

ALL STRIKE TOGETHER

- **Save our NHS**
- **Fight for inflation-proof pay rises**
- **Defeat new anti-union laws**

HELEN PERRIAM

NHS MENTAL HEALTH NURSE, CARDIFF WEST SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBER

No lunch break in six years, over an hour every day over my contracted hours. All so as not to let patients down. And now the Tories are telling us to work harder!

I work in a broken system - the NHS - criminally underfunded and understaffed. At every turn we're faced with a lack of staff to provide the care people need.

Nurses are leaving the profession in their thousands because they cannot take the unbearable pressure of what is being asked of them, and for pay that is not keeping up with inflation. Nurses have had a pay cut of 20% over the last 12 years of Tory government.

What's the answer? Working-class people standing shoulder-to-shoulder on the picket lines, refusing to accept current pay and conditions. We demand a dignified inflation-proof pay rise that reflects the important job we do, safe staffing levels, and access to helpful and meaningful therapies and care for all.

Stop the continued back-door privatisation of the NHS and bring all people working for the NHS back in-house on the same contracts, with no compensation for the fat-cat privatisers.

There's enough money for a fully funded health service. The UK is the sixth-richest country in the world and there's always money when the rich 'need' it.

Asking the government nicely to "please pay us more" doesn't work. That's why we have called on the leaders of the Trades Union Congress (TUC) to act by coordinating the strikes, building towards striking together on one day - effectively a 24-hour general strike to show we won't be bullied anymore.

If Labour, as its leadership has shown so far, is not prepared to support strike action, then we need a new party that does. One that puts ordinary people's needs first and not those of billionaire bosses.

We can do it! By striking together we can save the NHS!

● **More on NHS crisis on page 5**



PHOTOS: PAUL MATTSSON

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

Karl Marx

MP pay is up, our pay is down

HARRISON CAIRNS

NORTHAMPTON SOCIALIST PARTY

Since the last general election in 2019, Tory MPs have taken £15.2 million from second incomes. Former prime minister Theresa May leads the way, with £2.5 million from giving talks to organisations such as JP Morgan bank and private equity firm Apax Partners.

She's followed closely by Boris Johnson. He accumulated £1 million for just four speeches, according to the Daily Mirror at £30,000 an hour.

This isn't unique to the Tories. Liberal Democrat MPs have taken £171,000, while Scottish National Party (SNP) representatives have taken £149,000.

Right-wing Labour MPs have accepted tens of thousands of pounds from MPM Connect, a company with no obvious line of business. Keir Starmer has earned an extra £26,000 from legal work, while serving as an MP prior to becoming leader of the Labour Party.

This is on top of their £84,144 salary. Many workers could only dream of earning this.



PHOTO: PAUL MATTSOON

2022 was hottest year ever - more capitalist climate failure

DEJI OLAYINKA

SOUTH WEST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

2022 was officially the UK's hottest year on record. The Met Office has confirmed that climate change has driven the UK into its first year with an average temperature above 10°C.

There's no sign of this letting up as we enter 2023, with a January heatwave that's affected 15 European countries. 1 January 2023 was the hottest ever recorded in eight countries. Scientists are particularly worried that it's been 4-5°C hotter than previous records.

This may be a temporary relief for our wallet, given the rise in energy prices, but the environmental costs are massive.

Last year's COP27 climate summit, like its predecessors, failed to deliver the changes needed to save our planet. Corporations won't make the necessary changes because it would harm their short-term profits. Capitalist nations aren't willing or able to impose the

changes needed to save our planet, because they know polluting companies would just move their operations elsewhere.

Rishi Sunak didn't even mention climate change in his first speech of the year. But it is on the minds of the capitalists.

Corporations are 'greenwashing' their brands. Their profit-driven system can't solve climate change.

With Environment Agency workers set to strike over pay, it's clear the Tories won't put the money where it's needed. Labour's proposal for 'GB Energy' to compete in the capitalist market is not enough.

We need full nationalisation of the energy industry, major banks and commanding heights of the economy. That would allow us to implement a democratic socialist planned economy that could reorientate the scientific and engineering skills of the working class towards the goal of solving the environmental crisis, and improving the lives of workers across the globe.



PHOTO: LIMA ANDRUSKA/CC

Wholesale gas prices fall, but we won't benefit

ADAM GILMAN

READING SOCIALIST PARTY

Wholesale gas prices are lower now than at the start of the war in Ukraine, and are a quarter of what they were last autumn.

However, working-class people are still paying record-high amounts in their household bills. Energy suppliers buy their gas in advance to protect their short-term profit, so lower prices won't be immediately passed onto consumers.

Energy companies have enjoyed

huge profits at the expense of households in the last year - prices surged, but their costs remained much the same.

Shell paid £0 in windfall tax, despite record global profit of £26 billion in the first nine months of 2022. And ExxonMobil has launched a legal challenge against even the minimal windfall tax

This is why companies like Shell, ExxonMobil and the other energy giants should taken into public ownership - nationalised under democratic workers' control and management to reduce our bills and ensure jobs are reallocated to more environmentally friendly sustainable work.



