

Staff are outraged. 1%, or an extra £3.50 a week for an experienced nurse, is not just a slap in the face for NHS workers, it's a pay cut compared to the cost of living.

Boris Johnson and the government promised the NHS would have all the resources it needed to fight Covid. Instead, they handed over billions to their mates for hopeless test-and-trace and PPE contracts. Staff have risked their lives with inadequate or expired PPE.

The NHS workers Boris Johnson praised for saving his life in intensive care, the ones all the Tory ministers publicly clapped, who lost colleagues and have not got over the trauma and exhaustion of fighting the second wave, are now being stabbed in the front by the government.

What the government fails to realise is that the most valuable commodity in the NHS is the people who work for it. Without them, nothing would function.

The threat of strike action by the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) is exactly what is needed to force a real pay rise for NHS staff. Other unions must get on board with this, and start to seriously build a campaign for coordinated strike action.

Make this the next U-turn

This arrogant government has been forced into so many U-turns, let's make NHS pay the next one!

Tories say, 'how dare NHS staff demand a pay increase when so many have lost their jobs or taken a cut in pay?' We say this despicable divide and rule must not succeed.

But the question is real. NHS staff must also build support for the campaign for a 15% pay rise by reaching out in solidarity to other workers in the public and private sector, supporting a proper pay rise for all.

MPs vote for their own payraises, and their salary of £81,932 puts them in the top 5% of earners in the country. Many of them claim more in expenses than most NHS staff could hope to earn.

The Covid pandemic has shown many things. That the sacrifice and exhaustion of keyworkers would be exploited by the government and bosses, who only think of lining their own pockets. That the people who keep society running in care, transport, food, retail, education and the NHS are badly undervalued by those that run society. And that we need fundamental change in the way society is run.

A strike by NHS staff would be about so much more than pay. It would be about people refusing to accept the 'old normal' of exploitation, privatisation and cuts, and starting to look for a real alternative.

We are ready.
NHS WORKER IN LONDON
• See also page 3

NHS PAY

15% NOW

TRADE UNIONS MUST ORGANISE FOR STRIKE ACTION

the Socialist

formerly Militant

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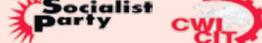
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"The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it."
Karl Marx

Tories keep bailing out bosses, while piling pain on workers and public services



Reading the headlines about Tory Chancellor Rishi Sunak's budget, some working-class people may have let out a small sigh of relief that at least the furlough scheme and the £20 increase in Universal Credit are continuing for a few more months. Others will have been furious, like the three-fifths of self-employed people denied furlough who are still left without a penny.

The Tories were undoubtedly hoping that Sunak's announcement - that in two years' time corporation tax for companies making more than £250,000 profit will be raised from 19% to 25% - might create the illusion that they intend to make big business pay for the Covid crisis.

Nothing, however, could be further from the truth, as was starkly demonstrated just a day later. The announcement that health workers will be offered a measly 1% pay rise - effectively a pay cut given expected inflation - comes on top of the pay freeze for other public sector workers.

The Tories cynically call health workers and other key workers heroes, and then continue to kick them in the teeth. There is an urgent need for the trade union movement to organise a serious struggle to break the public sector pay freeze and to support health workers' demand for a 15% pay rise.

Tories protect profit

Government spending during the Covid crisis has been enormous. Including the amounts announced in the budget, it is now predicted to reach £340 billion, or £12,400 per household. The Tories priority, however, has not been to protect the lives and livelihoods of the population, but to limit the damage to profits and the capitalist system as a whole.

Britain has one of the highest death rates from Covid in the world, and the worst economic crisis of the major G7 economies, yet the wealth of Britain's billionaires increased by more than a third. Now, in the aftermath of the Covid crisis, it will be working-class people who are told to tighten their belts.

The announced corporation tax increase is still two years in the future. While it would undo the last decade of Tory cuts to corporation tax, it would still leave Britain's rate lower than all but one of the G7 economies. And, in reality, far from taking money from the super-rich to assist the majority, the budget's announcement of a 'super-deduction tax incentive policy' is doing the opposite (see page 4). It is trying to bribe the capitalist class to carry out their historic role



of investing in developing industry. Businesses are being offered the right to claim 130% tax relief for any capital expenditure on plant and machinery.



Sunak's budget was a budget for the bosses. For the millions of working-class people rightly frightened by what their future holds there is only one alternative: get organised and fightback.

This, however, will have a very limited effect. Prior to the pandemic, levels of investment were at an historic low, despite already being able to deduct 100% of investment from their taxable profits, and sitting on huge piles of cash. By the end of June 2020, the cash reserves of UK private non-financial corporations had ballooned even further, to almost £900 billion, equivalent to 40% of GDP. An incredible £118 billion of that was built up during the pandemic!

In the past, despite many horrors, capitalism at least drove society forward by developing the means of production. Today, the sickness of the system is summed up by a failure

to invest because it is not profitable enough to do so.

Every aspect of the crisis of British capitalism has been heightened by the Covid crisis. The Office for Budget Responsibility's (OBR) economic projections that accompanied the budget make grim reading. The news headlines reported that they now expect a slightly faster recovery than previously, but they still estimate it taking until the middle of 2022 for the economy to get back to pre-Covid output levels.

More importantly, they expect no real recovery for millions of working-class people. The OBR predicts that, even when the economy 'recovers', incomes will continue to decline. In 2024, it expects real earnings to still be 4.3% below where they were forecast pre-crisis, equal to £1,200 a year. This, as the Resolution Foundation puts it, "comes on the back of a truly dreadful past decade for earnings growth."

While millions suffer continued wage restraint, others will be thrown onto the dole queue. The OBR expects unemployment to reach 6.5% in the last quarter of this year after the furlough ends, and to remain at a higher level for years. And, just as unemployment surges, the government has pledged to cut £20 a week from Universal Credit payments. The poorest households in Britain, already facing destitution, will have a further 7% fall in their income in the second half of this year. Overall, benefits will be reduced to the lowest level in thirty years.

Sunak barely mentioned public services in the budget, but that is because he knew that the truth would provoke outrage. The pandemic has shown clearly the need for a massive expansion in the NHS and other public services. Instead, the Tories are planning more austerity. After a decade of slashing public spending, proposed day-to-day public spending was cut by £12 billion in the autumn spending review, and by a further £4 billion in the budget.

Budget for the bosses

Sunak's budget was a budget for the bosses. For the millions of working-class people rightly frightened by what their future holds, there is only one alternative: get organised and fightback. Like the British Gas workers still striking against being 'fired and rehired' on worst terms and conditions, having overwhelmingly rejected the company's 'offer', workers across Britain are going to be facing increasingly brutal attacks from their employers.

The trade union leaders need to prepare to coordinate a fightback. At the same time, it is clear that the working class needs its own political voice that stands for a socialist alternative to capitalism. In the run-up to the budget Starmer again showed that he was only interested in fighting for the interests of the capitalist class - even opposing modest increases in corporation tax - rather than fighting for a socialist alternative.

NHS workers say: We are ready to fight Tory pay insult



Socialist Party members supported a banner drop in Sheffield, greeted by huge public support

● We deserve more

MATT
NHS NURSE

I've struggled to comment on the insulting real-term pay cut proposed by the government. I'm not naive, during clap for carers, we said: "Claps don't pay the bills."

The last year has been horrendous for NHS staff - the uncertainty, the PPE crisis, the changing guidance, seeing our colleagues off struggling with Covid. We've tried to get

72%
of the public think pay offer is too low, including 58% of Tory voters

through, with gallows humour and support for each other, but we're exhausted

This isn't just a Covid issue. Our health service has been at breaking point for years.

Overstretched, stressed, working in unsafe conditions, pay freeze after pay freeze, real-term pay cut of 20%, cutting off the NHS student bursary, the list goes on.

With all the public support, the 'thank you NHS' posters, murals, badges on Premier League football shirts, we hoped, just maybe, we might see a reasonable pay increase.

Instead, we've been told there isn't any money. But there were literally tens of billions of pounds for privatised track and trace, crony PPE deals, and for MPs to get a pay rise.

We all deserve more - every single carer, nurse, physio, porter,

51%
of the public back strike action, with only 36% opposed

technician, administrative staff, occupational therapist, and every member of staff in the NHS. We all deserve better, for holding the hand of the lonely patient, for being redeployed not knowing where we'll work, for being an inspiration to each other and everyone in the county.

The time is now for us to act. Our union representatives need to step up.

We need more than stunts, more than ridiculous slow handclaps - I'm looking at you Unison - we need action. We need support from everyone for a pay rise.

● What are we going to do about it?

ADRIAN O'MALLEY
UNISON HEALTH SERVICE EXECUTIVE (PERSONAL CAPACITY)

The 1% pay rise for NHS workers proposed by the government is a kick in the teeth. Tory hypocrites, who stood and clapped for 'our NHS heroes' every Thursday last summer, are now saying the country cannot afford more than a paltry £250 a year, or 1% for the 1.3 million NHS staff.

Trade union members are asking: "What are we going to do about it?" The government 1% pay recommendation has gone to the so-called independent Pay Review Body

(PRB), due to announce its decision in May. We should not be appealing for more money from the PRB. It has never gone against government recommendations.

The union leaders must lodge a claim, directly to the government, for the 15% that was demanded by NHS staff in the mass meetings that took place in the summer. And they must prepare for industrial action ballots if the Tories don't deliver.

Unison, the biggest NHS trade union, must take the lead, and lodge similar pay claims across local government, police, schools and universities. The Tories have declared

war on public sector workers by announcing yet another pay freeze.

We must respond by taking united action across the public sector, as we did in 2011, when millions of public sector workers struck in defence of our pensions. Only this time we must see it through, and win back what we have lost over years of pay freezes and austerity.

This rotten government can be beaten by the united action of NHS and public sector workers, who have the support of the millions who clapped us every Thursday.

