

# COMMUNIST WOMEN



July 2020 Number 2

## Communist women at the forefront



### POLITICS

OLIVIA PALMER

It does not take a global pandemic to expose the inequalities in our society. Most of those who struggle each day to put food on the table are well aware that they are not responsible for their situation, despite the neoliberal insistence that the wealth gained by a market economy is beneficial to all.

Our government should to be held to

account for decision making, but perhaps the true picture of which actions were beneficial or detrimental will not be uncovered for years.

The neoliberal myth has been exposed that under a market economy people are rewarded according to their contribution. Governments, companies and citizens have been forced to ask themselves what counts as essential work. Even our right-wing government has concluded that cleaners, postal workers, nurses, refuse collectors, bus drivers and other transport workers are all key to the functioning of our society. These manual jobs have been deemed essential whilst many higher paid workers have been furloughed or dismissed. Those who remain employed are able to work remotely, bringing into question whether the pollution caused by daily commute can ever be justified again. So, the working class has been vindicated, even applauded; although notably not financially rewarded.

In Britain, women who are employed get paid an average of 17.3% less than men, putting women at even more risk of economic hardship during this crisis.

Women are far more likely to be victims of domestic violence, so the rise in violence during lockdown also disproportionately endangered women. Women have added concerns around how coronavirus impacts their reproductive rights. Marie Stopes estimates the global cost of COVID-19 disruptions could be an additional 3 million unintended pregnancies, 2.7 million unsafe abortions, and 11,000 pregnancy-related deaths.

Black and Minority Ethnic people are disproportionately at risk from Covid-19. Research suggests that BAME people are nearly three times more likely to be critically ill in hospital with the virus. BAME people are also more likely to be in low paid work or unemployed and living in overcrowded households.

It's important to remember that the above oppressions do not exist in isolation; a working-class woman of colour experiences triple oppression. Accounts by retired Windrush nurses who have been asked to return to the NHS provide understanding of the full human cost.

The impact of years of underfunding of the NHS has been exposed and the lockdown itself has changed our way of life. Key workers have been pushed to the forefront of our media and their importance recognised.

It is no surprise that there has been a surge in downloads of the Communist Party programme *Britain's Road to Socialism*.

Now is the time to reconsider how to rebuild a fairer society. Communist Women will make sure that we are at the forefront of this movement.

OLIVIA PALMER IS A SOCIALIST FEMINIST AND ENVIRONMENTALIST AND MEMBER OF THE LONDON CP WOMEN'S ADVISORY COMMITTEE  
Abridged from an article in the *Morning Star*  
27 April 2020

### RED WEDGE GOES LIVE!



### Communist Party Women in Action!

1 August 2020 | 1.30am - 1pm  
Join the celebrations and discussions!

*Communist women, guided by Marxist understanding of our exploitation and oppression under capitalism, have been active in the labour movement, sharing solidarity with our sisters worldwide and working for peace and socialism since the Party was founded.*

<http://www.comunistparty.org.uk/centenary>

# REVOLUTIONARY LIVES Anita Halpin



ANITA HALPIN.....

My parents were anti-fascist refugees from nazi Germany. I was born in 1944 and grew up in a very political environment.

Although in that lucky generation without massive student debts, on leaving university I had great difficulty finding work despite having two degrees and two languages. My parents had strongly advised me against secretarial training which they saw as potentially career limiting but after 18 months I started as a production editor on the BMA's specialist journals.

I was recruited to the party by Mikki Doyle, the *Morning Star's* women's editor, whom I first met at a 1972 Women in Media meeting. The sisters' main concern was how to break the 'glass ceiling', but you could have heard the proverbial pin drop when I suggested broadening the remit to

include other women colleagues like 'tea ladies' and secretaries.

I met my Kevin at a branch meeting where he was speaking about the anti-trade union laws. We married in 1974 and our son Boris was born in 1975.

