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COVID WORKPLACE SAFETY 'IF YOU WANT TO STAY HEALTHY - YOU'VE GOT TO FIGHT BACK!'

Workplace safety. Something this government knows little about nor cares about. That's why there have been over 3,500 reported Covid outbreaks in workplaces since the start of the pandemic, affecting tens of thousands of workers.

What's the use in having a lockdown if Covid infections are allowed to spread through workplaces unchecked? Workers are being forced either directly or indirectly to go into work or risk losing their livelihood.

At the same time, there's no pressure on bosses to ensure full PPE, social distancing, or any other Covid safety measures. Not a single employer has been prosecuted for Covid safety failings since the start of the pandemic. This is hardly surprising since the so-called workplace safety regulatory body, the HSE, has decided not to place Covid in its highest risk category - with government approval!

The Tories and bosses have long derided HSE inspectors as 'interfering busybodies' and decried workplace checks as 'health and safety gone mad'. And to ensure the HSE



is a toothless watchdog, successive governments have slashed millions in funding from it. The Tories and bosses are interested only in ensuring profits for the few, at the expense of the many.

It's clear we can't depend on employers, the government or the HSE to secure our safety at work. We can only rely on our collective strength, through the trade unions, to defend our interests. Groups of workers have already demonstrated this point in action.

At the start of the year, after much campaigning by Socialist Party members and others, the National Education Union leadership bowed to rank-and-file pressure and told the government that an early return to mass schooling was a no-no. And much to the chagrin of the Daily Mail and the rest of the capitalist media, this pressure forced the Johnson government to back down.

If the Tories press for an unsafe early full reopening of schools, education workers will have to organise to take action again.

On 14 February, the National Shop Stewards Network of trade union activists convened a well-attended online meeting and heard reports from frontline workers about pressing Covid safety issues. Importantly, it discussed a clear strategy of fighting within the trade unions for action to defend the health, lives and livelihoods of workers (see pages 8 and 9).

The lesson about Covid safety at work is clear - if you want to stay healthy you've got to fight back!

**NHS WHITE PAPER NO SOLUTION
TO TORY POLICIES >>> p2-3**

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**SOCIALIST STUDENTS CONFERENCE:
BUILDING FOR A NATIONAL STRIKE >>> p6**

Tory consultation on home-use abortion pills Continued access is vital for working-class women

NINA BROWN
LEEDS SOCIALIST PARTY

One in three women will have an abortion before the age of 45. The abortion pill is a safe and uncomplicated medical procedure carried out in the first ten weeks of pregnancy.

Before the pandemic, obtaining it required travelling to a clinic, taking a pill there, then having to travel home again (often while still bleeding).

During the pandemic, to minimise face-to-face appointments, clinics have been allowed to offer telephone consultation and home-use abortion pills, which over 50% of service users have chosen.

The average waiting time for an abortion has halved since home-use was allowed, and major complications have dropped by two thirds.

Waiting lists

A study by the National Institute of Clinical Excellence study found that every extra day on the abortion waiting list costs the NHS £1.6 million, as quicker and earlier access means less complications.

Despite this, the government has launched a consultation about whether to revert to face-to-face only appointments.

For some, having an appointment in person may be preferable. But taking away the home-use option would disproportionately affect working-class women.

Kerry Abel, chair of Abortion Rights, said: "More than 50% of women who have an abortion already have at least one child, so childcare is not an inconsequential factor. Travel is expensive, taking days off work is expensive, getting childcare is expensive."

Employment opportunities and conditions are scarily unstable, and taking time off for an appointment frequently means lost pay, and could mean losing out on future work.

The option of tele-medical abortion improves access for people who may be unable to leave home easily,

for reasons such as travel restrictions, domestic abuse, disability and caring duties.

"If there is a decision to stop it [tele-medical abortion care] it is not for any scientific reasons," Dr Lord, a consultant obstetrician and gynaecologist, commented.

The Abortion Act has faced anti-choice attacks from controlling, puritanical capitalist politicians since it was put in place in 1967. It has been kept free and legal, in part by trade union pressure.

We in the Socialist Party know that no part of our NHS is safe in Tory hands.

It should be the right of all women to decide when or whether to have children. On the one hand, this means access to contraception, abortion, fertility services and sex education. On the other, it means ensuring that the resources are available for childcare, local services, decent housing and a guaranteed income that can enable children to be brought up free from poverty.

We say:

- The abortion pill must continue to be available for home use as has been the case during the Covid pandemic
- No more cuts and closures of contraceptive services. Full access to free, safe contraception
- Nationalise big Pharma and fund research into safer, more effective contraception
- Free abortion on demand
- Access to free fertility treatment on the NHS for all who need it
- Increase research into the prevention of infertility
- Inclusive, quality health, relationship and sex education in schools

The consultation is due to end on 26 February. Details can be found by searching 'abortion pills' at gov.uk.

Tory cladding money will not make us safe



OXFORD/CC

JACK JEFFREY
SECRETARY, UNITE HOUSING WORKERS

Despite the horrific scenes at Grenfell almost four years ago, around 700,000 people in the UK are still living in buildings fitted with combustible cladding. The government has announced £3.5 billion to fix dangerous cladding on high-rise buildings.

This fund is restricted to buildings of at least 18 metres, typically six storeys. It would not cover buildings between four and six storeys, such as Samuel Garside House in Barkin, which burnt down in 2019 after wooden cladding allowed a fire to spread across the whole block.

Those residents would be expected to contribute towards costs. Residents in buildings below four storeys would not be covered at all.

This fund can also only be used to replace and refurbish cladding, despite a key factor in Grenfell being the lack of fire safety measures, such as sprinklers. It will also do nothing to ensure properties are habitable.

The English Housing Survey revealed that 17% of households, 4.1 million people, live in properties classed as 'non-decent'. Although your property may not burn down, it may still be damp, overcrowded and unliveable.

Large housebuilder Taylor Wimpey, for example, estimates profits of over £650 million this year. So you would expect extra taxation

on big housebuilders to easily cover the cost of this fund.

However, a new levy on developers will only contribute £2 billion over ten years. The rest will come from general taxation.

Why should ordinary people, who have been forced to live in unsuitable and dangerous accommodation, be forced to subsidise the cost-cutting of developers earning huge profits?

Living in safe housing should be a right, not the ability to make money from it. Despite being a thriving industry with huge profits, capitalism seems completely unable to provide decent affordable homes for working people.

Only by taking housebuilding out of private hands, and into public ownership, can we provide safe accommodation for all.

Cuts cost disabled lives

Shockingly, 60% of Covid-deaths last year were disabled people, according to the Office for National Statistics.

But this awful fact is not solely attributable to disabled people's physical vulnerabilities. Social class was also an underlying cause, eg poor housing, low income, and so forth.

Campaign groups point to the lack of infrastructure to allow those shielding to access food and medicine during the first lockdown, as well as cuts in social care support.

Benefit injustice

Many bereaved families continue to be denied access to Bereavement Support Payment despite Prime Minister Boris Johnson recently admitting in parliament that it is an injustice. The contributory benefit allows for a £3,500 lump sum payment and then up to £350 a month for the first 18 months following the death of a partner.

But the Department for Work and Pensions will only make payments to married couples or those in a civil partnership despite a Supreme Court ruling in 2018 that this was discriminatory and therefore unlawful.



Sham inquiry into 'progressive extremism' will not stop movements against capitalism

NICK HART
WOLVERHAMPTON SOCIALIST PARTY

Shortly after the 2019 general election, former Labour MP John Woodcock was rewarded by Boris Johnson for his public call to vote Tory with a seat in the House of Lords. In this new role, he has now been appointed to lead an inquiry into "progressive extremism".

In his own words, he plans "to look at the way anti-democracy, anti-capitalist, far-left fringe groups... hijack important causes". This reflects the false idea spread by the far right, amplified by sections of the capitalist media, that the Black Lives Matter protests and the school strikes against climate change have been part of some kind of 'Marxist conspiracy'.

