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Issue 1075
27 February - 4 March 2020



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the Socialist

Formerly **Militant**



Tories' divisive immigration policy

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AUSTERITY KILLS

Protest on Budget Day

Wednesday 11 March, from 1pm in Parliament Square, London SW1P 3BD

Thieving cuts to incomes and services mean workers are dying younger and suffering sickness for longer. Austerity is killing us.

In fact, overall life expectancy has stopped creeping up for the first time in a century. The upward curve started flattening out ten years ago, when austerity began in earnest. Worse - among the poorest tenth of women in the North East, and Yorkshire and the Humber, it's now going backwards.

"Austerity has taken a significant toll on equity and health," says public health researcher Michael Marmot, "and it is likely to continue to do so." Professor Marmot led the new review for University College London's Institute of Health Equity.

"Poverty has a grip on our nation's health - it limits the options families have available to live a healthy life. Government health policies that focus on individual behaviours are not effective. Something has gone badly wrong."

Meanwhile, in the time since the world financial crash, the wealth of the super-rich has expanded like a monstrous tumour. The number of billionaires in the UK has more than doubled, from 68 to 151.

And from 2007 to 2019, the Sunday Times Rich List recorded the fortunes of the UK's richest 1,000 growing from £360 billion to £525 billion! But workers' wages have only just 'recovered' to their pre-crisis peak in 2008 (see p11) - and our public services continue to decline.

This is naked class disparity. In former 'red wall' areas in the deindustrialised Midlands and North, the more affluent long-held



Tory areas can look forward to 65 years of good health. Poorer Labour and ex-Labour constituencies can expect just 61. And the report "is concerned with England, but in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland the damage to health and wellbeing is similarly unprecedented."

"From rising child poverty and the closure of children's centres, to declines in education funding, an increase in precarious work and zero-hours contracts, to a housing affordability crisis and a rise in homelessness, to people with insufficient money to lead a healthy life and resorting to food banks in large numbers, to ignored communities with poor conditions and little reason for hope..."

"Austerity will cast a long shadow over the lives of the children born and growing up under its effects." A higher proportion of children now live in poverty in the UK than in the Republic of Ireland or Poland.

It is criminal that the richest 1,000 have gained hundreds of billions while the rest of us have lost years off our lives.

It is a consequence of capitalism, a system where private profit, not social need, is the motor force.

The Socialist Party demands an immediate end to all austerity. Restore full funding to the NHS and public services. Raise the minimum wage and benefits so they're really enough to live on. Scrap zero-hour contracts and bring in free education and childcare.

And nationalise the banks and big business, under democratic workers' control and management, to plan provision for all.

Coordinated trade union action can force the bosses to give us more. And councils must set no-cuts budgets to meet local needs, and demand that Westminster fund them (see p4-5, 12). Capitalism kills - socialist policies are a matter of life and death.

DO YOU HAVE NEWS FOR US?

The Socialist is written, read, sold and bought by ordinary workers, trade unionists, young people and Socialist Party supporters. We want you to write for the Socialist.

Send us reports of your workplace and community campaigns, short letters on working-class issues, or ideas for other articles.

CONTACT US

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020 8988 8777 - ask for the editors

DEADLINES

Friday before publication, or Monday morning for urgent news, unless otherwise agreed with the editors.

The Socialist goes to press on a Tuesday night. We publish online on Wednesday and in print on Thursday.

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The Socialist is the weekly newspaper of the Socialist Party, the England and Wales section of the Committee for a Workers' International

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ISSN 1366-9621

Registered as a newspaper
at the Post Office

Printed by Reach Printing Services
Published by Socialist Publications
PO Box 1398, Enfield EN1 9GT

Militant issue 1: October 1964

The Socialist issue 1: 7 February 1997

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

IMMIGRATION:
FOR A SYSTEM THAT
MEETS THE NEEDS
OF THE MAJORITY,
NOT A RICH ELITE



WHAT WE THINK

There has been a lot of controversy in the capitalist media about the Tory government's proposed 'points based' immigration system. The criticism of it, however, has mainly come from big business worried about a lack of cheap labour for them to exploit. Working-class people - wherever in the world we are from - have no common interests with either side of that argument.

For the Tory government this is a cynical attempt to strengthen their electoral base. Johnson falsely claimed that he would negotiate a Brexit in the interests of the majority. Now he is trying to back that up by posturing that his government will introduce a new 'fairer' immigration system.

The Tories are a party of big business and the super-rich. Their policies defend the capitalist system and undermine the living conditions of the working class, and their new immigration system certainly won't be fair.

Hostile environment

The Tories are the party of the 'hostile environment', which resulted in the deportation to the Caribbean of pensioners who have lived and worked in Britain since childhood. They are the party that voted to deny unaccompanied child refugees the right to come to Britain in order to be reunited with their parents. They are also the party that has presided over the greatest squeeze on all our wages since the Victorian era.

Over the last decade Tory governments have repeatedly tried to dishonestly divert workers' attention from the vicious austerity they've implemented by attempting to blame migrants for low wages and underfunded, overcrowded public services. These proposals are another attempt to play the 'migrant card'.

If you are rich enough, of course, there will still be no barriers to you settling in Britain. Since the 'golden visa' scheme was introduced in 2008 more than 11,000 people have been given the right to come to Britain under its auspices. The only condition is to invest £2 million in Britain, including in 'high-end' property. In 2018 it was briefly suspended following the outcry over the number of gangsters taking advantage of it, but in 2019 it was restored and record numbers of the super-rich were welcomed in.

It is an entirely different story for desperate refugees fleeing wars and repression. It is also an entirely different story for workers who want to come to Britain from other parts of the world, and now also from European countries. Under the Tories proposals your right to come to Britain will largely be determined by how much you earn. Less than £25,600 rules you out; regardless of how useful you would be to society or whether you have family already in Britain.

Bosses v workers

The large sections of big business that are objecting to the new system, however, are also the sworn enemies of the working class - migrant and non-migrant. Carolyn Fairbairn, head of the Confederation of British Industry (CBI), voiced the concerns of big business that "in some sectors firms will be left wondering how they will recruit the people needed to run their businesses. With already low unemployment, firms in care, construction, hospitality, food and drink could be most affected." What links those sectors together is not low skills, but low pay.

The CBI suggesting there is low unemployment will anger millions. Britain's official unemployment figure is low but it disguises a very different reality. There is mass 'underemployment'. More than 3.5 million people have some work but not enough to live on, and are desperately looking for more.

The bosses always maximise their profits by paying workers as little as they can get away with. They use whatever means they can to drive



Lindsey oil refinery workers beat the bosses' divide-and-rule, race-to-the-bottom attacks with united trade union action
photos Socialist Party



down wages - introducing zero-hour contracts, employing agency workers, young people who they can pay less, and also super-exploited workers from other countries. It is not exploited workers who gain from this 'race to the bottom', it is the employers.

What is the solution? No immigration system introduced to suit the needs of big business will be in the interests of the working class. Only a democratic socialist world could harness the wealth, science and technique created by capitalism in order to meet the needs of humanity worldwide. This would make it possible to create a society where people were free to move if they wished to, but no one was forced to move as a result of war, environmental catastrophe or poverty.

Workers' power

This does not mean, however, that the workers' movement has no power to fight back against capitalist exploitation today. It needs to launch an urgent struggle against austerity and for fully funded public services and decent housing for all. It must fight for every worker to get the rate for the job. We fight for an immediate increase in the minimum wage to £12 an hour without exemptions as a step towards a real living wage of at least £15 an hour. If this was implemented it would take away the incentive for employers to exploit one group of workers against another, because everyone would get a decent wage.

But to achieve this requires getting organised. For example, in 2009, workers' in Lindsey oil refinery - with a Socialist Party member playing a leading role - took strike action to prevent their employer using workers from Italy to undercut their wages and conditions. They succeeded in winning the rate and conditions for the job for all the workers, from Italy as well as Britain.

Part of the struggle to defend workers' rights is the fight for the rights of both refugees and migrant workers. This has to include demanding the right of every EU citizen currently resident in Britain to have the unequivocal right to stay. It also means fighting for the right to asylum for those fleeing war, sectarian conflict and dictatorship. This should be combined with supporting the right for families to be reunited and calling for an end to asylum seekers being treated like criminals and locked up in detention centres which are no different to prisons.

Control of decisions about whether to grant asylum cannot be left in the hands of this callous government. We demand that elected committees of working-class people, including from the trade unions and migrants' organisations, have the right to review asylum cases and grant asylum. The same approach should be taken to the new points-based system. The workers' movement, while campaigning against this unjust system, should demand the right to check, expose and overturn every decision taken to maximise profit, and decide what is necessary to meet the needs of the majority of society, not those of a rich elite.



WHAT WE STAND FOR

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

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

PUBLIC SERVICES

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

WORK AND INCOME

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

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weekly newspaper: the Socialist
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facebook.com/CWISocialistParty

- 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 and 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!

Do you agree? Join the fightback! JOIN THE SOCIALISTS

Visit socialistparty.org.uk/join
or call 020 8988 8777
or text your name and postcode to 07761 818 206
to find out more today!



Coventry: A socialist councillor who will vote against cuts

Socialist Party member Jane Nellist is standing as a candidate for Coventry council in the Upper Stoke by-election on 19 March. Below we print extracts from her leaflet.

Jane has been a local teacher, trade union leader and fighter for ordinary people across Coventry for 30 years. She would be a voice and fighter for local people against austerity, landlordism and closures in Coventry. Unlike Tory-lite Labour councillors, she would resist Tory austerity instead of passing on savage cuts.