We can, with organisation and solidarity, force the Tories back and win.

● Shocked

TOM HUNT
NHS NURSE AND UNISON NOTTS HEALTHCARE CHAIR (PERSONAL CAPACITY)

As an NHS nurse for over 40 years, I have watched the service I love being dismantled piecemeal. The government's 1% pay rise proposal is shocking.

All NHS workers are in shock after

the praise heaped on them during the pandemic. But this shock has quickly turned to anger, with staff looking to the unions to take a lead and stand up for them.

Despite the tsunami of job losses on the way, the public have shown through their weekly clapping that they support a significant pay rise for all care workers. The union leaders need to harness the anger in the workplace, knowing that the public will be behind workers struggling for a pay rise.

Online Rally: NHS workers fight back

Hosted by



6pm Thursday 11 March
Zoom ID: 842 8091 4746
Password: 611746
shopstewards.net



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.

- Scrap Universal Credit. For the right to decent benefits, education, training, or a job, without compulsion.
- Scrap the anti-trade union laws! For fighting trade unions, democratically controlled by their members. Full-time union officials to be regularly elected and receive no more than a worker's wage. Support the National Shop Stewards Network.
- A 35-hour week with no loss of pay.

ENVIRONMENT

- Major research and investment into replacing fossil fuels with renewable energy and into ending the problems of early obsolescence and un-recycled waste.
- Public ownership of the energy generating industries. No to nuclear power. No to Trident.
- A democratically planned, low-fare, publicly owned transport system, as part of an overall plan against environmental pollution.

RIGHTS

- Oppose discrimination on the grounds of race, gender, disability, sexuality, age, and all other forms of prejudice.
- Repeal all laws that trample over civil liberties. For the right to protest! End police harassment.
- Defend abortion rights. For a woman's right to choose when and whether to have children.
- For the right to asylum. No to racist immigration laws.
- For the right to vote at 16.

MASS WORKERS' PARTY

- For a mass workers' party drawing together workers, young people and activists from workplace, community, environmental, anti-racist and anti-cuts campaigns, to provide a fighting, political alternative to the pro-big business parties.

SOCIALISM AND INTERNATIONALISM

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

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Super-deduction will help big business pay less tax



NICK HART
BLACK COUNTRY SOCIALIST PARTY

The Tories are introducing 'super-deduction' for the next two years before corporation tax marginally rises. For every £1 invested by businesses, they will be able to wipe £1.25 off taxes paid on their reported profits. This will go alongside a host of existing 'creative accounting' methods that already allow big businesses to avoid upwards of £90 billion in tax each year.

Super-deduction will reward large firms who are already doing well. If Amazon's delivery and warehousing arm invests in new kit at a similar rate to its capital spending in 2019, it will face zero taxes on its profits. Previously publicly owned utility, transport and delivery companies that have to regularly replace their infrastructure and vehicles, will simply be able to hang on to a greater portion of their profits.

As well as yet another indirect

handout to big business, this latest 'corporate welfare' is a damning verdict on 21st century capitalism. Investment by British firms - that super-deduction is supposed to encourage - is stuck at historically low levels. It underlines the inability of capitalism to develop new technology without a massive leg up from government.

Free-market capitalism doesn't encourage innovation or healthy competition between businesses. The capitalist class is reluctant to stump up the cash to cut the time taken, or the environmental impact, of producing and distributing their products. Instead, they plough increasing amounts of their profits into rewarding executives and buying back shares.

Much better to replace this chaotic system with one based on democratic socialist planning, which can really begin to unlock the possibilities of technological advances to deliver for the working-class majority, not the big corporations.



Manchester protest SALLY GRIFFITHS

Police disgracefully stop NHS pay protest

MANCHESTER AND SALFORD SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBERS

An NHS pay rally was organised quickly and urgently in Manchester on 7 March. As soon as the government announcement was made, trade union branches were inundated and work WhatsApp groups were buzzing. The feeling of anger and need to do something was palpable.

The rally was socially distanced. Around the corner there were groups of people queuing to buy coffee - that was allowed. And the day after, millions of school children returned to school. But we were stopped by the police from protesting about this disgraceful kick in the teeth from the Tory government.

Striking Go Buses drivers from Unite union joined the rally from their picket line. Unfortunately, no one was allowed to speak, apart from to advise the crowd that the rally wasn't allowed to go ahead. And police cleared the area after arresting one woman and handing an outrageous £10,000 fine to the organisers.

Some NHS workers there seemed shocked about what the Tories are doing, but that shock has turned into anger.

They're particularly angry about the lies being told about their salaries

and terms and conditions. Workers don't recognise the £34,000 being bandied about. They don't recognise the 12.5% pay rise quoted in the capitalist media.

There is a reason they are not recognised. They are not true!

One nurse shouted: "Tell the truth about our salaries". Another worker told us: "I have to work extra week-ends just to be able to afford the childcare so I can go to work". A porter said: "The increase in our pension contributions took our last pay rise"

Health workers have been suffering under Tory governments for over a decade. Covid has shone a light on the dire state of the NHS.

Due to cuts, hospitals didn't have the required critical care or ward beds to fight the pandemic. Staffing levels have been cut so far to skeleton levels that there was no resilience in workforce levels when NHS staff became ill with Covid.

The irony of the Tories patting themselves on the back for building Nightingale hospitals that can't be staffed wasn't lost on the workers at the protest. We need our unions and the Trades Union Congress to organise a serious struggle to break the public sector pay freeze and to support health workers' demand for a 15% pay rise now.

Contractor MEH alliance is using Covid as a smokescreen to kickstart a race to the bottom. It is trying to deskill hundreds of apprenticeships in a brazen attempt at undercutting wages and conditions.

As a socialist and apprentice myself I find this repulsive, and this is why I'm supporting the Youth Fight for Jobs campaigns. Students and young workers who want to help fight for a society that is 'better than normal' should do the same.

As a socialist and apprentice myself I find this repulsive, and this is why I'm supporting the Youth Fight for Jobs campaigns. Students and young workers who want to help fight for a society that is 'better than normal' should do the same.

For example, we are supporting the fightback taking place by Unite the Union at Hinkley Point C dispute.

The Socialist Party supports the following people for Unison national executive council (NEC) election:

HUGO PIERRE NATIONAL BLACK MEMBERS' MALE SEAT
APRIL ASHLEY NATIONAL BLACK MEMBERS' FEMALE SEAT
JIM MCFARLANE SCOTLAND MALE SEAT
ADRIAN O'MALLEY NATIONAL GENERAL HEALTH SERVICE GROUP SEAT
DAVID MAPLES NATIONAL DISABLED MEMBERS' GENERAL SEAT
JOHN MALCOLM NORTHERN MALE SEAT
TOM HUNT EAST MIDLANDS MALE SEAT
NAOMI BYRON GREATER LONDON RESERVED SEAT

• Hugo, April and Jim are sitting NEC members. Please also support Paula Carlyle for national disabled members' seat. The Socialist Party is also backing sitting Unison Action NEC members.

• Rules introduced by Unison to clamp down on democratic debate in the union mean that candidates for union elections cannot 'invite or accept' support 'in money or kind' from any entity which 'is not provided for in Unison rules'. This article has been produced without the authorisation of the candidates, in order to comply with these requirements



Workers respond to 'back to school'



USDOE/CC



PHIL ROEDER/CC

Canaries in the coal mine

VICKY PERRIN
CALDERDALE UNION LEAD SCHOOL STEWARD
(PERSONAL CAPACITY)

Boris Johnson hypocritically warns that we must continue to be 'cautious', but the return to full opening of schools at this stage feels anything but cautious!

The vaccination programme, while well underway, has not yet reached school workers and many other key workers. We are vaccinated by age, but not for our jobs.

While vaccinating staff doesn't reduce child-to-child transmission, it would be a massive reassurance to those of us returning to classes of 30-plus pupils. Any social distancing has been abandoned in primary schools. There's only masks, open windows and hit-and-miss lateral flow testing between us and the risk of infection.

The victory won by education unions working together - forcing the Tory U-turn on full opening after Christmas - feels in the distant past. School union reps are left submersed in risk assessments, and battling to do everything we can to reduce the threat to workers from reopening.

Many school support workers have kept schools open for key worker and

vulnerable children since 4 January. We've staffed bubbles larger than during the last lockdown. We now feel like the canaries in the coal mine of the Tories' economic 'road to recovery'.

The 'R' rate of infection varies enormously from region to region, and even between neighbouring boroughs. Where it still remains stubbornly high, the fear is that full opening at this point could trigger further infection spikes.

Councils, including those Labour control, express fear over 'big bang' opening. But they fall in line and claim their hands are tied by the government. Even though it's councils that run these schools.

Without the education unions using their full weight to force the Tories into a more gradual approach, we are returning on the Tories' terms, not ours. We must hope that school reopening does not lead to big spikes, but we will need to keep a close eye on the infection rate.

We cannot be left fighting school by school, if and when it becomes too unsafe for schools to remain fully open. The unions need to be ready once again to force the government back if necessary.

A mockery of everything we've done

RACHEL LYON
TEACHING ASSISTANT AND UNION MEMBER IN
WALTHAM FOREST (PERSONAL CAPACITY)

Schools opened on Monday 8 March, and we don't know if we are inhaling or exhaling. Here we go again - bubbles, disinfectant, and social distancing in tight spaces.

I've worked through lockdown supporting key worker children and children with special educational needs. We have laughed and joked how the children have had their only experience of private education. Classes have been small, and children have had a lot of their teachers' attention.

Staff have been diligently complying with lateral flow tests and mentally supporting one another,

as we know each day we are at risk. We feel now we are going from the pond to the sea, with no in-between steps. As the gates have opened to all the children and classes have filled up, we can't maintain social distancing.

