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# Ditch the Tories - and austerity

## We say:

- No trust in pro-austerity politicians
- General election now
- Left union leaders should initiate the organising of mass protests
- Corbyn can win with socialist policies
- No to the bosses' EU
- For an EU exit deal that defends jobs and workers' interests

Parliament is closed but there's still open warfare in the Tory party. Meanwhile, in the real world, working-class people continue to suffer from austerity and exploitation at work.

Hospitals, schools and local services are collapsing under the strain of years of cuts and underfunding. Recently we were told we work some of the longest hours in Europe.

Yet, at the same time, thousands of young people face the nightmare of zero-hour contracts and precarious jobs. Others are having to work more than one job just to keep their heads above water.

More people might be in jobs but real wages are £5 a week less than they were eleven years ago. And if an acrimonious no-deal crash out happens, it will be working-class people who pay again through higher food prices and job losses.

## Cuts

Johnson promises an end to austerity. But after a decade of vicious cuts we can't believe a word that he and the Tories say. They are the party of the 0.01% who have seen their share of income triple since 1995; the 1,000 richest people whose wealth increased by nearly £48 billion last year.

In 2017 Corbyn inspired millions with his anti-austerity programme - his pledge to scrap tuition fees, introduce a minimum wage of £10 an hour and promote workers' rights. These are the kind of policies we need. Corbyn and the unions who back him should be energetically campaigning for a general election around such a programme.

Corbyn must not let the Blairites in the Labour Party drown that message out with their calls for unity with pro-austerity MPs who do not speak for working-class and young people. We need to make sure that our voices are heard above the Brexit/Remain parliamentary racket.

- Trade union movement must put its stamp on swirling events - editorial

## Editorial of the Socialist, issue 1056

# Trade union movement must put its stamp on swirling events

The routine is pretty well routine now. At Trade Union Congress, Jeremy Corbyn attempts to break through the Brexit fog with a stance that has the potential to unite Leave and Remain workers. He prepares delegates for the general election that he expects and wants and outlines a programme of policies on workers' rights that has the Tory press panicking about a "return to the 1970s". He reiterates the position of the Labour-affiliated unions that if elected, a Labour government led by him would negotiate with the EU a pro-worker exit deal that would then be put to a confirmatory referendum.

Then, a day later, deputy leader Tom Watson pops up to contradict everything Corbyn has said, calling for Labour to put a second referendum before a general election and campaign to "unambiguously and unequivocally back Remain"! More pressure is piled on from a meeting of 100 Labour councillors backing Watson's position. At the same time, MPs on the left, led by shadow chancellor John McDonnell, queue up to declare that they would campaign for Remain in any referendum.

## **Unions must mobilise**

It is more vital than ever that Corbyn stands firm and the labour and trade union movement puts its stamp on these swirling events. Corbyn's speech at the TUC was a start. He called for a return to national collective bargaining, promised to scrap universal credit and zero-hour contracts, repeal the anti-trade union laws and introduce a £10-an-hour minimum wage by next year.

But now he and the unions have to build on that and use those and other policies to mobilise the working class. It was a serious mistake for the TUC not to call an emergency demonstration to demand a general election. Motions for such action had been put forward by Socialist Party members in a number of unions. But, unfortunately, the debate at TUC wasn't the platform for the struggle that is necessary.

When MPs return after Boris Johnson's prorogation, he will undoubtedly face a critical test. But so too will Jeremy Corbyn. Watson has clearly set out his stall and behind him and the Blairites lie the other pro-capitalist parties and the capitalist establishment. They have common interests in wanting to join together to foil a Corbyn government.

The overwhelming majority of the bosses want to remain in the EU or as closely aligned as possible. They want to retain their advantages of this trading bloc and the Thatcherite neo-liberal, anti-worker rules that govern it. These enshrine privatisation and the 'race to the bottom' through laws such as the posted workers' directive.

They also fear a Corbyn-led government elected on the 2017 manifesto and the confidence this could give to workers to go on the offensive and demand more than the important but limited policies this contained. The stated dread of the bosses and their political representatives of a return to the 1970s isn't about workers gaining one or two more rights. The 1970s was a period of intense class struggle. Last year, 273,000 working days were lost through strike action. In 1972, it was nearly 24 million and nearly 30 million in 1979.

## **Courts not neutral**

Those on the left, like shadow chancellor John McDonnell, who are today misguidedly talking about the sanctity and neutrality of the judiciary, should remember that the courts were used by Tory governments in the 1970s and 80s against workers in dispute. In 1972, there was a virtual general strike when millions of workers took action to defend the London dockers' leaders who were jailed in Pentonville prison. Similarly, the full force of the state, including the courts and police were thrown at the striking miners in 1984-85. They are used today and will be used in the future on a larger scale against workers who move into struggle.

Based on the strength of workers in the 1970s, with nearly 13 million organised in unions compared to 6.2 million today, the gap between rich and poor was its narrowest in modern times. But with the end of the post-war boom, and declining profit rates, the British bosses turned towards Thatcher and her counter-revolution against the organised working class. Now they fear that the election of a Corbyn government could once more raise the sights of workers, pushing Corbyn further to the left, and again alter the balance of forces against them.

The capitalists are relentless in their efforts to prevent such an outcome, and the Blairites are one of their main tools in this endeavour. The best way for Corbyn to face them down is to fight for an election on the most radical pro-worker manifesto. But the more he prevaricates, the more he emboldens the Labour right. If Corbyn had gone for an election after Johnson lost his first Parliamentary vote, he would have had the ideal public platform to decisively challenge him. Not only by accepting the offer of an election, but boldly proclaiming that he would stand on his anti-austerity programme.

Corbyn made a serious mistake in retreating before the pressure of the Blairites in 2016 and going against his historic left-wing opposition to the EU. This opened up a vacuum for right-wing populists such as Farage and Johnson to exploit, appealing to disaffected workers, many of whom voted Leave to strike a blow at the establishment, and decades of the bosses' offensive and Tory austerity.

## **Bridging Brexit divide**

But Corbyn, along with union leaders like Len McCluskey from Unite and Dave Ward of the Communication Workers Union, is at least attempting to find a course that can appeal to workers across the Brexit divide.

Imagine if he spoke directly to the 100,000 Royal Mail workers, many of them Leave supporters, who are currently balloting for strike action against bullying management, that if elected he would re-nationalise Royal Mail? Or if he promised to the 5,000 workers facing the dole in the British Steel works in Scunthorpe, Yorkshire and in the north east, that he would nationalise the plants to save their jobs and communities? Corbyn's pledge of re-nationalising the railways was one of his most popular policies in 2017 with transport workers and commuters.

Corbyn should visit hospitals around the country, promising to force out the privateers and contrasting himself to Johnson, who would like to invite the leeches of private healthcare into the NHS from the US and elsewhere. He should get his pledge to end privatisation out to the legions of low-paid outsourced workers, many of whom have been taking action in councils, the NHS and the civil service.

Yet every one of these policies would come up against the neo-liberal rules of the EU. Jeremy Corbyn promises that if elected he will lead negotiations with the EU on an exit deal. We believe his red lines should be to eliminate precisely those EU rules that would attempt to hem his government in, such as restrictions on nationalisation and state aid, exposing the true class character of the EU. His talks should be transparent and accountable to the labour and trade union movement and visible to workers here and across Europe.

The impact of the EU bosses club being challenged would be enormous. From the French workers currently on a pensions strike to the 'gilets jaunes' yellow vest movement - both against the pro-EU Macron, as well as working-class people in Greece, Spain, Italy, Ireland, Portugal and other countries who have suffered from EU austerity. Along with a mobilised workers' movement here, this would be the most powerful leverage to force a pro-worker deal that could really resolve the Brexit crisis in the interests of the working class. But such a movement should be the platform to build a movement to overthrow the capitalists to be replaced by a socialist society.

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# **Climate protests: Which way forward after 20 September?**

**Josh Asker, Southampton Socialist Party**

The 20 September 'Earth Strike' marks an important new stage in the Youth Strike 4 Climate protests. These began over a year ago and have mobilised millions of young people around the world.

They are an expression of anger at governments that preside over a system which creates inequality, injustice and destruction, and is unable to provide youth with a future.

