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the Socialist

Issue 1125

18-24 March 2021

formerly **Militant**

DEFEND THE RIGHT TO PROTEST

END VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

- **Build a mass movement to end sexism and violence against women**

- **Scrap the police, crime, sentencing and courts bill**

- **Democratic community and trade union control of the police**

- **Fight the cuts to public services**



- **No trust in capitalist politicians - for a new mass workers' party to represent the interests of the 99% not the 1%**

- **For a socialist alternative to the sexism, inequality and crisis of capitalism**

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STOP POLICE BRUTALITY: JUSTICE FOR VICTIMS OF GENDER VIOLENCE >>> p5

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the Socialist formerly Militant

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

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

SUBSCRIBE to the Socialist for weekly working-class news, analysis and fighting strategy socialistparty.org.uk/subscribe Paper subscription £4.50 a month, or £6.50 including Socialism Today E-subscription £2.50 a month, or £4 including Socialism Today

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SOCIALIST PARTY The Socialist is the weekly newspaper of the Socialist Party, the England and Wales section of the Committee for a Workers' International socialistparty.org.uk socialistworld.net

BOOKS AND PAMPHLETS Socialist Books: our publishing house socialistbooks.co.uk Left Books: Marxist classics bookshop leftbooks.co.uk

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ISSN 1366-9621 Published by Socialist Publications, PO Box 1398, Enfield EN1 9GT Registered as a newspaper at the Post Office Printed by trade union labour at Reach Printing Services

Militant Issue 1: October 1964 The Socialist Issue 1: 7 February 1997

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

NHS workers map out strategy to win 15% pay rise

"The 1% proposed to the pay review body, alongside the cuts to our funding announced by Rishi Sunak in the budget, is a double whammy that I feel we will struggle to cope with. It feels like yet another chance for this government to show the workforce how little they value us and the NHS as a whole. This isn't just an attack on NHS staff, it is an attack on us all." These were the words of Kirsty Brewerton, a clinical sister and Unison member from Coventry speaking to around 100 workers at the online 'NHS workers fighting back' event on 11 March.

The meeting, hosted by Midlands Shop Stewards Network, and taking place hours before the 'slow hand-clap', was chaired by Dave Nellist, Socialist Party member and chair of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition. He explained that the brief meeting was arranged at very short notice to give the trade union reps and organisers across the health service the opportunity to discuss a strategy to win a 15% NHS pay rise. All contributors spoke in a personal capacity.

Kirsty outlined the ongoing lies from government ministers about nurses' average pay levels. In fact, in real terms, once tax, pension contributions, student loan repayments and inflation are taken into account, nurses have lost close to 20% of pay in the last ten years.

She also explained how the NHS is often left dangerously understaffed, how staff are suffering from mental health difficulties as a consequence of the trauma experienced during the pandemic, and that the lack of adequate protection has led to health workers tragically losing their lives.



The meeting was chaired by Socialist Party members and TUSC chair, Dave Nellist. PHOTO PAUL MATTSSON

Kirsty finished: "We need to build mass support with effective public campaigning and a union recruitment drive. We need members to engage with their unions to demand a decent coordinated campaign. We need to train and recruit reps in every workplace with a view to establishing workplace action committees, hold lunchtime protests, and organise huge days of action in the build-up to strike action."

We need to build mass support with effective public campaigning and a union recruitment drive. We need members to engage with their unions to demand a decent coordinated campaign

We need members to engage with their unions to demand a decent coordinated campaign

Adrian O'Malley, member of the Unison Health Service group executive, described the massive backlash against the government who had clapped the NHS only to offer a real terms pay cut. He said: "It's up to us to build on that anger, and make sure it is expressed in a fight to smash through the pay freeze. Not just for NHS workers but to unite across all public sector workers, and with key workers in the private sector."

"The response of the Unison leadership has been lukewarm at the most. A lot of our members have been asking: What are we going to do about this? We see the RCN announcing the potential for strike action, and that they have got £34 million in a strike fund. Unite the union is threatening to ballot its members. But all our union has said is to have a slow handclap tonight. There has been no mention of the fact that Unison has a £100 million strike fund."

Adrian explained how the deputy Labour leader Angela Rayner had appeared on the news that morning supporting a 2.1% pay offer, and in effect ruling out the 5% in Labour's 2019 election manifesto.

He said: "It's important to look to see what she is saying because her view will be reflected by her political allies within Unison and some of the other health unions. There is a risk that the pay review body suggests 2.1%, and that it will be claimed as some kind of victory by parts of the union leadership."



PHOTO ELAINE EVANS

Model trade union motion

This union branch/trades council condemns the Tory government's announcement that NHS workers will receive a pay rise of only 1%.

This union branch/trades council believes: Health workers have played an absolutely key role in treating patients in the most difficult and stressful conditions as well as fighting for workplace safety during Covid to protect both staff and our communities

That the Tory 1% pay rise is an insult and shows the total contempt the Tories have for health workers, and shows that their support for them during the pandemic is hollow and a sham

This union branch/trades council further believes that: The demand by health unions and NHS workers for a pay rise of up to 15% must be fully supported. This would only begin to make up for a decade of real terms cuts in wages

This should include all workers in the NHS and outsourced staff should be brought in-house to work directly for the health service on NHS pay, pensions and terms and conditions

The Tory pay freeze for other public sector workers must be opposed

This union branch/trades council resolves to call on our union to take the lead in approaching all other unions in the NHS to discuss and agree a joint struggle for the pay claim. This should include:

Calling a national day of action of socially distanced protests in towns and cities

Coordinated strike ballots across the health unions - approach all public sector unions for a joint fight against the Tory attacks on pay

"We have got to be saying quite clearly now, that we do not accept 2.1%, and we do not accept that our pay will be decided by the pay review body. That we demand national negotiations now, and we want a substantial pay rise, and that if they don't accept this by a certain date, we will be balloting for strike action."

We need a pay rise. Most nurses, ward clerks, cleaners, all NHS workers have to do second jobs and extra shifts to cover the bills

Adrian argued that this process should be replicated across the public sector unions also facing a pay freeze, making the case that the role of the Trades Union Congress should be to coordinate action across the public sector as it did in the 2011 pensions strike. On that occasion, millions of workers took action together. Ultimately, because of the role played by some of the leadership of the unions at that

time, it ended in defeat. That is why it is necessary to elect a fighting, left leadership in the ongoing trade union elections, including in Unison.

Beth Webster, a nurse in Cardiff, and a member of Unison and RCN said: "We don't want a pay rise because we want a reward or a pat on the back. We need a pay rise. Most nurses, ward clerks, cleaners, all NHS workers have to do second jobs and extra shifts to cover the bills. How can we give good care to patients when we have done a 70-hour week and are exhausted?"

"We need to put pressure on our union leaderships to prepare for industrial action if necessary. I know lots of people are worried about strike action, and the affect it would have on patients. But in Northern Ireland two years ago NHS workers, including nurses, struck for pay parity. Porters and cleaners in London have struck during the pandemic to improve pay and conditions, so it can be done. We do have emergency cover so patients aren't put at immediate risk."

"Some patients would be likely to have appointments cancelled and so on, but how often does that happen now because of a lack of staff? If we don't take action things will keep getting worse." She added: "We have massive public support, if and when we do take action, we can have things

like public meetings to explain strike action to the public. Everyone trusts health workers more than the media and politicians.

"All workers are under attack, losing their jobs and having their wages cut. If NHS workers can fight and win, that will embolden others and make their fight easier. The only way we can win is if we are united inside the NHS, and outside with other workers."

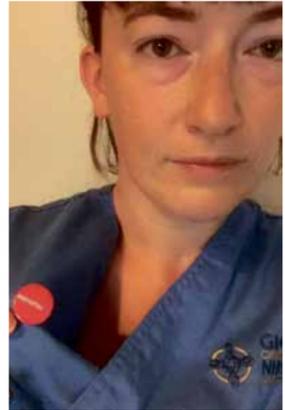
This sentiment was reflected in further contributions from health workers. Len Hockey, secretary of Unite Barts health branch and hospital porter, reminded us that somewhere near 85,000 health workers took part in protests during the summer, in many cases without the support of their unions. He called for "a national demonstration, socially distanced and organised safely, as only health workers know how to do, is the way to go as a prelude to coordinated national strike action."

'Social partnership' Roger Davey, chair of Wiltshire and Avon health Unison, spoke about the necessity to prepare ahead of a strike ballot. He outlined how for many years the unions' leadership have pushed the idea of social partnership, the false idea that NHS bosses, the government and NHS staff have the same interests. It is necessary to apply pressure on the union leadership to break with this approach in order to be able to reach the anti-democratic 50% turnout threshold in a strike ballot.

The pandemic has deepened all of the pre-existing stresses on the NHS, a consequence of decades of underfunding and privatisation. It was acknowledged that the struggle for an NHS pay rise needs to be tied to campaigning for a fully funded, fully public NHS. Tom Hunt, chair of Notts healthcare Unison, outlined the successful campaign to save Chatsworth Ward in Mansfield which mobilised workers, patients and the wider public to secure victory.

All speakers described a mood of bitter anger in the workplace and expressed a determination to translate this into an organised struggle for a 15% pay rise and to transform the NHS for the future.

The meeting agreed to produce a model motion for distribution to supporters of the National Shop Stewards Network. This is printed opposite:



Beth Webster - an NHS nurse in Wales

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

Socialist Party

WHAT WE STAND FOR

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

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

PUBLIC SERVICES No to ALL cuts in jobs, public services and benefits. Defend our pensions. No to privatisation and the Private Finance Initiative (PFI). Renationalise all privatised utilities and services, with compensation paid only on the basis of proven need.

Fully fund all services and run them under accountable, democratic committees that include representatives of service workers and users. Free, publicly run, good quality education, available to all at any age. Abolish university tuition fees now and introduce a living grant. No to academies and 'free schools'!

A socialist NHS to provide for everyone's health needs - free at the point of use and under democratic control. Kick out private contractors! Keep council housing publicly owned. For a massive building programme of publicly owned housing, on an environmentally sustainable basis, to provide good quality homes with low rents.

Trade union struggle for an immediate increase in the minimum wage to £12 an hour without exemptions as a step towards a real living wage of at least £15. For an annual increase in the minimum wage linked to average earnings. Scrap zero-hour contracts. All workers, including part-timers, temps, casual and migrant workers to have trade union rates of pay, employment protection, and sickness and holiday rights from day one of employment.

An immediate 50% increase in the state retirement pension, as a step towards a living pension.

Scrap Universal Credit. For the right to decent benefits, education, training, or a job, without compulsion. 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.

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.

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.

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.

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!

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.

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Do you agree? Join the fightback!

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Defend the right to protest

WHAT WE THINK

The ban on the vigils for Sarah Everard was an attack on the democratic rights to freedom of speech and freedom of assembly. It showed that these rights are not permanent but must be defended at all times.

This was an attempt by the courts and the police to silence us and contain the anger that has been triggered by Sarah's death - but also by the way the pandemic and the lockdowns have shone a light on women's situation in society.

This happened just as the police, crime, sentencing and courts bill is going through parliament. This bill is a severe attack on the right to protest. It will give Home Secretary Priti Patel even more powers to clamp down, creating laws to define 'serious disruption' to communities and organisations, which police can then rely on to impose conditions on protests.

A mass movement needs to be built to both challenge sexism and gender violence and to defend the right to protest. The millions-strong trade unions, the biggest civil organisations in the country and the main bodies of the workers' movement, must mobilise to take a leading stand on this. The statements by Unite, FBU and NEU unions condemning the police actions against the vigil are a welcome step in that direction.