Coventry Council can't go on like this anymore. Over 2,000 council jobs have been lost since 2010.

There's homelessness, high rents and dodgy landlords. While Sure Start centres, libraries and youth clubs have all closed.

Boris Johnson says austerity is over, but in the next three years £86 million is set to be cut from Coventry. What will suffer next? Social care? Parks? Schools? Roads?

Jane is someone who will fight Tory cuts, not continue to pass them onto Coventry people.

- Jane says:
- Enough of austerity - stop the cuts
- We need thousands of new homes and jobs to meet Coventry's needs
- For a £12 an hour minimum wage now
- Scrap zero-hour contracts
- Kick privatisation and 'PFI' out of the NHS
- For socialist change in society



photo Scott Jones

Socialists are dedicated to fighting for every possible improvement for working people. The free market is failing to provide decent jobs or homes for everybody. It is undermining our NHS and looting our services.

Instead of paying off the debts of the bankers, we want to change the system so we can use the huge resources that exist in society for the benefit of all, not the fat cats.

We call for the major companies

and banks that dominate the economy to be brought into democratic public ownership, under the control of the working class.

Production and services could then be planned to meet the needs of all while properly protecting the environment. That's why we fight for socialist change across society - so the wealth can benefit all, not just the super-rich.

■ See 'Coventry Socialists' on Facebook for more

Leicester: We can't take any more cuts, any more misery, and we are fighting back

Lindsey Morgan
Leicester Socialist Party

In one of the poorest cities in the country, the cuts will disproportionately affect those on low incomes, particularly women and the disabled - as stated in the council's own budget report!

Excluding social care, 62% has been cut from Leicester services over the last ten years. And the misery is set to continue.

The council is increasing council tax by 4%, pushing the burden of paying for Leicester services even further onto workers.

It's OK though, apparently, because they have a plan to mitigate the worst effects - by effectively letting women know about food banks and giving them budget advice!

The council found £700,000 to buy a car showroom as part of a

gentrification project. Why should we pay more to big business? The money isn't 'trickling down' here.

The council is arguing that by using a 'managed reserves strategy' they won't be implementing cuts this year. This fund was built by cutting more than the government forced them to in order to build up a surplus.

But throughout the year, the mayor has the executive power to make cuts, without the scrutiny of the full council. We have no faith that they won't try more cuts. The council's own report states that major pressures persist and future funding isn't clear.

We can't take any more cuts, any more misery, and we are fighting back.

Leicester Socialist Party lobbied the council on 19 February. We campaign for a solution that could put a stop to all this pain and

suffering the Labour council is inflicting on us.

The council should take the 'Liverpool road' - just like when Liverpool council beat Thatcher - and use reserves and borrowing powers to set a legal no-cuts budget.

This should be fought for by a coalition of council workers and their trade unions and community activists, joining together to pressure the council.

But our Blairite-controlled council won't set a no-cuts budget if we just ask nicely.

If one council refused to make cuts, we could use that movement to inspire communities around the country to put pressure on their councils too, get anti-cuts councils to support each other and unify to force central government to refund the money.

All of this is possible and more. Enough is enough. Fight for more, fight for socialism.



Budget Day Protest

Wednesday, 11 March from 1pm, Parliament Square, London

■ See socialistparty.org.uk for more

Number of women killed by current or ex-partner rises Labour councils 'balance' their budgets with cuts - they are "balancing with women's lives"

The number of women killed by a current or ex-partner has risen - by 27% in a year. For supporters of Women's Lives Matter these statistics are stark and prove the importance of the campaign.

One member said at the recent Women's Lives Matter national meeting - if Labour councils balance their budgets with cuts to services, such as refuges, they are "balancing with women's lives".

The wealth and resources exist to fund refuges and services, to build homes for everyone who needs them, and much more. But this rotten Tory government pushes forward with austerity and Labour councils simply pass on the cuts to vital services.

The result of austerity being allowed to continue is that 64% of people who are referred to refuges in need of housing and support are

Fighting cuts to domestic violence services in Doncaster
photo Women's Lives Matter



turned away. With nowhere to go, women's lives remain at risk.

Women's Lives Matter calls on councils to use their reserves and borrowing powers to fund services we need, as the first step in a challenge to Tory austerity.

Women fleeing violent relationships require a lot more than individual beds. They deserve decent support, a welfare system that works for them, secure and affordable council housing for the long term and secure jobs with decent pay.

That is why Women's Lives Matter is hosting a fortnight of action up to International Women's Day on 8 March. Between now and then we will be protesting at council chambers and government offices, where decisions are being made to further cut vital funding.

Helen Pattison
London Socialist Party

Students and workers out together on Budget Day, 11 March

Socialist Students is backing protests against the Tory budget on 11 March.

They offer us no future whatsoever. Instead, what's on offer is a lifetime of student debt, poverty pay and housing, and climate crisis.

The lives of students and young people have been blotted by a decade of Tory austerity and misery. Boris Johnson's words about austerity being over are hollow. The government has announced that all government departments will see a 5% spending cut.

Our education system is not safe. University campuses are in complete disarray. Tory-driven marketisation is piling up grievances for students and

workers alike.

Socialist Students says:

- Fight for free, fully funded university education
 - Cancel all outstanding student debt
 - Reverse the marketisation of higher education
 - Build council homes and university-run, not-for-profit student housing
 - End low pay and zero-hour contracts
 - Build a united student and worker fightback on the campuses against the Tories
- Read the full statement at socialiststudents.org.uk
Theo Sharieff
Socialist Students national organiser

Join the student fightback: join...
socialist students
socialiststudents.org.uk/join
or call 020 8988 8761
or text your name and school, college or uni to 07749 379 010

University workers' strike over pay, pensions and workload escalates

Workers at over 70 universities have been taking strike action against pay inequality, casualisation and workload, and in defence of pensions. The University and College Union (UCU) is out for 14 days throughout February and March. Below we carry reports from some of the picket lines Socialist Party members have attended.

Cardiff

UCU members at Cardiff University began the strike on 20 February with a bang, starting with a rally of a few hundred members and supporters with speakers including Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn.

Strikers have been buoyed by the vote of the students' union annual general meeting to support the strike, and the backing of more university societies for this round of action, with Socialist Students playing a prominent role.

Dani Smith, a member of Socialist Students and the Socialist Party, spoke to offer solidarity from further education UCU members in Wales who are balloting for a strike over workload, and remind university workers that their comrades in other sectors are racing to join them in taking action.

Socialist Party member Lucy Riglin, chair of the strike committee said: "Strikes can win. We've had enough of the senseless



Sheffield



UEL Stratford, east London

Southampton

A Southampton UCU member explaining why she's striking said: "In three years, I've had three jobs at three universities!" A picket line visitor was the uni's vice-chancellor, keen to find out why members hadn't accepted the 'generous' offer. Then it transpires that Southampton University management have paid themselves a bonus for spending less on staff than they'd budgeted for! What more can you say?

Sue Atkins
Southampton Socialist Party

exploitation of staff and we don't think asking for secure employment and a work-life balance is a radical demand." Lucy is standing for election as president of her branch.

Corbyn gave welcome support, calling management's behaviour an "attack on wages and conditions that is damaging higher education" and linking university workers' campaign to the same issues of precariousness faced by the rest of the working class. He declared himself "proud to stand on a picket line as leader of the Labour Party".

Calling for "free education from cradle to grave," Corbyn contrasted sharply with a previous leader of the Labour Party, Tony Blair, who as leader abolished free education, who spoke on the same day - not from a picket line outside a university, but from inside a lecture hall after crossing a picket line.

Ross Saunders
Cardiff Socialist Party



Keele, Staffordshire

East London

"The only thing standing in the way" against low pay, high workload, insecurity, inequality and pension cuts "is the union". One UCU member said this to the Socialist Party when we went down to support their strike at Queen Mary University in east London.

At Queen Mary, the union has grown by 100 members since the strike started.

UCU is striking 14 times in a month. One worker said: "The scale of action reflects the seriousness of the problem... What's changed? We've taken real action and seen tangible results."

We also heard about the



Socialist Students members at Goldsmiths handed in several sheets of signatures they have gathered of students signing in support of the strike

appalling management bullying and racism at Queen Mary. The gender and racial pay gap is huge - 20%. It was reported to us that a non-white colleague was turned down for a promotion and told they 'didn't have the right face to fit the post.'

On 24 February, UCU members at University of East London (UEL) started striking - with over 70 other unis already out. UEL workers have their own issues they're angry about. The workers want new workload rules worked out, agreed by the union. At the moment, degree courses start at different times, so staff struggle to get their holidays.

Ian Pattison
East London Socialist Party

Keele, Staffordshire

There were loud and determined picket lines at Keele University with banners and loads of placards. Drivers entering the university were stopped and given leaflets about the strike. Delivery vans and many cars hooted their horns to show their support.

A key feature of the picket lines was that they included not just lecturers but students as well. Stoke Socialist Party members and supporters of the local National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) group stood shoulder to shoulder with the pickets and were given a very warm welcome. We took away a pile of UCU leaflets and will give them out on our weekly campaign stall in Hanley.

Andy Bentley
Stoke Socialist Party

SEND US YOUR REPORTS
editors@socialistparty.org.uk

Leicester

De Montfort University staff in Leicester have been out on strike for the first time in many years. Leicester Socialist Students visited the picket lines to show our support. There were five picket lines across the campus which were noisy and energetic and aided by a fair number of school students who were on half term.

