying car insurance renewal certification, and restoration of paid waiting times after 15 minutes. These victories have encouraged the couriers to continue their action to force Stuart to withdraw the pay cut.

South Yorkshire Stagecoach strike results in "huge pay win"

ALISTAIR TICE
YORKSHIRE SOCIALIST PARTY

After three-and-a-half weeks of strike action, 560 Stagecoach bus workers across South Yorkshire have voted to accept what their Unite trade union has described as a "huge pay win" of over a £1-an-hour increase, amounting to a 10.7% rise.

In a two-year deal, workers at the Barnsley and Rotherham depots will go from £10.80 an hour to £11.91 in March, and at the two Sheffield depots from £10.50 to £11.60 an hour in May, and retain their Sunday and evening premium rates.

In May last year, Stagecoach management offered a derisory 1%. They didn't think that the drivers would strike. The Sheffield depots had never been on strike before. But inflation, labour shortages, and the example of other bus worker victories spurred the South Yorkshire workers into action. The strike was solid from day one, and more workers joined the union and the strike as it progressed.

Get all the latest union news
nationalshop stewardsnetwork
with the NSSN bulletin
shopstewards.net

Scunthorpe scaffs resume indefinite strike action over pay

SOCIALIST PARTY REPORTERS

The 61 scaffolders employed by contractor Actavo, working on the British Steel works at Scunthorpe, will resume indefinite strike action on 26 January. After 12 weeks on strike before Christmas, the Unite union members voted by 83% in their rebalot to hit the gate again.

They are striking to be paid the national industry (NAECI) rate for the job which is 10-15% more than they get now. Since Unite general secretary Sharon Graham supported the picket line on 1 December, there have been barricades on the picket line, a 14,000-signature online petition taken to Actavo HQ, an exchange of solidarity visits with Danish scaffs, and an intensification of the leverage

campaign, reaching as far as Ireland.

Unite is demanding talks with Actavo and the client, British Steel (who employ hundreds of other workers on-site at below NAECI rates). But if they continue to refuse to pay the rate, then the pickets and leverage campaign will be stepped up. Unite has called protests at four Actavo sites in England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland on 24 January even before the strike resumes.

There is huge support among engineering construction workers for the scaffs, as the bosses have been trying to undermine the national agreement for years. That needs to be mobilised through solidarity pickets and more pressure put on Unite reps and members inside the British Steel plant to stand with the striking scaffs.

Somers Forge workers continue pay strike

NICK HART
WEST MIDLANDS SOCIALIST PARTY

Workers at Somers Forge in Halesowen took their fourth day of strike action in their current dispute for a living pay increase - and also the fourth ever in the company's 155-year history!

Strikers told us about the Victorian working conditions at this Victorian company. It's not uncommon to see pools of water, with squirrels and ducks nesting in the workshop, which produces large metalwork for military and other specialist applications.

On top of this is a bullying culture

from management that has seen over 50 staff come and go in one section in the space of three years. Far from the company taking necessary measures to minimise Covid during the pandemic, workers were not only being trooped into the plant, but reportedly threatened with the sack for not taking overtime!

GMB union members there have a further two days of strike action planned for late January, as part of their campaign to win a pay rise in line with inflation and backdated to last April's pay anniversary. Yet another group of workers not taking the cost of living crisis lying down!

MUTUAL AID, THE WELFARE STATE AND THE FIGHT FOR A NEW MASS WORKERS' PARTY

JOSH ASKER

SOCIALIST PARTY NATIONAL COMMITTEE

The Covid pandemic and its effects have deepened an already existing social crisis. Ravaged by years of cuts and privatisation, public services have been unable to meet the needs of working-class communities. In a period when the super-rich have further increased their wealth - the top 0.01% richest individuals increased their wealth by another 10% last year, numbers of mutual aid groups took off.

Donations of time, energy, food and money, typically from hard-hit workers, and definitely not from the super-rich, were used to try to ameliorate the worst symptoms of the crisis. At the height of the Covid pandemic 4,000 mutual aid groups had been set up. People, many of whom were on furlough, volunteered to deliver food and medicine to their neighbours who were vulnerable or self-isolating.

The groups included individuals simply motivated to help, others were led by faith groups or had been given permission by employers to take part during work hours. There are also those who see their actions as more political - a minority believing that acts of mutual aid will play a central role in transforming society.

Who owns the wealth?

But an unavoidable fact is that to harness the vast wealth and resources hoarded by the capitalist elite to meet social need requires a political struggle to transfer the ownership of that wealth from a tiny minority, to the overwhelming majority - the working class. A political party of the working class is needed for that fight.

Unfortunately, Labour's defeat in the 2019 General Election, and subsequently Starmer's purge of Corbyn's supporters and influence, has had a demoralising effect on some of those who had been enthused by his rallying call "for the many, not the few". Some have, for a period, lost confidence in the possibility of building a political force to fight in the interests of workers. But a political party of the working class is needed now more than ever.

Without such a party, in the period after the 2008-09 economic crash, the Tories and Lib Dems - assisted by Labour councils - were able to inflict brutal austerity measures. The welfare state was under attack and wage restraint gave workers an ever-decreasing share of the wealth.

The use of foodbanks took off. The Trussell Trust food charity reports that their network distributed 61,000 emergency food parcels in 2010-11; this rose to 2.5 million in 2020-21. The numbers using foodbanks has continued to rise during the pandemic.

Many workers who would have previously been employed on zero-hour contracts lost hours, and the millions furloughed lost 20% of their pay.

The issue of food poverty was further highlighted by footballer Marcus Rashford's public campaign for free school meals to continue through school holidays, ultimately forcing a government U-turn. Rashford's victory was worth £120 million in funding from government. Imagine what a political party of the working class, even with relatively few MPs or councillors, carrying out a determined campaign for free school meals and other measures, could have won.

Austerity

The effects of austerity were acutely felt in local government, £16 billion of funding had been cut from councils' revenue support grants. The cuts and service closures left local authorities particularly unprepared for the demands during the first wave of the pandemic. In the Socialist Party's Coronavirus Workers' Charter (see socialistparty.org.uk), we put forward the need for councils to use their existing resources to meet the needs of communities: "Councils to coordinate local distribution of food, medicines and other supplies to the vulnerable and people in need, with the democratic oversight of trade union and community organisations".

We argued, as we had throughout the years of austerity, that councils should use their existing financial reserves and borrowing powers to provide services that meet the communities' needs. By using these resources in the short-term, popular support for the measures could be mobilised to demand the funding from central government, and ultimately from the capitalist class.

Councils, Labour as well as Tory, refused to take this stand. The distribution of food and medicine was often left to working-class communities themselves, drawing on their own limited resources and time, often delivering food donated by low-paid workers themselves.

Welfare state

Austerity attacks on the welfare state represent an unwillingness of the bosses to continue to give up a share of their profits in the form of taxes, to pay for services for the working class. The establishment of local authority-run services and other aspects of the welfare state historically were enormous victories for the working class, won through struggle.

