

IMMIGRATION



WORKS

SINCE THE BREXIT OUTCOME OF THE REFERENDUM,

we have seen a sharp move to the right in British politics with a dramatic rise in racist and xenophobic attacks. This increase in hate crime is an entirely predictable response to a Leave campaign which focused largely on migration.

All the ills of British society were laid at the door of immigration. A hundred newspaper front pages told us how damaging and harmful immigrants and refugees were to the British way of life – this was the underlying message of the Leave campaign.

The fact that government policies are to blame for the shortages and cuts – not migrants – was ignored, and the real economic benefits brought to our society and economy as a result of migration were airbrushed out of the debate. So the belief that curbing immigration will have a beneficial effect on British society has gained widespread support.

Even among those who supported Remain – including across the labour movement – the view that immigration damages the British working class has taken hold. Free movement of labour is blamed for lowering wages, diminishing social services and creating unemployment. But this is not actually true.

When 75 million people joined the EU in 2004, that did not lead to downward pressure on wages. That happened after the crash of

2008. It is since the recession – that began with the credit crunch and the bailing out of the banks that led to the longest and deepest slump in a century – that we have seen substantial pay cuts.

Average wages fell by 8 to 10 percent in the six years after the global financial crisis of 2008. And the truth is that wages overall rose during the period 2004-8 when there was significant large scale EU migration.

Reports show that immigration is a net contributor to the economy overall and, as far as average wages are concerned, it may actually lead to a small increase in average wages.

What's more, nearly all studies of the effect of migration on jobs and wages fail to include the positive effect of job creation through enterprise by migrants. Migrants create more jobs than their actual numbers.

Free movement is also an advance for the European working class as a whole. Rather than being 'guest' workers with few rights, those who work in other EU countries have rights and protections as EU citizens. These rights need to be extended rather than retreated from.

The terms of Brexit are now the key site of struggle for the left and progressive forces in Britain. Brexiteers will try to remove trade union and social rights that have been underwritten by the EU.

The Human Rights Act will be scrapped. Our job is to strenuously resist that. We will have to fight every step of the way to prevent the Brexit treaties being a deregulatory jamboree in the interests of the ruling class.

Not only free movement but migration in general must be defended; it is historically a powerful source of progressive development. We oppose Fortress Europe but ending free movement in Europe will make extending that right more – not less – difficult.

None of the problems that the working class faces internationally can be solved on a national basis. We need to work for a pan-European movement to create the democratic and federal Europe that can begin to solve the problems that we face. Blaming and punishing European workers for the problems brought by capitalism is not the answer. The working class belongs together, across borders, and we can only win together.

The fall-out from the referendum will dominate British and European politics for years to come, but potentially in an extraordinarily dangerous and damaging way.

The right sees this time as their opportunity but we must make it ours. We have to campaign for a refounded European union on a democratic and anti-capitalist basis. The first slogan in this campaign must be "Defend Free Movement".

DEFEND FREE MOVEMENT

SAVE OUR NHS — DEFEND LIVERPOOL WOMEN'S HOSPITAL

UP TILL 2014 THE NHS WAS THE MOST EFFICIENT HEALTH SERVICE IN THE WORLD.

Privatisation and cuts are killing it. But we're not just standing by and watching that happen.

Across the country there are hundreds of campaigns to defend local hospitals, maternity provision and Accident and Emergency and local NHS services, including action against private GP providers. Maternity and A and E appear to be on the front line. Campaigns like Keep our NHS public, Defend the NHS, Call 999 for the NHS, NHA Action and others have national reach.

In 2014 campaigners marched from Jarrow to Parliament, others are organising leaflets and stalls, calling public meetings and conferences. Local demonstrations are happening across the country.

We want an NHS free at the point of need, paid for from general taxation, a comprehensive and universal service, the best available treatments, publicly provided, not for profit and removed from market mechanisms - which waste so much time, money and effort.

We need well-funded and well-trained staff working reasonable hours with a decent workload. The research basis

of the NHS must be protected and privateers removed.

This fight-back needs a national mass movement to defend the NHS, convincing people of the danger and asking them to protest is painstaking work.

Local and national campaigns must continue and become a mass movement. Every single interested person can help with this. It cannot be left to politicians of any of the parties that have assisted privatisation. For Corbyn to get his re-nationalisation of the NHS through the Parliamentary Labour Party, he will need this mass movement.

