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12-18 March 2020



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the Socialist

Formerly **Militant**

CORONAVIRUS



FULL NHS



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■ **Take over private healthcare facilities**

■ **Stop the Tory sell-off**

■ **Make big business pay**

Jon Dale
Secretary, Unite union
Nottinghamshire NHS branch
(personal capacity)

Britain has almost the fewest intensive care beds per person, and hospital beds overall per person, of any country in Europe. How is our NHS going to cope with an influx from Covid-19?

It's not just vulnerable coronavirus sufferers who are at risk if there

are no critical care facilities for them. Patients suffering other serious illnesses and injuries during an epidemic could have nowhere to go.

Some estimates for how much of Britain's population could contract Covid-19 during an epidemic range from 30% to 60%. While the vast majority will not need hospitalisation, those who do will put even more strain on time and space because of the need for isolation, special protective equipment and extra cleaning.

The government must immediately reverse its decades-long policies of cuts and privatisation. It should also allow the NHS to requisition private sector resources, in particular private healthcare facilities, if needed, to guarantee extra capacity during the crisis.

The NHS had just 4,100 intensive care and high-dependency beds in 2018. Germany has around four

times as many per head. Even the US system, unprepared and riddled with private sector inefficiencies, has around ten times as many per head!

The Tories want to use trade talks to Americanise the NHS. But the world's most powerful economy is showing us the dangerous limits of that system.

Donald Trump's blinkered understanding of how the virus spreads has worsened its impact. By 1 March South Korea had run 100,000 tests, but the US under 500. By 8 March over 500 US cases had been reported, with many more certainly undetected.

The US Centers for Disease Control announced tests would be free - but hospitals have nonetheless billed patients thousands for staff time in administering them! Alex Azar, US health secretary, has been unable to report how many have been tested because competing

private companies, and the public sector, have created and distributed different tests!

28 million people in the US have no health insurance. Many more are 'underinsured' so may have to pay huge bills for testing and treatment. 30% of workers have no entitlement to sick pay.

With a market shortage of diagnostic kits, and Trump's dismissal in February of the viral threat as a Democratic Party "hoax," the US could see one of the worst epidemics of the advanced economies.

Health officials have now had to promise four million tests in a week. And under pressure, Trump has been forced to promise support for workers so that they are "not going to miss a paycheque" and "don't get penalised for something that's not their fault."

What help the US capitalists will

grant is yet to be seen. But the lesson is simple: the state is having to intervene because the market is incapable of running public services and protecting workers.

Meanwhile, even former Tory health secretary Jeremy Hunt admitted "the NHS has centralised structures, bureaucracy that it's sometimes criticised for, but it does mean it can react in a very coordinated and integrated way in a crisis like this."

What a hypocrite! Thirty years of privatisation by Tory, New Labour and coalition governments have not yet destroyed the NHS, thanks to resistance from workers and patients.

But their direction has been relentlessly towards the US system, including in the post-Brexit trade talks (and beforehand under the EU as well). Socialist policies to save the NHS are vital.



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the **Socialist**
 formerly **Militant**

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 12-18 March 2020

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

Coronavirus infects the world economy

Socialist Party
WHAT WE THINK

The biggest one-day fall in stock markets since the financial crisis; an oil price war between Saudi Arabia and Russia, and the fastest drop in the cost of oil for 30 years. The impact of coronavirus on an already fragile world economy is creating enormous volatility, aggravating a slowdown and risks plunging the world into a recession that could even be as deep as 2008-09.

Supply chains have been hit, initially as a result of temporary factory closures in China. That in turn has reduced world trade, with sea freight sinking to its lowest level since 2008. This is combined with a fall in demand for air travel, hotels, conferences and outside entertainment. So tourism is affected, one of the main industries in Italy, a country badly hit by the Covid-19 virus.

The economic impact is a scissors effect from two directions: 'supply shock' of disruption to goods and 'demand shock' of people staying at home more, so spending less money than usual. More and more people have been advised to self-isolate or just don't want to risk going out much. Some companies have told staff to work from home, including a number of major tech companies in the US.

All this has led to stock market volatility, including at one point the largest one-day fall on the US stock markets for over ten years. The stock markets don't reflect the real value of company assets, nonetheless a real reduction in global economic growth is taking place.

It is not yet known how widely the virus will spread and the timescale. But since its onset, the OECD has written that global growth might even shrink in the first quarter of 2020. It has forecast a minimum fall in GDP growth of 0.5% this year, or 1.5% if there is a severe pandemic. Others have suggested there could be a much worse potential fall - nearer 5%.

Underlying weakness

Whatever the eventual economic impact, it won't be solely due to Covid-19, as the world economy was already very vulnerable to shocks. In the decade since the 2007-08 financial crisis, governments worldwide have been struggling to improve weak economic growth. Stimulus measures were never entirely

stopped, including interest rates being held at historically low levels - presently negative in Japan and the Eurozone. Then, more recently, came signs of a new recession on the horizon.

Debt levels have never been higher. Total debt - governmental, companies and households - is now over three times the size of the global economy. The virus could quickly become a factor tipping some of these debts into unsustainability.

Investment and, in some countries, productivity levels remain low. Given how fragile the world economy is and its present stage in the boom-slump cycle, the virus outbreak could potentially trigger a rapid descent into recession worldwide.

Governments and central banks are desperately trying to prevent this by injecting more stimulus measures. The US Fed made a 0.5% emergency interest rate cut, the biggest since 2008, and a number of other central banks cut rates too. The IMF, World Bank and US Congress issued emergency funding packages, together totalling over \$70 billion.

China and Japan are also among the major economies which have ploughed additional money into financial institutions.

Limited options

However, the financial tools they can all use were partly used up during and after the 2007-08 crisis, especially the ability to lower interest rates. And as the Economist pointed out: "No amount of cheap credit can stop people falling ill". So governments and banks are flailing around without any sure way of achieving a safe landing.

Another factor limiting their response is the increased tensions between the global powers compared to a decade ago, which cut across cooperation in fighting the virus and its knock-on effects.

Alarm is coming from capitalist classes about how weak public health services generally are, now that whole economies face consequences that could directly hit their interests. In the US, a quarter of workers have no paid sick leave and 28 million have no health insurance.

The right-wing Economist admitted that more entitlement to sick pay would cut the spread of the virus and help "soften the blow to demand which, along with a supply shock and a general panic, is hitting economies".

The OECD too, wrote: "This episode of weak growth reinforces the need for stronger public investment in many countries, broadly defined to include education and health care spending, to support demand



“”
With the economy barely growing, new chancellor Rishi Sunak will not be able to get anywhere near to solving the multiple crises in health, social care, and living standards

and boost medium-term living standards".

There's also realisation that the huge stimulus injections can just end up in the pockets of the rich, as has mainly happened since the last crisis. So the Economist argues: "Better to support the economy directly, by helping people and firms pay bills and borrow money if they need it".

The alarm is high enough that some such limited measures are being announced across the world, but we demand that they go much further to prevent working-class and middle-class people from bearing the cost of the coronavirus crisis. No jobs or wages should be lost and everyone should have access to the best possible health care.

Where necessary, to maintain jobs and pay, large companies should be nationalised, with compensation paid only on the basis of proven need. Trade unions must demand that company books be opened to inspection, and government assistance be given to small businesses that genuinely need it.

These demands and more should also apply when, once again, workers are faced with paying the price of the coming downturn.

There will understandably be anger towards governments over inept responses to the spread of Covid-19 and lack of transparency. This is already the case in China, but also in western countries, including the US, where Trump has been

dangerously dismissive and shown lack of preparation.

As capitalism is a system based on profit and not human wellbeing, and is now in long-term economic decline, it will resist giving sufficient basic protection and aid to the majority in society when disasters hit - whether weather-related, diseases, or geological events.

Only through socialist planning in every country, coordinated on a global scale and utilising the immense resources that would become available from publicly owning the main industries, will this be possible.

Britain

None of the modest measures expected in this week's UK budget to counter Covid-19 will fundamentally change the fact that the NHS can't cope with a major epidemic.

Inadequate funding over many years has meant devastating staff shortages and lack of beds and equipment. The severe cuts in funding to local authorities will also become even more clearly exposed, as councils are meant to be able to play a key role in responding to public health emergencies.

Neither will any attempted 'feel-good' measures in the budget - designed to reward voters for returning Johnson's government to power with a majority - make up for long-stagnant wages and the fact that in recent years the poorest families have become poorer.

With the economy barely growing, new chancellor Rishi Sunak will not be able to get anywhere near to solving the multiple crises in health, social care, and living standards generally, within the constraints that his party and the financial institutions try to impose.

Then there is the Tory government's acute problems regarding Brexit, with the first round of trade talks with the EU ending with EU chief negotiator Michel Barnier stressing "very grave and serious" disagreements in the way of a deal.

Advice to Boris Johnson on that issue has come from Simon Nixon, a lead writer in the Times, who wrote that the government could use the coronavirus crisis as an opportunity to extend the transition period, soften some of its red lines or, among other suggestions, "provide cover for exiting the transition period at the end of the year with no trade deal. After all, in the midst of a crisis it will be easier to blame the economic consequences of Brexit on the virus".

This gives a glimpse of discussions within the capitalist establishment which are normally hidden from public view. The Socialist Party will continue to expose their anti-working class deliberations and to help the workers' movement build a force that can defend living standards and remove the Tories from power as soon as possible, while also building support for socialist ideas.

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There's also realisation that the huge stimulus injections can just end up in the pockets of the rich, as has mainly happened since the last crisis

Socialist Party
WHAT WE STAND FOR

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

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

PUBLIC SERVICES

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

WORK AND INCOME

- Trade union struggle for an immediate increase in the minimum wage to £12 an hour without exemptions as a step towards a real living wage of at least £15 an hour. 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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- 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!

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 to find out more today!



Supermarkets are ruled by profit - unions should control supply limits

Scott Jones

Udaw union member (personal capacity)

Many shop and supermarket shelves are being stripped of hand wash, toilet rolls and some food lines such as dry pasta, as people panic buy and stockpile because of coronavirus.

Under pressure to do something about this, some retailers have put limits on the amount of certain items that shoppers can buy. Tesco has put a quantity limit of five on antibacterial gels, wipes and sprays, dry pasta, UHT milk and some tinned vegetables. Others have limited hand sanitiser to two bottles per person.

For now, this is welcome. When I worked for Tesco in Wales and the local area had bad snow, the traditional rush for milk and bread took place. It meant many people couldn't buy any themselves.

Concerned, staff proposed a solution of limiting the amount individuals could buy. As the trade union shop steward I took the suggestion to management, but was told it wasn't really in the company's interest - that interest being profit. Therefore, we can't rely on the bosses to manage distribution of essential goods.

Guarantee access

To control and combat Covid-19 it's vital that everybody has access to washing products, basics like toilet roll, and of course food. Especially as those who can least afford to stockpile, and are worst hit by panic shortages, are workers on the lowest incomes with little cash and time.

The government has put its full trust in retail bosses, with Tory minister Oliver Dowden saying "we are confident that supermarkets have the supply chains necessary to keep shelves stocked for people."

He's clearly never worked in a supermarket! Supply chains work on a very short-term basis, and a few days' interruption to deliveries could leave stores empty of essential goods.

Udaw and other shop workers' unions should immediately convene democratic meetings of union reps from stores and distribution centres, alongside representatives of local shop customers. The unions should demand a say in how the sale and distribution of goods is controlled, and consider direct action if the situation worsens.

Flybe collapse: nationalise to save jobs threatened by Covid-19 and downturn

Steve Score

Socialist Party national committee

The collapse of Flybe, the British-based largest regional airline in Europe, highlights that an economy teetering on the brink could be pushed over by the new coronavirus, Covid-19.

2,000 jobs will be lost immediately as a result, with 1,400 more threatened in the supply chain, despite the government announcing a "rescue plan" two months earlier. It came a week before the budget where it was expected that air passenger duty would be cut in an attempt to help airlines.

Flybe had been struggling for some time but the impact of Covid-19 accelerated this. The International Air Transport Association estimates airlines could lose anything up to £87 billion this year as a result of falling demand, as tourists and businesses cancel travel plans. The economic effects of the virus of course go well beyond the airline industry.

Open the books

When big companies threaten job losses, lay-offs or pay cuts - whether a result of economic crisis or Covid-19 - the Socialist Party argues that they should open their books to show where past revenues have gone. If it is shown they are insolvent, then they should be nationalised under democratic working-class control and management to save jobs and protect the economy.

