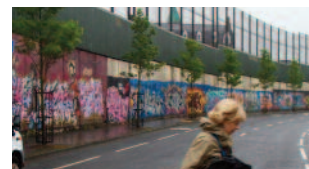




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STRIKE BACK!

Gary Clark

*Branch secretary, Scotland No 2
branch CWU (personal capacity)*

We've been told repeatedly by the Tories and big business that a "recovery" is just around the corner.

Yet for the vast majority, whether in or out of work, students or pensioners, that lie is wearing thin.

Low pay is rife. Wages are still falling behind the cost of living. Austerity cuts across the public sector have created a crisis for NHS, council and civil service workers who have seen at least 15% cuts in wages since 2010. But workers and trade unions are fighting back.

- Bus workers in Aberdeen have been heroically striking against attempts by greedy bosses to slash their pay by up to £5,000 a year. (see page 6)

- The magnificent strike action by university workers across the UK recently has stopped in its tracks the employers plans to dismantle pension entitlements. (see page 10)

- Postal workers organised in my union, the CWU, have won significant concessions on pay and pensions after returning a huge mandate to strike.

- In West Dunbartonshire, a tremendous trade union campaign is fighting the scandalous attempts of the SNP council to cut trade union facility time. (see page 5)

- The Scottish teachers' union, the EIS, is fighting on pay and is demanding a 10% wage increase this year to begin to make up for year-on-year pay cuts.

- In Dundee, Social Care workers have defeated attempts to attack their working conditions. (see page 5)

- Workers on the Mariner oil platform took unofficial strike action in early April to protest working conditions.

All of these examples, and more, indicate a growing mood to take action, whether, on pay, pensions or attacks on working conditions. But now the trade unions nationally have to step up and organise a mass campaign to deliver a real recovery for working class people.

To demand the return of every penny and more of our stolen wages. A reversal of all cuts and a programme of job creation to deal with ever increasing workload. For decent pensions and proper working conditions.

Mass coordinated strike action by trade unions can deliver for working people. And it can also end the life of this rotten billionaire Tory government.



Members of the UCU union have been striking at universities across the UK

ANTISEMITISM SLURS ARE ATTEMPT TO DERAIL JEREMY

A statement from Socialist Party England and Wales

The Blairite majority of Labour MPs will never be reconciled to Jeremy Corbyn's leadership. Corbyn resoundingly won the second leadership contest they forced on him in 2016 but they go on looking for every opportunity to undermine, damage and remove him.

Their slandering him as 'antisemitic', dredging up a two-line Facebook comment he made in 2012, is a continuation of this goal.

Right-wing Labour MP Luciana Berger led the attack, suggesting that Corbyn had opposed the removal of an antisemitic mural in east London.

Blairite MPs lined up to condemn the mural - which a 2015 Jewish Chronicle report described as under criticism for "antisemitic undertones" - and Corbyn by association. These included Chuka Umunna, Wes Streeting, Stella Creasy; and Liz Kendall of 4.5% fame - her vote when she stood against Corbyn for the Labour leadership in 2015.

They do anything to try to hold onto their seats - including Luciana Berger who is threatened with deselection in Liverpool Wavertree - not stopping short of exploiting genuine fears of antisemitism.

Corbyn responded that he "wholeheartedly" supports the mural's removal. This didn't stop the baying for blood by the Labour right, together with the Board of Deputies of British Jews and the Jewish Leadership Council, all intent on milking the slur as far as they could.

Another was John Mann MP, who when questioned on the BBC's Victoria Derbyshire show refused to say that Corbyn is not antisemitic. Derbyshire resorted to reading out a number of statements from Corbyn outrightly condemning racism and antisemitism and then said to Mann: "It seems to some that it doesn't matter what he says, it's never enough for people like yourself".

In his student days Mann didn't even support the right of



The anti-Corbyn campaign is driven by the capitalist establishment - both inside and outside the Labour Party - of a left government

Israelis to their own state, countering our predecessor Militant's support for a socialist Israel and a socialist Palestine with an insistence that there should be one capitalist state of both nationalities together.

Corbyn was even attacked for attending a Jewish celebration, Seders, hosted by the radical left Jewish organisation, Jewdas. Apparently, Jewdas involved the wrong sort of Jews. Even the Momentum leader, Jon Lansman, was reported to have criticised Corbyn, claiming that he should concentrate on "mainstream" Jewish organisations.

The fact that Derbyshire said she couldn't find a Labour MP to appear on her programme in defence of Corbyn, speaks volumes about the make-up of the parliamentary Labour Party. Those mainly right-wing MPs and the capitalist media don't mind the facts when they can whip up hysteria against Corbyn and throw enough mud in

the hope that some of it sticks. He is even blamed for Facebook posts he had nothing to do with.

This onslaught must not be responded to in an apologetically defensive way, rather it should be energetically counter-offensive.

Israel

Those who attack the Labour left as being 'antisemitic' sometimes concede that criticising the deeds of the Israeli regime is not antisemitic, but they also deliberately confuse the two issues by arguing that criticism of Israeli policy is used as a 'cover' for antisemitic views.

This is an attempt to denigrate the Labour left and socialists, who oppose the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories while also opposing all forms of racism and antisemitism.

Some on the left, in giving support to the Palestinians'

cause, have taken mistaken political positions regarding Israel (see article below), but no evidence has indicated that antisemitism is particularly commonplace in the labour movement.

A recent study published by the Institute for Jewish Policy Research found a higher percentage of people with "at least one antisemitic attitude" among those who identify as 'right of centre' than among people identifying as left wing.

During the Israeli military's brutal wars on Gaza, Jewish groups were welcomed on the large anti-war demonstrations as participants and platform speakers, including by the overwhelming majority of British Muslims who turned out in large numbers.

This unity in action strengthens solidarity with war victims and oppressed people abroad, and developing it will also strengthen working class struggles in Britain.

Those using accusations of

antisemitism to attack Corbyn and the left are seeking to divide and weaken the workers' movement as well as to try once more to remove Corbyn.

Blairite hypocrisy

Antisemitism is certainly prevalent on the far right, and it is socialists and trade unionists who are at the forefront of countering neo-Nazi racism and antisemitism, not the Labour right.

In Labour, the Corbyn wing and Momentum have supported disciplinary action in cases where behaviour is considered to be antisemitic, sometimes to an unwarranted extent even. In 2016 Momentum removed Jackie Walker - herself Jewish - from its vice chair position after a rabid media campaign was conducted against her for remarks she had made, despite Momentum recognising they were not in substance antisemitic. She was also suspended from

THE LATEST BY CORBYN



Tony Blair and his supporters will not rest until Corbyn is removed

Labour membership.

The Labour right and Tories' attitude on antisemitism is completely different when it comes from elsewhere. How much do they criticise Saudi Arabia, "whose mosques and education system have, for decades, spewed antisemitic venom of the kind the world has not been subjected to since the Nazis," as the Spectator right-wing magazine described that country?

When shadow foreign secretary Emily Thornberry moved a motion in parliament calling on the government to suspend its support for Saudi Arabia's bombardment of Yemen pending a UN inquiry, over 100 Labour MPs wouldn't even vote for it, including John Woodcock, John Mann, Liz Kendall, Wes Streeting and Luciana Berger.

And while throwing accusations of antisemitism at the Labour left, they are silent on the laws going through the Israeli parliament which are blatantly racist against Palestinians who live in Israel, not to mention the forced West Bank displacement of Palestinians and other racist discriminations that are no less abhorrent than antisemitism.

At last year's Labour Party conference a new network, Jewish Voice for Labour (JVL), was launched at a fringe meeting of over 300 delegates and visitors to counter the attacks on the Corbyn wing being made by the 'Jewish Labour Movement' and other right wing-led organisations.

Barely covered by the capitalist media (while the recent anti-Corbyn protest was covered copiously), JVL declared itself in favour of an "open, democratic and inclusive" Labour Party, and for the "rights and justice for Jewish people everywhere and against wrongs and injustice to Palestinians and other oppressed people anywhere."

This propaganda fightback is welcome, but needs to be accompanied by demands and pressure for concrete measures to democratise the Labour Party, including reintroducing mandatory reselection - ie local selection contests for the party's candidates.

The latest attacks by the right on Corbyn and the hysteria whipped up against him over 'Russian nerve agents' are not likely to succeed, but they are a further warning of the urgency of these measures.

Opposition to Zionism is not antisemitism

By **Bob Labi**
Committee for a Workers' International

Significantly neither of the organisers of the "open letter", the Board of Deputies (BDBJ) or the Jewish Leadership Council (JLC), specifically claim to represent all people of Jewish origin or faith in Britain, but they do like to give that appearance. Both bodies are, in effect, federations of representatives of Jewish organisations like synagogues, charities and political groupings.

But these do not include people of Jewish origin who are not members of such organisations or those who are members of the rapidly growing Charedi (ultra-orthodox) Jewish community that currently number around 16% of Jews in Britain.

Politically both the BDBJ and the JLC support Zionism and, effectively, seek to falsely equate opposition to Zionism with antisemitism. As the current JLC chair, Jonathan Goldstein, put it last year, "we showcase and take great pride in our historical connection and unbreakable commitment to our ancestral homeland, the state of Israel".

However, historically many Jews, people of Jewish origin and Jewish organisations were anti-Zionist. In 1917 the then BDBJ president wrote to the Times opposing Zionism because it regarded "all the Jewish communities of the world as constituting one homeless nationality".

Far from condemning these views as somehow antisemitic, today's BDBJ leaders argue carefully that "with the benefit of a century of hindsight, we are certain our predecessors" would now agree with that Israel is "the ultimate refuge for Jewish people and a place where Jews can determine their own future."