The capitalist politicians are incapable of solving the climate crisis and the misery of low pay, unemployment, debt, poverty and homelessness.

Now, on 20 September, students are linking up with workers in protests and strikes. In this country many workers are following the call from the university and college union, UCU, for a 30 minute lunchtime stoppage. Locally, many different trade unions are collaborating in the protests.

This is an important development because of the potential power that workers hold. Mass protests like those organised by Extinction Rebellion can block the streets, but coordinated action by workers can grind whole cities to a standstill.

The trade unions have six million members and these workers are potentially a colossal force in the fight to kick out the Tories and to save our planet.

## **Students' unions**

An important part of this struggle is also the formation of school students' unions, so that no one takes action on their own, and students can organise to defend each other and their right to protest.

These could link up with students at other schools and colleges in a local area and eventually at a national level.

They could act to democratically decide how to take the movement forward, as well as fighting on other issues such as school funding.

Links need to be maintained between students' unions and workers' unions beyond the 20 September protests.

The fight to save our environment is intrinsically linked to the fight to improve all aspects of our lives.

The same capitalist politicians that are unable to solve the climate crisis are also unable to give us a future with decent jobs, pay and services.

The climate strikers have raised the slogan 'system change, not climate change'. There is no way that climate change can be stopped while the capitalists continue with their drive for profits worldwide.

We believe that system change must be socialist if it is to be capable of solving the environmental catastrophe we face.

Fighting for a socialist alternative to capitalism's austerity and climate crisis requires building a mass movement of workers' and young people in this country and internationally.

And as part of that process we need a political voice. Kicking out the Tories in a general election would be just the first step.

To guarantee a decent future for working-class and young people a Corbyn-led government would have to dismantle the control that the big corporations exert over the economy.

This would mean taking them into public ownership, democratically controlled and managed by working-class people.

In that way it would be possible to draw up a plan of investment to provide jobs, homes, services and the resources we need, while at the same time ensuring that the environment is protected.

But pollution and environmental destruction don't stop at national boundaries. Only international socialist cooperation can save our planet and this is what the Socialist Party and our sister organisations in the Committee for a Workers' International are fighting for here and around the globe.

## **Picket for the Planet**

**Paul Couchman, Surrey Unison branch secretary**

Members of Unison in Surrey will be holding a rally - a 'Picket for the Planet' on 20 September. We are in full support of the action these courageous young people have been taking.

Month after month, across the world, school students have taken strike action against climate change inspired by Greta Thunberg.

This time, they are asking for the trade unions, the workers of the world, to come out and support them - calling for a Global Earth Strike.

We are calling on all our members to come and support a one-hour protest rally on the day in their lunch breaks or by taking annual leave etc.

School students will be walking out of (or picketing outside) a number of schools in Surrey, marching through Guildford to the Borough Council offices to deliver letters to the councillors, before marching up to the train station to join with the Unison rally at 12pm.

We need a government that will take this issue seriously and take over those huge, profit-hungry companies which are destroying our planet. We need socialist change - not climate change.

Currently politicians are arguing over deal or no-deal, Brexit or Remain, but in the real world the Amazon is burning, our oceans are dying, energy companies continue to profit from fossil fuels, and so on.

In Surrey our airports continue to expand, incinerators are being brought online and fracking is causing earthquakes.

I hope that the energy and commitment of these young people can be a spur, part of a massive movement of the trade unions and working people to transform society in the interests of the many, not the few.

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## **London earth strike trade union action**

On the day of the 'earth strike' thousands of young people are expected to descend on central London.

Additionally many trade unionists, including Socialist Party members, have been organising in their trades councils, union branches and workplaces for local actions to link together workers and young people.

Young Socialist Students member Eilis Mulholland led a lively discussion and debate at Southwark trades council.

The workers there are protesting at the council offices at 12.30 on Friday, to be joined by campaigners from local colleges.

In Camden, trade union members are rallying at lunchtime and then joining the central London protests. Similar rallies are happening in Hackney.

In Waltham Forest, the trades council has campaigned for protests by workers inside or at the front gates of their workplaces, as well as a local gathering in the town square.

Socialist Students member Lily Douglas spoke at Redbridge trades council to encourage the members there to take action.

These are just a few of the examples where Socialist Party trade unionists and young members have been involved in organising action - there will be similar events in many boroughs, including Lewisham, Wandsworth, Newham and many more.

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## Climate change: what's socialism got to do with it?

**Ben Robinson, Waltham Forest Socialist Party**

Recent images of the Amazon rainforest ablaze highlighted the scale of change currently underway. At the height of the fires, an area the size of a football pitch was destroyed every minute.

Greenland's ice sheet alone has lost three and a half trillion tonnes since 2003 - enough to raise sea levels worldwide and affect those living in low-lying areas.

Those most at immediate risk from rising sea levels are in some of the poorest countries internationally.

Moreover, left unchecked, this will lead to cities in Britain being permanently flooded within the lifetimes of school student climate strikers.

Climate change is already happening. If the destruction continues, the various processes being unleashed could reinforce each other, leading to exponential increases in the rate the climate changes.

Why is this happening now? A portion of the Amazon fires were started deliberately, to clear space on the fertile land for farming.

One rogue individual doing this is a bad apple - but the scale of deliberate arson is something more. It is systemic.

Burning forests and melting icecaps are just the visible symptoms of climate change. Global warming - an underlying factor in many of the ongoing changes - is related to the amount of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases in the atmosphere.

The link between rising CO2 levels and global temperature increases was first demonstrated in 1938. Then, Guy Callendar showed that this process had been underway since the industrial revolution.

Scientific advances in the intervening 75-plus years have only deepened and reaffirmed that basic analysis.

### **Anthropocene**

Scientists are debating whether to mark the industrial revolution as the start of a new geological age, on the scale of the Jurassic era.

The name they are proposing, the Anthropocene, means the age of humanity. Global warming due to human actions is a key factor in the developing fundamental shifts underway in the earth's systems.

But the scale and pace of the changes unfolding all around us mean that we cannot just place the blame on individuals.

It is undoubtedly true that reactionary politicians - such as Bolsonaro in Brazil, Trump in the US and Johnson in Britain - allow, and even encourage, environmental destruction to continue.

But this is a far more deep-going process than just the recent success of right-wing populists, and predates them by centuries.

In this 'age of humanity', our society has reached the level that puts us in the environmental driving seat.

Collectively, humans are in the process of reshaping the world in our image, and have the technology to direct the future, not just for humanity, but for all life on earth.

The decisive factor is whether that future is consciously shaped to rebalance natural systems, or blindly stumbling towards catastrophe. The organisation of human society will ultimately decide which road we embark on.

Presently, worldwide, society is organised around the profit motive. The vast majority will, do, or have worked for a living.

The results of our work are transformed by employers into capital, of which we receive a fraction as wages. The bulk is claimed by businesses as profit.

Government employees, to varying degrees, fulfil various duties necessary to maintain this system. Governments, legal systems, the armed forces and so on broadly act in the interests of 'their' domestic ruling class.

Despite record Amazonian fires, the Brazilian government has issued fewer fines than in previous years. The melting of the icecaps covering Russia's northern coast revealed five previously unknown islands, such was the scale of the ice's retreat this summer. The Russian government's response? To commission icebreaker ships to keep the water clear, to improve access for trade.

Worldwide, since 1988, just 100 companies have been responsible for over 70% of the world's greenhouse gas emissions.

Going further back, research in the Climate Change journal stated that just 90 companies produced 63% of the cumulative global emissions of carbon dioxide and methane between 1751 and 2010 - and 30% of emissions came from the top 20.

These included BP, Chevron, ExxonMobil, Royal Dutch Shell, Gazprom, coal producing companies and others.

Both the emissions of these companies, and their status as some of the most valuable companies in the world, is no coincidence.

The system which dominates society, the capitalist system, 'comes dripping from head to toe, from every pore, with blood and dirt' (to paraphrase Karl Marx). The capitalist system ultimately prioritises the profit motive above all else.

The consistent failure of the United Nations climate talks is a clear example of the priorities of the representatives of capitalism.

The first Earth Summit took place in 1992. In the subsequent two decades, CO2 emissions increased by 48%, and have continued to rise since.

