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the Socialist

Issue 1208

6-11 January 2023

formerly **Militant**

STRIKING HEALTH WORKERS LEAD FIGHT TO



PHOTOS: PAUL MATTSOON

SAVE OUR NHS

2023: PREPARE FOR A YEAR OF CONTINUED CLASS STRUGGLE >>> p6-8

JAMES IVENS
LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

“I think we are confident we are providing the NHS with the funding it needs,” says the prime minister’s spokesperson. Meanwhile, people die in their thousands waiting for treatment.

Our only hope is the working class – fighting on the wards to save our lives, fighting on the picket lines to save our health service.

When I pitched up in a south Wales A&E to sit with an injured friend in December, he’d already been there seven hours. We waited another eight. The consultant told him other doctors might have just sent him home – but as it turned out, he was bleeding inside his skull.

We need more pay, more staff, more beds. Rishi Sunak says we can’t afford any more. But by Thursday 5 January, the average FTSE 100 chief exec had already hoovered up more than the average worker will earn all year. World-wide, last year set a record for superyacht orders – end to end, five times the height of Everest.

Meanwhile, the president of the Royal College of Emergency Medicine estimates “somewhere between 300 and 500 people are dying as a consequence of delays and problems with urgent and emergency care each week.” Patients and staff alike are traumatised, or worse.

Emergency departments in Gloucestershire and Shropshire have just appealed for patients to stay away “unless it’s a life-threatening condition” (see page 2). This is more than the ‘normal’ winter crisis.

Running the 8am phone gauntlet for GP appointments is a saga with more indefinite queues for treatment at the end. Ambulances don’t come, A&E is a campsite, and waits for elective treatments can stretch out for years. We can’t resolve this by waiting.

The striking nurses and ambulance workers, demanding pay they can live on, are standard bearers for the fight we all face. They mustn’t be left to fight alone.

Other health unions need to campaign to win ballots to join the action. And the unions in all sectors need to concentrate their forces against this killer Tory government: build towards a 24-hour general strike.

>>> CONTINUED ON P2



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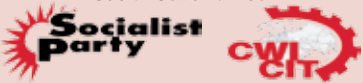
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"The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it."
Karl Marx



Take money off super-rich to fund NHS

▶▶ CONTINUED FROM FRONT

A striking paramedic in east London told me she had recently attended an older woman who had fallen the day before. It's now common for the morning shift still to be dealing with yesterday afternoon's emergencies.

She might have avoided hospital if the ambulance could have got to her the same day. After a night on the floor on her own, no chance. The queues at each point in the NHS make those who are waiting sicker, resulting in greater needs and longer queues.

It's a downward spiral in provision. Added to that, new paramedics take longer to train. If you're stuck in a queue outside A&E your whole shift, what are you learning?

Inside

Inside, patients are gridlocked while staff pelt around in top gear. No wonder NHS sickness rates are well above the national average, with stress, anxiety and depression the leading causes.

This is not some incidental consequence of the winter flu and Covid 'twindemic'. This crisis, and the pandemic before, reveals the underlying weakness of the NHS as it is.

Tory and Labour governments replaced centralised planning with market competition, and public funding with cuts and private debt. The NHS needs more resources and

coordination, not less! Fight to take the money off the super-rich, and for democratic control and planning by staff and patients.

There's not enough beds. UK spending on health infrastructure is about half the average of similar wealthy nations as a share of GDP. Argentina, a so-called emerging economy, has twice as many beds per person!

There's not enough staff for those beds. Real living wages with inflation-proof rises; scrapping student debt; paying for more staff on duty to reduce workloads, sickness and resignations – that's the solution.

Nationalise

Renationalise the private contracts under democratic working-class control, and take the money-grubbing pharmaceuticals too – with no compensation paid to the rich. Scrap 'PFI' debts – some hospitals spend more on those than drugs!

Tory MPs are divided on the NHS strikes, sensing their apocalypse of a general election soon. The strikes should exploit that. But the Labour government-in-waiting proposes funnelling more money to private hospitals, and replacing wards with homecare by overworked families, while clinicians check patients remotely.

The working class needs its own, new, mass political party to rebuild the NHS.

Huge support for NHS picket lines in Liverpool

A STRIKING LIVERPOOL UNISON MEMBER AND NHS WORKER

Like in many trusts around the country, NHS workers in Liverpool are feeling the pinch of the cost-of-living crisis and pressures of unsafe staffing levels. Despite being hailed as heroes during the Covid pandemic, according to Tory health secretary Steve Barclay, NHS workers are not deserving of an above-inflation pay rise.

Tory threshold

In Unison's NHS pay ballot, around 81,000 members nationwide returned a 'yes' vote for strike action, but most branches didn't clear the Tory anti-democratic turnout threshold. Liverpool Hospitals was one of the few branches that did so, with a turnout of 50.1%. 97% voted in favour of taking strike action!

Unison has confirmed that ten other health branches in the country, which fell just short of the threshold, will be rebalotted. This includes Liverpool Women's Hospital, which achieved around a 45% turnout.

Taking strike action is a last resort, but workers feel that we've been left with no choice after being continuously insulted with derisory pay offers by the government. Low pay means staff have to use food banks, and they are leaving the NHS in droves, leaving wards dangerously understaffed. Poor salaries also mean that the NHS cannot attract workers to fill the

thousands of vacant posts needed for hospitals to run safely.

Picket lines at Liverpool's Royal, Broadgreen, Aintree and Heart and Chest hospitals were very well attended with an almost party-like atmosphere. The mood was high and staff very determined to fight for the pay rise we deserve.

A broad section of workers stood alongside each other, including nurses, therapists, paramedics, security guards, pharmacy technicians, stores operatives and admin staff.

Workers required to provide essential cover and members of other unions showed solidarity by standing on the picket line during their lunch breaks. Members of Unite, FBU and RCN also attended in solidarity.

Tooting horns

The strike was well supported by the public, with drivers tooting their horns, including the fire brigade and police. People turned up with food and drink for the pickets.

A recurring talking point on the picket was why the union leaders opted against coordinating strike dates with other unions, which would have maximised impact and avoided workers feeling forced to cross each other's picket lines.

WHAT'S YOUR VIEW?

editors@socialistparty.org.uk

'Don't come to A&E unless you are dying'

HANNAH ROCHE
SHROPSHIRE SOCIALIST PARTY

The recent message from NHS officials in Shropshire – 'Don't come to A&E unless you are dying' – is a tone-deaf response to the health and social care crisis.

CQC (the governing body for inspecting hospitals) has said there is inadequate care at both Shropshire

hospitals – Princess Royal in Telford and Royal Shrewsbury. And now the Tories are trying to close Telford's A&E, relocating services up to 50 minutes away in Shrewsbury.

"We can't help you"

My mental health team were reviewed as 'good'. But when trying to cancel an appointment, because I couldn't travel through the train

strike, the call handler just referred me back to my own day team, as if to say: "Sorry, we can't help you". It gives little hope for those with accessibility issues, constantly feeling as if they do not deserve to be listened to.

My own experiences of my local A&E have been positive. The people who work at Royal Shrewsbury Hospital are doing the best they can to provide care for everyone.

'Don't come to A&E unless you are dying' is not coming from nurses and doctors.

It is from those in government who choose to prioritise bosses' profits over funding decent health services for all.

No wonder nurses are becoming fed up and striking. It is time they received their dues for their tireless services.

Nurses make history in massive RCN strikes

15 and 20 December 2022 will go down in history. The largest nursing strike ever in the NHS. Members of the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) were joined by Socialist Party members in towns and cities across England and Wales.

Socialist Party members from **Nottingham** to **Cardiff** to **Hertfordshire**, and many more places, report solidarity on the nurses' picket lines from postal workers in the Communication Workers Union, also on strike.