But nationalisation should not be a temporary measure simply to sell it off once taxpayers' money has helped it become profitable again - as with the Tory government's rescue of Rolls-Royce in 1971. Neither should rich bosses walk away with wads of cash - there should only be



Struggling Flybe was pushed over the edge by Covid-19 photo Pieter van Marion/CC

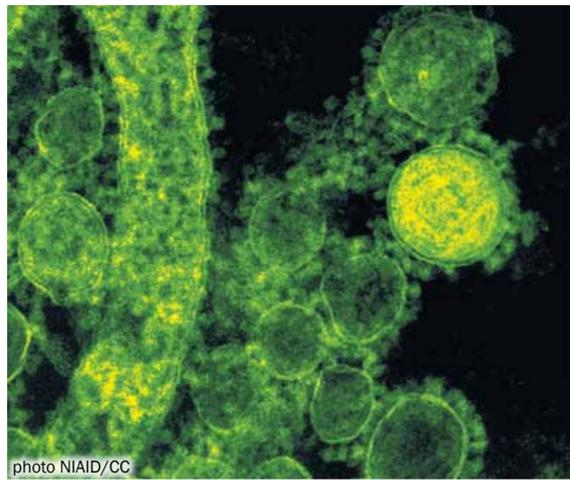


photo NIAID/CC

compensation on the basis of proven need, not for the super-rich.

For example, Flybe was owned by a consortium of super-rich billionaire Richard Branson's Virgin Atlantic, Stobart Air and a hedge fund called Cyrus Capital. They shouldn't benefit from their speculative buy-outs while workers suffer. Nationalisation should be permanent in order that these companies can become part of a wider democratic socialist plan for the economy.

The Socialist has proposed a workers' charter for the Covid-19 crisis (see p6) which demands that working-class people do not pay the price of controlling it. It includes full pay during isolation, no pay losses, no redundancies, and so on.

If firms say they cannot afford these measures, again they should open the books. In the case of small firms who can't afford it there should be government subsidies, but in the case of big ones they should be nationalised.

The threat posed to the economy by Covid-19 has already forced some governments to consider exceptional economic measures (see editorial, p2-3). We need to deal with the crisis in a way that defends workers' interests - not rich bosses - including by fighting for the measure of socialist nationalisation.

Nationalise big pharma

A pharmacy worker in Dumbarnton rushed out to sign our petition saying she'd been inundated with customers asking to use a hand sanitiser. But as it's a private Lloyd's pharmacy, the bosses would not provide one for public use. She agreed with our demand for nationalisation of the pharmaceutical industry.

Matt Dobson, Socialist Party Scotland

Coronavirus: international cooperation needed, not capitalist competition

Jon Dale

Secretary, Unite union Nottinghamshire NHS branch (personal capacity)

Nine weeks after the first Covid-19 coronavirus patient was identified in Wuhan it had spread to 98 countries.

This is much faster than the 2003 Sars coronavirus outbreak, which eventually spread to 37 countries.

However, so far Covid-19 is less lethal in relative terms, killing 1-2% of those who catch it - compared to nearly 10% for Sars.

Covid-19's rapid spread is because China is much bigger in the global economy than in 2003. Many workers, students and tourists now travel within China, and between China and other countries.

No single country can tackle an outbreak like this alone. International

cooperation is vital to control virus spread and to research, test and manufacture treatments and vaccines.

There have been many previous attempts at international cooperation to deal with global pandemics. They often failed due to capitalists' competing interests.

Six cholera pandemics during the 19th century spread from India across the world (over several years rather than a few weeks). In

response, delegates from 12 countries attended the first International Sanitary Conference in 1851.

Six months of negotiations failed to produce any substantial result. Governments wanting to maintain and increase trade conflicted with those wanting to maintain and strengthen quarantine.

The first International Sanitary Convention was not signed until 1892. It aimed to create a "semi-permeable" border between East and West "open for commercial enterprises but closed for microbes and other suspicious elements."

Similarly, the World Health Organisation in 1951 declared the

For full pay during isolation: for public health as well as workers' wallets

Josh Asker

Southampton Socialist Party

Government forecasts say up to 20% of workers could be off sick or in self-isolation in the UK when coronavirus reaches its peak. This is a potential headache for bosses worried about their profits, but an even bigger worry for workers facing lost pay.

One London hospital cleaner told the New York Times he would have to come into work even if he caught the virus. "Let's say I'm sick for one month now - how am I going to pay my rent? The bills are there - how am I going to cope?"

Boris Johnson and the Tory government are faced with the dilemma of bosses demanding their profits are safeguarded on the one hand, and millions of workers unable to make ends meet on the other, forced to take time off work due to ill health or to stop the spread of infection.

So far Johnson has extended statutory sick pay to start from the first day of 'self-isolation' rather than after the third day. Statutory sick pay is worth a measly £94.25 per week, less than a third of what a full-time worker on minimum wage earns. We say workers should be paid full pay, from day one, and for the full extent of their illness or self-isolation period.

There are millions of workers who do not even qualify for statutory sick pay. Anyone who earns less than £118 per week will not qualify - around two million workers.

Workers on low-hour contracts must have exceeded this amount on average for the past eight weeks, and 4.8 million self-employed also do not qualify. Not to mention those in receipt of benefits facing potential sanctions as a consequence.



Hospital workers on strike for better pay in 2017 photo Socialist Party

Sick pay is an essential part of preventing the spread of disease. A US study by economists Stefan Pichler and Nicholas Ziebarth showed that states with paid sick leave reduced the spread of influenza by between 5% and 40%.

Union action

Meanwhile, most workers are at the mercy of the attitude of their bosses. Houseware chain Wilko has announced it is removing sick pay entitlements from 21,000 workers in stores and warehouses. The GMB union has rightly threatened industrial action as a result.

Conversely, bakery chain Greggs has said it will continue to pay workers their contracted hours. Workers at Greggs recently won union recognition with bakers' union BFAWU. Trade unionists at

Homerton Hospital in east London recently forced the same from their outsourcing employer ISS (see p8).

In fact, it is in trade union-organised workplaces where there are likely to be better sick pay arrangements, as well as a means to fight for full pay during self-isolation or when taking on childcare responsibilities.

These are issues that need to be fought for by the whole trade union movement. The unions must demand full pay for all of those affected by coronavirus, to prioritise public health over the bosses' profits. Strikes are one way to stop the virus spreading at work if not!

If the bosses claim they can't pay - open the books to trade union inspection! The government should nationalise big firms refusing to comply and subsidise small firms if they genuinely can't afford it.

Treatments and vaccination must be made available to everyone who needs them, not only those who can afford to pay.

Small numbers of cases identified so far in Africa, Indonesia and other countries may be due to fewer tests done by less developed health systems.

There are half a million African migrants in China, often with limited access to local health services. Refugees from wars, poverty and violence in the Middle East, Africa and Latin America are also at high risk of uncontrolled Covid-19 outbreaks, with no health care.

Instead of spending huge sums on weapons and private profit, socialist planning would urgently direct resources to developing testing facilities and health services worldwide.

Self-isolation patients speak: NHS facilities and advice not up to it

Two members of the Socialist Party in London fell ill after returning from a holiday in Italy. Below they describe their experience of self-isolation.

The outbreak of Covid-19 in northern Italy took place during our short holiday in Rome. On arrival in Italy, all the passengers on our flight from London were individually screened in front of a video camera that appeared to register body temperature. (We were later told by a health expert that this is mainly to give "assurance" that something is being done and has little real benefit.)

Over the next few days, we saw many people in Rome, mainly tourists, wearing face masks. (It is reported that most commercially produced masks are not sufficient to prevent infection.) But as is now widely known, washing hands and general personal hygiene are essential in the battle against coronavirus.

Given this, we were shocked that many public toilets, at tourist destinations and in cafes and restaurants, were in a poor state. Along with thousands, we visited the Coliseum and found a public toilet without any sort of handwash. The deterioration of public hygiene facilities does not just apply to Italy - in Britain, council cuts mean public toilets have closed or worsened over many years.

On our return to London, we were not met by any government department and given health advice at the airport, despite the number of cases climbing steadily in Italy. After a couple of days, both of us showed flu-like symptoms.

Neither of us belongs to the categories which make the virus more likely to be life-threatening. Nevertheless, we felt it was important for the health of others that we immediately dialled the NHS 111 line.

NHS struggling

The phone staff, who were not medical professionals, were friendly but obviously very busy and told to stick to a script. We were advised that the virus was only affecting northern Italy and that we should treat our symptoms as we would a usual cold or flu and go about our normal business. We decided ourselves to stay away from our workplaces until our illness had passed.

On 6 March, the government's advice abruptly changed. Anyone who had travelled from anywhere in Italy over the previous 14 days, and showed flu symptoms, was told to contact NHS 111. After several phone consultations, and eventually



Marching to save the NHS photo Mary Finch

one with a nurse, we were given appointments for the next day to have swabs taken.

A medic could arrange to make a house call, but clearly they preferred we went by car to a coronavirus testing 'pod'. Given leaving the house is more likely to spread infection, it would seem cuts to the NHS means there are not enough staff to make all the necessary house calls at this stage.

The next morning, we drove to the pod - a small marquee on the grounds of a local community hospital - getting some bemused but also hostile stares from passers-by. We were the only people awaiting testing, though the nurse told us they expected numbers to rise greatly in the coming days.

In our poor part of east London, which is hugely overcrowded and has a creaking infrastructure after years of deep cuts, the rapid spread of coronavirus must be a real danger.

We are now awaiting, for up to three days, the results of the test. We were told to self-isolate but given contradictory verbal advice about the timescale - and the printed advice sheets do not even mention self-isolation. We are not overly worried about our health but we are concerned that we do not pass on the virus, if we have it, to more vulnerable family members, friends and work colleagues.

Our experiences show the NHS and other government agencies under the Tories are not up to dealing with this crisis as they would be if proper funding and training was in place.

A WORKERS' CHARTER FOR THE CORONAVIRUS CRISIS



PUBLIC SERVICES

- Emergency funding to provide resources to protect workers, patients, students and service users in the NHS, education, transport and public services
- Requisition private healthcare facilities to supplement NHS treatment and quarantine if needed
- The government must ensure that schools and health services are adequately funded to meet needs. This should include additional budgets in schools to provide supply staff to cover absence arising from the coronavirus, and to make sure that both staff and parents are fully compensated for any loss of earnings arising from the crisis
- Education workload demands on staff must be reduced, and time made available to prioritise protecting the health and safety of staff and students
- No to any removal of statutory class size limits as a response to managing teacher absences arising from novel coronavirus. Schools should not be treated as if they were just child-minding services. Increasing class sizes would damage education and heighten the risk of infection being spread further, as well as further increasing staff workload. Public health advice to education workers to hand-wash regularly throughout the day will only be possible if time is provided within the school day for this to take place
- Vaccines, when available, for free - nationalise the big pharmaceutical companies to guarantee research, production and supply
- Reverse privatisation in the NHS, remove the privateers, and fund a massive increase in health spending

PAY AND BENEFITS

- No worker to pay the price for controlling the spread of the virus. Any worker who is required not to attend work, or is unable to do so because of childcare or transport closures, should receive full pay and not be forced to take annual leave. This should include workers in receipt of in-work benefits

Covid-19: a socialist response to the coronavirus crisis

- Trade union model motion available at shopstewards.net
- More demands may become necessary as the situation develops - pick up future issues to read the latest

More online at socialistparty.org.uk

- Coronavirus: underfunded, understaffed - NHS is not prepared
- Hospital worker: protective clothing doesn't make up for lack of beds

such as Universal Credit, who should be paid their full benefits and receive no sanction. Workers who follow health advice to be absent from work to avoid potential spread should be excluded from any attendance-management procedures

- All workers should be entitled to full pay from day one of isolation or sickness for as long as it is needed
- Self-employed, agency, zero-hour-contract and gig economy workers required to self-isolate to be granted emergency benefits by the Department for Work and Pensions, at full pay, for the equivalent of at least a full working week of 37.5 hours, or more if they usually work longer
- Benefit claimants should be believed, excused signing on and attending mandatory interviews, and have their benefit payment advanced. Claimants should not be penalised for not being able to leave their homes and not being able to undertake labour-market activities because of lack of access to transport, internet, postal services, and so on
- No redundancies, lay-offs or loss of pay in manufacturing, logistics or service industries because of supply issues

STOP ABUSES BY THE BOSSES

- Any companies who claim they cannot comply with the necessary protections for workers must open their books to inspection by the workforce and trade unions. Small firms which genuinely cannot afford these measures to be underwritten by the government. Big firms which refuse to comply to be nationalised - with compensation only for proven need, not for super-rich bosses - to defend workers' jobs and incomes
- Democratic trade union oversight over any government or private sector emergency measures taken to contain the virus, such as restrictions on public assemblies or strikes, or supermarket supply rationing
- For the Trade Union Congress and the unions, the biggest voluntary national organisation with over six million members across the country, to prepare to lead national coordinated strike action to protect people should necessary measures not be taken

- Schools and Covid-19: class size proposal is about cuts, not health
- Trade unionists demand precautions
- Who will emergency measures protect?
- Capitalism limits response to viral outbreaks
- Coronavirus exposes capitalism's weaknesses in healthcare and economy
- Coronavirus crisis shakes Chinese regime: fight for independent workers' organisation and democratic socialism

change as the crisis develops. So would such a closure be designed to prevent infection, perhaps convening electronically - or to totally suspend even the feeble and distorted oversight the Commons exercises over the government?