We truly believed - with all that we know so far - that Boris Johnson would, under no circumstances, open schools without children's return being staggered at least until the Easter break. We know the corona numbers will rise. It makes a mockery of the staff that have worked so very hard through lockdown and those having to shield.

A small number of staff have been vaccinated, while the rest of us know it will be months before we are. In my school year group, we have three adults off, and not nearly enough

adults to contend with the amount of children coming in.

During lockdown, domestic violence has increased. And children have become more exposed to witnessing, and been victims of, emotional and mental abuse. We understand how crucial the next few weeks will be to highlight any vulnerable children, and get families the support they have lacked through lockdown.

Schools are the first port of call for safeguarding, and staff worry about so many children who are coming back to school who will need extra support with the change and experience they have had at home.

We expect to start the rest of term with media criticism, no financial support, no let up and with no priority for a vaccine. Happy Easter.

Oppose Tories longer school opening plans

MARTIN POWELL-DAVIES
SOCIALIST PARTY IN EDUCATION (SPINED)

This callous government's 'thank you' to essential workers will be a further attack on our pay and conditions.

For NHS staff, their 'reward' is a derisory 1% pay offer (see pages 1 and 3). For school staff, education secretary Gavin Williamson suggests that schools operate with longer days and shorter holidays.

This proposal is nothing to do with helping children. The Tories' continued school cuts, alongside their reckless rush to full school opening, show that they regard schools primarily as a childcare service, not an educational one.

Extending hours will not improve education. Children, even more than adults, get tired. Concentration will not be maintained.

Compare England with Finland, consistently regarded as one of the highest achieving education systems. Pupils in England already spend almost an hour a day more in school, and get roughly half the summer holidays.

Instead of even more time enduring 'exam factory' conditions imposed on schools by league tables and Ofsted, school students after the pandemic need a 'recovery curriculum' that prioritises their wellbeing.

For their social development, children need leisure time and parents need time with their children. That

means better pay and shorter hours, not Williamson's suggestion.

Youth and play services should be funded to provide additional support. But these have been slashed by council cuts.

Over 20% of new teachers already leave the profession within their first two years, rising to 33% within the first five years. If the government succeed in imposing even greater working hours, staff turnover will increase even further, damaging education.

Government figures show that teachers already work over 50 hours a week. Support staff are pressured into unpaid overtime too.

Instead of conditions being made worse, they need to improve. That's why one of the ten key points in my

campaign to be the National Education Union (NEU) deputy general secretary (martin4dgs.co.uk) is for a national contract for all school staff that sets a genuine limit on overall working hours, not just teachers' 'directed time'.

Under current contracts, school employers cannot enforce a longer working day or year. Any move by Tory ministers to try and impose changed contracts must be firmly rejected.

Such an attack could not be fought school by school. Unions need to boldly respond with a clear warning that, if the government tries to enforce worse conditions, we will organise national action to defend staff and education.

The 'old normal' meant poverty for young people

KRIS
BIRMINGHAM YOUTH FIGHT FOR JOBS

The budget was another nail in the coffin for the prospects of young people. Pre-Covid Britain was nothing to write home about regarding youth unemployment. But during this pandemic, there has been an absolute jobs massacre in hospitality and retail, which are primarily made up of young workers.

I still remember when infamous Wetherspoon's boss Tim Martin sent out a video to all staff stating he was holding them to financial ransom - he was refusing to pay any furlough until he received confirmation from the government. But he said it was fine as everyone could just 'get a job at Tesco'. Many capitalist bosses threw young workers under the bus during lockdown - protecting their profits at all costs.

Last year, Chancellor Rishi Sunak promised 'kickstart' schemes for young people. Where are these kickstart schemes now? Needs - not in education, employment or training - rose from 39,000 to 797,000 in the final three months of 2020 - from 0.6% to 11.6%!

Young people are promised things are 'going back to normal'. However, before Covid, 'normal' was a generation dumped with zero-hour contracts, minimum wage, generational

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- US-Russian treaty won't end threat
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• Please support the following Socialist Party members standing in the NEU executive elections: Nicky Downes, Sean McCauley, Alex Moore, Sheila Caffrey and Louise Cuffaro

Leicester university workers ballot for action against redundancies

Sarah Seaton, chair of the University of Leicester and College Union branch, has spoken to the Socialist about fighting proposed redundancies and the impact the pandemic has had.

What has been the experience of university staff over the course of the pandemic?

It has been difficult for everyone. The workload was already unmanageable pre-Covid, but has now become absolutely unsustainable - for teaching, research and support staff alike. We were fortunate in that many of us could work from home, unlike some other professions. But at the start of the first lockdown, all temporary workers' contracts were terminated and the burden of that work shifted onto permanent staff. No choice, no pay increase - nothing. Many of us also have caring responsibilities, being expected to home-school our children while working full-time hours. It's impossible.

Can you explain how your dispute with the University of Leicester bosses came about?

On the first teaching day of 2021, university staff came back to an email from the vice-chancellor notifying us of a consultation over reconfiguration plans which put 145 jobs at risk of redundancy. The mood was instantly one of shock and disbelief. To be told we were facing unemployment amid the uncertainty of the pandemic was just incredible. Despite the exhaustion of our members, the shock very quickly crystallised into anger. We know that if we don't fight job cuts now, similar attacks will

be coming down the line for other workers.

What has been the response of the UCU branch?

Our branch has historically had a strong position on opposing compulsory redundancies after a previous dispute we won in 2018. We called an emergency general meeting at short notice, where over 200 attended. There was incredible strength of feeling. We agreed for the union go back to the vice-chancellor's office giving them until 1 February to withdraw the proposal or enter into dispute. We passed a motion of no confidence in the university executive board. As it failed to withdraw the proposal we have now declared a dispute and are preparing to ballot.

What has been students' reaction?

The Students' Union at University of Leicester have been hugely supportive, with the 'Students Against Redundancies' group also moving a motion of no confidence in the university executive, passing by 116 votes out of 120.

I feel incredibly sorry for current students. There is a danger that the question of tuition fees becomes limitted to demanding a refund for the lockdown period, when really education should be free and accessible to all, with fees scrapped completely.

What do you think is a solution for both students and workers?

Obviously, the university's executive needs to immediately halt its redundancy plans. We must demand that the government step in and fund the shortfall in university budgets rather than the insidious creeping influence of big business.

Sparks deskilling protests



London ISAI PRIVA



Swansea ALEC THRAVES

London

Socialist Party members in London joined around 50 rank-and-file construction electricians, members of general union Unite, to protest against deskilling on 3 March.

The workers have been boosted by forcing back plans to train new 'electrical support operative' (ESO) grades at the Hinkley Point nuclear power plant. These would have done electrical work at lower wages than time-served electricians. The action organised by the sparks started with workers protesting at the headquarters of NG Baileys and then marching to different construction sites - receiving support from the workers on sites.

Construction workers have also had high rates of death involving Covid-19, working on unsafe sites with no adequate PPE. More than 360 construction workers died between 9 March and 25 May last year while suffering from coronavirus.

The Socialist Party has called for the closing of unsafe working sites and the stoppage of non-essential jobs. Our placards and leaflet calling for support and shutting the sites to stop deskilling were welcomed.

The protest itself was very enjoyable - fun, lively and power-packed. It included construction workers who have been working in the industry for up to 50 years and some who joined recently. Workers were acting together to fight and defend their rights. Their collective action has already forced a retreat. The training course for ESOs may have been suspended but the fight continues until the threat of deskilling is off the agenda.

Every Wednesday they will be out again and we will be supporting them all the way. We sold six copies of the Socialist - two for the solidarity price.

ISAI PRIVA
WALTHAM FOREST SOCIALIST PARTY

Swansea

As part of the national campaign against the employers' attempts at the deskilling of construction electricians, Unite protesters were joined by Swansea Trades Council and Swansea Socialist Party members leafleting and discussing these attacks with dozens of workers entering the site.

Obviously, not all the construction workers who were going into the site were electricians, but the threat of deskilling spreading to other trades if this attack was not defeated was immediately recognised.

Some of the older electricians were explaining to the younger sparks that this is just the most recent employer attack to drive down terms and conditions leading to an almost constant battle over decades.

Plans were discussed to take the Unite protests to other sites across Wales over the coming weeks until the sparks get an absolute guarantee that deskilling moves will stop immediately! We will be supporting and standing alongside them.

ALEC THRAVES

VICE PRESIDENT, SWANSEA TRADES COUNCIL AND SOCIALIST PARTY

Grangemouth

"Say no to the ESO", was the chant that rang out outside the HQ of the hated Ineos corporation at Grangemouth. 45 construction electricians, organised as part of the Scottish rank-and-file group of Unite, gathered to protest.

Many were working on a Balfour Beatty site at Grangemouth and were walking out for the day, pointing to the potential to shut down the sites unless the bosses back away from their attacks. There was a determined mood, with enthusiasm for maintaining weekly protests at big construction sites around Scotland every Wednesday morning. Socialist Party Scotland's leaflet was well received by those attending.

PHILIP STOTT
SOCIALIST PARTY SCOTLAND

PCS leadership failures lead to concession bargaining on pay

DAVE SEMPLE

PCS NATIONAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEMBER (PERSONAL CAPACITY)

The HM Revenue and Customs group is the second largest in the PCS. Its Left Unity leadership has just balloted members on a three-year pay deal. This deal, while giving a 13.75% pay increase, means a significant worsening of conditions for many members. Unsurprisingly, in the absence of any lead to the contrary - given the union recommended a 'yes' vote and lack of all the information available - members voted overwhelmingly to accept the deal.

Funding your own pay rise - or concession bargaining - should not be an approach associated with left-led unions such as PCS and its anti-pay freeze public stance. Yet general secretary Mark Serwotka told the union's February national executive that he had informed the Cabinet Office that, even in the context of a pay freeze, deals could still be done, and exemplified the current HMRC pay deal - which he supported.