In fact, big numbers joined the nurses everywhere. Tom Baldwin reported about 60 at **Bristol** Royal Infirmary; Amy Sage about 50 at Southmead Hospital in Bristol, with more still arriving.

More than 60 were reported in **Cardiff** and Seamus Smyth says that the picket at **Kettering** was, simply, "huge".

Protests

Hundreds gathered at St Thomas's and at University College Hospitals in central **London**, where National Shop Stewards Network chair Rob Williams gave a message of solidarity to both protests. Socialist Party members spoke to offer support at several protests around the country.

Socialist Party members also initiated and helped organise solidarity wherever we could. Mal Richardson organised a lunchtime solidarity rally at **York** hospital.

Holly Johnston helped organise an 'NHS workers say NO' solidarity banner drop in **Sheffield**, alongside CWU members and Shelter strikers, members of Unite the Union.

Socialist Students members in **Southampton** organised a solidarity protest of student nurses, with the support of the RCN and UCU.

A nurse at St James's Hospital, **Leeds**, told Iain Dalton: "The Tories are not prepared to give anyone any extra money, apart from themselves and their mates. They don't care about workers like you and me".

A striker at **Birmingham** Children's Hospital told Nick Hart: "People I know are leaving the nursing profession to go and work in a supermarket."

Strike together

He reports the Socialist Party's call to prepare for a 24-hour general strike was popular: "The idea that everyone needs to strike together is becoming common sense."

Mark Kerr reports that in Hertfordshire, RCN pickets were "all very positive. All the people we talked to agreed on the need for a 24-hour general strike in the new year."

Gareth Bromhall says that at the Singleton and Morrington hospitals in **Swansea**, and at **Neath Port Talbot** hospital, the trades council and Socialist Party members were welcomed and invited back.

Alec Thraves adds: "There were dozens of RCN members on each main entrance receiving support from the public and staff, including some Unison members who refused to work."

"At one stage a Wales radio

interview, being recorded live from the Neath Port Talbot picket line, was almost drowned out by the noise of cars beeping their support!"

Nurses told Socialist Party member Amanda in Birmingham: "I have never felt more like just a number. This service relies on goodwill, and that goodwill is ending."

Joining the union

Joe Foster, also in Birmingham, reports that one nurse came to the picket to join the RCN. "One reason we don't have many agency staff here is because of all the extra unpaid work we have done over the years".

"Striking is no good for your waistline," one nurse said to Ross Saunders on the picketline in Llandough, near Cardiff, pointing to the mountain of cakes, chocolates and other donations they'd received.

A Unite rep from Cardiff buses stopped by to raise the pile a bit higher with donations from the drivers.

Glen Howard reports that the RCN at the Royal **Worcester** organised cover for non-essential wards, to ensure patients were safe during the strike. They used recommended night-time numbers of nurses, only to realise there were more nurses working today than the day before!

Despite the below-zero temperatures, the mood at the Royal in **Liverpool** was high among the striking workers, says Connor O'Neil, with plenty of passers-by bringing coffee and mince pies to warm everyone up. The shop steward described the striking nurses as "highly skilled professionals" who are "very pissed off!"

First strike

For almost everyone at Great Western Hospital in **Swindon**, it was their first strike, reports Scott Hunter. One said, "I joined the RCN 40 years ago because it was the only union that had a 'no strikes' clause. I never thought I'd have to do this."

But she explained that she had been moved to strike due to the worsening conditions in the NHS. "Pay is secondary. This strike is about patient safety, working conditions and staffing. I'm getting older and I'm worried there won't be an NHS when I need it."

Elaine Brunskill found overwhelming support for the RCN nurses on strike: people understand that alongside fighting for better pay and conditions, nurses are also on strike to fight back against the hammer-blows being inflicted on the NHS.

In **Gateshead**, other health workers from the hospital, who weren't on strike themselves, came out on their breaks carrying trays full of hot drinks to sustain the strikers.

At **North Tyneside**, one of the strikers told us that going out on strike was something none of them had done without a lot of soul-searching.

She said one nurse initially hadn't been going to strike, but a member of her family had had to go to A&E, where they waited 14 hours to be seen by a doctor. For this nurse, that had been a tipping point and she was on strike.



London, Bromsgrove and Cardiff nurses (above); Sheffield and Bristol ambulance workers (below) PHOTOS: SP MEMBERS



Ambulance workers on strike "for the love of the job"

ROB ROONEY
CORNWALL SOCIALIST PARTY

On strike to save the service so it can save lives, and taking a day out of the insane, dysfunctional, imploding world of the NHS, ambulance crews were on the picket line in St Austell, as part of the Unison and GMB strike action on 21 December.

Passing motorists hooted their support, while others stopped and dropped gifts off to the strikers who were huddled around a brazier.

Chris, an emergency care assistant (ECA) and Unison member, recalled how the obscene queueing of ambulances, laden with patients, at hospitals around the country, started around 18 months ago.

Chris described what is a common

experience. "We can take the place of another crew and sit there all day and all night with a patient. Then another crew will take that patient off us so we can go home but the patient stays in the ambulance."

"We're sat there, listening to the radio constantly requesting a crew for a 'category one' (highest alert level), and there's none available in the whole county because they're stuck at hospital."

The procedure for category one calls illustrates how increased risk for patients is now built into the system. A crew stuck waiting at a hospital with a patient gains permission to offload the patient while attending to the emergency.

While the crew is absent, the patient goes through triage (initial assessment), but is then "pushed back

out onto an ambulance" to await a bed.

ECAs are supposed to go out with a paramedic but that does not always happen because of the strain on the system. Chris said: "It's becoming more frequent for ECAs to form a crew with no paramedic support. You can go to a job, request paramedic support, and none is available because they're tied up at hospital."

I asked newly qualified paramedic, Sammy, a GMB member, why she was on the picket. She said: "For fairness. It's not about pay, we do it for the love of the job."

"We are seeing people die in front of our eyes because we are not getting to them. We're sat outside the hospital, hearing there is a cardiac arrest and nobody is going to them. It's soul-destroying."



PHOTO: RORY HYDE/CC

Fat Cat Thursday – billionaires ‘earn’ a worker’s annual salary in three days

ADAM HARMSWORTH
COVENTRY SOCIALIST PARTY

While millions of workers are facing a 2023 of poverty and debt, the bosses are already having a great year. On ‘Fat Cat Thursday’, just three working days into the year, the average CEO of a FTSE 100 company had already taken home more money than most workers will earn this entire year. For the rest of the year, the bosses will be raking in millions of pounds from bloated salaries and bonuses.

Since the start of the pandemic, when the Tory government

proclaimed ‘we’re all in it together’, the number of billionaires in Britain has increased by a fifth. Now 177 billionaires hold an average of £2 billion each. An 18-year-old on current minimum wage would have to work for over 140,000 years to make that much! ‘Fat Cat Thursday’ demonstrates just how much money has been transferred to a tiny super-rich elite. It’s all wealth made off the backs of workers, many of whom are no longer able to make ends meet.

Each household now owes an average of £16,200 in ‘unsecured debt’, like overdrafts and credit card

borrowing. That household debt is soaring won’t surprise many. Workers’ wallets have come under attack from all angles – wages stalling while energy bills, food and fuel prices, and rail fares are soaring.

Capitalism defends the right of billionaires to hoard their billions. We need to take back that wealth.

More workers and youth are starting to see that, shown by the swell of support for the strike wave. We fight for socialism – for the working class to democratically own and control the wealth it makes to be put to use for the benefit of all.

Courts force hundreds of thousands onto prepayment meters in secret

NICK DOYLE
PORTSMOUTH SOCIALIST PARTY

Nearly half a million warrants have been issued to allow energy firms to force the poorest in England and Wales onto prepayment meters since July 2021. While the energy companies are driving millions into poverty forcing the poorest to pay even more, they are swimming in profits.