Huge international financial groups with access to the media and vast resources now have vested interests in the NHS. There are administrators trained in privatisation, and "ninja" privatisation companies that are skilled in pushing their agendas.

For six years, these 'change-makers' have been, in their words, 'supporting the brave' and 'encouraging the timid' to reform health services and hand them over to the private sector. But they cannot withstand a mass movement.

Local councillors must stand against the pressures in Sustainability and

Transformation plans and really represent their electorate's interests and defend the NHS.

The unions in the hospitals must organise afresh and support their members in defending jobs, working conditions and in defending the NHS.

The culture of fear, where staff feel they cannot speak out must change. A whole new approach is needed if we are to keep the NHS.

I am involved in the fight to keep the Liverpool Women's Hospital a good safe and internationally renowned hospital. Our demands:

- Full public funding sufficient to allow the hospital to thrive, for all our sisters, mothers, daughters and babies
- No privatisation or cuts
- No loss of beds
- Better funding for midwives and neo-natal nurses
- Full funding and an end to marketisation and privatisation of the NHS.

Defend the Liverpool Women's Hospital – and all our national health resources. Now is the time to step up the fight to Save our NHS. Join a national or local campaign wherever you are. Don't wait – it'll be too late.

Felicity Dowling

AXE THE HOUSING ACT

THE HOUSING AND PLANNING ACT IS DUE TO COME INTO FORCE IN APRIL 2017.

But how the Act will be implemented is yet to be put before Parliament. Meanwhile, the campaign against the Act - now Axe the Housing Act - is organising to defeat it. We're at the crucial stage of the campaign, bringing together regional campaigns, getting the message out that it will make the Housing crisis worse, and encouraging Councils and Housing Associations to refuse to implement it. This is vital work - and in the long term everyone will be affected, apart from the very rich.

If the Act is enforced as the Tories want, within a generation Council housing will be virtually non-existent, and Social Housing in general will be so scarce that it will exist only as a temporary refuge for the most marginalized in society, the poorest and most vulnerable. The Chartered Institute for Housing predicts that 350,000 social homes will be lost by 2020. This Act is designed to privatize housing, placing it in the hands of private developers and landlords, at the mercy of the market. As the numbers of social homes are reduced, more and more

people will be pushed into poor quality private renting, which will become even more expensive and insecure.

In the long-term, the most damaging aspect of the Act could be the largely ignored - Planning changes. These require local authorities to keep registers of 'brownfield sites', capable of accommodating five homes or more, and require that 90% of these sites have planning permission for development by 2020. Government statements, like Cameron's on 'Sink Estates', make it clear that Council Estates are being targeted under these provisions, under the guise of being beyond repair, low density, and preventing 'mixed communities'.

The impact of the Act will be combined with the impact of Housing Benefit changes: the family premium is being removed for new claims, the Local Housing Allowance frozen for 4 years, so while rents increase benefit entitlement will be restricted, and the Benefit Cap is being reduced, to £20,000 a year, and £23,000 in London: this means that if Claimants' annual Benefit income, including Housing Benefit, is above the cap level, the Housing Benefit they get will be cut, to reduce total income to the cap level.

Housing organizations expect large areas to become unaffordable for Claimants; it's also feared that families made homeless as a result may be placed in temporary accommodation which is more expensive, risking further homelessness. Alternatively, Claimants with caring responsibilities or ill-health may be forced into work.

We call upon Councils and Housing Associations to refuse to enforce the Act. We ask Councils to continue issuing Secure tenancies to new tenants, not the 2-10 year tenancies the Act stipulates, and to refuse to sell off Council homes as they become vacant. We ask them to refuse to collect information on tenants' incomes, so that Pay to Stay - the tenant tax - cannot be implemented. For Housing Associations, sections of the Act are voluntary, and we call on them not to increase their tenants' rent under Pay to Stay, and not to sell off homes under the Right to Buy. But most of all we call on tenants, and everyone who believes that decent affordable housing is a human right, to work with their local Councils and Housing Associations to challenge every aspect of this Act, and ensure that it is ultimately repealed.