We discussed the marketisation of higher education and the increasing use of zero-hour contracts, and the importance of linking struggles in the city, such as with the climate strikers, and the sixth form staff at Wyggeston and Queen Elizabeth I College who are also going out on strike on 27 February.

We gave out our leaflet to a number of strikers and students who were keen to hear our UCU members' perspective on the industrial action. The students who we had spoken to on campaign stalls backing the strike in the

run-up to the action were also very supportive and keen to get involved with Socialist Students. We held a Socialist Students meeting on the campus with UCU members and students to discuss how they could support each other.

The staff we spoke to on pickets were determined to see the action through, and many were disgusted by the threat to dock marks at University of Leicester for students if they refused to cross picket lines. Strikers were also angered by the threats made to international students that their visas could be revoked if they missed lectures.

One striker spoke about the attacks on their conditions within the wider context of austerity, and argued that enough was enough. Socialist Students will continue to support the strikers and build towards uniting workers and students in the fight against austerity and for socialism.

Lindsey Morgan
Leicester Socialist Party

Socialist Party members in CWU

The Communication Workers Union (CWU) is about to reballot its 110,000 postal members for industrial action. This is after the disgraceful actions of unelected high court judges who ruled a 97% record-breaking Yes vote for industrial action illegal.

The CWU then called for a period of calm for serious negotiations. At the first meeting, management informed the CWU that it was going to push through its changes and smash the 'Four Pillars' national agreement to pieces.

Royal Mail has declared all-out war with the CWU, which is viewed as one of the most combative trade unions in the country. It's clear that management has taken confidence with the election of the Boris Johnson government, and believes that now is the time to take us on.

Up and down the country, Royal Mail is announcing that it will be introducing unagreed changes in scores of units (executive action). At the same time, it is refusing to implement the shorter working week which was due last October.

This is clearly the way that Royal Mail CEO Rico Back is aiming to ignore agreements and smash the CWU, in order to bring in maximum

All out to win Royal Mail strike reballot

- For a new massive strike vote
- Defend trade union rights and the right to strike
- Renationalise Royal Mail

returns for the big private capitalists at the expense of workers and the public service. Management also wishes to bring in electronic monitoring of employees without agreement, and work posties into the ground.

We are clearly dealing with a type of management we have never faced before in Royal Mail. We must now get our members prepared for the fight of our lives. We are facing job losses on an unprecedented scale, with 40,000 job losses likely.

We now must tell our members in clear terms what we are facing, and make sure we receive another massive Yes vote for strike action

by holding meetings in every single workplace in the country.

It's also very clear to the membership that we will need serious action as management is forcing change all around the country. This must be met at the very least with a 48-hour stoppage as a first step, which can then be built on.

But we must also take our dispute to the rest of the trade unions and make a call for the whole movement to support us by all the means required - and demand that the Labour Party maintains its policy of renationalisation of Royal Mail, no matter who the next leader is. This is a fight we can't afford to lose.



Dawn rose on Socialist Party members leafletting postal workers at gate meetings across the country on 25 February such as in Leicester (left).

Ross Saunders says: "At the sorting office in Cardiff (above) the reception was warm even if the hailstones weren't. Delivery workers gave us the thumbs up as they drove away waving our

leaflets. A local rep stopped his bicycle to chat and reported the mood was optimistic about beating the turnout threshold, angry at the violation of the democratic right to strike and determined to deal the company a blow in defence of members' interests." photos Steve Score and Ross Saunders

PCS union relaunches pay campaign

Marion Lloyd
Broad Left Network candidate for PCS president

A meeting of the PCS union national executive committee on 19 February agreed to relaunch the union's national pay campaign. PCS represents civil and public servants working for central and devolved governments, as well as private sector workers on government contracts.

Its leadership, drawn mainly from a group called Left Unity, spent

However, no timeline has been offered, and an industrial action strategy has yet to be proposed.

Despite there being a clear opportunity to build the anger of members into a serious national campaign, PCS general secretary Mark Serwotka refused all attempts to strengthen the union's strategy.

He opposed amendments to his campaign paper that would have made explicit the call by PCS for the 2% that all staff have been overpaying on their pensions to be backdated to 2015; that called for an immediate £10-an-hour minimum wage as a step to £12 an hour for low-paid staff; and which highlighted the real cause of attacks on our redundancy rights - the desire to cut jobs.

Serwotka's proposals for the campaign are nothing new. The proposal that individual senior officers of the union's national executive now have responsibility for things

like communications, for coming up with an industrial strategy, and so forth, are good - insofar as they represent a degree of lay oversight that has been lacking. Yet anyone who attended the union's national conference in 2019 and heard the debate there will be left asking, why wasn't all of this done in 2019?

The reality is that the union's current leadership is lost at sea. They lack confidence when it comes to tackling the government, they lack a strategy that members can believe in, and they have the mistaken belief that if they keep calling ballots, the big push involved to turn out the vote will help to halt the falling membership of the union. They're wrong. People join unions when those unions win things.

Socialist Party members in PCS support a new organisation called the PCS Broad Left Network, which has set out a powerful platform for

how to change the union, how to democratise it and move back towards the basic tasks of winning things for members; telling them about it and drawing them into union activity by demonstrating that this has concrete value.

The Broad Left Network is putting forward an alternative leadership for the union by standing for national president and supporting candidates for this year's elections in April-May 2020.

The closing date for nominations is 5 March. We urge all PCS members to nominate and vote for the Broad Left Network-supported candidates, details of which can be found at pcsblnwordpress.com.

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NSSN: Fight the anti-union laws - support the strikes

Packed meeting of workplace militants, strikers, socialists and trade union leaders

Paula Mitchell
London Socialist Party

A packed London meeting of the National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) on 18 February brought together 80 workplace militants, strikers, socialists and leading left-wing trade unionists to discuss some of the most pressing questions facing the working class since Boris Johnson's victory.

Entitled "Fight the anti-union laws - support the strikes", speakers and participants who discussed strategies to fight the Tories included assistant general secretaries of the transport union RMT and general union Unite, Steve Hedley and Howard Beckett, and deputy general secretary of the postal workers' union CWU, Terry Pullinger.

The meeting pledged solidarity with the postal workers embarking on a reballot.

The meeting brought these speakers together with some of the key battles taking place in London at the current time. Kathy Smith, Unite branch secretary, fresh from the victory at Bromley libraries was joined by Unite regional official Onay Kasab reporting on the battle of parking wardens in Hackney, a victory on Woolwich ferries and the fight against outsourcing.

PCS union member Lydia Ndoijeh spoke about the battle to save Ealing tax office, while PCS official Helen Flannagan spoke on behalf of the bold cleaners, security and maintenance workers at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, fighting for union recognition from private employer Interserve (see below).

Fiona Taylor, University and College Union (UCU) member at Goldsmiths University, reported on the national strike action UCU members were about to embark on again (see page 4), while Lewis Baker reported on the fight for £15 an hour by McDonald's workers, members of the bakers' union BFAWU.

Reminding the meeting that the RMT formed the NSSN, Steve Hedley called for "maximum unity among rail unions", and said the fight would require "reaching out to groups like this, and other trade unions, and the whole trade union movement". He pointed to the possibility of unoffical action.

Terry Pullinger explained "we need to inspire a new generation of trade unionists and we'll only do that if they see trade unions taking action. Being prepared to get into the workplace and organise."

Declaring that anti-trade union laws are "in danger of wiping out the trade union movement and neutralising us to staff associations" he referred to the outrageous court action against the CWU and said "if that ain't enough for the TUC to get up off its knees, I don't know what is."

Howard Beckett said that despite the Tories winning the election, "don't let anyone say we should step back from politics, we should step forward". He lambasted Labour councils that use anti-trade union laws against their own workers, and Labour councils that go to war against their care workers.

Onay Kasab said that the test in the Labour leadership election is where do you stand on council cuts - do you agree with the 'dented shield' idea that it's better for cuts to be made by a Labour council than

the Tories, or do you call for needs-based, legal, balanced, no-cuts budgets.

From the floor, Socialist Party member Nancy Taaffe stressed the importance of the political fight, and raised the need for socialists in London's City Hall. Who will fight for socialist policies in London, if Sadiq Khan is left unchallenged by socialists and trade unionists?

The meeting also heard about the youth climate strikes and students supporting UCU strikers.

Chairing the meeting, Socialist Party member and NSSN national chair Rob Williams declared that this is "not a strong Tory government, it is far from certain that it will last five years, but that's conditional on this trade union movement fighting."

He said: "The worst thing we can do is play the waiting game and hope that Boris Johnson forgets he talked about anti-union legislation". He called on the Trade Union Congress - and if not them, the unions that are willing - to use their authority to organise a national tour of rallies in every town and city, to prepare the ground for a national Saturday demonstration.

And "link the strikes, to win those disputes and to build the fight necessary to defeat the Tories and defend the right to strike."

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



Speakers (left to right) Fiona Taylor, Lydia Ndoijeh, Kathy Smith, Steve Hedley, Rob Williams, Howard Beckett and Onay Kasab photos London Socialist Party



Solidarity with the strike to save Ealing Tax Office



Terry Pullinger



Solidarity with the postal workers' dispute

Workers call on Interserve bosses to recognise union

Dave Semple
PCS national executive committee (personal capacity)

On 19 February, members of the PCS union, which represents civil and public servants, as well as private sector workers on government contracts, protested outside Interserve's London headquarters on Waterloo Road.

Their demand was that Interserve recognise PCS and settle a dispute, ongoing now for nearly a year, with union members who work on Interserve's contract at



photo Dave Semple

the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO).