An average of 13,200 warrants a month have been issued by Portsmouth Magistrates Court for debtors nationwide.

Hundreds of warrants are issued in a matter of minutes. In many cases, those affected have no idea what is happening until an engineer turns up at their house, often with a locksmith to force entry, sometimes with a dog handler.



Prepayment meter top-up keys PHOTO: LYDIA/CC

If on a smart meter, households are just switched over after a warrant has been issued.

Customers are being denied an opportunity to challenge what is happening. It would seem that the ruling class has learned the lessons of the Poll Tax in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Then, magistrates were unable to operate because of the large amount of nonpayers attending hearings.

This is not the same, but lessons can be learned from the struggle against the Poll Tax. Community mobilisations could develop to resist the imposition of pre-payment meters.

Protests against rising energy costs should be linked to the ongoing strike wave. Coordinated strike action – building to a 24-hour general strike – would give communities the confidence to resist prepayment meters being installed. Particularly if it was linked to demands around rent control, cheap public transport and other issues fuelling the cost-of-living crisis.

This raises the need to place demands on politicians. However, it is clear that the Tories and Labour will do little to challenge the energy companies. Alongside strikes and community campaigns, a new mass workers’ party needs to be formed to fight for our interests.

Children’s mental health is deteriorating – austerity is making things worse

CALLUM JOYCE
OXFORD SOCIALIST PARTY

1.1 million children in England required treatment for serious mental health issues over 2021-22 – a 39% rise on the previous year. Dr Elaine Lockhart, from the Royal College of Psychiatrists, noted that mental health issues among under-18s had already been rising before Covid, largely due to the impact of austerity and growing social inequality.

Our health service already suffers from massive underinvestment and understaffing, especially in areas concerned with mental health. Many issues which could be dealt with early are delayed treatment, making them more likely to develop into serious health concerns.

People being unable to work due to mental health issues costs the UK economy over £110 billion a year. But capitalism is so shortsighted that it cannot bear to part with any excess profit, even if it’s in its own long-term interests!

A socialist society – where

resources are fairly distributed among all working people, and public services get the investment they require, regardless of profit margins – would fix the economic causes underpinning so many mental health issues, and ensure that all vulnerable people have free, easy access to the services that they require.



Strike at Arrow XL: Profiteering while paying poverty wages

STUART AND MARK DAVIES
WORCESTER SOCIALIST PARTY

350 workers at Arrow XL have been taking strike action since October 2022 over pay.

The company’s bosses have offered its workers a pay rise of just 5%, and are now refusing to meet with their union, Unite.

The highly profitable delivery and warehousing company is part of Logistics Group Holdings Ltd, whose billionaire owners, also own the Telegraph newspaper, Yodel and Very.com.

Many of the workers are only paid the minimum wage, with others paid just above £9.50 an hour. The workers had been taking part in regular strike days around the country, but an

all-out strike began from 9 December in Arrow XL’s headquarters in Wigan.

Despite not being prepared to pay its workers decent pay, the company’s highest-paid director was paid £539,000 in 2021, an 84% increase on the previous year!

In November, over 100 employees travelled to Liverpool’s Albert Dock to demonstrate outside Logistic Group’s head office. Many travelled from Arrow’s headquarters in Wigan, and from Worcester and Enfield. To try to remove the protest the managers called the police, who stood aside as the event continued.

A protest was arranged outside the prestigious Logistics UK Awards in central London, where sister-company Yodel was shortlisted for an award. A smaller event also took

place outside the “Severn Arts Charity” in Worcester’s St John’s. One of the main managers in Worcester is involved in this charity, but was shamed for not paying a living wage to Arrow employees.

While supporting the workers on the picket line, Socialist Party members have been well received. One worker explained that he had previously “not been into politics”, but this changed as he looked both at this dispute and beyond, and thought about what future there is for his 20-year-old son and his son’s generation. He highlighted the need for “real change”, but that the current Tory and Labour offerings are much the same, and that an alternative is required. He said: “They have got to realise we are the power”.



Socialist Party members join the Enfield picket line PHOTO: ENFIELD AND LEA VALLEY SOCIALIST PARTY

Strike wave continues into 2023

Rail strikes continue: RMT and Aslef



Strikers told Birmingham Socialist Party members: "The Tories and the press make out that we're just interested in getting more money, but that's not all this strike is about. We just want to go to work and be able to do our jobs without our terms, conditions and working hours being messed about." PHOTO: BIRMINGHAM SP

All strike together for a real pay rise!

- Prepare now for a 24-hour general strike
- If the Tories try to implement their new anti-trade union plans, they must be met with a 24-hour general strike
- The union leaders and the TUC should launch an appeal to build a massive strike fund to assist those unions on the front line
- Kick out the Tories! But Starmer's New Labour doesn't speak for us, so fight for a new working-class party
- No more austerity – end cuts and privatisation in the NHS and councils, reject council tax rises
- Nationalise rail, mail, energy and utilities under democratic working-class control and management, with compensation only on the basis of proven need
- Take the wealth off the super-rich. For a socialist alternative to capitalism's poverty and crisis

PCS civil service strikes

Targeted action has been taking place by workers in the Border Force, Driving Standards (DVSA), Highways, Driving Licencing (DVLA), Rural Payments and the Department for Work and Pensions.



Socialist Party members supporting striking driving examiners in Plymouth
PHOTO: PLYMOUTH SP

London Abellio bus strike for a decent pay rise

BERKAY KARTAV
LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

Bus drivers employed by Abellio in south and west London have been on strike for 14 days, and are taking a further seven days of strike action. They are fighting for an inflation-busting pay rise.

Unite reported that Abellio made a profit of 401 million euros in 2021 alone, and yet it refuses to offer a decent pay rise for bus drivers. The money is there but it is not going into the pockets of the workers.

Socialist Party members have visited the picket lines consistently since the start of the strike. Abellio is resorting to all sorts of tactics to try to dampen the mood.

Nevertheless, the mood is still strong, and the drivers are prepared

to take further action if the dispute is not resolved.

London's Labour mayor Sadiq Khan shares responsibility for the attacks on bus drivers' pay. He has given the green light for the private bus companies to rake in enormous profits while driving down wages, and he's passing on Tory cuts.

The Socialist Party argues that these bus services should be immediately brought back in-house, under the democratic control of workers and service users, as part of an expanded, free-to-use and fully funded transport system.

As well as improving the service, this would ensure workers get an inflation-proof pay rise, with decent terms and conditions.

The next strike dates are 10, 12, 16, 19, 25 and 26 January.

CWU postal workers: Vote yes in the rebalot, and step up the action!

Steve Ion from Merseyside Socialist Party interviewed **Jane Loftus**, Communication Workers Union (CWU) Vice-President, on the postal workers' picket line at Prenton, Birkenhead, on 23 December.

Why are you out on strike?

We are out to protect pay and terms and conditions in Parcelforce and Royal Mail. But we are also out to protect and maintain services for the general public.

Royal Mail's business model now is for casualisation, to turn it into a courier service by attacking the terms and conditions of the current workforce.

This is why we emphasise the importance of the impact of the attack on terms and conditions.

But as a union we have stood together. The march and rally in London, reported by the press as only 500 people, was a massive show of the strength and unity of 20,000 CWU members.

On the picket lines, members' resolve continues. Members who are motivated by their shared aim to provide a decent service to the public.

Our members have provided, and continue to provide, a long-standing commitment to the communities they serve.

What about the future of the postal service?

The CWU continues to support initiatives to expand the service, but those must fully support and protect the terms and conditions of our members.

Alongside winning this dispute, we also support the demand to renationalise the postal service back into public ownership.