Ruth McTurk

WOMEN'S LIVES MATTER

IF YOU ARE A WORKING CLASS WOMAN LIVING IN TODAY'S

BRITAIN, it's fairly guaranteed you will be experiencing one of three things; low pay, unwanted reduced hours or living in fear of public sector cuts that will take away your much needed job. Consequently, you will have some type of contact with the benefits system. What most of us won't know is, that since 2010, women have had 22 out of the £26 billion worth of benefit cuts taken from them. If you imagine for a second what these state imposed sanctions will do to us, I suspect you will think poverty, long term poverty, caused through reduced pensions, wages and benefits.

What happens if you add domestic violence to that mix? And you should, as one in four women will experience it in their lifetime. You should, as two women a week in the UK are murdered by an intimate partner and three commit suicide as a result of living with it. And you most definitely should because 54% of domestic violence services have been forced to close since 2010 as a result of austerity.

Good old Tory imposed austerity has

not only been responsible for widening the gap between the rich and poor but it's spectacular success has been in hitting disabled and BME women the most, making them some of the poorest in our society.

So, try adding domestic violence to their daily lives?

In Doncaster this is precisely what we did. When domestic violence survivors, workers and volunteers heard that women's aid was closing down in our town this February, due to a lack of funds, despair and fury ran through our bodies and minds. This service had been in our town, quietly keeping women and their children safe and alive for forty years.

So what price do we put on a woman's life? In Doncaster, it appeared our price was too high; we cost far too much for those in power to consider giving us a safe women's only space, in order that we could receive advice and support around domestic violence.

Thankfully, enough women in our community thought differently and came together from all over Doncaster, with men too, to say enough was enough - women's lives mattered. Our campaign began;

fueled by a sense of injustice and rightly placed anger, both would see us through weekly street protests, public meetings, radio interviews and council budget protests. It saw us through our own personal battles whilst we campaigned, creating bonds of comradeship that we'll never forget. We shouted loudly, women's lives mattered and when Question Time came to Doncaster, we made sure our story would be heard nationwide.

Sadly, we couldn't save the old women's aid, but with passion and perseverance we have established a grass roots new service, with initial funding of thirty thousand from the council. We will campaign to make sure other funds become available to us; to create an empowering safe space required by women.

Women's lives matter, like the black lives matter campaign, shines an uncomfortable light on hidden, brutal aspects of our society. And without a shadow of a doubt both campaigns are here to stay.

Contact South Yorkshire Women's Aid (Doncaster) at sywadoncaster@outlook.com.

Louise Harrison

GRAMMAR SCHOOLS: ANOTHER STEP BACK TO THE 1950S

THERESA MAY'S PROPOSAL TO INCREASE THE NUMBER OF GRAMMAR SCHOOLS

is another step to entrench class privilege - despite her false claim that grammar schools increase social mobility. It is a part of a series of measures aimed at refocusing working class education on vocational courses and eliminating courses that teach students to think critically.

The idea that there was a 'golden age' when grammar schools enabled social mobility is a myth. The Crowther Report in 1959 showed that just 10% of grammar school pupils came from working class backgrounds - and two thirds of them left without getting three 'O' Levels. 81% of working class grammar school students left before age 17. Grammar schools, in other words, did very little to promote social mobility.

For the really wealthy, the capitalist and upper middle classes, this is a side-show. They send their kids to fee-paying schools and get a massive pay off in terms of educational outcomes and life chances. The extension of grammar schools is aimed at middle class parents. At the general election only UKIP advocated a return to grammar schools. Presumably the Tories hope to reclaim middle class

UKIP voters by adopting the grammar school cause.

The government also wants to retreat on the target of 50% university entrants. All the evidence is that producing more and more graduates has enormous cultural benefits, but doesn't transform the economic prospects of capitalist economies very much.

A new de facto grammar/secondary modern system would likely lead to substantially fewer students going to university and a cutback in university courses - and this will hit working class students hardest. This is reinforced by the £9000 a year fees which have led to many universities struggling to recruit at clearing this summer.

Britain badly needs an extensive and high level, properly-funded apprenticeship system. Only 5% of students go on apprenticeship courses because of the lack of relevant, quality provision. Too often it's a short period of cheap or free labour for employers. The job prospects for students forced into the new secondary moderns but unable to get on useful apprenticeships would be grim.

Post-1960s comprehensive education and widening access to universities

opened up a new realm of educational opportunities for working class students and it's now under threat.

The fight against the return to grammar schools is crucial for the future of our communities, to defend opportunity and inclusivity: to extend equality not reduce it. This is a struggle that the labour movement can unite around and win. Let's get active now.

Paul Clarke