Trade unions, where they are organised, democratic and active in defence of their members, have shown how sexism in the workplace can be fought. This was demonstrated in 2017, when at Woolwich Ferries a predominantly male workforce was willing to strike in order to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with a woman union member who faced sexual harassment. The action led to the removal of the most senior manager and the workers demanded that management positions should be filled by an election of the workforce.

Covid restrictions are being used to prevent expressions of justifiable anger. Safety during the pandemic is vital and it has been defended most

effectively by workers and trade unions. It was bus workers who had to defy threats from the bus company bosses in London and take action for safety. It was members of the NEU education union who mobilised across the country against the rushed and unsafe reopening of schools after Christmas when the virus was rising.

Outdoor, socially distanced protests, well organised and stewarded, with PPE available - like the nurses organised last summer to demand the 15% pay rise they deserve - do not pose a threat to health. What has motivated the court and the police is the threat to the Tories and the capitalist system which they ultimately exist to defend.

Last week, a nurse was arrested and fined £10,000 on an action taken against the government's insulting 1% pay rise. In Leeds last November, bus manufacturing workers faced threats from the police to fine strikers if they continued to picket, citing the new Covid restrictions. They aim to make us pay for the pandemic spending - not their billionaire mates. That means undermining our ability to organise.

There is no party in parliament that defends working-class people's interests, including our right to protest and organise. The Labour Party has been shamed into opposing the policing bill by what happened at the vigil in Clapham. But Labour Party leader Keir Starmer's disgracefully failed to oppose Johnson's bill which protects current and future police 'spycops' from prosecution if they commit crimes while undercover spying on trade unionists and protesters.

Like the Tories, New Labour represent the interests of big business. Working-class people need to build our own party to defend our interests. This is why the Socialist Party is standing as part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) in the 6 May elections, as a step towards that.

The right to protest is not a given in a society based on the exploitation of the majority by a tiny minority. Defending it is part of the struggle for a socialist society.



The right to protest is not a given in a society based on the exploitation of the majority by a tiny minority

WE WILL NOT BE SILENCED

Saturday 13 March. They came in their thousands, defying the undemocratic establishment ban on peaceful vigils. Women and men in towns and cities up and down the country were determined to remember Sarah Everard, brutally murdered while walking home at night in south London. They were there to protest the everyday threat of violence and harassment that so many women face whether walking the streets, in their own homes, at school, on the university campuses or in the workplaces. Socialist Party members were there with our leaflets and posters calling for an end to violence against women and the right to protest. This included the changes that we think are immediately necessary to reduce the risk of gender violence and to support those women who suffer violence, harassment and abuse. And, most importantly, how we think those demands could be met - through building a mass campaign - linked to a fight for the systemic change that would be necessary to completely eliminate violence against women.

The Socialist Party leaflet given out on the vigils:

End violence against women

Capitalism = sexism, inequality and abuse

Grief, shock and an outpouring of anger have been unleashed by the appalling abduction and murder of Sarah Everard. Her killing has shone a spotlight on the extent of violence, abuse and harassment that so many women face on a regular basis.

In the same week that Sarah was murdered, it was reported that a staggering 97% of young women in the UK have experienced sexual harassment. Women fear for their personal safety outside the home; and inside it are at even greater risk from violence and abuse.

One in four women will experience intimate partner abuse at some time in their lives and two women a week are killed by violent partners or ex-partners. Such levels of harassment, violence and abuse are systemic. They are the consequence of a fundamentally unequal capitalist system which perpetuates sexism and abuse. The solution is not to tell women that they should change their behaviour! We should be able to go where we want, when we want, to dress the way we please and to live our lives without fear of violence and harassment. That means organising for structural change that tackles the problems at their very root. And we should be able to protest safely without the fear of being arrested or landed with a massive fine!

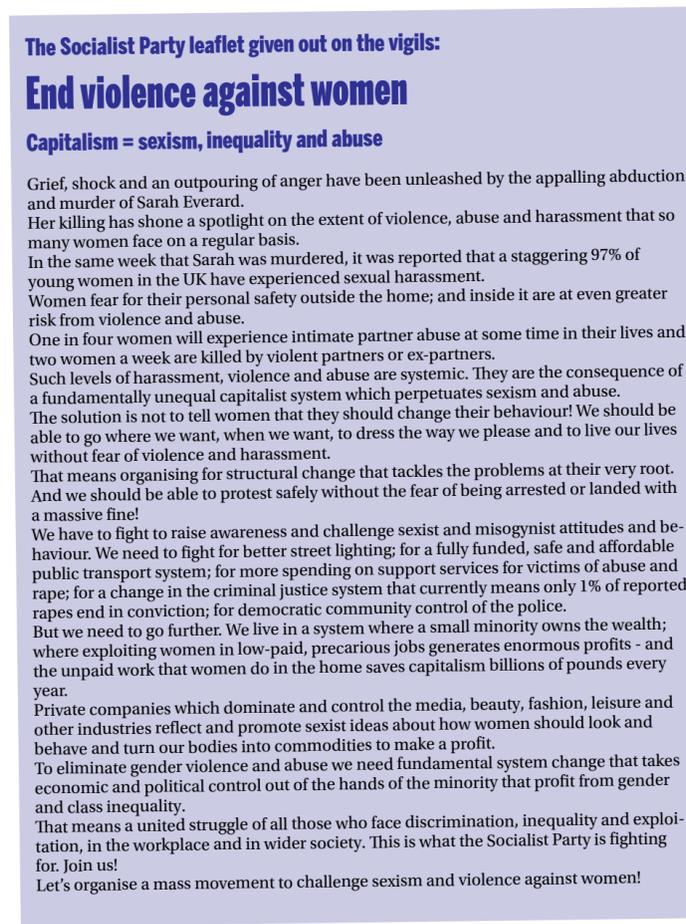
We have to fight to raise awareness and challenge sexist and misogynist attitudes and behaviour. We need to fight for better street lighting; for a fully funded, safe and affordable public transport system; for more spending on support services for victims of abuse and rape; for a change in the criminal justice system that currently means only 1% of reported rapes end in conviction; for democratic community control of the police. But we need to go further. We live in a system where a small minority owns the wealth; where exploiting women in low-paid, precarious jobs generates enormous profits - and the unpaid work that women do in the home saves capitalism billions of pounds every year.

Private companies which dominate and control the media, beauty, fashion, leisure and other industries reflect and promote sexist ideas about how women should look and behave and turn our bodies into commodities to make a profit. To eliminate gender violence and abuse we need fundamental system change that takes economic and political control out of the hands of the minority that profit from gender and class inequality.

That means a united struggle of all those who face discrimination, inequality and exploitation, in the workplace and in wider society. This is what the Socialist Party is fighting for. Join us! Let's organise a mass movement to challenge sexism and violence against women!



Protesting in Cardiff SP/VALES



We say:

- Democratic community and trade union control of the police
- Fully fund services and support for all women affected by domestic violence, rape, and abuse, including refugees and permanent, affordable social housing
- Services must be specialised, publicly funded and democratically controlled by service workers and users, and open to all women
- Safe, affordable well-staffed public transport and adequate street lighting
- Build a united struggle for zero tolerance of sexism and sexual harassment in workplaces, schools, colleges and universities.
- Healthy relationships, consent and gender equality to be taught in every school
- Specialist training, under democratic control, for all workers and bodies coming into contact with abused women
- Community and working-class accountability of the criminal justice system
- Fight for a socialist alternative to the sexism, inequality, and crisis of capitalism

PHOTO THEO SHARIEFF



Socialist Party members went down to the protest in Clapham to demand the ending of violence against women.

We should be safe in our own homes, at school or work, on transport, going for a run or walking down the street. Free from sexual assault or harassment. These protests are an important part of that struggle and amazing to be part of.

Social distancing isn't properly implemented inside many workplaces, trade unions have had to fight to protect members at work. The police haven't arrested these bosses.

But when women and men protest for safety the police wrestle them to the ground and arrest them. It's the hypocrisy of a capitalist system which defends profit over everything else.

HELEN

I went to the Clapham Common protest/vigil because I was outraged. The abuse of power and the gender politics enabling that behaviour.

It really hit a nerve as a woman knowing that it was not an isolated incident. Sexual harassment and assault is an inevitability in our lives. Despite the great strides for liberation that we have fought for, in a capitalist society our entire beings will always be commodified and some men will have a sense of entitlement to our bodies. That is terrifying and heartbreaking.

The vigil was a perfect mix of solemn respect and rightful outrage. It was an incredibly powerful environment, chants and banners, candles and bowed heads.

The strong police presence was insulting but totally unsurprising. The flowers on the floor outnumbered them anyway.

ABI

I joined the Priory Park vigil in north London to demonstrate solidarity with the organisers who boldly continued with the vigil despite police calls to shut it down. By going I was protesting for all those who have not only endured abuse, harassment and violence but then been silenced by institutions that claim to protect us, such as the police.

BEA

A Fighting Programme for Women's Rights and Socialism

New Socialist Party publication available now
Email: info@socialistparty.org.uk



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Women and the struggle for socialism available at Left Books

LEFT BOOKS
The bookshop of the Socialist Party
leftbooks.co.uk



Parliament Square 'die-in' 14 March HELEN PATTISON

Stop police brutality - justice for victims of gender violence

WHAT WE THINK

There was understandable outrage at the appalling scenes of Metropolitan Police brutality against women peacefully taking part in the vigil for Sarah Everard on Clapham Common. Those present were already furious that the Met had refused to allow a socially distanced vigil to go ahead. That women protesting gender violence could then be physically grabbed, dragged, pinned to the floor and arrested by the police almost beggars belief. That a serving member of the Met, 'one of their own', had been arrested and charged with Sarah's murder only enraged people more.

Almost as sickening is the hypocritical response of establishment politicians. Home Secretary Priti Patel was apparently "upset" by the footage. The same Priti Patel who called Black Lives Matter protests "dreadful" and is planning yet further draconian curbs on the right to protest through the police, crime, courts and sentencing bill (see opposite).

Lib Dem leader Ed Davey has called for Met chief Cressida Dick's resignation. This is the leader of the same party that in coalition with the Tories was complicit in taking the axe to public services, decimating refugee and other support for women suffering from violence and abuse.

Sadiq Khan, Labour mayor of London, is "urgently seeking an explanation"; the same Sadiq Khan who is going along with Tory cuts to Transport for London that could seriously put at risk the safety of women travelling in the capital. And it's Khan who the Met reports to! Why didn't he speak out in support of the peaceful vigil going ahead in the first place?

What happened at the bandstand on Clapham Common will only further undermine the lack of confidence that women victims of violence already have in the police and the criminal justice system as a whole, which are seriously failing them.



All of these state institutions both reflect and defend the capitalist profit system which is based on inequality

Less than 20% of women who are raped report what happened to the police. Not surprising when only 1.5% of reported rapes end in conviction.

We remember the two sisters, Nicole Smallman and Bibaa Henry, stabbed to death in Wembley, London, and the nauseating action of police officers taking selfies next to their dead bodies. Their mother said she had to initially organise a search herself for her daughters because of the Met's poor response. And Amy-Leanne Stringfellow, whose throat was slit by her partner with a sword in June last year - one of 110 victims of abuse killed since lockdown began. Her killer had been let out on police bail after assaulting her a month previously.