I am proud of the determination and continued support of members of the CWU. Together alongside other unions who are joining us in dispute we stand in solidarity.

Victory to the CWU!

GARY CLARK, SECRETARY OF SCOTLAND NO 2 CWU BRANCH, SAYS:

"As we are now entering a rebalot of our members, as required by Tory anti-union laws, it is vital we get another massive yes vote.

"We must demand that any potential deal includes reinstatement of all reps who have been suspended during the dispute under the conduct code.

"This is clearly a fight to the finish. We must now step up the action.

"This should include our union playing a leading role in calling for a 24-hour general strike.

"And, at the same time, we need a big public appeal for a strike fund to support our members who require assistance."



Jane Loftus joins striking postal workers to hand the Royal Mail boss his P45
PHOTO: PAULA MITCHELL

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2023: PREPARE FOR A YEAR OF CONTINUED CLASS STRUGGLE

HANNAH SELL
SOCIALIST PARTY GENERAL SECRETARY

The Socialist Party enters 2023 full of optimism. The reasons for pessimism or even despair are obvious. 2022 was a year of dramatically falling living standards, frightening climate change, and the horror of war; and all this is set to continue. As inflation has soared, billions more people around the world are left struggling to afford the basic necessities of life. This increasingly barbaric capitalist system offers fat profits for a very few, and impoverishment for the majority. In 2022, for the first time this century, real monthly wages fell on a global basis. At the same time, capitalism is incapable of taking the kind of thoroughgoing measures that are needed to combat and reverse climate change.

In 2022, however, in Britain and other countries, a force re-entered the scene of history which could bring about the fundamental change needed. It is the Socialist Party's confidence in the ability of the working class and oppressed to build a better democratic socialist world which is the basis for our optimism. Look, for example, at the heroic Iranian movement for "women, life, freedom" which has repeatedly faced down the brutal dictatorial Iranian regime.

Or the Sri Lankan masses' response to their complete impoverishment, with shortages of every necessity, rising up and sweeping the Gotabaya Rajapaksa presidency from office with the biggest general strike since 1980. Hundreds of millions of people worldwide cheered when they saw the Sri Lankan population take over Gotabaya's opulent palace – sweeping up the grand staircase and swimming in his luxury pool.

Of course, none of the heroic movements that erupted in 2022 have yet achieved fundamental change. In Sri Lanka, Gotabaya was thrown out but a pro-capitalist government continues to preside over misery and increasing repression. That does not negate the potential power of the Sri Lankan uprising. Instead it points to the need for the masses to be organised in their own party, capable of establishing a workers' government that is determined to defy the dictates of the international markets, and to start to build a socialist society in the interests of the Sri Lankan people.

The same tasks will be posed here in Britain. In 2022, workers in Britain acted together collectively in a way we have not seen for generations. Just two years ago, during the pandemic, the government's Office for National Statistics stopped even bothering to collect strike figures, which had been at record lows throughout the pre-pandemic years. Capitalist newspapers had long since got rid of 'industrial correspondents' as unnecessary relics of a bygone era. The only way to find out about the workers' movement, and strikes that did happen, was to read the workers' press, particularly the Socialist.

Now, however, while the Socialist

is still by far the best place to hear from the workers involved about their struggles, every news bulletin and mainstream newspaper has been forced to give front pages over to the 1.5 million strike days lost in December 2022 alone – compared, for example, to a total of 33,000 workers taking strike action, in the whole of 2017.

Unsurprisingly, the pro-capitalist press has mainly covered the strikes to attack them, but their relentless propaganda about strikers 'stealing Christmas' has not cut across public support, which opinion polls show as at a higher level now than when the strike wave began six months ago. On the contrary, a new generation is discovering that the only reason that it has any rights at work, including Christmas holidays, is that working-class people – organised collectively in trade unions – fought for them.

The working class and much of the middle class suffered the worst fall in living standards since the Second World War last year, and are facing an average further 3.8% fall in disposable incomes in 2023, at the same time as rising interest rates begin to make it harder to pay mortgages. They have experienced public services, above all the NHS, in a state of collapse. The result is a powerful mood of solidarity with the strikes.

Weak Tories try to dig in

At the time of writing, Scrooge-like the multimillionaires heading the Tory government have refused to concede a penny to the strikers, or even to talk to them about pay! However, their seeming intransigence does not stem from a position of strength, but of weakness. The Tory Party and the capitalist class as a whole can see no easy way to defeat the strikes. They hope that the financial hardship of those strikers who started first – particularly the CWU and RMT – will lead to those strikes starting to crumble. As the resounding rebalots show, however, there is no sign of that happening so far. Nonetheless, it is vital that the whole trade union movement builds a massive strike solidarity fund in order to prevent any group of workers being starved back to work, and to make it easier to escalate the action.

For the government, making concessions would give confidence to others to fight, but 'standing firm' means a rising tide of industrial action that could force the Tories out of office. Not every ballot has managed to overcome the existing Tory anti-union laws, but millions of workers could still potentially be involved in strike action. And the cracks in this deeply divided 'zombie government' are showing, particularly around the nurses' strike – where Tory backbenchers, under the weight of public opinion, are starting to demand concessions.

The pressures at the top were also reflected in the comment by Admiral Sir Tony Radakin, Britain's most senior military officer, that the military was not "spare capacity" and it would be "slightly perilous" to treat the armed forces as the "ultimate backstop" for strikes. It is completely



Royal Mail strikers descend on Westminster, 9 December 2022 PHOTO: PAUL MATTSSON

unprecedented for a serving senior military figure to even implicitly criticise a Tory government's policy in this way.

His comments are one indication of the deep splits at the top of British society as a result of the growing economic and social crisis of their system. Radakin sensed the growing anger among the army ranks faced with providing strike cover over Christmas for which they had little or no training, and themselves suffering austerity with a below inflation 3.75% pay rise in 2022. Seeing the strike wave, many rank-and-file 'squaddies' will be drawing the conclusion that they too should have the right to join a trade union and to strike. It is the fear of this growing radicalisation that motivated Radakin's intervention.

Radakin's remarks are a sign that the capitalists are starting to fear for the future of their system. They are a tiny minority of society, whose wealth stems from the exploitation of the majority. The repressive apparatus of the state machine, including the army and police, plays – in the last analysis – a vital part in maintaining the capitalists' rule. That the state's neutrality is an illusion was illustrated a few years ago by the response of senior military figures to the election of Jeremy Corbyn as Labour leader. General Sir Nicholas Houghton, then chief of the defence staff, said he would "worry" if Corbyn's views were translated into power, while Michael Clarke of the military think tank the Royal United Services Institute argued that "the armed forces don't belong to the government, they belong to the monarch."

However, as we said at the time, the generals could not have got support from the working-class ranks of the army to take action against a government that had the active support of working-class people. The obvious anger of soldiers at this government's attempts to use them as strike breakers is an indication that discontent is brewing at the base of the army, as in the rest of society.

For maximum unity in action

The potential exists for a united strike movement to force this government out of office. Inevitably, attempts are being made to weaken the movement by trying to create divisions between strikes, with right-wing papers like the Daily Express calling for concessions to be made to the nurses while attacking the RMT. The leadership of the trade union movement should be united in the face of these attacks, forcefully arguing that all workers deserve at least an inflation-matching pay rise, and that the victory of one group should be seen as a step forward for the whole class. Arguments for unity need, of course, to be combined with stepping up unity in action.

The interviews given by the new Trades Union Congress (TUC) general secretary, Paul Nowak, have been more combative in tone than his predecessor, Frances O'Grady. Unfortunately, however, his conclusions have fallen far short of what is needed. In

the Financial Times he claims to have read the great Russian revolutionary Leon Trotsky, but it seems none of it stuck! He is reported to play down talk of a general strike, "pointing out that such a mass walkout would fall foul of trade union legislation, and would make little sense to groups as disparate as teachers and physiotherapists who were worried about pay, but hardly inclined to militancy."