In the same period, we have seen the widespread adoption of computers, the internet, the development of mobile phones, the construction of the ISS manned space station orbiting the planet, and the creation or rapid growth of seven of the top ten biggest companies in the world.

## **Kyoto agreement**

The most comprehensive climate agreement coming from the United Nations talks was the Kyoto agreement in 1997.

This agreement, effective between 2005 and 2012, proposed market incentives to reduce CO2 emissions (or its equivalent).

Riddled with loopholes, Kyoto did not halt climate change - CO2 emissions rose during its period on the statute books.

The United States, acting in the short-term interests of the US capitalist class, simply refused to enact Kyoto.

In roughly the first two decades of United Nations talks, the US was the world's only superpower. Globalisation meant that the world economy was becoming more interconnected.

If a lead had been given by an American government in this period, decisive action may have been possible.

Today we face a different picture. The leading authority of the US has disintegrated, personified by the present ill-tempered president. Trade wars between capitalist states show the growing international divisions.

Parliament has been suspended because of the crisis in trade relations between the UK and the 27 European governments, organised as the EU. The world is moving towards increasing international division, not cooperation.

To tackle a worldwide threat such as global warming requires worldwide action and cooperation. China - despite topping the world in air pollution and carbon emissions - leads the world in the development of green energy.

The technology that exists, as part of an international plan, could rapidly reduce CO2 emissions and begin rebalancing the natural systems of the planet. However, a trade war with the US will hinder that technology being adopted.

The US government on its part acts to defend its own capitalist class; both major fossil fuel exploiters such as ExxonMobil and home-grown green tech companies such as Elon Musk's Tesla.

The ultimate question comes down to profit and the potential for growing markets. A consequence of this desperate search for profit means that each company has to reinvent the wheel in terms of developing and implementing new technologies; knowledge is not shared but divided up and its proprietary guarded.

The massive duplication and waste further holds back implementing the necessary changes.

Starting from scratch, and the duplication competition requires, necessitates large-scale investment.

Capitalists invest to profit. Without good odds of seeing increasing returns, billions upon billions upon billions have piled up in offshore accounts, rather than being put to use on behalf of humanity.

This is - in the long term - even more damaging than fanning the flames of rainforest destruction.

Escalating climate catastrophes could well provoke a desperate change of course for capitalism. However, there is a significant delay between the causes and the effects; possibly decades.

Halting all CO2 created by humans tomorrow - an impossibility - would not stop capitalism's cumulative effects being felt decades into the future.

The Stern report in 2006 concluded that climate change was "a result of the greatest market failure the world has seen".

Whether it is deliberate destruction or dismissive inaction, the experience of modern-day society can be summed up in two words - capitalism destroys.

This system's faultlines were blown open in the minds of millions by the economic crisis of 2007-08. The decades since have shown that when the rich fail, workers and young people pay the price.

In the decade since, we've seen that lesson lead to a search for a solution, and the re-emergence of left-wing politicians such as Jeremy Corbyn in Britain.

One of the actions of this emerging left was the proposal for a Green New Deal by Alexandria Ocasia-Cortez in the US Congress.

The basis of this - and other similar schemes - is accepting that business alone will not halt global warming.

Therefore, state action is necessary. The bill failed - a clear indication of the outlook of the majority of US politicians.

But state intervention is absolutely necessary. Pooling the vast resources available and employing the best techniques developed is the quickest and more surefire way to avert a catastrophe.

## **Socialism**

The capitalist class, and the capitalist state, will not allow this. The interests of a tiny minority stand at the head of society, rooted in a system organised to defend their class above all else, which on the present course will drive the planet's natural systems beyond the point of no return. That system needs to be fundamentally eradicated.

Socialism means a complete overhaul of society. It means removing the profit motive, allocating resources democratically on the basis of need and respecting the environment.

It means ending natural and artificially created waste and duplication, organising production to ensure what we create is for use. It means getting rid of the rule of the 0.1% here and internationally.

Socialism is the conscious recognition of the current situation. Humanity determines the future of the Earth's natural systems.

Capitalism is blindly stumbling towards ecological crisis. Socialism would actively seek to implement a plan, rebalancing natural systems to build a harmonious future for all life.

### **Planning for the Planet: How Socialism Could Save the Environment by Pete Dickenson**

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## **How students can fight and win**

As university campuses reawaken for a new academic year, we ask Socialist Students national organiser Theo Sharieff about the major issues facing students - and how to fight back.

**Cuts and marketisation in higher education are greatly reducing the quality and availability of courses and support. How can we fight back?**

Workers in the University and College Union (UCU) led the way two years ago when they took strike action on hundreds of university campuses against management's attacks on their pensions. The UCU is balloting for strikes this year too, over pensions again and now also a pay dispute.

Students flocked to support those strikes because they could see a fightback taking place, and understood that it's the workers who have the biggest potential power against campus cuts and marketisation. That's why Socialist Students calls for the building of joint student and worker campaigns, locally and nationally, to defeat cuts to campus services and courses.

But the best way to end cuts and marketisation on our campuses is to link this to the fight for an anti-austerity government that will properly fund our education, unlike the Tories!

**Housing is a defining social crisis for the younger generation. What does Socialist Students have to say about it?**

The housing crisis is particularly bad for students and young people. At university, students pay extortionate levels of rent to landlords who only provide dilapidated housing and cramped living conditions.

Students' average rent in halls totals £130 a week, while the average maintenance loan students receive is just £138.85 a week. But of course, it isn't only at university we suffer the housing crisis.

One recent study looked at people aged between 20 and 35. The number living with their parents has now climbed to one in four! It illustrates this isn't only the youngest, but the working class more generally which is suffering.

Socialist Students has a proud record of campaigning on the issue of student housing, with our members across the country having launched and led local campaigns. We say that universities should provide decent and affordable student housing for all students, and that students' unions should be leading campaigns for universities to provide such housing.

If local councils used their reserves and borrowing powers to launch mass programmes of council house building, and introduced rent controls for private tenants, the situation for students and workers alike would be transformed.

**Tuition fees and student debt are crushing burdens for students and graduates. Is free education achievable?**

The Tories are in the midst of a historic political crisis and are splitting apart in parliament. Unelected prime minister Boris Johnson has even managed to lose the Tories' majority in parliament!

They are of course split over the matter of what to do about Brexit in order to best protect the interests of the capitalist class. But they're also split over how to take their system of capitalism forward, which is still in crisis over a decade after the 2007-08 economic crash.

This presents an enormous opportunity to launch a fightback to demand a general election and kick the Tories out of government. Jeremy Corbyn put the demand for free university education central to his manifesto during summer 2017, and has said he wants to fight the next general election on the issue too.

The Tories this year published their report into higher education funding. This suggested lowering the income threshold for loan repayments, and extending the repayment period from 30 to 40 years - they want to shackle us

in debt for our lifetimes!

But the then prime minister Theresa May said it's up to the next government whether or not to enact it. So it's all to play for!

**Jeremy Corbyn has good policies in many of these areas, but also needs to go further in others. How can students make it all happen?**

Corbyn's anti-austerity manifesto in 2017 - which includes free education, extending public ownership in rail and energy, a mass programme of house building, and a £10-an-hour minimum wage for workers of all ages - saw young people queuing round the block to vote for it.

But we say he needs to fight for those policies!

That means not only calling students and workers out onto the streets, and demanding that the trade union leaders organise a like struggle to defeat the Tories. It also means kicking the pro-capitalist MPs out of Labour - the Blairites, who are determined to sabotage Corbyn's anti-austerity promise.

Students, alongside workers, could build an almighty movement that not only kicks out the Tories but pushes a Corbyn-led Labour government further left than it initially intends to go.

Socialist Students, for example, demands not only the scrapping of tuition fees, but also the cancellation of all outstanding student debt. If Corbyn nationalised the banks and top corporations as well as the railways and energy companies, this could let him fund such a programme and prevent sabotage by the billionaires.

**So do students have the power to create social change alone?**

Students can play an important role in building movements to change society. But we think the key role is played by the working class.

Because it's the working class that really runs all of society - from manufacture and transport to retail and nursing - the working class holds the power to grind the economy to a halt, and with it the bosses' profits.