PHOTO: PETER ASQUITH/CC

Meet new Tory anti-union laws with coordinated strike action



WHAT WE THINK

Tory Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's new year message included finally declaring his intention to bring in yet more anti-union laws. A bill was introduced to Parliament on 10 January. This must be seen by the whole trade union movement as a declaration of war on the democratic rights of workers and their ability to fight back against the brutal cost-of-living squeeze. There must be an immediate united response from across the unions, with determined action, up to and including the preparation for a 24-hour general strike.

Sunak's plan would place him in a long line of Tory prime ministers, going back to Ted Heath, Margaret Thatcher and John Major, who have implemented anti-union legislation over the last four decades and more. His promised restrictions would be on top of what are already the most restrictive laws in western Europe.

Plans include imposing 'minimum service levels' on ambulance, fire and rail services. Failure to comply would bring the threat of unions being sued and workers sacked. Unions' failure to agree minimum service levels in education, border security, and other health and transport services among others would lead to their imposition in these areas too.

The existing undemocratic industrial action ballot thresholds, brought in by David Cameron's government in 2016, mean that at least 50% of members have to vote, with a simple majority not sufficient for a legal mandate. Hardly any councillor, or an MP elected on a typical by-election poll, would comply with these rules!

Last March, 800 P&O workers were viciously sacked, some put in handcuffs and dragged off their ferries, in a move the company's CEO admitted to MPs was illegal. The firm has got off scot-free and the workers are still out of a job.

Sunak's announcement will be another confirmation to workers that this capitalist system and its laws are rigged against them.

But while Sunak is looking to follow Thatcher's example, this is far from a strong Tory government. He is the third Conservative prime minister in six months, as the Tories reel from one crisis to another. The basis for this is the weakening economy and soaring cost of living, which is being met by the biggest and broadest strike wave for years.

Boris Johnson posed more draconian anti-strike laws, in particular



The unions must name the date for a co-ordinated strike, on the scale of a 24-hour general strike



TUC demo 18 June 2022 PHOTO: OXFORD SOCIALIST PARTY

'minimum service levels' for rail and transport workers, in his first Queen's Speech after winning the December 2019 general election. The Covid crisis and the subsequent Tory meltdowns have kept it on ice.

But the union leaders have to take this threat seriously, far more than the union leaders did in 2015-16 when Cameron brought in the Trade Union Act. Then, not one national weekend demonstration was called, let alone any strike action. Now, coming in the midst of the strike wave and as prices spiral, workers will fully understand the purpose behind the new laws - to try and hamstring them while the employers, including this Tory government, impose effective pay cuts.

The Trades Union Congress (TUC) must give a lead, to bring together the trade union leaders in a 'council of war', and plan how to bring together the hundreds of thousands if not millions of workers who are taking action and balloting to do so. And if the TUC leaders falter, the trade

union leaders willing to lead the fight must take the initiative. The unions must name the date for a co-ordinated strike, on the scale of a 24-hour general strike. A national Saturday demonstration near that date too would mobilise all the anger against the attack on our incomes and the anti-union laws.

This would be a beacon to all workers, especially the young and unorganised, who can be brought into the ranks of the unions. Already Amazon workers, who walked out unofficially last summer after bosses 'raised' their wages by a meagre 35p an hour, have become unionised and are going on strike in Coventry on 25 January.

Mass pressure needs to be levered on to the union leaders. In his first press interview, new TUC General Secretary Paul Nowak appeared to play down the possibility of a general strike but such is the anger of workers, he had to then agree with the idea of co-ordinated action.

Even Labour leader Keir Starmer

has said that, while Labour "will look at what they bring forward," if it is "further restrictions then we would repeal it." But workers will remember his lack of support for their strikes and his warnings of "tough choices". If even a small workers' party existed, with one or two left MPs, some anti-cuts councillors and union support, it could exert huge pressure on Starmer, but more importantly offer a real political alternative for workers, strengthening their strike action.

The Tories are in crisis, weak and divided, and are lashing out. But the threat of new anti-union laws is a real one. At TUC Congress last autumn, outgoing general secretary Frances O'Grady warned the Tories, at that time led by Truss: "We'll see you in court". Workers must ensure that the real response is a fighting one, from the picket line and the streets - like the 20,000 striking posties that filled Parliament Square on 9 December. That is the real mood, if it is mobilised, the Tories and the employers they represent can be defeated.



Cuts make youth services unsafe

LINDSEY MORGAN
PARENT AND SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBER

Years of funding cuts to youth groups, sports clubs, and a whole variety of places young people could safely spend their time mean that resources are stretched very thin across 'out-of-school settings'.

Services, previously under clear local authority control, are now being run by a whole range of groups. With less oversight from local-authority safeguarding procedures, young people are put at risk of harm.