Socialist Party members have been proud to take part in these movements. But there's been nothing secretive about the way we've gone about it.

During the Black Lives Matter protests in Wolverhampton and elsewhere last summer, Socialist Party

leaflets and posters were enthusiastically received by large numbers of people looking for ideas that can end the systemic oppression of black people.

Rather than looking to 'hijack' the demonstrations, we boldly and unashamedly raised the slogan that "you can't have capitalism without racism". Banishing racism to the dustbin of history once and for all means doing the same to the class society that breeds division and racial inequality.

Worried about socialism

The desperate attempts by the Tories to create a moral panic around growing support for socialism follows on from their proposals to further restrict the right to protest and strike (see 'State forces want more power to crush the protests that are coming' at socialistparty.org.uk).

Taken together, these are clearly conscious moves to try and undermine support for protests, in preparation for further attacks on the working class through yet more cuts and redundancies, as part of their 'recovery' from the Covid crisis.

But this bid to introduce 'red scare' tactics to the UK may backfire. In the US, completely non-socialist, pro-big business politicians, such as Barack Obama and Joe Biden, have long been labelled 'socialists' by their Republican opponents.

This has only driven more workers and young people to seek out the real ideas of genuine socialism and Marxism. A series of opinion polls have shown that around 40% of American adults now have a favourable view of socialism.

The reality is that the inability of capitalism to solve the issues of racism, climate change and economic collapse, in favour of the working-class majority, will continue to give rise to mass movements against these ongoing crises.

The Socialist Party will be fighting alongside those taking part in these protests and campaigns every step of the way. We link up the different issues faced by workers and young people with the need to replace the system over which Lord Woodcock and his ilk preside.

Cumbria mine: How can we fight for jobs and stop climate change?



Haigh Mining Museum in Whitehaven in Cumbria. It was planned the new mine would be in Whitehaven RALPH RAWLINSO/CC

BRENT KENNEDY
CARLISLE SOCIALIST PARTY

The government and the Labour-led Cumbria County Council have finally had to take notice of the obvious contradiction between talking warm words about fighting climate change and opening a new coal mine.

It was pointed out that if the government gave approval for the mine, its credibility as host of the World Climate Conference in Glasgow this autumn would collapse. The Tories don't really care about charges of hypocrisy, but this would harm their 'soft power' in the world.

Tory lies

The public has been told lies about this mine. Cumbrian Tory MPs and councillors claimed that this 'coking coal' was necessary to supply steelworks in Britain to build windparks, etc. This would supposedly be environmentally friendly, because it would cut diesel output on ships transporting coking coal from other continents.

This greenwash has now been exposed. 85% of the Cumbrian coal will be exported.

There is also suspicion that this mine could become a depository for the nuclear waste that has built up here since the 1950s. A previous plan was rejected by the council, because Cumbria is geologically unsafe.

The promise of 500 jobs, 400 of them for local folk, has won support for the mine from some locals desperate for permanent, well-paid jobs. As if the mine owners and local Tories care about workers!

This government destroyed 20,000 skilled jobs by cutting the subsidy for installing solar panels.

And more Tory lies

The government made a big announcement of a £2 billion 'green homes grant' to help 600,000 households cut carbon emissions, cut energy bills and create 100,000 green jobs. But only 5% of that has materialised. Installers are laying off workers because the government owes them tens of thousands of pounds.

I was one of those poor pensioners who, incredibly, didn't meet the limited qualification set by the American consulting firm hired to administer the scheme. The government will now keep the money instead of extending the scheme. But they'll repeat the 'made available' propaganda in the next elections.

Now is the time to invest in creating well-paid skilled jobs and apprenticeships, on Cumbria's much-vaunted 'Energy Coast', by building wind, solar and tidal renewable energy projects and transforming our energy-inefficient housing stock.

Cryptocurrency bubble: Insanity of capitalism

ANNON COHEN
NORTH LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

Low interest rates and the declining profit margins of capitalist production have pushed speculators to find new areas to invest their capital. This has created a massive bubble in cryptocurrencies.

In 2010, a bitcoin was worth \$0.0008, and a bitcoin could be 'mined' with an ordinary laptop in ten minutes of calculations. Today the same bitcoin is worth \$47,000.

This has created a massive industry of 'bitcoin mining farms' - warehouses where hundreds of thousands of servers are crunching through the calculations needed to mine new bitcoins. These farms consume more electricity than the datacentres of Google, Amazon and Microsoft

combined, and more power than Argentina, accounting for 0.5% of global electrical carbon emissions.

Elon Musk, whose companies just received \$4.9 billion in government green subsidies invested \$1.5 billion in bitcoin, sending its price up by thousands of dollars and fuelling the expansion of these bitcoin farms. The expansion of these farms is the reason for the shortage of graphics processing units that they often use.

Under capitalism, vast amounts of power, computer hardware and technical expertise is used to perform socially useless calculations to create these cryptocurrencies, while needlessly boosting carbon emissions. Let's end this insane system and use the technology and resources at our disposal for the benefit of humanity, and not the profits of speculators.

news in brief

• Never had it so good

Last year was dubbed 'the year from hell' as a result of two million deaths from Covid and the pandemic's huge hit on working-class living standards and livelihoods.

But for some, it wasn't all bad news. The world's top 15 hedge fund managers scooped £16.9 billion in total - the equivalent of the total economic output of Zambia with its population of 18 million.

• Less than minimum wage

One group of important workers during lockdown have been parcel couriers. But unlike hedge fund managers, they haven't fared as well. Some self-employed drivers contracted to Amazon claim that after deductions, including van hire charges and fuel costs, they can end up earning as little as £1.83 an hour - far less than the minimum wage of £8.91 an hour from 1 April.

Meanwhile, anti-union Amazon, whose global sales soared past \$100 billion in the last three months, enjoyed a 35% increase in UK profits in 2020.

• Stop evictions

According to homelessness charity Shelter, nearly 445,000 private renters in England have fallen into arrears or been served with some kind of eviction notice in the last month.

Housing minister Robert Jenrick is keen to highlight the government's 'compassion' by extending the ban on bailiff-enforced evictions to the end of March. However, this is just kicking the can down the road as it doesn't address the huge increase in Covid-related household debt.

Moreover, 'no reason' landlord evictions are still being granted by the courts.

Socialist Students conference

Building for a national student strike

Socialist Students will hold its online national conference on Sunday 28 February at 1pm. The conference will discuss what is needed to build a movement to transform education and the lives of young people and students. Below we print an edited version of the document to be discussed at the conference.

To register to attend visit: cutt.ly/GkfZLCH

Ten years ago a student movement erupted, which saw thousands of university and college students mobilise in a struggle against the trebling of fees and the scrapping of the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA, a weekly payment for 16-18 year-olds in education). In 2020, universities entered a new phase of crisis, ultimately thanks to the market funding model of higher education. A decade on, it is urgent that a national student movement to fight for the scrapping of the market model and for free education is built.

Students on university campuses across the country have taken the first steps towards getting organised against the symptoms of the market model of higher education. Socialist Students put out the call for campus protests at the beginning of the new academic year, organising them in many areas. During the first term, following the A-level victory in the summer, students organised protests demanding fee and rent refunds, as well as demanding that no cuts be made on campuses due to the coronavirus crisis.

Alongside these, students in some areas established rent strike campaigns. Since the announcement of new Covid lockdown measures preventing many students from being able to return to university, new rent strike groups have been created. Approximately 50 rent strike campaigns have been created since the start of the academic year.

Socialist Students has energetically participated in this movement, including putting forward the need to build a national student movement with a bold programme to kick profit out of higher education and student housing.