Italy on lockdown: lack of resources and democracy causes panic

With confirmed coronavirus cases in the thousands, the government of Italy has placed the entire country on lockdown.

Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte first quarantined 16 million of the country's 60 million population in infected 'red zones', then announced that "the whole of Italy will become a protected zone."

Jo, a teacher from Bologna, spoke to the Socialist. "The children have already been at home for two weeks because the schools have been closed and they're saying they won't open again until 3 April. I'm self-employed so if I

don't work I don't get paid.

"That's six weeks without any money. How am I supposed to feed my kids? The government is doing nothing to help us. And the health service is on the verge of collapse."

The mayor of one small village with over 1,000 Covid-19 cases, Castiglione d'Adda, has said "we feel truly alone. People are ill and are not receiving the necessary assistance. Help us please."

As we go to press, all schools and universities are closed, and all public events banned, until 3 April. There are

police and military checkpoints to block non-emergency travel. Prisons have suffered riots after suspending visiting rights. Major airlines have cancelled all flights to the country during March.

Thousands flooded roads and train stations to try to escape when the decree was leaked. The panic is understandable - no pay, no public services, and a crumbling healthcare system.

The state has promised €10 billion to support businesses and households and pledged to suspend mortgage payments. Calming the panic and stopping the spread will need a still greater influx of resources - and democratic oversight of the response by local workers and residents, rather than shock diktats from Rome.

South Korea shows capitalism has money to respond to coronavirus

South Korea has been held up as a model by some commentators for its containment of coronavirus. It's far from perfect, but a rapid supply of resources shows that the capitalists do have the money - if the state intervenes. An English teacher in Ulsan spoke to the Socialist.

Korea has been pretty good. Local councils are giving money to low earners to help with rent. Anyone who needs to get the test and potential treatment receives it free. And if you have to self-quarantine I think the government sends out a care package, food and so on.

All teachers in

the public school system - Korean and foreign - are off work until 23 March, but are receiving full pay. They are being required to do lesson planning, and perhaps some other work from home, to varying levels.

Private is a little more complicated. I can tell you that I, at least, am only working afternoons right now, on full pay. No kids at the school, but we are doing phone lessons.

Various friends in other private schools are at home till the 23rd - with no work, or doing a small number of video lessons - on 50% pay. I



can't tell you about other sectors.

The government has imposed a ban or something so that mask sellers (pharmacies and so on) cannot mark up the prices due to shortage. In fact, there is now an organised rationing system for them.

The tracking and containment procedures are quite meticulous. A little too much maybe. We get constant government messages on our phones tracking where patients have been, in case we've been in the same place at the same time.

I've got them all on my phone. I have the sound turned off, but it makes a siren noise and you have to click into it, you can't just ignore it. I mean, it helps people to know if they were near an infected person I guess, but this is fuelling panic a bit.

Supposedly that system has exposed at least one affair. If private information has been dragged out because you caught a virus... whoops.

Panic profiteers

Amazon reports it is trying to remove listings for face masks and hand sanitiser marked up by up to 2,000%. Snake-oil merchants and spivs are trying to capitalise on the global panic. If Amazon struggles to control the profiteers, perhaps nationalisation is in order - of Amazon, and the medical and hygiene supply firms.

NHS staff don't want to return

The government's plan to call up retired NHS professionals during the coronavirus crisis has not had a good response. Of 120 retirees who spoke to Guardian, 71 said they wouldn't go back. Working conditions in the NHS are horrific - and older people are in the high-risk category for severe symptoms anyway.

"After the way I was treated I would rather shove a rusty six-inch nail up my backside than return to my old job," said one former nurse. Another has "nightmares 12 years on about the extraordinary working conditions."

A third "left nursing in disgust at the treatment of nursing and ancillary staff by a toxic and bullying management culture." And GPs reported "being

repeatedly shafted by successive administrations" and "burnout. I would not go back under any circumstances."

There's no quick fix - but a promise of immediate full funding to mitigate those conditions might sweeten the pill for some. Permanent full funding and reversal of privatisation - better still.

Police plan reduced cover

Emergency policing plans include that "we could stop homicide investigations, stop everything that is not time-critical. Everything goes on the protection of life and property," one officer told the Guardian.

But who decides what local policing priorities are? Democratic community control of police policy and hiring would help prevent abuses if resources become too scarce.

Homeless can't quarantine

How are rough sleepers to self-isolate? The government is already under fire for suppressing the true scale of the homelessness crisis. Whitehall reported 4,677 rough sleepers last year, but Freedom of Information requests to local councils counted almost 25,000.

Councils should requisition empty

homes - 216,000 in England alone - to help the homeless prevent the spread. Then refuse to give them back to the landlords and developers to help resolve the housing crisis!

Prescription rip-off

In the midst of a potential epidemic, prescription charges in the "free at the point of use" NHS are due to rise again. You can now expect to pay £9.15 a pop.

With wages already hit by sickness and closures, how are workers to maintain their health and help control the spread? Scrap prescription charges! And nationalise big pharma to cover the costs.

Ghost flights

Airlines are running "ghost" flights without passengers while the outbreak hits demand. Why? The capitalist European Union's competition laws dictate that airlines which don't use at least 80% of their flight slots can lose them to rival firms.

This rule - and all the EU's pro-market, anti-worker regulations - have to go. Struggling airlines should be nationalised as part of a democratic, socialist plan for cheap and environmentally sustainable transport.

Fight for transparency

The government hastily withdrew a proposal to reduce infection count updates from daily to weekly. And parliament announced there were no plans to close as of 9 March. But this may

The Socialist Party says:

- No cuts
- No increases in council tax, service charges, council rent. No privatisation
- Use reserves and borrowing powers to set no-cuts, needs-based budgets
- Build a mass campaign of trade unionists, community activists and service users to demand the government restore the 60% funding stolen from councils since 2010



A protest against the cuts Salford council made in 2017 photo Socialist Party

Salford 'no-cuts' budget includes cuts and tax rises

Nick Chaffey
Socialist Party national committee

Salford council has cut £211 million from spending since 2010.

What can be done to protect jobs and services and reverse the decade-long era of austerity that has wreaked damage to working-class communities? There is growing pressure on Labour councils to respond to Tory funding cuts.

But setting this year's budget, Salford council leader Paul declared: "For the first time... I have presented a budget that will deliver no further cuts to the services our residents need."

The budget was welcomed by public sector union Unison in Salford. Care workers in Unison, working for the council, will see their pay rise to £9 an hour in October.

The Socialist Party welcomes any steps taken to protect jobs and services. But what Salford Labour has voted through, robs Peter to pay Paul.

By increasing council tax by almost 4% - for what claims to be at best a stand-still budget - working-class families are being asked to pay for Tory cuts.

Dennett recognises this: "Council Tax is a regressive form of taxation, which hits the poorest people in our communities the hardest... we must raise local rates to pay for the deficit caused by austerity budgets from national government."

The first rule for socialists is to tell the truth and propose a programme and strategy in the interests of the working class. Salford's budget far from being a no-cuts budget actually includes "£9.8 million savings".

This is a smokescreen that divides workers and undermines the possibility to fightback. Rather, Salford council should mobilise a fight to restore the stolen £211 million that unites workers.

Across the country, Labour councils control combined budgets of almost £80 billion. And hold over £14 billion in reserves.

The Socialist Party says setting no-cuts budgets is the means to mobilise a mass campaign of council workers, trade unions and local communities to demand the restoration of government funding.

On this basis in the 1980s the Militant (now Socialist Party) led Liverpool Council forced Thatcher to retreat and concede £60 million that funded a programme of building 5,000 council homes, leisure centres, nurseries and parks.

Stoke council unions beat pay cuts - now let's stop all cuts

Andy Bentley
Stoke Socialist Party

Protests and the threat of strike action by council worker unions - GMB, Unite and Unison - have forced Stoke-on-Trent city council to scrap their plans to cut some workers' wages by up to £5,000 a year.

This is an important victory, and shows that workers can win if they get organised. Stoke Socialist Party and the National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) were part of the campaign.

This victory must be used as a launch-pad for building organised opposition to all cuts. There are still £8.3 million cuts to other services.

The Tory/Independent council used council reserves to finance backing down - the second time that the coalition council has used reserves. It demonstrates in action that it can be done.

Councils can also legally borrow money to help to prevent cuts. Using these options can stop cuts and buy time to build citywide opposition to all cuts.

There are three years before the next Stoke-on-Trent city council



Union protest opposing the pay cuts photo Stoke Socialist Party

elections in 2023. Under the control of the Tory/Independents this will mean three more years of cuts to council workers jobs, pay and conditions and our services.

Labour councillors should use this victory to announce that they will not support or carry out any

council cuts.

They should immediately organise a citywide meeting of Labour and trade union members, local anti-cuts campaigns, the Socialist Party and all others who want to help build a force that can stop all council cuts.

Is there an anti-cuts rebellion in Scotland?

Matt Dobson
Socialist Party Scotland

In Scotland, both Scottish National Party (SNP) and Labour councillors continue to be complicit in implementing cuts.

In a welcome change of approach, three Labour councillors affiliated with the Campaign for Socialism, have this year refused to vote for cuts budgets for the first time. All three broke Labour group discipline, having previously voted for cuts budgets.

Gordon Munro in Edinburgh abstained on the SNP/Labour cuts budget. In North Lanarkshire, Angela Feeney "with a heavy heart" refused to support her party's proposals.

Glasgow councillor Matt Kerr walked out of the council chamber in opposition to the various cuts budgets on offer, including Labour's alternative budget. He said: "I refuse to be an administrator for any more cuts."

Socialist Party Scotland welcomes political opposition to cuts budgets from councillors and we would

oppose any witch-hunt of councillors who refuse to vote for cuts. But we would go further and call on these councillors to advocate an alternative no-cuts budget for their councils.

So far this has not happened. Individual protests by councillors are not a substitute for a strategy of building a mass campaign against cuts.

Unions and campaigns

Why did these left councillors not link up with council workers and communities and put forward the alternative, legal, no-cuts budget strategy that has been demanded consistently and for several years by the joint trade unions in Glasgow for example?

This is also the official position of the UK local government committees of Unison, Unite and GMB unions, and Unison Scotland. Councils could stop cuts and council tax rises by utilising financial mechanisms such as borrowing, debt management, reserves and cancellation of PFI privatisation.

They then could launch mass campaigns uniting with trade un-

ions and communities to demand more funding from Holyrood. The Scottish government should do the same and use its income tax powers on the wealthy to fund public services.

Historically, the socialist Liverpool council in the 1980s was able to win more funding from the Thatcher government by refusing to implement cuts. Why not follow this road if enough is really enough?

Many trade unionists, workers and community activists in Glasgow are also pointing out that despite this recent protest, Matt Kerr was part of the previous Labour administration that carried out several hundred million in cuts. He was also on the wrong side of bitter strikes in social work and over the privatisation of ICT services in Glasgow.

Angela Feeney voted to increase council tax - in reality another austerity attack on the working class - something the Socialist Party opposes.

■ This is an edited extract. Read the full version 'SNP and Labour councils pass on Tory cuts' at socialistpartyscotland.org.uk

Homeless charity workers to strike against intransigent management

Paul Kershaw
Unite housing workers' branch

Workers at the homelessness charity 'St Mungo's' are set to strike on 16, 17 and 18 March. Further action will be announced if management remain intransigent.

Workers have been forced into this position by their boss's decision to go back on an agreement limiting the number of lower-paid (and less well-trained) staff on duty in projects, as well as by a draconian approach to staff sickness and disciplinaries.

Staff say a lower-paid, lower-skilled workforce will not be able to deliver the same standard of service to vulnerable clients. They see the move as part of an irresponsible 'race to the bottom' by executives.

Chief Executive Howard Sinclair has taken a combative approach

from the start and has sought to bypass and undermine Unite the Union as the voice of staff.

Sinclair chose to launch an attack on Unite and its general secretary Len McCluskey in the Daily Telegraph. Just 48-hours before a meeting with Unite to discuss emergency cover, he claimed the union was prepared to put vulnerable people at risk.

But frontline staff strongly feel they put the interests of vulnerable clients first every day, sometimes struggling to overcome senior management who have quite different priorities.

At recent talks at conciliation service, Acas, Unite put costed proposals to St Mungo's management which were aimed at a compromise, but St Mungo's bosses refused to discuss them.

To give one example of the

management style in St Mungo's, a recent judgement by an employment tribunal found that St Mungo's had victimised a staff member following her submission of an equal pay questionnaire.

The Human Resources director Helen Giles told the staff member's husband that she would never work in the organisation again having made the submission.