The landslide election of a Labour government in 1945 led to a programme of reforms that hugely expanded the welfare state, including the establishment of the NHS, expansion of comprehensive education, and mass building of council homes

(see 'Poverty increasing. Welfare state in crisis. Do we need a new Beveridge Report?' at socialistparty.org.uk).

In this period, fearing the potential of workers' struggle for a 'land fit for heroes', the capitalists conceded huge reforms. The capitalist state, as Marx explained, exists to police the class conflict that is inherent in capitalist society in favour of the bosses. Often it does this by employing oppressive measures - sending police to beat up picketers and so on. But also, by conceding resources to take the edge off the sharpest aspects of class society, the capitalists hope to be able to maintain social peace.

Ultimately, the concessions won by workers in the aftermath of World War Two were a huge victory. They represented the working class winning an increased share of the wealth in society in the form of healthcare, education and council housing.



The establishment of local authority run services and other aspects of the welfare state historically were enormous victories for the working class, won through struggle

But the situation in 1945 politically and economically was different to today. The end of the war had given rise to a number of revolutionary movements in Europe, with workers unprepared to return to the conditions of the 1930s. The Soviet Union, with its bureaucratic planned economy, had emerged strengthened. It was in the interests of capitalism, and also the Soviet bureaucracy, for big concessions to be made to prevent revolution.

Unlike today, after the destruction of the war, the world economy was beginning a period of sustained economic growth. The capitalist class could continue making increased profits, and at the same time maintain the welfare state. Eventually, in a period of economic crisis, the bosses would inevitably come to attack workers' previous gains.

"There's no such thing as society", were the famous words uttered by Margaret Thatcher as part of her ideological and fiscal assault on the welfare state, later continued by Blair, Brown, Cameron and May.

With Thatcher as his hero, why then did Boris Johnson declare from his Covid isolation in March 2020 that: "There really is such a thing as society"? Because in the turmoil of the



The beginning of austerity saw an explosion of anti-cuts groups campaigning to defend local services WALTHAM FOREST SOCIALIST PARTY



Hundreds joined the campaign to save Hackney children's centres from Labour council cuts in autumn 2021 HACKNEY SOCIALIST PARTY

months of lockdown, the idea of social cohesion and the myth that 'we are all in it together' was absolutely in the interests of Johnson and the bosses he represents.

Johnson is not the only Tory prime minister to laud the benefits of 'society' when it suits. In another period of social turmoil after the 2008-09 financial crash and during the first years of austerity, David Cameron proclaimed the 'Big Society' - cynically proposing that communities step in to provide services closed by cuts. Cameron's 'Big Society' project was a failure. Many of the organisations and charities that were meant to expand to fill the services gap were savaged by austerity too, losing the government and local authority grants their existence depended on.

Tory hypocrisy

Today, as secretary of state for leveling up, Michael Gove is regurgitating the same failed idea by introducing a backbench report entitled: "Trusting the people, a rallying call for a new community-powered conservatism". The Tories are hoping to win support among those who have stepped in to offer 'mutual aid' and, at the same time, attack the welfare state: cutting £20 a week from Universal Credit, maintaining the squeeze on local authorities and a public sector real-terms pay cuts.

Simultaneously, the same Tory government is beefing up the powers of the capitalist state to perform its more elemental role, as a force to defend the interests of the bosses by introducing the repressive police and crime bill to restrict the right to protest. The ruling class anticipates a period of class struggle and discontent, and is preparing itself for those battles.

Workers' experience of police harassment, racism and misogyny, a biased legal system and punitive benefit sanctions give rise to distrust and contempt for the state, alongside widespread support for the NHS and well-funded local services.

During the height of lockdown restrictions, with demand for services at a peak and many services failing to function effectively, mutual aid groups attempted to fill the gaps. But there was no question of mutual aid being able to meet social care needs, for example, or to stand in for the NHS. Other services like libraries and youth services, however, have increasingly been handed over to volunteers as a consequence of council cuts. In these services too it is necessary to continue to demand well-paid, union-organised professionals to provide a high-quality service.

The control of council services and councils' substantial budgets cannot be left in the hands of councillors who continue with privatisation, outsourcing and cuts. It is necessary to

challenge them, including at the ballot box, with candidates prepared to fight for the high-quality services we need.

A council prepared to use its borrowing powers financed by reserves in the short term, could, for example, invest in building high-quality council-run care facilities to meet the needs of its vulnerable population. By paying care workers a trade union-agreed minimum of at least £15 an hour, the staff shortages and poor care that dog privatised and under-resourced council care services could be overcome. More favourable care needs assessment could be introduced to ensure decent, affordable, care for all.



A council prepared to use its borrowing powers financed by reserves in the short term, could, for example, invest in building high-quality council-run care facilities to meet the needs of its vulnerable population

This is just one example of steps a council could take, led by councillors prepared to fight the government for funding, to transform local services and people's lives. Such a stand would win massive public support, increase pressure on other councils to follow suit and on the government to concede funding.

Democratic oversight of public services is in steady decline. Clinical commissioning groups in the NHS, subject to limited public scrutiny are to be done away with as part of the health and care bill. Academisation of schools reduces the influence of elected school governors. Privatisation of services reduces the influence of elected politicians over how they are run.

Transformed local services, fully resourced by a council acting in the interests of the working class, could be run by committees made up of elected representatives of service users, the workers' trade unions and the wider community to decide how best to allocate resources and run services. Subject to recall by those who elected them and without material privileges, elected representatives would be made accountable. Bodies like these could play an important role in determining a national plan based on the needs of working-class communities.

In 1945, the expansion of the welfare state demonstrated many of the benefits of nationally planned and resourced services. The largely successful first stage of Covid vaccination in Britain was a consequence of a public, nationally coordinated NHS, in contrast to the failed privatised test and trace. But the 1945 Labour government did not give comprehensive democratic control to workers and communities. And by not bringing an end to the capitalist profit system, the bosses remained in place to claw back what they had given.

In response to the Covid pandemic, the Tory government carried out unprecedented spending to prop up the capitalist system and protect profits. But British capitalism in crisis cannot afford lasting concessions. Already the government is seeking to claw back that spending, ending furlough and reducing Universal Credit, so the working class is being asked to pay.

Who pays for Covid?

The central and most immediate task facing the workers' organisations, including the trade unions, is to fight to ensure workers aren't made to pay for Covid through service cuts or inflation. Already, workers are exercising their power through strikes and the threat of strikes, winning above-inflation pay rises. Some, like outsourced NHS staff working for Serco in East London, are combining their struggle over pay with the demand to be brought back in-house as part of a public NHS.

But the struggles of these workers and others would be strengthened by a political party that fights in the interests of the working class and puts up a serious challenge for the bosses' wealth - that is what the Socialist Party is fighting for. By standing in elections as part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC), we hope this will be a first step towards building a new mass party of the working class (see page 3).

To prepare for May's local elections, TUSC has been organising People's Budget meetings, bringing together trade unionists, local campaigners and socialists to draw up council budgets based on the needs of our communities. Mutual aid groups are among those that have been invited to participate. And those willing to sign up to TUSC's anti-cuts core policies are encouraged to stand with us.