"Who do you serve?" "Who do you protect?" were two of the chants at the vigil attacked by the police. This is the same question that was asked after the deaths of Mohamad Mohammed and Moyied Bashir in Wales (see socialistparty.org.uk), and after the arrest of a protester in Manchester demonstrating for a decent pay rise for NHS workers.

Establishment politicians of all stripes hide behind talk about the 'operational independence' of the police. But police chiefs have themselves spoken about the 'political pressure' they face in policing protests. Investigations into police violence, racism, sexism and anti-worker attacks; decisions about operational priorities; these cannot be left to the police themselves or to capitalist politicians.

All of these state institutions both reflect and defend the capitalist profit system which is based on inequalities of power, wealth, gender and race. We need democratic community and trade union oversight of the police, as well as the criminal justice system. But we also need to fight for an alternative socialist system in which power and control are taken out of the hands of the minority who currently wield it, and in which the economy and society are democratically controlled and organised by the majority.



Vigils for Sarah Everard

We will not be silenced

● West Dunbartonshire: Enough is enough

I organised the Reclaim the Night demo in my home town to give women an opportunity to get their voices and anger heard after the horrific murder of Sarah Everard.

Already an impoverished town due to Scottish National Party imposed austerity, the pandemic has made life for working-class women so much harder.

Domestic violence increased by 140% from April to August last year. The council introduced its 'No home for domestic abuse' scheme but our social work department was closed and moved to a town eight miles away.

The inherently sexist Universal Credit, which gives money for a couple to one person, is trapping women in violent and coercive relationships. This is while women are less likely to be able to access the furlough scheme, are in low-paid, frontline jobs, caring for elderly and sick relatives, homeschooling, and looking after the home.

Enough is enough. It's time the rotten, capitalist system with sexism baked into its DNA was removed. I wanted to offer the women who attended the demo a glimpse at a socialist alternative. That proper investment in well-paid jobs, funding for women's services, a nationalised public transport service which is safe and affordable and democratic control of the police are possible; to encourage them to get organised and fight for those measures.

The women who came out were heroic in defying the ban as we were the only ones to go ahead in Scotland. They all took our leaflets and are keen to be included in future events.

LYNDA ZDANOWICZ

● Birmingham: Searching for political answers

Over 100 people gathered right at the heart of Birmingham in Victoria Square, outside the council offices.

This was in spite of draconian laws recently introduced by stealth by the Tories to curtail the fundamental right to protest, and demands from West Midlands Police who pressured organisers to cancel the original event.

Although the original organisers did not attend, many women and people of all genders from different communities across the city grouped in the city centre. While the event began as a vigil, it was clear that attendees were looking for political answers to the deep-rooted structural issues faced by women.

Women members of the Socialist Party took the lead in delivering speeches to the crowd, raising the need for fully funded services and a socialist future to protect women and create real equality for everyone. We encouraged other protesters to come up and speak about their own experiences.

There was great interest in the political

points being made, with many taking leaflets, papers and leaving their details with members to continue to discuss how to continue to take political action despite attacks from the Tories and capitalist establishment.

ELLA FOLEY DOYLE

● Cardiff: Angry mood

About 150 women and men turned up to the vigil on the steps of the Senedd in Cardiff despite the ban on the events and having to walk through a gauntlet of police.

There was a somber but angry mood and many young women got up to speak about their own experiences of violence and the lack of support from those who should have helped them report the crimes.

Socialist Party member Mia Hollsing spoke about the extent of domestic violence and the need to unite the working class to act. She highlighted the failure of politicians in tackling discrimination and violence and the real impact cuts in public services were having on women's lives. She got a supportive response when she stated that this was the reason she had decided to stand as a Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition candidate in the Senedd elections.

The protesters saw the clear link between sexism, the lack of support in dealing with violent crimes against women and the racism experienced by the black community in the city. There was wholehearted support for justice for the family of Muhamud Mohammed Hassan who died after being held in police custody.

There was support for our demands that the trade union movement stands up for the right to protest and unites its six million members to root out discrimination and abuse in all workplaces, schools and colleges.

The determination to stand up and build a movement to tackle the way we are treated in society has hardened, and further protests are being organised.

KATRINE WILLIAMS

● Bristol: Sense of outrage

500-plus gathered on College Green in Bristol city centre. The crowd was generally peaceful, men and women, many holding candles and clapping; a few held up placards.

There was a police presence walking around the crowd in twos every few minutes and at the end of the vigil two police on horseback walked in to clear people away.

There was an underlying sense that people had come out, not just for Sarah. They were outraged at what had happened, and wanted change and to show their solidarity.

It was possibly the first time many had been out in a crowd since the pandemic and shows that the public do want to meet with others and stand up for what they believe in.

Paper sales and interest in the party should increase as we come out of

lockdown, if this event was anything to go by.

ALISON BOND

● Leeds: We need action

In Leeds, a crowd of over 100 people gathered outside Parkinson Steps at the University of Leeds, despite Reclaim the Night organisers moving the official vigil online. Leeds Socialist Party member and Women's Lives Matter campaigner Amy Cousens spoke at the online event.

It was mostly young women who gathered at the physical event, laying flowers and messages for Sarah on the steps. While there was a noticeable police presence, the mood of the crowd was quiet and emotional with people visibly upset and comforting each other. Although moving, the silence at this vigil hammered home that there is nothing left to be said. We need action.

KATHERINE GWYTHYR

● Nottingham: Looking for a way forward

150 overwhelmingly young women and men gathered in Nottingham city centre.

One of the organisers of the event, from Women for Change, explained that it had been called as a vigil for Sarah and also to remember less well-known women, such as Blessing Olusegun, whose family were still fighting for justice. A minute's silence was held at 6pm.

People laid flowers and lit candles on the steps of the Clough statue, as did one police officer - in contrast to what happened in Clapham. The event was sombre and respectful. Attendees eagerly took our leaflets, looking for a way forward.

GERAINT THOMAS

● London: Police also attack peaceful Tamil protest

On 14 March, over 100 Tamils took part in a peaceful protest outside the house of activist Ambihai Selvakumar in London. She has been on a hunger strike for 16 days, demanding action against the Sri Lankan government.

The protest was complying with Covid-19 regulation, socially distanced, with PPE, etc. But the Metropolitan Police moved quickly, and used repressive and intimidatory tactics to disperse and arrest peaceful protesters.

There is shocking footage of a young person being dragged and pinned to the floor, and later carried to a police van. The person arrested has been released, but had to go to hospital later due to his injuries.

The right to protest is a fundamental democratic right. We must defend the right to protest and oppose the Tories' new anti-protest bill.

ISAI PRIYA



Socialist Party member Mia Hollsing speaking at the Cardiff protest (see left)

Readers' opinion

● It made me angry

I went for a run and thought: "Would my friends and family recognise my clothes if they needed to? Am I being captured on CCTV? Is there someone lurking in the dark spots, between houses or behind a car etc?" And it made me really angry.

Happy 'buy cards and flowers for your mum, but we will arrest you if you protest for women's safety' day!

HELEN PATTISON
EALING, WEST LONDON

● Where are we safe?

Women are not safe on the streets. Major hike in domestic violence - we are not safe in our homes.

A policeman killed Sarah Everard - we cannot trust our systems of protection. Men who have killed their wives in lockdown are having their sentences reduced to manslaughter - women are not protected in the courts. How long can we go in silence with no action being taken?

AMY COUSENS
BRADFORD

● Tory 'immediate steps' won't make women safer

The idea of plain clothes police in clubs sends shivers down my spine, especially after the spycops bill. Trained, approachable and accountable representatives in venues, that women can approach if needed, and who will actively intervene in an appropriate way, if needed, is what we want instead.

BEA GARDNER
WALTHAM ABBEY, ESSEX

The £25 million the government has coughed up straight away isn't nearly enough. But once again it shows it was always possible to find money.

The Tories are putting that money into street lighting, which does have a chance of reducing attacks, but also into CCTV. CCTV isn't about prevention. All it should in theory do is make prosecution easier.

But plenty of stories have come up online of women reporting attacks and telling police where to find likely CCTV evidence, only to be ignored and have nothing done.

ADAM HARMSWORTH
COVENTRY

● Standing shoulder to shoulder

I remember the times I have been abused, patronised, sexually harassed, gaslighted, threatened, ignored, had my ideas stolen, put down, etc, by men.

But I also remember, since my teenage years in the 1960s, standing shoulder to shoulder with men, on strike, on picket lines, on protests and demonstrations, against pit closures and redundancies, bailiff busting against the poll tax, in elections, against the cuts, saving the Glenfield Children's Heart Unit, and standing up to racists and fascists whenever they come out onto the streets.

We have worked with men to struggle for a better life in my union, National Union of Teachers (NUT), now National Education Union (NEU) and my party, the Socialist Party.

On Mother's Day, I was also thinking of my mother and comrade, Daisy Rawling, who was sexually harassed at work during World War Two and raped by a soldier, which meant enduring an illegal abortion. Nearly 60 years of protests have gone by



Swansea



The Dunbartonshire protest organised by Socialist Party Scotland member Lynda (see opposite page)

since then, and still 97% of young women report that they have been sexually harassed.

So what can be done? To find the solution, we must understand the cause of misogyny, sexism and violence against women.

Capitalism doubly oppresses women in the home and at work. It requires women to be the homemakers and carers and raise the next generation of workers. Then women have less bargaining power in the workplace because of family responsibilities.

Our culture encourages men to have a sense of entitlement and to dominate women - the slave of slaves as Karl Marx put it. Fortunately, many men consciously stand up against this culture.

The answer is to fight like hell to improve the lives of women now, and also build support for the struggle to end capitalism. The Socialist Party's new programme for women (socialistparty.org.uk) explains how that can be done - linking up with the organised working class.

HEATHER RAWLING
LEICESTER

should go after the police treatment of the 13 March vigil. It illustrates the bankruptcy of the call to just get as many women at the top, and all our problems will be solved. We need system change and that system needs to be socialist.

ROSS SAUNDERS
CARDIFF

● Barriers for working-class women

Running is something many working-class women face huge barriers to do. I train along a tow path, mainly in the dark.

At no point have I felt unsafe or been harassed. That would be different if I was a woman.

If I was a working woman with children, and with the societal expectation to provide most of the childcare and housework, I can only imagine it being nearly impossible to find the time to train.

We need a world free from sexism and oppression. We need free childcare for all and a 30-hour working week without loss of pay. That way everyone can enjoy leisure safely.

We need a world where people are free to hold vigils and protest. London Labour Party mayor Sadiq Khan and deputy Sophie Linden are responsible for policing. He could have instructed the police not to interfere.

JOSH ASKER
WALTHAM ABBEY, ESSEX

They cut services that kept us safe. They got rid of this service that kept us safe. It was 'too expensive'.

The street lights have been turned off and turned down everywhere. Last year my street lights plunged us into darkness.

We had to threaten not paying the housing association our service charge. Nurses coming home late felt scared getting out of their cars.

It took them six months to fix it. All the time they took our service charge.

Women have less financial security due to cuts. Yes, men have to change, but then so do some female politicians who think its ok to cut the services that make us safe.

I think Met police chief Cressida Dick

unaccountable to us, so that they can be used against our protests and strikes.

ROSS SAUNDERS

CARDIFF

● Cramped classroom v socially distanced protest

So just to be clear - I am allowed to spend five hours a day crammed in a room with teenagers, but I'm not allowed to attend a socially distanced outside vigil to show solidarity with women suffering from gender violence? This has nothing to do with 'safety' and everything to do with crushing our right to protest.