Nowak's 'moderate' conclusions are following the same tradition as O'Grady and many other TUC leaders before her. However, while O'Grady was TUC general secretary at a time of few strikes, Nowak is 'leading' the movement at a time when a new generation is having to strike and rapidly drawing conclusions as a result. Nowak is right when he says many of the strikers have never considered themselves 'militant', but they are learning that for a worker to be called a militant is the inevitable consequence of standing up against the attacks raining down.

Build for a 24-hour general strike

On picket lines up and down the country, while all kinds of discussions are taking place on what tactics are needed to win, there is one issue on which there is unanimity – that a 24-hour general strike is needed. Everyone can see that it makes sense for all the different groups of workers involved in action to strike together on one day, linked to the demands for decent pay rises for all and to get the Tories out. This alone would involve millions of workers and be a significant step towards a one-day general strike.

If local demos were called in every town and city, there is no doubt that other workers, students and retired people would choose to participate. Discussions between unions on naming a day for such action, probably in early February, are currently taking place. If the TUC fails to act, the leaderships of all unions with live ballots need to work together to do what is necessary.

In the same Financial Times interview Nowak correctly warns of the Tories' threat of new anti-union legislation, while also pledging that "our unions... will still find ways to take effective action". Unfortunately, however, his plan to fight the anti-union legislation appears to be limited to "challenging it legally".

There is nothing wrong in principle with fighting the Tories via legal means, but – as almost every union that has taken action in recent years knows all too well – the odds in the capitalist courts are stacked against the workers' movement. Any legal action can only be a secondary adjunct to an industrial response. The Tories' hesitation in bringing in further new anti-union laws up until now has been because of their fear, as transport secretary Mark Harper admitted, that doing so could provoke the trade unions into escalating their strike action. The Tories have seen how their sister

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party in Ontario, Canada was forced to withdraw new anti-strike laws over the course of a weekend in the face of the trade union movement threatening general strike action. Here too, if the government proceeds, the only way to stop new repressive legislation is by demonstrating the power and determination of our movement.

If the TUC in Britain was to respond to new anti-union legislation in the way that happened in Ontario, the laws would be history and so could this weak Tory government. Not only would such a strike terrify the capitalist elite, it would also massively increase the confidence and cohesion of the working class.

The vast majority of those currently taking strike action have never done so before, including many of those who are now stewards and reps. Lessons of the past are still being relearned, for example of democratically organised mass picketing blocking scabs entering the workplace. This is inevitable given how new striking is for most, but the struggle itself educates, and ideas on how to ensure strikes win are already developing rapidly.

Understanding the collective strength of the working class is a vital aspect of developing class consciousness. The great mass rally of postal workers outside parliament on 9 December – followed by a march to Buckingham Palace – had a huge effect on raising the fighting spirit of CWU members. Imagine the electrifying effect of everyone ‘striking together’.

Urgent need for a political voice for the working class

Another issue that is beginning to be discussed on picket lines is how workers’ collective strength could be increased by also having a political voice. There is a desperate desire to get the Tories out, and a Keir Starmer-led Labour government is on the agenda. However, Nowak, a representative of the trade union movement, has used his platform to warn trade unionists that Labour “can’t turn on the taps from day one”. This is a very thinly disguised way of defending a Starmer-led government continuing with Tory austerity, and appealing to public sector trade unionists not to take strike action when Labour is in power.

At this year’s conference of the Confederation of British Industry, Starmer was greeted with unprecedented enthusiasm, whereas Sunak had a very cool reception. Above all, this is because the majority of the capitalist class now believe that a Labour government would be more able to implement their programme of attacks on the working class more effectively than this broken Tory government.

Historically, the capitalist class has repeatedly relied on the pro-capitalist leadership of the Labour Party to use their authority as the party of the working class to implement unpopular policies in government.

This time as well, relief that the



Nurses on strike, 15 December 2022 PHOTO: PAUL MATTSOON

Tories were gone would result in workers giving a Labour government ‘a chance’, desperately hoping that it would act in their interests. Nonetheless, Labour today is not seen by workers as ‘their party’ in the way it was in the past.

The brutal pro-capitalist reality of Starmer’s New Labour would shatter the inevitable initial hopes. The capitalist elite will demand Starmer presides over a far more vicious anti-working class programme than New Labour Mark I did under Tony Blair. In 1997 the economy grew by 4.9%, whereas Starmer would be coming to power against the background of a recession which the capitalist class is determined the working class should pay for.

Starmer and his shadow cabinet are already doing their utmost to make clear that they will govern in the interests of the capitalist elite. True, Starmer has said that an incoming Labour government would – unlike the Tories – be prepared to negotiate on pay. However, he and his shadow cabinet have repeatedly made clear that they would not agree to inflation-matching pay claims. In other words, they too would impose

savage real-terms pay cuts on public sector workers.

At the same time, Starmer has refused to even commit to repealing new anti-trade union laws, and Wes Streeting, shadow health minister, has also pledged to expand privatisation in the NHS! Starmer has promised to “wipe the slate clean” of policies from Corbyn’s 2019 manifesto, such as renationalisation of Royal Mail. In doing so he is demonstrating his intention to completely ignore the policies passed by Labour Party conference this year when it comes to drawing up Labour’s election manifesto. Yet imagine what a powerful weapon it would be for strikers in the Royal Mail strike if Labour was promising to nationalise, without any compensation to the fat-cat shareholders, as soon as it won the general election! In fact, a central factor in the Royal Mail strike if Labour was promising to nationalise, without any compensation to the fat-cat shareholders, as soon as it won the general election! In fact, a central factor in the Royal Mail strike if Labour was promising to nationalise, without any compensation to the fat-cat shareholders, as soon as it won the general election!

While Starmer would claim the credit for an election victory, in reality this Tory government will have been ousted as a result of the anger of the population at what they are suffering. Many will see the strike wave

as being the main expression of that anger. A Labour government will be facing a working class that has gained in confidence and strength, and will not accept austerity and wage cuts for long, whatever the name of the party in government.

This is a very different era to the 1990s. The strike wave is only the latest experience that is forging the outlook of the new generation. Growing up in the era of the post-2008 Great Recession, they have only experienced capitalism in crisis. Then came the pandemic. Opinion polls show that voters reaching 40 today are considerably more left wing than when they were 20, a reversal of the ‘tradition’ of moving to the right with age. With capitalism offering them no prospect of a secure home, a well-paid job, or halting climate change, the majority are looking for an alternative to the left.

Starmer’s government would act in the interests of capitalism. Therefore the need to begin building a new mass party of the working class, based on the workers’ movement and with a socialist programme, will be posed urgently in this period. The Socialist Party, as part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, will do all we can to assist in taking steps in that direction, including by standing candidates in the next general election. Alongside this, the Socialist Party works with others to transform the trade unions into fighting, democratic bodies.

2022 was a year when the failures of capitalism were writ large. But it was also a year of dramatically increased struggle against those failures. 2023 will be a year of continued struggle, and of increasing opportunities for socialist ideas to gain in strength.

As part of the Committee for a Workers’ International, we fight to convince a new generation, in Britain and worldwide, of the need for, and the possibility of, the socialist transformation of society. Nationalisation of the major banks and corporations that dominate the economy, around 150 in the case of Britain, under workers’ control and management would lay the basis for the development of a socialist plan of production. Such a plan would create the basis to transform peoples’ existence. Hunger and poverty would quickly become a thing of the past. The science and technique created by capitalism could be harnessed to meet the needs of all while protecting the planet.

Come and discuss at a Socialist Party meeting near you

The Socialist Party has regular meetings in towns and cities across the country.