We fight for free education, the scrapping of tuition fees, the introduction of living grants for students, and the cancellation of all student debt. When Jeremy Corbyn raised the demand to scrap tuition fees in his 2017 manifesto, it enthused thousands of students and young people. While scrapping tuition fees was estimated in Labour's 2017 manifesto to cost roughly £9.5 billion a year, the Tories have spent an eye-watering £280 billion on Covid-related measures in 2020, mainly to prop up the profits of their big business friends.

Join the student fightback: join...

socialist students

- Visit socialiststudents.org.uk/join
- or call **020 8988 8761**
- or text your name and school, college or uni to **07749 379 010**



Students protests for free education in October 2020 BIRMINGHAM SOCIALIST STUDENTS

● Rent strikes win concessions

In student housing we have been fighting for 100% rent refunds for students unable to move back into their halls, with the funding for those refunds made up for by the government. We also fight for the right of students in private accommodation to be released from their contracts early, with compensation paid to the landlords only on the basis of proven need, and for rent controls.

Concrete victories have been won by students at universities across the country. Some universities have paid out partial refunds on this term's rent to students in halls, despite the fact that students have been scattered across the country because of the lockdown.

This movement has already won small gains from the government. On 18 January, the Welsh parliament announced that it was releasing £40 million of emergency funding to Welsh universities' hardship funds. Two weeks later, on 2 February, the Tory government announced £50 million of additional funding to universities in England.

The level of additional funding won so far is inadequate, representing about £25 per student for those studying in England. But it shows that when we fight, government funding can be won.

The education secretary is, at

● Go on the offensive for free education

Meanwhile, the capitalist class and the Tories are split over the question of how to resolve the crisis in higher education. This represents a big opportunity for the student movement to boldly go on the offensive and fight for free education.

While some students have taken the first steps towards getting organised, the key task of linking up these separate local movements into a national movement is yet to be achieved. This is a reflection of the crisis of student organisation and leadership nationally as well as locally. We desperately need democratic and fighting student organisations locally and nationally, to discuss the crisis facing students and the strategy and programme necessary to fight back.

National student strike

That is why Socialist Students is launching its campaign for a national student strike. We are writing to the leadership of the rent strike network, as well as the NUS and others, to propose a 'council of war' - to bring together students in struggle across the country and discuss how we can build a national student movement to win free education.

This must also include a discussion on how we can build a political voice for students and young people. Currently, there is no party students can rely on to fight for our interests - only 20 MPs so far have signed a parliamentary petition supporting student rent strikers. Since Starmer took over leadership of the Labour Party, his priority has been to prove his loyalty to big business and that he is not prepared to fight for our interests. We need a new party that will fight for the interests of workers and students.

Our campaign for a national student strike is also happening on the ground locally. Although it is still unclear when exactly students will return to the campuses, Socialist Students has the opportunity to put out the call now for campus protests as soon as students return.

This means organising Socialist

Students public meetings over Zoom, and writing to different campaigning organisations locally, not only rent strike groups but also UCU branches, local anti-cuts groups, liberation societies, and anyone who wants to fight for free education, to discuss campaigning alongside Socialist Students.

We are fighting to draw broader layers of students into the struggle for free education by using the many tools at the disposal of the student movement. Not only rent strikes but occupations, walkouts, and mass marches. Key to achieving this is raising a bold programme which takes up the many crises facing students, staff and post-graduate students.

Socialist Students' programme includes demands for rent and fee refunds for students, for an end to all cuts on campuses, for democratic trade union and student oversight of health and safety on campuses, and for free education - all linked to a programme of public ownership to make the 1% pay for free education.

Build Socialist Students

We will continue to build Socialist Students as widely as possible on the campuses. We want to reach the best layer of campaigners and students who are interested in discussing and debating socialist ideas to change the world by holding regular Socialist Students meetings and campaigning activity on campus.

Socialist Students says that capitalism has failed our education system and offers no future for young people.

Despite the huge crisis facing working-class and young people, Britain is the fifth richest country on the planet. That's why we fight for socialist policies - to take the banks and monopolies which dominate the economy into democratic public ownership in order to provide a decent future for young and working-class people, including affordable housing, decent jobs, and free and high quality education for all.



Manchester Go North West bus drivers in all-out strike over fire and rehire dispute

Bus drivers employed by Go North West in Manchester will begin an all-out continuous strike from 28 February. The company is trying to fire and rehire its workers on vastly inferior contracts.

The 400 workers, who are members of Unite, returned an 82% 'yes' vote in favour of strike action.

If Go North West's fire-and-rehire proposals are implemented it will result in:

- A 10% cut in bus drivers
- Workers, who earn an average of £24,000 a year, forced to work longer for no additional pay, resulting in them being £2,500 a year worse off
- Tearing up the existing sick pay policy, which will force workers to work when they are sick or should be self-isolating during the Covid-19 pandemic

Go North West's parent company, Go Ahead, is hugely profitable. Its most recent accounts reveal it earned £1 billion from its bus division, with

an operating profit of £121 million. The company paid dividends to shareholders, worth 102.80p per share.

Unite regional secretary Ritchie James said: "Unite gave Go North West the opportunity to withdraw its fire-and-rehire plans following the overwhelming vote for strike action, sadly it spurned this opportunity."

"If Go Ahead were allowed to implement its fire-and-rehire policies it would result in our members, who have been in the frontline since the pandemic began, having to work longer for far less money."

In the run-up to the strike, in an attempt to bully and intimidate workers, Go North West managers delivered letters to drivers' homes informing them that they had just eight days to accept the new contracts or be dismissed on 8 May.

The Socialist Party calls for an end to fire and rehire, no pay cut for drivers and renationalisation of bus services.



London bus strike 2015 PAUL MATTISON

London bus drivers set to strike over pay and conditions

Some London bus drivers are also set to walk out over pay and conditions. Members of Unite based in several parts of the city will walk out from 22 February.

The union is in dispute with French-owned company RATP, which operates three subsidiaries in the London bus network.

Workers at London United, which provides bus services in south and west London, will take strike action on February 22, 23 and 24.

Workers based at a depot in Epsom, Surrey, will strike on February 22 and 23, while drivers in north west London, will strike on February 22.

Scaffolders' strike continues

Around 50 scaffolders, members of Unite employed by Brand Energy at Scunthorpe steelworks, are now in their fourth week of strike action. They are striking for the industry-agreed Blue Book rate of pay, roughly a £2 an hour increase. Having already taken three weeks of 48-hour strikes, they have ramped up the action to three days of strike action. This is to hit Brand, who are losing the contract, and send a clear message to the new contractors Activo that the scaffs are serious about getting the rate for the job. This has forced Activo to offer talks in advance of starting the contract in March.



Hackney teaching assistants strike against cruel and unnecessary job cuts



BRAYDEN LEW HACKNEY SOCIALIST PARTY

Teaching assistants organised by general union Unite took to the streets on 10-12 February to picket against unnecessary forced redundancies.

The Colvestone and Thomas Fairchild primary schools in Hackney, east London are currently facing a budget deficit. Their joint management has chosen to lay off these key members of staff - some of whom have been with the schools for more than 30 years.

Hackney Council has the ability to accept the budget deficit and carry it on into next year. This, combined with fighting for more funding, would prevent these cruel redundancies taking place during a global pandemic. But neither the school, nor the council has been willing to enter into a meaningful dialogue about this course of action.

Fight for school funding

Strikers told us that management had advised several members facing redundancy to simply apply for other, lower-paying, less stable positions. Those few positions available are also now subject to a 'review' in six months' time.

Police were called out to the peaceful picket line on Thursday morning, firstly making sure everyone was maintaining social distancing. Once they were content with this, they could be seen standing in the street

next to the school taking photos of seagulls eating pizza off the ground.

Things quickly escalated, however, when the officers told pickets that were 'illegally' protesting under Covid-19 restrictions and needed to disperse immediately. Union organisers quickly stepped in to explain that strike pickets are not illegal, and the police left shortly after.