LEEDS TEACHER

● Slimy politicians

The Police Federation says it doesn't understand the criticism from politicians, when the Met was only doing what politicians asked them. Politicians are slippery opportunists, especially when it all goes wrong.

No doubt the idea was to try to scare protesters into staying at home. The news has been struggling to rewrite the story that the vigil was the problem, not the Met's reaction. You can ban protest but you can't stop it!

CLARE WILKINS
NOTTINGHAM

● Union wins victory

There has been a legal win in the battle for women-only refuges for homeless women, backed by Unite housing workers' branch. The issue of women survivors being sent to mixed accommodation by Camden council arose because the Labour council passed on cuts.

We call on local councils not to make cuts to services, to stop carrying out government austerity policies, and to prioritise people's needs.

PAUL KERSHAW

CHAIR, UNITE HOUSING WORKERS



Clapham Common

What should the unions do?

● Sexism in schools

Teacher and Socialist Party member Martin Powell-Davies is standing to be the National Education Union's (NEU) deputy general secretary. He said:

A 2017 NEU survey confirmed the sexism and sexual harassment that young women and girls encounter daily in schools. Almost a quarter (24%) of female students at mixed-sex schools reported that they had been subjected to unwanted physical touching of a sexual nature while at school. Yet only 14% of students who had experienced sexual harassment said they had reported it to a teacher.

The NEU has called for consistent and ongoing action from schools and government to challenge sexism in schools. Schools, where women make up most of the workforce, face further cuts and job losses, particularly support staff.

Given the ongoing risk of rising community infections, it has been understandable that some people have questioned whether public protests should take place. But the risks of infection are considerably less in outdoor environments than the indoor ones like schools and workplaces that the government insists are 'safe' to attend.

Last year, Unite the Union successfully challenged another attempt by the police to use the Coronavirus Act to prevent legitimate protest - in this case the right to picket outside your workplace during strike action.

Unions have been at the heart of many gains won by women against sexism and oppression. They must now come together to support those protesting against sexual harassment and gender violence.

● Tories flout safety, not unions

KATRINE WILLIAMS
VICE-PRESIDENT DWP GROUP IN CIVIL SERVICE
UNION PCS (PERSONAL CAPACITY)

● No more half- hearted appeals

BEA GARDNER
POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH REP, SOUTHAMPTON
UCU (PERSONAL CAPACITY)

I am glad that the trade unions have put together a statement, but I want to know how they will actively organise and fight for the demands they place on government. Women make up the majority in the trade union movement and we are angry.

How will our leaders give voice to that anger? Will they step up and defend the right to protest, to organise and to be able to express our anger? Trade union members are getting arrested and face fines for organising campaigns that the trade union movement should be doing.

How are the trade union leaders organising and mobilising to stop cuts in services, including specialist support services for those experiencing and fleeing

violence? What about restoring the quarter of women's refuges that have closed since 2010? Will the union leaders continue to back the same politicians who have carried out these attacks?

No more solidarity messages in words only, or half-hearted appeals to the government, but a strategy that gives confidence that we can fight and win, and we don't have to keep putting up with all this crap.

● Right to protest is fundamental

HUGO PIERRE
UNION NATIONAL EXECUTIVE COUNCIL (PERSONAL CAPACITY)

The right to protest is fundamental. It has led to so many gains for working-class people. Solidarity with all those who have protested against violence against women.

The Tories have used the courts and the police to clamp down on protest during the pandemic. The police fined a nurse for protesting against the pittance NHS pay rise, and now arrest protestors on a vigil.

The trade unions must not be silenced during the pandemic and must continue to organise protest, socially distanced and safe, and demand that this is allowed under the regulations.

● Tories flout safety, not unions

KATRINE WILLIAMS
VICE-PRESIDENT DWP GROUP IN CIVIL SERVICE
UNION PCS (PERSONAL CAPACITY)

The trade union movement has a key role to play in mobilising a mass united response to root out discrimination and harassment in every workplace. While dressing up the ban on protests as being about safety, the government has let employers flout safety regulations and put workers at risk, including in their own departments - as shown by the total disregard for the safety of the PCS members in DVLA. There over 2,000 workers are being forced into the workplaces - a significant proportion have contracted Covid-19 from unsafe, badly ventilated workplaces. But they have delivered a strong 'yes' vote for strike action in a ballot over safety.

Online Socialist Party meeting
End violence against women
- a socialist approach
● Register for Zoom details via Socialist Party Facebook page
● Friday 19 March, 6-7:30pm

CHAIR, UNITE HOUSING WORKERS

CAN THE CAPITALIST MEDIA PREVENT SOCIALIST CHANGE?

This is the first in an occasional series of socialist answers to the big questions.

JAMES IVENS
SOCIALIST PARTY NATIONAL COMMITTEE

Have you ever found yourself shouting at the TV because the talking heads just keep missing the point? They let the establishment off the hook; they ignore ordinary people or blame them for society's problems.

Have you found yourself thinking 'if only other people thought like me'? You're not alone in feeling alone.

Four-fifths of Britain's online news market is controlled by five big firms, the Media Reform Coalition calculates. The same proportion of the print news market is controlled by just three. And they do not share your priorities.

Net profits in the media average 23%, according to a 2011 Ernst and Young study. This is around twice the average return on capital - more in line with banking than 'normal' sectors.

Whopping profit

For interactive media, including social platforms, it's a whopping 35%! Why? These super-profits are a result of the special power wielded by some sections of capitalists due to their role in wider society.

Financiers have become the real rulers of the world under capitalism. Banks can decide the fate of whole industries by, say, opening or closing lines of credit. They use their power to dominate the other capitalists and command a bigger share of the loot.

Media barons have a certain power in the world of ideas. By controlling what and how information is reported, they can attempt to influence public moods and developments in markets and politics. Obviously they try to do this in a way that protects extraction of profits.

There is also state media in most capitalist countries. This is not neutral, however, any more than the police or the courts.

It defends the interests of the system as a whole. The BBC has been a far more reliable liar for the government than even the Tory press during the pandemic.

Social media, meanwhile, offers bosses marketing opportunities of an unprecedented scale and effectiveness - huge reach. This is a key reason for its exceptional profitability.

Some liberal commentators have even blamed social media for the rise of right-wing populism and reactionary leaders like Donald Trump. They blame 'bubbles' and 'echo chambers' - in effect, seeing ordinary users as empty vessels who accept anything poured into them.

So how does this explain the rise of reactionary movements before the internet? And what about the hours and hours each day which people spend in real life with work colleagues, family members and friends?

The truth is that falling living standards, alienation from traditional political parties and impasse at the top of society force people to seek alternative ideas. Any given form of media is just one road network people travel in that search, not the engine that propels them.

The Sun, owned by billionaire Rupert Murdoch, infamously declared "It's the Sun wot won it" after the 1992 Tory election victory. Following Jeremy Corbyn's defeat in December 2019, many blamed the establishment media's campaign of lies.

This is an important factor - but the media's control of events is overstated. People's experience of reality limits what ideas take root. In fact, the media is only one source of ideas - real events themselves provoke them.

Corbyn's anti-austerity leadership made Labour 'two parties in one'. While his pro-worker policies were very popular, Labour administrations in local government carried on with brutal cuts and sell-offs.

Corbyn accepted a confused position on the working-class vote to leave the capitalist EU. And he seemed incapable of standing up to the Blairites in his own party - could he really resist the banks and billionaires if he took power?

Working-class people heard positive promises from Corbyn, but felt real attacks continuing in his name. This turned the soil for the capitalist media, including liberal outlets like the Guardian, to sow their lies.

Smear

The smear campaign decried Corbyn's lack of 'charisma' while depicting him as antisemitic, a Stalinist and even a terrorist. Some working-class voters repeated these talking points.

Pollsters and journalists on safari in working-class communities found false confirmation of their own prejudices, that workers are gullible and reactionary. They caught the sense but missed the meaning.

There was class fury at falling living standards and being taken for granted. There was suspicion of a party seen to be complicit in it.

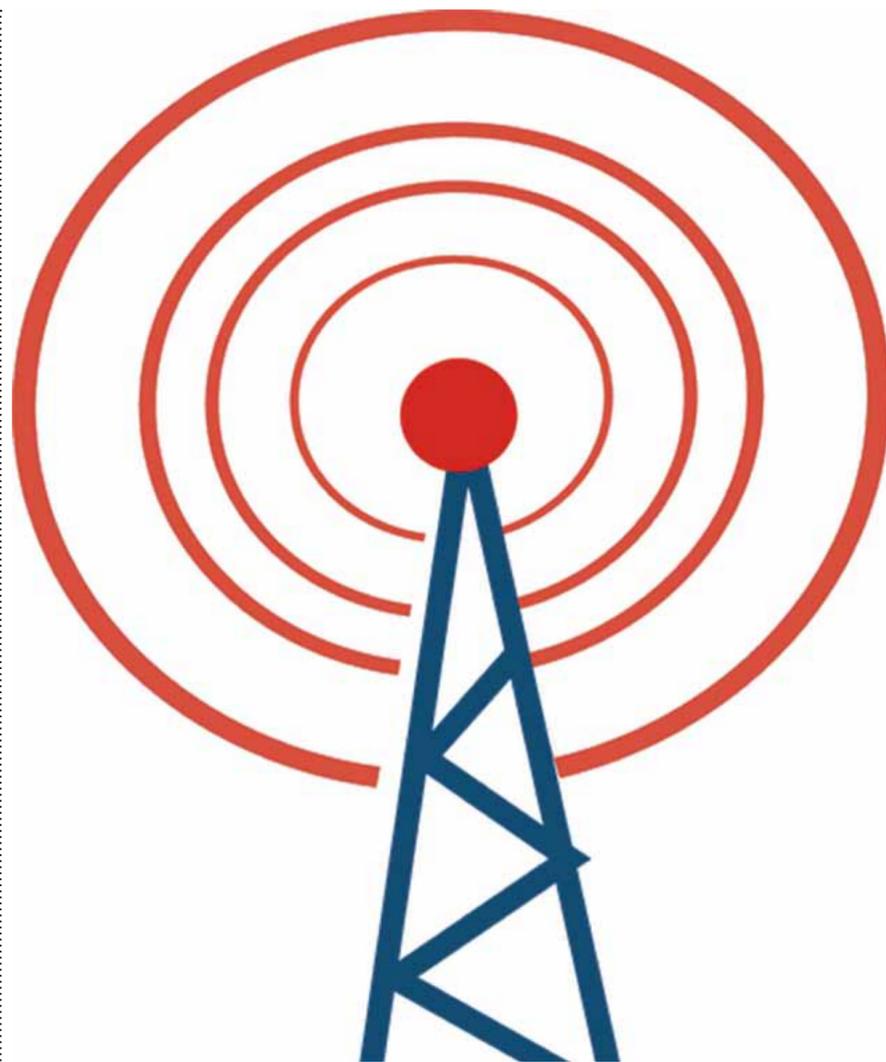
There was frustration that nothing ever seems to change. Had they really talked to working-class people about these things, as the Socialist Party does, they might have learnt all this.

People felt angry, alienated and disoriented, and needed a way to explain and express it. The hypocritical slurs of the capitalist media were the most widely available tools.

"But," you might ask, "won't that always be the case in a capitalist society? And doesn't that make it impossible for socialists to break through?"

Under mass pressure, it is possible to win reforms that improve press freedom. But in a society ruled by billionaires and the market, with huge costs for operating mass media, 'freedom' primarily means freedom of the rich to print what they want.