Low-paid workers from Interserve in the FCO took month-long strike action in February.

The dispute began in March 2019 when Interserve unilaterally changed the dates of pay for their staff, inflicting financial hardship. This was the final straw for many staff.

Interserve in the FCO had stripped some staff of paid sick leave, it had illegally withheld annual leave from staff on short-hour contracts, and its use of temporary contracts made workers feel insecure and less likely to raise their concerns.

Strike action has led to significant concessions, including back pay worth thousands of pounds for some staff, who Interserve were ripping off.

It also resulted in a one-off payment for all staff, to compensate for

hardship over the change of pay dates.

But despite negotiating with PCS, Interserve refuses to recognise the union. This means the elected union reps are not entitled to time off to represent their colleagues.

The protest on 19 February, supported by the National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN), the RMT transport union and Socialist Party and Broad Left Network members of the PCS national executive committee, was an attempt to increase pressure on Interserve.

Unite the Union loaned PCS its giant inflatable rat, and activists, including strikers, spoke on a microphone about the strike.

At the end of the rally, strikers spoke openly of the potential for escalating the dispute to all-out action, to force Interserve to do what it should have done a year ago: recognise PCS and lay out plans for serious negotiations.

Anti-academy strikes growing

The anti-academy strikes in east London are growing. St Bede's in Redbridge is joining St Michael's and St Bon's already on strike. National Education Union (NEU) organiser Glenn Kelly says:

"An excellent anti-academies meeting took place in Redbridge on 21 February. Parents and workers are fighting to stop local Catholic primary schools being swallowed up into a 'multi-academy trust' and are supporting NEU members on strike to oppose it. The local priest turned up to defend the proposals - he happens to be one of the people I'm negotiating with for the union. I put him right on a few things and let people know that the Catholic diocese's response to our 97% turnout in our members' strike ballot is to threaten to get a High Court injunction to rule it unlawful."

The UK's public broadcaster, the BBC, is facing renewed threats to funding and jobs. **James Ivens** looks at how the workers' movement can defend employment - and overcome the establishment media's anti-worker propaganda.

■ See also 'Is the BBC worth saving?' in the March issue of *Socialism Today* - read and subscribe at socialismtoday.org

THIS IS THE BBC: FIGHT THE CUTS - AND THE CAPITALIST MEDIA



BBC workers protesting against Blairite attacks in 2004 photo Paul Mattsson



BBC workers on strike against pension cuts in 2010 photo Manchester Socialist Party

How can BBC jobs be saved?

Management at the BBC plans to scrap over 500 news jobs. High-profile targets include reductions at Newsnight and 5 Live, but cutbacks will hit the whole division. The Victoria Derbyshire show, for example, is to be cancelled outright. Scandalously, workers on the programme had to find this out through a leak to the press.

This latest 'restructure' has been looming for some time. Its announcement was due last year and delayed by the general election. But the funding deficit arising from reforms to the licence fee system and market changes goes back years.

NUJ, Bectu and Amicus (now part of Unite) struck for 24 hours in May 2005.

The NUJ struck for two days against pension cuts in 2010. Bectu had accepted the deal. Staff faced losses of between £10,000 and £100,000 to their pensions. The attack (and strike) foreshadowed the general struggle against Tory pension cuts in the public sector in 2011.

In 2013, NUJ and Bectu members walked out together for 12 hours. This was against the 2,000 redundancies and management bullying resulting from 'Delivering Quality First' (DQF) cutbacks.

The main unions involved are the National Union of Journalists (NUJ), and Bectu (now part of Prospect) which organises technicians and other staff. The NUJ has slammed the latest licence fee settlement. Bectu is consulting members on redeployment.

But union members may well ask: with management seeking £800 million of 'savings' across the whole BBC, will an internal move secure my job? And what if I want to keep my current post?

Each time, management was forced to replace flagship scheduled content with recordings or even re-runs, so the NUJ and Bectu do have real power. But short one-off strikes did not prove enough to stop the attacks.

The lesson is therefore that more concerted action is necessary to wring concessions from management. A programme of longer, escalating strikes could draw more BBC workers into the struggle until management makes a real retreat.

The unions must argue for industrial action as the best hope for saving jobs. It's true that senior journalists at the Beeb tend to come from more privileged social backgrounds. But the lecturers are out; even the junior doctors struck in 2016; and many BBC workers are low-paid as well.

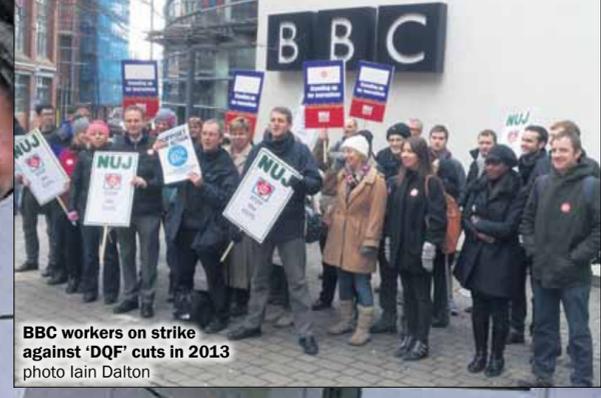
Plus the Beeb is no stranger to strikes. Funding, outsourcing and staffing have been flashpoints under both Blairite 'New Labour' and Tory governments.

As a first step, union leaders should call mass meetings at the BBC to discuss demands and start explaining the need for bolder action. That would give confidence to members that their union is ready to lead collective action - and warn employers to think again.

This would also be a fight for the whole BBC. Its commercial arms - production company BBC Studios, facilities company BBC Studioworks, and BBC Global News Ltd - could have particular power. Media unions more widely have a vested interest too.

In 2004, then director-general Mark Thompson announced one in five jobs would go - a total of 3,780 - mostly through voluntary redundancies. This was a part of New Labour's programme of privatisation and selective cuts. The

After all, the cuts do not begin and end with BBC news. An NUJ victory here would have repercussions for jobs across the entire broadcaster and wider media.



BBC workers on strike against 'DQF' cuts in 2013 photo Iain Dalton



BBC workers on strike against pension cuts in 2010 photo Paul Mattsson



Should we defend the licence fee?

A fight can save the jobs. But without funding to back it up, this will only be a reprieve. So if the context of losing funding is the problem, the answer is not to accept the context.

BBC unions are right to point the finger at the licence fee settlement as underlying the present crisis. In fact, attempts to undermine BBC income - and the state broadcaster's authoritative position in Britain's media landscape - date back to Margaret Thatcher.

More recently, David Cameron's "bonfire of regulations" led in 2015 to the Deregulation Act and David Perry QC's review of the licence fee. The Perry Review surprised neoliberal politicians, and not for the first time, by recommending the fee stay.

Cameron's government took some of the licence fee for local stations as well as TV and broadband infrastructure, but nine-tenths goes to the BBC. In 2018-19, this meant £3.7 billion for the Beeb, with commercial arms bringing in a further £1.2 billion.

Now, the Tories have stopped subsidising licence fees for over-75s not in receipt of pension credit. They have also announced plans to decriminalise non-payment of the licence fee. Both will cost the BBC hundreds of millions.

The government knows it will face enormous public anger at some stage. The BBC's proposed cuts in investigative and local news teams would make it an even more compliant establishment mouthpiece. Some Tories also want to force the BBC to become an online subscription service so that profit-making media firms can fill the resulting gap.

In fact, the government may not be unified on how to attack the BBC. The Times reported on 18 February that Number 10's top advisor Dominic Cummings wants the licence fee abolished on "ideological" grounds.

However, Boris Johnson himself reportedly wants "reform rather than revolution." And the minister in charge of that reform, John Whittingdale, considers the Netflix

model "politically utterly impossible" - not least because older voters who are not on broadband rely on public broadcasting. Meanwhile, earlier cuts closed departments like BBC3, leaving little catering for the net-savvy 16-34 demographic.

BBC unions, with the support of the wider trade union and labour movement, can and should exploit any divisions to press their demands. But does that mean defending the licence fee itself?

For a start, it is a compulsory, flat-rate household charge for anyone who watches live TV or BBC iPlayer. In effect it is a regressive tax. For this reason alone it should be replaced - with funding from general (progressive) taxation.

The entertainment and media unions have traditionally backed the licence fee as stable, ring-fenced funding that it's harder for the government to cut. But years of attacks and the latest developments show this is no guarantee.

The answer is not to defend regressive taxation, but to strike and campaign for the necessary money. Johnson says austerity is over - demand he replace licence fee losses with central funds!

And would a subscription model work anyway? The current £154.50 licence fee works out as £12.88 a month, of which almost half pays for non-streamed services, including radio, orchestras, news and the website.

Market leader Netflix charges just £5.99 to £11.99 a month and doesn't have to fund any of that. Meanwhile, the main competitors - Amazon Prime and Apple TV - are backed by multibillion-dollar tech giants. This doesn't look like a sustainable option.

BBC staff will understandably welcome any concession that shores up their funding. But clearly neither the licence fee nor subscription is a long-term solution.

And why should workers have to pay? Public broadcasting is a public service. It should be free for all at the point of use. But it also needs to be under genuine democratic control.

Isn't the media a barrier to achieving socialist change?

During the years of Jeremy Corbyn's anti-austerity Labour leadership, the BBC joined with the capitalist-owned press in vicious slanders against the left. This reached a high point in the run-up to December's fateful election.

But the idea in some parts of the left that the capitalist media caused the defeat is wrong. Of course it was a factor. But the bosses have always employed lies and propaganda against the workers' movement - sometimes even worse than this. Left-wing governments and revolutionary movements have nonetheless broken through.