Unite represents over 500 members at the charity. It continues to appeal to management to negotiate an agreement.

Donations can be made by:

- Sending a cheque made out to Unite Housing Workers Branch, Box 66701 London E11 9FB. Please write 'Mungo's' on the reverse
- BACS transfer via account number 20238645, Sort Code 60-83-01, reference 'Mungo's'

Fighting to transform the union in my warehouse and improve our workplace

Connor O'Farrell
Warehouse worker and Usdaw union member

Conditions in my workplace have been decaying over the last decade. The cost of surviving, let alone living, has gotten harder. During this period, the workers have twice been on the brink of industrial action, rejecting multiple pay deals and begrudgingly accepting a third. Unpaid overtime and tracking of workers are the norm, yet fully working equipment is almost a rarity.

But we started organising the union, Usdaw, in the workplace. Armed with support and guidance from the Socialist Party, and confidence in the workers around me, I began to put together a mailing list.

within an inch of securing a branch position. A split vote led to the chair serving his own individual interest, as was expected.

We have put together a ten-point programme to improve our workplace as part of our campaign to win the upcoming union rep elections.

The hurdles put in place by management and its supporters in the union are a backhanded compliment to our patience and programme.

We want regular branch meetings to bring direct democracy into our workplaces and improve our pay and conditions. The ground-work made so far makes me proud to stand shoulder to shoulder with those fighting to do so.

Iain Dalton
Udaw Broad Left chair

Argos has announced the transfer of its staff working in Sainsbury's stores to Sainsbury's itself.

Since purchasing Argos for £1.4 billion in 2017, Sainsbury's has now opened several hundred Argos shops within its stores. As this expansion has continued, many of these have replaced pre-existing Argos stores.

It is clear that management are conducting a policy of levelling down terms and conditions. Last year Argos staff bonuses halved in value from £10 to £5, the same amount currently received by Sainsbury's workers.

The transfer would mean protection for a year. But then, while workers would get a pay increase to £9.20, they would lose paid breaks, premium payments and the right to take bank holidays off.

Also, Usdaw the shop workers' union, has collective bargaining rights for Argos staff - but Sainsbury's has much weaker agreements with Usdaw and Unite the Union in its stores, which do not include collective bargaining rights. This will weaken the position of those staff being transferred.

As we pointed out in relation to the Asda-Sainsbury's potential merger, there is a need for trade unionists on both sides of any merger to come together to plan a campaign to level up terms and conditions to the best level in either company - or better!

Failing to do so leaves the door open for the company to 'divide and rule' and level them down.

Unfortunately, this has been the case in Sainsbury's where Usdaw and Unite meet separately with the company, one after the other. Reps across the two unions urgently need to come together and plan a campaign to win a joint collective bargaining agreement with the company.

At the same time, negotiations on the Argos pay award for this year have been taking place. It is just above the Tory 'living wage' at £8.50 for over 25s. Not only is this less than that of Sainsbury's, but it falls short of Usdaw's four-year-old demand for a £10 an hour minimum wage.

Like in Morrison's last year, workers in Argos are frustrated by low pay and may well vote down the pay offer. In which case, Usdaw's response cannot be to again refuse to mobilise the membership to fight for more.

Members meetings should be organised to discuss with the national negotiating team to put in a counter-offer, with serious discussions about what campaigning, coordinated between Usdaw and Unite, can be done to back this up, up to and including industrial action.

If Usdaw refuses to fight for Argos workers now, it will be in a far weaker position when it inevitably attempts to transfer the remaining Argos workers onto Sainsbury's contracts and destroy the remaining collective bargaining rights.

Homerton Hospital workers fight for sick pay

■ Staff win right to full pay if forced to self-isolate - now demand policy made permanent



A lunchtime protest in 2016 by ISS workers at Homerton Hospital against threatened job losses photo Clare Doyle

Brian Debus
Hackney Socialist Party and Hackney Trade Union Council

Staff at Homerton Hospital, east London, celebrated when they heard the news that private contractor ISS had agreed to pay workers their usual pay if they are forced to self-isolate to help stop the spread of coronavirus.

But celebrations very quickly turned to questions. Why won't they pay us if we are off work with any other infectious disease?

About half the ISS workers at Homerton Hospital get no occupational sick pay, meaning they have to rely on statutory sick pay. This is only paid from the fourth day of sickness and is a tiny £94.25 a week.

This is a serious health risk. Workers forced to work when they are sick are more likely to spread infections and disease. This should not be allowed, particularly in a hospital where there are many vulnerable people. Workers should not be forced to choose between paying their rent or buying food, or following health advice and staying home

if they are sick or injured. NHS trade unions Unison and the GMB have been campaigning for all staff to get full sick pay, and this victory on coronavirus is a good step towards it. It is also proof that campaigning and trade union organising can win real improvements for workers.

There have been victories on pay. After a strong trade union campaign, the half of the workforce who don't get sick pay have finally had their pay increased to the current London Living Wage of £10.75 an hour. But the other half, who for years had higher pay because of their length of service, and because their contracts give them more rights, are now being kept below the London Living Wage. This seems to be a cynical attempt to 'divide and rule' a two-tier workforce.

A trade union petition signed by thousands of Homerton Hospital staff, patients and members of the public also calls for ISS workers to be given full NHS rates of pay, and the conditions that go along with it, like real occupational sick pay and better annual leave.

But Unison and the GMB are also campaigning for all services run by ISS to be brought back in-house at

the end of their contract later this year. Workers at Homerton have heard about the strike at St Mary's Hospital in west London. That resulted in the trust, which covers St Mary's, announcing in January that staff in all five hospitals they cover would be brought back in-house from 1 April 2020!

This has convinced the workers that their best option is direct NHS employment. Workers are angry at broken promises. Unions estimate staff are owed well over £1,000 - many well over £2,000 - in back pay from ISS stretching back over two years. Unions say ISS agreed to pay the London Living wage from the start of the contract, but allowed wages to fall below it from November 2017. What has happened to this money?

Hackney Trade Union Council is organising a public meeting in April to highlight campaigns for services to be brought back in-house, including speakers from Homerton Hospital unions and the Hackney APCOA traffic wardens, who are striking to be brought back into the council, and for £15 an hour. The campaign for services to be brought back in-house is gathering momentum.

Southampton trade unionists say "defend the right to strike!"

Josh Asker
Southampton Socialist Party

Over 70 trade unionists packed Southampton Friends Meeting House on 7 March committing to resist any attempts made by the Tory government to remove workers' right to strike.

The meeting brought together trade unionists from the RMT transport union, Communication Workers Union and University and College Union, all currently in dispute in the area. Rob Williams,

Socialist Party member and chair of the National Shop Stewards Network also spoke.

RMT guards on South Western Railway, now two years into their dispute to protect the safety-critical role of the guard on the train, have been threatened by Boris to remove their right to strike. The guards were due to strike again on 9-10 and 12-13 March, but called the action off for talks with management.

Meanwhile, 110,000 postal workers in the CWU have had their vote to strike deemed illegal by one unelected judge. They are now rebalancing.

The mood of the meeting was clear - workers are determined to resist in the face of unjust legal manoeuvres; the best way to overcome this is for trade unions to act in solidarity and by coordinating action. Demands need to be put on the Trade Union Congress to do this.

But we cannot wait. Instead we must start the process of building support for this from the ground up.

The meeting was determined to do this in the southern region, starting by protesting on May Day and preparing to support any trade union facing restrictions on its right to strike.

MAY DAY GREETINGS IN THE SOCIALIST

20% discount for payment by 1 April!

- Calling all trade union branches and committees, community campaigns and student groups!
- Show solidarity and fund the socialist press with a 2020 greeting
- Prices start at £30 for a small box - minimum price negotiable
- £55 for our most popular size, 1/16 of a page
- £90 for 1/8 and £170 for 1/4
- £300 for 1/2, £500 for a page
- socialistparty.org.uk/mayday
- jamesivens@socialistparty.org.uk

East London uni and bin worker strikes

Over 250 lecturers at University of East London (UEL) have contracts no longer than one term. We went down to support the University and College Union (UCU) before they start a week of strikes next week - both picket lines in Stratford.

UEL workers have their own workload issues they're angry about - they're starting extra 'short of strike' action soon too, unless management back down immediately. They were boosted by pink union hats and teachers playing the drums.

Ian Pattison
East London Socialist Party



Refuse workers in Tower Hamlets, east London are striking over unsettled holiday pay arrears. Workers, members of Unite the Union, work for Veolia, which holds the refuse, recycling and street cleaning contract for the borough. The contract is being brought back in-house next month.

Despite reaching an agreement with Unite and other trade unions on the calculation of holiday pay in August 2018, Veolia owes around 150 workers significant sums in arrears. The firm's UK waste management division generated revenues of nearly £1 billion in the first half of 2019.

Unite members, who voted 96.5% in favour of strike action in a ballot with a 70% turnout that was held earlier this month, are out for seven days starting on 9 March.



photos Ken Teegardin/CC

Strong support for PCS Broad Left Network

The newly formed PCS Broad Left Network (BLN) is contesting this year's PCS national elections for the first time. When nominations closed on 5 March, BLN supported candidates for president and the national executive committee had received over 40 branch nominations. This is an outstanding achievement.

The president and national executive committee ballot takes place over the period 16 April-7 May. The challenge facing BLN will be to turn this strong nomination support into membership votes.

Socialist Party member Marion Lloyd, who is the BLN candidate for president says: "We expect to do very well in the elections. Nothing

can be taken for granted, but it is clear there is a mood for change in PCS, and the BLN programme has gone down well with activists and members. Thanks to BLN supporters for all their hard work."

■ To join the BLN and give support in the election visit pcsbln.wordpress.com
Socialist Party members in PCS

HOW CAN TRUMP BE OUSTED FROM THE WHITE HOUSE?

■ Sanders faces uphill struggle to win Democratic Party nomination ■ Working class must have independent political voice

Hannah Sell
Socialist Party
general secretary

The turmoil in the US Democratic primary battles reflects all of the tensions in US society. The capitalist class has struggled to find a viable representative, while millions have looked to Bernie Sanders for an alternative to the misery offered by capitalism.

Bernie Sanders, fighting to win the Democratic Party candidacy for the US presidency, has often been compared to Jeremy Corbyn.

Describing himself as a “democratic socialist”, like Corbyn he puts forward a programme - including free healthcare for all, free college tuition and cancellation of all student debt, increased rights for trade unions in the workplace and a \$15 an hour minimum wage - which has enthused and mobilised important layers of the working class, and above all young people who have grown up in the age of austerity.

Many in Britain who were disappointed with Labour’s general election vote took hope from the prospect of Sanders making it to the White House. In the wake of ‘Super Tuesday’ (when 14 US states held Democratic ‘primaries’ ie electoral contests), however, the obstacles to him becoming the Democrat’s candidate for President are growing.

Sanders argues that he alone can beat Trump because of his radical programme, but as he falls behind corporate Democrat Joe Biden, questions about how popular his programme really is are inevitably being posed in the minds of many who are enthused by his campaign.

In fact, opinion polls indicate that Sanders would beat Trump in a presidential election. Many of his central policies have overwhelming popular support. Polling shows, for example, that 64% of Americans support free

healthcare for all, including four out of ten Republicans, and even a bigger majority opposing social security (pensions and disability benefits) cuts.

The difficulties that Sanders is facing in the primaries are not - any more than Corbyn’s problems were - because he has put forward a programme which would, if implemented, improve the lives of the majority. Jeremy Corbyn and those around him mistakenly made concessions to the pro-capitalist wing of the Labour Party, which resulted in his anti-austerity message being muffled.

Sanders, unfortunately, has also allowed his message to be partially muffled by keeping his campaign within the limits of the Democrats, an unloyal party of big business.

Sanders has rightly and repeatedly pointed out that the ‘billionaire class’ are desperate to stop him getting to the White House. Unfortunately, he has not drawn all the necessary conclusions from that.

Lessons of 2016

Back in 2016, Sanders’ campaign became a mass movement, harnessing the anger of wide layers of young people and workers. The billionaire class strained every nerve to prevent Sanders winning the Democrat nomination.

The Democratic Party has no real democratic structures through which working-class people can influence its decisions; in some areas it is not even possible to join it!

The result was Hillary Clinton being defeated by Donald Trump. A candidate for Wall Street, she was incapable of mobilising the many working-class people who had grown poorer under successive presidencies - Democrat as well as Republican.

Sanders could have used the momentum from his 2016 campaign to launch a new party of the working class, independent of the Democrats, preparing the ground to run for president on that basis in 2020.

Instead he ‘reluctantly’ endorsed Hillary Clinton.

For the 2020 campaign he has repeated his mistake, making clear from the beginning that he will endorse whatever candidate the Democrats select. He has rightly attacked Biden for taking donations from over 40 billionaires, for advocating cuts to social security, for supporting the Iraq war and more.