Many Socialist Party members were present at the picket line in solidarity with educators who were quite literally left out in the cold. Local Labour councils have the power to set no-cuts budgets, fight for better resources and demand more money for schools - yet they do not. The Socialist Party is running in the May elections, as part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, on these key issues and more, in order to help workers like these striking TAs build the political alternative they need.

Boot private companies out of our NHS

SIMON CARTER EAST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

Despite the recently leaked government draft white paper suggesting reversing "controversial privatisation policies" introduced in 2012, private healthcare operators continue to gorge on the NHS.

In January, the US 'for profit' healthcare company Centene Corporation, through its UK subsidiary Operose Healthcare, acquired AT Medics London contracts. This means that Operose now runs 69 GP surgeries in total, the largest GP surgery network in the UK.

Absorbed into Operose was The Patient Group (TPG), which has a history as a failing service provider. In June 2012, TPG walked away from a contract to run the Brandon Street surgery in Leicester. It had failed to recruit permanent GPs for the surgery and a succession of locums was used.

In April 2012, TPG shut its Camden Road surgery in London, bought from United Health. Patients were given very little notice of the decision. Both United Health and TPG were subsequently accused of running down the surgery and there was considerable use of locums.

The closure sparked a public inquiry by Camden Council. The inquiry was, however, abandoned when both United Health and TPG refused to attend. In January 2016, when TPG ended its contract for five surgeries in Brighton and Hove following a funding dispute, some 11,400 patients had to be found alternative GP practices.

In January 2020, Centene increase its stake in Circle Healthcare to 40%. Circle is notorious for walking away from its contract acquired in 2011 to run Hinchingsbrooke Hospital in Cambridgeshire - the first privately run NHS hospital in England - when it found it wasn't

making the profit expected.

Private healthcare companies cherry-pick profitable areas of the NHS. But when the honeypot runs out so do these parasites, leaving the NHS to clear up the costly mess.

The use of 'any willing provider' to run NHS services was codified into the Con-Dem government's 2012 Health and Social Care Act. This outsourcing was preceded by the Blair/Brown governments' trialling of Independent Sector Treatment Centres and GP commissioning.

Booting private companies out of the NHS is long overdue. These contracts, along with those of the rip-off Private Finance Initiative schemes, should be made null and void and services brought back in-house. The government should fully fund the NHS, with the public healthcare organisation run democratically involving trade unions representing the workforce and representatives of user groups.

national shop stewards network meeting



On 14 February, the National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) hosted its fifth online meeting of workplace trade union reps and workers during the pandemic.

NSSN chair **Rob Williams** introduced the meeting explaining: "This is a meeting deliberately called so that union reps and activists like yourselves, can come together and discuss. Workers organised in the union movement can take on the bosses and their Tory government's offensive."

He set the scene saying: "For a period at leadership level at least, too many in the union movement called off disputes, suspended action and, for a time, the basic ability of the unions to organise as independent organisations was in question."

"This reached its lowest level last autumn when the government announced a watered-down version of furlough. The general secretary of the TUC, Frances O'Grady, stood practically hand in hand with Tory Chancellor Sunak and the head of the bosses organisation CBI.

"Ironically, they were forced to retreat. One of the 20-plus U-turns forced on the Johnson administration. The latest U-turn has been over their proposed review of employment rights and regulations post-Brexit. The fact that the Tories have retreated so quickly on these initial proposals, without a big mobilisation, is a sign of their weakness. And we are saying that that should now be built upon to face down the offensive that the Tories and bosses are raining down on workers." This is the role of the NSSN.



● Determined British Gas strike against fire and rehire

Liz Robinson, a British Gas worker and a GMB union rep, told the meeting: "Management have gone from shedding tears in meetings at the way we helped foodbanks during the pandemic, to laughing at us for not getting national publicity for our strike."

Liz summed up the attitude of British Gas bosses who are attempting to fire and rehire engineers, a disgraceful tactic to force through changes that will result in worse pay, hours

● Transport workers prepare for battles ahead

Jared Wood, a member of the RMT transport union's national executive, spoke to the meeting in a personal capacity. The RMT was one of the founders of the NSSN. Jared explained the challenges the union is facing at present and the battles to come.

He said: "The government is going to publish a roadmap out of lockdown but the issues of maintaining a safe workplace haven't gone away, and will continue to be issues for some time yet. We have to remain vigilant as shop stewards and union reps and make sure that our members are not put in vulnerable positions."

"The government has also got a roadmap out of the consequent economic crisis. But their roadmap is one of job losses, redundancies and attacks on terms and conditions. In trying to recover from this crisis they will attempt to put the bill onto

the shoulders of working people to make sure that the rich and powerful and the bosses don't suffer."

Jared outlined the government's plan to reorganise the rail industry and franchise system and how the RMT is going to fight it. The reorganisation is just one of the fronts the RMT is fighting on: "In the RMT we are going to be facing a wholesale reorganisation of the national rail industry. We're going to be facing cutbacks on suburban and metro systems that are generally funded by local authorities such as TfL.

But also Merseyrail and others will be facing similar problems. And that's not even to start on the crisis that we're facing in the maritime industry, and also the bus workers that RMT represents, who are predominantly outside of London. In our engineering sectors, we've got the historic Doncaster railworks, under threat of closing down altogether."

He ended by urging: "It's absolutely critical, in my view, that we do everything we can to build a fight back across trade unions and also take the companies completely out of private hands and renationalise them."

and terms and conditions. While bosses "have lied, while earning absolutely fantastic wages and none of them are suffering, the company has made £900 million profit."

Workers have taken many days of strike action, picketing British Gas offices and organising protests in all weathers. The strike is currently on hold to allow talks, but Liz told the meeting that more strikes are planned and workers will walk out if bosses don't back down: "If it's not acceptable we will be back on the picket line."

She also warned other workers: "If British Gas get away with this, other workers will face the same tactic used against them."



Unite officer Onay Kasab shared examples of workers prepared to fight

● Hospital porters action against rota changes

Lee Williams, Unison branch secretary representing striking Heartlands Hospital porters, detailed why workers have been on strike at Heartlands Hospital in Birmingham over bosses' plans to impose a new rota that will force workers onto rotating shifts which will hugely disrupt porters' lives.

Lee explained: "The porters at Heartlands were among the first workers in the NHS to be farmed out to the private sector at the turn of the century. It took 17 years and a merger to get us back in-house and two years down the line this attack has come. Workers have built their lives around a particular pattern of working, including the enhanced rates that

workers get for evening work, but are now expected to change to a significantly different pattern."

The workers have been taking blocks of multiple days of strike action throughout the dispute which has run for 12 months. The porters are battling to not be picked off one-by-one but to ensure nobody is left worse off. The workers are proud NHS workers but are appalled that the NHS tried to use that fact against them in trying to stop them taking strike action at all. But they were determined to take on the NHS trust which "applauded the NHS like everyone else, except for their own workers."

The workers are holding an online rally on 25 February.

Get all the latest union news
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● Rolls-Royce workers strike action wins victory

The future of the Rolls-Royce factory in Barnoldswick, Lancashire, and its 350 jobs has been secured after a deal was agreed between the workers' union Unite and the company. It was supported overwhelmingly by the workers and followed nine weeks of determined strike action.

The deal struck by Unite included: a ten-year manufacturing guarantee for the site, a guaranteed minimum headcount of 350 workers and the creation of a 'centre of excellence' training school supporting the development and manufacture of zero-carbon technologies and advanced manufacturing excellence

Ross Quinn, the Unite regional

officer with responsibility for Barnoldswick, said: "When many could be forgiven for thinking there was nothing that could be done, our Unite reps led these workers and the town of Barnoldswick and collectively they stood as one to say 'no way.'"

He explained the process by which workers and the union, together with the community, organised, steeled themselves for a fight and embarked on their strike action and campaign which won their demands. They took inspiration from workers fighting at Cammell Laird's shipbuilders on Merseyside, and in turn have inspired workers fighting elsewhere.