There is no doubt at all that the Nazi mass slaughter of millions of European Jews in the Holocaust, the fact that many Jews trying to flee the Nazis were denied entry visas to other countries, plus the legacy of anti-Jewish

pogroms in European and Arab countries has meant that for many Jews, including some non-religious ones, Israel is seen precisely as the "ultimate refuge". But this is not the case.

The Socialist Party's fore-runners agreed with Trotsky's warnings in the 1930s that the setting up of a specifically Jewish state on territory already lived in by non-Jews would produce a trap for the Jews who moved there.

fears

In Israel the Jewish fear of losing a war and being "driven into the sea" is constant. It reflects the fact that Israel's creation has not been the solution to the threats facing Jews, something that our forerunners argued when opposing creation of Israel.

Subsequently, however we recognised that, over decades since 1948, an Israeli nation and an Israeli working class had developed.

This meant that, while constantly fighting for the full rights of Palestinians, the social and national questions facing the Israeli working class have to be addressed by socialists.

Among the JLC founders were a number of Jewish capitalists who naturally, given their class position, opposed socialism. Until recently the JLC was chaired by Sir Mick Davies who in June 2017 was appointed chief executive of the Conservative Party.

People of Jewish origin, like all peoples, contain within them all classes - capitalist, middle and working - and political positions. Internationally people of Jewish origin have been prominent in the workers' movement. Indeed the Nazis attacked Marxism as part of a Jewish conspiracy, but at the same time in fascist Italy there were Jewish members of Mussolini's Black-shirts until anti-Jewish laws were introduced there in 1938.

Today it is capitalist and pro-capitalist elements who predominate within the BDBJ and JLC leaderships. This is

why their "open letter" is not simply a criticism of Corbyn, it also aimed at socialists in general by condemning what they call "the far left's obsessive hatred of Zionism, Zionists and Israel".

In carrying out this propaganda attack the pro-capitalist BDBJ and JLC leaders ignore the position of the Socialist Party, today the strongest Marxist force in the trade unions, and of our co-thinkers in the Socialist Struggle Movement, the CWI in Israel/Palestine.

Instead they utilise the mistakes and stupidities of some individuals and tiny groupings to attack what they call the "far left".

We oppose the attempt to equate opposition to Zionism with antisemitism. Opposition to Zionism does not mean antisemitic opposition to Jews, those of Jewish origin or the Israeli working class.

As in all capitalist countries, class struggles take place in Israel and we fully support the battles of both Israeli and Palestinian workers against capitalists and oppression.

socialist solution

The Socialist Party and the Socialist Struggle Movement advocate that a "combined call for both nationalities to have the right to their own states on a socialist basis, with full rights for any minorities within them, is central.

"On the one hand, it is a clear rejection of the coercion of either Palestinians or Israelis. At the same time, it argues for the overthrowing of capitalism that would open up the road to raising the living standards of all.

"Moreover, while it cannot be ruled out that a common struggle of Palestinians and Israelis could lead to the creation of one state carrying through a socialist transformation, to get there it would be first necessary to recognise the rights of the two peoples." ("Anti-Semitism, Labour and Momentum", Socialism Today, Issue 203, November 2016).

CAPITALISM HAS FAILED FIGHT FOR SOCIALISM



Marching for \$15 an hour in Seattle, US. The struggle for a living wage has swept across the US as a challenge against stagnant and falling incomes for the 99%.



What we think

Ten years on from the world-changing economic crash of 2007/08, capitalism has still not recovered from its “near death experience”. Indeed there are growing fears among the ruling elite that a new crisis is being prepared.

Inequality continues to soar to record levels. In 2017 a billionaire was created every two days on average - the highest growth in the 31 years Forbes magazine has surveyed the billionaire class. Debt is exploding again.

The combined global debt of companies, governments and households rose from \$142 trillion in 2007 to \$233 trillion in 2017 – a massive increase in absolute terms but also a 40% increase as a percentage of world output.

Economic growth, even ten years after the “great recession”, is shockingly slow. As Martin Wolf wrote in the Financial



The lust for profits – “the werewolf-like hunger for surplus value”, as Marx described it – is the raison d’être, the driving force for capitalism.

Times in January 2018: “The US economy is 17% smaller than it would have been if the 1968-2007 trend had continued.

Predicted economic growth for the Scottish economy for 2017-2021 is forecast at less than 1% per year. According to the Fraser of Allander Institute: “such low trends in economic growth for Scotland have not been witnessed in 60 years.”

Then there was the bizarre sight of Tory chancellor Philip Hammond declaring to the House of Commons in March that he was positively “Tigger-like” in his optimism for the prospects for the British economy.

Yet the government's own Office of Budget Responsibility (OBR) believes that the impact of the economic crisis has reduced the long-term growth rate of the UK economy from 2.25% a year to 1.5%.

As Paul Johnson, director of

the Institute for Fiscal Studies, put it: “Not that much to be Tigger-ish about here. Growth forecasts dreadful...dreadful by historical standards and dreadful compared with most of the rest of the world.”

Stimulus

International capitalism injected vast tranches of money, over \$10 trillion in QE alone, along with zero or very low interest rates, to try to prevent a 1930s-style collapse and drag economies out of recession.

Globally, there has been some growth. Some of the eurozone countries that were worst-hit by the recession – given bailouts and suffering extra economic damage through enforced austerity – have managed to return to pre-crisis growth rates. A welcome consequence has been a more

favourable arena for the working class and middle class to achieve gains.

But the enormous stimulus and bailout packages have, in reality, been a bonanza for the wealthiest, having increased the value of their main financial assets

Instead of investment to advance society, the ‘captains of industry’ have gorged themselves on obscene pay levels, stock options and dividends.

These colossal gains have been partly financed by reducing the share of total wealth produced that goes to their workforces – by grinding workers’ conditions and wellbeing further into the ground.

Lack of investment

“All economy comes down in the last analysis to an economy of time”, wrote Karl Marx. The only justification for capitalism – its ‘mission’ – is to raising labour productivity in the past, leading to the development of the productive forces. They are no longer playing this historic role.

At best we have seen spasms of investment, particularly in new and information technology. But this investment has been intensive rather than extensive. And has not revolutionised production as a whole.

It has not had similar effects as the first and second industrial revolutions that took place between 1760-1840 and 1870-1914.

The lust for profits – “the werewolf-like hunger for surplus value”, as Marx described it – is the *raison d’être*, the driving force for capitalism. But as more and more investment is needed this leads to a tendency to cut profits, which only comes from workers, rather than machines. A combination of this factor alongside grinding austerity and the inability of workers to buy what they themselves produce, has created a deep structural crisis of capitalism.

Labour productivity is dire, despite the growth of technology and robotics. As one economist explained: “We can see the computer age everywhere but in the productivity statistics”. New technology is used by capitalism to throw workers onto the scrapheap or to increase their level of exploitation. A socialist planned economy would utilise technology to cut the working week while ensuring a living wage for all.

The ten years since the crash has shattered the idea, explained by Leon Trotsky, of the “religion of capitalist progress”. That is the idea that each generation would be better off than the one before.



Dundee's social care workers protesting

Today, the young generation, alongside women, suffer the brunt of exploitation, low pay and casualisation. Rising rents, student debt and a general lack of opportunity to advance are creating the conditions for a revolutionary upheaval against capitalism.

Socialism

As the realisation grows that there is no way out, interest will grow in socialist ideas as the only alternative. The decade since 2007/08 has seen significant support for politicians advocating a break from neo-liberal capitalist model.

Bernie Sanders has become the most popular politician in the US, Jeremy Corbyn could possibly become the next prime minister in the UK. Syriza in Greece were elected into power but then betrayed the hopes of those who voted for it. Jean-Luc Mélenchon received seven million votes in France in 2017.

These examples of left, populist and reformist leaders and parties are just the first wave. They will be followed by what will become a flood in support for ideas to challenge capitalism and replace it with socialist planning.

A poll last November in the US showed more young people supporting “socialism” than capitalism. As new mass socialist parties based on the working class and trade unions come to be built, they will be enormously attractive. Especially if they boldly pose programmes that can sweep away the rotten-to-the-core capitalist system.



outside the council meeting

Workers 1 SNP council 0

Jim McFarlane
Dundee Unison secretary

Dundee's social care workers have inflicted a significant defeat on the SNP-led council's plans to slash their working conditions. Hoping to save over £1 million by forcing the 300 mainly female staff to accept split shifts, job and wage cuts, SNP councillors were forced to withdraw their proposal at the council meeting.

Facing a packed council chamber of angry union members, council officers were loudly jeered when they tried to justify the attacks by claiming split shift working would not be detrimental to health of these low paid workers.

Unison, GMB and Unite, had refused to accept the attacks and this leadership gave confidence to their members.

Speaking inside the council meeting and to resounding cheers from the workers, Jim McFarlane said: "If you go ahead with this it has implications for every single council worker - we will ballot our members across the workforce." Social care worker and GMB rep Susan Marnie laid bare the reality that if workers could not move onto split shifts they would be forced to accept reduced hours, losing between £300 and £350 a month.

The scandalous behaviour of the SNP council included threats to dismiss all staff and then re-engage workers on new

contracts if they did not accept the changes. One of their leading councillors had raised the spectre of privatisation if the changes were not made.

The big turnout of social care workers and their supporters outside and inside the council chambers forced the SNP into a significant retreat.

Calling a break in proceedings, the council leader John Alexander agreed to withdraw the proposals, pending negotiations and a new report on the service by the summer.