In previous articles, the Socialist has explained that two of the main reasons for Labour's defeat were its Brexit position and continuation of Tory cuts in local councils. These and other mistakes gave some credence to the hypocritical attacks on Corbyn. Even quite spurious press smears and talking points can end up in wider circulation as a distorted but ready way of expressing a deeper class anger and political dissatisfaction.

The BBC, of course, is well-known for its pro-establishment bias. Its political editor, Laura Kuenssberg, is a notorious defender of the right and opponent of the left. Its one-sided coverage of the Israel-Palestine conflict is infamous. The list goes on.

The BBC does sometimes criticise the government and report on uncomfortable facts for the bosses. But it is ultimately no more than the media outlet of Britain's capitalist state. Just like the courts, police, army and senior civil servants, it is part of a machine designed and led by representatives of the capitalist class, and in a pinch will always defend capitalist interests.

However, cutting news workers and weakening their unions will only make the situation worse. Journalists so inclined will have even less time and power to investigate, challenge official statements or stand up to editors. Perhaps ironically, the BBC's

institutional backing for the capitalist establishment could even create some complications for uniting public support in its defence. Bold industrial action can overcome this by showing that BBC staff are prepared to fight the government and defend public services.

Such a struggle can also have a political effect on the BBC. Workers who have stood up for themselves are less likely to accept editorial diktats. And a more general rise in trade union militancy can act as a social pressure to force the media to give space to the actions and views of the workers' movement.

Socialists fight for every possible reform that makes it easier to organise workers and argue for our ideas. But that doesn't mean we can rely on institutions owned or controlled by the class enemy to do the job for us - and that includes the BBC. The workers' movement must establish its own independent mass media to counter the bosses' omissions, distortions and lies.

Overcoming the impediment of the capitalist media is only possible by organising workers' struggle and socialist political campaigning. Yes, for reforms to weaken the established media as a tool against the working class. But also for the trade unions and workers' parties to build our own mass media that can finally be a tool for the working class.

And the goal the workers' movement and media must set for the media as a whole is genuine freedom of the press: breaking the capitalists' control. Nationalise the mass media - under the democratic control not only of media workers, but the wider working class.

Allocate democratic access to public print and broadcast resources to all groups and trends of public opinion in fair relation to their size. And guarantee space for minority and experimental projects. A BBC which was part of this framework might finally become a public broadcaster worthy of the name.

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Socialists must defend trans rights



photo Leeds SP

On 18 February, the Morning Star published a cartoon, drawn by Stella Perrett, depicting trans people as predators, using self-identification laws to gain access to and harass other vulnerable communities.

On Sunday 23 February, an apology for the cartoon was issued, claiming that "the cartoon had not been authorised for publication and its appearance in the print edition represents a failure to follow our own procedures for approving submissions."

No explanation for why a contributor with such obviously transphobic views was published at all has been provided. In my opinion the Morning Star is only attempting to mitigate the consequences of its actions, rather than take responsibility for them.

The myth of the 'predatory trans person' - a manipulative man who uses self-identification laws to sneak into women's safe spaces and attack them - is used to justify attacks on trans rights masked as reasonable concern for women and gay, lesbian and bisexual

people. This is the myth that Stella Perrett's cartoon perpetuates.

The claim is reminiscent of those made in defence of segregation and homophobic laws, painting black and gay men as predators to deny them basic rights.

These attacks are as disgusting today as they were then. They are also made with absolutely no supporting evidence.

American states and school districts that protect trans rights report no increase in harassment or abuse in bathrooms and locker rooms. Examples of men pretending to be women to harass women are rare but are just as likely to happen in American states without non-discrimination laws.

This suggests that preventing trans people from using the bathrooms that they want to is simply cruel and does absolutely nothing to protect women from abuse. There is nothing 'reasonable' about transphobia.

Christian Russo
Sheffield Socialist Party

Socialist struggle

Just as people deny climate change and say it's not happening when there is clear evidence of global heating, so it is with socialism. The struggle is hard, with disappointment to overcome, so we motivate, organise and collaborate. As active socialists, we win

campaigns, we demand and initiate change, we support and inspire each other. Our duty is that of optimism and strength when people are unsure of a political name. Socialists provide answers, stand strong, and fight on.

Denise Tooley-Okonkwo
Mansfield

Bending under pressure

Rebecca Long-Bailey told a recent Jewish Labour Movement hustings that she would "welcome" the return of Luciana Berger to the Labour Party.

Berger, the ultra-Blairite and former Liverpool Wavertree Labour MP, stood for the Lib Dems in Finchley and Golders Green in December, and failed to get elected.

The Lib Dems had propped up Cameron's austerity coalition government, and as a party are totally opposed to the interests of the working class. Anybody who stands for the Lib Dems is promoting policies in opposition to everything that the Labour Party should stand for. These individuals should never be allowed back into the Labour Party.

Of course Luciana Berger, when she was a Labour MP, used that platform to publicly slander and vilify her own party. Long-Bailey is the sole 'Corbyn continuity' candidate for Labour Party leadership, so for her to not only say that Berger should be allowed to rejoin the party, but should be "welcomed," is utterly bizarre.

In reality, Long-Bailey's stance shows an unwillingness to stand up to the large hostile audience at the hustings. Any Labour Party leader will come under far greater pressures, from the press, from the lobbyists, from political opponents, and so on. And these pressures will pale into insignificance compared to the pressures a Labour prime minister will have to face down from the capitalist class at home and abroad.

It is not enough to have a vaguely socialist approach and to mean well. A leader of the labour movement needs to fight for the interests of the working class and stand firm against the class enemy. But she has shown an utter lack of the grit needed to defend these ideas when put under pressure.

If this is the best the Labour Party has to offer, then the fight against austerity will have to take place outside the Labour Party.

Annon Cohen
North London

Nationalise the railways!

Greater Anglia trains are shit. They're late, slow, infrequent, old and often cancelled.

Travelling on a train recently a ceiling inspection panel fell down mid-journey, exposing electrical wires and cables underneath. But there was no guard on this service to tell. And there wasn't a staff member on the station platform either.

When we got off the train, the live departure board didn't match up with the train in the station. And there was pandemonium on the platform when the driver announced the train's destination had changed.

There are plenty of companies making lots of money off a failing service. Kick out the privatisers and nationalise the railways; keep the guards on the trains, and invest in a better service.

Ian Pattison
Romford

Public assets or private profit

Capitalist production of electric vehicles is contributing to the turmoil in Bolivia, which holds one quarter of global



Rebecca Long-Bailey - would she stand firm against the capitalist class? photo Paul Mattsson

lithium reserves, essential for battery manufacture.

Over the past decade the previous Morales government moved to create a "100% Estatal" (state) lithium industry, rather than following the 'public-private' model in Argentina and Chile. Without the expertise and equipment to set the industry up, Bolivia looked for international support and in 2018 surrendered a 49% stake to a Chinese consortium for just \$2.3 billion.

In October 2019 a military coup, initiated by allegations of electoral corruption, forced president Evo Morales to flee the country; 17 indigenous protesters have since been killed after the interim government granted the military criminal immunity.

For now, polls indicate Morales' Movement for Socialism retaining majority support in the upcoming elections. Will international capitalists succeed in their colonialist extraction of Bolivia's lithium for profit, or will employment and education be shared with the indigenous people of Bolivia, as Morales envisaged?

Tom Ruddell
Bristol

Andrea Enisouh - a full-hearted comrade

It's very sad news to hear of the passing of Andrea Enisouh. I first met Andrea in the mid-1980s when we were both Militant-supporting students in the north-west of England (Andrea in Manchester and me in Preston). How young we were - just teenagers! She was a force of nature.

Our working-class roots and Marxist ideas gave us confidence to take on the right wing!

Andrea was a working-class fighter and one of the first Militant supporters on the National Union of Students' national executive council.

I worked with Andrea in anti-racist collaboration when I was in Belfast and Andrea in London in the early 1990s. Andrea wrote on the need for socialism to end racism in the Militant pamphlet on the legacy of US black liberation radical, Malcolm X.

In 1997 when I began work for the Committee for a Workers' International (the socialist international organisation to which the Socialist Party is affiliated) in London, Andrea was one of the first comrades I met - still full of energy and enthusiasm for the struggle. A full-hearted comrade.

How very sad her passing, but Andrea left her mark that will be remembered.

Condolences to all of Andrea's family.
Niall Mulholland

Tories' racist views

Eugenics is a term for the spurious theory that people inherit, criminal tendencies and even poverty, and that these conditions could be bred out of the gene pool.

A prime advocate, before Dominic Cummings and Andrew Sabisky were even thought of, was Nazi Dr Josef Mengele.

Mengele, an SS doctor at Auschwitz, oversaw many experiments on both adult and child twins. Many of his 'patients' died or suffered permanent disability, and his gruesome experiments earned him the nickname "Angel of Death."

Boris Johnson's chief strategist Dominic Cummings once famously said, in effect, there was no point in educating the children of the poor because the rich were genetically superior. Eton mess Johnson is a prime example of this superiority.

The resignation of Downing Street "contractor" Sabisky (who links intelligence to race) is a step forward and indicates that Cummings is not as all-powerful as he would like to believe. However, the refusal of Downing Street to repudiate this vile doctrine tells its own story.

Johnson does not need to pretend any more, now the election is over. The most disgusting racist views have been expressed by Johnson, Cummings and Sabisky. That is why the initiative of Unite and other trade unions to march against racism is so important.