The pandemic has laid bare insufferable inequality and hardship - this has been met by mutual aid solidarity and mass popular support for key workers' struggles. To win a future with fully funded public services and an end to inequality means fighting politically to challenge for the wealth hoarded by the super-rich. Join us in building a new mass workers' party to take on that fight.



Campaigning to save Newham's Stratford Circus in October MARY FINCH

Demonstrating against the Tory anti-protest bill

As Parliament continues to debate the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill, which aims to further restrict the right to protest, demonstrations took place on 15 January around the country.

Leeds

There were over 500 noisy, singing, mainly youthful protesters. The Tories' bill aims to prevent protests on numerous grounds, including being too "noisy". So, after the Commons Choir had sung protest songs, a deafening one minute's sound was made by the protesters, using horns, pots and pans, etc.

The crowd then set off on an impromptu, unauthorised march around the city centre, gaining applause and support along the way. Many signed the Socialist Party petition and took our leaflets.

KEVIN PATTISON

Bath

The protest was organised with just a few days' notice. 150 attendees chanted: "This is what democracy looks like", and, of course, "Kill the



Bristol

bill". Socialist film director Ken Loach spoke.

Placard slogans included "Keep the 'demo' in democracy" and "Priti shameful". We started with a rally outside the abbey, and then a short parade loop through the main shopping precinct.

NIKKI DODDS

Bristol

Speakers made it clear that they would continue to protest, whatever legal restrictions existed. The mood was one of contempt and anger at the establishment. A cascade of noise descended onto the city centre

and chants of "Whose streets? Our streets!" from the over 1,000 mainly young protesters.

This was the 15th demonstration in Bristol against the Tories' anti-protest bill, and probably the largest. It's a reflection of the tradition of protest in the city.

The protest stopped at Bridewell police station to chant and direct protest against the police. The right to protest has had to be painfully extracted from the police and others in authority in Bristol - through the struggles against the poll tax, to the battles around cuts after 2008, up to these Kill the Bill protests, Black Lives Matter and the toppling of Colston's statue.

ROGER THOMAS

Waltham Forest: Campaign unites families facing eviction



The community mobilises to stop Nadia Zaman's first eviction in June 2021 MARTIN REYNOLDS

KEVIN PARSLAW
WALTHAM FOREST SOCIALIST PARTY

Following threats and evictions of women and their families in Waltham Forest, east London, the trades council's Housing Action Network met on 5 January to discuss the defence of residents who may be forced out of their homes.

The campaign is now working with four families. All have been taking legal advice, and, of course, we will assist them and others in legal battles. An advocacy group will be

established to assist tenants having problems.

We have to take on unscrupulous private landlords, and the complicit Labour council, if we are to prevent further evictions. Everyone should have the right to stay in the borough where they work or have networks of friends and family.

The meeting agreed to set up a register of empty homes, and urge families not to move if threatened with eviction. We are producing a leaflet outlining residents' legal rights.

We will also regularly lobby council

meetings. Councillors should act in their constituents' interests and not those of private landlords.

The council must requisition empty properties for the homeless. Our next 'eviction resistance' action will be on Saturday 22 January - meet 2pm, Wood Street Square, Walthamstow.

• See also 'Nana's eviction: Community vs heartless Labour council' and 'Nadia: Resisting evictions in east London' at socialistparty.org.uk.

Newham council rejects using 0.03% of reserves to fund arts

JAMES IVENS

EQUITY, NORTH AND EAST LONDON GENERAL BRANCH

I was part of the deputation from the North and East London branch of performing arts union Equity to a Newham Council cabinet meeting. Sadly, Labour mayor Rokhsana Fiaz refused to respond to our proposal for further discussion on arts funding at the former Stratford Circus arts centre.

We again made several clear proposals:

- Replace the lost public funding
- Ensure a home for the displaced groups
- Reconsider the centre's name
- Support a democratic cultural conference of the arts groups, unions and local working-class community
- Reopen discussions with the union

They ignored them all.

The council say that Newham only has £9 million in reserves. The union is calling for at least £190,000 for the

arts centre. Even if Newham really only had £9 million, that could satisfy our starting proposal for 47 years!

The truth is that Newham has £616 million in usable reserves, but has chosen to allocate only £9 million of that into its 'general fund'. By changing the way other sections of reserves are 'earmarked', the council could invest that and more in the arts for several centuries!

But we're not saying spend reserves and that's that. Cabinet members asked why we were not campaigning for central government to give Newham more money? We are!

Our proposal is that Newham spends (at least) 0.03% of its reserves, and sends the bill to Westminster. Pass the crisis up to the Tory government, not down to trade union members and the working class.

• Go to socialistparty.org.uk for more on the campaign to fund Stratford Circus and the arts in Newham

Birmingham: Cuts consultations replaced by computer game

CLIVE WALDER

BIRMINGHAM SOUTH WEST SOCIALIST PARTY

Birmingham City Council traditionally holds public consultations on its annual budget, but for 2022 it has decided to change the format. Gone are the public meetings where ordinary people can actually challenge councillors.

Instead, they are to be replaced by a computer game that will allow the player to increase council tax by 5% and then divide up the remaining budget between the various services. Strangely, there is no option to set a needs budget using reserves and borrowing, or campaigning for the return of funds stolen by central government.

The council leader says that they have introduced this game so that taxpayers can see how difficult it is

for the council to prioritise services against its income.

But the real reason for this change is that the old-style public consultations were dominated by people opposed to cuts, and often workers or service users who would be affected.

The council has said that it will consider suggestions from the public. But its track record has been to ignore anyone who opposes cuts.

This stunt is a cynical waste of money aimed at telling council taxpayers that there is no alternative to austerity. The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) will be standing candidates in the local elections in May to fight the cuts by the council and the government. We won't fool the public into believing that there are no legal alternatives to austerity.

NUS walkout: Organise to fight for free education on 2 March

THEO SHARIEFF

SOCIALIST STUDENTS NATIONAL ORGANISER

The National Union of Students (NUS) has launched its campaign for a 'student strike for education', calling for a national student demonstration in London on 2 March.

Students need a fightback! Two years of Covid have laid bare the effects of Tory and Labour government marketisation of universities.

In September 2020, students were lied to about in-person teaching, and then locked down on campuses, just so university management could keep our rent and tuition fee payments. This came on top of years of cuts to jobs, wages and conditions, and courses on campus, meaning a slow decline of the quality of education students receive, while paying £9,250-a-year fees.

Last year, student rent strikes across the country succeeded in winning millions of pounds in rent refunds. Far from just being a fight for compensation for the disruption caused by Covid, for many students the rent strikes were a first step towards fighting against marketisation, cuts, fees and student debt.

Strike

When the rent strike movement was in full swing, Socialist Students organised campus protests to demand tuition fee and rent refunds for students, funded by the government, as the first step towards the complete scrapping of tuition fees.

The University and College Union (UCU) took three days of strike action last term over attacks to staff pay and pensions, and is continuing with action short of strike this term, with more possible strikes to come. Students have been protesting against the failures of management to effectively tackle the pandemic of sexual harassment and assault on campuses.