The growing anger among working class people in Dundee was reflected in the disgust evident from the workers, many of whom pledged never to vote for the SNP again.

jubilant

The workers were jubilant but also determined to fight on. As Gail Wallace, Unison rep and social care worker, said: "It's not often the council back down. Be very proud of yourselves. Union members made this happen. We don't want to go back to Victorian times of working 11 hours a day."

The attacks on this overwhelming female workforce are part of an attempt by the SNP to slash £15 million from the council budget this year.

The joint council trade unions demand a no cuts budget and for councillors to help lead a struggle for a return of the £100 million stolen from Dundee since 2010.

NOT LOVIN' IT - A fast food worker speaks out

continued from page 16

The manager is known for these practices among McDonalds higher-ups in other chains. It is good for business though after all and we are told to put up with it for the sake of the company.

It is good to see more young women workers coming forward and speaking out against sexist abuse. What role do you think trade unions can play in the fight against sexism?

Our workplace currently has no union presence. I myself have joined the Bakers Union, but I am the only one to do so thus far. I am glad to see Unite taking up the issues of sexual harassment, especially in the hospitality sector which is rife.

The #MeToo movement has shown the scale of rape and sexual abuse within our society. Women are saying loudly and clearly that we are no longer "putting up with it".

Wherever we go, we will not tolerate sexism and that includes in our places of work. By building strong trade unions in our workplaces we can ensure proper grievance procedures are in place to allow women to come forward and speak out



without fear of victimisation, and that sexist, abusive managers are held to account.

You joined the Bakers Union. They were responsible for organising the recent strike at several McDonalds stores. They won a victory meaning that all staff in the company owned stores will be given a pay rise to £10 an hour. Did this play a role in you deciding to join the bakers union?

It was the main reason I joined the Bakers union. They are clearly very serious about building a fightback in McDonalds.

Unfortunately the store where I work is a franchise and therefore not included in the

pay rise. This highlights how much work still has to be done to fight against exploitative conditions across all stores and the fast food industry more generally.

The strikes that took place at the end of 2017 involved only a small number of workers, yet this important mobilisation led to a massive victory for McDonalds workers.

The Bakers Union are currently balloting their members in five McDonalds' stores for further action against poverty pay and zero-hours contracts.

These actions will inspire the low paid across the country. Only by fighting exploitative practices across the whole industry can we ensure that no workers are left behind.

SNP-led council attack on trade union rights

By Lynda McEwan

A major battle has opened up between West Dunbartonshire SNP council and its workforce.

On April 3rd, 200 workers and trade unionists held a mass meeting at the council headquarters to discuss the fight against the council's cut to trade union representation. The council wants to reduce the number of full time union convenors as part of wider budget cuts.

Speakers addressed the West Dunbartonshire mass meeting from Unite, GMB, Unison. EIS gave support as well as opposition councillors and myself, a Socialist Party Scotland local activist.

I explained that "budget cuts are a political choice and it doesn't matter if they come

from the SNP or Labour. The council should have set a no cuts budget as there was enough money in the reserves not to make any cuts. We need a mass campaign and the community would support the trade unions taking strike action. West Dunbartonshire voted Yes for independence but we sure as hell didn't vote for austerity".

Also fuelling this mobilisation was opposition plans to implement "shared services" over road maintenance with neighbouring Inverclyde.

Workers rightly see this as the first step on the road to privatisation and cuts.

At mass meeting of the joint trade unions in East Dunbartonshire (also a council with which West Dunbartonshire has considered sharing services), Unison launched a consultative ballot for strike

action, in opposition to the Liberal and Tory administration cuts. The teaching union NASUWT organised a one day strike on workload in East Dunbartonshire recently.

At the time of writing, opposition councillors have secured an emergency council debate on the trade union attacks. With the collusion of the majority SNP group and council officers, the council is attempting to conduct this meeting in secret without public or press.

There are discussions by the joint trade unions about ballots for industrial action. A demonstration for Saturday 28 April, 10.30am, Haldane Park, Balloch. Socialist Party Scotland has been petitioning in the local area on the issue.

● For info see West Dunbartonshire Joint Trade Unions Facebook page.

Aberdeen bus drivers force back bosses with determined strike action



Aberdeen bus drivers picket line. Picture Socialist Party Scotland

Philip Stott
Socialist Party Scotland

As we go to press, and after 11 days of action, striking drivers at First Bus Aberdeen have rejected the latest offer from management. An all-out indefinite strike will begin from Wednesday 11th April.

Managing director Andrew Jarvis and First Bus have been taught a lesson; that workers will not be kicked around by profiteering bosses and their attempts to slash wages and working conditions.

Why should any worker have to face cuts to pay and working conditions? First Bus have made plenty profit in the past from their Aberdeen operation.

Facing an indefinite strike from April 6th, and after having lost a reported £200,000 as a result of the strike action, First Bus offered concessions to the drivers.

First were demanding wage cuts for new staff and that drivers work longer shifts for less pay. The removal of paid breaks alone would have meant huge pay cuts for drivers.

Drivers could also be on the road for up to ten hours each day, while holiday entitlement would also be reduced. In all,

some drivers faced pay cuts of up to £5,000 a year.

Unite members rejected the two previous "offers" from First which would still have meant severe reductions in pay and conditions – albeit not as bad as the original proposals.

However, First Bus bosses have been forced back by the strength, resolve and determination of the workers' action.

The overwhelming vote in favour of an escalation of the strike rattled the employer who claimed that they cannot afford the current pay and working conditions packages.

Yet it's clear that First have made significant profits in previous years through their Aberdeen operation. Where have those profits gone? To finance the shareholders, top bosses pay and the international profiteering operation of the group.

Public ownership

In a publicly owned bus service those profits would be ploughed back into the bus service, including for decent pay and conditions.

That's why it's right to demand public ownership and the democratic control of bus services, including in Aberdeen. Running vital lifeline



services for profit by corporate shareholders is not acceptable. A publicly owned and democratically run transport system is essential to prevent profit-hungry companies from abusing its workers in this way.

Socialist Party Scotland give our 100% backing to the Aberdeen bus drivers in their dispute with First Group.

Our members in unions like Unison, PCS, Unite and the CWU have built support and solidarity for the bus drivers.

As Mike Flinn from Unite told Socialist Party Scotland: "First are cutting into drivers' wages to achieve more profit. Drivers who are earning £25,000 are going to jump down as low as £19,000.

"They have rent and mortgages to pay and this cuts into it. "How are they going to afford to pay their bills, or feed and clothe their kids?"

We reply to Richard Leonard



Socialist Party Scotland – Militant, as we were previously known – welcomed Richard Leonard's election in November 2017 as Labour's leader in Scotland. However, we were disappointed at Leonard's attacks on Militant in an interview in the Scotland on Sunday newspaper recently.

Citing his involvement in the Stirling University Labour Club in the early 1980s, which had many Militant supporters among its members, reference is made to Militant's so-called "cult-like" approach and its "bullying tactics" to "make people part with money". Anyone in the labour, trade union and socialist movement who has participated in Militant, or today at Socialist Party Scotland events, will find these lazy, tabloidesque attacks laughable.

In fact that are lifted from the playbook of Labour's own millionaire Blairite tendency who fought bitterly to oppose Jeremy Corbyn's welcome ascendancy to the leadership of the UK Labour Party.

Richard Leonard is quoted as saying that: "It was all about the advancement of Militant rather than the advancement of working people". It was Militant that spearheaded the campaign of mass non-payment of the poll tax. Beginning in Scotland in 1989 and then spread across the rest of Britain from 1990, 18 million people refused to pay, which led to the demise of Margaret Thatcher and the scrapping of the hated poll tax legislation. Was this not an example of an "advancement for working people"?

Similarly it was Militant in Liverpool between 1983 to 1987 (see picture) that was the driving force which led the defiant and successful anti-cuts campaign of the socialist Labour council to win increased funding for the city. Forcing the Thatcher government to retreat and to provide millions in extra resources for Liverpool.

Richard Leonard and Jeremy Corbyn today should be calling on their councillors in Scotland, England and Wales to "do a Liverpool". That means refusing to implement cuts to coun-

cil jobs and services while fighting for a return of the hundreds of millions stolen from as a result of a decade of austerity.

reselection

Richard Leonard says in the interview that Militant sought to "take over control of the commanding heights of the Labour Party, to deselect MPs and insert Militant supporting members".

Militant's support, along with Tony Benn, Jeremy Corbyn and many on the Labour left at the time, was for democratic changes that would allow party members and trade unionists to select Labour candidates and was a huge step forward. Moreover, it allowed for the selection of working class fighters to stand as Labour candidates and for the removal of some "jobs for life", pro-capitalist right wing Labour MPs.

Richard Leonard opposes democratic reselection today. But why should Labour Party members and affiliated trade unionists not have the right to select their candidates? And if necessary deselect sitting MPs, MSPs and councillors if they fail to defend the interests of the working class, for example by voting through cuts?

Labour, including in Scotland, is still two parties in one. The pro-capitalist right wing have not and will not simply acquiesce to Jeremy Corbyn's leadership. Biding their time they will act again to try and remove him at a certain stage.

On the other hand, the pro-Corbyn, anti-austerity membership face a situation where a majority of councillors, MPs etc represent the old right wing, many of whom are voting through austerity in councils across the country. It is the responsibility of the left to fight for the transformation of Labour into a fully democratic, anti-austerity party.

Instead of attacking Militant, Richard Leonard should give his support to achieving the building of a principled, 100% anti-austerity socialist Labour movement in Scotland.