Mengele is dead. His views would seem to be alive.

Derek McMillan
East Grinstead

Reclaim the unions

Regarding your article 'Trade unions - new decade, new challenges' (the Socialist 13-19 February), we must remember who is the union; it is each individual member who pays their subs to the collective.

It is therefore the responsibility of each member to attend their branch meetings on a regular basis and make their demands known to regional officers, etc.

Should these people on high refuse to take up workers' demands, then members can give notice of a mass 'chuck out'. The union needs the cash from members, clearly therefore members should call the shots?

Through the system, arses need to be kicked, especially that of Frances O'Grady - who is as much use as a chocolate tea pot.

Adrian Rimington
Chesterfield

Average wages recover to pre-crisis levels - but we're still over a decade behind

Joe Fathallah
Cardiff East Socialist Party

Average wage levels in the UK have, for the first time, recovered to the level they were at before the financial crisis. In the last quarter of 2019, the Office for National Statistics says weekly pay averaged £512 - the highest level since March 2008 with inflation taken into account.

For the Tories in their Westminster bubble, this is a statistic to shout about. (Under)employment minister Mims Davies hailed "a record-breaking jobs market and business confidence on the rise." For ordinary working-class and many middle-class people, however, the reality is very different.

Today's average wages would have been £650 a week had the pre-crisis trend continued, according to the Resolution Foundation think tank. So really we're still behind. And any average figures are artificially skewed upwards by a small number of people receiving obscenely high salaries.

The minimum wage is currently set at £8.21 an hour for workers aged over 25, due to rise to £8.72 in April. A 2019 report by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation estimates that a single person needs an annual wage of £18,800 (plus public services and benefits) for a minimal living standard.



Above: average UK weekly earnings, adjusted for inflation
data from the ONS

However, the same person working full-time on the £8.72 rate would make just £15,870 before deductions. And that's not even taking the reduced rates for workers aged under 25 into account.

While the bosses try to make the working class pay for the crises of capitalism, the rich continue to line their pockets. Just since 2014, shareholders of the largest 100 companies in the UK have received a 56%

increase in dividends, according to the Trade Union Congress.

If the minimum wage had increased at the same rate over that period, it would now be £10.14 an hour. Even this would not be enough.

Big business will always put its own profits ahead of our living standards, but workers are fighting back! McDonald's workers in London have struck for a wage of £15 an hour. Workers at Uber, Deliveroo and TGI Friday have also organised action.

University workers in the University and College Union are currently striking over a number of issues including low pay and insecure contracts (see p7). Posties in the Communication Workers Union could soon join them (see p6).

The Socialist Party fights for:

- Trade union struggle to restore the wage shortfall from the 'lost decade' - and for an immediate increase in the minimum wage to at least £12 an hour, as a step towards a living wage of £15 an hour
- A mass campaign to organise workers into the trade unions - especially young, low-paid and migrant workers
- End age discrimination! For the minimum wage to apply to all workers from day one of employment regardless of age or status
- End precarious employment! For full employment rights from day one on the job. Stop zero-hours - for permanent, full-time work for all who want it, with flexibility on workers' terms, not the bosses'

Weinstein found guilty

A jury in New York City found Harvey Weinstein guilty of rape and sexual assault on 24 February. More trials are ahead for the multimillionaire film producer.

The voicing of decades of allegations against Weinstein initiated the #MeToo outpouring against sexual abuse and violence against women. Sexual exploitation and violence are endemic problems in capitalism and class-based society. We say fighting for liberation means fighting for socialism.

■ This is "about power and money, and the abuse of both" - read the Socialist's review of 'She Said - Breaking the sexual harassment story that helped ignite a movement' at socialistparty.org.uk

WHAT'S YOUR VIEW?

editors@socialistparty.org.uk

Bezos gives \$10bn for climate - nationalise the rest!

Adam Harmsworth
Coventry Socialist Party

A \$10 billion 'Bezos Earth Fund' is the biggest 'giveaway' yet by owner of Amazon and world's richest man Jeff Bezos. He has claimed the fund will go to "any effort that offers a real possibility to help preserve and protect the natural world."

Perhaps the Socialist Party should bid for the fund, having a far more sincere programme to protect the planet than any billionaire! Bezos might not be so fond of us, not least because he has repeatedly featured in the Socialist for his immense wealth and greed.

\$10 billion equates to 8% of Bezos's current wealth. Losing even 8% would be ruinous for most ordinary people. But Bezos has been a billionaire for over 20 years and has been worth over \$10 billion since 2010; he could have poured billions of dollars in to fight climate change years ago!

But the capitalist system grants



photos reynormedia, Steve Jurvetson, Scott Lewis, all CC

Bezos and the rest of the capitalist class the right to choose when and how they spend 'their' money. This is despite the fact that his private fortune was made by the hard work of hundreds of thousands of Amazon employees - and could benefit

all humanity and help save the planet right now.

Meanwhile, the group 'Amazon Employees for Climate Justice' has said the company threatened to fire employees when as many as 1,800 of them called on their employer to do

more to fight climate change during the September climate actions. And Bezos has fought tooth and nail to avoid taxes on Amazon's profits to fund socially useful investment!

It seems this Earth Fund is little more than a publicity stunt. There is no serious intent from Bezos, Amazon, or any of the biggest polluting businesses to change their practices and risk their profits to take action that would prevent global catastrophe.

The resources exist to fight climate change right now; billionaires like Bezos are in the way, hoarding money and holding the planet to ransom. Preventing warming of more than 2°C will require expenditure of \$2.15 trillion every year, according to the Economist - about 2.5% of world economic output.

Socialist change is urgently needed to rid the bosses of their power, taking their money and big business into public ownership under democratic workers' control so these resources can be planned to genuinely combat climate change now.

Rebecca Long-Bailey rally for Labour leadership in Birmingham

Council cuts could cost Labour another general election

Oliver Walder
Birmingham South West
Socialist Party

150 people tuned out in Birmingham to hear Rebecca Long-Bailey's pitch for the Labour leadership. The decline in Momentum's influence and the partial demobilisation of Labour members is reflected in the fact that Jeremy Corbyn spoke to an audience of 800 in the same venue in 2015.

A Birmingham Labour councillor, reflecting public despair at the relentless cuts in council budgets, asked what she would do to help Labour councillors who didn't want to vote for cuts. All she said was that she would enable councillors to show people how good things could be under a Labour government, while they are cutting services beyond the bone!

There was no mention of no-cuts

budgets or using borrowing powers and reserves to protect services. She was also taken to task by a Labour member for signing up to the International Holocaust Remembrance Association's definition of antisemitism.

Rebecca made many good points that Socialist Party members would agree with. Building 100,000 council houses a year, providing secure, well-paid employment, ending the race to the bottom and blaming the near collapse of public services on underfunding not immigration.

She talked about aspirations for improved conditions of life, but this wasn't linked to the need for socialist policies or the need to change society. The word 'socialist' was only mentioned once. Rebecca Long-Bailey is a long way from the socialist leader that workers need. The battle for a worker's party needs to continue.



photo Martin Reynolds

Socialist sellers

Marx is back. And this time he's got a card reader!

If Karl Marx were alive today, I'm certain he'd have a card reader. One of the best ways to build the Socialist Party is for people to buy our publications and read what we say.

But this approach has become a little harder with the amount of people who no longer use cash. To overcome this problem I purchased a card reader for £18 in September 2018.

The purchase of that card reader has made a very significant increase in the amount of copies of the Socialist we sell and the fighting fund raised for the Socialist Party too.

Since Sept 2018 I've taken 435 payments on the card reader, totalling £1,111.

Not all of this is from sales of the Socialist. And not all are my sales.

The Socialist Party uses it when we're campaigning in Waltham Forest. Other members often send people over to me to make a payment - to buy the Socialist or make a donation.

Some of the £1,111 is also room money or socialist book sales. But that just shows how valuable the card reader is.

Since the start of January this year, I've sold 142 copies of the Socialist, 60 of those on the card reader.



photo Shac

Housing cuts cost lives

Suzanne Muna
Social Housing Action Campaign
(Shac)

We gathered outside Peabody Head Office on the evening of 19 February to make the point that cuts to the community and neighbourhood services cost lives, and are counter-productive.

Housing association Peabody plans to drastically cut its neighbourhood managers and has already done away with the community services team. The organisation has already lost valuable staff trained to intervene in domestic violence, abuse, and anti-social behaviour cases.

A depleted team remains - with less time, fewer resources, and less specialist expertise for supporting tenants, residents and service users. One tenant said: "We've had three neighbourhood managers in as many months. We now have an interim neighbourhood manager who's got 1,000 properties to deal with."

Many staff leaving work welcomed the action, took leaflets, and described the constant change and restructuring that the Peabody executive has inflicted on the organisation.

One person said: "Every time a

Shac and the Unite the Union Housing Workers Branch are already planning their next joint action, so check their sites - housingworkers.org.uk and shaction.org - for regular updates

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Waltham Forest



Basingstoke

I ask if people would like to pay solidarity price for the Socialist, to help support what we do, and around half say yes. Mostly £2, but also £3, £5, and a few times £10. I've raised £69 selling the Socialist at solidarity price this year.

Martin Reynolds
Waltham Forest Socialist Party

Martin also told us about the response the Socialist Party got on our latest campaign stall:

Waltham Forest
People are no longer ashamed to say they are poor - and being made poorer by the greedy landlords

We appealed to young people to step forward and sign our petition for rent control and council housing. A 19 year old stopped and said to me:

"I work in a hotel in Waterloo. It takes me an hour to get to work.