The trade unions have huge potential power. A united movement of workers, with students fighting alongside them, could transform society.

**Meanwhile, students' own union, the National Union of Students (NUS), is in crisis. How can students build the kind of national campaigns - and links with the workers' movement - you've mentioned?**

At its last annual delegate conference in Glasgow, the right-wing leadership of the NUS forced through a package of 'reforms'. These are pushing the NUS in the direction of being reduced to the status of a think-tank, rather than an organisation that leads serious struggle for students' rights and conditions.

Socialist Students calls on all students' unions this year to convene emergency meetings on campuses, to allow students to discuss the events inside the NUS, and what the way forward is for the student movement.

Out of these meetings could come a strategy to refound the NUS itself, on fighting and democratic lines, or a plan for a national meeting of students to discuss building an entirely new national students' union.

Regardless of which of these two outcomes emerges, the be all and end all for us is that students need a fighting, national students' union to organise students in the fight to get rid of this rotten Tory government.

- Join the student fightback - [join Socialist Students today!](#)

# Northern Ireland: Campaign mounts over historic sexual abuse allegations cover-up

**Councillor Donal O'Cofaigh, Cross Community Labour Alternative and CWI Ireland North**

Northern Ireland is a society scarred by its history. The legacy of the conflict over the national question is everywhere apparent.

But just as the history of the working class has been excluded consciously from the 'green' and 'orange' narratives, the hidden legacy of sexual abuse of children has also largely been left unexplored.

Fermanagh local journalist Rodney Edwards was investigating reports of a paedophile ring operating in the county when he started to receive more and more reports of sexual abuse spanning decades.

A common feature was that victims had reported incidents to the police, but there was an apparent failure to investigate or see the cases through.

The cases were predominantly reported during the period of the long, armed conflict known as the 'Troubles'.

Those whose names have been made public span the breadth of society. One alleged prominent abuser worked as a bus driver and was reportedly responsible for a range of abuses of children (sometimes on school buses) in the 1980s and 1990s.

Other alleged abusers exposed include the headmaster of a local Catholic primary school (and prominent Gaelic Athletic Association member) and a number of Orange Order members.

## **Power and authority**

The list of alleged abusers is understood to extend to include prominent businessmen, republicans and police.

It seems that many of those most centrally involved in the abuse were in positions of power and authority over children during the Troubles.

Every week for more than six months, Rodney Edwards has brought forward new revelations of sex abuse.

These are sending shockwaves across Fermanagh society and the North of Ireland. More than 60 alleged abusers have been identified (but not named by the newspaper) with more than 50 alleged survivors coming forward.

But not one alleged abuser has been charged let alone brought to a court of law to face a jury trial.

The apparent inaction by police has drawn further questions about why they have failed to act. Attempts to raise the issue at the local council have been stymied, and myself and independent councillors have had our speaking rights curtailed.

I have been threatened with action for raising whether the council has questions to answer - over allegations of child sex abuse occurring in council toilets - by council officials.

The Fermanagh Council of Trade Unions initiated the first protest at Enniskillen Courthouse steps and this has been followed up by two further protests.

Victims of historic childhood sex abuse have spoken out, demanding action from the police and the relevant authorities.

At first, no other politicians were present, despite it being well-publicised. However, there was strong support from local people.

A second protest was held in Enniskillen's town centre the Diamond. Again, union banners were prominent and alleged victims got up to speak publicly and encourage others to come forward and demand justice.

This time representatives of the Democratic Unionist Party, Sinn Fein and the 'cross community' liberal Alliance Party attended and spoke.

Commitments were made that the subject would not be buried but would be discussed freely at the council meetings (commitments that vanished into thin air).

A third protest was held recently at the Enniskillen Courthouse steps to highlight the continued inaction by police on the issue.

The campaign occurs against a backdrop of worsening community divisions and austerity cuts. Recent weeks have seen tensions surge across Northern Ireland over marches, flags, Brexit fears and incendiary speeches by politicians on both sides.

Just days after the 'Justice' campaign protest there was an attempt to kill police and army bomb disposal crews with a secondary explosive device planted in the county.

Historic sex abuse is clearly a pervasive issue in Fermanagh, a situation highly likely to be replicated across Northern Ireland.

Much has been written on how British intelligence facilitated the abuse of boys at the Kincora boys' home, in Belfast, in the early 1970s, which was used to entrap both Unionist and Loyalist political leaders.

At the very least, a culture normalising sex abuse - like domestic violence - predominated during the period of the conflict.

Secret societies and organisations and the deference with which figures of authority were held in this society no doubt contributed to that situation.

The work of the journalists who chose to pursue these stories can bring them into a head-on conflict with elements of the state.

National Union of Journalists national executive member Anton McCabe, who spoke at the most recent rally for justice, highlighted the need to defend press freedom and spoke against police pressures on investigative journalists pursuing historic stories.

The pressure is on local journalists to drop their investigations and exposés and 'let the police get on with their work'. Notwithstanding threats and intimidation, that is not going to happen.

Uncovering the truth and the fight for justice for survivors is intimately linked with challenging the culture of deference to authority which has held down and separated working-class people for too long.

It is also part and parcel of finding out the truth of the capitalist state's role during the conflict.

Seeking justice for the victims of sex abuse is not just about securing closure and support for their ongoing needs - it helps open up the space necessary for working-class people to reshape our society in the future.

The survivors and their supporters who are driving this campaign come from both sides of the community and demonstrate that such an outcome is possible even in a divided society like Northern Ireland.

# Unions must mobilise to drive out Boris

**Marion Lloyd, PCS national executive committee (personal capacity)**

Johnson's a "liar" and Gove's a "disloyal... foam flecked Farageist". So says David Cameron in his recently published autobiography.

But the bigger problem for workers is that these creatures were given a get out of jail card by the failure of Labour to press for a general election before the parliamentary shut down.

The TUC at its Congress in Brighton compounded this mistake by supporting the 'block no-deal first' policy, leaving the Tories in power and free to pursue their anti-worker agenda.

PCS members have as many good reasons for getting rid of the Tories as any other section of the working class.

This is why, at the PCS National Executive Committee meeting prior to the TUC, Broad Left Network supporters, including Socialist Party members, pushed for an emergency motion calling for a "mobilisation through mass protests and demonstrations for a general election and for a government to be elected with a clear anti-austerity programme...".

Unfortunately this was rejected by PCS general secretary Mark Serwotka and his supporters and an opportunity to pose the question to the TUC was lost.

But we cannot sit back and let the Tories go unchallenged. It is time for Left union leaders to urgently make a call for mass action before 31 October to force a general election.

Meanwhile, increasingly, PCS members are taking action to defend their interests. HM Revenue and Customs members in Merseyside started a week-long strike for a living wage on 16 September.

And members in DVSA IT have been out for a month in Swansea and Nottingham (see below).

The long running BEIS strike for a living wage is reportedly close to victory. Foreign and Commonwealth Office members have called further fifth period of strike action after talks broke down.

These are just a few examples of localised disputes taking the fight to our employer - the government.

Also, anger among PCS members is building against office closures and staffing cuts across the civil service.

Marion Lloyd is standing as a candidate for general secretary of PCS in the union's forthcoming election.

She needs at least 15 nominations to get on the ballot paper. Marion is a member of the Socialist Party. Her campaign launch statement can be found on [socialistparty.org.uk](http://socialistparty.org.uk) - 'Fighting PCS general-secretary needed - Marion Lloyd: Why I am standing'. Please share and support her nomination #Marion4GS

- Facebook - Marion Lloyd for PCS general secretary

## Save the planet - strike and protest on 20 September

20 September is an opportunity for unions to highlight climate change issues. The call for a 30-minute stoppage must be supported by PCS branches who should link up with protests in towns and cities across the UK.

The evidence is now overwhelming that extreme weather events are linked to climate change caused by global warming.

It cannot be left to school student strikes and Extinction Rebellion protests - as important and inspirational as they have been - for action needed to avert a climate catastrophe.

Climate change is a trade union issue. Trade unions must use their collective power for decisive action to achieve the 45% cut in carbon emissions by 2030 and zero emissions by 2050 and to overcome opposition from profit-motivated business interests.