- If you would like to participate: **Go to socialistparty.org.uk**
- **Or text 07761 818206 with your name and postcode**

TUSC conference: with Starmer heading for No.10, what should we do at election time?



TUSC campaigning in local elections in Cardiff PHOTO: CARDOFF SP

The 2023 conference of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) is being held at London’s Birkbeck College on Saturday 4 February.

The conference, open to all TUSC supporters, will discuss plans for both the general election and the local elections taking place in May.

Under the title, ‘Starmer’s heading for Number Ten: What should we do at the general election?’ the opening session of the conference will include a broad discussion on what attitude trade unionists and socialists should take to the next general election, that must be called no later than the end of 2024.

This will be followed, in the afternoon, with specific sessions on the TUSC core policy platforms – a list of minimum commitments that voters could expect from someone elected under the TUSC banner, while leaving room for the candidates from the different parts of the coalition to control their own campaigns.

There will be two draft platforms to discuss – for the May 2023 local elections and, separately, the minimum core policies TUSC candidates would stand on in the next general election.

The core policies platforms

The local elections will see over 7,900 council seats contested (see the TUSC directory of the May 2023 elections at www.tusc.org.uk/txt/473.pdf). With local authorities responsible for over one fifth of all spending on public services, these elections

are an important arena to fight for the socialist policies needed to meet the cost-of-living crisis. That is the theme of the draft core policy platform agreed by the TUSC all-Britain steering committee in October, previously published on the website and now available as a PDF at www.tusc.org.uk/txt/484.pdf

The general election platform was finalised by the steering committee at our December meeting after a series of discussions, using as a ‘default’ baseline the TUSC core policies for the 2015 general election (TUSC did not contest the 2017 and 2019 general elections with Jeremy Corbyn as the Labour leader). The draft document can be read at www.tusc.org.uk/txt/485.pdf.

The conference will also see the election of steering committee members representing the individual independent members of TUSC.

TUSC conference

- **Saturday 4 February, 11am to 4-30pm**
- **Room B34, Birkbeck College, Malet Street, London WC1E 7HX**
- **The conference registration fee is £10 waged and £2 unwaged or low-waged, for both in-person and Zoom attendees, and there will be a capped pooled fare of £15 (which means that if you transport costs are greater than £15 you can get the difference back, although please do what you can to keep the costs down)**



WHAT WE STAND FOR

Capitalism is an ailing, crisis-ridden system based on the exploitation of the majority of the world’s population by a small, super-rich elite who own most of the wealth and the means of producing it. This way of organising society, in which the pursuit of profit comes before everything else, causes poverty, inequality, environmental destruction, wars and oppression across the globe.

The Socialist Party organises working-class people to fight against the attacks from this rotten system on our lives and livelihoods, and for a socialist alternative: a society which takes the wealth out of the hands of the super-rich and is democratically run by working-class people to meet the needs of all not the profits of a few.

Building fighting democratic trade unions in the workplaces and a new mass workers’ party is a vital part of the struggle to change society along socialist lines.

Because capitalism is a world system, the struggle for socialism must also be international. The Socialist Party is part of the Committee for a Workers’ International which organises across the world. Our demands include:

WORK, PENSIONS AND BENEFITS

- A £15-an-hour minimum wage for all, without exemptions. For the minimum wage to automatically increase linked to average earnings or inflation, whichever is higher.
- Share out the work. A maximum 32-hour working week with no loss of pay or worsening of conditions. The right to flexible working, under the control of workers not employers. An end to insecure working, for the right to full-time work for all who want it; ban zero-hour contracts.
- All workers to have trade union rates of pay, employment protection, and sickness, parental and holiday rights from day one of employment. End bosses using bogus ‘self-employment’ as a means to avoid giving workers rights.
- No to austerity through inflation. For all wage rates to be automatically increased at least in line with price rises.
- Open the books of all companies cutting jobs or claiming they can’t afford to pay a real living wage. State subsidies, where genuinely needed, for socially-useful small businesses.
- For trade unions independent of the capitalist state, with members having democratic control over their own policies, constitutions and democratic procedures. For all trade union officials to be regularly elected, subject to recall by their members and paid a worker’s wage.
- Reduce the state retirement and pension age to 55. For decent living pensions.
- Replace universal credit and the punitive benefit system with living benefits for all who need them.

PUBLIC SERVICES

- A massive expansion of public services including the NHS and council services. Reverse all the cuts, kick out the privateers. Bring private social care and childcare facilities into public

ownership under democratic control, in order to provide free, high-quality services for all who need them. Expand services for all women suffering violence.

- For local councillors who are committed to opposing austerity and all cuts to local services, jobs, pay and conditions.
- For a socialist NHS to provide for everyone’s health needs, including dental and eye care – free at the point of use and under democratic control. Kick out the private companies! Nationalise the pharmaceutical industry under democratic workers’ control and management.
- Renationalise privatised utilities – including rail, mail, water, telecoms and power – under democratic workers’ control and management.
- Free, publicly funded and democratically run, good-quality education, available to all at any age. Abolish university tuition fees and write off student debt, end marketisation, and introduce a living grant. No to academisation. For all schools to be under the genuine democratic control of local education authorities, school staff, parents and student organisations.
- The right to a safe secure home for all. For the mass building of genuinely affordable, high-quality, carbon-neutral council housing. For rent controls that cap the level of rent. Fair rent decisions should be made by elected bodies of tenants, housing workers and representatives of trade unions. For cheap low-interest mortgages for home buyers. Nationalise the privately owned large building companies, land banks and estates.

ENVIRONMENT

- Prioritising major research and investment into replacing fossil fuels and nuclear power with renewable energy, and ending the problems of early obsolescence – where products are designed to ‘wear out’ and be replaced – and unrecycled waste.
- Nationalisation of the energy companies, under democratic workers’ control and management, with compensation paid only on the basis of proven need, in order to carry out a major switch to clean, green energy, without any loss of jobs, pay or conditions.
- A democratically planned, massively expanded, free to use, publicly owned transport system, as part of an overall plan against environmental pollution.
- For a major, publicly funded, insulation and energy transition plan for existing housing stock.
- Agribusiness to be taken into democratic public ownership. For a food processing and retail industry under workers’ control to ensure that standards are set by consumers, small farmers, and

all workers involved in the production, processing, distribution and retail of food.

DEMOCRATIC RIGHTS

- For united working-class struggle to end discrimination on the grounds of race, gender, disability, sexuality, age, and all other forms of prejudice and oppression.
- Repeal the anti-trade union laws and all others that trample over civil liberties. For the right to protest and to strike! End police harassment. For the police to be accountable to local committees, made up of democratically elected representatives of trade unions, local community organisations and local authorities.
- For the right to choose when and whether to have children – for the right to access abortion, contraception and fertility treatment for all who need it.
- For the right to asylum – with democratic community control and oversight of emergency funding resources. No to racist immigration laws.
- Expand democracy. For the abolition of the monarchy and the House of Lords. For all MPs to be subject to the right of recall by their constituents at any time, and to only receive a worker’s wage. For proportional representation and the right to vote at 16.
- For the right of nations to self-determination. For an independent socialist Scotland and for a socialist Wales, both part of a voluntary socialist confederation of Wales, England, Scotland and Ireland.
- Oppose the dictatorship of the billionaire owners of the media. For the nationalisation of newspaper printing facilities, radio, TV and social media platforms. Access to these facilities should be under democratic control, with political parties’ coverage being allocated in proportion to the popular vote at elections.
- For a new mass workers’ party, based on the trade unions, and drawing together workers, young people and activists from workplaces, and community, environmental, anti-racist and anti-cuts campaigns, to provide a fighting, socialist political alternative to the pro-big business parties.