PCS policy is opposed to pay caps and pay freezes, is opposed to trading conditions for pay and is for an immediate pay increase of 10% that starts to make up for the 20% loss in real pay since 2010. Demands that need to be backed up with the necessary campaign and action.

In late 2017, the union carried out a non-statutory consultative ballot, which secured huge membership support for the union's pay demands and strike action. A statutory ballot which was delayed until mid-2018, did secure majority support for strike action but failed to get the 50% turnout required by the anti-union laws.

Socialist Party members called for a full debate to determine the way forward and improve prospects for achieving a 'yes' vote in any future ballot - including demands beyond pay and disaggregated ballots within a national framework.

The Left Unity leadership said if we simply organised more effectively next time then we would beat the threshold. But 2019 was a rerun of 2018, and with a similar result.

A 10% claim was tabled in February 2020, shockingly almost immediately withdrawn by the leadership - a gesture towards national unity over the Covid-19 pandemic. They asked instead for an inflation-proof increase. The Cabinet Office thanked Mark Serwotka for his "constructive approach" and imposed a 1% to 2.5% pay limit.

Faced with this humiliation, the Left Unity leadership reinstated the original 10% claim and launched a petition! This abject approach in 2020 led directly to the abandonment of any national campaign. Left Unity's flawed approach has led to the collapse of successive national pay campaigns and to concession bargaining.

The Broad Left Network, a PCS, socialist, rank-and-file group in which Socialist Party members are active, opposed the divisive "fund your own pay rise" deal in HMRC and nationally, and has consistently argued for a campaign on pay, linked with other key issues such as pensions, to build support amongst the membership to help win a statutory ballot.

The fight for decent pay with no strings attached must continue. A fresh approach with a change of leadership is needed to achieve our demands - support the Broad Left Network candidates in the 2021 PCS elections.

● See pcsbln.wordpress.com for the candidates

Goodlord striker speaks out: 'Workers have to fight for our skills to be appreciated'

Tenant-referencing workers at tech company Goodlord, organised by general union Unite, are on all-out strike against 'fire and rehire' wage cuts. Striker Athena Parnell spoke to James Ivens, East London Socialist Party, about the issues facing tech workers and all workers fighting back.

What is Goodlord? What do you do?

Goodlord is a tech company, a platform for letting agents. They also offer referencing services to check on potential tenants, and insurance for letting agents. I work in the referencing team.

What is the strike demanding?

The London Living Wage - ideally for everyone, but at least for everyone in London. And permanent contracts.

How has management provoked it?

Until I joined in March, most of the referencing workers were employed through a temp agency. I was part of the first batch hired on fixed-term contracts, for six months.

In July, a group of us got together and asked management for a conversation. These jobs are not unskilled. They require two or three months' training.

So we felt we had something to offer them as workers; we wanted them to offer us permanent contracts. Due

to the pandemic, we were afraid that at the end of six months we were going to lose our jobs.

They rudely refused to talk to us about that. They pose as a start-up to avoid giving us normal conditions and wages.

We were told there would be a restructuring in the department. A consulting company was hired to make the referencing department more 'viable' for the business. Our contracts got extended until the end of January.

We heard nothing from the consulting company. Then management notified us of a big announcement at the end of October.

One day before our big announcement, the company announced that many management positions were getting a promotion or more money. So we were quite excited!

What was the big announcement?

They announced an offer of permanent contracts - with a 25% pay cut. I am on £24,000; they want to reduce my salary to £18,000.

They said that since the job can now be done from home, they are no longer going to pay the London Living Wage. This absolutely made us mad. Every single person lives in London.

I accepted a contract extension

until the end of April. The company offered us one week of pay if we quit.

How did you respond?

At that point we wrote a letter to the company, from almost everybody in the referencing department. We asked for a collective consultation. Hear us out. Let's just be a bit more logical about the options.

They absolutely refused. There could be individual consultation, but no collective consultation.

My colleagues tell me that one of the managers said "we don't have to negotiate with you collectively, it's not like you're in a union." That's when some of us organised to join the union.

What would you say to other workers facing 'fire and rehire' tactics?

Unionise! Sticking together and fighting for our rights is crucial right now.

Everybody who sells their skills, and that's how you make your living - we have to stick together to negotiate against those who own stuff.

Wherever you came from, wherever you're going, whatever you do. We have to stick together and fight for our skills to be appreciated.

That's what Karl Marx said - and the Socialist Party agrees! So how can people support your strike?

We have a strike fund. We've had some donations, which is amazing and we really appreciate it. Supporting our picket lines would also be amazing.

Support the strike

- Messages of support to grefstaff@gmail.com
- Email complaints to complaints@goodlord.co.uk; tweet complaints to @sogoodlord
- Strike fund donations to Unite LE/7098L London ITC Branch, sort code 60-83-01, account 20303680, reference Goodlord
- Read the full interview at london-socialistparty.org.uk



Goodlord picket line 8 March JAMES IVENS

MAY DAY GREETINGS

Support the working-class press in 2021

- Calling all trade union branches and committees, community campaigns and student groups!
- Show solidarity and fund the socialist press with a 2021 greeting
- Prices start at £30 for a small box - minimum price negotiable
- £55 for our most popular size, 1/16 of a page or £90 for 1/8 and £170 for 1/4, £300 for 1/2, £500 for a page and a 20% discount until 31 March!
- Visit socialistparty.org.uk/mayday

Get all the latest union news

nationalshop stewardsnetwork
with the NSSN bulletin shopstewards.net

Stop union busting on the buses: Reinstate Declan Clune and Moe Muhsin Manir

In the space of a couple of weeks, two bus driver union reps have been sacked - Declan Clune, RMT, at Bluestar in Hampshire (see below) and Moe Muhsin Manir, Unite, at Abellio in South London.

Both are members of the National Shop Stewards Network steering committee and both have built reputations for fighting for their members, particularly coming to the fore in the fight for workplace safety during the pandemic. Declan's appeal is 10 March and Moe is appealing against his dismissal which took place on 8 March.

Huge support for Declan

RMT drivers at Bluestar were outraged at the news of Declan Clune's sacking by management, accused of bringing the company into disrepute for reporting a bridge strike to Network Rail. Many drivers at the depot have come forward to report other incidents of bridge strikes that the company has scandalously ignored.

It is a legal duty of any driver to report a bridge strike whether a bus driver or member of the public. To be dismissed in such circumstances is viewed by the Southampton RMT District Bus and Coach Branch as a

union-busting attack on their trade union rights and passenger safety, which they are determined to fight.

Support has flooded into the campaign with over £2,600 donated to Declan's RMT branch fighting fund. Declan's sacking has been met with widespread support from RMT and other trade union activists, including invitations to speak at meetings across the country. This attack, alongside that of other trade union reps, is viewed as a concerted effort by employers to undermine workplace organisation as a prelude to attacking jobs, pay and working conditions.

In a more light-hearted indication of support for Declan, he was nominated by over 400 people as Bluestar's key worker of the pandemic in a company contest. The winner's name was to be painted onto the front of a bus. Needless to say the company has cancelled the contest as a result of the support for Declan.

The company has been rattled by the strong backing for Declan and steps are now being taken by the RMT to prepare for further action if he is not reinstated.

SUE ATKINS

PRESIDENT SOUTHAMPTON TRADES UNION COUNCIL

● Send messages of support to to.defendmoe@gmail.com and southamptondbc@rmt.org.uk

Manchester bus drivers' indefinite strikers fight on

SALLY GRIFFITHS

MANCHESTER SOCIALIST PARTY

Bus drivers in Manchester at Go North West have been on the picket lines, on indefinite strike over the deplorable actions being taken by the employer.

In another act of 'fire and rehire' the company is imposing a new contract with more hours, worse terms and conditions and a shift system which would have a massive effect on workers' lives.

The picket line was strong, with around 70 workers in a fighting mood. It is the actions and attitude of their employer that have forced them to take this action, voting 82% in favour of strike action after the

employer tore up their contracts and withdrew from the negotiating table.

The drivers were keen to explain that they weren't striking for extra pay or changes in conditions - they had to vote to strike in order to defend their lives and livelihoods.

There is a strong feeling of 'we are out until this is won', that their action links with others around the country, and that they are defending a potentially massive issue for all workers.

The drivers on the picket today felt this attack on their conditions and on trade union negotiating is "abhorrent and vicious".

Go North West bus drivers and others across the country have worked throughout Covid-19 - having PPE battles along the way - and are high on the list of the most affected by Covid infections and deaths.

And now their employer says thank you by launching an attack on their jobs; already slashed sick pay in the middle of a pandemic! 'Key workers' aka the working class deserve and demand more.

Picket lines at the Queens Road Depot, Cheetham Hill are 5am - 5pm every day.

London bus drivers continue walkout

HELEN PATTISON

LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

Bus workers in Unite, striking at private company RATP in London continued on 5 March. On the picket lines they listed all the impacts of privatisation, from the lack of air conditioning and heating in the drivers' cabs, to the company's plans to extend their shifts, pay and holiday disparity among drivers.

One driver put it bluntly, saying that ultimately private companies exist to make profit, and agreed with Socialist Party members that the buses needed to be renationalised. There was also enthusiasm once again for candidates against London Mayor Sadiq Khan, who talks no end about being the son of a bus driver, but while in office has failed to act to protect drivers or other transport workers from the pandemic or the drive for profit.

DO YOU HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY?

Send your news, views and criticism, in not more than 150 words, to editors@socialistparty.org.uk - or if you're not online, PO Box 1398, Enfield EN1 9GT

We reserve the right to shorten and edit letters. For legal reasons, we need your full name, address and phone number - but confidentiality will be respected if requested

THE SOCIALIST INBOX

● Bullying bosses jeopardise workers' safety

"My life is more important than a bowl of salad!" are the words of a worker from Bakkavor, which provide M&S and other supermarkets with packed salads. He was sacked for being off work with anxiety over the food plant's Covid safety failings.