In September 1917, just weeks before the working class took power in Russia, Bolshevik leader Vladimir



Lenin estimated that the three main nominally socialist parties "command from three-quarters to four-fifths of the votes." However, "the circulation of the newspapers they publish is certainly less than a quarter, or even less than one-fifth, that of the whole capitalist press."

This shows the limits of capitalist media influence. It's also a warning that the capitalists can regain control of ideas unless there is revolutionary change. The working class needs to take the means of producing and distributing news, and political and economic power as a whole, out of the hands of the capitalists so they can be democratically organised.

In capitalist society, workers' media can supply explanations and demands that truly correspond to working-class anger and needs. But most important is that it not just propagate alternative ideas to the many who are receptive. It must act as an

organiser, to turn them into facts on the ground, to convince the broadest sections of the working population.

From 1983 to 1987, Militant - forerunner of the Socialist Party - led Liverpool's Labour council in a struggle against Margaret Thatcher. Not just the Tories and their press, but also the Labour leadership and newspapers which supported it, slandered Militant again and again. The Catholic Church even threatened to excommunicate congregants who voted Labour!

Yet Labour's vote, membership and active participation continued to rise. How?

The city was building thousands of council homes and creating thousands of jobs - bricks-and-mortar proof of whose side it was on. What's more, it was doing so under the ongoing democratic control of Liverpool's working class.

Trade unions, campaign organisations and local Labour branches

elected delegates to the District Labour Party, which debated and decided all the council's policies. The council mobilised mass demonstrations - and de facto city-wide general strikes - and won millions of pounds from Thatcher.

When the bosses' press told workers that the council was their enemy, they could say 'what do you mean? We control the council!' Workers could feel their collective power and thrash out independent class ideas, breaking free of the isolation which leaves individuals unarmed or demoralised before the capitalist media lies.

The most important next step towards such a movement today is a new, mass party of the working class - a kind of workers' parliament to facilitate collective political engagement. The only newspaper consistently explaining and organising for this is the Socialist - the weekly paper of the Socialist Party.

We have to lay out reality plain for all to see, and state what we think needs

Why we need working-class, socialist media



The capitalists try to use their control of the media to distract and disorient working people. If the workers' movement is to challenge that, it needs its own media.

Newspapers, websites, podcasts and more run by trade unions and workers' parties could help counter the one-sided reportage of the bosses' media. They could cover the strikes and working-class campaigns the capitalists ignore or distort.

The Socialist Party's publications already carry this out. Just turn to the workplace pages on 6-7. If you want know what's going on in the workers' movement, read the Socialist.

Unlike the establishment press, our pages are not filled by professional journalists reporting from outside or subject to the editorial control of the rich. We enlist the talents of the true experts in class struggle: working-class fighters.

On the panel on page 2, you will read that "the Socialist is written, read, sold and bought by ordinary workers, trade unionists, young people and Socialist Party members. We want you to write for the Socialist." The by-lines next to our writers' names in each article are proof.

Our paper has to be a platform for real working-class struggles and voices. But as the publication of a revolutionary party, it has a further job. All of our media - leaflets, periodicals, books, podcasts and broadcasts, websites and social media channels - lay out the Socialist Party's views and proposals to the working class.

How else could the working class see and judge us? Establishment parties can rely on the bosses' media to do much of this for them. We can't.

The liberal sections of the capitalist media, with greater resources than we have, do often gather useful information on the evils of capitalism. But we cannot simply bemoan problems and leave it at that.

We have to lay out reality plain for all to see, and state what we think needs

to happen to solve society's problems. What's more, we have to explain the connection between problems in everyday life and the mouldering system of capitalism.

When the capitalist media - liberal or conservative - 'editorialises', it does so with the aim of patching up or perfecting the existing system. But most reports pretend to be 'neutral'. In the capitalist media, really this means a stylistic disguise for defence of the status quo.

Unashamed

We are undisguised campaigners for the working class and socialism. Our publications systematically advance practical demands - working-class struggle for resources, control and socialist change. The Socialist's 'What We Stand For' column on page 3 lists the Socialist Party's main policies, and we add to this with articles on specific issues.

We want to report and learn lessons from every workers' struggle, however small or large, so the party and the class can gain the full benefit. And we have to point from the most localised scraps and injustices, step by step, towards the general crisis of world economy and politics.

But change doesn't happen just because we think it's a good idea. Our media aims at reaching working-class and young people looking for ideas to fight back, to give them weapons in their campaigns, and organise them into a united force for change.

All of our media plays a part in this task, but we still emphasise the newspaper. On picket lines, at demonstrations, in workers' movement meetings, referring to a website or podcast leaves people with nothing.

A physical publication, with a price showing it has value, is an indispensable tool. We sell the Socialist wherever workers struggle. The regular rhythm of a newspaper's production also helps guarantee the party takes action, tests our ideas among workers, and contemplates the results.

But while the newspaper is central, it is now just one of many forms of media. The balance between these forms will change with our work.

Podcasts were barely on the radar ten years ago. Now we run our own, Socialism, followed by thousands. During the first pandemic lockdown, the Socialist Party broadcast weekly social media videos to help counteract the bosses' lies and workers' isolation.

Social media has become a crucial instrument. But it's still owned and controlled by the capitalists - who duly switched it off during the 2011 Arab Spring.

The Myanmar military has done the same in its current coup. This underlines the need for retaining physical media too.

Whatever its form, our media - like our party - lives and breathes the working-class struggle. Sometimes this can make it harder to reach people. But whenever struggle breaks out, our publications get big take-up and engagement.

The capitalist media relies instead on dominance of markets and passive consumption of news. So key to our media's independence from the capitalists and their influence is funding.

Public sales have been sporadic during the pandemic. This will change.

Subscriptions are vital to ensure stable income too. And May Day greetings - groups of workers donating and sending solidarity messages for International Workers' Day (1 May) - make an important financial and political contribution.

A newspaper and media founded on the ideas, activity and financial support of the working class can be far more sustainable than some of the dying capitalist outlets. But we're not after a permanent place alongside the capitalist cacophony. Our media must organise a mass, working-class movement and party for revolutionary socialist change.

"The role of a newspaper, however, is not limited solely to the dissemination of ideas, to political education, and to the enlistment of political allies. A newspaper is not only a collective propagandist and a collective agitator, it is also a collective organiser.

"In this last respect it may be likened to the scaffolding round a

building under construction, which marks the contours of the structure and facilitates communication between the builders, enabling them to distribute the work and to view the common results achieved by their organised labour."

VLADIMIR LENIN
LEADER OF THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION



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- Visit socialistparty.org.uk/mayday

British Gas strike at crucial stage

IAIN DALTON
LEEDS SOCIALIST PARTY

After the elation of recent picket lines, following the decisive voting down of the latest British Gas offer, there was a more sombre mood on the picket lines on Friday 12 March. This followed the union sending letters with legal advice recommending that strikers sign new contracts by 25 March.

This move, seemingly over the heads of the elected reps, was the subject of much debate on the picket line, with many criticising the timing of the letters being sent the day before this latest round of strike action.

The mood of those on the picket lines was still one of determination to oppose the attacks on their pay, terms and conditions implied in the new contracts. Goodwill that was

previously there towards the company has evaporated. Many workers are determined to do what is currently contracted and no more.

The impact of the letter has been to turn a debate over how to deal with the looming imposition of the new contracts collectively into a decision for individual workers.

Instead of sending out surveys, which many strikers haven't seen, a strategy of how the strike could be escalated further following the rejection should be discussed by the reps and put to a national meeting of the workers on strike to decide upon.

The Socialist Party says:

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

PHOTO STEVE SCORE



Electricians protest against deskilling and lower wages

Cardiff

Following on from a protest in Swansea on 3 March, construction electricians in Unite the Union, supported by Cardiff Trades Union Council, protested outside the Cardiff offices of construction giant, NG Bailey.

They chanted "no deskilling, no ESO!" at the company, which is trying to force down wages and skill levels at the huge Hinkley Point nuclear power station construction site in Somerset, using electrical support operative (ESO) grades instead of fully-trained electricians.

Andrew Wilks, a Unite construction activist, explained:

"NG Bailey has decided to offer six to eight week courses to unskilled workers to try and do the basics of electricians work, the containment work which amounts to 60-70% of the work on the job. They will be giving those ESO workers a lower rate of pay than fully trained electricians.

"NG Bailey and Balfour Beatty are trying to cut their costs and increase their profits at electricians' expense.

They're trying to make out that there's a skill shortage but if they advertised the job they'd have plenty of applicants from electricians in the Bristol, South West and South Wales area.

"It's a dead end for anyone roped into doing the work too: the six-week course doesn't lead on to further progression to becoming a fully qualified electrician. These companies should be taking on more proper apprentices instead of these gimmicks to try and undercut our wages.

"The danger is as well that work will be done unsafely, especially if this way of working spreads. The bosses' attitude is: 'It's only a nuclear power station. What could possibly go wrong?'"

Questions are being asked about why the Welsh government is allowing a company like NG Bailey to build expensive projects for the public sector in Wales. The Welsh Labour government claims to demand ethical employment practices from its contractors, yet both NG Bailey and Balfour Beatty get profitable contracts, no questions asked. The Welsh Government must stop handing out contracts to companies aggressively

forcing down wages and skill levels.

The 'sparks' construction electricians have well and truly launched a nationwide struggle against deskilling. On 3 March, there were protests in London, Manchester, Swansea and outside Grangemouth.

The message to electrical contractors such as NG Baileys and Balfour Beatty is simple: take the electrical service operator deskilling grade off the table or expect more protests, walkouts and strikes.

The protest organised by the sparks started with workers protesting at the headquarters of NG Baileys and then marched to different construction sites - receiving support from the workers on site.

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

The Socialist Party has called for the closing of unsafe working sites and the stoppage of non-essential jobs.

DAVE REID
CARDIFF SOCIALIST PARTY

London

The construction electricians took their struggle against deskilling to the 'belly of the beast' in the third week of action.

Workers protested outside the headquarters of Balfour Beatty in Canary Wharf against the bringing in of the ESO grade that would open the door to a huge percentage of electrical work being done by unskilled labour.

This would be used to shatter the pay and terms and conditions of electricians, boosting the profits of the bosses.

The sparks' campaign has already forced the suspension of the ESO course at Hinkley Point nuclear power station site. But workers are determined that it must be taken off the table totally.

If the likes of Balfour and NG Bailey don't guarantee this, the fight will be taken to the construction sites and protests will be turned into walkouts.

ROB WILLIAMS
HACKNEY SOCIALIST PARTY

Thousands of BT workers to ballot for strike action

CLIVE WALDER
CWU MIDLANDS NO 1 BRANCH
(PERSONAL CAPACITY)

The Communication Workers' Union (CWU) announced during a Facebook Live event on 10 March, attended by over 7,000 members, that it will shortly hold an industrial action ballot.

This is over the company's plans to reduce the number of offices from around 300 to 30, causing displaced workers to either travel large distances to work or, in effect, make themselves redundant - and to halve the current voluntary redundancy terms, and increase the likelihood of compulsory redundancies. This would be the first national action involving BT workers since 1987.

BT managers are trying to reverse the steep decline in the share price, resume paying a dividend and find £12 billion to invest in a full-fibre broadband network. They aim to do this at the expense of workers' jobs and conditions, and they have a vicious new management in place to drive this through.