Yet, he has now said that if Biden has more pledged delegates than him - that is delegates chosen on the basis of the primary results rather than unelected ‘super-delegates’ - he will pull out at the end of primary season. That would be correct if it was to call a conference to begin building a workers’ party, but Sanders has declared he would endorse Biden.

Meanwhile, of course, if Biden is behind Sanders at the end of the primary season it is absolutely clear that the capitalist Democratic establishment will do all it can to prevent Sanders taking the nomination.

Only if he has a clear majority of pledged delegates might they feel they have no choice but to reluctantly accept Sanders being the official candidate, although even this would not prevent them continuing to sabotage his campaign by other means.

The need to start building a new workers’ party independent of the Democrats to mobilise to defend Sanders’ programme from big business sabotage would be more urgent than ever in that situation. Following Super Tuesday however, it looks difficult for Sanders to achieve such a clear majority.

‘Unite’ against Trump

It is true that in that instance the pressure on Sanders to endorse Biden would be huge, because of a deep-felt desire to ensure Trump does not win a second term, no matter what compromises are necessary to achieve that. That was an important factor in mobilising support for Biden on super-Tuesday, with the capitalist media relentlessly driving home their message that only a ‘moderate’, ‘middle of the road’ candidate could defeat Trump.

However, Sanders should not have succumbed to that pressure. The idea that Biden - just as much of a capitalist politician as Clinton but far less competent - is the best candidate to take on Trump is laughable. Biden becoming the candidate would make a second term for Trump likely, with objective developments - such as the possibility of a new economic downturn triggered by the coronavirus - being the only obstacle in Trump’s path.

Biden will be utterly unable to harness the growing class anger in US society. In 2016 a section of the US working class who had voted for Obama switched to Trump, including some who had supported Sanders.

A racist, sexist millionaire, Trump’s



Bernie Sanders’ campaign has been muffled inside the Democratic Party photo Jackson Lanier/CC



The challenge is to turn around the 43% of trade union households that voted for Trump in 2016 photo Gage Skidmore/CC

populist claims to be standing up for the ‘little people’ are completely false, as has been shown by his anti-working class, pro-big business policies in office. Nonetheless, a section of workers who were desperate to protest against the capitalist establishment, as personified by Clinton, went and voted for Trump. More stayed at home. The 2016 exit polls indicated that 43% of trade union households voted for Trump, the highest Republican result in decades.

Since then there has been an important wave of strikes, starting with the magnificent uprising of teachers in West Virginia in March 2018. This has been followed by other teachers’ strikes, but also strike action by shop workers, nurses, and the longest au-

toworkers strike in a decade. Overall, albeit from a low base, strikes in 2019 increased by 257% compared to two years before. But most workers looking for a means to fight back against the bosses’ onslaught will not see Biden as their candidate. Unlike Sanders, despite his attempt to claim to be the ‘union’ candidate, he has no record of supporting workers’ in struggle, and a long record of voting for pro-big business, anti-working-class policies - including for the NAFTA free trade agreement.

As vice-president he wrote the 2005 bankruptcy bill, which increased the draconian punishment of debtors, piling on the misery for millions of working-class people when the world

economic crisis erupted two years later.

Far from maximising his support, Sanders insistence on running his campaign inside the cage of the Democrats will have limited enthusiasm for him among some who learnt the lessons of 2016.

As in 2016, there have been large rallies for Sanders. In the Super Tuesday primaries, however, while he overwhelmingly won the youth vote, and was also ahead among Latino voters, he trailed behind among older and African-American voters.

And his overwhelming lead among young people, while politically very important, did not result in victory partly because, as he has recognised, he did not manage to qualitatively increase the youth turnout. Turnouts were up compared to the 2016 primaries, but in no state did young people account for more than 20% of primary voters, and in most they were 15% or less.

One factor in this must be a justified scepticism, based on the experience four years ago, of the prospects of Sanders managing to win the nomination of an undemocratic big business party.

Attitude of socialists

The mass movement that developed around Sanders in 2016, and to some extent again in 2020, is an extremely important development. It reflected the first stirrings of the awakening giant, the US working class.

Millions of people who were touched by the campaign reflected their alienation from the capitalist ruling class. They were looking for an alternative to the political caste or dynasties at the head of the Democratic and Republican parties, something Trump cynically exploited.

It is essential to engage positively with this movement. This does not, however, mean simply being cheerleaders for Sanders. Socialists have to patiently explain what steps are necessary for the movement to achieve its goals, and to criticise mistakes of its leadership.

Central to this is campaigning for a break from the Democrats and the establishment of a clear working-class party, pointing to the possibility for such a party. This was one of the issues in the recent debates in the Committee for a Workers’ International (CWI - our socialist international organisation to which the Socialist Party is affiliated), which led to a division in our ranks, including the departure of the CWI’s previous supporters in the US, Socialist Alternative (SA).

In 2013, SA member Kshama Sawant was elected to Seattle City Council, the first openly socialist to be elected there in a century. After her first election Kshama spoke on a platform in New York with Bernie Sanders, and urged him to run as an

independent candidate for the US Presidency.

Unfortunately, however, over time SA has tended not to use Kshama’s platform to consistently point to the need to build a new party outside the Democrats, but instead has blurred the lines with ‘progressive’ Democrats.

While the need for steps to lay the basis for a new party are sometimes mentioned, this is not usually explicitly a workers’ party but “a new political party with genuine democratic structures”.

SA no longer argues that Sanders should have run as an independent, something that could have kick-started the development of a workers’ party and avoided being trapped in the pro-capitalist Democrats. Instead it has dropped that position in an attempt to get closer to Sanders’ supporters.

Thus the central focus of its recent public literature is simply on mobilising to get ‘Bernie’s back’ at the Democratic Party Convention in July. Meanwhile, Bernie has made clear that he will not fight at the Convention if Biden is then ahead!

It is likely that, angry at a stitch-up at the top, a section of Bernie’s supporters will draw the conclusion that it is necessary to begin building a new party. Under huge pressure from below it is not excluded that Bernie himself could switch tack and draw that conclusion.

That would be a major step forward, but socialists cannot wait for such developments to put forward what is needed, we have to point towards its necessity now.

The question of breaking from the Democrats is not the only issue we need to raise. Unfortunately, SA consistently suggests that putting Sanders, “a democratic socialist” in the White House is enough to succeed in a US ‘political revolution’. While Sanders does describe himself as a “democratic socialist”, and while his programme contains many good demands, he does not propose a break

with the capitalist system. It does not even include the nationalisation of public services that were included in Corbyn’s election manifesto. Instead Sanders’ programme is limited to increased regulation and taxation on corporations and the super-rich.

Limited as these demands are, Sanders programme is still too much for the US capitalist class and its political representatives to accept.

He points to ‘European socialism’ as the way forward, when in reality the gains that were won by the workers’ movement in Europe in the post-World War Two period are no longer acceptable to the capitalist classes of Europe, and have been systematically undermined over decades.

Working-class struggle

From the NHS in Britain to the French pension system, only mass movements of the working class have been able to defend past gains from complete annihilation by capitalist governments, albeit sometimes headed by social democratic parties.

The capitalist establishment’s attempts to prevent Sanders getting the nomination are as nothing to the sabotage they would attempt to prevent him introducing his policies in power.

Just one individual in the White House, surrounded by a hostile capitalist state machine, Congress, and the Supreme Court, would not be able to act. Only backed by a mass movement, organised in a workers’ party, would it be possible to force the US capitalist class to make some temporary concessions to the working-class majority.

Fundamental change, however, would require breaking with the capitalist system and bringing the 500 major corporations that dominate the US economy into democratic public ownership. This would then enable the enormous industry, science, and technique created by US capitalism to be harnessed to begin to build a democratic socialist society that could meet the needs of all.

“”
Fundamental change, however, would require breaking with the capitalist system



Trade union strikes increased in 2019 photo Charles Edward Miller/CC



All the other right-wing Democrat candidates stood aside to give Joe Biden a clear run to secure the party nomination photo Gage Skidmore/CC



photo London Socialist Party

Socialist Party join International Women's Day protests in London

Organisers divide and weaken fightback

Isai Priya
London Socialist Party

The Socialist Party joined protests organised for International Women's Day in London. We took part in Million Women Rise and the London Women's Strike.

We gave out leaflets opposing cuts to services, proposing a socialist programme to fight women's oppression, and a statement from the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI) - the socialist international organisation the Socialist Party is part of.

We also advertised our protest for Tory budget day. Our materials were well received but the organisers weren't too pleased with us being there.

Million Women Rise was advertised as a young girls and women-only march. We don't agree with this

approach.

We met one teenage man who was unsure if he could join the protest. He wanted to march in solidarity with his sister, who was killed by domestic violence.

The approach by the protest organisers not only divides and weakens the march, but fundamentally doesn't understand why women are oppressed and how to fight it.

At the protests, we sold the Socialist newspaper which carried articles explaining this. We also had articles in the Socialist on sexual harassment, abortion rights, refuge cuts, the role of the unions and the need for socialism.

■ Read 'International Women's Day: fighting sexism and austerity' at socialistparty.org.uk
■ Also turn to pages 14-15 for 'women's rights, trans rights and the labour movement'

Socialist Party executive committee positions

Following a very successful Socialist Party national congress the newly elected Socialist Party executive committee has unanimously agreed that Peter Taaffe will become political secretary, while Hannah Sell will become general secretary.

Peter has been general secretary since the inception of the

Socialist Party, and prior to that was editor of the Militant newspaper. He will remain on the executive committee.

■ See 'A world in turmoil and weak British capitalism faces working-class anger' at socialistparty.org.uk for a report of our congress.

Socialist Party Fighting Fund

	£ received	£ target	January to March 2020	Deadline: 1 April 2020
East Midlands	2,864	1,850		155%
Southern & SE	3,197	2,350		136%
Northern	895	750		119%
Wales	2,622	2,300		114%
London	5,176	4,600		113%
North West	1,204	1,150		105%
Yorkshire	2,333	2,550		91%
South West	1,619	1,800		90%
Eastern	860	1,200		72%
West Midlands	1,167	2,600	45%	
Other	5,759	3,850		150%
TOTAL	24,751	25,000		111%



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

Newcastle - Do we need a fightback? Yes!

One young fella told us that all his family were fed up with the Tories and angry about attacks on the NHS. But there was a feeling there's nothing they can do.

We in the Socialist Party think there can, and must be, a fightback. The people we spoke to liked our workers' charter to tackle coronavirus, and that we were defending the NHS.

Hopefully coronavirus won't become a full-blown epidemic, because if it does it'll be the poorest that are hardest hit.

We demand that workers on zero-hour contracts - many of whom work in the food industry and are saying they won't be able to afford to stay off work and self-isolate - receive sick pay. Failure to do this could endanger many more.

Anyone on benefits who is unable to sign on must not be sanctioned. Self-employed workers should also receive sickness benefit.

An attack on any working-class person is an attack on all!

Elaine Brunskill

> Read the socialist response to coronavirus pages 1-6

Derby - How can I join?

On our campaign stall, we met someone who was looking to join a political party, but just didn't know how. After a discussion about low pay and the NHS, I explained how she could join one - ours of course! She gave us her contact details and she's coming to our next meeting.

Charlie Taylor

Like what you've read?
SUBSCRIBE TO THE SOCIALIST
socialistparty.org.uk/subscribe

Wolves - Read the paper the bosses don't want you to

Selling the Socialist outside a DWP office, management send out a security guard to get rid of us. But just at that moment, one of the union reps walking past recognises us from coming down to support previous strikes.

The union rep tells the security guard to leave off and that the 'gaffers' can talk to him if there's a problem. Subscribe to read the paper that the bosses don't want you to read.

Nick Hart

Swansea - the stalemate is breaking

The Socialist Party campaign stall was the most successful this year. The Young Socialists stall built for the climate strike. Our regular Socialist Party stall featured petitions and posters around the socialist response to coronavirus and the need to defend the NHS.

Both had a steady stream of locals wanting to talk to us about our ideas, response and plans to tackle these crises. We sold over 20 copies of the Socialist and raised £20 fighting fund.

One young mum donated £5. She bought copies of the Socialist for her and her 12-year-old daughter. She commented that it was great to see young people making a stand.

An older man, a lifelong Labour voter, stopped to ask our young members what our views are on the future of the Labour Party. A woman bought a copy of the Socialist after asking if we'd made good on challenging the local council's latest cuts budget. She was proud to see people taking them on.

Hopefully, this week's surge in interest is an indication of a shift in the consciousness of the working class in our city, who seem to have been in a state of frustration since the election in December.

Gareth Bromhall

> Read about the state of Swansea services on opposite page

Stoke - worried about cuts, angry at council

As we were setting up a couple approached asking if they could sign the petitions. He bought a copy of the Socialist, while she signed all four of our petitions - on NHS, young workers, council cuts and coronavirus.