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## Strike back to stop bullying Royal Mail bosses

Gary Clark, Secretary Scotland No 2 branch Communications Workers Union (CWU)

Preparations are continuing for the national strike ballot in Royal Mail against its newly installed, openly anti-union management.

Just over a year ago the 'Four Pillars' agreement was signed between the Communications Workers Union (CWU) and Royal Mail bosses. It was viewed by almost everyone as a victory for the CWU.

Under the national agreement we are due another hour off the working week this October, but management has stated that this will only be given if every office makes 5% 'savings'.

This edict is to a workforce already pushed to its limits. Also, management is clearly opposed to a 2020 pay rise for us.

But what has become clear to every single postal worker is that the bullying culture within Royal Mail has passed breaking point.

Hardly a week goes by without a workplace across the UK taking some form of action, either official or unofficial, to defend our members against the extremes of management actions.

The new CEO Rico Back - who came from GLS, a parcel company in Europe owned by Royal Mail which has never recognised trade unions - was paid £6 million as a 'welcome', despite already being employed by the Royal Mail group.

Some of his first actions were to replace the so-called Doves who negotiated the Four Pillars agreement and bring back the 'Hawks' who were sidelined during the Four Pillars dispute.

Royal Mail has announced its five-year plan, which has many major issues for postal workers across the country.

The new parcel plan and the building of three new parcel hubs will mean around 20,000 job losses across the UK.

This is alongside their plans to make a new, separate, limited company for Parcelforce.

### Royal Mail breakup

The workforce is to be 'Tupe'd' across to the new company. This is clearly a major danger to the whole of our membership as it will mean, if not overturned, the start of the complete breakup of Royal Mail.

It therefore must be fought by all means. If Parcelforce was to go, what's to stop breaking up the Royal Mail piece by piece?

The response from members so far has been brilliant. We must build on the workplace and gate meetings, to prepare for the fight ahead.

We must make it clear to management that they are heading for a fight where there will be only one winner.

And that will be the union - which has taken on all the previous CEOs and chased them away.

We should prepare to hit them hard right away and, if we require it, with action over and above a 24-hour stoppage.

We also need to appeal to the rest of the labour and trade union movement to build pressure on Royal Mail management and this crisis-ridden Tory government. We could be on strike during a general election!

Jeremy Corbyn should appeal directly to our 100,000 members in Royal Mail, telling them that he is fully behind our action and promising that, if elected, he will take the company back into public ownership, fully honouring the Four Pillars agreement as the first step to improving our working lives.

This is the best way to unite workers whatever their stance on Brexit, and expose the fake radicalism of Boris Johnson and his attempt to cynically appeal to Leave-voting workers.

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## **Lincolnshire health visitors strike boost**

Striking Lincolnshire health visitors felt boosted after Jeremy Corbyn gave his support at the recent TUC congress.

Three Unite union reps got a standing ovation from congress delegates. They came away feeling their battle is becoming a national issue.

Health visitors have now been on strike 26 days during the past two months against a council imposed pay freeze (ie pay cuts) - the first time ever health visitors have been on strike as a profession.

Unite rep Karen Hayes from Boston spoke to Jon Dale of Mansfield Socialist Party about their action.

"When you come out on strike it's empowering as you meet all your colleagues facing the same problems.

"I haven't enjoyed the strikes because we don't want to let our families down, but if we don't fight they'll get a worse service in the future.

"I'm seeing a family now with four children. The mother's on maternity leave not getting paid and the father - a farm worker taking home £6,000 a year - got injured and isn't getting paid.

"They can't afford a car or to take the family on a bus. I've had to give them food bank vouchers and take the food to them.

"Our families are suffering from cuts Lincolnshire County Council has carried out. We don't see our families as 'Key Performance Indicators' as senior managers do.

"We spend a long time building up relationships with families, but managers are stopping us doing any preventive work - it's all reactive.

People can't be tick boxes. They're cutting down our home visits and expecting families to come to our clinics. How many more can they squeeze into our day?"

### **Wider ballot**

More health visitors have joined Unite from other unions and joined the strikes as the dispute has gone on.

However, three months after their ballot, the strike is now being suspended for a further ballot to continue action.

Those on council 'junior health visitor' rather than NHS contracts, not involved in the action so far, are also being balloted and will hopefully join further strike action.

Having applauded health visitors at the TUC, trade union leaders now need to organise real solidarity action and bring together all public service workers facing similar issues.

Against such a weak chaotic government, united trade union action could help bring a Corbyn anti-austerity government to power.

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## **DVSA strike - employer asks for talks**

**Gary Freeman, Nottingham Socialist Party**

The PCS strike at the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA) involving the IT Service Desk and the Approved Driving Instructor Teams is coming to the end of its fourth week.

The dispute is over many issues but staffing and bullying are the main issues for the teams out.

These teams' last day of strike action is 19 September and the union has made clear they are prepared to bring out members in other teams if there is not a satisfactory resolution.

There is no doubt the strike has had an impact alongside the threat of other teams being brought out at various times such as Driving Examiners and Enforcement Teams - the latter potentially around 'Brexit day'.

If it wasn't for the strike, why would Chief Executive Gareth Llewellyn have just written to the union to discuss talking? He has not personally negotiated with PCS in his tenure of over three years!

However, alongside his offer to talks, there appears to be a threat to stop 'check-off' (automatic deduction from pay) of union subs if the action is escalated.

Llewellyn is trying to pressurise them with a carrot and stick approach. The union can clearly see his strategy and don't want to fall into a management delaying tactic.

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## **Nottingham College UCU - more strike action planned**

**Gary Freeman, Nottingham Socialist Party**

On 11 September Nottingham College UCU strikers from various sites around the city along with trade unionists and some students congregated for a rally after the morning pickets at the Brian Clough statue in the city.

It was to show their determination to defeat the college employer's draconian contract - involving savage cuts in terms and conditions and with pay cuts for 20% of teachers.

The strike followed a one-day strike on 28 July (UCU's 'Day of Yearning' as opposed to the College's 'Day of Learning') and a further 14 days of strikes are planned - 19 and 20 September, three days the following week, four days the week after, and all five days the following week.

In July 2017, John van de Laarschot, the Chief Executive of the college had written an article that appeared on the Nottingham Post (NottinghamshireLive) website - an article that brought to mind the attitude of Margaret Thatcher.

It was headlined: "Our students need tough love, says boss of Nottingham's biggest college" Clearly, "tough" is also being applied to the staff.

This from a Chief Executive whose salary in 2017-18 was £207,000 (Education and Skills Funding Agency data) and where the college also employs a 'Principal'. Having both roles is unknown in a Further Education college, according to strikers.

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## **PCS members at BEIS maintain just fightback**

Members of the PCS civil servants' union are continuing their indefinite strike at the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) government department in Westminster over implementation of the London Living Wage (£10.55 an hour) and decent terms and conditions. The workers have been out since 15 July.

It's reported that management has conceded the living wage, but other issues remain outstanding. Moreover, no offer has yet been put to the strikers.

The outsourced catering and cleaning workers at BEIS are employed by contractors ISS and Aramark.

From 2 September to 13 September they were joined by receptionists, security guards, porters and post room staff also employed at BEIS by ISS and Aramark.

From the week beginning 30 September, these workers will take rolling strike action of one week on strike and one week off.

Socialist Party members both in the PCS union and in London are continuing to give full support to the strikers.

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## **Iford: strike forces school management to back down**

After a series of strikes by members of the National Education Union (NEU) over the summer and a threat of more action to come, management at Ilford County High School has agreed to withdraw its unacceptable proposals.

These amounted to imposing a cuts package that would have seen its teaching staff being asked to take on more work with less time to do it in and for no additional pay and, in the case of some, a pay cut.

Glenn Kelly National Education Union (NEU) regional officer said: "Given that Ilford County High School already had one of the lowest spending on teachers per pupil than any other Redbridge secondary school, our members were not prepared to see an attack on their jobs and working conditions and we are pleased that the strike action and support of the parents has forced the school to back down".

Venda Premkumar the Redbridge NEU branch secretary said: "We warned the school that you can't keep cutting jobs and simply expect teachers and support staff to pick up the extra work.

"We were not prepared to see our members driven into the ground nor see the children's education suffer".