Ross concluded: "The message is that the vital importance of being organised of understanding our history. They have achieved a massive victory from where we were at the beginning."

ONLINE WORKERS' RALLY: TAKING FIGHT TO THE BOSSES



● Workers speak 'from the floor' about their battles and victories

Many more trade unionists and reps spoke 'from the floor' about the fight in their workplaces and unions.

Martin Powell-Davies, a teacher and National Education Union rep, told the meeting: "The action that NEU members took in January, forcing the government to close schools, lifted a lot of people's spirits. Trade union members acting together to force the government into making a U-turn is something that is definitely worth celebrating. Section 44, which is legally an individual right, was used by us as a group of individuals acting

collectively, showing how it can be done."

Mark Evans, Carmarthenshire Unison union secretary spoke in a personal capacity. He has recently been involved in pay negotiations with employers and commented: "If you needed any evidence that the Tories intend to make us pay for the Covid crisis it's the pay freeze."

Dave Warren, a retired DVLA worker and PCS union member talked about the situation at his old workplace that has made the news due to the amount of Covid cases: "535 Covid cases have been reported at the DVLA in Swansea, including one death. But the vast bulk of the Covid-19 cases have happened more recently in the second wave as staff are made to attend work in person. The PCS union leadership has sadly

left the branch to fight on its own, but a real fight is needed to stop workers' health and lives being in danger." A strike ballot has now correctly been called, which the union should go all out to win.

Kris, a young worker in Birmingham, spoke from Youth Fight for Jobs which is relaunching to fight the coming tide of youth unemployment, as well as the low-pay, zero-hour contracts and exploitation young workers face.

Onay Kasab, a Unite officer in London, gave the meeting an example of workers prepared to fight: "There were three days of strike action by school workers in Hackney demanding Covid safety, no job losses and attacks on terms and conditions. There are workers out there prepared to take action. The workers

are also aware that there are school closures on the horizon in the borough and are planting a flag now to say that we are going to fight them when they come."

Gary Clark, a Communication Workers' Union branch secretary who has written for the Socialist about the battles in Royal Mail, told the meeting of the victory that kicking out boss Rico Back represented and also of the struggles that continue.

Moe, a London bus driver in Unite has been attacked by his employer for fighting for safety for bus drivers - 47 London bus drivers have died after catching Covid-19 since the start of the pandemic. He spoke about strike action and strike ballots that are taking place in London over pay and 'remote signing on'.

● GKN workers prepare fight to save plant

Frank Duffy, a worker and Unite trade union convenor at the GKN car parts plant in Birmingham spoke to the meeting about the closure threat at the plant putting up to 519 jobs at risk.

"The owners have not given us the rationale for closing the plant, they only claim that it isn't viable whatever that means," Frank said. The trade union and workers are preparing for action when the time is right and are taking inspiration from workers at Rolls-Royce, who Frank has been in touch with.

Unite national officer **Des Quinn** also spoke about the campaign at the plant and what they are doing so far. He praised the workers saying: "The confidence they have given me, through their determination not to allow the bosses who have lied, cheated and been dishonourable all the way through their ownership to get away with it, is really a breath of fresh air."

● Couriers fight against destitution

Key-working couriers currently locked in a battle against York city council in a bid to protect income and jobs were represented at the meeting by their union IWGB chair **Christian Santabarbara**. Christian said that he had been invited by York Socialist Party to speak at the meeting. He explained that the gig economy riders, who have worked throughout the pandemic delivering meals, groceries and medicines, have seen incomes plunge rapidly due to restrictions on their ability to use York's pedestrian zone. They are facing fines and termination of contracts due to "untimely deliveries."

Christian said: "Key workers' voices have been kicked into the long grass and we don't currently have collective bargaining to change the app's algorithm to take into account these pedestrianised zones. We need companies and the council to listen to us to change it, to stop riders being made destitute every single day."

Nearly 2,000 bus drivers are due to go on strike later this month over wage cuts - the 24-hour strikes will take place over three days from February 22-24.

Others are balloting over changes to how they work. He explained: "By introducing remote signing on, drivers would not report to a depot but would meet their bus and begin work at a location such as a bus stop. There will be no checks to ensure the driver is fit and well to drive a bus, and a lack of access to toilet facilities, rest and canteen facilities. Drivers will be forced to wait for their bus to arrive in all weathers and there will be a greater risk of exposure to Covid-19 in travelling to a location which has not been subject to the risk assessment and health measures."



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

THE SOCIALIST INBOX

Looking after number one

The monarchy is seen by a lot of people in Britain as a quaint, if ludicrously expensive, tourist attraction. But it turns out that her majesty does a bit more than rubber stamping legislation that is passing through parliament.

The Queen and Prince Charles use their powers to vet legislation before it even gets debated in parliament.

You could assume her power of "consent to debate" to be a purely formal procedure.

But it actually gives palace lawyers 14 days to vet proposed legislation and "request" alterations. There is evidence of successful royal lobbying.

Most changes demanded have been to keep royal finances secret. Even the monarchy understands that, particularly in an age of austerity and in the middle of a pandemic, there's only so much that people will tolerate.

The workers' movement needs to be wary of the institution of the monarchy. It is not a neutral anachronism. It will always act in the interests of protecting itself.

And it would attempt to prevent any socialist government acting in the interests of the working class. Abolition of the monarchy has got to be one of the policies of the workers' movement.

ALISON HILL

WALTHAM FOREST, EAST LONDON



Return of the 'Prince of Darkness'
PHOTO POLICY NETWORK/CC

Starmer brings back Mandelson

Labour leader Keir Starmer has got Peter Mandelson in to advise him. It's like playing an old, cracked record: back to cuddling up to big business.

Jeremy Corbyn temporarily rescued the Labour Party from spiralling down into irrelevance and boosted the membership.



Her maj - not just a figurehead

PHOTO OASTHOUSE ARCHIVE/CC

Now we see a return of the failed Blairite shadows of the past - witch-hunts, privatisation, etc.

The right wing is firmly in the saddle. Even the most ardent left wingers still inside Labour must now be getting the message. Socialists in the Labour Party face years of futile ineffectiveness, suspensions, expulsions and morale-sapping disappointment.

TERRY PEARCE
BRACKNELL

Adopt socialist policies? Nah! Get a 'New' Labour war criminal who helped destroy Corbynism. Blairites leading Labour - Labour is finished.

JOHN WILLIAMS
CARDIFF

Handforth Parish Council

That acrimonious Handforth Parish Council meeting, I think it was so funny. But it does strike me Jackie Weaver isn't elected. Essentially she's a clerk, who may not be accountable.

In London, loads of spineless councillors are deferring to unelected council officers to steamroller decisions. The councillors at the Waltham Forest planning meeting on 27 January, when we spoke out against the monster blocks, seemed silent in the face of the property developers and council officers (see 'Save our square: we need social housing and public services' at socialistparty.org.uk).

I got chucked out for shouting: "This is what New Labour did to the northern working class, betraying them over decades." Not sure about that parish council meeting, but if she was unelected she shouldn't have the right to chuck people out.

NANCY TAAFFE
WALTHAM FOREST, EAST LONDON



Queuing in the cold for food parcels in Hartlepool, county Durham

Poverty, poverty, poverty

In Britain, 1.3 million children under five are living in poverty. On Newsnight, Emily Maitlis asked what needs to change.

A photo was shown of people queuing at a food bank in Hartlepool. Many of the parents queuing have been furloughed, suddenly thrown into relentless poverty.

A volunteer tells of a woman crying because she feels ashamed of needing

to rely on charity. One woman using a food bank tells of how she only eats one meal a day, in order to ensure her kids get three. Another how she dreads her kids growing out of their shoes or winter coats, as she can't afford to replace them.

This dire poverty also leads to the use of loans, basically from loan sharks with high interest rates. The money isn't used for luxuries, but for food and children's clothes - in other words for living.