Socialist Party members in the CWU welcome the calling of this industrial action ballot, but believe that this should have happened before Christmas when it was clear management was going to play hardball. The mood of the members, judging by the on-screen comments, appears to be very solid.

BT's proposals were opposed by 73% of their workers when they were 'consulted'. Workers realise that if action isn't taken many will lose their jobs and those left will have no future. BT is one of a dwindling number of companies offering comparatively well-paid jobs with a career structure, and this must be defended at all costs.

The determination of management to carry out this jobs massacre must be exceeded by the determination of the CWU leadership.

The headline attitude of management and the heavy costs involved in modernising the network demonstrate that BT workers can only look forward to working increasingly harder for a vicious and unthankful management.

This demonstrates that BT and the rest of the telecoms industry should be taken into public ownership as is the CWU's policy.

- **Victory to the BT workers**
- **Defend all jobs**
- **For a publicly owned and democratically planned telecoms industry**

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

Goodlord workers continue strike against 'fire and rehire'

SCOTT JONES
EAST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

Tenant-referencing workers at the tech company Goodlord in east London were again out on strike on 12 March against the company's attempts at 'fire and rehire'.

The strikers, members of the Unite union tech workers branch, are employed on rolling fixed-term contracts. When Goodlord offered them their new contracts, a 20% pay cut had been applied so the workers are now calling for the restoration of their previous terms and conditions of the London Living Wage.

There was huge support for the

picket line from tech workers in the Communication Workers Union, other Unite members, the NSSN, and eight members from three Socialist Party branches bringing solidarity.

The workers are proud to be out on strike and determined to win: "It's ridiculous what they are doing and we can't let them get away with it. We are fighting for everyone to stop this practice," said one.

We can't rely on the bosses to self-regulate fair pay, we need a £15 minimum wage now and we need an end to fire and rehire.

● **The workers are out on indefinite strike and the next picket line is 11.30am to 1pm on 18 March.**



Goodlord workers are on indefinite strike against savage wage cuts PHOTO JAMES IVENS

Government's bus plans fall short of making up for the cuts

The government's new plans for much of England's bus network, including a pledge to invest £3 billion doesn't go anywhere near compensating for the cuts that have taken place.

The Campaign for Better Transport has said that 3,000 bus services have been axed over the past decade due to a 40% cut in local authority bus funding. The reduction of services has particularly affected England's smaller towns and rural areas without rail links.

As part of his strategy to 'level up' England and reduce regional inequality, the prime minister will reform the privatised bus market that has existed since 1986. "Enhanced partnerships" will be formed between bus operators and local councils to promote closer collaboration. But to really take bus services to the level needed, all services should be renationalised under democratic workers' control and management.

Proposals to reduce ticketing prices, to allow for contactless payments

and move towards greener buses, are set out. But as Unite the Union, which represents many bus drivers, says, it is highly disappointing that the strategy fails to introduce minimum standards for bus drivers' pay and conditions, and ignores the growing crisis of fatigue which results in accidents and leads to long-term health problems for drivers.

Unite national officer for passenger transport, Bobby Morton said: "The National Bus Strategy is an admission that the 1980s deregulation of the bus service has been a complete failure.

"Fares have increased, services have reduced, private operators cherry-pick the most profitable routes and social exclusion has mushroomed as connectivity has been cut.

"The National Bus Strategy attempts to address these issues but specifically excludes the best solution which would be to allow local authorities to work together to operate their own services."



3,000 bus services have been axed over the last decade due to a 40% cut in council funding PHOTO JOHN BRISTOW/CC

Reinstate Moe - stop trade union-busting at Abellio!

REINSTATE MOE CAMPAIGNERS

Moe Muhsin Manir, Unite Walworth garage rep, bus driver on the C10 London bus route and Socialist Party member, has been sacked by Abellio. This is another attack on the union after Battersea rep Judith Katera was dismissed before Christmas. After the union and members fought back, Judith was reinstated in February. Moe himself was threatened with dismissal over a year ago on a trumped-up charge but the company was forced back.

We have to do the same to get Moe back in Walworth now. It's the same old story - management attacks union reps to then cut bus workers' pay and terms and conditions. Some drivers are asking, are they going for Moe because Abellio want to impose remote sign-on? Drivers in Metroline in North London are currently balloting for strike action over this. Last summer in Manchester, a Unite rep was targeted and now drivers are on indefinite strike because Go Ahead/Go North West wants to use fire and rehire to cut wages by £2,500.



Sacked Unite union rep, Moe

Moe is a committed union rep and has a proud record of fighting for bus drivers in Abellio and across London. He was on the picket lines in the battle for the Olympic bonus in 2012 and for sector-wide negotiations in 2015.

He has also supported every strike taken by bus drivers, including the action currently being taken by workers at RATP. Unite asked him to come to Walworth from Battersea to help build the strength of the union in the garage. As a result, union membership grew from 25% to 75%.

Targeted

Over the last 14 months in particular, it has been clear that Moe has been targeted by management:

- The first attempt to sack him early last year was in the middle of a London-wide Unite consultation ballot on safety
- They then even threatened Moe about his union election leaflet! The election was stopped by Unite after it was proved that a vote of no-confidence petition against Moe was fraudulent
- Last July, on the very day that

Unite started an investigation into this petition, a new complaint went in against Moe!

● Ten days later, a further complaint was put in against Moe and the same day a similar one went in against Judith that led to her sacking

At that time, during some of the most difficult days of the Covid pandemic, when over 30 London bus drivers tragically died, Moe was leading the campaign to make buses safe by fighting for the front doors to be closed.

Moe fights for every improvement for drivers but believes that there should be one contract on the best pay and terms in London, that stops the bosses playing off bus workers against each other. He demands that the London Labour mayor refuses to pass on Tory Transport for London budget cuts and that the 18 private bus companies be taken back into public ownership.

Moe is appealing against his sacking but he needs to be backed up, including by industrial action, to tell management: 'Hands off Moe and our union!'

Campaign to reinstate sacked union activists

Come to: Trade Unionists Under Attack, Solidarity Meeting! 7pm - Wednesday 24 March - online event

(Hosted by Southampton and South West Hampshire Trades Union Council and Southern and South East Shop Stewards Network)

Speakers include -

- **Gary Carney, RMT activist and sacked London Underground worker**
- **Moe Muhsin Manir, Unite activist and sacked London Bus driver**
- **Declan Clune, RMT activist and sacked Southampton Bus Worker**

Join Zoom Meeting
Meeting ID: 764 535 2620
Passcode: STUC2020

STOP PRESS:

● Declan Clune was informed by Bluestar buses, part of Go Ahead South Coast, that his dismissal has been upheld following his appeal last week. Reports of ongoing bullying and harassment of trade union reps at Bluestar show that this is an attack on effective trade unionism and nothing else. The RMT Southampton District Bus and Coach branch is determined to fight this outrageous attack on their rep and branch secretary.

DAVE WARREN
FORMER DVLA WORKER AND
SWANSEA AND WEST WALES SOCIALIST PARTY

PCS members at Swansea DVLA to strike for safety

The Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) branch of PCS has voted for industrial action against management's failure to provide a safe working environment.

During the first lockdown, only 250 essential staff out of the 5,000-strong workforce were required to physically go into the workplace, but since September over 2,000 workers have had to go in every day. Little wonder that there have been over 500 Covid cases since September, including a horrific outbreak of over 300 at the contact centre in December. This affected around a third of the contact centre workforce and was the worst outbreak anywhere in the civil service.

The 71.6% vote for a strike and 76.9% for

action short of a strike on a 50.3% turnout was a significant achievement considering that we are now three months on from the outbreak in the contact centre and members working from home with less incentive to vote were included in the ballot. This is down to the hard work of local activists, but it also shows how bad conditions at DVLA still are.

DVLA management will have been rocked by this result and might be tempted to offer minor concessions, but PCS members will not be satisfied with gestures. They will want significant changes to protect their health and safety, particularly a major reduction in the numbers attending work. Only those who are absolutely essential and cannot work from home should be required to attend. The obvious anger and strength of members must now be harnessed to achieve this goal.



DVLA workers have voted to walkout over Covid safety concerns

Build for the Socialist Students day of action on 21 April



Socialist Students street meeting in autumn term BIRMINGHAM SOCIALIST STUDENTS

TOM GREEN

BIRMINGHAM SOCIALIST STUDENTS

This academic year has exposed the greed at the centre of higher education institutions, and many students have been radicalised by the blatant exploitation that has taken place during the pandemic.

When students were invited to campuses across the country in September, the university management knew that teaching would be forced online, and students would be confined in their accommodation or even have to resort to learning remotely from home. Despite this knowledge, management intentionally lied to students about the opportunities for teaching to take place

in-person to order to secure students' tuition and rent money.

This alone would be cause for action. However, this is paired with the misuse of student money to fund vice-chancellors' bonuses and university vanity projects. There has been no evidence of the investment of fees into enriching student experience, and vital resources like use of libraries and mental health services have been restricted despite the desperate need for access to these amenities.

It is clear that we have not received the experience we were promised, and now is the time to express our frustration and anger through a national day of action. However, as a movement fighting

for student justice, we must broaden our agenda. It is not just a movement for the refunding of tuition fees this year, because this is not the only year that students have been taken advantage of. For as long as tuition fees have been charged, students have been seen as a means to make money. It is vital that we address this with a fight for free education, because inherent in a marketised university system is the exploitation of students.

Students are already taking action through rent strikes, protests and online campaigns addressing issues specific to this year. But as Socialist Students, we must link these struggles to a broader agenda that fights for publicly funded, democratically run universities.

To achieve student justice, we must unite and organise a mass student movement based on the principles of free education for all. That's why Socialist Students is calling for a day of action on 21 April, the week after students return to campus, as part of building for a national student strike to take on the university bosses and the government.

Join the student fightback
JOIN THE SOCIALISTS
socialiststudents.org.uk/join

Why I joined the Socialist Party I couldn't just stand and watch!

KAREN GERAGHTY

NHS WORKER, SWANSEA AND WEST WALES SOCIALIST PARTY

If my memory serves me well, I recall the One Show doing a 'vox pop'. The public were asked a number of questions such as: "Do you agree with free education for all? Do you like that we have the NHS?", and so on. They wrapped up the 'vox pops' by telling people "these are all socialist values", delivered as if they had been tricked or duped into believing in socialism. The tone was derisive to say the least, and churlish at best.

What shocked me was not just the surprise of people being interviewed: "Oh wow I believe in socialist values, oh my! What am I like?", but that the values they agreed with made sense! It feels like we are boiling frogs, and with each eye-watering bung given to a Tory peer or hedge fund, we stand and watch. I was left thinking the world had taken leave of its senses.

Until one day, mulling around in Swansea before the pandemic,



SWANSEA SOCIALIST PARTY

I came upon the friendly smiling faces of Gareth Bromhall and Linda Thraves from the Swansea branch of the Socialist Party.

I signed up there and then and, slowly but surely, I have attended our wonderful Zoom meetings, marched on behalf of the NHS, which I am proud to be an employee of, and tried to help Dave Warren unfold a table in the middle of Swansea town centre! I am also a candidate for the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition.

To me it makes perfect sense as we navigate the never-ending siege of corruption. The Socialist Party provides a panacea of sanity, fairness and equality, and not just politically. I have the pleasure of knowing the friendliest and warmest people you could ever wish to meet, who just so happen to have a belting PA system, and the ability to organise, unionise and mobilise in the blink of an eye.

I am very proud to say I will stand, march and shake my placards at the unwitting citizens of South Wales.