# Violence against women in South Africa: how should organised workers respond?

## Marxist Workers Party members South Africa

The rape and murder of Cape Town student Uyinene Mrwetyana was the final spark that lit a new wave of protests demanding an end to violence against women.

She was killed by a Post Office employee who, alongside 300 others, failed a vetting process because of their criminal records.

He had a previous rape charge but the case had been withdrawn. However Post Office employers sat on the report for more than a year and Uyinene's killer used his position to identify and target her.

Uyinene's murder followed a slew of reports of murdered women. In 2016, out of every 100,000 women and girls in South Africa, 12.5 were violently killed.

This was five times the global average of 2.6. In 2017-18, this increased to 15.2 - 2,930 murdered women; the slain bodies of an additional 291 women and 29 girls.

A mass memorial for Uyinene at the University of Cape Town, on 4 September, showed the depth of feeling and anger among women and young people.

Memorials and vigils took place on other campuses and solidarity marches in other cities and towns.

On 5 September, more than ten thousand protested outside parliament in Cape Town, demanding that President Cyril Ramaphosa come out and tell them what his government planned to do to stop gender based violence.

While men are five times more likely than women to be murdered, itself a social crisis, it is the fact that so many women are being murdered by men who feel entitled to control and possess women, treating them like personal property, that has led to the outpouring of anger.

Gender inequality is rooted in class inequality and emerged with class society.

Under capitalism, women are frequently paid less than men, concentrated in low-paid sectors such as cleaning and retail and precariously or casually employed by contractors or as domestic workers.

Women are also most likely to be the main carers for children and the elderly and perform the majority of domestic work in the home.

The foundation of capitalist economy in commodity production - where everything is for sale - commodifies women's bodies, turns them into objects and encourages the idea that women only exist for the entertainment and pleasure of men.

The social conditions of capitalism are a breeding ground for the sexist attitudes that justify the many forms of violence against women - rape, assault, domestic violence, 'cat-calling' etc.

## Strategy

Protests have been mobilised under the banners #AmINext, #TheTotalShutdown and others. Young people and students have played a central role.

Significantly, protests are being called using appeals to working-class methods of mass struggle, eg shutdowns and stay-aways.

This points the emerging movement in the right direction. However, at this stage, this language is symbolic, and not based on a conscious strategy to mobilise the working class.

#TotalShutdown's 2018 call for women to stayaway from work was not linked to appeals to workers and their trade unions for the mobilisation and shutdown of workplaces, ie united strike action.

One of the main demands of protesters outside parliament was for the government to declare a state of emergency.

While this was a demand for a gesture from the government that it 'gets it', it was nevertheless incorrect.

It would be suicidal for the movement to support increasing the repressive powers of this ANC government and the state in general.

Outside the recently held World Social Forum, protesters against gender based violence were attacked by police with tear gas, rubber bullets and water cannons.

The last time a state of emergency was declared was in the 1980s by the white-minority regime, used to suppress the mass movement against apartheid.

At this stage it is the middle class, especially the NGOs, which are setting the ideological tone of the movement against gender-based violence.

They look to work with big business, the capitalist politicians and the state. Protests are to pressure them but not to challenge their control of society and the unequal capitalist class structure they defend.

In the Marxist Workers Party we argue that the many women and young people radicalised by the struggle against gender oppression and gender based violence should rather look towards a united movement of the working class.

It is only the working class which has the power to fundamentally transform society, abolishing capitalism and the class inequalities that gender oppression is rooted in.

## **Workplace role**

In June, mine workers at the LanXess chrome mine in Rustenburg - members of the Numsa union - organised a strike and occupation in protest against the sexual harassment of a woman mineworker. Her manager was demanding sexual favours in exchange for a permanent job.

This has set a shining example for how workers can take up the issue of harassment and violence against women. Workers have the power to force the removal of perpetrators from the workplace.

But crucially, because of their position in the economy, workers have the power to improve the position of women in society more generally.

Every workplace demand and struggle for equal pay, higher pay, against gender discrimination in promotion and job opportunities, for housing allowances, transport allowances and longer paternal leave, increases the independence and choices available to women.

Wider working-class movements on healthcare, housing, social services, childcare and schooling do likewise.

A mass working-class movement can lay the real social foundations upon which gender equality can be built.

The struggle for women's liberation is part of the class struggle and needs to be re-written on the banner of the workers movement.

## A workers' programme to end gender-based violence

- For working-class unity and leadership against gender based violence! Build a class-independent trade union Campaign Against Sexual Harassment, Domestic Violence, Rape and Femicide.
- United workers' action to end sexual harassment in the workplace. Build links with working-class community organisations
- For gender equality in the pocket! Equal pay for work of equal value.
- Expose and fight against the bosses' gender equality hypocrisy! Place on the table in every negotiation the question of employer subsidised healthcare, longer paid parental leave, increased housing allowances, safe employer provided transport to and from work, and free workplace childcare facilities
- Follow the example of the LanXess workers - an injury to one woman is an injury to all workers! Make gender based violence a real cost to the bosses' bottom line.
- Strike and walkout to picket police stations and courts in defence of all colleagues who are made victims of gender based violence.
- Organised trade union participation in Community Policing Forums to fight for community oversight and control of policing and ensure all reports of gender based violence are taken seriously and dealt with professionally and quickly
- End the class foundations of gender inequality. Nationalise under democratic working-class and community control the banks, the mines, the commercial farms, the big factories and big businesses.
- A publicly owned and democratically planned socialist economy to meet the needs of all and not the profits of the capitalists
- Build the fighting unity of the working class in a party of mass struggle. Build a socialist mass workers' party to unite the struggles of the workplaces, the communities and the youth as a vital step toward the creation of a mass revolutionary party to lead the struggle for socialism

## South Yorkshire defeats fire cuts

After months of campaigning, lobbying and petitioning by the Fire Brigades Union (FBU), Socialist Party and others, on 16 September the [South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Authority voted not to proceed](#) with the chief fire officer's proposal to reduce crewing levels from five to four.

This would have resulted in 84 fewer firefighters over the next three years.

Now, they will instead look at using some of their £25 million reserves, and lobbying the government for 'fair funding'.

We are proud the Socialist Party played a big role in this campaign, collecting over 2,500 signatures across South Yorkshire, campaigning with the Fire Brigades Union. We distributed hundreds of leaflets and supported the FBU lobbies.

This victory proves once again that if you fight, you can win.

## Help us move our press by October: pay in your building appeal pledge!

**Ken Douglas, Socialist Party national treasurer**

Regular readers of the Socialist will know that the Socialist Party launched a building appeal in 2018, following our eviction from the premises we had occupied for nearly 20 years.

We set an initial target of £150,000 and the response has surpassed all our expectations. The appeal has now reached an incredible £201,501 of paid donations: 134%.

This has only been achieved through the tremendous sacrifices made by members and supporters of the Socialist Party throughout England and Wales. They have donated up to a week's income, or more, over the course of the appeal - because they recognise the importance of maintaining our national centre in London.

Together with a mortgage, it has enabled us to buy the new premises we recently moved to. We have just held our first national committee meeting here as well, saving on the costs of hiring an expensive venue.

We will shortly also be moving our printshop, where we print our monthly journal *Socialism Today* along with all our leaflets, placards, posters and pamphlets. This will be the first time for 20 years that we have been able to accommodate the printshop in the same place as our headquarters.

We are appealing to all our readers and supporters to help with the costs of this move. It will cost up to £4,000 to move our press alone - plus all the other equipment, including the finisher, guillotine and strapper that we use for producing and distributing all our material.

We have to complete the move by the end of October. If you have already promised a donation - and there is still £26,000 in outstanding pledges - can you pay some or all of it in the next two months?

Our new premises will be a great asset for the Socialist Party as we head into a tumultuous political period, campaigning for a socialist Brexit, for a Corbyn-led Labour government with socialist policies, and building support for socialist ideas. We thank all our members, and readers of the Socialist, who have helped to achieve this.

- Pay at [socialistparty.org.uk/donate](https://socialistparty.org.uk/donate) and comment 'building fund'

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## **Worcestershire campaigners plan march to save Bewdley Fire Station**

**Mark Davies, Worcester Socialist Party**

The campaign to save Bewdley Fire Station continues to build, with a march and rally planned for Saturday 28 September, starting at 10.30am.