I went from full-time to part-time working from home at seven months pregnant. Kevin still had to clock-in and would lose money or holidays if he took time off work, so we agreed that I would continue working from home. In 1979 I got a PR and communication job at a major multinational and joined the National Union of Journalists (NUJ)

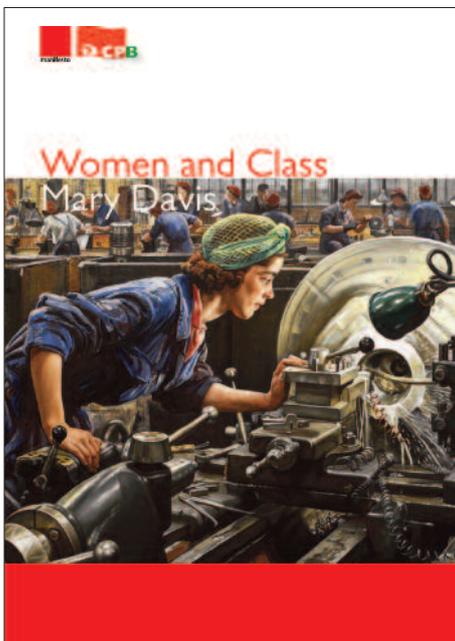
As Boris grew older I was able to increase my hours and when I was elected to the NUJ's national executive council in 1991 I opted to work four days a week to allow me to play a full role on the union's NEC. In 25 years service I became only the third woman president in nearly 100 years.

Starting as chair of my branch, my trade union work included NUJ treasurer, vice president of SERTUC, over 10 years on the TUC general council and chair of its women's committee.

I have been active at all levels of our party from branch secretary, election agent, election candidate, district secretary, EC and PC member, national industrial organiser, chair and editor-in-chief of *Unity!*

Luck - or a fortunate co-incidence - played some part in my ability to be active as I worked within walking distance of the NUJ and TUC offices. But, without the support of comrades in the union and the party and, above all my husband, that would never have been enough.

ABOVE Anita Halpin at the TUC rostrum

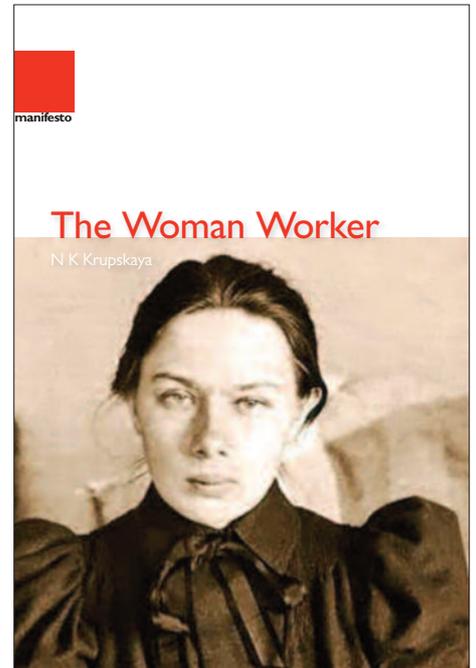


**A** NEW REVISED edition of *Women and Class*, by Mary Davis is to be published in early August as part of the celebrations for the 100th anniversary of the foundation of the Communist Party.

This book has been at the centre of dispute and analysis in the working class, labour and socialist movement for three decades.

Over four editions and constant reprintings it has informed the debates in the trade union movement, animated discussions in academic circles, been fiercely contested and defended in the women's movement and has educated successive waves of young communists, socialists and trade unionists.

Mary Davis brings to these renewed debates a marxist analysis of the role of women in class society, provides a sharply polemical introduction to competing conceptions of feminist theory and dissects



**The Woman Worker**  
by N K Krupskaya

£3.50 (plus £1.50 p&p) ISBN 978-1-907464-26-3

*The Woman Worker* was N K Krupskaya's first pamphlet, written in exile in Siberia where she had joined Lenin, following their arrest in 1896 and sentencing to three years. Krupskaya wrote *The Woman Worker* in 1899 under the pseudonym 'Sablina'. It was the first written work on the situation of women in Russia.

Originally published in 1901, the pamphlet was banned following the suppression of the abortive 1905 revolution. Lenin and Krupskaya came to London in April 1902 where, in what is now the Marx Memorial Library, Lenin edited the Bolshevik illegal newspaper *Iskra*.

[www.manifestopress.org.uk](http://www.manifestopress.org.uk)

the ways in which women's work in class society is experienced as both oppression and exploitation.

In a newly revised section she provides a firm repudiation of new forms of idealist thinking about sex, gender and identity that constitute a barrier to practical action and materialist thought

Mary Davis has written, broadcast and lectured widely on women's history, labour history, imperialism and racism. She is a former member of the UCU national executive and the TUC women's committee, a founder member of the Sylvia Pankhurst Memorial Committee and chairs the Charter for Women. She was awarded the TUC Women's Gold Badge in 2010 for services to trade unionism. She is also a former member of the Communist Party's executive committee and the party's national women's organiser.