DEFEND HIGHLAND SERVICES



Campaigners have been fighting to defend NHS services on Skye

@Save_PortreeNHS

Sean Robertson
Socialist Party Highland

Highland Council's budget plans for 2018/19 added £15m cuts to the hundreds of millions of pounds axed from public services in the region since the financial crisis of 2007/8.

Many of the effects of a decade of cuts are obvious to Highlanders. Roads are in a perilous state, schools are in a state of disrepair, play parks left to rack and ruin, paths and side streets ungritted, drains not cleared or maintained, grass cut less often: the list goes on and on.

But this year's cuts budget is an appalling, heartless attack aimed at all aspects of our community. Democracy is under attack – community council budgets are to be

halved. Social work and adult learning are to facing swingeing cuts, for example the removal of services such as the out of hours call service. Leisure services are to be cut with the flagship theatre, Eden Court, to lose 50% of its funding. Funding for community projects is to be slashed.

In education teaching posts are to be lost, and the massive cut in projected capital spending, reduced by around £50m, will mean that the proposed upgrade and new build of schools such as in Tain and AIness will be delayed or cancelled.

Other areas cut which have an obvious detrimental effect on our communities are reduced funding for offender rehabilitation social workers, cuts to community improvement grants, cuts to funds for

survivors of abuse such as Women's Aid, which will have a devastating effect.

Council cuts are only half the story. NHS highland is running tens of millions over budget and various services are under threat, notably in Skye and Caithness. Mental health services are poor or non-existent with many young people having to travel out of the region for treatment.

Previously an SNP-led coalition carried out relentless attacks on our services. Now a coalition of independents, Tories and Labour councillors choose to hammer our community instead of fighting back. Socialist Party Highland is a new branch of our party.

We hope to bring communities, trades unions and young people together in Highland to fight back against all cuts.

SNP/Greens back Glasgow cuts budget



Matt Dobson reports

Glasgow's minority SNP council passed an austerity cuts budget with support from the Greens. This follows the SNP and Greens agreeing a cuts budget for the Scottish government. The SNP won the council election last year, ending four decades of right wing Labour control.

The budget included service cuts of £10 million to social work.

The SNP council leadership accepted, without any resistance, the settlement from Holyrood. Glasgow workers are to receive only the 3% pay rise instead of the 6.5% demanded by council workers' unions.

Glasgow residents are also to be hit by a council tax rise of 3% (the maximum allowed by the SNP government), increased charges for nursery care, parking and refuse uplift.

The SNP administration did not meet the council trade unions before setting the budget, effectively rejecting the

joint trade union's demands for a no cuts budget.

The new boss is the same as the old boss, with the SNP adopting a similar approach to Labour of implementing Tory cuts rather than defying them.

The SNP and the Greens did agree to meet the demand of the trade unions to break up the unpopular ALEO, Cordia and bring it back "in house".

Cordia has been the focus of bitter industrial action by Glasgow Unison whose janitors won a 6% pay rise after a year in dispute.

It is however significant that no details were present in the budget on how the settlements for equal pay, which will run into several hundreds of millions, will be funded. Already a demonstration of 600 has taken place over equal pay on February 10th. (see picture)

Over 200 trade unionists and community campaigners protested the budget setting meeting. Socialist Party Scotland will continue to fight for a genuine anti-austerity alternative in Glasgow.

Have you got some news for us?



The paper of Socialist Party Scotland

E-mail: info@socialistpartyscotland.org.uk

Website:

www.socialistpartyscotland.org.uk

Editor: Philip Stott

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Most vulnerable under attack from cuts politicians

Jimmy Haddow
East Lothian

Cuts, cuts and more cuts are facing the most vulnerable of East Lothian.

The East Lothian Integration Joint Board is looking to cut two county hospitals and two care homes over the coming year; to be replaced by 'extra-care housing'.

This extra-care housing will not have the 24 hour care as in the community hospitals or care homes. The Labour minority council are not only putting plans in place for a counter-revolution in East Lothian

healthcare. They are now starting to charge adults with learning disabilities to use council run day centres.

The Council are charging disabled users £5 per day as a means to raise £87,000 to the cost of adult disabled services. The minority Labour Council is being held up by the Tory councillors' votes in the chamber. On top of that Capability Scotland have withdrawn its services from East Lothian, with the loss of two full time workers jobs, because they cannot secure long term funding from East Lothian Council.

If only the Labour and SNP



Jimmy Haddow stood as an anti-cuts socialist candidate in the 2017 council election

councillors would fight for a no cuts budget and organise a campaign with the East Lothian people to fight austerity and to win the money stolen from East Lothian since 2010.

CAPITALISM OPPRESSES

RESIST AND FIGHT FOR SOCIALISM

Internationally, women are increasingly fighting back against austerity and gender-based oppression. In this feature **Sinead Daly** looks at the struggles of working class women and the work of some of our sister parties in the Committee for a Workers' International.

The dawn of the 21st century was supposed to see the erosion of inequality and oppression, but nothing could be further from the truth. The economic crash caused by the greed of big business, the banks and speculators has seen soaring levels of inequality and misery – particularly for women.

Impact of austerity

Back in 2010, the then Tory Prime Minister David Cameron warned of - "difficult decisions over big areas of spending like pay and pensions and benefits - and we need to explain those to people". By those people he didn't mean the millionaires and bankers who caused the crisis in the first place, he meant the working class and the poor.

The decimation of our public services has hit women hardest, indeed research undertaken by the House of Commons in 2017 revealed that women have "borne 86% of austerity since 2010".

This is due to a number of reasons. Firstly women make up the overwhelming majority of employees within public services, secondly we depend on those services more (without them it is usually left to us to fill the gaps) and thirdly the horrendous benefit 'reforms' that have been introduced have been catastrophic for women.

Austerity has impacted directly on the amount of violence and harassment women face, and their ability to fight back. In Britain, for example, more than 30 refuges for women fleeing violence have closed due to lack of funds, with many of the rest facing closure or, at best, severe cuts. At the same time the complete absence of affordable housing leaves women with nowhere at all to go if they flee vi-

olent partners.

But not everyone is doing so badly from the economic crisis. The millionaire/billionaire elite have continued to see their wealth soar. Just 8 of the richest men in the world have a combined wealth equal to 3.6 billion people who make up the poorest half of the world's population. And it is women who are disproportionately represented in the poorest half of humanity.

Moreover, hungry for profits we have seen the growing use of hugely exploitative practices by scrupulous employers like zero hour contracts, particularly among young people.

Women Fighting Back

The #MeToo movement has highlighted that many women in the workplaces experience sexual harassment. Some are even expected to just put up with it – it's just the normal part of the job – this is particularly the case in the hospitality sector where 9 out of 10 women reported experiencing sexual harassment at work.

More worryingly is how many women are reporting putting up with sexual harassment at the hands of their managers just to keep a job or ensure they have enough hours work that week to get by.

There is a growing mood of anger and willingness to fight the impact of austerity, gender inequality and oppression among women. Some of this is bubbling under the surface, but in other cases – women have said enough is enough!

The marvellous struggle of the Glasgow City Council workers demanding equal pay shows what having a fighting trade union leadership willing to give

a lead and support workers in struggle can achieve. Under Labour and SNP administrations 11,500 women workers have been historically been paid less than men for doing work of equal value.

The SNP have been talking the language of fighting austerity and inequality, but in reality they have been found wanting on a whole number of fronts. Across the country they are presiding over attacks on our public services, and slashing our pay and pensions.

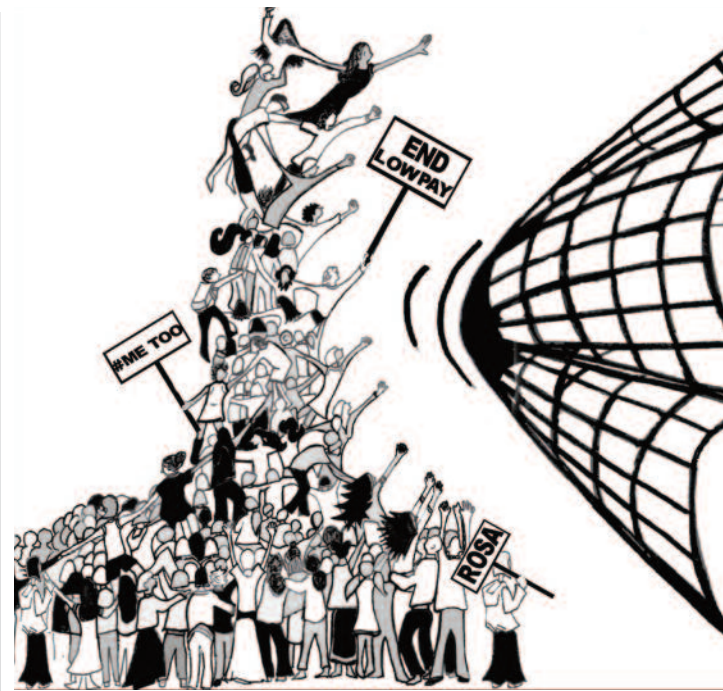
In an interview with The Herald on International Women's Day, Nicola Sturgeon, First Minister, said "We've got to look at how we accelerate the progress, whether on equal pay and representation" - a good starting point would be to instruct her colleagues in Glasgow City Council to pay up!

The women's and feminist movement is not a homogeneous group – there are very different strands of opinions. For some it is about quotas – lets get more women into board rooms or the parliaments.

For others – particularly among socialist feminists – its about fighting for real fundamental changes to our lives – which won't be delivered by having more women sitting in the board rooms of big business breaking the 'glass ceiling' whilst the rest of us are sweeping up the shards of glass.