All of these events combined have mounted pressure on the leaders of the National Union of Students (NUS) to act. The NUS is demanding, among other things, "higher and further education to be funded by



ISAIAH PRYIA

governments - free at the point of use for students - with proper pay, pensions and conditions for staff across education and beyond".

Albeit a whole year after the campus rent strike movement developed, that the NUS has finally called for a national demonstration to stop these attacks is welcome. Given the depth of the crisis facing students, 2 March could find a significant response from students looking to fight for free education.

However, guaranteeing the best possible turnout for such a demonstration will take a fighting campaign on the ground, linking the day-to-day attacks on students and staff to the need for free education. Student unions should mobilise students, including funding and organising transport to the protest in London for students and staff.

This demonstration has been called while rumours are swirling that the government is considering lowering the student debt repayment

threshold, threatening to trap working-class students in particular in a lifetime of debt repayments. This is a prime opportunity for the NUS to put forward the cancellation of student debt, the replacement of loans with grants we can actually live on, and the scrapping of tuition fees, all funded by taking the wealth out of the hands of the super-rich.

Socialist Students is organising local campus protests as part of the campaign to mobilise students for 2 March, and will be demanding that student unions organise coaches to London. 2 March could be a significant step in building the fightback against marketisation of universities and for free education.

- Socialist Students annual conference is on Saturday 26 February in London to discuss how to rebuild the student movement, and what next after 2 March - visit socialiststudents.org.uk to sign up for updates about the conference



ÉCOLE POLYTECHNIQUE / BARANDE/CC

Southampton uni ignores staff and students in exam farce

EVA ELIADOU PAPADOPOULOU

SOUTHAMPTON SOCIALIST STUDENTS

University management was forced to meet the student union after 95% of the over 7,000 people that participated in an all-student vote favoured moving exams from in-person to online because of the latest Covid crisis.

But the outcome of the meeting was not what we wanted. Our demands were rejected.

We have now been sent an email assuring us that in-person exams will be Covid safe. This has not done much to alleviate our concerns.

University management has now said that some exams were in fact going to take place online. That information was presumably given to students to placate us, but instead revealed the unfairness of the situation. Some of us would be exposed to the virus, while others would not.

It also calls into question how consistent the difficulty of the exams will be. Students like myself, who study

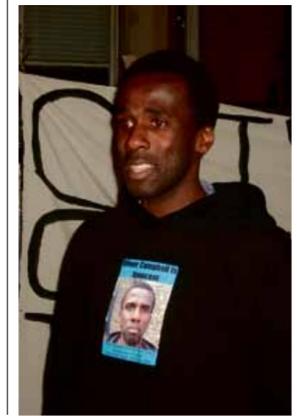
modern foreign languages, will have to complete closed-book exams in 90 to 120 minutes, while other students will be allowed a window of at least 24 hours to complete an assessment at home.

The student union has sent three open letters on behalf of students. Alarmingly, PhD students are being asked to invigilate exams because many staff members who usually fulfil this role are now, understandably, refusing to do so due to Omicron concerns. The student union calls for a one-week delay to the exam period, to give time to transfer assessments online.

The student union is showing no signs of conceding. However, neither is management. We are yet to receive a response to the third open letter. Students stand in solidarity with each other and with staff in order to fight for a safer exam season.

• See also 'Southampton student vote for online exams must be accepted' at socialistparty.org.uk

Oliver Campbell - 31 years fighting for justice



"I went into prison innocent. I came out innocent. And I've been innocent all the way through. I was put under pressure to confess to a crime I did not commit."

It is 31 years since socialist activist Oliver Campbell (Ollie) was unjustly convicted for murder. Ollie has learning difficulties, but the police still behaved very aggressively towards him during questioning, which was initially carried out without a solicitor or an appropriate adult.

Ipswich Socialist Party member Teresa Mackay spoke at Basildon and Thurrock TUC about Ollie's campaign for justice. You can read an edited extract of what she said at socialistparty.org.uk, and find out more by searching 'Justice for Ollie' at crowdjustice.com.

Bournemouth - angry people not represented by capitalist parties

Boscombe is supposedly not fertile ground for socialist values, but at our first Bournemouth Socialist Party campaign stall of the year on 15 January, we talked to many disaffected people on a range of topics - including union rights, issues affecting LGBTQ+ people, housing and homelessness.

There are many angry and desperate people living in Bournemouth,



Bournemouth

not represented by the establishment political parties. We shall do our best to offer them an alternative.

MARK RICHARDS

Pauline Wall memorial meeting

The memorial meeting for lifelong Marxist Pauline Wall will take place on Saturday 29 January, 2pm, Haworth Village Hall, Butt Lane, Haworth, Keighley, West Yorkshire. Donations to Manorlands Hospice instead of flowers are welcome. You can read Pauline's obituary 'From Liverpool youth leader to facing down press barons in Bradford' at socialistparty.org.uk.

Theatre: Yes Yes UCS

Interview: Telling the story of the 1971 Upper Clyde Shipbuilders work-in

In June 1971, the privately owned shipyards of Upper Clyde Shipbuilders collapsed into receivership. But instead of accepting redundancy, the large workforce occupied the affected sites and began its famous 'work-in'. Socialist Party member **Neil Gore**, part of socialist theatre company Townsend Productions, spoke to **Ian Pattison** about how the inspiring story was turned into their latest play.

Tell us about the new play

The play is 'Yes Yes UCS'. It's the story of the Upper Clyde Shipbuilders (UCS) work-in. UCS was a consortium, an amalgamation of five shipyards in Glasgow, to try and make them 'functional', 'affordable' and 'economic'. It worked up to a point. It was done by the Labour government in 1968 involving Tony Benn, then a minister.

Shipbuilding was such a critical part of the economy of Glasgow and the west of Scotland. It wasn't just the shipyards. It was all the other business around as well, like steel-making, toolmaking, machine-making companies. All the things that serviced that industry. It was a huge thing for the economy of the whole of that area. The Labour government had committed quite a lot of money to it. Then the Tories got in in 1970 under Ted Heath. And they decided it was time for change. The key words

that they used for industries that weren't making money.

They decided to get rid of them. And one of these was UCS consortium, which they considered to be a lame duck. They were going to 'streamline' it. That meant closing down some of the yards, bringing an end to shipbuilding in John Brown's Clydebank. Bringing an end to shipbuilding at the Govan site and others. It was going to be devastating. Thousands and thousands of jobs gone: in an instant. In an area where there was already 10% unemployment in the male population.

It was a very dodgy decision. It came with all the usual promises. 'You'll be alright, we'll put in new industries, we'll reinvigorate the economy somehow.' All those empty promises.

But the shop stewards at the yards were pretty well-organised. They got together and said we're not having

that. Decisions had to be made pretty quickly. They decided against strike action as they thought that the gates would be shut and everybody locked out anyway. Then somebody thought, what about a work-in? Actually, working-in and finishing off. Because they had orders on the order book. There was work to be done and finished. Why don't we just finish the jobs? That way we can get public opinion on our side. People will go: 'Look how hard they're working to maintain the businesses and keep it going.'