You might remember Bakkavor. It was in the news last year when a worker took a secret video of the boss telling workers that if he needed to sack anyone, he was "gonna look at who had turned up for work and who hadn't bothered."

There were reports of workers turning up coughing and spluttering. It was clear that low-paid workers cannot afford to take time off work if they're ill.

Then there was a Covid outbreak at the Kent factory. It started with 15 workers. Four days later there were 36, then 91. Two of the factory workers died.

So, the next time you see the advert - "This is not just food... this is M&S food" - spare a thought for the workers packing the food in processing plants across the country.

If capitalism cannot ensure workers are safe at work, then workers cannot afford capitalism.

ELAINE BRUNSKILL
GATESHEAD

● A workers' representative on a worker's wage



Terry Fields PHOTO D SINCLAIR

The Times obituary of former Labour MP for Liverpool Broadgreen, Terry Fields [Militant supporter and Socialist Party member], said he was "a class warrior to his fingertips". It continued: "Fields declined to accept his full salary as an MP... to take only the equivalent of the pay he had earned as a firefighter"...

Contrast this magnificent example with Liverpool council's budget meeting. The

Liverpool Echo's headline was telling: "Liverpool council to vote on doubling acting Mayor's pay." This was approved by Labour councillors. Consequently, the allowance of Acting Mayor Wendy Simon, will increase from around £40,000 to just over £80,000.

And yet, at this same meeting, Labour councillors voted through a Tory pay freeze for ordinary council workers who earn over £24,000 a year. They also approved a programme of cuts and council tax hikes...

Like Terry Fields, the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition candidate for Liverpool mayor, Roger Bannister, will only accept the average worker's wage. I urge all good socialists to vote for him and other anti-cuts candidates in May.

ALEX SMITH

LIVERPOOL

(extracts of letter published in the Liverpool Echo)

● Model selection system

The good news for Starmer is that China has adopted the Labour Party's candidate selection system. China plans to use it to ensure Hong Kong elects the 'right' kind of government, just as Labour planned for Liverpool's mayoral election.

ANNON COHEN
NORTH LONDON

● Universal class discrimination

I'm on Universal Credit (UC) and the money is a joke. So when I found out the £20 a week rise in payment was only temporary, I couldn't believe it.

I receive £342 per month which is a massive drop to what I was earning while at work. It's barely enough to survive on. But the right-wing media spread propaganda against people on UC, saying they just spend it all on 'beer, cigarettes and drugs'. This is just class discrimination.

ROBERT QUIRK
EAST LONDON

● Down and out in California?

Amid the unsurprising and undoubtedly true allegations made by Harry and Meghan of racist royals and a bullying distant institution, the prince said his family "literally cut me off financially" in the first part of 2020. He also said the Netflix and Spotify deals that he and Meghan have struck were never part of the plan, but he "had to afford security for us".

However, before you have any sympathy for his 'plight', Harry admitted: "But I've got what my mum left me". They



PHOTO SP WALES

● Stand together and fight back

NHS staff have literally put their lives on the line during this pandemic - which is not something they signed up for. As a society we owe them so much. A 1% pay rise is an insult.

The Tories use the excuse that 'there's no money due to Covid-19. We can't afford it...'

If we let them get away with this, they will come back again and again to attack our pay and the services we rely on. Don't let NHS workers stand alone. We need all the public sector trade unions to coordinate industrial action and strike together

against pay freezes and austerity.

JAMES ELLIS

LEEDS

● TUSC support

Interviewed by Andrew Marr, Labour's health spokesman Jonathan Ashworth never categorically said that nurses should get a 15% pay increase, and he never said he would support a strike or be on a picket line. He only said he supports last year's Tory budget pay award of 2.1%.

The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition supports the nurses' pay demand and any industrial action they take.

NANCY TAAFFE

WALTHAMSTOW,

NORTH EAST LONDON

● Failure of 'opposition'

One reason the Tories only offered NHS workers 1% is because of the massive failure of the opposition, which includes Labour's Keir Starmer and the trade union leaders. They have all but formally signed up to a 'national unity' coalition government.

This failure does not mean NHS workers are not prepared to fight. They are

receiving massive public support for the heroic role they have played over the last year.

The Tories always mistake the cowardly behaviour of the workers' leaders as the unwillingness of workers themselves to put up a fight to get what they deserve.

Last year, the health workers' trade unions did next to nothing to support the 15% pay rise campaign organised by rank-and-file health workers.

The Tories have a 13-point lead over Starmer in opinion polls. How shit must you be to be losing to this rotten Tory government!

MARTIN REYNOLDS
WALTHAMSTOW,

NORTH EAST LONDON

of this atrocity.

However, GMC carries on the presence of having an on-going project in Bangladesh, its website stating that it is "poised" for development once the Bangladeshi government gives approval.

The committee calculates up to half a million people would lose their land, their livelihoods, and become homeless.

This year's protest, which took place during the GMC shareholders annual general meeting, was online and leading members of the committee in Bangladesh participated.

I backed the call for the energy industry to be nationalised under democratic workers' control and management, not just because of criminal activities such as those described in the meeting, but also because of a decades' long failure to act on climate change.

PETE MASON

BARKING, EAST LONDON



PHOTO FERRAN CORNELLA/CC

● Marxism versus Stalinism

The mention in Clare Doyle's film review of 'Dear Comrades' (see socialistparty.org.uk) of how the real traditions of the 1917 Russian Revolution were hidden from the population, reminds me of an incident in Budapest several years ago.

The Hungarian government has preserved many of the old Stalinist monuments and keeps them in an open-air museum just outside the city limits.

I took advantage of the guided tour. The guide looked like she would have only been an infant when Stalinism was overthrown in Hungary, and so would have grown up with a capitalist view of her country's history.

At one point of the tour, she launched into a mild tirade against Lenin's "blood-thirsty tyranny". I explained the real record of Lenin and the Bolsheviks with regards to democracy, in contrast to Stalin. And while I didn't convert her into a revolutionary, I did find her open to alternative ideas.

It is always worth setting the record straight with people who have been deliberately miseducated. The state of capitalism in the ex-Stalinist countries makes people more open than ever to the ideas of genuine Marxism.

CLIVE WALDER
BIRMINGHAM

● International solidarity - nationalise energy industry

For the last 14 years the Committee to Protect Oil, Gas and Natural Resources in Bangladesh has organised vocal, highly visible protests in central London against coal mining conglomerate Global Coal Management Resources (GCM), through its UK branch.

In 2006, a 70,000-strong demonstration in Phulbari, Bangladesh, against GCM's plan to develop open-cast mining there, was attacked by paramilitary forces. Three protesters died and 200 were injured. The Bangladesh government withdrew the mining licence in the wake

threat to Britain.

Racism from the royals is nothing new. Prince Philip has a long record of telling racist jokes.

The Queen and Prince Philip have been exonerated by the media, but the repeated jibes about Meghan Markle's race came from somewhere in the palace.

The attack on her is being used as a means of stirring up race hatred. The fate of the ex-royals is not a matter of concern to socialists. The racist 'dog whistle' outpourings of the establishment media are.

DEREK MCMILLAN
WORTHING

● Capitalist inequality deepens under Covid

A report by Oxfam - 'The inequality virus' - is a stark warning about the growing issue of inequality across the world during the Covid pandemic. With many suffering poverty, some of the wealthiest people significantly increased their personal fortunes. It took just nine months for the fortunes of the top 1,000 billionaires to return to their pre-pandemic highs. For the world's poorest, recovery could take almost a decade.



PHOTO MARK JONES/CC

also revealed American billionaire and media mogul Tyler Perry provided them with a home and security last year when they moved from Canada to southern California.

If only everyone who had been 'cut off' through losing jobs, homes and pay during the pandemic had massive inheritances and billionaires to tide them over until they could strike lucrative media deals!

Royals like Harry live on a different planet from the rest of us. Let's not take sides in this spat between the reactionary monarchy and privileged whingers. Let's abolish the institution once for all and fight for socialism!

FRANK ALLEN
LOUGHTON, ESSEX

● Royal racism

The right-wing press has been full of criticisms of Meghan Markle after her revelation of racism in Buckingham Palace.

The Daily Mail protests that its vicious attacks on Markle have nothing to do with racism. It is forgetting its own history and its most infamous headline "Hurrah for the [fascist] Blackshirts". To this day, it repeatedly portrays asylum seekers as a

Solidarity with Amazon workers!

Historic union battle at Alabama warehouse



PHOTO JOE PIETTE/CC

ASHLEY ROGERS

INDEPENDENT SOCIALIST GROUP (CWI, USA)

Deep in the heart of the American South, through the mire of anti-union repression, nearly 6,000 Amazon workers in Bessemer, Alabama, are making a historic push to successfully organise the first Amazon warehouse in the United States.

They are now clearing one of the last obstacles to unionisation, voting for representation. The Covid-19 pandemic has brought with it immense levels of devastation for the working class. While working people suffer under the worst economic conditions in living memory, companies like Amazon - now the third largest corporation in the world - have experienced massive growth.

This growth has come at the cost of its employees' health, safety, and standard of living. During the pandemic Amazon's revenue has increased by over \$100 billion, while Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos nearly doubled his personal net worth.

The last time Amazon workers voted on union representation, in 2014, it was a group of only 30 workers. Now, the push in Alabama comes from over 5,805 workers in a single location.

Coming just weeks after Teamsters in New York City successfully forced bosses to the negotiating table with a week-long strike, it shows that workers in the logistics industry are gathering their power.

Amazon is attacking workers, at the Bessemer distribution centre and across the country, with anti-union propaganda, declaring in leaked videos that unionisation could "hurt innovation" and "jeopardise everyone's job security."