She said the Government must start prioritising the NHS and protecting young workers. For the first time, she had voted for the Tories because of Labour politicians regarding Brexit.

She was worried her age and health conditions made her vulnerable to coronavirus and it was impossible to keep safe after years of austerity forcing down their standard of living.

She was angry with Stoke Council for cutting services. She thanked us for standing up against injustice and gave us a £2 donation to the fighting fund.

Andy Butcher

> See 'Stoke council unions beat pay cuts' on page 7

Barnstaple, North Devon - 'climate' councillors cut buses

Young people in North Devon are looking for socialist answers to the problems of education, housing, jobs and pay. The Socialist Party held a campaign stall and raised our programme at a climate forum on 7 March in Barnstaple.

We have two new young Socialist Party members in Barnstaple. And we met more young people interested in joining on the day.

On the stall we called for a workers' charter to tackle the coronavirus crisis - an immediate provision of more hospital beds, protection for health staff, and full pay for all workers, including those in precarious zero-hour jobs and the self-employed.

At the climate forum I quoted Greta Thunberg: "nothing is being done to halt the climate crisis, despite the beautiful words and promises from our elected officials", demonstrated by Devon councillors cutting buses.

Richard Worth

Housing workers explain reality to idiot Boris Johnson



photo Gareth Milner/CC

Jack Jeffrey
Support worker for homeless people

I work at a homeless day centre in central London, supporting rough sleepers with severe mental health issues. In an attempt to distract attention from his continued mismanagement of floods, Boris Johnson decided he would visit us and announce increased funding for rough sleeping projects.

The format was odd, but not surprising, considering his desire to avoid speaking to the public. Instead of visiting the day centre he would speak to five pre-prepared clients and then a 15-minute conversation with five members of staff. I was one. There was no charm or preparation, just bluster and a complete disconnect from the lives of real people.

He swanned in with Robert Jenrick, Secretary of State for housing. He boasted his plan to expand Housing First by 6,000 beds would "eradicate homelessness". However, when pressed that this didn't even match the 9,000 hostel beds lost since 2010, he had no reply.

He switched the conversation to

increased funding for mental health provision. When I gave an example of a vulnerable client who had been unable to access treatment due to lack of beds, his face started to drop.

Again a change of topic, this time to drugs. In an attempt to dodge a question about the effect of local authority cuts on substance abuse treatment, he called for stricter laws.

One of my colleagues raised decriminalisation in Portugal. Incidentally his reply was "what happened in Portugal?"

When he heard that decriminalisation led to a significant drop in addiction and drug-related crimes, he turned confused to Robert Jenrick and asked: "secretary of state is that true?" Blushing he mumbled: "I think so prime minister".

He made some more poorly informed comments on social housing, then panicked and staggered off when someone said revoke Right to Buy.

Only his media team and the Evening Standard were present. The whole interaction passed unreported and will soon be forgotten.

At least it managed to confirm what I always expected - there is no intelligence or cunning plan, Boris Johnson really is just an idiot.

Student occupation in support of striking workers

On 9 March, students from Nottingham University and Nottingham Trent occupied the Coates Road auditorium at Nottingham Uni in solidarity with the University and College Union (UCU) strike. There are occupations at eleven other universities.

The occupation will go on until at least the end of the strike on 13 March. Four nights for the four fights - pay, casualisation, workload, and equality.

We invite anyone who wishes, to come in and give talks on what they know - climate justice, labour struggles and so on.

Students have made this decision as they are disgusted with the disrespect shown to lecturers, estate staff, hospitality employees and all other workers at the universities.

Students are showing that we will fight back against casualisation, unfair treatment of staff and the commodification of education. Please send solidarity messages to @UoNSolidarity on twitter and to the Nottingham Student Solidarity Facebook page.

Reece Lawton
Nottingham University
Socialist Students



photo Socialist Party

Swansea: Ask anyone about state of services, you will hear the real story

Gareth Bromhall
Acting secretary of Swansea Trade Union Council

Ask any Swansea resident about the state of social care, education and refuse collection and they will tell you the real story. A decade of Tory cuts, passed on by a Labour council, has decimated services. In the last three years, another £70 million cut. There is a massive democratic deficit in the council's decision-making

process. At the budget meeting, a short ten-minute window was given over for public questioning, taken up by a series of pre-written questions, although three Socialist Party members were able to put the council and its leader on the spot.

Swansea Trade Union Council organised a lobby outside. Because of a one-off election-year pay-out, the council tried to claim that they were investing rather than cutting, despite a further £10 million in cuts contained in the budget. After

almost a decade of austerity, the council says services are now better run, as they are doing "more with less".

The Trade Union Council and the Socialist Party are the only forces in the city that have consistently and diligently campaigned against the cuts in Swansea. We have long advocated a legal no-cuts budget and a campaign with other councils doing likewise to demand the money from central government needed to run our vital services.

Camarthenshire: Councillors' 'walk of shame'



photo Socialist Party

Mark Evans
Carmarthenshire County Unison branch secretary (personal capacity)

Plaid Cymru councillors voting for the cuts had to walk the 'walk of shame' past us to get into the council meeting.

Carmarthenshire County branch of public sector union Unison, along with Socialist Party and other anti-cuts campaigners, lobbied the Plaid-led council where the budget

was being voted on. We called on councillors to make a stand and implement our union branch's no-cuts budget.

Due to a pre-election sweetener from Boris Johnson, Tory cuts passed on by the Welsh Labour government to the council for the next three years were lower than expected - £16.5 million. But these cuts will have a serious impact on jobs, services and communities and come on top of previous cuts.

We had no illusions that Plaid councillors would make a stand

because the council's public consultation about the budget was a sham. There was no mention of cuts in the consultation - the words "efficiencies" and "savings" were substituted for 'cuts'. And if the public didn't accept suggested 'efficiencies' or 'savings' they were threatened with a rise in council tax.

Carmarthenshire Unison has stopped council cuts on many occasions. We will continue to make councillors walk the 'walk of shame' until they stand with us or are removed from office.

Women's rights, trans rights and the Labour movement

The Socialist has been contacted by **Women's Place UK (WPUK)** requesting a right of reply to the article by Sarah-Sachs Eldridge 'Labour Party and trans rights: United working-class fight needed for rights and resources for all', which was published in issue 1074. Below we print WPUK's contribution to the debate and a further reply by **Sarah-Sachs Eldridge**.

Woman's Place UK right of reply

Sarah Sachs-Eldridge's article, 'Labour Party and trans rights: united working-class fight needed for rights and resources for all' in the Socialist (issue 1077, 19 February) is to be welcomed, because it clearly rejects the demand for expulsions of Labour members who are active in, or support the views of, Woman's Place UK (WPUK) and LGB Alliance.

Since WPUK was established we have been asking for a respectful debate inside the labour movement and wider society on the issues Sachs-Eldridge raises. For this we have faced a degree of harassment and abuse that is unprecedented in progressive politics.

Venues have been pressurised into cancelling bookings, our meetings have frequently been the target of angry, hostile demonstrations, and people who agree with us have been no-platformed - a tactic usually only applied against fascists.

However, we think that she gets many things wrong about the nature of WPUK.

WPUK opposes all forms of discrimination - and that includes discrimination against trans people. Our active members and supporters have long records as campaigners against all forms of prejudice.

It simply isn't true that WPUK has nothing to say about class and austerity. Our recent conference was ignored by virtually the whole of the left, but it was attended by over 900 women who took part in discussions on sex and class, economics and feminism, racism, organising, violence against women and service provision.

A point on which we may differ with Sachs-Eldridge and comrades in the Socialist Party is that we believe it is essential for women to create their own spaces to discuss these issues. Women are disproportionately affected by austerity. It is women who are expected to provide the care that councils and central government withdraw, and it is right that they are able to draw up their own pro-

gramme in discussions they control, rather than be submerged in the demands that are too often written by male-dominated groups and committees.

So, while many of us are active in a range of local and national campaigns against austerity, we make no apology for insisting that women's voices are heard and our needs are met.

Anyone wanting a fuller understanding of what we are calling for should read our manifesto at womansplaceuk.org and make up their own minds. It clearly outlines concrete steps we believe need to be taken to address the political, economic, social and cultural oppression that women face. It's unlikely to contain anything that supporters of the Socialist Party will disagree with.

Sachs-Eldridge says that we sow "illusions in the government's ability to protect women's spaces." We think that it is entirely reasonable for campaigners to make demands on governments to offer legal protections to citizens. No one seriously believes that we shouldn't demand that the government legislates to prevent racist violence.

In fact, it is only the activity of the anti-racist and women's movements over many decades that has given us the existing legal protections we enjoy. We consider these as victories to be defended and extended rather than sowing illusions.

Our ambition is for clear definitions of sex and gender which aren't based on sexist and limiting stereotypes. Yes, we do think that a change to self-identification is a challenge to the rights of women and girls as well as other people who have protected characteristics under the Equalities Act, including trans people.

WPUK will be organising more events in the coming months. We would welcome any readers of the Socialist to come along with an open mind and take part in a comradely discussion.

Judith Green, Ruth Serwotka, Kiri Tunks
Co-founders, WPUK



The Socialist Party's response

The Socialist Party welcomes this exchange with trade union and Labour Party members who lead Women's Place UK (WPUK). The fight against oppression is a central question for the entire labour movement.

We hope that this debate about programme, ideas, organisation and methods of struggle will be discussed across the trade union and labour movement, without threats of bans or exclusions, in order to aid the fight against oppression in all its forms.

Opposition to all discrimination and oppression is the starting point for the Socialist Party. In its letter, WPUK says it "opposes all forms of discrimination" including "against trans people".

But later it says that "a change to self-identification [of trans people] is a challenge to the rights of women and girls". Such a position is not consistent with opposition to all discrimination. Nor does it take the fight for the rights of women and girls forward.

The working class, because of the economic exploitation it faces, and the role it plays in the production process under capitalism, has a collective interest in ending capitalism - which is the root cause of exploitation and oppression - and has the collective power to do so.

The capitalist class, therefore, attempts to divide the working class along gender, race, religious and sexual orientation lines in order to make it easier to maintain its rule.

Self-identification

Unfortunately, by opposing the right to self-identification for trans people, WPUK is falling into the capitalist trap of dividing and pitting oppressed groups against each other.

The role of the trade union and labour movement is not as an arbiter of limited rights and resources, but as a mass force fighting for the full rights and needs of all workers.

This means fighting for an end to austerity, and for full public funding for services such as domestic violence refuges; ensuring, alongside the staff that run them, that these are safe spaces with adequate screening processes, sufficient trained staff and specialisation to meet different needs.

This would lay the basis for meeting the needs of all groups of service users, and democratically negotiating and resolving any potential conflicts.

The Socialist Party supports the self-organisation of specially oppressed groups.

But we are opposed to any attempts to rigidly and permanently

separate the working class along the lines of gender, sexuality or ethnicity, etc, or organisational forms that undermine the ability of the working class to struggle, including for the rights of minorities and all oppressed groups under capitalism.

Separate organisations can be a bridge to greater workers' unity, but that is dependent on the leadership, make-up and programme of those organisations.

The WPUK letter states that "it is only the activity of the anti-racist and women's movements over many decades that has given us the existing legal protections we enjoy".

This completely ignores the role of the organised working class, such as the strike by women workers at Ford Dagenham in 1968, and the key effect it had in winning the Equal Pay Act. In fact, this forms part of the basis of the 2010 Equality Act.

These laws, however, are not sufficient to end oppression and discrimination as the continuation of the gender pay gap demonstrates.



The road of exclusivity in campaigning weakens rather than strengthens women's potential to fight their oppression

As the WPKU letter states, there are many demands in the WPUK manifesto that we could support.

But to "address the political, economic, social and cultural oppression of women", it needs to show how women can win. The WPUK manifesto does not mention trade union struggle or the need to fight for a socialist alternative to the capitalism system.

The manifesto calls for "sustainable investment from national government" for support services for women and girls who are victims of violence. But how will this be achieved?

The Socialist Party calls on Labour councils to set no-cuts budgets to save domestic violence services and all the services women rely on, and to fight for the money that the Tories have stolen from local authorities in a decade of austerity.

The manifesto says: "Take action to achieve equal pay, such as compulsory equal pay audits, the collection of sex disaggregated data and better enforcement of

the Equality Act 2010."

Data is important, and we oppose cuts to its collection, but it was mass-organised strike action by low-paid women workers in Glasgow that won them the half a billion pounds in equal pay owed to them by the council. That their strike inspired solidarity action by the mostly male refuse workforce was recognised as significant by all involved.

Women are at the sharp end of austerity. It's a fact. What we can't agree on is that women can more effectively fight austerity alone. The UCU union is organising strikes at the moment, and their four demands include ending unequal pay. That strike would obviously be less effective if only the women members took action.