As socialists, we are clear that the struggle for real change in women's lives and ending the oppression we face requires the linking up of the struggles in the workplace, to the struggles against gender based violence and other forms of gendered oppression.

It means fighting to end the system whose very survival is based on inequality and oppression.



Capitalism thrives on patriarchy but can be defeated by mass struggle.

IRELAND: The right to

Under pressure from the growing mood from below, the Irish government have been forced to hold a referendum on May 25 2018, to remove the 35-year-old constitutional ban on abortion known as the 8th Amendment.

There isn't a day that goes by now in Ireland without hearing the heartbreaking and horrendous stories from women about their experiences of feeling like criminals to sneak across the waters to the UK to have a termination.

Since 1983 an estimated 170,000 women have been forced to travel to the UK in order to have safe terminations. Up to 2,000 women each year illegally take the abortion pill, accessed online.

For years the establishment have fudged the issue, particularly given the huge grip that the Catholic church has. Just five years ago the Irish government voted to reassert the laws on abortion and even went as far as

increasing the sentencing to 14 years for anyone aiding an illegal abortion. So what has happened to see such a shift in attitudes?

Huge anger against successive governments on both class and social issues has been evident. There is also a real desire among the youth to break the control of the Catholic church on Irish Society. 75% of 18-24 year olds support the right to abortion up to 12 weeks.

ROSA

The Socialist Party and ROSA – Socialist Feminists (an initiative launched by the Socialist Party) have played a key role in continuing to raise the issues defending the woman's right to choose. They had mass publicity for the Abortion Pill train and the national Abortion Pill buses. The aim of which was to highlight how ludicrous the current laws are and also to raise awareness

S WOMEN SOCIALISM



Cartoon by Elaine Mallon.

to choose

about how women can access medical abortion pills online (this is supported by the Women on the Web).

Our sister party in Ireland have been very clear – we need a clear vote in favour of repealing the 8th amendment – this will send a clear signal to the Irish government not to delay their commitment to introduce legislation for unrestricted abortion up to 12 weeks.

The Socialist Party and ROSA have launched a #Time4Choice campaign. They have done so because many in the mainstream ‘Yes’ campaign, whilst supporting repealing the 8th amendment, are at best lukewarm on the issue of abortion rights. There is enormous potential for this campaign to be hugely politicising and radicalising.

They be using this campaign to explain the need for a socialist left government that will give people choices over their lives –



this includes access to free health care, a living wage, free child care and an end to the oppression and inequality of women. As well as arguing for the separation of church from the state.

Most importantly socialists will fight for breaking with this rotten capitalist system in Ireland and internationally.

SPAIN: Mass feminist strike #M8



Huge strikes and demonstrations took place in Spain on International Women's Day 2018

The scenes emanating from the Spanish State on March 8th, International Women's Day, were nothing short of inspiring. Over 5 million women went on strike – led by the youth – and hundreds of thousands took to the streets in cities across the countries.

As our sister party in the Spanish State - Izquierda Revolucionaria (IR), explains:

“The feminist strike on 8 March was unprecedented. Never in the history of the class struggle in the Spanish state have such a deep and massive mobilisation against the oppression of working class women, against inequality and violence against women.

Hundreds of marches took place from morning to evening and became a genuine Tsunami of millions in the streets. It reflected not only the anger of working class women and the youth with the capitalist crisis and reactionary PP government, but also the enormous discontent throughout society.

What we saw will not be easily forgotten. Firstly, because this movement was built from below, on the initiative of hundreds of women's collectives, social movements and Left organisations, which worked for months to make this success happen. Secondly because the PP and Ciudadanos leaders viciously opposed the strike and marches, showing that their political agenda is a declaration of war in favour of institutionalised sexism and inequality.

The images of the demonstrations speak for themselves. Despite the fact that the system's

media try to dilute the figures participating, the marches were far bigger than during previous general strikes... In Madrid, there were more than one million people, covering more than 5 kilometres of road.

And Madrid was not an exception. The same happened in Barcelona, Vigo, Ferrol, Gijón, Bilbao, Gasteiz, Valencia, Malaga, Sevilla, Zaragoza, Tarragona, Cadiz, Toledo and dozens of other cities. It was a mobilisation which surpassed all expectations.

The role of the youth

Many media articles have underlined the massive role of the youth in this struggle, and it is true. The participation of millions of young women and men in this battle reflects the enormous revolutionary potential of the new feminist movement which is developing.

In this earthquake of the youth against violence against women and sexist capitalism, the Sindicato de Estudiantes (SE - Students Union) Libres y Combativas (socialist feminist platform launched by SE and IR) and the comrades of Izquierda Revolucionaria have played a key role.

Our call for a 24-hour student strike was massively supported. 90% of students in secondary schools and 80% of university students joined the strike. Thousands filled the streets in our student demonstrations in Madrid, Barcelona, Vigo, Ferrol, Gijón, Bilbao, Gasteiz, Donosti, Tarrag-

ona, Valencia, Sevilla, Málaga, Cádiz, Salamanca, Guadalajara etc, with more than 150,000 taking part.

On 8 March, the need for a revolutionary, anti-capitalist class-struggle feminism was clear. A movement which denounces capitalist patriarchy, but also the PP (Popular Party) government, Ciudadanos, and all those who accept the logic of this system of cuts to rights, wages, health and education etc, of precariousness and sexist “justice” which protects those who abuse women.

Struggle until victory!

This great feminist strike made clear that we don't have to put up with this reactionary government for one more minute. Those who keep saying that there are no conditions for struggle, who lament an “unfavourable balance of forces”, what do they say now? Beneath the surface there is bubbling discontent and building pressure, in the homes and workplaces of the poorest and most oppressed in society.

Among women, youth, and pensioners who have also begun an epic battle going over the heads of the parliamentary and union bureaucracy.

All of this vitality, shown on 8 March, must continue in an organised fashion until the PP's policies are defeated and Rajoy and co are removed from power. We must come together in a new general strike of all workers to end sexism and all cuts.”

IRAQ 15 YEARS ON: Imperialist war failed

Matt Dobson
Socialist Party Scotland

It is 15 years since the bombardment and invasion of Iraq in 2003, that led to bloody slaughter and ceaseless carnage.

This imperialist adventure by the neocon Bush US presidency was backed by his lap dog Tony Blair, who led the New Labour government in Britain. The war and its consequences has contributed to the instability of lives of millions. It shook all capitalist institutions and politics at the time and its legacy continues to be factor in this convulsive period today.

In an early example of "fake news" that claimed weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, distrust of the capitalist media and the establishment was forever cemented by the lies from the ruling class, particularly Bush and Blair.

US undermined

Bush arrogantly declared a "New American century" and the "flowering of democracy" in the Middle East. Today the US is still the greatest military power but the unipolar world of 2003 is no more.

What a price has been paid for the arrogance of Bush, the neo con's and the Blairites! One

million were killed in Iraq. The "war on terror" unleashed sectarian tyranny as the imperialist powers implemented divide and rule through their proxies.

This has contributed to the rising of refugee numbers to 65 million across the world and spilled over into a brutal war in Syria.

Rather than a haven of stability, today's Iraq is a battlefield for competing regional and world powers, sectarian conflict has seen the displacement of millions and in reality the breaking of the viability of the state.

The Iraqi working class and poor hated Saddam Hussein's dictatorship but were not prepared to welcome and imperialist invasion.

There was a willingness by significant sections of the population to fight what was perceived not as a liberating army but as a force of domination and conquest. The masses in the middle east showed their courage in overthrowing dictatorships back by the US and Britain in the 2011 revolutions in Egypt and Tunisia.

Only the oil, arms and military hardware and security companies benefited. By 2013 the US had spent \$138 billion on private security, logistics and reconstruction. By then the invasion was already estimated to have cost \$2 trillion. This exacerbated the

economic crisis of 2007-8 and even now the US working class is paying. Trump's 2019 budget proposes to cut food stamps by more than \$213 billion over the next ten years.

A colossal mass movement erupted globally against the war. An estimated 30 million marched in over 600 cities on the historic date of 15 February 2003 in the run up to the invasion. Two million marched in London and a hundred thousand in Glasgow.

The forces of the Socialist Party across Britain and the CWI internationally played a leading role in this movement, mobilising for the demonstrations and leading mass walkouts from the schools, colleges and universities on "Day X" when the war started.

what we said

The potential existed to stop the war. But the absence of a political voice and call for the organised working class to take action meant the mass movement fought with one hand tied behind its back.

The Socialist newspaper's England and Wales edition argued in an editorial on 28th March 2003, "We have to continue and extend the walkouts, protests and civil disobedience. But we also have to campaign now for decisive in-

UCU strike action delivers but more can be won

Sam Morecroft
Sheffield branch delegate
(personal capacity)

On 28 March, delegates from striking University and College Union (UCU) branches met to be consulted on a new deal, put forward by Universities UK (UUK) to resolve the pensions dispute. The deal is a

huge step forward from UUK's decision on 23 January to announce plans to completely scrap defined benefit.

It is a testament to the power of UCU members' sustained industrial action that the employers have been pushed this far, and demonstrates beyond doubt that the Trade Union Act is not an insurmountable barrier to national industrial action.

Overwhelmingly, while there was a real sense that the latest offer demonstrated genuine progress, the majority of branches favoured a 'revise and resubmit' position, asking for more detail and discussion of the offer before it was put to the membership.

In reality, this consultation of branches has been rushed, and there is a feeling among many members that it has been railroaded through by the full time officials of the union.