The company also compels workers to attend "captive audience meetings" where corporate anti-union lies are forced on the workers. Amazon has even begun offering long-standing workers at the facility a \$2,000 or more bonus if they quit, all in an effort to disrupt the union vote.

Amazon has long-standing anti-union policies. For example, in 2001, when the company was a fraction of the size it is now, it laid off 850 employees in a Seattle customer service centre after a union drive. Since then, Amazon has grown to over a million employees - only the second American company ever to reach this size - and its anti-union practices have only grown increasingly sophisticated and repressive.

If the majority of the workers vote 'yes' for the union - the voting lasts until 29 March - it

would open a new chapter in union organising at Amazon, and a historic victory against Big Tech would be won that could set off a flurry of organising activity at other Amazon locations across the country.

Since the start of the Covid pandemic we have seen an increase in 'wildcat' strikes - strikes without official union approval. Just days into the Covid crisis in March, UAW members in a Michigan Fiat-Chrysler assembly plant, after hearing two of their co-workers had been quarantined for coronavirus, staged a wildcat work stoppage and forced management to close the plant in only three hours.

Actions such as these show that it's often the rank-and-file, rather than the union leadership, which initiates struggles against the bosses.

Unionised workers shouldn't have illusions in the often-conservative union bureaucracy. Workers can build the power of the membership within their union, through militant workplace action, and pull conservative bureaucrats into struggle.

The union drive in Bessemer highlights the golden opportunity that labour has: to fight and win better lives for working people during one of the most trying periods in US history.

If the labour movement is able to break away from the parasitic Democratic Party and the bureaucratic union leadership, both of which act as a brake on working-class struggle, we will be able to make serious gains for the working class and fight for a socialist society with a democratically planned economy, operated for the needs of all.

● This article can be read in full on independentsocialistgroup.org



Why I'm standing for TUSC

● We need councillors to prioritise housing need, not super-rich developers

MIRA GLAVARDANOV
NORTH LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

Enfield council is Labour-led. Labour councillors shed crocodile tears while implementing Tory cuts, with the excuse that 'there is nothing we can do'. They hide behind the 'illegality' of no-cuts budgets. In fact they are not illegal. But I'd like to ask, is it legal to kill people through austerity?

rich developers and investors, not the people in housing need. Next door to Meridian Water, in a working-class, predominantly black and Asian area, is an old and polluting incinerator which the council plans to expand rather than turn into a recycling plant. The council wants to save money - burning is cheaper than recycling - sacrificing our health and lives. We support campaigners' call to "Stop the incinerator".

I was a member of the Enfield North Constituency Labour Party during Corbyn's leadership. We

passed a motion that instructed the council to set a no-cuts budget. It hit a brick wall. I have come to the conclusion that the only way to fight against austerity is outside the Labour Party, more so after the takeover of the party by the Blairites.

We desperately need a voice that stands for the working class, in Enfield and the whole country. That's why I am standing for the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition in the Chase ward by-election in Enfield this May. We need an alternative to austerity, poverty and capitalism.



Mira campaigning for 100% council housing at Meridian Water. MERIDIAN FOR COUNCIL HOUSING



The council is getting into debt to satisfy rich developers and investors, not the people in housing need.

● We need anti-cuts councillors, not private cuts consultants!



LUKE JOHNSON
ROTHERHAM SOCIALIST PARTY

Labour-controlled Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council (RMBC) has declared that it has another £18 million 'savings' to make in the 2021-22 financial year to 'balance the budget'. This is in addition to £16 million in the last two years.

These cuts are already known to include the closure of vital public services, such as Addison House in Maltby, an adult learning disability centre. This is due to close at the end of June despite a high profile union and carers' campaign of 90,000 petition signatures, several big protests, and a judicial review.

Labour councillors justify further austerity measures by declaring that they have 'no alternative' but to pursue them. A job listing has appeared on the council website for a 'Head of Change and Innovation'. It seems RMBC are to pay a private consultant £550 a day to "achieve sustainable financial savings whilst ensuring services continue to meet the required outcomes of the council".

What this really means is probable job cuts, and further assaults

on terms and conditions. It means council workers, including many of those who have been on the front-line during the pandemic, receiving less pay or pension.

Unfortunately, paying consultants to advise on public services is widespread. In 2019, a freedom of information request revealed that local councils across the UK had spent around £400 million on consulting firms in the preceding year alone.

In Rotherham, councillors are willing to make working-class people pay the price of the pandemic. The Socialist Party will fight these cuts. We will continue to put pressure on local authorities and councillors to use reserves and borrowing powers to set no-cuts budgets and, along with other local authorities, demand the funds from central government.

We need councillors prepared to vote against the cuts and put a fight up against the Tories. That is why I will be standing for election to Rotherham Borough Council for the Bramley and Ravenfield ward on 6 May, as part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition.

International Women's Day

Socialist women speak at inspirational online rally



The rally heard contributions from different sections of the CWI

JULIA LEONARD
HILLINGDON SOCIALIST PARTY

Thousands have viewed the International Women's Day rally, hosted by the Socialist Party and the international socialist organisation to which we are affiliated - the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI). The rally, chaired by Isai Priya, a member of the Socialist Party's national committee, heard of the tremendous work being done by different sections of the CWI.

In recent years, International Women's Day has been pushed as an opportunity for companies to encourage women to spend money, or

for employers to try to show that they support equal opportunities for their women workers. The rally on Sunday 7 March was a real inspiration that reminded us of its true socialist origins. Common themes were the huge impact of the pandemic on the lives of women, and the desperate need for mass workers' parties to defend the conditions of all workers.

Women on Strike

Rashme, a member of the Chennai Committee of New Socialist Alternative in India, described the lack of preparation made by the Indian government at the start of the pandemic, with lots of migrant workers having to travel back to their home areas



Protests in Poland during 2020 against a constitutional ban on abortion. JAKUB HALUNOWICZ

with no transport provided. Many women lost their lives during this time. She spoke of how, despite poverty and the double burden of work and looking after families, workers in the garment industry fought to defend their salaries.

Women workers in Ireland previously employed by Debenhams have also been on the picket line, fighting for their rightful redundancy packages despite being harassed by security guards and the police.

Carah Daniel, a central committee member of Militant Left in Ireland, talked about how during the pandemic it is workers who keep society going, not the bosses. She also highlighted the 14% gender pay gap

in Ireland, something replicated internationally.

Sheri Hamilton, from the Marxist Workers' Party South Africa, described a pandemic of femicide where a woman is killed every three hours, only one in 36 rapes is reported, and there is a conviction rate of less than 8%. Women are organising in the trade unions against gender-based violence, to tackle sexual exploitation in the workplace, and the scandal of sex for jobs.

Unsafe abortions are one of the main causes of early death among women globally. Pamela Meza Lobos from Socialismo Revolucionario, Chile, spoke of how they are campaigning for women's reproductive

rights. Inspired by the victorious struggle for abortion rights in Argentina, women are fighting for similar rights in all countries in Latin America.

Claire Bayler, from the Independent Socialist Group in the US, said that young people will not be willing to sacrifice their future for the crisis of capitalism. Many have incurred huge amounts of debt to fund degrees that no longer guarantee a good job, with young women suffering a gender pay gap throughout their working lives.

Leila Messaoudi, general secretary of Gauche Révolutionnaire in France, and a local government councillor, spoke of the need for a new mass party to defend the rights and gains of workers, as the existing parties have failed to do this.

Clare Doyle, CWI International Secretariat, praised the fighting socialist women who had taken part in the rally. She detailed the role of women in some of the momentous revolutionary events in history, such as the Petrograd textile workers who took strike action in February 1917 as part of the revolutionary movement to overthrow the Tsar in Russia.

Around the world, governments will expect workers to pay for the health and economic crisis. Helen Pattison, Socialist Party London regional secretary, explained how the ruling class is banking on divisions among the working class, forcing us to fight over crumbs rather than for the huge resources that they own and control. She pointed out: "It will be mass united class struggle against sexism, inequality, and all forms of oppression for a socialist world that will be key."

The Socialist Party has produced 'a fighting programme for women's rights and socialism' (see socialistparty.org.uk), which is currently being printed and will be used in all our campaigning, including in the trade unions and for the local elections.

Build subscriptions to the Socialist

For the Socialist Party, selling our paper - with all the ideas it contains - is a vital part of what we do. By selling it in the street we test the mood of workers in our community, and get an audience for our ideas. Lockdown restrictions have limited our ability to do that. To partially offset this we have launched a campaign to build the number of subscribers to the Socialist. We have had 113 new subscribers so far in the first two months of the campaign.

SUBSCRIBE TO the Socialist

- socialistparty.org.uk/subscribe
- E-subscription £2.50 a month, or £4 including Socialistism Today
- Paper subscription £4.50 a month, or £6.50 including Socialistism Today

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- or make cheques payable to Socialist Publications, PO Box 24697, London E11 1YD (3 months £20, 6 for £35, 12 for £60)

Who do you know who would benefit from a parcel of socialist ideas dropping on their doormat or landing in their inbox every week? Can you ask them to subscribe too?

We spoke to Sukh Sethi, paper sales organiser for the West London branch of the Socialist Party, about why the Socialist is important for her.

"The Socialist has been an integral part of developing my understanding of the key ideas underpinning how we can bring about socialist change and empower the working class.

"The centre pages often contain a double spread on crucial Marxist ideas. Also, the Socialist is the perfect supplement reporting on up-to-date developments in working-class movements and campaigns across the globe.

"I am a regular subscriber to several other newspapers, including The Guardian and the Financial Times. The Socialist is different because its articles are written by the working class, reporting on issues that directly affect our lives.

"Importantly, the demands of the Socialist Party are printed in every issue, so that there is no confusion as to who we are, and whose interests we represent (see page 3)."