The road of exclusivity in campaigning weakens rather than strengthens women's potential to fight their oppression.

The WPUK says its ambition is "clear definitions of sex and gender which aren't based on sexist and limiting stereotypes".

But the ideas that are dominant within capitalism, including gender stereotypes and sexism, cannot be overcome without building a mass workers' movement and organisations to transform society in a socialist direction. In that way, the basis for eliminating all forms of oppression would be laid.

Our ambition is a world free of class exploitation and inequality, where a democratic socialist planned economy is able to meet the needs of all, not just the few.

Freedom of identity is a right that must be defended - but not one that can be fully realised within the confines of unequal capitalism.

The conclusion the trade union movement must draw is the need to build a movement of the working class to defend every right, service and job - and to change society.

That means drawing in all sections of the working class through a programme for action that shows that all those oppressed and exploited in this system will benefit from, and are needed, in that struggle.

Sarah-Sachs Eldridge,
Socialist Party
executive committee

WHAT'S YOUR VIEW?

editors@socialistparty.org.uk
or, if you're not online, write to
the Socialist Inbox, PO Box 1398,
Enfield EN1 9GT

Film: Greed directed by Michael Winterbottom, starring Steve Coogan as Sir Richard "Greedy" McCreadie

Barbara Clare
Stenage

It was refreshing to watch a mainstream film exposing the madness and exploitative nature of the capitalist system.

'Greed' is an apt title for this film which, presumably, is based on the career of Philip Green, most infamously remembered for finalising his purchase of a £100 million super-yacht on the same day as BHS employees found out that they were losing their pensions! (In the film Greedy McCreadie's wife states that cost did not cover the interior design).

The film portrays Greedy McCreadie as a bully with no knowledge of the fashion industry, but who negotiated rock bottom prices for clothing, thereby exploiting the already poorly paid female machinists in developing countries, pressuring them to work faster in order to maintain the profits of their factory owners.

In one scene of the film a fire breaks out in a factory, a reminder of disasters that have occurred in recent years, (notably the Rana Plaza garment factory near Dhaka which collapsed killing over 1,000 people).

The sharp business practices that seem absurd to working people, but are apparently perfectly normal and legitimate under capitalism, are also explained. Greedy McCreadie used the assets of a company he did not own to buy that very same company. He did this using very little of his own money, asset stripping the companies and running them into the ground, leaving employees jobless. His wife lived in Monaco and, as everything was in her name, avoided paying any tax.



Actor Steve Coogan playing the central character, loosely based on notorious boss Philip Green

The film switches to different times in Greedy McCreadie's life, but the central theme is the preparation for his 60th birthday celebration at his home on a Greek island. An important subplot is the presence of refugees living in tents on the beach which could be seen from his luxurious accommodation. I feel this contrast could have been

developed further in the film, though it did draw attention to the lavish lifestyle of a fashion mogul and the plight of homeless refugees.

Exploitation

The facts presented at the end of the film highlight the exploitation of women in the fashion industry. In Myanmar women machinists earn

the equivalent of €3.30 a day and in Bangladesh €2.60 daily. This is compared to the obscene profits made by fashion companies. (I have read that Sony Pictures International would not allow individual brands and millionaires to be named as they didn't want to damage relationships with them.)

However, the information clearly il-

lustrated the massive inequalities under capitalism. One fact stated "The richest 26 men own as much wealth as the 3.8 billion poorest people."

For an up-to-date estimation you can read Oxfam International's document 'World's billionaires have more wealth than 4.6 billion people' (who make up 60% of the global population).

Book: Why you should be a trade unionist by Unite general secretary Len McCluskey

Derek McMillan
East Grinstead

Len McCluskey's book 'Why you should be a trade unionist' is a lively and accessible account of the role trade unionism has played in the past, and the hope which workers' organisations provide for the future.

It answers in detail the question: "What have the unions done for us?" In particular, he praises those in the so-called gig economy who have organised and fought against some of the most vicious employers in the country, and won significant victories.

It deals with some issues which are not usually thought of as trade union concerns. For example,

the Grenfell Tower fire, which he squarely blames on austerity cuts: "Union members were involved from the outset, supporting residents in the immediate humanitarian response. In those painful days after the tragedy we provided a vital link to the wider community, offering legal advice and representation to many residents, in what will be a long road to justice. Grenfell members have also received legal support from their unions in relation to housing, welfare and employment issues arising as a direct result of the fire - injustices that the mainstream media rarely notice."

On 'Unite Community' (of which I am a member) he writes: "This has become a fundamental part of our union's political response to the Tories' aggressive agenda of cuts. It has

helped to ensure that we are at the forefront of political, industrial and community opposition to austerity. We invited not only the unemployed through our doors, but all those not in paid work, including students, pensioners, disabled people, volunteers and carers. This is undoubtedly without precedent in British trade unionism, and it adds another dimension to the union's strength, because giving people not in work the opportunity to find their own voice assists us industrially."

Whether it is dealing with anti-union bosses like Ryanair's Michael O'Leary or the climate emergency, this is a text book for anyone interested in the future of society. I enjoyed reading it. It educated an old leftie like me and it can do the same for you.

Why You Should be a Trade Unionist by Len McCluskey
Published by Verso, 2020, £7.99

See also March's Socialist Today: 'Class Fighter', Peter Taaffe reviews Len McCluskey's book



Len McCluskey
photo Paul Mattsson

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UK governments' military, trade and diplomatic alliance with the UAE more important than securing justice

Horseplay

How do you escape justice after being found guilty of kidnapping, forced return, torture and a campaign of intimidation? That's right, by being Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid al-Maktoum the billionaire ruler of Dubai (and vice-president and prime minister of United Arab Emirates, and owner of Godolphin horseracing stables).

His highness's recent high-profile court case in London - which found in favour of his sixth wife, the estranged Princess Haya, who fled Dubai last year along with her two children - revisited the kidnapping by the Sheikh's operatives of his 19-year-old daughter Sheikhha Shamsa from Cambridge in 2000. Then, the police were blocked by the CPS and frustrated by the Foreign Office from pursuing their investigations.

And why was that? Only cynics would say that it was because the UK government has extensive military, trade and diplomatic relations with Dubai.

Still, as horseracing owners are meant to be 'fit and proper' he might not be able to shake the Queen's hand in the royal enclosure at this year's Derby!

Simon Carter
East London

Cardiff reader
>Flybe collapse: See page 4

Grounded by Flybe

I'm one of the screwed over Flybe passengers. Off to Jersey in three weeks' time for a chess competition, and I've just had to panic-book trains and a



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



The Militant-initiated Broad Left Organising Committee lobbying the Trade Union Congress in 1984 to demand a 24-hour general strike photo Dave Sinclair

Phil Holt: broad left pioneer

Phil Holt, Militant supporter, Broad Left pioneer and national executive member of the Post Office Engineering Union/National Communications Union has sadly passed away at 71.

In their heyday in the 1970s-80s, some Broad Lefts transformed unions into fighting organisations capable of winning longstanding concessions from employers, probably best demonstrated in the CPSA/PCS and the POEU/NCU (forerunners of the CWU). Those times pre-dated the collapse of Stalinism and the huge effect which that had on socialist consciousness generally. Some broad lefts later turned into little more than electoral machines.

Was it wrong to build them in the first place? Of course not. Is it still possible to build them? Yes - but the starting point has to be a clear programme of action. Currently that would include a commitment to fight all cuts, including campaigning for councils to set needs budgets, a call for renationalisation and a plan for the democratisation of union structures.

This is also relevant for building a left network of union members in your workplace. Draft a programme, get fellow workers to endorse it, then organise a meeting to work out how to pursue aims or grievances.

Obviously at this time, thoughts are with Phil's wife Beryl and family, including Katie and Audrey (who younger readers may wish to know has her own chapter in the annals of Militant - visit <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nsTYGucBk>).

But let's ensure the pioneering work done by many, including Phil, isn't just a footnote in history. We need fighting unions; they need to be built from the bottom up.

Dave Gorton
Former-Communications
Broad Left editor

Assange persecuted

The article on the BBC was interesting ('This is the BBC: Fight the cuts - and the capitalist media' socialistparty.org.uk). However, what the Socialist has been quiet about is the continuing persecution and torture of Julian Assange, for the 'crime' of exposing US war crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Not only is this a threat to a free press

and independent or investigative journalism, but to free speech and democracy itself.

Even the right-wing press are waking up to the serious implications of this.

It was good to see on last month's march for Julian Assange through central London banners and placards by NUJ and Women Against Rape, as sections of the media are still trying to smear him with rape allegations for which no charges were brought.

Keith Hussey
Hertfordshire

>See 'Assange arrest: US and allied governments seeking revenge for exposing dirty wars' on socialistparty.org.uk

TV: Expensive and low quality

The Socialist recently did a two-page feature about the BBC and the capitalist media. (See 'This is the BBC: fight the cuts - and the capitalist media' at socialistparty.org.uk.)

Modern television is not worth the fee. I do not pay it, and watch my friend's TV. We share the 65p cost of a TV Choice magazine, but it is a fact of my life that I can only find around five hours' viewing from a weekly schedule, such is the quality of the product.

My friend and I pay £17.80 per month for the cinema and attend two to three times per week because of the poor Freeview on offer. It's not 'free', it's £12.88 per month for the licence fee. I am not sure that the pay-to-view services offer value for money, and in any event my friend and I have no ambition to make Rupert Murdoch any richer.

The same goes for his newspapers. The Socialist remains my favourite read, and at £4.50 per month, to the door, it is excellent value.

Returning to the BBC, your comments concerning Laura Kuenssberg and pro-establishment bias were spot-on. The Socialist must continue to make articles, and come the revolution we will have a media for the people, one that is not driven by capitalism.

Adrian Rimington
Chesterfield

Hero to zero

Disappointingly, actor and former worker-militant Ricky Tomlinson and anti-racist campaigner Doreen Lawrence are

supporting Keir Starmer in the Labour leadership contest. Mainly, it seems, because of his previous legal help with their high profile cases for justice. That's partly understandable but not nearly reason enough to decide the next Labour Party leader.

Keir Starmer was also legal counsel for me, Lois Austin and many others over our false imprisonment ("kettling") by the Met police during a May Day demo in 2001.

We found Keir Starmer personable enough - we had many good chats about politics and all our activist pasts, and our legal case which ran for years. We shared an antipathy to Blairism.

Then Keir became Director of Public Prosecutions. When heading the Crown Prosecution Service he refused to prosecute the Met Police over the death of bystander Ian Tomlinson, struck by a police baton during an anti-capitalist protest in the City in 2009. He cracked down hard on teenagers in the 2011 riots and, as an MP, abstained over cruel Tory welfare cuts in a parliamentary vote. He was also, unsurprisingly, a coup plotter against Jeremy Corbyn.

It's not personality or past human rights advocacy that's essential but political programme, ideas and politics. Keir Starmer is not the continuation of Corbynism but the slide back to Blairism, even if he'd never admit so.

Niall Mulholland
East London - via facebook

Covid-19 chronicled

The virus is spreading
From Wuhan to Reading
Coughing and sneezing
Folks gasping and wheezing
The killer virus has hacked up here
There's no need to panic and no need to fear

A brand new virus is at large
But fear not Britain, Boris is in charge
Aided by Matt Hancock and Jacob Rees-Mogg

Who suggest we wash our hands after using the bog
So sleep safely loyal citizens of Uxbridge and Grantham
Just wash your hands and sing the national anthem.

Mel Hepworth
Doncaster

Terrorist threat

I was thinking of the importance of working people and how much the multi-billionaires' corporate industries rely on them. It just goes to show that the now number one world terrorist - coronavirus - is spreading worldwide and has a direct effect on global stock markets (see pages 2&3). The importance of people's health and well-being is one of the most important facts for a healthy planet.

It was Priti Patel who said we should treat Extinction Rebellion as terrorists, yet because of pollution it has been said that life expectancy has now reduced and people's health has declined as a direct result linked to it.

She and the government are overlooking that pollution is becoming the true number one terrorist of the world and only a socialist government can overcome the problem. Would someone tell them their billions are not worth anything if the planet dies?

Tim O'Connell
Bristol

Greece-Turkey border refugee crisis

Desperate people are pawns in regional power struggles

A new refugee crisis has erupted on the Greek-Turkish border. The trigger for this has been the conflict between the regimes of Turkey and Syria, backed by Russia, in the disputed Idlib region of Syria.

There, the deaths of 34 Turkish troops, reportedly from a Russian airstrike, saw Turkey's president Erdogan respond by ramping-up the country's

military intervention. At the same time he's pressuring the EU states and Nato military alliance into supporting Turkey's occupation by threatening to open its borders to allow an estimated four million refugees to cross into Europe.

A tentative ceasefire has now been agreed between Erdogan and Russian president Putin, but

the ongoing Syrian conflict threatens to reignite at any time this regional military, political and humanitarian crisis.