Put simply, this was a stitch up by Sally Hunt and the full time officials. Members will understandably want to know why. The reality is that Hunt and the IBL favour a form of



Millions protested the drive to war in Iraq in 2003. Picture by [unintelligible]

industrial action against the war. Left union leaders like Bob Crow of the RMT are opposed to war with Iraq and have pledged to support any workers who take action against it. They now have to be more proactive.

"They should immediately organise an anti-war conference of rank-and-file union members, union reps, executive committee members and general secretaries who support the Stop the War Coalition. "Such a conference could discuss taking action against the war, including naming the date for a one-day strike."

Unfortunately, this call was not taken up. The leadership of the Stop the War Coalition also made mistakes, allowing

Charles Kennedy, leader of the Liberal Democrats, to speak at the mass anti-war demonstration, posing as anti-war but failing to put forward a clear strategy for stopping the war.

Jeremy Corbyn's anti-war record was definitely a factor in his stunning 2015 victory in the Labour leadership election. Unfortunately, the parliamentary Labour Party remains dominated by Blairite war mongers as we have seen over Syria.

Fifteen years later, we need a mass movement to bring down May's Tory government, as part of the fight for a real mass socialist, anti-austerity party that can lead the fight against war, terror, austerity and capitalism.

'partnership' unionism based on compromise with the employers rather than industrial action.

The strike has taken on a life of its own and has felt like the beginnings of a mass movement against marketisation, privatisation and austerity in education. It has re-ignited the student movement, acting as the spark for the largest local student mobilisations since 2010 and over 20 campus occupations have taken place since the strike began. It is not an exaggeration to say that if this movement were to continue to develop it could act as a catalyst for an eruption of strikes which could bring down the

weak and divided Tory government.

What is now being offered by UUK is a huge step forward from their attempt to completely scrap Defined Benefit. But at the same time there are huge questions over what the offer means and at worst it is possible this is just a stalling tactic by the employers that will allow them to regroup and come again to attack pensions.

We have taken huge steps forward together but we need to reject this deal and keep the action on until UUK provide further guarantees and what they intend for our pensions after April 2019. Vote no, keep the action on!



by Molly Cooper

NHS Tayside spirals into crisis



By an NHS worker

The crisis in Scotland's National Health Service is claiming many casualties.

Treatment has been limited, staff have been cut, facilities relocated, wards closed, care removed from some hospitals. The scale of deficit in Scotland's health boards runs into the hundreds of millions of pounds, a weight of debt that impacts on services day and daily.

Surgical procedures were cancelled across the country during the so called winter crisis, in reality a year round situation of allocating care in a permanent state of scarce resources.

resignations

The specific crisis in NHS Tayside has, however, claimed other casualties in the forced resignation of board chair John Connell, the apparent suspension of chief executive Lesley MacLay, and the early retirement of finance director Lindsay Bedford.

These changes in senior personnel appear to be the result of financial indiscretions at the highest level of the health board.

A health board that gave itself bonuses only last year, despite a deficit in its budget requiring £200m of savings over the next 4 years. This health board has forced through the centralisation of

services in mental health, claiming an improved service can be delivered with less resources.

NHS Tayside spends more on agency staff than any equivalent health authority in Scotland, it also has historic liabilities with private finance initiative facilities costing £14m a year until 2042.

Expected to deliver a 5% cut in its budget for the next 5 years on top of a spiralling deficit based on loans that have been deferred from the Scottish Government.

These loans were seen as temporary sticking plasters, and would be repaid once NHS Tayside sold off closed hospitals to residential developers. In the absence of a single sale the loans have mounted up and been recycled to keep the health authority in financial balance. A strategy of financial plate spinning that has crashed to the ground in recent weeks.

Creative accounting appears to have obscured the full extent of financial pressure in NHS Tayside. Monies allocated for digital healthcare (£5.3m) was inappropriately hidden for 6 years, as part of a £23m fund for deferred expenditure.

Money for a rainy day that was dipped into as the health board tried to bring the deficit down, unfortunately massaging the figures has not hidden the fact that Tayside is £12m over budget, owes £33m in brokerage loans to Holyrood, and is now seeking a further £12m.

Further revelations has

shown that endowment funds, charitable donations to the health board made in good faith mostly by relatives who wish to show material gratitude for care given, have been raided to the tune of £2m to cover general running costs. At the same time performance based pay increment bonuses were given to a host of senior managers, including the retired finance director, who is implicated in the mismanagement of public funds.

The pressure on the Scottish government to act has ratcheted up. More so because cabinet secretary for health is local MSP Shona Robison. All health authorities in Scotland report budgetary deficits, all health boards face the same financial crisis, it is systemic.

trade union action

The SNP government are underfunding health, fuelling cuts across the service. Whilst they have devolved responsibility to local health board managers, they know budgets are stretched, they know the service is retracting, they want to avoid responsibility for their national policy decisions and will gladly blame local health managers if it suits.

The crisis in Tayside is not unique. As such it should be a call to arms for all, particularly the NHS unions who have a huge responsibility to act in organising coordinated strike action, to defend the NHS.

Mass strikes engulf France



Leila Messaoudi and Cécile Rimboud
Gauche Revolutionnaire, CWI in France

Since the election of Emmanuel Macron - president of the rich - in May 2017, and after the onslaught of the French government against all sectors in society especially the public services - the railways (the SNCF), pensioners, young people, unemployed - we were expecting the day of action on 22 March to go well.

22 March was deliberately chosen by the trade unions because it was the 50th anniversary of the events that culminated in the general strike movement of May 1968.

This time there were up to

500,000 on the streets across the country. More than one in three railway workers were on strike and one out of every four primary school teachers.

Many groups of workers went on strike - some for the first time ever, some for the first time in a long time. Public and private sector workers included.

Young people are threatened by the thoroughgoing dismantling of school and higher education. We are all under attack from these policies. We have to mobilise in a united fashion.

The next date for strike action has been set by the CGT trade union federation for 19 April.

This date should serve as a step towards building a massive, united all-together strike

20 years since the Good Friday Agreement



The Stormont assembly has been suspended for over a year.

NORTHERN IRELAND: PEACE PROCESS ON THE BRINK

April 2018 marks the twentieth anniversary of the signing of the Good Friday Agreement (GFA) in Belfast. This was the formal ending of the 'Troubles', the euphemism for decades of sectarian upheaval and armed conflict that wracked the north of Ireland. **Niall Mullholland**, a leading member of the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI), looks at the situation 20 years on.



Huge demonstrations erupted after the verdict in the Belfast rape trial

Key figures involved in the negotiations that produced the GFA, such as Sinn Fein's Gerry Adams, the Ulster Unionist Party's David Trimble, former US president Bill Clinton and former prime minister Tony Blair, are due to congregate in Belfast to celebrate the 'model peace process'. But given that Northern Ireland's power-sharing executive remains collapsed, the festivities will be conducted with some embarrassment and even despair.

Months of deadlock between the former governing parties, the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) and Sinn Fein, underlines the fact that the agreement never lived up to its billing as bringing long-term

peace, stability and prosperity to Northern Ireland. Twenty years since its implementation, the GFA stands on the brink, with its definitive breakdown potentially on the cards.

The establishment's narrative is that the 1998 agreement brought to an end a seemingly irrational tribal war. However, when the Northern Ireland civil rights' movement exploded onto the scene 50 years ago, it attracted not just mass support from Catholics but also initially layers of Protestant youth.

Socialist leadership

With a determined socialist leadership, the possibility existed of fundamental change.

But as sectarian bigots and nationalist and unionist political parties attempted to sow divisions among workers and to derail the movement, the labour and trade union leaders failed to present a class alternative.

Due to anger at brutal state repression and deep frustration at the failure of 'politics' to end discrimination and poverty, many working class Catholic youth turned to the Official and Provisional IRA in the early 1970s.

From the start, the Socialist Party (CWI Ireland) and its predecessor Militant argued that the republican armed campaigns would prove counterproductive, dividing the

working class further and failing to defeat the might of the British state while providing it with the justification to increase repression.

At the same time, Loyalist paramilitaries carried out indiscriminate, deadly attacks against innocent Catholics.

In conditions of daily bombings and shootings, heavy state repression and polarisation, those, like Militant, advocating for the unions to resist sectarianism and repression, to organise the defence of working class communities and to build a workers' political alternative, often seemed like lone voices.

Nevertheless, Catholic and Protestant workers remained united in shared workplaces and in the unions. Not one strike was broken by sectarianism, despite the best efforts of bigots on both sides.

By the 1980s the IRA's campaign had run out of momentum. While the British state could not defeat the IRA, it was able to contain the Provisional IRA's campaign with military means and intelligence.

During the 1990s many on the left were also disorientated by the developing 'peace process' in Ireland and the role of Sinn Fein. The Gerry Adams/Martin McGuinness leadership wanted to cut a 'power-sharing' deal in the North, without achieving their

long-stated goal of immediate British withdrawal and a united Ireland. In the 20 years since, they have accommodated themselves to administering capitalist austerity in the power-sharing executive.

All sides had to make significant compromises to reach a deal.

Prisoner releases, paramilitary arms 'decommissioning' and British 'demilitarisation' were just some of the highly contentious issues that took years to carry out.

The GFA also enshrined the ending of institutionalised discrimination - a process already underway largely as a result of working class Catholics' implacable opposition to a return to any form of Unionist misrule.

Capitalist status quo

But it was Sinn Fein that gave most ground leading up to the signing of the GFA in 1998. The collapse of the Stalinist regimes in Russia and Eastern Europe sped up the process of movements like the ANC in South Africa, PLO in Palestine and the IRA coming to terms with the capitalist status quo.