SOCIALISM AND INTERNATIONALISM

- No to imperialist wars and occupations!
- Take the wealth off the super-rich! For a socialist government to take into public ownership the top 150 companies and the banking system that dominate the British economy, and run them under democratic working-class control and management. Compensation to be paid only on the basis of proven need, not to the fat cats.
- A democratic socialist plan of production based on the interests of the overwhelming majority of people, and in a way that safeguards the environment.
- No the EU bosses’ club. Organise a campaign with European socialists and workers’ organisations to use the talks on post-Brexit relations to tear up the EU pro-capitalist rules. For a real collaboration of the peoples of Europe on a socialist basis as a step towards a socialist world.

Do you agree? Join the fightback!

JOIN THE SOCIALISTS

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

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Tory private schemes bankrupt Thurrock Council

DAVE MURRAY
ESSEX SOCIALIST PARTY

Thurrock Borough Council in south east Essex has declared that it is £470 million short of balancing its budget – not bad when its budget is only £150 million. A local authority cannot go bankrupt, but its Section 114 declaration is the closest you can get.

Council services are now under the control of officers from Essex County Council. The government has bailed Conservative-controlled Thurrock out. It has authorised £850 million worth of borrowing from the Public Works Loans Board (PWLb) to allow the council to meet its obligations.

Many of Thurrock's problems started in 2016. Liam Kavanagh, CEO of Rockfire Capital, was pushing a scheme whereby his company would buy solar farms using money generated by issuing bonds to local authorities. Revenue from the solar farms would filter through his network of companies to the local authorities.

Thurrock invested heavily in Rockfire and other schemes. It used low-interest, short-term loans from

150 other local authorities to funnel hundreds of millions of pounds into commercial activities.

Tory councillors welcomed the income, praising the council's "entrepreneurial" approach. "The beautiful thing about this plan is that it's someone else's money," said one.

In February 2022, the money dried up following the liquidation of Rockfire. The assets now belong to Anyard Holdings, an Isle of Man registered company owned by a Mr L Kavanagh. We know this because the Bureau of Investigative Journalism spent three years trying to penetrate the council's secretive arrangements, and eventually forced the government to bring the curtain down.

The council now carries £850 million of PWLb debt, and is to impose a bonfire of jobs, a massacre of services and a fire sale of assets.

This must be resisted by the workers' movement, starting with local authority unions whose members will bear the brunt.

There must be no cuts to jobs, services or council workers' pay. Thurrock bin workers have already beaten thousands of pounds of pay cuts with strikes in 2021.



Thurrock council bin workers on strike in 2021. PHOTO: ESSEX SOCIALIST PARTY

Campaigners to seek judicial review in fight against Lancashire incinerator

LEWIS MELVILLE
STOP THE SIMONSWOOD INCINERATOR CAMPAIGN

Since plans were announced to build a medical incinerator by West Lancashire council in January 2022, the "Stop the Simonswood Incinerator Campaign" has seen overwhelming support from local residents. The campaign continued to build momentum in the months leading up to the final decision by the West Lancashire Development Control Committee, on the 7 December 2022, which approved the plans by a small margin.

Over 1,400 local residents had raised objection to the scheme, with a further 3,500 wider community members, citing that the proposal goes against World Health Organization standards. A similar site in Oldham saw an increase of 12% in cases of lung cancer in neighbouring areas.

There is currently 68,000 tons of unused capacity in neighbouring facilities, there is no need for such a medical incinerator to be built.

The current proposal shows that the incinerator will exceed the maximum advisory limit of PM2.5 (fine particle) emissions.

If the incinerator's construction goes through, it will have adverse effects for generations in the surrounding areas.

Socialist Party member Neill Dunne, committee member of the "Stop the Simonswood Incinerator" campaign, explained his disgust at the methods in which the planning application was approved: "It's really hard to accept when the committee consists of 12 members and, due to apologies, the vote went four to three in favour of approval with two abstentions. That's the hardest bit to take. How could a county that has declared a climate emergency

ignore all the medical and scientific evidence made available from our campaign?"

Neill continued: "Liverpool City Region Combined Authority has reported that 800 people die in Merseyside each year due to pollution alone. The effects of the incinerator will spread out in a circular radius of 8-10km. The increased cancer rates seen in Oldham would equate to a minimum of five extra deaths each year in the town of Kirkby alone – plus more in the other surrounding areas."

"The campaign has had support from thousands of residents as well as organisations and trade union branches, including Unite and Unison branches, Save Oglet Shore, Frack Free Lancashire, Save Liverpool

Womens Hospital, Save the Rimrose Valley"

Neill commented on the hard work achieved by the campaign in the space of eleven months: "Residents held meetings in February and March, leafleted the worst affected areas, organised a march in the summer, lobbied the planning committee on its visit to the proposed site in September. This forced a deferral of the Lancashire committee." It was only through the pressure of the campaign that the secretary of state intervened to force the meeting to be held with the campaign's attendance and contributions guaranteed. The anti-incinerator campaign will continue to keep up the pressure and will now seek options for a judicial review going forward.



Neill Dunne campaigning against the incinerator in Kirkby. PHOTO: STOP THE SIMONSWOOD INCINERATOR CAMPAIGN

Mae Sot garment workers file landmark lawsuit against Tesco

JUNE ANGUS
WEST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

130 former workers are suing Tesco for allegedly trapping them in 'effective forced labour' at the VKG Garment Factory (VKG) in Mae Sot, Thailand.

The garment workers manufactured denim for Tesco's F&F clothing line between 2017 and 2020. The lawsuit alleges that workers faced dangerous and illegal working conditions as well as pay that fell below Thailand's national minimum wage. The former workers claim that they often worked 99-hour weeks, for less than £4 per day. They reported numerous injuries due to unsafe conditions, as well as employees falling asleep or becoming unwell at their stations during long hours without breaks. Accommodation provided by the factory was also reported to be overcrowded and unsanitary.

Mae Sot, located on Thailand's border with Myanmar, is a hub for garment manufacturing, and is known to locals and those in the industry for its reliance on illegal exploitation of Burmese migrant labour. The workers allege that Tesco was aware of these abuses during its time working with the VKG Factory and did not take action.

In 2020, 136 workers were dismissed after asking for better pay and conditions in the wake of an audit carried out at VKG that exposed the factory's abuses. Later that year, the workers filed a case in Thailand, but did not win the full amount they had claimed for unpaid wages. Now, the case is being brought to British courts, marking the first time a UK company has faced legal threat from a foreign garment supplier that it does not own.

However, the situation leading to the lawsuit is far from unique. The

case has highlighted the exploitative nature of many multinational corporations in employing cheap and easily exploitable labour. Brands retailing primarily in wealthier countries rely on inexpensive labour, often in less economically developed countries, to manufacture their goods. Consumers demand lower prices, and retailers demand higher profits – the result is that workers often bear the brunt, working in squalor for low pay. Numerous scandals have erupted in the past over even luxury brands taking advantage of illegal labour and 'sweatshop' conditions.

Working classes in all regions will continue to suffer under profit-driven capitalism. Success for the former VKG employees can inspire continued action and organisation for workers across South East Asia and globally.

Public meeting organised by Socialist Party Black and Asian group

The struggles for socialism worldwide

SOCIALIST PARTY BLACK AND ASIAN GROUP

2022 went down as the year of crises and mass movements. Multiple crises – social, political, economic and environmental – are gripping countries across the world. Working-class and young people are faced with a wave of misery caused by the exploitative capitalist system.

While the world poverty level has increased, so has the wealth of the billionaires.

As the crisis of capitalism spreads and intensifies so does the attractiveness of the ideas of socialism to bring a world free of wars, poverty and oppression.

In 2022, we have seen what's needed to change the world. Working-class and young people are turning out to the streets en masse in heroic movements that have shaken the very core of their countries' establishments.