The attack on the service in Wyre Forest, Worcestershire involves planned closure of stations in Bewdley, Stourport and Kidderminster, with the service to be centralised in a 'hub' in Kidderminster. The police and ambulance service judge it will be ineffective and negatively impact response times for the fire service.

But this is not the only attack by Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service. There are also attacks on the level of cover, and on the terms and conditions of both existing firefighters and new recruits.

Worcester Socialist Party continues to support the campaign organised by the Fire Brigades Union (FBU), and any future action, including strike action, firefighters decide to take in defence of the service.

The Socialist Party demands that closed fire stations are reopened, along with the reinstatement of any axed crews. The number of firefighters on duty at night should be 40, all appliances should be staffed fully and permanently, and there should be a minimum crew of five on all appliances.

And we say councillors on the Fire and Rescue Authority must commit what funds are needed to run a safe and effective service, and commit to fight the government for these funds.

The following message was received by Worcester Socialist Party: "Hereford and Worcester Fire Brigades Union are extremely grateful for the continued support that the Socialist Party have provided through our recent disputes.

"Hereford and Worcester FBU officials and their members applaud this show of solidarity and will continue to update you with matters as they unfold.

"Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service are currently engaging in meaningful discussions with brigade officials with a view of working towards suitable resolutions to the trade dispute."

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## London: packed public meeting discusses political crisis

**Oisin Mulholland, East London Socialist Party**

A packed public meeting on the turmoil in British politics and the Conservative Party was hosted by London Socialist Party on 12 September. 80 people attended.

Socialist Party deputy general secretary Hannah Sell addressed the turbulent time facing the capitalist class and its politicians as they navigate their way through the tricky task of delivering a Brexit resolution in the interests of big business. Hannah spoke on the role of the Socialist Party and trade unions against the latest Tory face in Downing Street, Boris Johnson.

The need to end austerity and argue for a pro-worker Brexit - through a Corbyn-led Labour government, standing on socialist policies - was put forward as the priority.

The key issues for the working class are widely ignored by establishment parties. The devastating impact of austerity - imposed by the Tory-Lib Dem coalition, then in recent years the Tories alone - must be at the forefront of campaigning.

The meeting then opened up to the floor, including updates on the party's work in London. A Socialist Party has member convinced general union Unite's London healthcare regional industrial sector committee to support a general election before any second referendum, and for Labour to fight that on socialist policies.

At Southwark Trade Union Council, Socialist Party members argued the need for socialist change to end climate change. Both Southwark and Waltham Forest TUCs have agreed to organise workers' action on the 20 September climate strike.

Finally, a fighting fund collection took place where £1,374 was donated by individuals and Socialist Party branches from across London.

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## Selling the Socialist

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

## Pontypridd

We sold 20 copies of the Socialist in Pontypridd. Some interesting comments. Corbyn was more popular this week.

"I think a lot of things should be nationalised. Let's hope Corbyn gets in next time," from a woman with kids in her 40s. "Thank goodness for people like you" - from a young woman in a coffee shop apron.

"I gave you a tenner last week in Merthyr," from a guy in his 30s. "Nationalise the banks," from a guy in his 50s. A 13-year-old girl signed too.

**Mariam Kamish, Caerphilly Socialist Party**

## South Yorkshire

Boris Johnson visited South Yorkshire on 13 September. He was harangued on the streets of Doncaster and heckled at a speech in Rotherham.

Socialist Party members joined public service union Unison and others outside the Magna centre in Rotherham, but Boris was whisked in and out again without us even getting sight of him.

As Tim Jones so eloquently puts it: "This takes the piss! Boris addressing business leaders over Brexit in relation to the 'Northern Powerhouse' - in a former steel plant that the Tories destroyed!"

**Yorkshire Socialist Party**

## Oxford

Sam from West Papua, who spoke at Oxford Socialist Party's meeting on 11 September, compared the brutal treatment of West Papuan independence campaigners by the Indonesian state to the British government at Peterloo 200 years ago. "But it is happening every day in West Papua right now!"

We support the right of West Papuans to self-determination, and support the struggle for a socialist West Papua, as part of a struggle for socialism throughout Indonesia and south-east Asia.

Then an excellent 'Tories out' campaign stall in Oxford on 12 September, selling the Socialist and raising fighting fund for our campaign work. Lots of interest, and new people at our meeting in the evening.

**Oxford Socialist Party**

## Birmingham

Boot out Boris, boot out the Tories, boot out all austerity politicians! That was the message for Birmingham Socialist Party's campaigning in Erdington on 14 September.

There was working-class support from the community for a general election, and for Labour to stand on policies of renationalisation, scrapping Universal Credit, mass council home building, and real living-wage jobs of £10 an hour upwards now.

**Kris O'Sullivan, Birmingham Socialist Party**

## **Hull**

Hull Socialists were at Hull Uni on 16 September, campaigning for #SocialistChangeNotClimateChange.

**Matt Whale, Hull Socialist Party**

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## **Non-Fiction - Peterloo: The English Uprising**

# **Peterloo - fighting for democracy and a better life**

**Kevin Parslow, Waltham Forest Socialist Party**

When I met Robert Poole, the author of 'Peterloo: The English Uprising', at the recent bicentenary commemorations, he asked me if he had taken too long in getting to the actual events of 16 August 1819.

Certainly, eleven of the 15 chapters of this book deal with the prelude to the massacre.

However, these chapters are crammed with detail of the economic, social and political circumstances in Manchester and the surrounding districts in the late Regency period, and particularly after the Battle of Waterloo in June 1815.

The book thoroughly describes the position of the different class forces at the time. The ruling class - in Manchester mainly the biggest manufacturers, but nationally also the landed aristocracy and financiers - was clear that movements for reform had to be crushed.

It would have no truck with concessions to the leaders of the Radical movement and did everything to prevent them gaining a mass base in society.

## **Movement**

In the chapter entitled 'Conspirators', the author describes the state of the radical movement. In some towns, its 'unions' and 'societies' reached sizeable numbers.

But, "in Manchester, spies and informers had penetrated the radical network from top to bottom." Infiltration was organised not just directly by the Westminster government but also by local magistrates who ran networks to gather information about the radicals' intentions.

This was aided by the methods of the leaders of the radical organisations. On the one hand they talked about general political demands to widen the franchise and change representation in parliament.

At the same time, however, they discussed semi-conspiratorial ideas for uprisings, without a real understanding of what forces would be necessary to carry them out.

Nevertheless, the following chapter, 'Strikers', shows the actual fear of the authorities in the face of the strike movement of 1818.

Poole, through available letters, outlines the methods of the mass movement and how it shook Manchester.

When the spinners took strike action, they organized against 'knobsticks' (scabs): "Four or five hundred or perhaps one or two thousand assembling from different factories and at the hour of work, viz. 4 or 5 o'clock in the morning go to a factory at the other end of town where they are not known, and so carry off by force or intimidation, though without any violent breach of the peace, the hands who might be disposed to go to work."

The strike wave was commonly believed to be a failure. But Poole has uncovered evidence that the master spinners gave secret concessions to reduce the working day and widen the higher rates of pay for smaller pieces of work, a settlement announced factory by factory.

Even the Home Secretary, Lord Sidmouth, considered this agreement "judicious, but the disclosure of it at this moment would have an appearance calculated to produce very injurious effects" - to the bosses, not the workers!

The authorities were worried that industrial unrest would merge with the Radicals resulting in serious consequences for their position.

Manchester stipendiary magistrate James Norris wrote: "I cannot think that the trades are at all organized for a general turnout [strike]... but the idea necessarily acquires strength amongst the lower classes... and some are no doubt ripe for it at this moment."

Similarly, Bolton magistrate Colonel Fletcher was worried: "The danger of a committee dictating what wages must be paid, is manifest, and if [it] should be submitted to, a worse than universal suffrage would succeed. It would introduce a mob oligarchy, bearing down on all the better orders of society, and would quickly be succeeded by universal anarchy"!

When the strikes were over, with unsatisfactory endings for some, workers did turn to the political field in 1819 to continue the struggle.

Protest meetings were held and the pressure on the radical organisations was such that they called a delegate meeting in Oldham for 7 June.