In the following article, reproduced here from the CWI website, **Alex Gounelas** explains the refugee crisis as a failure of capitalism and advances a socialist programme for solving it.

Nowhere is the failure of the EU institutions to bring about genuine 'unity' of the continent, or the arguments of pro-EU politicians more exposed than in the current refugee and migrant crisis in Greece. Thousands of desperate people - many of whom have gone through five shades of hell to escape wars, oppression and desperate poverty, to reach foreign borders - are used as political pawns by Turkey, Greece, other European governments, populist politicians and nationalist and fascist elements.

The real character of the EU was shown by the president of the European Commission, standing on the Greek-Turkish border and declaring that "Greece is Europe's shield", and then hypocritically saying she had "compassion" for those at the border.

The Greek government announced it will no longer process applications from migrants arriving on its shores. It intends to build a series of holding camps by the end of March, each to contain 20,000 migrants. Proposals for where these should be built includes uninhabited islands. Access to healthcare has been denied to the migrants and reliance is put on charities to provide basic help.

Police attacks

Heavy-handed tactics by Greek police have been exposed in the last few weeks, including boats of desperate people being shoved back to sea.

On the islands of Lesbos and Chios, police were filmed battering locals, smashing car windows and throwing teargas at houses. Video footage of a Greek man harassing a pregnant migrant woman is widely viewed on social media.

On 2 March, 1,000 mainly Afghan asylum seekers marched from Moria to Mytilini town, shouting "azanti!" (freedom). There was also a demonstration of Greek locals, who clashed with the police.

The scale of the crisis has reached epic proportions. On 2 March, within a 12-hour time frame, 4,354 people tried to cross the Turkish border

at Evros. From Saturday 29 February to Monday 2 March, over 24,000 attempted to cross the border. Around 183 people were arrested. Over 40,000 still await an answer on their asylum applications.

The islands have been descending into a form of occupied territory, where the police, in gang-like fashion, make up the rules as they go along.

Turkish invasion

The Turkish invasion into northern Syria, as well as the military actions of Russia and Syria, have led to the escalation of the crisis. Iraq, Afghanistan and Sudan, and other countries torn up by imperialist interventions and local despots, are creating millions of displaced people.

The US Trump administration effectively offered Erdogan a 'green light' both on the Kurdish question and now that of the Syrian border issue.

After receiving large subsidies totalling €6 billion from the EU, in order to accept and contain huge numbers of migrants and refugees, Turkish President Erdogan, is now backtracking. He is also cynically proposing the settlement of migrants into Kurdish areas in an attempt to change their ethnic composition.

The majority of the Greek capitalist press scrambles about trying to push the blame onto the governments of other countries, in a plea for them to do their 'duty' towards the EU establishment.

Meanwhile, most of the left in Greece seems to be sticking to a vague 'open border' policy, accusing anyone who does not agree with this position (which fails to take into account the concrete action needed to aid refugees and migrants, while allaying fears amongst Greek workers and the poor) of being 'fascist'.

Neither of these perspectives has credibility among the majority of Greek people. This is especially the case for those living on the islands and border areas who have also seen their communities devastated by the vicious austerity hoisted upon them by both New Democracy and the supposedly



Distressed refugees being rescued off the Greek island of Lesbos photo Ggia/CC

'left' Syriza government.

There are, of course, no easy solutions under capitalism, where war and economic crisis spiral indeterminably. What is needed urgently are immediate and clear demands from the left on what is to be done in the affected areas but also on a national level.

The international workers' movement must clearly call for an end to attacks on refugees and immigrants by the Greek state and fascist gangs.

The workers' movement in Greece must organise democratically run defence committees, in local communities and workplaces, and protest against EU anti-refugee policies that can divide and weaken the working class.

The CWI calls for:
■ Properly funded, humane rescue centres, and for the immediate scrapping of the Greek government's camps for immigrants and refugees

■ The formation of a democratically run body made up of local residents, workers' representatives, and workers representatives from the main countries affected by wars and brutal oppression, which can process the needs and rights of migrants and refugees

■ Funding for decent public housing in all local communities across Greece for all, including refugees, with full rights to healthcare and work

■ For a major infrastructure plan, including the building of new homes and community services for immigrants and locals throughout Greece. Nationalise the big banks and corporations under democratic workers' control and management

■ The immediate withdrawal of all US and other imperialist forces from the Middle East and Afghanistan. End all foreign power meddling in Syria

■ Winning these demands calls for the international unity of the working class across the EU and in the Middle East against capitalism and war, with a bold socialist programme

■ It entails a major struggle by the Greek workers' movement against the right-wing Greek government, and also against the cruel migrant and refugee policies of the capitalist-run EU. This requires solidarity action

with Greek workers by the workers' movement across the EU, and class solidarity with Turkish workers, who gain nothing from Erdogan's military adventures

■ Such united struggles can inspire the fight for a socialist Europe, that would see the end of wars, and oppression, which creates refugees, and the poverty conditions and economic crisis that forces millions of people to dangerously seek a better life elsewhere



Domestic Violence bill

WE STILL NEED TO FIGHT TO SAVE OUR SERVICES

Amy Cousens
Bradford Socialist Party

The new domestic violence bill, first introduced by Theresa May, has supposedly been improved under Johnson's leadership. It shows the pressure on the Tories to be seen to act on women's oppression, but it is a drop in the ocean of what is needed to protect women.

The bill will implement some legal changes which, in the context of a legal system that retraumatizes victims, should improve their experiences in court. But this bill in no way marks an end to the turbulent landscape of support and service provision for victims of domestic violence.

Local authorities will now have a statutory responsibility to fund domestic violence services. While this is a welcome point, it comes with no promise of sufficient funding. Local authorities will fund these services on already stretched budgets. The need to fight for no-cuts budgets and the money stolen by the Tories from our communities remains.

In areas where domestic violence services haven't been cut altogether, this has led to a trend of stopping funds for specialist charities like Women's Aid, and giving funds to charities which are non-specialist. In that way they can tick the box of 'supporting victims' while getting 'more for their money'. The bill reinforces this trend.

A recent example of this is in Bradford, where the council cut funding for a Women's Aid's refuge and adult provision, and has, instead, funded a charity called 'staying put'. If the name isn't enough to ring alarm bells, the charity declares that it provides a "holistic family approach". "Together we can give you the right support at the right time", it says, "to make you safe, sooner, and help your family to recover and heal."

This is a dangerous trend. It moves away



photo Leeds SP

from recognition of the origins of domestic violence and that women are disproportionately the victims - which women fought for in the 60s and 70s. It is cheaper for local authorities to fund non-specialist services, which support the whole family, with leaving the family home coming as a last resort. No doubt, the fact that this lowers demand for social housing is a factor.

There is an issue with 'bed blocking' in refuges, because there is not enough affordable accommodation for women to move on to. This is a dangerous approach to an issue caused by austerity. There is also a trend countrywide, where women's refuges have been decommissioned in favour of generic homeless hostels. The bill

only promises refuge accommodation and "other safe accommodation".

We support all victims of abuse regardless of gender in getting the support they need. But this trend is a veiled cut, where more victims are given support with the same or fewer resources. Men need support to flee violence. But we must also protect women's refuges and community services from closure. They offer more than a bed, providing much-needed advocacy and therapy.

So the bill will not tackle the lack of support for victims. A renewed fight is needed to win sufficiently funded specialist support services for all, and for council housing to provide long-term security for victims fleeing violence and abuse.

Readers' opinion

Childcare - costly, inadequate and hard work

Juliette Fogelman
East London Socialist Party

Childcare costs have risen 5% according to charity Coram. Its family and childcare survey found the weekly price for a part-time nursery place for a child under two is over £130 - £6,800 a year.

A lot of people feel it's not worth going back to work because they won't make any money or may end up worse off. It's not giving women a real choice about whether they want to go back to work. They end up working for nothing.

There's no way for women to improve their families' situation because their salary gets eaten up by childcare.

Childcare isn't available in a lot of areas.

Parents check out nurseries before their child is even born. That's stressful.

If you're renting you might not know where you're going to be living - you're priced out of certain areas.

How can you check childcare 18 months from now? It's difficult getting on a childcare waiting list a year and a half in advance.

Reliance on relations

Childcare is difficult with shift work. Often it's grandparents providing free childcare that makes it possible for parents to go back to work.

Not everyone's parents live nearby or are willing and able to help out. Even if they are, it's hard work on grandparents.

People have to work longer because of



pension attacks. It's one thing to want to help, another if you have to. 40% of grandparents provide regular childcare.

Statutory maternity pay isn't enough. If you're on a well-paid job, you can afford childcare.

If you're not earning much, you work for free. People feel guilty about leaving their child to not earn anything.

People should have choice to go back. Deciding to go back shouldn't be based on money.

The main reason I want to go back to work is to earn enough. And if I stayed at home, I'd be accused of being a skiver. But I would be working, I'd be looking after a child.

If people stay home, they should be supported, looking after a child is hard work.

News in brief

Amazon warehouse jungle

Hundreds of injuries have taken place at Amazon warehouses in Britain in the past three years. The GMB union says that one worker at a London site was left unconscious after a head injury and stopped breathing. And figures show it's getting worse.

Amazon employs over 27,000 workers in the UK. Between 2016 and 2019, 622 serious injuries were reported, including five 'near misses'. Serious injuries are those severe enough to stop someone doing their normal job for seven days.

Workers at Amazon are paid £9.50 an hour. It would take them around 203 hours to match the £1,925 Amazon boss Jeff Bezos earns every second - safely sat in his plush office, lounging around in his mansion or sunning himself on a yacht, away from his company's dangerous warehouses.

Boris's 'golden age'

Boris Johnson's Queen's Speech in December bragged of a "golden age for the UK." The prime minister also pledged to upgrade workers' rights as part of a Tory Brexit.

The reality is a million miles away from this nonsense. After a decade of Tory-led governments, job security has never been more precarious.

The latest official figures from the Office for National Statistics show almost one million workers are now on zero-hour contracts - the highest on record. This figure represents a year-on-year increase of 130,000, or 15.4%.

And who benefits from this burgeoning business model? Not zero-hour workers - who worry about whether they'll have enough hours work to earn sufficient wages to pay the rent and household bills.

No, the only beneficiaries are the bosses, who can 'hire and fire' at will without the overhead of workers' rights. This is the "golden age" Boris hails - a golden age of Dickensian capitalism!

Zero-hour contracts with associated low pay, and the absence of other employment rights, must be fought. The best way to do that is through the trade unions.

In fact, late last year, members of the PCS union working for a private employer at government offices in central London secured the London Living Wage, increased sick leave, and paid holidays, as well as union recognition, by taking indefinite strike action over many weeks.

Currently, members of the University and College Union are striking to end casualisation, among other demands (see page 8). End zero-hour contracts - support the UCU strikers!

Floody stupid planning

Following the disastrous floods in Britain, 11,410 new homes are to be built in areas at high risk of flooding. One-tenth of all new homes in England since 2013 were built in the highest-risk areas, Guardian analysis has found.

Callous course cuts

The Tories are removing funding for 5,000 education courses. Their justification is that very few people have enrolled in the qualifications to be cut.

But many are specialist certificates for people with physical or learning disabilities. One course for the chop is for people with visual impairment to work in therapeutic and spa industries. It's never going to have big numbers enrolling, but it's crucial for those who do.

POSTAL WORKERS MOBILISE TO WIN ROYAL MAIL STRIKE REBALLOT

VOTE YES!

photo Steve Score



Socialist Party members in CWU

Almost 110,000 postal workers are currently balloting for strike action to force Royal Mail to honour the 'Four Pillars' agreement over pay, pensions, workplace bullying and a shorter working week.

Postal workers up and down the country are taking part in gate meetings and mass Yes votes, queuing up to post their ballot papers. The Communication Workers' Union (CWU)

and its members are determined to win the ballot - again - after the disgraceful actions of unelected high court judges who ruled a 97% record-breaking Yes vote for industrial action illegal last year.

Management have told the CWU that it is going to push through its changes and smash the 'Four Pillars' national agreement to pieces, declaring all-out war with the union. It's clear that management has become confident with the election of the Boris Johnson government, and believes that now is the time to

take us on.

But workers are drawing confidence from the huge vote for Yes last time, and the mass, determined campaign to win the ballot again this time.

Job losses

Our members are prepared for the fight of our lives. We are facing job losses on an unprecedented scale, with 40,000 job losses likely.

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.

One rep says: "I have voted Yes because I support my union but also because I know now more than ever my job is at risk.

If you don't vote, then Royal Mail will claim they speak for you. CEO Rico Back and his £6 million golden hello will speak for you. Let's not be silenced. Vote now and vote Yes. There is too much at stake. Let's make history."

The ballot closes 17 March.

The Socialist Party sends solidarity to the CWU and postal workers. We say all out to win the Royal Mail strike rebalot and renationalise Royal Mail!

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