In the North, after two decades of conflict, and apparent military stalemate, there was also 'war weariness' on all sides. Between 1969 and 1998,

20 years since the Good Friday Agreement



One of the "peace walls in Belfast. (Picture Nick/CC)

some 3,289 people were killed as a result of the conflict - the equivalent ratio of victims to population in Britain would have seen 100,000 people killed.

The Sunningdale Agreement of 1973 - whose main provisions were very similar to that of the GFA - had proved unpalatable to the "extremes" (Ian Paisley's DUP and loyalist groups, whose 'Ulster stoppage' brought Sunningdale crashing down, and the Provisional IRA who denounced it as a "partitionist" sell-out).

But 25 further years of sectarian deadlock, paramilitary campaigns and state repression, as well as rejection of violence by the working class, forced an agreement.

Establishment politicians perpetuate the myth that 'peace' in the 1990s was achieved largely from above. But the yearning for an end to the conflict was expressed most forcibly and consistently from below.

This was indicated by the Socialist Party's slogan, 'No going back!' which caught the imagination of many working class people.

As paramilitary organisations moved towards shaky ceasefires, many thousands of Catholic and Protestant workers went on protests - often initiated by Militant/Socialist Party supporters in trades councils and unions - against a slide back to sectarian conflict. And the party's initiative, Youth Against Sectarianism, rallied thousands of school students from both sides of the divide across the North.

We pointed out that the

peace process and GFA would not bring about lasting peace and prosperity, as many claimed. It institutionalised sectarianism, including with the stipulation that Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) officially state they are 'nationalist' or 'unionist' or 'other'.

Nevertheless, the Socialist Party called for a critical 'yes' vote during the referendum held on the GFA, North and South. Relative peace would, at least, give the working class a much better opportunity to develop class politics.

From the start, the institutions created by GFA were beset by instability and crisis. Events on the ground, such as disputes over parades, threatened to bring down the power-sharing executive.

After a suspension of the assembly, a new deal, the St Andrews Agreement, was painfully put together to restore power-sharing in May 2007.

Rather than bringing the two communities together, the institutionalisation of sectarianism led to the opposite extremes of the political spectrum, the DUP and Sinn Fein, supplanting the 'moderate' nationalist and unionist parties.

The decade of power-sharing rule of these two parties saw an intensification of the policies of privatisation, education cuts, health cuts and a failed attempt to impose water charges. While content to work together carrying out Tory government austerity cuts, the DUP and Sinn Fein conducted sectarian mudslinging against one another on outstanding Troubles-related

issues. This also served the useful purpose of averting attention away from their unpopular policies and to bolster their sectarian support.

For many of their voters, however, the power-sharing relationship produced no 'peace dividend'. Over 25% of children live in poverty, public services are slashed, miles of 'peace walls' still divide Catholic and Protestant working class communities, and basic rights, such as same-sex marriage and a woman's right to choose (which both Sinn Fein and the DUP oppose) are denied.

'Cash for ash'

Scandals and sleaze surrounded the executive. The DUP leadership was embroiled in the Renewable Heat Incentive 'cash for ash' scandal that could squander up to £700 million of public money for the benefit of their big businesses friends. Sinn Fein was slow to take up this scandal and it was only widespread anger among Catholics that forced the party to call time on power sharing.

Since the collapse of the executive, new factors, such as Brexit, have destabilised the situation further. All the parties oppose a return to a 'hard border'. Not only would it most likely lead to economic dislocation but it would present a powerful propaganda weapon to republican dissidents.

The Tory government advocates a free trade deal with the EU or a 'high tech customs system' that does not require a hard border. Quite how this can work, with over 200 border

crossings, remains to be seen.

Theresa May acquiesced to the EU demand for a 'backstop' arrangement which would somehow keep Northern Ireland in the Customs Union if no other option can be found. Although what the backstop entails is left purposefully ambiguous. The DUP, supported by the pro-Brexit faction of the Tory party, would fiercely oppose any 'exceptionalism' for Northern Ireland.

In this fraught atmosphere, Sinn Fein campaigns for a 'border poll'. Gerry Adams blithely comments, "the Good Friday Agreement... allows for Irish reunification in the context of a democratic vote: 50% plus one."

Lurking behind the concrete issues of controversy in the current crisis are factors and changes of greater magnitude and impact, such as the demographic shift taking place, with Catholics set to become a majority in Northern Ireland in the near future. This threatens one of the pillars - an in-built Protestant majority - of the state's very foundation, underlining the instability and fragility of the GFA.

Northern Catholics have long held valid national aspirations and, of course, have a right to decide their future. But Sinn Fein's crude 'majoritarianism' will not deliver the peaceful, stable, prosperous united Ireland they yearn for.

Sinn Fein dismisses genuine Protestant working class fears of becoming second-class citizens in a capitalist united Ireland and the fierce reaction to moves towards it.

Dublin-based commentator

Fintan O'Toole argued in the Irish Times that it cannot be assumed that southerners, who must also hold a referendum to decide the border, will vote "...for a form of unity that merely creates an angry and alienated Protestant minority within a bitterly contested new state".

Two decades on, the Good Friday Agreement's institutions are suspended and its provisions, based on the assumption of endless sectarianism, only aggravate divisions. In many ways, we see a continuation of the Troubles "by other means", like the sharply contentious question of implementing an Irish Language Act.

And the GFA has not brought universal peace and justice. Low-level paramilitary attacks and punishment beatings continue in many deprived areas, as does British state repression.

The DUP's leader, Arlene Foster, calls for a period of direct rule from London. This is strongly opposed by nationalists, especially as her party props up the Tories. They call for a period of 'joint direct rule' between London and Dublin, which, in turn, is vehemently opposed by Unionists.

It is more likely that the current situation, a 'light' form of direct rule, will continue for some time before the British and Irish governments attempt another deal, a St Andrews Agreement Mark 2.

None of this resembles the peace, stability and prosperity promised 20 years ago. An absence of a deal opens up a dangerous vacuum on the ground. And any restored power-sharing executive will only be on the basis of unprincipled fudges on many issues, preparing the way for more instability and crisis.

United working class

Only a united working class struggle, with socialist policies, can show a way out of austerity, poverty, injustice, and sectarian divisions.

Genuine power-sharing from a socialist perspective entails working class people, Catholic and Protestant, coming together to democratically agree on new arrangements.

A socialist society, based on people's needs, would see the ending of all coercion against either of the communities, overcoming historic fears and distrust.

This is the power-sharing solution - the basis for a new, socialist Ireland - that the workers' movement should take up in Ireland and Britain, linking it to a voluntary, equal socialist federation of these islands and Europe.

CATALONIA: GENERAL STRIKE NOW!

Excerpts from a statement issued by Esquerra Revolucionària (CWI in Catalonia)

The authoritarian “regime of 1978” (term used to describe the post-Franco “democratic” regime in Spain), its state apparatus and the parties which support it (the PP, Ciudadanos, and the PSOE leadership) have carried out a new coup against democratic rights and freedoms in Catalonia.

They have unleashed a repressive avalanche against the Catalan independence movement, reminiscent of the Franco dictatorship. They have eliminated Catalan autonomy, arrested Catalan President Carles Puigdemont and are charging 25 pro-independence leaders, many of whom have already been jailed without trial or bail.

There is no doubt that the monarchist, Spanish nationalist bloc in power is willing to crush, at any cost, the pro-Republic aspirations of the Catalan people. Catalonia is living under a Francoist state of emergency.

A general strike must be called now to demand the immediate freedom of the political prisoners, the end of article 155 (suspending Catalan autonomy) and for a Catalan Republic. The workers and youth in the rest of the Spanish state also have a duty to support the Catalan people, uniting all our forces to bring down the Rajoy government once and for all.

The youth and working class of Catalonia has reacted with great energy to the provocations of the state. Hundreds of thousands of people went onto the streets following the call of

the Committees for the Defence of the Republic (CDR). Despite the violence of the Mossos (Catalan police) who indiscriminately attacked the multitude, the demonstrators acted in an exemplary manner. The slogans – “free political prisoners!” and “General strike now!” rang out with irresistible passion. (see picture above)

Rajoy, under intense pressure from the mass protests in defence of pensions and the massive feminist strike on 8 March, is struggling more and more to control the discontent which threatens to turn into a new social explosion.

His way of trying to avoid this pressure and recover electoral support is to deal new blows to the Catalan people, and play the Spanish nationalist card to the full.

The judicial farce against the Catalan government and movement is being used to crush the will of the people expressed in the referendum on 1 October (with over 2.1 million votes for a Catalan Republic and nullify the results of the 21 December Catalan elections which were a new defeat for the PP, giving pro-independence parties an overall majority.

repression

This judicial repression began with the state Attorney General filing a complaint on 30 October which characterised the democratic mobilisation on 1 October and the general strike which paralysed Catalonia on 3 October as a “violent uprising”, in order to justify bringing charges of “sedition and rebellion”. This was the legal basis for the im-



SNP sit on their hands over Ponsati

Clara Ponsati was the education minister in the Catalan government that briefly declared an independent republic in October 2017. She now lives in Scotland and has been subject to an arrest warrant to be deported to Spain to stand trial for rebellion.

Nicola Sturgeon and the Scottish Government have said they oppose the attempts to extradite Clara Ponsati, however, at the same time, they also say “our justice system is legally obliged to follow due process in the determination of extradition requests and “government ministers cannot intervene.”