Poole writes: "At first only certified delegates were admitted, but early in the proceedings 'the doors were thrown open for general admittance and the room was instantly filled by the working class of people who manifested a very strong feeling for a general movement.'"

This was the mood in the Manchester region just five weeks before the demonstration on St Peter's Field. (See 'The Peterloo Massacre 1819' at [socialistparty.org.uk](http://socialistparty.org.uk)).

It is clear that the government and local authorities feared the 'English uprising' in the book's subtitle. The author deals with the day itself in two chapters.

In the first he describes the semi-festive atmosphere of those who marched into Manchester to hear Henry Hunt. In the second he writes about the massacre itself.

## **Brutality**

Poole shows the cold brutality of the forces of the state, not just in carrying out the massacre, but in denying that there had been one! This was contradicted by the reports of journalists present, even those considered generally pro-Tory or anti-reform, who were disgusted and sickened by the brutality meted out.

Soon, the true nature of the day's events came out, causing mass revulsion and anger. But then, and subsequently, the government and its apologists attempted to cover up and lie about the extent of the violence.

HNV Temperley, a historian, could write in the Cambridge Modern History of 1902 that "one man was killed and some 40 wounded", figures that were often repeated, including in schools to history students. The real figure was 18 killed and almost 700 wounded.

It used to be said that history was written by the victors, as emphasised by Temperley's quote. But Robert Poole is on the side of those who fought for democracy and a better life.

After two centuries, history is being written more favourably to the victims and the working class as a whole.

If you can afford the £25 for the book, read it and understand the lessons of the early working class in England for the struggles today.

- Peterloo: The English Uprising, by Robert Poole, Oxford University Press, 2019, £25
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## The Socialist inbox

Letters to the Socialist's editors.

### Do you have something to say?

Send your news, views and criticism in not more than 150 words to [editors@socialistparty.org.uk](mailto:editors@socialistparty.org.uk), or if you're not online, to Socialist Postbox, PO Box 24697, London E11 1YD.

We reserve the right to shorten and edit letters. Don't forget to give your name, address and phone number. Confidentiality will be respected if requested.

Views of letter writers do not necessarily match those of the Socialist Party.

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### Rape convictions low

Two recent news items demonstrate the shocking deterioration of our justice system and support services for women.

On 10 September we were told that rape convictions were at the lowest level for a decade. Of 54,000 reported rapes just 1,925 resulted in a conviction.

So many women, because rape predominantly impacts women, have been failed by a flawed justice system.

It is eager to imprison women for shoplifting when they can't feed their children, but actively tries to deny justice to women when raped.

The message it sends is that we don't count. The justice system is failing us and desperately needs overhauling. It must be more accountable and take rape cases more seriously.

It was also reported that 173 people had been killed as a result of domestic violence, the highest level in the last five years. The vast majority of these victims are women.

At a time when services such as refuges and support services for women fleeing from violent partners are being slashed, is it any wonder the figures are so high?

But it doesn't have to be like this. More affordable homes and a wide range of well-funded services that provide a proper safety net must be provided.

We have to fight harder than ever as austerity corrodes our services. That's why I'm in the Socialist Party fighting for real change.

Jane Nellist, Coventry

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## Abuser Boycott knighted

It's unforgivable that domestic violence killings have reached a five-year high, and that progress to the domestic violence bill is going to be delayed further as parliament is prorogued.

And Theresa May's parting 'gift' at this time, after women have borne 87% of the impact of austerity? The second female prime minister has honoured a man convicted for assaulting his partner for a knighthood.

Like American student Brock Turner's lenient sentence on account of him being a promising athlete, the knighting of Geoffrey Boycott (former England cricket captain and commentator) sends the message that women's lives don't matter, or at least, not as much as sports titles!

The Tories have never championed women, and knighting Boycott captures May's complete lack of recognition of the reality of so many women living in fear because of domestic violence.

We need to get the Tories out now to stop cuts to services and refuges, end austerity and fight against the gendered oppression and violence entrenched in capitalism.

Nina Brown, Leeds

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## Too small to make a difference?

Greta Thunberg's 2019 publication 'No one is too small to make a difference' sets out her views on climate change and the reason why she sparked off a massive student protest all over the world.

It contains some ideas which socialists will be sympathetic to. In one speech, for example, to the United Nations climate change conference, she said: "We are about to sacrifice our civilisation for the opportunity of a very small number of people to continue to make enormous amounts of money, we are about to sacrifice the biosphere so that rich people in countries like mine can live in luxury. But it is the sufferings of the many which pay for the luxuries of the few."

The chapter about addressing the Houses of Parliament in April shows her rising frustration. It is titled 'Can you hear me?' and repeatedly makes plain that the existing political order is incapable of listening to the demands of the youth because it would mean tearing up their most hallowed beliefs: free enterprise, the profit motive and the divine right of the corporations to wreck the environment to make a fast buck.

If you are looking for a worked-out, detailed socialist analysis of how capitalism drives climate change, this is not the book for you.

If you want an insight into the passion which drives the hundreds of thousands of people who are seeking to fight for a future then it is.

Derek McMillan, Worthing, Sussex

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## Climate protests and workers

Mick Whale's letter in issue 1054 - '[Collective climate crisis](#)' - raised a very important point about the need to keep workers onside in climate change protests.

I work for National Express, and coach services were heavily disrupted in London during the Extinction Rebellion protests over Easter.

Blockades caused delays to coach services, which run the risk not only of alienating coach drivers, but also the travelling public.

Many poorer workers travel by coach as a cheap alternative to trains and these are the people we don't want to alienate. Public transport is part of the solution to climate change - not part of the problem.

It is encouraging to see approaches being made to trade unions to participate in climate change protests.

But that would be much more successful if unions used their authority among workers to lead from the front rather than respond to appeals that may or may not come from local protest organisers.

**Clive Walder, Birmingham**

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## **Another London tower block fire**

On Monday 16 September a fire took place in Harry Zeital Way in Clapton, east London, the third fire in three months in tower blocks in the capital.

Thankfully, it appears that no-one has been seriously hurt. According to one eyewitness, the fire spread from the ground floor to the fourth floor in two minutes.

This is not the first time a fire has happened on this estate. Five years ago there was another fire and only now is the estate management talking about removing the flammable cladding.

We need quality, permanent rehousing of all affected residents. We demand the removal of all cladding and balconies immediately and the release and re-doing of the fire safety assessment. We cannot allow these fires to keep happening.

**A local resident**

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## **Operation Yellowhammer**

MPs have forced the government to publish the Operation Yellowhammer document. This report looks at the potential consequences of a no-deal Brexit and its aim was to mitigate the problems that would arise.

However, it found that no-deal would interrupt the flow of medical supplies, cause food shortages and food and energy price rises, and may lead to civil unrest.

At first, Boris Johnson tried to suppress the report but is now claiming it is only a worst case scenario.

The reality is a no-deal Brexit will have dire consequences for working people, but a Tory deal led by Johnson and Rees-Mogg will be no better.

Corbyn is right to demand a general election and says Labour would negotiate a credible deal that protects workers' rights and living standards.

However, Tom Watson and other leading Blairites are demanding that Labour prioritise a second referendum and campaign to remain.

This would be disastrous in Leave voting Labour constituencies and it would run the risk of pushing many Labour voters towards the Tories or the Brexit Party allowing them to drive through a no-deal.

The Blairites know this but are more concerned with ousting Corbyn and reasserting their control than stopping the Tories and a no-deal.

The big issues that working people face are low pay, precarious employment, the housing crisis and cuts to vital services.

With regards to Brexit, most workers simply want it resolved. This is why we support the election of a Corbyn-led Labour government with socialist policies that offer real solutions to these problems.

**Dave Walsh, Liverpool**

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## Audio version of this document

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## What the Socialist Party stands 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), a socialist international that organises in over 40 countries.

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 to increase the minimum wage to £10 an hour without exemptions as an immediate step towards a real living wage. For an annual increase in the minimum wage linked to average earnings.
- 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.
- Reject 'workfare'. 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 maximum 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 unrecycled 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.
- Fight for Labour to be transformed into such a party: deselect the Blairites!

## 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!

# Audio version of this document

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<http://www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/29590>