A Tory MP interviewed had the audacity to portray himself as caring for the plight people are in. However, it

turns out he voted for the bedroom tax, against increases in disability benefit, and against public spending increases. He's a contemptuous toad.

Meanwhile, the UK's six richest individuals are wealthier than the poorest 13.2 million people, and this gap is widening.

So back to Emily Maitlis' question. What needs to change?

If capitalism can't afford to give us a decent standard of living, then we can't afford capitalism. Forward to socialism
ELAINE BRUNSKILL
GATESHEAD

Hywel Francis missed chance to challenge Blairism

The ex-Aberavon Labour MP, Hywel Francis, has died. His father, Dai Francis, was a leader of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) in south Wales during the 1970s strikes. They were both Communist Party members in their youth.

He wrote important books which are worth studying, including *The Fed: A History of the South Wales Miners*, and *Miners Against Fascism: Wales and the Spanish Civil War*. The latter is uncritical, in my view, of the counterrevolutionary role of the Stalinists in that struggle. But it does give an important view of working-class fights against fascism, mass unemployment and the means test, through oral history collected from miners themselves.

Hwyel did vote against the 2003 Iraq invasion, but served in a Blairite government which inflicted damage on his own working-class community, and voted for repressive attacks on democratic rights.

I met Hywel when preparing my dissertation at Swansea University, as a young member of Socialist Party Wales. He was helpful, while we also had very sharp political debates.

MATT DOBSON
GLASGOW

Tories 'celebrate' IWD

The Tories are proposing schools fully reopening on 8 March - International Working Women's Day. But it looks unlikely that all the safety concerns of school workers will be resolved by then.



How else would you expect the Tories to celebrate International Women's Day, except by putting a predominantly female workforce at risk?

IAIN DALTON
LEEDS

Dentist or slam-door method?

Dental health is as popular a subject in the media as talking about 100,000 shortage of staff in the NHS. The best dental care is reserved for the wealthy.

£2,000 I borrowed for a bridge, now I need the other side done! Now people are extracting teeth by the slam-door method, or whiskey and pliers! Don't try this at home!

MIKE MARX
SOUTHAMPTON

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- Corbyn's project - why not an initiative for a new party?
- Peter Taaffe looks at an insider's story of Corbynism
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Film Review: Dear Comrades!

CLARE DOYLE

COMMITTEE FOR A WORKERS' INTERNATIONAL

The film 'Dear Comrades', produced by the Russian filmmaker Andrei Konchalovsky, came out last year and won the Special Jury Prize at the 2020 Venice Film Festival.

The film brings home in dramatic detail the heroic workers' uprising in 1962 in the North Caucasian city of Novocherkassk, news of which was totally suppressed at the time and which needs a clear explanation for the new generation coming onto the streets to fight the Putin dictatorship of today.

It is filmed in black and white throughout, giving the impression of being made at the time of the events in 1962. The dialogue is in Russian with English subtitles.

The uprising started with a strike at the electric locomotive plant, and ended with the mowing down of demonstrators in the city's central square by Red Army soldiers and KGB snipers.

The drama follows the personal tragedy of Lyudmila, a single mother living in a cramped flat, working loyally for the ruling 'Communist' Party administration. She tries to restrain her 18-year-old daughter from joining the mass demonstrations in support of workers who are striking against wage cuts and higher prices, protests officially characterised as being 'anti-communist'.

It takes place in the era of Khrushchev who had denounced the crimes of Stalin at the party congress in 1956. Lyudmila cries out in anguish that Stalin would not have allowed things to deteriorate like this. She has to make a speech against the workers' action beginning with the words "Dear comrades!"



The film brings home in dramatic detail the heroic workers' uprising in 1962 in the North Caucasian city of Novocherkassk

As discontent mounts over shortages and rising prices, she hankers after the certainties of life under Stalin. Along with the party bureaucrats around her, she has to sign a letter not to divulge anything of the events which will remain "state secrets". Like them, she equates the workers' uprising with what they call the "counter-revolutionary", "fascist", "CIA-backed" uprising in Hungary in 1956 - where workers braved the tanks of the 'Soviet' army to try and carry through a political revolution against totalitarian rule.

There is little doubt that the film faithfully relates the background to the strike, and the bravery and determination of the workers who risked their jobs and their lives participating in it. The strikers stopped building trains and toured neighbouring factories appealing for workers to



Workers' struggle in Novocherkassk showed the possibility of a workers' revolution to take democratic control of the planned economy ANDREI KONCHALOVSKY STUDIOS

join in their fight. Their anger and courage is palpable. Their heroism is brutally snuffed out by tanks and army divisions and a total blackout on news of the events. A new layer of asphalt is rolled out over the blood-drenched square.

Stalinist bureaucracy

In what was by 1962 a Stalinist dictatorship without Stalin, a vast bureaucracy leeching off the backs of the working class - consuming a share of the pie that far exceeded that of the workers who produced it. The film shows privileged bureaucrats at the head of the regional party committee sweeping through the town in their Zil limousines and feasting on "cognac and Hungarian sausage" while workers' families go hungry.

At a time when a new layer of youth in Russia is on the streets demanding an end to the regime of Putin and the oligarchs, this contribution to a new understanding of what happened in the past is timely. History must be cleansed of the lies and cover-ups of post-war Russia, but also of what happened during and after the Russian revolution of 1917.

In 1962, the state-owned planned economy had been growing and providing the basics of free education and housing, full employment and food on the table for all. But the seven-year plan for 1959-65 had run into trouble. Between 1956 and 1960 there was a 6.5% growth rate but by 1961-65 it had slowed to under 5% (still better than in most capitalist countries - then or, especially, now).

Without workers' representatives controlling production and distribution, wastage due to bureaucratic mismanagement could be as high as 50% of what was produced. Without control from below, the economy would zig-zag between

decentralisation and recentralisation. The bureaucrats could not overcome even the most straightforward problems that workers themselves, if involved in planning, would have found solutions for.

News of the bloody events of Novocherkassk, where official figures gave 26 as the number of dead, was suppressed. It leaked out and got some publicity in the western media, but was only fully acknowledged more than three decades later, after the failed state coup of 1991 and the subsequent collapse of Stalinism.

The true number of dead and wounded in the Novocherkassk uprising may never be known. Some estimates put deaths at more than 80. One of the most moving of scenes in Konchalovsky's film is the visit of Lyudmila to a cemetery in search of her daughter, only made possible with the assistance of a friend in the KGB who was able to get through the massive road blocks that surrounded the city. Old graves had been opened and victims of the massacre thrown into them.

Workers' uprisings

The truth of events in Novocherkassk and other uprisings against Stalinist dictatorship lay buried for decades. Even now their true significance remains a closed book to those who have been told that the whole history of the USSR is of totalitarianism. They are told about the futility of workers trying to take control over their own industries and of trying to have a say in the way the country is run.

The ideas and analysis of Leon Trotsky, the heroic revolutionary leader finally murdered by Stalin in 1940, are also hidden from today's youth in Russia. No regime in power before or after the collapse of Stalinism and the 'Soviet Union'



These heroic struggles serve to show that workers were more than capable of fighting for an alternative way of running the state-owned enterprises and the planned economy.

has rehabilitated this heroic figure in the country's history. Thousands who shared his ideas and fought for a political revolution against Stalin, went to their deaths in Stalin's prison camps in the 1920s and 1930s.

These days the crimes of Stalin and his successors are rehearsed to discredit the very idea of a socialist alternative to capitalism. The events of Novocherkassk in 1962 were followed by a workers' uprising and massacre a few weeks later in the mining city of Krasnodar (also in south-western Russia). It was also a workers' revolt against food shortages and local corruption. These heroic struggles, as well as important illegal mass strikes in factories and shipyards elsewhere, serve to show that workers were more than capable of fighting for an alternative way of running the state-owned enterprises and the planned economy.