The liquidator went in and made redundancies, but as soon as people were made redundant, they were re-employed by the work-in. They said we're going to stick with this, there will be no redundancies and we're fighting for all four yards. They maintained that all the way through for the 18 months of the work-in. There were various organising committees



The Upper Clyde with the cranes of Govan Shipbuilders ANDREW MCCONNELL/CC

that looked after publicity, public connections, media, that sort of thing. They were constantly making sure that their position was very clear. That it wasn't going to be misinterpreted by anybody, certainly not the press.

Everybody paid in a levy so that anybody that was made redundant was paid. A fundraising committee was set up and they got funds from the Soviet Union, shipyards in the Netherlands, Sweden, from the trade unions. They had connections with all the shop stewards of all the trade unions.

You had characters like Jimmy Reid. He was really the spokesperson. Everybody recognised him. And Jimmy Airlie, another brilliant speaker and organiser. And of course it was a success. Economics don't run people, people run economics. That was the clear message. 'We're gonna fight this and we're gonna fight it hard and win.'

John Brown's yard was saved and taken over by an American company called Marathon who built oil rigs. They saved all those jobs. And they saved shipbuilding at least for some time on the Clyde. The yard at Govan that the Tories had earmarked for closure is still there now run by BAE systems. They build nothing but warships but it's work isn't it? We paid a visit and it's amazing to see it.

How did you turn the work-in into a play?

In our usual style. We have a bit of acting, a bit of singing. We have songs. We pick songs from the period and reinvent that atmosphere as much as we can. Using theatrical devices including projection and song and so forth. That's what we've aimed to do. The songs are pretty much from that time.

There's plenty of cultural stuff around UCS. Loads of great songs and plays. Billy Connolly's play, the Great Welly Boot Show, which came out a year after UCS. It has a Welly Boot factory that has a work-in and became a very popular thing culturally. There are all sorts of things, all around UCS. It was a rich cultural time so rich pickings for the show.

We're very small-scale in terms of what we do. We've got two actors performing this whole thing and it's an epic story. I'm not acting in it because what we've chosen to do is tell this story from the point of view of two women.

There weren't many women workers in the shipyards but there were a few jobs and tasks run exclusively by women. We've chosen to focus on their activities and tell the story through these two women who come

together in the yard. This allowed us to focus on the community too.

How did the play come together?

We started this project three years ago but Covid has held it back. We started by interviewing ex-shipyard workers from the Clyde, from Belfast, from Sunderland. We gathered loads of information, discussions, and interviews about the effect of the closure of a big industry on an economy, the local area, local people. So the women in the play represent that connection between the effect of the closure on the community and the campaign to save those shipyards. These women are really the backbone of that community.

We start the play by going back in time. How did the shipyards appear? Red Clydeside. The rent strikes in the 1920s, organised by women. We wanted to touch upon that all of that.

The two women are young. Aggie is new to the shipyards and gets a little job there but then finds it's just about to close so ends up getting involved in the work-in. And it rubs off on her. She becomes very politically active, becomes a shop steward. And the other character is Eddy. Her family have been working on the shipyards for generations. She wants to be an artist. The outcome on her is it gives her an outlet for her artwork. And it inspires her to go on and do other things beyond the shipyard.

What lessons are there for today?

It's about workers' control and it had a massive impact. Workers thought, 'we're in control now'. Productivity went up and people were happier in their work. When they took over and went into the offices of management they found thirteen ships on the order books, millions of pounds worth of orders which the government was prepared to just throw in the bin.

So workers were furious at these 'industrial cavemen', as Jimmy Reid called them, coming along and closing down yards and cutting jobs. But the government wanted to smash the trade unions in major industries. It's rich in lessons and shows the atmosphere of the campaign and work-in. The camaraderie and how the campaign impacts on the workers and their families and their futures. Hopefully it's inspiring and we capture the atmosphere and the fight to save those jobs.

● Visit townsendproductions.org.uk for tour dates

● For more on the work-in, search 'The 1971 Upper Clyde Shipbuilders occupation and work-in' at socialistparty.org.uk



The play centres around UCS workers Aggie and Eddy TOWNSEND PRODUCTIONS

Rob Windsor - remembering a tireless fighter for socialism

LENNY SHAIL AND DAVE GRIFFITHS
COVENTRY SOCIALIST PARTY

It is ten years since we lost Coventry Socialist Party member Rob Windsor to a serious illness. He was only 47, sadly far too young, but what a force of nature and of socialism he was.

That over 800 people attended his funeral gives just a glimpse of the effect he had on working people's lives as a tireless fighter and campaigner for socialism and a former councillor in St Michael's ward for the Socialist Party.

His legacy lives on in those who were inspired by Rob to fight against the capitalist system and for a socialist future.

It was no accident having been fostered as a child that he worked to help the homeless and the most downtrodden abandoned by capitalist society. At 18 he went to London and ran a 900-bed homeless hostel and did soup runs while living in a Notting Hill squat.

When striking print workers in 1986 held mass pickets at Murdoch's News International plant in Wapping to defend their jobs, Rob went to support them. He said he'd never been so scared as when he saw the real face of the state, as police unleashed horse charges and brutal baton attacks on the crowd. "It was then I realised there was a class war going on and the lengths that the privileged would go to defend their interests", he said.

In 1987, during the re-election campaign of Militant-supporting Labour MP Dave Nellist, Rob walked into one of our campaign rooms to get involved.

Joining the party

We were keen to have him. Clearly a working-class lad himself, you could tell he was bright and meant business.

As he put it: "Of all the groups on the left, Militant (forerunner of the Socialist Party) was the most serious and disciplined. When something was fully discussed and decided, it got done. Within two years, I was playing a leading role in building the anti-poll tax campaign that beat Thatcher and her tax."

His quality was also shown in the trade unions. In a battle with right-wing full-time union officials, he won the support in his union branch of Nupe (now Unison) for a half-day, city-wide general strike against cuts in public services.



Rob was the first 'Militant Labour' parliamentary candidate in England

Rob became a leader of the anti-poll tax campaign. He would help others, often to his own detriment, becoming a hero for the working class and poorest in Coventry.

The anti-poll tax campaign revealed his huge talents, giving confidence to tens of thousands of people to defy the unfair tax with a non-payment tactic. He gave up his job to focus on the campaign.

One day he went away with the hundreds of pages of poll tax legislation. Three days later he returned with a summary of what it was and how to fight it in a mere ten-page campaigning pamphlet, and not a word of it was found wanting.

No one who heard him could forget his wonderful and vivid way of explaining events and ideas. He was one of the best 'ranters' we've known, whose use of humour always made ideas accessible to people.

He baffled magistrates around the country with his legal nous and drove them to distraction. And he taught others how to do it. Court after court was clogged up. He also bamboozled and chased off poll tax bailiffs across the Midlands with his

'bailiff-busters'. Within months of beating the poll tax, alongside Dave Nellist and countless other Militant supporters across the country, Rob faced expulsion from the Labour Party.