This scandalous position is rooted in their support for the anti-democratic bosses’ EU. They have shockingly only expressed “regret” that a European Arrest Warrant has been used to try to ensnare Clara Ponsati. They should:

- Refuse to recognise the EAW and demand its rescinding and the dropping of all charges against Catalan representatives
- Call for the release of all the political prisoners from jail
- Condemn the PP government’s use of Article 155, that allows for the complete denial of self-determination for the people of Catalonia, the Basque Country and Galicia.
- Demand the ending of the use of the EAW to criminalise and arrest political activists
- Offer Clara Ponsati political asylum

Many of the European Union’s statutes and treaties exist to promote the interests of capitalism. The EU backed the PP government and Rajoy to the hilt last year in its repression against Catalonia. That’s why we oppose the EU and fight instead for a socialist Europe.

prisoning of the ‘Jordis’ (Jordi Sanchez and Jordi Cuitxart), of the Catalan government Ministers including Puigdemont, and the denial of the right of elected MPs to attend parliamentary sessions or be proposed as President. In one fell swoop, the popular sovereignty of the Catalan people was suppressed.

Who was it that used arms and exercised violence in Catalonia? We all know the answer: the regime of 1978, its government and state, which sent over 10,000 police and military police to savagely beat the hundreds of millions of people who pacifically exercised our right to vote. The attacks on democratic rights and the freedom of speech have also been extended to the rest of the Spanish state.

We have seen the imprison-

ment of rappers, artists, and tweeters for criticising the King, the confiscation and censorship of works of art, books and magazines, the vicious repression against protestors in Murcia who demanded that the high speed rail AVE be routed underground, the charges against dozens of activists, even on the pretext of “hate crime” laws.

Meanwhile, fascist violence, violence against women which has murdered hundreds, and the PP and other establishment parties’ corruption has gone unpunished

The leaders of CCOO and UGT (the two major trade unions) in Catalonia and throughout the Spanish state, by refusing to organise mobilisations to stop this authoritarian offensive, have given precious oxygen to the PP gov-

ernment and in practice endorsed the application of article 155.

However, the current Spanish nationalist campaign has managed to generate confusion, first of all because the leaders of PSOE (social democratic party) have participated in it without exception, as well as many who in the past called themselves “Communists”, like Paco Frutos the former General Secretary of the Communist Party who has now become a pathetic Spanish nationalist agitator. The responsibility of them all in facilitating the repression of the state is immense.

The leadership of Izquierda Unida and Podemos have also defended a wrong position, which has fed the confusion and given space to the right wing.



The leadership of Unidos Podemos (electoral alliance between Podemos and IU) must make a 180 degree turn and end the policy of abstaining in this battle. They have an obligation not to abandon the people of Catalonia, the workers and youth who have been in the front line of the struggle against the PP. They must explain that the same pretext used today by the judge Llarena, the reactionary block and media to justify repression in Catalonia can serve tomorrow to accuse pension protestors, strikes like on 8 March, and local protest movements against racism and police violence, of "rebellion and sedition".

Francoist coup!

Of course we must build a united front of the entire fighting trade union movement, Left organisations and social movements to immediately call a 24 hour general strike in Catalonia, accompanied by mass mobilisations.

This general strike should unite all those in struggle against the PP government, from the feminist movement and pensions movement to the student movement.

It should demand the freedom of the political prisoners, the ending of all court proceedings and article 155, and the fall of the Rajoy government. A general strike which should demand that CCOO and UGT, and Unidos Podemos, support it in all parts of the state, organising mobilisations throughout the state, in support of the Catalan people and against the anti-democratic

shift we are seeing in general. Obviously, a general strike will be a decisive step, but afterwards the struggle will have to be extended, broadened and continued with new strikes and mobilisations until repression is defeated, the prisoners are freed, and all democratic rights of Catalonia are restored, including the implementation of the democratic decision of the Catalan people in favour of a Republic.

From Izquierda Revolucionaria we also insist that the national liberation movement has a duty to win over the powerful Catalan working class as a whole, including those Spanish-speaking workers from outside of Catalonia.

The immense majority of these workers reject corruption and cuts of the PP, and thousands joined the mobilisations on 1 and 3 October against repression.

However, many of them still look upon the "process" with distrust because of the role played in it by the bourgeois leaders of PDeCAT (right wing nationalists) and the policies of cuts and privatisation which both they and ERC implemented in the Catalan government.

These sections of the Catalan working class can be won to the cause of a Catalan Republic and play a decisive role in the struggle against the right and article 155. However, for this to take place, they must see that this is a fight for a workers' republic, not one of bosses and the Catalan oligarchy. This is the path to victory.

● To read the full statement go to socialistworld.net



what we stand for

Socialist Party Scotland fights for a socialist society, democratically run for the needs of all and not for the profits of the few. We oppose every cut and austerity measure by fighting in the trade unions, communities, colleges and schools for every possible improvement in the lives of working class people. Organised, we, the working class and the 99%, have the potential to change society.

Because capitalism is a world system, the struggle for democratic socialism must be international. Socialist Party Scotland is part of the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI), a socialist organisation that organises in over 40 countries.

www.socialistworld.net

work and income

- For trade union action for a £10 an hour minimum wage. No age exemptions. For an annual increase in the minimum wage, linked to average earnings.
- Reject Workfare; for the right to decent benefits, training or a job without compulsion.
- A maximum 35-hour week without loss of pay.
- All workers, including part-timers, temps, casual and migrant workers to have trade union rates of pay, employment protection, sickness and holiday rights from the first day of employment. End zero-hour contracts.
- Scrap the anti-union laws. Build fighting trade unions, democratically controlled by their members. Full-time officials should be regularly elected and receive no more than a worker's wage.
- An immediate 50% increase in the state retirement pension, as a step towards a living pension. Reinstate the link with average earnings now.

environment

- Major research and investment into replacing fossil fuels with renewable energy. End the problems of early obsolescence and unrecycled waste.
- Public ownership of the energy industry. No to nuclear power. No to Trident
- A democratically planned, low fare, publicly owned transport system, to protect the environment.

public services

- Fight all cuts. No to privatisation. Renationalise all privatised utilities and services.
- Free, high quality education for all from nursery to university; with a living grant.



New pamphlet available now

No to the return of tuition fees in Scotland. Cancel the student debt and end the cuts in education funding.

- A socialist NHS to provide for everyone's health - free at the point of use and under democratic control. Kick out the private contractors from all parts of the NHS.
- Keep council housing public. For a massive programme of publicly owned housing to provide good quality homes at low rents.
- Fully fund all services and run them under accountable, democratic committees that include representatives of workers and service users.

rights

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

A mass working class party

- For a mass workers party that draws together workers, young people and activists from other movements to build a political alternative to the big business parties.
- Trade unions should play a central role in helping to build a new workers' party.

socialism and internationalism

- Tax the rich. For a socialist government that takes the major companies in Scotland into public ownership. Run them under democratic working class control and management. Compensation should be paid only on the basis of proven need.
- For an independent socialist Scotland. A free and voluntary socialist federation of Scotland with England Wales and Ireland.
- A democratic socialist, environmentally secure plan of production based on the interests of the overwhelming majority.
- No to the bosses European Union. For a socialist Europe and a socialist world free from poverty.

Fast food worker speaks out on exploitation

Not lovin' it



Campaigning for workers' rights outside a McDonalds store

Members of Socialist Party Scotland have launched a Young Socialists - Workers Rights Campaign. We aim to highlight the exploitative practices of employers, to build support for socialist policies and a fightback in our trade unions to challenge the low pay, insecurity, bullying and harassment faced by young workers on a daily basis. **Below is an interview with a young woman who recently began working at her local McDonalds.**

Continued on page 7

When did you begin working at McDonalds and what are the working conditions like?

I started about 3 months ago. If I could go back I would think twice. As a Socialist, I was not expecting much from them, knowing all too well the kinds of practices employed by these fast food giants.

Like every private company, speed is valued at ten times the importance of hygiene and safety. We are badgered if we take the appropriate amount of time to follow cleaning procedures and disinfect something because it takes too long. Washing your hands is looked upon as 'skiving'. We are supposed to wash our hands every hour, and every half an

hour in the kitchen. This never happens. The managers often threaten to send people home from their shifts if they make mistakes - which is illegal. Personally, as a new start, I have been subject to emotional blackmail, that my losing the restaurant a measly £14 will mean that my manager will lose her job.

We are also expected to remove and replace use-by stickers with new labels stating the products are safe to use/consume.

Raw meat is touched by ungloved hands which then go on to touch cooked ingredients - all in the name of efficiency and the maximisation of profit.

What kind of contracts are the workers employed on?

I am currently employed on a zero hours contract, as are most of my workmates. This has meant me working constant 10 hour night-shifts, for a measly £1 on top of my hourly rate. If I turn down these shifts I run the risk of not being given hours the following week. This is also used against workers for making mistakes. These contracts are designed to give bosses maximum control over their employees.

What do you think young people can do to fight back against these exploitative terms and conditions?

Well first of all we need trade union organisation in our workplaces. I am glad to

see the Young Socialists-Workers Rights Campaign taking up the issues of unionisation.

However, a union presence should not be to merely campaign on health and safety issues and more secure contracts, but to fight on all issues affecting workers, including bullying and harassment at work. One form of harassment that I have become aware of very quickly is sexual harassment.

As a woman, I should be free to go out and earn a living without being discriminated against and objectified by management on the basis of my sex - which I have no control over.

Sexual harassment in the workplace is a serious issue. Do you mind saying a little more on this?

Not at all. My manager sexually assaults and harasses his female employees. He has been known to grab the backsides of young women, in his office - even employees as young as 16. There are attempts to normalise sexual harassment in the workplace, with a general attitude of "it's all just a laugh".

As a night-shift worker, it is common at weekends for all female members of staff to be put on the front tills for the pubs and clubs chucking out. Drunken men coming in leering at us, trying to touch us, making inappropriate comments.