The massive economy of the USSR

still went forward during the 1970s. But by the 1980s, the state-owned, bureaucratically planned economy was failing to provide even the most basic of needs for working people. As in the era of Novocherkassk and Krasnodar, shortages and corruption drove workers like the miners in the Kuzbas and Donbas to engage in widespread strike action against the bloated 'Communist' Party bureaucracy, seeking an alternative.

The Committee for a Workers' International drew inspiration from the examples of Novocherkassk and Krasnodar, where workers fought for control in a state-owned economy and society. We warned during the turmoil at the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s, that a transition to the capitalist market would not bring an era of prosperity and real democracy, but Latin American-style capitalism with hyperinflation, mass unemployment and dictatorship. And tragically, this is what came about with the criminal raiding of state assets by those who now constitute the horribly rich oligarchy around Vladimir Putin.

All this is yet another page of history waiting to be told truthfully to a new generation of workers and young people in the former Soviet Union. Many more films like "Dear Comrades" are waiting to be made. There is so much more to be related when, at last, history can be cleansed of all the lies and distortions propagated by Stalinists and capitalists alike.

• *Dear Comrades!* can be viewed online at Curzon Home Cinema

WHAT'S YOUR VIEW?

• editors@socialistparty.org.uk

or, if you're not online, write to the Socialist Inbox, PO Box 1398, Enfield EN1 9GT



SNP's independence referendum 2 'roadmap' - no substitute for a mass movement and socialist policies

Statement from Socialist Party Scotland's executive committee

The SNP-led Scottish government's latest road map towards a second independence referendum (indyref2) has been unveiled. Boris Johnson's Westminster government has also launched a five-step plan to save the union. Battle lines are being drawn for an explosive collision on the national question in the coming months.

The SNP's road map illustrates two things. Firstly, the enormous pressure that is building on the SNP leadership as a result of the growing mood among the working class and young people in favour of an independent Scotland.

There have now been 21 consecutive polls in Scotland showing majority support for the break-up of the UK. Among those aged 34 and under, a colossal 71% back independence.

Moreover, the last few years have seen very large demonstrations organised by the likes of All Under One Banner demanding a second independence referendum. These have been outwith the control and influence of First Minister Nicola Sturgeon and the SNP leadership.

SNP divisions

Opposition to what has been largely viewed as the cautious and timid approach of Sturgeon has also been reflected inside the SNP itself.

A number of dissident voices were elected in ballots last year to leading internal SNP committees. Growing demands for a Plan B should, as seems inevitable, the Tories refuse a section 30 order for a 'legal' referendum have piled further pressure on the pro-capitalist leadership of the SNP.

A long-lasting civil war inside the SNP, between supporters of former leader Alex Salmond and current leader Nicola Sturgeon, is also destabilising the party. At root, it reflects growing divisions on how to overcome the entrenched resistance of the capitalist class to Scottish independence.



Socialist Party Scotland members campaigning for an independent socialist Scotland during the 2014 referendum PHOTO SPS

“
The struggle in Scotland is one not just for democracy but also for the social and economic emancipation of the oppressed working class from capitalism

The SNP's internal warfare includes divisions over issues such as gender recognition and Salmond's sexual assault court case in 2020. The Tories will be hoping these divisions will weaken support for independence and could impact the outcome of the May parliamentary election.

However, is it still most likely that there will be a large majority for parties who support a second indyref in the May 2021 Scottish parliamentary election. Such an outcome would detonate an explosive confrontation between the Scottish working class and the capitalist establishment. This will put the pro-capitalist SNP leadership in a very difficult position.

The roadmap is an attempt to head off demands from the independence

movement for extra-parliamentary struggle and an 'illegal' referendum. This pressure has, in part, been reflected in the new roadmap. The document restates the preferred position of the SNP, that it will request and receive a section 30 order from Johnson after the election.

As the SNP goes on to state: "There could be no moral or democratic justification for denying that request. If the UK government were to adopt such a position its position would be unsustainable both at home and abroad." So far, so much the same.

The tweak this time is that the SNP intends to go ahead with a "legal referendum" if one is refused by Westminster. This would leave the Johnson government with the option of delivering a section 30 agreement or, much more likely, refusing and going to the courts to block a referendum if necessary.

Secondly, the roadmap reveals that little has changed in the SNP's own strategic thinking. Nowhere in the roadmap does the SNP say it will hold a 'wildcat' or an 'illegal' referendum if a section 30 order is not forthcoming.

The capitalist courts, which routinely are used by the bosses against trade union ballots, will be very unlikely to rule in favour of an independence referendum being legal if Westminster has not given its agreement.

If the courts and/or the Westminster government were to rule that the SNP can't organise a binding independence referendum, Sturgeon may seek a 'legal' option, for example

a referendum that could be 'advisory' or worded to ask for the opening up of negotiations on the possible terms of independence with Westminster but falling short of declaring an independent state.

It is likely that such a referendum would be met with a boycott campaign by the pro-union side as it was in the Catalonia referendum.

That is not to rule out that under pressure from a mass movement the SNP could be forced, against its instincts, into sanctioning a referendum that was technically illegal. Particularly if it was in danger of losing large sections of its base of support among the working class to, for example, a new workers' party with fighting socialist policies.

They will seek to avoid this at all costs, however. Either way, the response from the Tories et al will be to resist all options that could result in an independent Scotland.

Changed conditions

As Socialist Party Scotland has consistently explained, this is not 2014. Tory PM David Cameron agreed to a section 30 order because he was confident they would win a majority for Scotland remaining in the union. Today, in the context of an economic crisis, the pandemic and majority support for independence in Scotland, that confidence has evaporated.

The break-up of the UK - and it is Scotland that is currently the weakest link in that chain - would be a catastrophe for the ruling class and their economic, strategic and geopolitical

interests. The knock-on impact on Northern Ireland and Wales would be dramatic.

For these reasons the capitalist class, including the Labour leadership under Keir Starmer, will oppose tooth and nail conceding an indyref2, probably while offering to concede more powers to Scotland as a trade-off. But the SNP leadership's entire strategy is to rely only on their electoral mandate in May 2021 to use as a lever, backed up by the bosses' courts if necessary.

The SNP's deputy first minister, John Swinney, underlined the Scottish government's real position by stating: "What the proposals that we have set out do is define exactly how, on a legal basis, we can have a referendum on independence - that is the government's preferred option and that's the strategy that we will pursue should we be successful in securing a majority in favour of that proposition in the elections in May."

As the BBC's Scottish political reporter, Philip Sim, put it: "She [Nicola Sturgeon] wants any new vote to be unimpeachable in its legitimacy, to have international recognition - particularly from the EU, which she would like to see Scotland rejoin some day."

The pro-big business EU's refusal to recognise the 'illegal' Catalonia independence referendum in 2017 looms large in this equation.

Ultimately, the main European powers, even with Britain out of the EU, will provide hostile opposition to Scottish independence. They fear such a development would also add

further to secessionist movements in Spain, Belgium, Italy and across the continent.

The only power capable of overcoming the entrenched opposition of British and international capitalism to self-determination for Scotland is the mobilisation of the working class in a mass movement for democratic rights.

That would involve not only mass demonstrations for the right to indyref2 but also widespread and coordinated strike action by trade unions and occupations of workplaces, schools and colleges by workers and young people.

Moreover, such a movement would have to appeal to workers in England, Wales and Ireland for their support for the right to decide Scotland's constitutional future.

Socialist policies

To do that effectively - and to cut across the concerted attempts to divide the working class through, for example, using English nationalism and religious sectarianism by sections of the ruling class - a socialist approach is essential.

If the mass movement in Scotland was to adopt the idea of fighting for an independent socialist Scotland based on public ownership, an end to all forms of austerity and massive investment in housing, jobs and public services, this would find fertile ground among tens of millions of workers in the rest of Britain who have suffered through more than a decade of austerity.