The early 1990s saw the collapse of Stalinism in Eastern Europe. Capitalism appeared to have triumphed.

The left was now in full retreat. The Labour Party (and their like internationally) was moving to the right. This phenomenon of 'Blairism' meant abandoning any talk of socialism and embracing the capitalist market, policies that have brought us to the dire economic position we face today.

Expulsion

Labour's right wing declared the mass anti-poll tax movement a 'Militant front', and Rob's opposition to the poll tax therefore proved he was a 'Militant' and should be expelled.

Our Marxist organisation was under attack, but for all his individual talents Rob, like Dave before him, saw the importance of our organisation ahead of any personal ambition. He fought on to help establish the support and organisation we have today that will advance the struggle for change.

We think Rob was the first 'Militant Labour' candidate in England. He stood in the Longford by-election, gaining a marvellous 17% of the vote, which disappointed Rob but showed what was possible if the fight was taken outside the Labour Party.

In 1998, the Socialist Party saw its first council candidate victory as an independent organisation with Dave Nellist in St Michael's ward. Rob was elected a couple of years later, helping us to win all three seats in the ward.

It is the greatest compliment to say that in his two terms as a Socialist

Party councillor (2000-04 and 2006-10) he was utterly politically reliable and down the line.

He was a 'politician', not because he wanted to be one, but because he knew we had to fight back. On the council he played a great role in politically hostile conditions. Questioned by the media about his qualifications to be a councillor, he answered "CSE woodwork!"

Rob, Dave and Karen McKay used every inch possible as fighting socialist councillors, making gains for people in Coventry.

As councillors, they were able to stop some spending cuts and wage almighty struggles against others. We fought privatisation and PFI in the NHS, helped save green space, won parking rights for local residents, and fought off grasping business and landlord developers

Rob was an expert on housing and ran an inspired campaign against council housing privatisation. Despite the council's promises of improvements (broken of course) we nearly won a majority in a ballot to oppose the sell-off.

Rob and other socialist councillors used their positions to help inspire others to show what could be possible in terms of building the foundations for a new mass workers' party on the electoral plane, and would help mobilise support for countless strikes and struggles across the UK and the world!

In 2009, Rob spent days sleeping on a roundabout on the Isle of Wight, joining workers at Vestas trying to keep a wind turbine blade factory in the UK.

When Blair and the Labour Party launched their disastrous illegal war in Iraq, Rob, Dave and Karen forced through a special council meeting to debate the invasion, with only our councillors opposing the war. In

2008, Rob mobilised countless protests on the town hall steps against the brutal Israeli army invasion of Gaza.

He spent huge amounts of time on people's day-to-day problems and worried about every detail, but he always put at the front the need for fundamental change in society. He did all this as a Marxist who understood the need for a party like ours.

He wrote in the Socialist: "But we are not like this because we are nice individuals or specially gifted. It is because we are members of a party with firm ideas about transforming society so that working people own and control the wealth created; a party that doesn't allow its representatives to have lavish lifestyles way above those that we represent. We're there to improve the lives of working people - not our bank balances."

In 2010, Rob sadly lost his seat as the Labour Party slowly eroded the settled working-class communities of St Michael's, letting developers and landlords run out of control with Housing in Multiple Occupations.

While clearly disappointed, for Rob "there were bigger battles than a council seat."

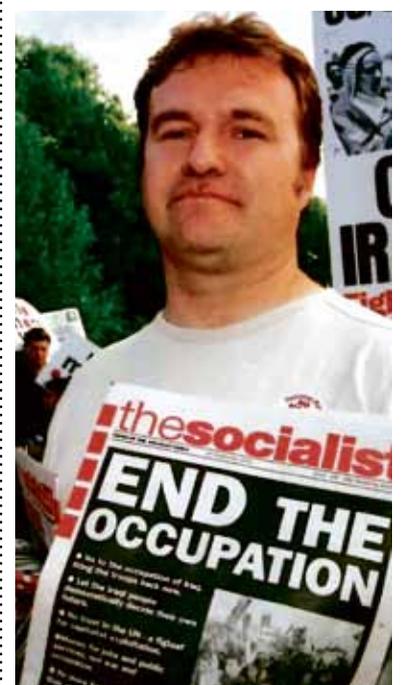
Despite deteriorating health Rob played a huge role in 2010 in assisting young Socialist Party members organising against the tripling of student fees and the removal of Education Maintenance Allowance (grants for college students), speaking and helping to organise numerous protests and a marvellous school students strike that took place in Coventry on 'Day X'.

We commemorate comrades like Rob to remind us of why we do what we do, and as inspiration to carry on the fight. Remembering or learning about his ideas, his strengths and personal manner, should help us rededicate ourselves to the socialist struggle to change society that he gave his life force to.

● More accounts of Rob's activities as a socialist councillor, as well as other Socialist Party councillors and members in Coventry, are available at socialistparty.org.uk



Rob rallying trade unionists and community campaigners against council cuts



On an anti-war demo

In the first of a series on Marxist classics, **Nick Hart** reviews 'An introduction to the Logic of Marxism' by George Novack.

Why are things the way they are?

In 'The Logic of Marxism', George Novack attempts to answer this question often posed by philosophers, scientists and small children alike. This short book is based on a series of talks delivered in 1942 to worker activists in the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) in America (not to be confused with the present-day British organisation of the same name).

At the time, the SWP was a leading section of the Fourth International. This followed the Third International, a global organisation of communist parties which grew rapidly during the turbulent period of the 1920s as workers were inspired by the example of the October 1917 Russian Revolution.

Despite this, the leadership of the Third International, which after Lenin's death in 1924 increasingly came under the control of Stalin and his bureaucratic clique, passed up multiple revolutionary opportunities, which helped lead to the rise of fascism and World War Two.

Therefore, the Russian revolutionary socialist Leon Trotsky (who was expelled from Russia and the Communist Party by Stalin) and his supporters, including the SWP, set up the Left Opposition and then the Fourth International to resist the turn of the USSR away from a democratically run workers' state during the 1920s and 30s, and to reorient the workers' movement internationally to the socialist revolution.

Sudden turns

Then as now, it was a time of sharp turns in the political and economic situation, old certainties collapsing and things seemingly being transformed into their opposite.

Like today, it was necessary for revolutionaries to understand not only what was happening and why, but what direction political groups, classes and society as a whole were heading, so as not to be caught by surprise by apparently sudden turns in events.

The Logic of Marxism was written to aid this by summarising the philosophical discoveries of Marx and Engels in an accessible form, with examples given based on the political struggles of the time.

Novack begins by explaining how the Ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle developed the system of formal logic. Put simply, these laws of identity state that each thing, be it object, living being or concept, is entirely itself, and is not and cannot be what it isn't.

Clearly this approach has practical uses in telling apart one thing from another. A hammer is not a screwdriver, up is not down, and a capitalist is not a worker.

But while formal logic can tell us

what something is and is not at any given moment in time, what it can't describe is how it came to be the way it is, what it will be in the future, and the internal and external forces leading to these changes.