So if you support your own kind and kin, and the community you live in; if like me you are ready for a change, and wondering what you can do, you would be hard pushed to find a better organisation to join than the inimitable Socialist Party.

Join the fightback
JOIN THE SOCIALISTS

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



Socialist Party LGBTQ+ members meeting



LEEDS SOCIALIST PARTY

MADDY STEEDS

MANCHESTER AND SALFORD SOCIALIST PARTY

The Socialist Party LGBTQ+ group met on 14 March to discuss our programme on LGBTQ+ rights, and how we can intervene in the upcoming Pride season for these rights. The meeting was one of the biggest we've had, with attendees from across England and Wales, and 16 contributions during the discussion. The meeting involved many new Socialist Party members enthusiastically engaging in the discussion.

As with all political discussions in the current period, there was an emphasis on the impact of Covid on workers. For LGBTQ+ people, the pandemic has posed unique challenges. Through lockdown, some LGBTQ+ people have had to live with unaccepting family members or housemates, causing them to essentially be forced back into the closet.

Pre-pandemic, LGBTQ+ people were more likely to suffer from mental health issues, and this has been compounded by the toll the pandemic has had on mental health. Furthermore, the ongoing discourse surrounding trans rights has led to backward steps in the legislation protecting trans people, and current government consultations surrounding access to toilets threatens to further oppress trans individuals.

One of the main themes of the discussion was how we can link the

struggle for LGBTQ+ rights to the wider problems in capitalist society and explain the need for a socialist transformation. One example of this was the question of LGBTQ+ venues, which are at risk of closure. Many people in the discussion raised how, during the pandemic, independent gay bars have been at risk of closing for good due to lack of revenue.

But the threat to LGBTQ+ spaces existed prior to the pandemic. The gentrification of areas has led to increased rents which are untenable for many small businesses. Furthermore, non-alcoholic LGBTQ+ services which were under council control have been closed alongside many other services due to cuts and austerity.

Austerity measures and cuts to services have led to a false belief that there is not enough money for the needs of all to be met, and that oppressed groups are in competition with each other for resources. We know that the money exists in society. However, it is being hoarded by the 1% while working-class people face austerity.

The meeting allowed us to discuss our programme, and boost new members' confidence in our ideas. We plan to develop our demands further in future discussions and publish a more detailed programme. We want the meeting to be reported in Socialist Party branches, as the topics discussed will help inform all of our work in the trade unions and other campaigns.

AREA	£ RECEIVED	£ TARGET	Q1: JANUARY-MARCH 2021	DEADLINE: 31 MARCH 2021
Wales	5,631	2,300		245%
South West	2,979	1,800		166%
East Midlands	2,462	1,850		133%
London	5,713	4,600		124%
Northern	783	750		104%
North West	1,165	1,150		101%
Eastern	895	1,200		75%
Southern & SE	1,653	2,350		70%
Yorkshire	1,611	2,550		63%
West Midlands	1,367	2,600		53%
Other	5,830	3,850		151%
TOTAL	30,089	25,000		120%

Selling the Socialist

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

● Southampton

Sticking to Covid guidelines for the election, we set up our canvassing stall in the centre of Southampton near open shops. It was quiet, but a steady stream of shoppers passed us and some stopped to chat. Many were key workers hit by furlough, job cuts and the pandemic. Significantly, some were socialists who wanted to buy our paper and discuss the elections. New Socialist Party member and election candidate Catherine was very bold and enthusiastic, asking everyone to join and consider standing as a candidate. Two left with join cards and the idea of building an anti-cuts alternative in the elections.

NICK CHAFFEY

● Enfield

We sold 20 copies of the Socialist in Enfield town on 13 March, the first time North London Socialist Party had been able to hold a campaign stall in 2021. There is overwhelming public support for a 15% pay-rise for NHS workers, and overwhelming anger at the Tories. Our stall also happened on the same day many people received their council tax bill, 5% higher than last year thanks to the Labour London Mayor and Enfield council. Our members are standing in the elections as part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition to demand workers aren't made to pay the bill for Covid.

● Hall Green, Birmingham

People were angry, but not surprised, to hear about Birmingham City Council's plans to cut another £41 million from services in the coming year. The news that we are standing in a by-election in the area in May was well received as a result.

● Oldbury, Black Country

We kicked off canvassing for our election campaign in the town with a call for key workers at Sandwell Council, in the NHS and elsewhere, to receive a living wage of at least £12 an hour, backing the health workers' campaign for a 15% pay increase.

● Leeds

Honks, claps and thumbs up - that was the response to the banner drop Leeds Socialist Party members took part in, supporting a 15% pay rise for NHS workers. One student ran across the road to ask what our banners were about and responded "brilliant" when we told him.

IAIN DALTON

Film Review: Judas and the Black Messiah

A taste of Fred Hampton's politics, with lessons for fighting oppression today



DEJI OLAYINKA

SOCIALIST PARTY BLACK AND ASIAN GROUP

Before watching the movie, my expectations were set low by Hollywood's history of diluting radical politics, but also by the movie's soundtrack which included track names like "Rich N*gga Problems". That Noname, a popular anti-capitalist rapper, turned down featuring on the album because of the movie's political representation seemed to confirm my fears.

However, a review of the movie was perfectly summarised in her tweet that read: "It was shot beautifully, the acting was amazing. But it's a movie about an informant, Fred is secondary and his radical communist politics are [not] central, at all."

That said, focusing the camera on his murder rather than the party's politics is probably the only way that Hollywood would release a movie about a black radical socialist without diluting their politics. It's within these constraints that we could see cinemas play Fred Hampton's speech, all the way up to him saying: "We're not going to fight capitalism with black capitalism, but we're going to fight it with socialism", and for that I'm grateful.

The movie is about 'Judas' first and 'the black messiah' second - the individuals and not the radical movement. The plot flows through the steps that led the two main characters

to their fate. But it's in these scenes and dialogue that the unfiltered politics of the Black Panther Party bleeds through.

In his first scene, actor Daniel Kaluuya channels the spirit of Fred Hampton in a speech to a room full of students feeling triumphant because a college was getting a black leader and being renamed after Malcolm X. Fred is unflinching in attacking these empty symbols of change. He argues in favour of "the revolution that will free you" versus "the candy-coated facade of gradual reform", and warns against "capitalists... in dashikis".



The conditions that led to the formation of the Black Panther Party are still with us, which shows that many of the same battles still need to be fought and won

Fred was shown as brave, he wasn't afraid to negotiate with gangs, armed with nothing but his words. And even in the face of impending imprisonment and death, he remained committed to the people and their liberation.

The movie made it clear that Fred

wasn't a black nationalist, instead he was determined to build a multicultural rainbow coalition with groups like the 'Young Patriots Organization', and Puerto Ricans in the 'Young Lords'. The full range of the Black Panther Party was shown, including scenes showing the school breakfast programme, discussions on building health clinics, and sections in the party's political education classrooms.

But while the conspirators of Fred's murder were humanised, their crimes certainly were not. The director, Shaka King, was unrestricted in depicting the crimes that the police and capitalist state committed to stop the socialist movement - disinformation, false arrests, murder and entrapment - before finishing with the brutal and bloody home invasion to assassinate Fred Hampton.

Despite being a dramatised version of a political assassination, many of the events of the movie could easily be recreated today. British spies can legally commit these very same crimes, thanks to a law that Keir Starmer whipped Labour Party MPs into supporting.

The action in the movie is balanced by scenes that focus on some of the personal challenges faced by the victims of capitalism's racism and police brutality, as well as showing the challenges for those fighting against it.

One scene exposes the struggles of a mother whose son was killed in a firefight with the police. She had to battle grief while facing prank calls from the media's destruction of her son's legacy. Her words: "He did that, but that ain't all he did... it doesn't seem fair that that's his legacy" could be uttered by many today whose loved ones end up on the wrong side

of the law and the media. The movie stayed true to Fred's politics, but it wasn't the great inspiration a movie on the Black Panther Party should be. Many watchers will be frustrated by the amount of time spent on Bill O'Neil and the FBI officer using him.

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Council funding crisis – We need a workers' programme to restore the stolen millions

SUE ATKINS
SOUTHAMPTON SOCIALIST PARTY

The National Audit Office (NAO) has recently confirmed in a report what we have warned for some time - that councils up and down the country face near implosion. A decade of austerity funding, coupled with the twin effect of the Covid pandemic, have brought this crisis out into the open.

The Tory government was able to get away with the reduction of local government spending power by a third between 2010 and 2018 as councils of every political colour failed to oppose them in any meaningful way. Instead, councils have 'balanced' their budgets on the back of vital services. Care homes, libraries, bin collections, public health, meals on wheels - all have been cut to the bone, and one million public sector jobs have disappeared.

Even so, the carnage continues. 94% of English councils expect to cut spending next year to 'balance' their

budgets amid the Covid pandemic. Only one council, Croydon, went bust this year, but the NAO assesses that "25 more are at acute or high risk of financial failure and a further 92 at medium risk of insolvency."

No confidence in Tories

So what is to be done? The NAO says that "authorities' finances have been scarred and won't simply bounce back." It urges ministers to draw up a programme to stabilise councils' finances. However, we can have no confidence in a government that claims austerity is over but can only 'afford' an insulting 1% pay offer to health workers, while dishing out billions in lucrative contracts to their mates.

Raising the council tax by 5%, local lotteries and crowdfunding schemes, as proposed by the Labour council in Southampton, are also no way to rebuild our local finances. And council tax rises hit the working class in our pockets.

Workers need to draw up and fight

for our own independent programme to restore the stolen millions, to rebuild our vital services and the million jobs that go with them.

That is why I and ten others in Southampton, including bus and health workers, carers and disabled, retired and shift workers, will be standing as part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition in the elections on 6 May.

We will be the only ones putting forward an alternative of a no-cuts budget, demanding the necessary funding from central government. However, to be successful this needs to be backed up by mobilising our communities to build a mass campaign. It's why a new mass political party of the working class, open, inclusive and democratic, needs to be built to represent the interests of working people, the poor, the vulnerable and oppressed.

A united fight involving our trade unions and communities could push the government back and start to rebuild our scarred communities.



SOUTHAMPTON SP

Why I'm standing for TUSC

We need a fighting strategy to win funding from the government

LEE TROW
DONCASTER SOCIALIST PARTY

Last March, Doncaster Council's Labour group passed a three-year council budget which included a 'budget gap' of £17.7 million. The plans to fill this financial hole include service and job cuts as well as council tax rises.

Labour councillors generally try to justify these austerity proposals by declaring that they have 'no alternative'. It's also been reported that Sir Keir Starmer has warned all Labour councillors to vote with Tory councillors on budget caps.

But the money is there. According to the council's latest statement of accounts, its general fund balance reserve stood at £63.5 million on 31 March 2020. This reserve is considered 'usable', meaning that the council may use it to provide services.

These funds can and should be

immediately reallocated to avoid cuts and tax rises. A campaign can then be launched - in collaboration with other local authorities - demanding that the Tory government reverses cuts in central government funding and provides relief funding for local authorities that have had to deplete their reserves, or adopt other temporary budget-balancing measures, to maintain vital public services.

However, rather than adopt this fighting strategy, Labour councillors choose to carry out the Tories' dirty work - all the while falsely claiming that they have 'no choice' but to carry out the cuts.

The Trade Union and Socialist Coalition candidates, in contrast, will fight the cuts by whatever means necessary. Our candidates will not hide behind phoney excuses. That is why I'm standing as a candidate in Doncaster in May's elections.