"I live at home with my mum. I want to leave home. I want my independence. I want to live in my community.

"I spend ten hours a day working and travelling. I don't want to have to move out and have to travel further and far longer just to find somewhere cheaper to live."

I asked if he would like to join our fight for rent control and council housing and he said: "yes what can I do?"

I said you can start by speaking into our microphone and telling everyone what you just told me. And to my surprise, he did. That took courage. I could never have done that at his age.

I left home at his age. I did it because wages as a factory worker allowed me to. And there was also lots of council housing. But that's all changed.

We use our open mic to tell workers tell us about the crap they have to deal with.

The Socialist Party was overwhelmed, with people telling us they are being driven further into poverty and signing our petition. A number of people said they were glad we were there.

They cannot afford the rent. It seems people are no longer afraid or ashamed to tell us they are poor and being made poorer by the greedy landlords. 22 of them bought a copy of the Socialist.

Housing is an explosive issue. In the words of our open mic speaker "this has to end".

Basingstoke
NHS: Workers are angry they've been lied to

Our campaign stall was very busy with lots of debate on 22 February. There's a lot of anger about the hospital that was promised by our Tory MP Maria Miller before the election. Now we can read in our local paper that was all a lie.

Basingstoke Council is cutting £5 million from services, which have already been decimated by ten years of cuts.

Two libraries will close. Council tax is going up.

Hampshire Council is cutting £80 million which will hit Basingstoke social care and school budgets.

We are campaigning to stop the cuts and organising a public meeting on Wednesday 18 March.

Mayola Demmenie
Public meeting: Organise, fight, resist. 7.30pm, Melrose Community Centre, Abbey Road, RG24 9ES



photo Socialist Party Wales

Stop the council cuts

Stoke
Strikes can stop £5,000 pay cuts

150-200 angry council workers met outside Stoke Town Hall on 19 February to protest against cuts that will leave some workers £5,000 a year worse off.

The Tory and Independents-run council are proposing savage budget cuts and attacks on council workers' pay and conditions.

All the protesters that we spoke to agreed that a ballot for strike action - from all three unions, Unite, GMB and Unison - is necessary as soon as possible.

Andy Bentley

Stop attacks on our council jobs and services
Ballot for strike action
Demand no-cuts councillors

Swansea Council keeps on cutting

Swansea Socialist Party challenged the Labour cabinet when it voted through further cuts, increases to service charges and an above-inflation council tax rise. Despite £70 million cuts, they claim services have improved over the past five years.

Attempting to put on a positive spin, the cabinet report claimed that £35 million was being added to the budget. It all sounds optimistic, but really it's a disingenuous statement from a desperate council.

What is really happening? There has been a one-off £17 million Tory election bribe, a 4.5% increase in the council tax costing residents £8 million and another £10 million more cuts.

Swansea residents will be dipping into their pockets once more because of the failure of the council to fight for the resources needed to run the city from the Tories in Westminster and the Welsh Labour government in Cardiff. £40 million more cuts are planned over the next three years.

Burying your head in the sand and hoping against hope that the Tory leopards will change their spots is no strategy whatsoever. Following the example of the Militant Liverpool City Council in the 1980s - that refused to implement Tory cuts - is increasingly becoming the only serious strategy to stop the destruction of council jobs and services.

In neighbouring Carmarthenshire Council, the workers' Unison union branch has consistently led the demand for the council to set a legal no-cuts budget. Now other local government union branches across Wales are starting to line up to support this call.

Alec Thraves
Swansea Trade Union Council vice president

Join Swansea Trade Union Council lobby and protest at the full council meeting. Thursday 5 March, 4pm, Swansea Guildhall

Newham, east London
Socialist Party calls 3 March protest to oppose £45 million cuts

Newham Council set their budget on 3 March. It will be a cuts budget because they want to make £45 million 'savings'. So we are organising a protest at the town hall outside the meeting.

These cuts are linked to the gentrification of Green Street and Queen's Market. We want a guarantee that Hamara Ghar sheltered accommodation will stay, and the same for Terry Waite House.

Newham council should refuse to carry out the cuts, and instead use its reserves to set a budget which meets our borough's needs.

Lois Austin
Lobby the council to say - no cuts! Assemble 5.30pm, outside East Ham Town Hall, 328 Barking Road, E6 2RP
Read more 'Stop Newham Labour's cuts and gentrification' at socialistparty.org.uk

Congress 2020 appeal

Donate to help us renew vital resources

Ken Douglas
Socialist Party national treasurer

We are asking all our members to donate to the Congress 2020 appeal. Delegates and visitors from across England and Wales and internationally will be coming together on 29 February and 1 March for the Socialist Party congress.

At this event, we will be assessing the depth of the ongoing capitalist crisis and its effects in Britain, Europe and across the world. We'll be discussing the movements of workers and young people fighting back - protesting against climate change, poverty, inequality and oppression.

A crucial aspect is the Socialist Party's participation in these movements, putting forward a strategy and programme to unite the working class, and posing the need for socialist change. Without the necessary finance we will be constrained from trying to reach as wide an audience with our socialist ideas.

We continually need to renew our resources to enable us to be as effective as possible. For example, we have recently bought a new copypainter costing £3,500.

Our old one had done over 4.5 million copies and was a bit worn out! We use it to enable us to quickly and cheaply print leaflets and posters for the many protests and strikes that occur on a daily basis.

in the printshop, at a cost of over £7,000. We have also had to get the roof repaired, replacing a number of cracked and broken tiles, another £1,000.

We encourage all our branches to come and visit the new HQ and see the steps forward we have made for ourselves. It would have not been possible without the tremendous £241,000 that our members and supporters raised over the last two years in the building fund appeal.

4.5 million
copies produced by our old copypainter - it's a bit worn out!

There will also be a subs appeal at the Congress - asking all our members to increase their regular membership sub. We are aiming for a 10% increase overall to strengthen the regular finance coming into the party.

This Congress will demonstrate how the Socialist Party's programme shows a way out of this capitalist crisis. The amount of wealth in the world could ensure a decent life for everyone but only if the working class and poor can wrest the main levers of the economy from the hands of the super-rich capitalist elite and democratically control and plan society to meet the needs of the many.

That's why building the Socialist Party and winning people to socialist ideas is so important - and why we are asking all our members and supporters to help provide the finance to put them into practice.

Our building fund raised **£241,000**

2020 has also seen us establish ourselves in our new national headquarters, which we bought in July 2019. This has been a tremendous step forward for the party after renting for 20 years, and is a great investment in the future. After also having a separate printshop for that time, it has enabled us to bring all our operations together under one roof.

However, this has also come with extra costs. We have had to overhaul the heating system, replacing two units and installing a new one

Help fund the fightback
DONATE
socialistparty.org.uk/donate

Socialist Party Fighting Fund

	£ received	£ target	January to March 2020	Deadline: 1 April 2020
Northern	680	750		91%
Wales	1,646	2,300		72%
East Midlands	1,242	1,850		67%
Southern & SE	1,382	2,350		59%
South West	965	1,800		54%
North West	509	1,150		44%
London	1,878	4,600		41%
Yorkshire	759	2,550		30%
West Midlands	361	2,600	14%	
Eastern	117	1,200	10%	
Other	5,540	3,850		144%
TOTAL	15,085	25,000		60%

Germany: Right-wing terror attacks - fight racism, fight capitalism!



Sascha Staničić addressing an anti-racist rally in Berlin in the aftermath of the racist attacks in Chemnitz photo CWI

The murder of nine people in two shisha bars in the German town of Hanau by a fascist gunman is the third fatal right-wing terrorist attack in the country in just nine months. But as **Sasha Staničić** (Sol - CWI, Germany - national spokesperson) explains, the laments of establishment politicians over such attacks will not eradicate the far-right threat. On the contrary, their anti-working-class policies have created a fertile soil for the growth in racist parties like the AfD.

The racist murders in Hanau are part of a chain of right-wing terror attacks and racism. They are not caused by the sick brains of individual perpetrators, but by a capitalist society that produces racism and right-wing forces on a daily basis. And a state in which networks of racists, fascists and right-wing populists can operate. Just recently, a fascist terror network was discovered - the so-called "Gruppe S" - which involved a police administrator. Right-wing networks exist in the Bundeswehr - the German army.

Last October, there was the antisemitic attack on a synagogue in Halle. The racist mob attacks on 'foreigners' in the streets of Chemnitz was only a year and a half ago.

The network of Nazis and Verfassungsschutz - domestic security service agents - suspected of being behind at least ten National Socialist Underground (NSU) murders between 2000 and 2007 has still not been fully uncovered.

The threat from fascists is growing daily, but the state authorities arrest people who fly a Kurdish flag.

And FAZ - Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, a conservative paper - denounces left-wing 'extremist' activities in the left party Die Linke. After the recent events in Thüringia's state parliament, where for the first time the conservative CDU and liberal FDP deputies elected a state prime minister together with the far-right populist AfD, one commentator after another falsely equated the left and the right.

One thing is clear: regardless of whether 'Tobias R' committed the Hanau crime alone or as part of a group - his actions were prompted by the AfD and all those who incite against migrants.

It is no coincidence that the gunman chose two shisha bar places for his murders. For months there has been racist incitement against such places of migrant culture by the AfD, and also in the capitalist media.

The fact that this atrocity took place in Hanau, in the state of Hesse, should not really be a surprise. Hesse was a focal point of the NSU murders and the scene of last year's murder of CDU politician Walter Lübcke. In Hanau itself, there is an active Nazi scene which has attacked left-wingers and migrants.