In the late 18th century these limitations of formal logic were taken up by the German philosopher Georg Hegel.

As Novack describes, this took place against the backdrop of the French and American revolutions, where "the whole of civilised society was racked by contradictory forces and turned upside down. These colossal, catastrophic conflicts impressed themselves upon minds and turned them upside down too."

New philosophy

Hegel reformulated the system of logic and thinking known as 'dialectics'. This holds that rather than each thing having a permanent "identity" within a definite category, objects, organisms or social groupings can contain multiple contradictory characteristics, and over time transform into something else - even their opposite. And all things that come into being will eventually cease to exist.

As Novack comments, "nothing is permanent. Reality is never resting, ever changeable, always in flux." He gives the example of how a seed can grow into a tree which bears flowers and fruit which in turn contains more seeds. All of these are distinct and different things, but all contain elements of each other.

In the same way, an economic boom in capitalism can store up problems which lead to a slump, a period of seeming political stability can lay the basis for revolution, and a former workers' party can become a party of big business.

At the time, this system of dialectics was revolutionary. Taken to its logical conclusion, it challenged the prevailing ideas that the world is, and always has been, as God created it, and that there will always be rich and poor as part of the natural order of things. No wonder that Marx and Engels found these ideas energising, with both of them participating in meetings of the Young Hegelians while students.

However, as the book goes on to explain, the main flaw in Hegel's dialectics was that he believed that it was ideas that dictate the world around us, and that the motor force behind changes in human society is a combination of "world-spirit", "national-spirit" and "the spirit of the times". But this is clearly back to front.

A seed grows into a plant not because it is inherently destined to, but because of the sun and rain acting upon it. The early capitalist class didn't set out to overturn the previous system of feudalism, but found



Leon Trotsky (above) resolutely defended 'scientific socialism', or Marxism, and applied these ideas to develop the socialist movement internationally

that capitalist methods of production represented the best way for them to enrich themselves.

Dialectical materialism

Marx and Engels' great philosophical breakthrough was to take Hegel's dialectical method and to make it materialist.

Engels summed it up: "Human beings must first of all eat, drink, shelter and clothe themselves before they can turn their attention to politics, science, art and religion." In other words, all ideas flow from material reality, and not the other way round.

Giving the example of a car worker who gets drawn into struggle against his bosses' attempts to attack pay and conditions, Novack shows how it is experience of reality and conditions of day-to-day living that exert the greatest influence on people's view of the world.

Formal logic will tell us that something is either true, or false. But dialectics helps us to see how a false idea can grow from a grain of truth.

Religion, for example, partly grew out of a need to explain the changing of the seasons and to organise ancient society. And today's conspiracy theorists offer ready-made and made-up explanations for the problems faced by ordinary people, while only scratching the surface of the real economic and class interests that govern capitalist society.

Similarly, liberals and conservatives alike raise 'common sense' to the level of a science standing above society and governing human relations for all of time.

But what is considered 'common sense' varies from one era to the next, and one class to the next. A pay cut will appear logical to the boss trying to protect their bottom line, but less so to the worker expected to do the same amount of work for less money!

Most importantly of all, Novack explains how the Marxist form of 'scientific socialism' isn't just an abstract

idea based on what is morally right, but grew out of the economic reality of capitalism itself. If capitalism can create a working class which is vital to production and the running of society, and are concentrated together in factories and chains of production, then it follows that this same working class would do a better job of managing production and society than the capitalists who leech off them.

But although societal changes and revolutions will have a basis in the already existing social and economic state of society, the passing over from capitalism to socialism won't be inevitable. "As Marx and Engels pointed out, ideas become forces when the masses accept them".

The role of a Marxist party is to take the method of dialectical materialism developed over centuries, and use the understanding it gives us of the world we live in to build a movement that can change it.

As Novack puts it at the book's conclusion: "The abolition of capitalism through the triumph of socialism will be the final vindication of the logic of Marxism. The task of revolutionary socialists is to realise this in life."



Marx and Engels' great philosophical breakthrough was to take Hegel's dialectical method and to make it materialist

The Logic of Marxism

by George Novack

Published by Pathfinder.

Currently unavailable at Left Books. Used copies widely available online

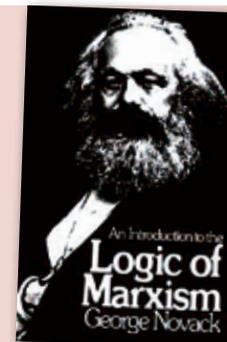
Also,

In Defence of Marxism

by Leon Trotsky,

£22, including postage, available from Left Books - leftbooks.co.uk

A robust defence of Marxist philosophy during a factional fight within the US section of the Fourth International in 1939-40.



Murder of Ashling Murphy sends shockwaves across Ireland and beyond

CARAH DANIEL
MILITANT LEFT, (CWI IRELAND) DUBLIN

The tragic and senseless murder of 23-year-old Ashling Murphy in County Offaly, in the Irish republic has sent shock waves, anger and devastation throughout communities across the country and beyond. The primary school teacher was attacked in broad daylight on 12 January while she was running.

Vigils organised in her memory were attended by tens of thousands in various cities, towns and villages in Ireland, North and South.

More vigils took place in countries with historically big Irish immigrant populations, including Scotland, England, Australia, the US and elsewhere, with members of the Committee for a Workers' International participating.

The violent end to Ashling Murphy's tragically short life has understandably led to increased fear among women for their own safety, and it has shone a light on the violence and abuse women face

every day.

The solution is not for women to change their behaviour; Ashling Murphy did everything 'right' to keep herself safe, but her life was still taken from her. Misogynistic behaviour and attitudes are what need to change, and the system that perpetuates them needs to change.

State indifference

The state does not take violence against women seriously. More than 3,000 domestic violence calls were unanswered by Gardai (police) in 2019-20.

This attitude of indifference toward crimes against women by the people who are allegedly there to protect us says a lot about the priorities of the state.

We need investment in street lighting, improved and safe public transport that operates at night, and further funds to be allocated to refuges and services that are currently relying on public donations in order to continue to function.

We also need the trade union

movement to take the lead in campaigns against sexism and harassment in the workplace. In schools, students must receive proper and thorough fact-based sex education that deals with issues like violence against women, attitudes towards women, and consent.

To fully eradicate sexism and violence against women requires eradicating the capitalist system that perpetuates violence and abuse.

We need a united movement of all those who face discrimination, inequality and exploitation. This would be a powerful force capable of really making the fundamental changes we need.

A socialist alternative to sexism, inequality and capitalist crisis is the only way we can really transform society and make it a place where women, and everyone else, feel safe without fear of violence.

Militant Left sends our sincerest condolences and solidarity to the family, friends, colleagues and pupils of Ashling Murphy, and all who have been affected by her murder.

Northern Ireland: Workers fight threatened closure of women's hostel



Unite members are fighting to keep open Northern Ireland's sole women-only hostel

DONAL O'COFAIGH
CROSS-COMMUNITY LABOUR COUNCILLOR AND
MILITANT LEFT (CWI IRELAND) MEMBER

The sole women-only hostel in Northern Ireland for homeless women, those with addictions, mental health issues or suffering domestic violence, is facing closure on 27 February.