By making clear that the struggle in Scotland is one not just for democracy but also for the social and economic emancipation of the oppressed working class from capitalism, a united movement for a voluntary socialist confederation of an independent Scotland with England, Wales and Ireland would take root.

The building of a new mass workers' party based on the trade unions and the independence movement is a vital step in ensuring the struggle for self-determination and socialism go hand in hand.

The Scottish Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, supported by Socialist Party Scotland, will be standing on that programme in the May elections.

Our candidates will stand on a pledge of living on a workers' wage, for public ownership and socialist planning of the economy, for a real recovery for the working-class majority from the Covid crisis and for a mass working class struggle for indyref2.

• **Scottish TUSC conference - Saturday 20 February**
The Scottish Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (of which Socialist Party Scotland is a core component) is convening this conference to discuss the Scottish parliamentary elections on 6 May
For details and registration go to facebook.com/ScottishTUSC

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Derby Toyota plant Covid crisis

Derby Socialist Party has compiled a report on the situation at the Toyota Car Plant in Burnaston, near Derby which employs around 2,500 staff.

On the night of 3 February, there was a high number of staff off work. Workers were moved to the affected lines to staff the production area, delaying production by an hour.

At the evening briefing, staff were told targets did not matter that night, it was only about quality and safety. Yet looking over at one affected line, you could see two to three people doing one process where normally only one person would be working.

The following week, it was reported to staff that there were 17 staff off with Covid and 68 isolating.

Some cleaning times introduced during the Covid pandemic have been reduced. There was a five-minute clean down at the beginning and end of a two-hour session to stop cross-infection. That has been reduced to two minutes at the start of each session.

Lots of people, both in and out of the union, felt let down by what is going on. The union needs to give its own reports to members about the health and safety measures it is demanding, and what management is or is not implementing.

It's been reported that a member of staff had to train someone on the line while at the same time the person opposite was training someone. It appears that continuing the work meant that some social distancing had gone out the window.



Former Tory chancellor George Osborne being shown round the Toyota car plant in Burnaston, near Derby PHOTO HM TREASURY/CC

While there are staggered break times to ensure staff from different production areas start and finish at different times, staff in the same shop take breaks together. Random tables and chairs had been placed at the side of the line as new workers have been taken on. But there wasn't the room in group areas so they were sat without masks on as people wearing masks walked close by.

Although some staff are scared to bring up issues, there was clearly concern and anger about the risks at the plant, and staff were raising it. The pressure by staff has certainly had an effect.

The company has now revamped what it has been doing. Anyone going into someone else's process

area, like a trainee or a team leader, now has to wear a mask and visor. It's non-negotiable. And employees must wear a mask in their own area. Tables have been moved further away from the lockers.

There's still an issue if someone is using a tool to do a job and there's a problem like a cross-thread; a team leader will use the tool to do a repair, but the tool is not always wiped down, just put back in the gun pot, and off they go to the next repair, instead of stopping the line (which reduces car production) to do the fix and enable better social distancing.

There needs to be a return to a high standard of safety as a big fear is that staff might catch Covid either at work or bring it in and the

infection will spread. There also needs to be:

- Temperature testing on entry and leaving
- On-site testing for people both asymptomatic who think they may have Covid and for those showing signs
- If one person tests positive in a team then the whole team isolates
- Full pay including shift allowances for all who are isolating whether directly-employed Toyota workers or agency
- If the situation arises again, then the plant needs to shut down for two weeks for a deep clean and then only after agreement from the union should production be restarted.
- Safety first!

PCS: Reject the HMRC pay deal

AN HMRC WORKER

PCS members in the HMRC are being balloted on a divisive and retrograde pay deal. The ballot period is 11-26 February.

The pay deal, which is for 13% over three years, requires all staff to accept a new contract. This significantly worsens conditions for a large number of members, but this has not been made clear to members, despite the

fact that the ballot has started. The deal is being recommended by the PCS Left Unity national leadership. The Left Unity leadership in HMRC itself is making no recommendation.

Vote for the Broad Left Network

The Broad Left Network - the socialist rank-and-file group in the union - rejects the deal and is campaigning for a 'no' vote.

The ballot on this pay deal comes at a time when the PCS 2021 election process has begun. The Broad Left Network slate for president and national executive committee is set out below. It includes six candidates from HMRC who reject the pay deal and are campaigning for a 'no' vote.

We call upon all socialists in PCS to nominate the Broad Left Network slate and fight to reject the proposed HMRC pay deal. Unite behind the Broad Left Network demand for a national campaign to secure a decent - not less than 10% - no strings pay increase for all PCS members.

PCS Broad Left Network election candidates - vote for the following

President	Lloyd Marion: (BEIS)		
Vice presidents	Brittle Fiona: (Scot Gov), Brown Sarah: (Met Police), Semple Dave: (DWP)		
National executive committee	Bartlett Dave: MOJ	Borland Rebecca: Home Office	
Brittle Fiona: Scot Gov	Brown Alex: Health	Brown Sarah: Met Police	
Denman Kevin: Met Police	Dennis Alan: DSG	Foxton Gill: DfE	Bridges Andi: HMRC
Francis Sue: BEIS	Guinnane Paul: DfE	Heemskerck Rachel: DWP	Davies Jamie: HMRC
Lloyd Marion: BEIS	Lowry Tom: DWP	Parker Nick: BEIS	Doyle Nick: HMRC
Rees Dave: DWP	Ritchie Rob: Met Police	Semple Dave: DWP	McDougall Rachelle: HMRC
Suter Paul: DWP	Tweeddale Saorsa-Amatheia DWP	Williams Katrine: DWP	Rosser Jon-Paul: HMRC
Worswick Craig: DWP	Young Colin: DfE		Young Bobby: HMRC



Sturgeon seeks an independent capitalist Scotland within the EU PHOTO ARCTIC/CIRCLE/CC

£1/£2 solidarity price

socialistparty.org.uk



the Socialist

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STRIKE BACK FOR FREE EDUCATION

COME TO SOCIALIST STUDENTS ONLINE CONFERENCE SUNDAY 28 FEBRUARY 1PM



This year, students have been shafted. We've been used as scapegoats by the government, treated as the personal piggy banks of the higher education sector, and many of us have been completely isolated from our peers and communities of support.

In spite of this, student voices have been some of the most prominent throughout this pandemic. Students are the ones organising strong rent strike campaigns up and down the country that have led to accommodation rebates and refunds from universities. Socialist Students have played a key part in this.

However, it is not enough for us to only be organising on the immediate issues, this is just the start of the crisis. We need to get organised and connect ourselves and our immediate concerns to our community and workers' struggle.

This is why I am going to the

Socialist Students national conference. It will be an opportunity to connect young people in schools, universities, and colleges to make sure that we are prepared to fight for free education.

KAT GWYTHER
LEEDS SOCIALIST STUDENTS



I'm going to the Socialist Students national conference this year because there is an ongoing crisis on university campuses that only Socialist Students as a group seems interested in addressing.

Despite the increased need for mental health services, access to university facilities and extra funding for courses, the availability of these things has been restricted to the detriment of all students.

It is clear that the market university model has consistently failed students. This fact is clearer than ever.

Socialist Students conference is an opportunity to learn more about how to fight back against the profit-driven university system; to learn from other students across the country how to build a successful student movement that fights for free education for all.

TOM GREEN
BIRMINGHAM SOCIALIST STUDENTS

I will be attending the Socialist Students conference because I believe that if enough students organise in solidarity against our corrupt and broken system, our collective voice could make a real difference in fighting for change.

This past year has highlighted not only how inept our leaders are, but how capitalism itself is failing so miserably. Socialism presents a real alternative, in which people will be put before profit, so we can all work together for a fairer world.

HAL KELLY
BRIGHTON SOCIALIST STUDENTS

- Register for Zoom details at cutt.ly/GkfZLCh
- See page 6 for the document to be discussed at the conference

Join the student fightback
JOIN socialist students
socialiststudents.org.uk/join

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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