Now there has to be a clear response. It is necessary to get organised - against the Nazi murderers and against those who have lit the fuse with their political actions.

A central role must be played by the trade unions which, with six million members, are the largest multi-ethnic organisations. Their primary task should be to combat the social causes that give rise to racism. They should mass leaflet workplaces and invite people to workplace meetings.

On this basis, they could organise a nationwide demonstration against right-wing terror and racism together with the #unteilbar-Bündnis ('Indivisible - alliance'), Die Linke (the Left party) and migrants' associations, and combine the fight against the right wing with the trade union and wider social struggles. Or why not even strike in protest against right-wing terror?

Divide and rule

There is no capitalism without racism, said Malcolm X, the US civil rights activist. The capitalists need racist divisions in order to exploit the wage-earning class. 'Divide and rule' is the old familiar motto. That is why there are special laws for migrants, and that is why not only the AfD agitates against non-Germans.

For years, we have seen campaigns by the Bild newspaper, other media, and the capitalist parties against immigrants. So, those who have capital and power can also distract attention from the fact that they and their system are the real causes of social problems such as

unemployment and cuts in services.

It is these social problems that are the root cause of the rise of the AfD and growing racism. This, in turn, strengthened the militant Nazis in their thinking and further radicalised them.

The capitalist state promotes racism and usually lets the fascists do their thing. Whoever believes that the state - whose security service is obviously connected to the series of NSU murders, and that pro-capitalist politicians - who have undermined the right of asylum and carry out daily deportations, will effectively do something against right-wing extremism, also believes in fairy tales!

The investigation of the murders must not be left to the state which, especially in Hesse, is itself knee-deep in the 'brown' swamp.

Sol demands the formation of an independent committee of inquiry consisting of migrant associations, the local population and the trade unions, in order to clear up the background of the crime and to identify possible further dangers. These must also have the right to inspect all police investigation findings.

The left must not, however, limit itself to moral indignation and expressions of sadness about the Hanau murders. It must not refrain from naming the deeper causes of the right-wing terror and the arsonists in pinstripes and pantsuits.

We now need joint mass mobilisations and actions of trade unions, Die Linke, and social movements to stop the right, and for social rights

and a better life for all.

The best fight against racism, fascism and right-wing populism is the common fight of wage earners, young people, and socially disadvantaged people for higher wages, better working conditions, lower rents, decent social benefits, against precarious working conditions and exploitation, and for equal rights for all people living here. This cannot be conducted with the established parties responsible for 'Agenda 2010' - raising the retirement age, horrendous rents, etc.

Socialist challenge

Getting to the root of the evil also means questioning the capitalist system and discussing alternatives to the power of capital and concentration of wealth in a few hands.

Sol says: as long as the banks and corporations are privately owned by a few, and democracy ends at the factory gate, social problems and fears of the future will drive people into the arms of right-wing criminals.

Only a socialist democracy in which the banks and corporations are in public ownership and democratically controlled and managed by the working population, can solve social problems, put an end to the capitalist crisis, and halt the environmental destruction.

We need a strong, socialist, workers' party that does not play the game of the established parties but consistently represents the interests of the majority of the population, regardless of skin colour, religion, and nationality.

NORTHERN IRELAND'S STRIKE WAVE

Don't give the power back - build a workers' political alternative

Northern Ireland's government was suspended between 2017 and 2020 after the sectarian parties refused to reach a power-sharing agreement following the 'cash for ash' scandal. Now a strike wave has forced them and the bosses to give ground. The Socialist spoke to public sector union Nipsa's deputy general secretary **Carmel Gates** (in a personal capacity) about the struggles.

Were the private sector strikes in 2019 a watershed for workers' struggle?

Yes. There's been a significant change in Northern Ireland. We've gone from a period of having the least number of days lost in strikes to potentially now moving into a peak that we haven't seen in decades.

And I think it was the Harland and Wolff shipyard occupation victory that kick-started that. The shipyard was facing closure. It's an historic landmark. Not just on the landscape, with the two very prominent cranes, Samson and Goliath - it has also been one of the most important employers.

The proud industrial heritage within Belfast and Northern Ireland - much of this has gone. Symbolically the action taken by shipyard workers has had an impact. People saw those workers standing up and saving industry, saving something that is monumental.

And it has to some degree changed the landscape - the confidence that workers now feel. Quickly after Harland and Wolff, Wrightbus - a factory that makes buses - was facing closure. And again, the workers took to the outside of the factory and made their presence felt.

Young people, who've not seen trade unions in action before, are now seeing what trade unions really are for. When you see workers standing outside a factory, you see them saying 'we're telling you what we want. We have the power.' And older workers, who had lost their confidence, are saying: 'That's what trade unionism is about!'

And then the civil service strike started last summer, while Northern Ireland's government in Stormont was still suspended?

Yes. The strike was about pay restoration after ten years of real-terms pay cuts. But more to the point, setting out our stall for next year, as in, you're not doing this again.

There was no end in sight for restoring devolution at that time. But even if we're not fighting with Stormont politicians, we're fighting with senior civil servants - and



Nipsa members picketing during their pay strike last July photo Donal O'Cofaigh

essentially, with Westminster, who were setting the below-inflation pay remit in the absence of local politicians.

We had a very, very successful strike day in July. And since then we have taken a number of strike days, and some very successful selective strike action.

Because of the reduction in numbers of the civil service, and the fact there's been a moratorium on recruitment for a while, there's a high number of agency workers in the Northern Ireland civil service. Normally you worry that agency workers can be used to undermine a dispute.

We found that agency workers - who are mainly young, desperate for a job and feeling exploited themselves - joined us in the strike. Even though we didn't ballot them, they walked out en masse in support of the dispute, which was excellent. We feel that was part of a new-found confidence.

Our hopes for a Corbyn government were dashed. Nonetheless, people have said: 'We're still up for the fight.' So that took us into December - and the health service dispute.

What is significant about the NHS strike?

For the first time in the 103-year history of the Royal College of Nursing - which is not affiliated to the Irish Congress of Trade Unions

or Britain's Trade Union Congress - it took strike action.

As a result of a situation of low pay and staffing levels, and with no choice, the RCN balloted and got a huge return in favour of strike action. And on 18 December, along with Unison, Nipsa and Unite, the RCN took strike action.

Since then there's been different action. The nurses have been on strike on more than one day. This is the most significant action in the health service since 1982, when there was the pay dispute.

And the anger on the picket lines - the picket lines have been huge, they've been noisy. And they've been overwhelmingly supported.

In fact, the impact of that action has changed the dynamic of politics in Northern Ireland. Coming as it did in a list of other actions where workers have gained confidence, it has led to a forcing of the Stormont parties back into power.

Also upfront has been the issue of teachers' pay. Teachers in Northern Ireland have been in a three-year dispute. It's action short of strike, which means they don't do duties after school, which has a significant impact on the workings within education.

In practically all of the public sector, as well as the private sector, there is a mood among workers now that 'enough is enough'.

What are the next steps for the workers' movement?

I'm not suggesting the sectarian issues have gone, because they haven't. But as historically in Northern Ireland, if the workers' movement is at the fore, then sectarianism can be pushed back, because Catholics and Protestants are struggling together.

The expectation of workers has now risen. The sectarian politicians are not

going to deliver on all the issues we want. There is now, for the trade union movement, the real task of building a political alternative.

In Northern Ireland now, there's the embryo of a workers' political alternative - we've seen a bit of a better vision, so let's build on that, and make it political, and make it permanent.

The smallest sectarian incident can change this. That's why we need to cement this now, to say workers can pose a political alternative. Don't give power back to the politicians. Build a party that represents workers' interests.

■ Listen to the full interview in episode 59 of our podcast **Socialism**, available on all major platforms

Constituent assembly demand and a revolutionary programme

In the recent mass movements against austerity and the capitalist establishment in Chile, the demand for a constituent assembly has arisen. This demand has also surfaced in similar movements worldwide. What is a constituent assembly and what role can it play in a struggle to transform society? **Tony Saunois**, secretary of the CWI, who was in Chile last year, answers these questions. See socialistworld.net



SOLIDARITY WITH STRIKING UNIVERSITY STAFF

“”

“I am on strike because I am on a zero-hours contract. I was shocked at the level of casualisation at my university. 50% of staff are on casual contracts. And on top of that pay has gone down!”

Bea Gardner, UCU rep and Socialist Party member

Workers and students unite

Reece Lawton
Nottingham University
Socialist Students

It is time for students to coordinate action with striking staff, as our struggles against casualisation, the commodification of education, and attacks on trade unions are a struggle against the same enemy - the Tories, the bosses and their system.

The trebling of tuition fees, which came alongside a cut in government funding to universities, has taken its toll on university workers and students alike. On the one hand, it has meant increased workloads and attacks on pay, pensions and conditions for staff. On the other hand, it has meant student debt, spiralling housing costs, and cuts to courses and student services.

This strike is a significant step towards building a united student and worker struggle that fights for the abolition of tuition fees, for an end to the marketisation of higher education, and for a fully-funded education system where the objective is the pursuit of knowledge rather than making profit.

Join your teaching staff and support workers in the University and College Union (UCU) on the picket lines, and let's build a movement to resist Tory austerity and defend our right to protest on the campuses!

■ See reports from the picket lines on page 5 and read more about the strike at: 'UCU: Striking to fight education cuts and marketisation' at socialistparty.org.uk

UCU strikers, students and RMT transport union members on a picket line together at King's College London
photo Gary Harbord



ISSN 1366-9621



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