Fighting fund target achieved - keep up the momentum

Congratulations to Socialist Party members and supporters across England and Wales who have helped us smash through our fighting fund target. Campaigners have been inspired by the Socialist Party's upcoming election campaign as part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition.

We want to make sure that we have the best possible campaign, with as much material as possible. So we're asking you all to keep up the momentum by raising fighting fund and help us go well over our target.

Election appeal donations have

been flooding in from across England and Wales. £100 has been donated by Maggie Fricker, an NHS worker in Southampton, £10 from Ron Phillips and £20 from Wilf Laws from the South Tyne and Wearside branch of the Socialist Party. We've also had £30 from Phil Speakman in Liverpool and £30 from D M Thorburn in Cumbria.

Socialist Party members and supporters in Wales, despite having exceeded their target, are not letting up. We've had £20 from Charlie Wells and £20 from Oisín Mulholland, both students in Swansea and West Wales. These are just a few

examples of the many donations we've had in during the last week. Don't forget election day is less than two months away, so it's vital we get the election appeal donations in urgently. Who else can you ask for a donation?

Thanks also to Socialist Party members in Sheffield who have raised a tremendous £264.90 selling TUSC t-shirts, and to Neill Dunne in Liverpool who has raised £20 selling Socialist Party t-shirts.

We need all your fundraising and donations, no matter how large or small, to make sure we have the best possible election campaign.

AREA	£ RECEIVED	£ TARGET	Q1: JANUARY-MARCH 2021	DEADLINE: 31 MARCH 2021
Wales	5,397	2,300		234%
East Midlands	2,103	1,850		114%
South West	1,938	1,800		108%
North West	1,056	1,150		92%
London	3,895	4,600		85%
Northern	563	750		75%
Eastern	865	1,200		72%
Southern & SE	1,483	2,350		63%
Yorkshire	1,537	2,550		60%
West Midlands	1,298	2,600		50%
Other	5,742	3,850		149%
TOTAL	25,859	25,000		103%

Fund our local elections challenge

DONATE TODAY

- Visit socialistparty.org.uk/donate
- or call 020 8988 8777
- or make cheques payable to Socialist Party, PO Box 1398, Enfield EN1 9GT

Why I joined the Socialist Party - to fight for the future of the working class

DAVID MURRAY
MANSFIELD SOCIALIST PARTY

As an ASDA worker I have seen firsthand the capitalist drive to pursue profits before the wellbeing of people, reflected in more work piled upon shop-floor colleagues. Skeleton staffing has seen colleagues leave in droves and never replaced. Benefits and rights have been pared back as colleagues are forced onto swingeing new 'flexible' work contracts. And since the beginning of the Covid crisis, colleagues have been forced to work with minimal protection in teeming stores as ASDA's bosses have pocketed super-profits.

When Jeremy Corbyn was elected leader of the Labour party in 2015, I joined hoping to help deliver the new mass party that seemed to have come into existence as an embryo within the shell of the old Labour Party. What followed in the next five years was a stark lesson in the impossibility of transforming Labour - with

its machine firmly in the hands of the Blairites - into a party willing to stand with the working class against the bosses.

After Labour went down to a crushing defeat in the 2019 general election, I couldn't help but look for an alternative. When Corbyn came to Mansfield after the 2017 election I attended his rally. On the way out I encountered local Socialist Party members who had set up a stall, and fell into a conversation with them. It was apparent that we shared a lot more in common politically than I did with most of the people in the Labour Party.

Over the next couple of years I would often see the Socialist Party campaign stall in Mansfield town centre. Outside of the big cities and university towns, most socialist groups seem to be limited to a quiet Facebook page. These socialists seemed different. Not afraid to talk to the public and make their argument, even when it meant standing

in a freezing and windy town centre in February. We aim to be part of the "fabric of a working-class community", a Socialist Party member explained to me.

The decision to join the Socialist Party was easy. The consistent belief in the need to build a mass party of the working class, to organise in the trade unions, and to root ourselves in working-class communities has given me hope.

And so, to those who are tired of watching the 'official' left backpedal in the face of spurious attacks from the right, and to those who understand that the task at hand is for the working class to build power for ourselves, and in our own interests, I would say join the Socialist Party to fight bosses and to fight for the future of the working class.

Do you agree? JOIN THE SOCIALISTS socialistparty.org.uk/join



Campaign stall in Mansfield town centre. MANSFIELD SP

150th anniversary of Rosa Luxemburg's birth

A revolutionary life, exuding passion and determination

CHRISTINE THOMAS

SOCIALIST PARTY EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Rosa Luxemburg was born in Poland on 5 March 1871 - the year of the Paris Commune. In her short lifetime she experienced three major revolutions and participated in the most important debates among socialists internationally.

Before the Bolshevik-led October 1917 revolution in Russia, socialists had no model of a successful socialist revolution. They were trying to grapple with how workers would move into struggle and become conscious of the need to change society. Rosa was a thinking and 'creative' Marxist, ready to defend the ideas of Marx and Engels but prepared to develop them when necessary.

Hers was an inspirational life, exuding passion and determination. She was passionate in her love of life, about her beliefs and principles and her desire to see an end to all exploitation and oppression. She showed courage and determination, standing firm when in a minority or facing repression, imprisonment, illness, even death.

Rosa became involved in revolutionary politics when she was still at school in Poland. At the age of 18, state repression forced her into exile in Zurich.

When Rosa moved to Germany in 1898 she had already established herself among international socialists as a Marxist speaker and thinker. She became active in the German Social Democratic Party (SPD), the largest working-class party in the world. By 1912 it had amassed one million members, 15,000 full-time party workers, 90 daily newspapers, youth and women's sections and 2.5 million affiliated trade unionists.

The party described itself as Marxist and revolutionary but had never been tested in struggle. The end of the 19th century saw an economic upswing allowing the German ruling class to buy a degree of industrial peace through some economic and social improvements. But the repressive regime restricted political activity.

Outspoken

Despite her youth and the internationally recognised political authority of the German SPD leaders, Rosa would speak out if she disagreed with their political orientation. Sometimes she confronted overt sexism from an overwhelmingly male leadership unaccustomed to confident female revolutionary leaders.

Her first real test came when Eduard Bernstein, an SPD leader, challenged the basic ideas of Marxism. Capitalism, he argued, had overcome its basic contradictions. Economic crises had been eliminated through credit, the development of monopolies and 'globalisation'. The SPD should no longer stand for class struggle and revolutionary change but economic, social and political

reform within the existing system.

In her famous pamphlet 'Social reform or revolution' (1899), Rosa Luxemburg argued that capitalism may have experienced a prolonged economic upswing but it hadn't solved its contradictions. Credit could only temporarily delay a crisis and would also intensify it. Monopoly capitalism had not eradicated competition, which was sharpening between the imperialist countries, resulting in further conflict when war broke out in 1914.

Bernstein's theory of gradual reform of capitalism was utopian, she argued. As capitalism moved into crisis the capitalist class would attack the wages and conditions of workers. The fight for revolutionary change in society was as relevant as ever.

How do working people become conscious that society needs to be transformed and that they have the power to change it? For Rosa, reform and revolution were inextricably linked.

By struggling for economic, social and democratic reforms on a daily basis, workers become more confident, better organised and aware of the need to fight for a fundamental transformation in the way society is structured.

Bernstein's arguments were defeated at three SPD congresses. But over the next few years the gap between revolutionary theory and practice widened. Day-to-day activities, especially standing in parliamentary elections, became increasingly divorced from the struggle for revolutionary change. Sections of the leadership were conservative and bureaucratized, holding back the movement of the working class.



She lambasted the SPD leaders who argued that mass strikes were purely Russian 'exceptionalism' and not relevant to Germany

Rosa, more than anyone else, recognised the dangers. She waged a constant struggle against reformism within the SPD. When revolution broke out in Russia in 1905 she grasped the opportunity to try and shake the leadership out of its conservative complacency.

A new historical period was opening up. In 'The Mass Strike' she describes how Russian workers were striking in their thousands; how their strikes became generalised and political, giving confidence to less organised workers to strike for their own economic demands.

She lambasted the SPD leaders who argued that mass strikes were

purely Russian 'exceptionalism' and not relevant to Germany. The growing crisis of capitalism, she argued, would push the German working class into following their Russian brothers and sisters.

Rosa emphasised the spontaneous nature of the strike movement. Some critics have used this to argue that she ignored the role that a revolutionary socialist party plays, believing that spontaneous mass movements alone would be sufficient to change society. This is a crude misrepresentation of her thinking.

Ossified SDP leaders

Rosa aimed to shake up the ossified German leadership, who either thought that mass strikes were irrelevant or could be organised at will by the party, regardless of economic and political conditions.

Rosa bent the stick towards spontaneity but also recognised the necessity of a revolutionary party, which could unite together the most conscious workers to give a lead in a revolutionary situation. In her words, the party must not "fold its arms" and wait for a spontaneous movement of the people to "fall from heaven" but instead "hurry on ahead of the development of things and seek to accelerate it."

But in the concrete situation in Germany, Rosa didn't draw the necessary organisational conclusions. She was confident that when German workers moved into struggle they would either push the SPD leaders into taking a more revolutionary position, or replace them in the course of struggle.

Lenin was critical of this approach, as he was of Rosa's position on the national question. In Russia, he pursued a very different course, patiently pulling together a core of revolutionary Marxists around a clearly defined political programme. Politically and organisationally cohesive, the Bolsheviks successfully gave leadership to the revolutionary movement in 1917 Russia.

Rosa's failure to organise a coherent political and organisational opposition to the SPD leadership proved fatal both to the outcome of the German revolution and to her own life. Individual political and personal courage were, on their own, insufficient for the historical tasks at hand.

The bankruptcy of the SPD leadership was laid bare in 1914 when it backed the war aims of the German capitalist class. Only a handful of revolutionaries around Rosa Luxemburg initially opposed the imperialist war. Rosa herself spent much of the war in prison.