In Iran, the slogan "Woman, Life,

Freedom" galvanised a whole generation to rise against the dictatorship, repression and poverty. The inspiring mass uprising in Sri Lanka demonstrated to the world that when the masses have nothing to lose, no amount of brutal suppression is going to stop them.

We have also seen unprecedented strikes for pay rises and job security, against attacks on workers' terms and conditions. November 2022 saw the first national strike against South Africa's ANC government as workers defended themselves against an assault on public sector pay.

The Socialist Party Black and Asian group is organising a public meeting with key activists from South Africa, Nigeria and Sri Lanka.

Workers are looking for an alternative world over. Come and hear about these countries' struggles and how we can win the fight for socialism worldwide.

Saturday 28 January 3-5pm
YMCA Indian Student Hostel,
41 Fitzroy Square, London, W1T 6AQ



Protest in Amsterdam in solidarity with the mass movement in Iran. PERSIAN/DUTCH NETWORK (CC)



PHOTO: ALEX SMITH

Student cost-of-living crisis continues Come to Socialist Students 2023 conference

SOCIALIST STUDENTS

Students in 2023 are facing more cost-of-living misery. 91% of students at the end of last year were worried about living costs, according to the Office for National Statistics.

Rising costs aren't only causing us stress and worry however, they're having a direct effect on our ability to study. 29% of students reported they were skipping non-mandatory lectures or tutorials in order to save money, while around the same figure said they were choosing to study from home and attend lectures remotely.

Thousands of students have been forced to take on new debts just to get by – an indictment of the disgracefully low amount of financial support students have access to through student loans.

Under pressure from students, some universities have been forced to commit extra funding to student hardship funds, and to pay small emergency energy grants to students living off campus, like at the University of York. The battle for genuine cost-of-living grants for all students, linked to the building of a movement which fights for the funding our universities need from central government, will be a key task for students who want to fight back against the cost-of-living crisis this term.

Despite the brief escape home many students will have enjoyed over the Christmas holidays, all of the worry and anger students felt last term will start anew in 2023. There is potential for this anger to be channelled into an organised fightback against the cost-of-living crisis and the marketisation of our universities.

In the sixth richest society on the planet, where the super-rich billionaires have increased their wealth by 1,000% over the last three decades, the resources are there to scrap tuition fees and loans, and replace them with living grants which are tied to the rate of inflation to provide every student with a high-quality education. However those resources are in the hands of the bosses, put to work increasing their wealth instead of under the democratic control of workers and students for what we need.

Socialist Students is meeting this year on Saturday 18 March in Birmingham for its national conference. This conference will be open to any students and student societies who want to work to build a movement to say we will not be made to pay for the cost-of-living crisis. It will be a key event in the fight for cost of living grants, to end all cuts on campus and for free education.

£50,175 raised to fund the fight for socialism!

ISAI MARJERLA
SOCIALIST PARTY NATIONAL TREASURER

The Socialist Party is extremely pleased to announce that we have ended the fourth quarter of 2022 having raised £50,175 for our fighting fund. This includes £34,204 donations by members and supporters at our Socialism 2022 event.

Last year was a financially difficult year for many workers and young people. The cost-of-living crisis, increase in inflation, wage stagnation, and onslaught by the bosses mean that masses of people are struggling to make end meets. Given the hardship and difficulties facing ordinary people, the Socialist Party is grateful for all the donations we received during all our public activities and in the Socialism 2022 appeal.

We have been campaigning for a real pay rise. And we have been supporting the numerous strikes that have been taking place – we have been on picket lines with the bus drivers, nurses, ambulance drivers, rail and postal workers, as well as others.

Christmas traditionally has been a quieter time for our members. But not this year! When workers were on

strike during the festive season, Socialist Party members have been out to support them. We were alongside postal workers on Christmas Eve, bringing solidarity and discussing with them how to win the struggle for a pay rise. We have been pushing for a massive strike fund organised by the TUC or individual unions to assist those workers on the front line.

Our demand for a 24-hour general strike was well received. Strikers agree that we need to coordinate strikes and for all sectors to strike together.

As we say in our new year statement (see p6-8) – the Socialist Party enters 2023 full of optimism. We are confident in our ideas and in the working class to deliver the socialist change we need. We have a programme of action and a strategy to achieve it.

All donations we receive will aid that process. Thank you for continuing to support the Socialist Party.

Help fund the fightback
DONATE
socialistparty.org.uk/donate

SOCIALIST PARTY FIGHTING FUND		Q4: OCTOBER-DECEMBER 2022		
AREA	£ RECEIVED	£ TARGET		%
South West	5,784	1,800		321%
Eastern	3,182	1,200		265%
East Midlands	4,235	1,850		229%
London	8,860	4,600		193%
Southern & SE	4,494	2,350		191%
Wales	4,307	2,300		187%
Northern	1,389	750		185%
West Midlands	4,689	2,600		180%
Yorkshire	3,798	2,550		149%
North West	1,489	1,150		129%
Other	8,080	3,850		210%
TOTAL	50,306	25,000		201%

Strike wave continues... TRADE UNION LEADERS MUST NAME THE DATE TO STRIKE TOGETHER!

Strike wave dates

Rail

- RMT: 3,4,6,7 January
- Aslef: 5 January

NHS

- Nurses, RCN in England: 18,19 January
- Ambulances: 11 January GMB and Unison, 23 January Unison

Civil service

- PCS members are participating in targeted action throughout January in the National Highways, DVSA, DVLA, DWP and Rural Payments

Scottish teachers

- EIS, SSTA, NASUWT: 10-11 January

Strike votes pending

- NEU teachers - vote closes 13 January
- NASUWT teachers - vote closes 9 January
- FBU firefighters - vote closes 30 January
- BMA junior doctors - vote opens 9 January



PHOTO: PAUL MATSSON

2023 is beginning as 2022 ended, with significant nationwide strike action, this time of railway workers in RMT and Aslef. Postal workers continue their fight against Royal Mail bosses and are gearing up for a mandatory re-balot after six months of strikes. NHS workers, nurses and ambulance workers have more strike dates set for this month. Civil servants in PCS across numerous government agencies continue their targeted strikes.

And even more sets of workers could join the fold. Teachers in NEU

and NASUWT have strike votes that come to an end on 13 and 9 January respectively. Firefighters in FBU have a vote that ends on 30 January. Junior doctors in the BMA will start their strike vote on 9 January.

The reasons to strike are only growing. Household income is set to fall by another 3.8% on average in 2023, an even bigger hit than in 2022, according to the Resolution Foundation. Pensions and benefits continue to fall further behind the real cost of living, and public services like the NHS are crumbling from

years of underfunding, profiteering and neglect.

The attacks of the bosses and the government are not just directed at one section of workers, they are an attempt to make the whole working class pay for the crisis. No truck can be given to attempts by politicians and the right-wing media to divide strikers into those 'deserving' and 'undeserving' of a pay rise. All workers need a pay rise that at least matches inflation.

Terrified of workers' growing confidence and preparedness to fight,

Rishi Sunak is talking up new punitive anti-strike laws. The response from the workers' movement to such attacks must go beyond legal challenges to include coordinated strike action.

The leaderships of the trade unions are meeting in the first weeks of the year to decide their strategy moving forward. The Socialist Party supports the demand being made by strikers on the picket lines to 'all strike together'. The TUC should name the date for all those workers with a live strike mandate to take

action together, potentially in early February to maximise numbers involved, as a major step towards a 24-hour general strike. If the TUC leaders refuse to act, the willing trade union leaders themselves must take responsibility to arrange such action.

United workers' action on this scale would be a clear demonstration of workers' huge potential collective power, it would further boost workers' confidence and further tighten the screws on the Tories and the bosses.