Disgracefully, seven workers, members of the Unite union, who were sitting in to keep the building open, have received suspension letters for alleged "serious breaches of the safety and security" of residents. Meanwhile, vulnerable female residents were told to get into taxis to go to mixed accommodation, uncertain

of whether it met their needs. Thankfully, workers continued their occupation action.

That this is happening when up and down this land people are protesting the murder of Offaly teacher Ashling Murphy seems to have passed the management committee by!

This is a disgrace. And, yet again, where is Stormont (seat of the Northern Ireland parliament)?

The 21-bed facility owned by the Legion of Mary, and run by a trust, should be taken over by the Housing Executive (which funds the hostel) and used as part of a programme of investment to meet housing and social needs.



PHOTO HELEN PATTISON

Camden solidarity vigil

On Saturday 7 January Socialist Party members took part in a vigil for Ashling at the Camden Irish Centre in London (above).

Hundreds came to show their solidarity with the victims of gender-based violence - far more than the organisers had expected. Our posters called for socialist change to end the violence, sexism, inequality

Committee for a Workers' International
**FIGHTING FOR A
SOCIALIST WORLD**
socialistworld.net

and abuse perpetuated by the capitalist system.

Eyewitness account of workers' uprising in Almaty, Kazakhstan

In the following extract, Igor Ushakov, who serves on the Almaty editorial board of the left-wing online magazine *Krasnaya Yurt*, explains the events on 4-5 January in the Kazakhstan city of Almaty, where a working-class uprising against the regime took place.

As readers of the *Socialist* are aware from last week's feature article on the uprising (see socialistparty.org.uk), using armed forces backed by Russia paratroops, the Kazakhstan dictatorship bloodily regained control and is carrying out a brutal clampdown on the population. Nonetheless, Igor's account shows the potential power of the working class when it moves to change the situation.

"At about five 5pm, information was beginning to arrive that some kind of rally was starting outside the Kasteev Museum. There would also be a rally at Almaty

Arena at 6pm. Trade union representatives and others were writing about it in social networks.

When we arrived at Kasteev's museum by 6pm, we didn't find anyone. We decided to go to the central square to see what was going on. Finding it empty and heavily guarded by the police, we decided to head for the Almaty Arena - a big ice rink on the outskirts of the city.

People were trying to break through the cordon, but did not succeed. The stand-off lasted for about three hours and made the protesters very angry; their comrades were being taken away by the police.

Many workers complained about the increase in car fuel prices and the rise in food prices, saying they did not know how they were going to go on living. More people were coming to the Almaty Arena, ordinary workers from the poorest parts of the city.

When the protesters became even more numerous, they finally broke through the restraining chains and walked straight down the road towards Independence

Square, the central square of the city.

Immediately after the first detachment of police, who were standing unarmed, there was another detachment with shields and truncheons. The protesters tried to peacefully persuade the police not to interfere, but in response they received blows from truncheons and orders to leave the rally. The police efforts did not last long, as there were so many protesters who broke through the cordon with sticks and moved on.

At the intersection of Abaya and Pravdy streets, the first water cannon appeared and tried to disperse the protesters. But they persuaded the firefighters not to use the water cannon and they moved on peacefully.

A police truck drove straight into the crowd at high speed, provoking a hit-and-run. The crowd parted in time and, by some miracle, it did not run over anyone. The car was pelted with sticks and bottles. As the convoy walked towards the mayor's office (town hall), the crowd grew larger and larger.

As soon as we got there, stun grenades could be heard going off in the road. There was a very strong smell of tear gas and it was very difficult to breathe, even at some distance from the protest site.

We approached the government building, which had already been taken over by the protesters. There was a pile of police overcoats, hats, helmets, flak jackets and shields lying in the street to the left of the entrance.

The police fled the City Hall, quickly disguising themselves as civilians.

It was already about 2am when we decided that we needed to send the footage to the editorial office and we went home.

Not only did the internet not work, but the cell phone service didn't either. As we discovered later on, the government had declared a state of emergency at 12 midnight that night which no one had known about. This was done in order to increase the time limit allowed for holding detainees.

Thus passed the evening and night in Almaty from 4-5 January 2022."

● US: Independent Socialist Group launches new paper

The Socialist salutes the tremendous step forward achieved by the Socialist Party co-thinkers in the USA, the Independent Socialist Group (ISG), in launching a new party newspaper, 'Socialism Today'.

"The paper contains socialist analysis about current events and history, as well as proposals for how to build the workers' movement and fight for socialism here in the US and internationally," says the ISG.

● Readers of the *Socialist* can subscribe to *Socialism Today* at independentsocialistgroup.org



TORIES HAND CASH TO PRIVATE HEALTH PROFITEERS

- ▶ **Nationalise private health and big pharma**
- ▶ **For a fully publicly funded NHS**
- ▶ **For a 15% pay rise in NHS and care**



PHOTO: PAUL MATTSSON

JANE WARD
SOUTHAMPTON SOCIALIST PARTY

Pivate hospitals are set to receive up to £525 million of public money in a deal negotiated by Sajid Javid, the Tory Health and Social Care Secretary. It means that over the next three months they will treat a wider range of NHS patients, including those needing cancer surgery.

The deal has been sanctioned despite warnings from Amanda Pritchard, the Chief Executive of NHS England. She has warned that it would leave the NHS exposed financially, the beds would be significantly more expensive than those in the NHS and there is a great degree of uncertainty as to how they would be staffed.

Scandalously, the private companies will be given up to £270 million from the NHS as a minimum income guarantee, which means they will receive it regardless of whether they treat any patients. Pritchard expressed her concern to Javid that she might in fact be in breach of her legal duty to follow the Treasury rules on managing public money. Javid then gave her a direct order to give private hospitals the money anyway.

The Labour Party has now abandoned its previous promise, under Jeremy Corbyn's leadership, to protect the health service from privatisation. Wes Streeting, shadow health secretary, has said that Labour would use private healthcare providers to tackle NHS waiting lists too. Streeting does blame the Tories for running down the NHS, but has not as yet come up with any solutions whatsoever to provide sufficient funding.

Successive governments, Tory and Labour, have presided over a massive underfunding and privatisation of the NHS. It is short of around 100,000 staff. The number of beds has been cut by a third since 1988. The health service has one of the lowest number of beds per person in Europe, with 246 per 100,000 people, while Germany has 800 per 100,000 people.

We need socialist policies to defend the NHS. Health workers have voted decisively in their unions to reject the government's pitiful 3% pay offer. There has to be an immediate pay rise of 15% for all those who work for the NHS and in social care.

We need a fully publicly funded NHS free at the point of use. Privatisations of NHS services must be reversed. Private health care and pharmaceutical companies must be nationalised, with compensation paid only to small shareholders on the basis of proven need, to be integrated into the public health service. The NHS should be run by democratically elected and accountable committees including service workers and users.