In 1916, an attempt was made to strengthen organised revolutionary opposition to the war through the formation of the Spartacus League. Though it attracted some of the best youth and workers in Germany, it remained a loose 'network' rather than a cohesive political party.

When the German revolution



Rosa Luxemburg PHOTO FILE BUNDESARCHIV BILD/CC

finally erupted in November 1918, the Spartacus League and its successor the German Communist Party (KPD) (formed in the heat of the revolution) were too weak to lead the working class to successfully overthrow capitalism as the Bolsheviks had in Russia in October 1917.

The state forces, with SPD leaders at their head, reasserted control and crushed the revolution, brutally murdering Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Liebknecht and many other heroic revolutionary workers.

As the revolution faced imminent defeat and she faced possible death, Rosa confidently wrote: "The revolution will come back and announce I was, am, I shall be". Within five years of her death, she was proved right as revolution broke out in Germany 1923.

As socialists today, we maintain Rosa's confidence that working-class people will struggle to change society. But we combine that confidence

with a determination to learn from her mistakes and build a party which can ensure that next time the struggle will be successful.

• This article originally appeared in the Socialist in 2001

Further reading:

Articles from socialismtoday.org (magazine of the Socialist Party) 'Rosa Luxemburg's inspirational legacy' by Peter Taaffe - Issue 125 (2009)

Reprinted in issue 224 on the centenary of her death

'The 1918-19 German Revolution' by Bob Labi - Issue 123 (2008)



10 years ago – the Fukushima nuclear disaster

“WE CAME CLOSE TO LOSING NORTHERN JAPAN”

CARL SIMMONS

KOKUSAI RENTAI (CWI IN JAPAN)

On 11 March 2011, a magnitude 9 earthquake hit north eastern Japan. It was followed 50 minutes later by a 14-metre tsunami, devastating coastal areas.

Nearly 20,000 people died in the most costly natural disaster in Japan's history. On 12 March, the media reported an explosion at the Fukushima No 1 Nuclear Power Generation Plant. The drama unfolding in the plant had important consequences both for Japan and environmental movements throughout the world.

When the earthquake hit the three operational reactors, the plant went into emergency shutdown. 50 minutes later the tsunami slammed into the plant, damaging both the emergency generators and the cooling system, necessary because the reactors continue to produce heat after shutdown.

There followed a cascade of system failures, resulting in hydrogen explosions, the meltdown and melt-through of the three reactor cores, in the most serious nuclear accident since Chernobyl in 1986.

Workers in the plant were worried. Plant manager Yoshida Masao described the situation they faced: "I thought we were really going to die. With no water coming in, the No 2 reactor was going to melt. All fuel was going to really override pressure in the containment vessel and escape outside. That would have been a worst-case accident, with corresponding amounts of radioactive substances all sped outside. That would no longer be on a Chernobyl class - maybe not a 'China Syndrome', but something like that."

No contingency plan

Despite warnings about the possibility of a tsunami higher than the protective wall, the accident manual of the Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO) that ran the plant had no guidelines for dealing with such a situation. Workers in the plant were left alone to develop their own solutions.

They faced high radioactivity and at least three hydrogen explosions. For the most dangerous tasks, a group of older workers and section leaders, referred to within the company as the 'suicide squad', was created. Workers used fire-engines and boric acid pumps to inject seawater into the generators. However, they faced opposition from both the company and the Prime Minister's office.

Seawater corrodes components in the generators, making decommissioning of the plant, with huge losses and bankruptcy for TEPCO, unavoidable. At one point, Yoshida defied orders from both the company and the Prime Minister's office to stop using seawater.

In order to inject the water, pressure had to be reduced first. However, in the No 3 reactor this proved difficult. 'Dry well venting', releasing



International Atomic Energy Agency inspectors tour the partially destroyed Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant site in Okuma PHOTO IAEA/IMAGEBANK/CC

radioactive gases into the atmosphere directly, without first passing them through water, was seriously considered. Had this been done, TEPCO's own estimates were that within three hours, the radiation level would reach 250 millisieverts (the maximum permitted annual exposure), at a distance of 20 kilometres from the plant.

Officers of the Nuclear Industry Safety Association tried to impose a press blackout. With no time to evacuate residents they sought to hide their plans. However, another explosion in the reactor building meant pressure fell, and they could get water into the reactor.

On 17 March the US embassy advised its citizens living within 80 kilometres of the plant to evacuate. On 25 March Kondo Shunsuke, chair of the Atomic Energy Commission, worked out a worst-case scenario should the reactors spiral out of control. He proposed a 170-kilometre radius for compulsory evacuation, with a 250-kilometre radius "optional". This would have meant evacuating Tokyo.

US experts' fears were not groundless. They believed a large number of spent fuel rods, stored in a pool by the No 4 reactor with no containment, were overheating.

We now know that was not the case. Water had flowed from the reactor well into the pool. Had planned work on the reactor not been delayed for a week, the water in the pool would have evaporated. The US theoretical physicist Michio Kaku was correct when he stated in June 2011

that they "came close to losing northern Japan."

In the end though the worst case was avoided and radiation contained. While debates still rage about the effect of low-level radiation on cancer rates, deaths due directly to exposure to radiation have been very few with only one death legally recognised.



I thought we were really going to die. With no water coming in, the No 2 reactor was going to melt. All fuel was going to really override pressure in the containment vessel and escape outside

But the disaster has not been without cost. 160,000 people were evacuated from an area within 20 kilometres of the plant. It is estimated that 2,200 died as a result of the accident, mostly from the evacuation.

Surveys of the evacuees show that large numbers do not intend to return. Many have suffered drastic reductions in income, worsening health and high levels of stress. Their life expectancy dropped from 65 to 58 years.

The clean-up has proceeded extremely slowly. There are enormous problems disposing of the contaminated water used for cooling. The reactors may never be properly decommissioned.

The economic cost of the disaster has been huge - \$180 billion and still rising. The ecological effects are still not fully known. Even this month, fishing co-ops stopped sales of rockfish, due to dangerously high levels of radioactivity present.

Protest demonstrations following the disaster were huge. Some opinion polls showed 80-90% in favour of scrapping nuclear power. While both the Democratic Party government, and the Abe-led Liberal Democratic Party government that replaced it, pushed restarts, ten years later only nine of the 39 reactors at five plants in the country have restarted. In addition to the opposition, new safety regulations make it uneconomical for companies to restart some reactors.

Kokusai Rentai (CWI in Japan) opposed all restarts and called for the nationalisation under democratic workers' control and management of the nine regional electricity companies. In 2012 the government partly nationalised TEPCO to bail out the company, making its debts public.

We also raised the demand for fighting trade unions independent of management. Denryoku Soren, the enterprise union organising power workers, was better known for campaigns promoting nuclear power and backing pro-nuclear candidates than raising problems with safety exposed

by the accident. It supported TEPCO's 20% cut in workers' pay, justifying this by referring to the plight of evacuees - although they had refused to meet with residents groups opposed to nuclear power.

Shutdown of the reactors meant Japan losing 30% of its power supply. Despite this, with voluntary campaigns to conserve energy there were no power-cuts, demonstrating the massive waste of energy under capitalism.

Clean renewable energy

Kokusai Rentai called for a massive programme of investment in renewable energy and energy conservation. Instead, pro-business governments have used formerly mothballed coal and gas generators and abandoned targets on carbon emissions.

Their pro-nuclear stance is more about recouping profits from the enormous amounts of fixed capital invested in the nuclear programme than concern about greenhouse gas emissions.

The Fukushima accident shows that attempts to portray nuclear power as a safe form of energy and a solution to global warming are misguided.

Had there existed a genuine mass workers' party, Fukushima could have provided the spark for a break with capitalism and for a socialist Japan. In the absence of such a party, despite the massive demonstrations, it was one factor paving the way for eight years of a right-populist Abe government.

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the Socialist

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formerly **Militant**

BRITISH GAS STRIKERS REJECT DEAL AND CARRY ON FIGHTING



PHOTO STEVE SCORE

STEVE SCORE
LEICESTER SOCIALIST PARTY

“We’ve told O’Shea to stick it!” This was the message to the British Gas CEO and the feeling on the British Gas engineers’ picket line in Leicester on 5 March. It was the day after GMB union members had rejected management’s latest offer.

Some of the pickets described how the results had come in live from the different business groups as if it were a football match:

“One-nil, two-nil, two-one...” In the end all bar one of the five groups voted to reject. The anger of the strikers has only increased as a result of various bullying attempts by management.

The engineers on the Aylestone Road picket line were from the service and repair group, the biggest, that voted 79% to reject on an 88% turnout. It has been the membership that has led that determination to fight, not the GMB leadership, who made no recommendation on the deal.

Paul Carvell, GMB steward, said: “It was a four-to-one vote against accepting the offer,

so we are out on strike again today. We are now into day 26 of strike action, yet more people are coming down to the picket line. The depth of feeling is getting stronger against the attack on our terms of conditions and the use of ‘fire and rehire’. O’Shea says the consultation meetings, legally required in the fire and rehire process, are starting. The threat of mass sackings is imminently real.

“We want them to come back to the table with a decent offer. But we have already announced sixteen days of strikes in March, and there is talk of escalating it further towards the end of March. It is the membership itself that

has spoken really strongly against the company and their proposals.

“The extra three hours working per week with no extra pay, and the impact it will have on work-life balance, is a huge stumbling block to accepting any deal. Because we are on annualised hours it is likely that we will be working far more hours in the summer.”

The Socialist Party says:

- Solidarity with the British Gas strikers
- End ‘fire and rehire’
- Renationalise British Gas under democratic workers’ control

A SOCIALIST RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC CRISIS
▶▶ socialistparty.org.uk/coronavirus

WHAT WE STAND FOR: THE SOCIALIST PARTY’S MAIN DEMANDS
▶▶ see column on p3

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