PAUL MATTSSON

As a step towards building a mass party of the working class

CALVIN FOWLER
WORCESTER SOCIALIST PARTY

Worcester council is Tory run, and its underfunding of services has been appalling. Also, over the last few years we have seen our hospital, The Worcestershire, in the headlines. It has not been reaching acceptable levels of care, not due to the hard-working NHS staff, but the crippling PFI debt and underfunding. This in turn has led to low staff morale, ward closures, and outpatient services being stopped.

In 2019, the Tory council proposed to shut two community libraries due to lack of funds. So a 'Save Our Libraries' group was set up with local residents and members of the Worcestershire Socialist Party. We organised public meetings, a rally and a protest. It was well-publicised and well-attended. This mobilisation of the working class led to the money suddenly being found by the council, and the libraries staying open.

In Worcester, like in other towns

and cities, the pandemic has seen shops closing and smaller shops being unable to pay the super-high rents and business rates.

Where I work there are five of us. Three of us, myself included, have been furloughed since last March. 80% of your wages isn't a government hand out - it's a pay cut!

Austerity

The austerity following the 2007-08 banking crash, where the establishment politicians showed that they would rather bail out their mates in the banks than help the working class, has meant poorer living conditions for all workers and has snowballed ever since.

The mood in Worcester is one of anger at the injustice. The Labour Party at local and national level is not a party for the working class, but merely a second eleven for capitalism. We need a new mass workers' party. I am standing as part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition in Worcester as a step towards building one.

Help fund the Socialist Party's election campaign as part of TUSC

In the pages of the Socialist, you will see the number of campaigns and workers' strikes that we are involved in. The Socialist Party is based on the working class and is fighting for the lives and livelihoods of the vast majority of people. In the upcoming elections in May we will be standing anti-cuts candidates as part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) - a real socialist alternative on the ballot paper.

If you agree with us that we need working-class political

representation, help us to fund our stand. As well as standing in the council elections and the Welsh Senedd, TUSC is preparing to stand in the Liverpool mayoral election, the Bristol mayoral election, and the Greater London Assembly elections. These all require a deposit, and the Socialist Party will be contributing to these costs. We have already started printing leaflets and posters. Can you donate £50 towards 1,000 leaflets or £30 towards 100 posters?

Fund the fightback

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



MYANMAR: WORKERS BRAVE BRUTAL MILITARY CRACKDOWN

TU SENAN
COMMITTEE FOR A WORKERS' INTERNATIONAL (CWI)

The call on 8 March for a second general strike in Myanmar was met with a brutal clampdown by the military. Several protesters were shot dead and overnight raids were conducted to arrest many leading activists and union leaders. Despite these ruthless attacks, protesters have built barricades and remain determined to resist the 1 February military coup.

The call for a full and extended shutdown of the economy was totally implemented in many parts. Dockers, railway workers, who blocked the rail tracks, and industrial workers made sure that the shutdown was strong.

This general strike involved workers from all sectors. Small businesses also shut and joined the protesters. Now the military (Tatmadaw) has stepped up the attacks against protesters. Despite the attacks and shooting with live bullets, protesters continue to defy the military and the enforced regulations used during the Covid pandemic. Hundreds of protesters have been killed and many more injured.

The military tops claimed 'election fraud' in last November's general election - in which the National League for Democracy (NLD), led by Aung San Suu Kyi, won an overwhelming majority of seats (440 out of 476) - as a reason for the takeover. The election was not fully democratic, many minorities were excluded. But the military acted because the vote for its Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) showed extremely weak support.

The Tatmadaw has committed many brutal massacres and atrocities against the population - in particular its genocidal slaughter of the Rohingya people.

Chief military personnel also control parts of the economy. The military establishment is rife with war criminals, looters and corrupt individuals.

Ethnic minorities

The movement against the coup has now drawn in wider numbers involving the various ethnic minorities, including the Rohingya people.

There are over 100 different ethnic minorities living in Myanmar. Ever since the so-called 'return to democracy' (beginning in 2012), the Aung San Suu Kyi led-NLD made no effort to meet the demands of the minority populations.

Not only did the NLD share power with the military, but it also defended the military's atrocities, most brazenly when Aung San Suu Kyi spoke at the International Court of Justice in December 2019.

Aung San Suu Kyi's role in hiding the real truth in relation to the Rohingya people resulted in damage to her reputation as a 'human rights defender' - previously promoted by capitalist politicians and the media in the west.

She and her party have never delivered on improving rights or conditions for the majority of the population during the years they



Establishing a revolutionary constituent assembly is vital to take the struggle forward PHOTO MGH/LA/CC

were in government. Instead, many attacks against workers' rights were carried out. Even the cybersecurity bill, that allows the military to imprison anyone who organises protests online, was drafted and implemented by Aung San Suu Kyi and her government.



The masses have already shown enormous strength in the powerful general strikes. It is evident in the 'democracy movement' that workers' involvement has helped to develop it further

Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD do not have support among the minority populations. The NLD agreed to not hold the election in regions where sizeable minorities lived. Candidates representing the Rohingya people were prevented from standing in November's election. In effect, over two million people were not involved in the election process.

Through the brave actions taken by health workers and other public servants, the masses have begun to gain the confidence to mobilise on the streets.

Various trade unions, including the main union federation, quickly joined the fight, setting up the Civil Disobedience Movement. This

eventually led to a general strike that united the opposition even further. The formation of a General Strike Committee of Nationalities brought together 27 different ethnic groups.

However, the movement now faces a critical moment. The hope that existed among sections of people in relation to the west and the so-called international community has been diminishing. The crocodile tears of western capitalist countries have inevitably produced zero results.

China's role

The Chinese government, which maintains direct links with all political parties and the Tatmadaw, provided support for the regime, including sending a team of experts to block and control the internet and social media.

The Chinese regime has made significant investments in Myanmar, as part of its 'Belt and Road Initiative'. Although Chinese investment was initiated under the military, it was under the NLD government that the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor developed further.

Myanmar's General Min Aung Hlaing reportedly met the Chinese authorities prior to the coup. However, the Chinese had previously also had close ties with the NLD. The Chinese regime would prefer the previous arrangement, where the NLD is in power with the military under a thin veneer of democracy, to maintain its regional interests.

Myanmar's junta is also making deals with Russia that include military contracts and obtaining the Russian-produced Covid vaccine. Russia and China's regimes also blocked any condemnation of the coup at the United Nations Security

Council recently.

Western capitalist governments, on the other hand, are only motivated by their own interests and rivalry against China and Russia. Western governments do not defend democratic rights when their interests are not challenged, for example in Saudi Arabia, India or Turkey where authoritarian regimes carry out gross human rights violations.

With all these factors keeping the military's grip on power strong, the developing opposition movement faces a bigger question than what it seems from outside: ie the simple return to rule by the NLD.

The NLD's attempt to 'balance' between these competing forces has now blown up in their faces. These factors along with repression can, for a time in the future, create a feeling of powerlessness that can demobilise the masses allowing the continuation of the military regime.

But the masses have already shown enormous strength in the powerful general strikes. It is evident in the 'democracy movement' that workers' involvement has helped to develop it further.

However, this alone will not be enough. Workers' councils in workplaces need to be set up and brought together. The movement should also appeal to the rank-and-file police and soldiers to join the opposition forces.

Solidarity should also be extended and requests should be sent to join forces with the mass movements that are taking place in other countries in the region.

Demands have now developed

further than calling for the release of NLD leaders and all detained oppositionists. Now the demand for changing the rigged constitution altogether has also emerged strongly.

Workers' independence

The workers' movement needs to defend its independence. Struggling against the coup cannot mean political support for the NLD leaders. Demanding a civilian government should not mean forming a coalition with the NLD. The workers' movement needs to fight both for democratic rights and for the economic interests of the working people and poor.

The development of a mighty mass movement would raise the question of who should replace the military. Many, for now, support returning Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD to office, but while opposing military rule, socialists should argue that no trust can be put in those who, until now, were publicly defending the military elite.

Instead, calls must be made for a revolutionary government of representatives of working people and the poor that can defeat the coup, remove the plotters, and allow a democratic decision to be made on the country's future.

The demand for establishing a revolutionary constituent assembly can play a vital role in this struggle. Democratically elected representatives from all constituent parts of the country can come forward to discuss the future that they want to create for themselves. This links to the question of guaranteeing all democratic rights, including the right to self-determination of ethnic minorities.

However, this task cannot be left in the hands of the representatives of the capitalists or the landlord class who have a history of collaborating with repressive regimes. The working class must take the leading role and argue for a socialist alternative.

Under a workers' government, a genuine socialist confederation of Myanmar can be created. Of course, the task will not stop there. The implementation of a socialist, planned economy will be vital not only to secure these rights but also to take society forward. For the movement to succeed, these ideas should be discussed, debated and adopted.

● This article can be read in full on socialistworld.net



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the Socialist

Issue 1125

18-24 March 2021

formerly **Militant**

RICH PICKINGS FOR PRIVATE COMPANIES - PEANUTS FOR HEALTH WORKERS



PHOTO PAUL MATSSON

15% NHS PAY RISE NOW
KICK OUT THE PRIVATISERS
FULLY FUND THE NHS

NHS RADIOGRAPHER

The problem with soundbites is that people have a habit of remembering them. Like Boris Johnson promising us a 'world beating' test, track and trace system. £22 billion pounds later and we are told by the Public Accounts Committee that there is no evidence that the scheme has actually reduced the spread of coronavirus infections!

This staggering failure you might imagine would have led to sackings and a rethink, but no. Instead, Sunak's budget handed another £15 billion to Tory pal and ex-telecoms boss Dido Harding, who runs the scheme.

People may wonder what this mega-expensive white elephant is for. That's easy to explain. Most of the work is contracted to private

consultants, who don't have to have any experience and get paid up to £6,624 a day. In this way, lots of rich people get even richer, just like the killing they made from selling inadequate PPE to the NHS.

So, if the Tories reward failure, how will they reward the incredible achievements of health workers, who, despite resources being cut to the bone for years, have pulled off herculean efforts to manage the pandemic?

As we start to come out of this worst wave of infections, with record numbers catching coronavirus, being hospitalised and some sadly dying, we are told by the chancellor 'there's no money in the budget for you lot.'

Cuts to NHS services over decades have meant, among other things, that we faced the pandemic with a fraction of the intensive care beds of other European countries and record

staff shortages.

The establishment press makes much of the 'heroism' of NHS staff, but an under-resourced and understaffed NHS has taken a heavy toll on health workers.

A recent NHS staff survey for England found a third of health workers were thinking of leaving, and 44% reported feeling unwell from work-related stress.

Also, part of the report contains shocking figures about the treatment of black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) staff - who account for 21% of the workforce. Despite NHS chiefs paying lip service to issue of race discrimination - highlighted by last year's Black Lives Matter protests - nurses from BAME backgrounds reported the highest levels of discrimination from managers for five years. This may well be a contributing factor to the

63% of Covid-19 deaths coming from this group of staff.

The other equally hollow soundbite we won't forget is the Tories saying they'd give the NHS whatever resources we needed.

Of course, the Johnson government has found huge sums of money to prop up big business in its budget. Therefore, the idea that there is 'only so much money available' for NHS services and paying us a decent wage is nonsense.

If health workers make a stand for a 15% pay rise and win, it will encourage other workers to get organised and fight for a better deal. If we back down now it will be a green light to the government to speed up privatisation and destroy the NHS.

● **A fighting union strategy for 15%**
- see pages 2-3

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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