A government report states that some young people were in immediate danger due to unsafe premises, unchecked staff and inappropriate practices. Education watchdog Ofsted, or even the police, have been contacted for incidents of verbal abuse, grooming, child sexual abuse

and the risk of sex offenders working in these settings.

Too few resources are again putting young people at risk of serious harm. This has been the experience of austerity for so many young people – their safety comes second to money and finance.

The government's answer has been to draw up some proposals. But it's unclear if any serious funding will be allocated for them to be enacted.

And without real democratic oversight of these services, under local authority control, where the users rather than the profits are prioritised, these risks to safety will continue.

Youth services need to be fully resourced, publicly owned, and under the democratic control of young people, youth workers, and the wider community to be made safe.

Cuts and low pay force teachers out

1/3 of teachers who qualified in England in the last decade have since quit

Nearly a third of teachers who qualified in England in the last decade have since quit. If that sounds a lot, it's because it is.

350,000 qualified teachers not currently teaching. Thousands are leaving in Wales and Scotland too.

It's clear what is to blame. Years of low pay, now exacerbated by inflation and the cost-of-living crisis.

At the same time, due to Tory cuts and austerity, schools are in the grip of funding crisis. Thousands of schools are even planning redundancies. In November, unions warned that 54% of schools will go into financial deficit this academic year.

That's why those still teaching are balloting for strike action in England and Wales – and already are walking out in Scotland.

The figures on teachers quitting were released by the Labour Party

after analysis of Department for Education figures. But Labour's announcement was not accompanied by any solutions.

Labour's only policy is to end tax breaks for private schools to fund a few thousand new teachers. But with Labour promising a continuation of Tory austerity, even this looks dubious.

THE SOCIALIST PARTY CALLS FOR:

- Investment in education – reverse school cuts and reduce class sizes
- Inflation-busting pay rises for teachers – end performance pay, win national pay scales and workload limits for all
- An end to academies – bring all schools, including private schools, under democratic local control

350,000 qualified teachers are not currently teaching

Bus services need change now



CHRIS SAMPSON

CHARLIE ROWLAND
OXFORDSHIRE BUS USER

Like many others, I'm no stranger to the state of public transport, primarily bus services. Whether run by Oxford city or Stagecoach, both privatised bus services come with major issues.

Stagecoach has been increasing ticket prices continuously throughout 2022. For example, for me to go from Botley to Eynsham and back – a relatively short journey – costs £4.30. It might not sound much, but as I'm doing this every day, the costs add up scarily quickly!

The government has introduced a temporary £2 cap for all single bus tickets. To put it bluntly, this is completely useless. People bussing around normally get return tickets, and many single tickets don't reach £2.

Angry about service

Riding the buses, I witness drivers constantly confronted by passengers angry about the quality of service. It's not surprising bus drivers are scarce, or that many are choosing to strike.

Services are overcrowded and infrequent. My mother gets the 33 home from work every day and when that bus doesn't come, she is made to wait another hour for the next one.

The companies have offered no insight into how they intend to improve

services. The simple reason is they're too uptight to do so. As long as the bus companies make a profit, people suffering in the cold needing to get home is not a factor for the bosses. They want to run fewer services and keep driver wages low to boost profits.

By why should a few very rich individuals profit from our need to get around and to work? Bus services should be brought into democratic public ownership, with no compensation to the existing fat-cat owners. Service users and bus workers could then plan services to meet the needs of communities, and also make transport free.

The country has more billionaires than ever, why not take that wealth and put it to good use by fully funding a free, high-quality public transport system in the interests of people and the planet?

We will fight Berkshire bus cuts

ADAM GILMAN
READING SOCIALIST PARTY

Last year, the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) started a campaign to stop the bus cuts happening all around Berkshire. Wokingham Borough Council introduced

an hourly service to Reading, only after our campaign put pressure on the bus companies and local councils.

Passenger numbers went up by 45% with this new service. It has a lot of flaws, like no Sunday or bank holiday service, but it was something.

A Lib Dem-led coalition won control of Wokingham Council from the Tories last year. The previous Tory administration had left lots of the local bus services with no funding. But now the Lib Dems, with the support of Labour, are making cuts in other areas.

The council recently bid to keep the 600 route to Riseley. But the council put in a low bid, causing the council to lose the contract beyond March. This is being used an excuse to cut the service.

But that's not all. The Lib Dem, Labour and 'independent' coalition council has cut some bin collections. They only just got into power!

These bus cuts are horrific. They will worsen the lives of many people, and affect vulnerable people worst.

WE DEMAND:

- All public services to be taken back into public ownership
- For all cuts and austerity measure since 2010 to be reversed
- For local councils to implement legal no-cuts budgets and fight central government for the funding

Tory 'work harder' insult to NHS staff

Immediately after talks between the health trade unions and the government on 9 January, Onay Kasab, Unite the Union's lead national officer, was interviewed by the media.

All the government are interested in is saying in order to justify a payment, then we need to find, we need to come up with, 'productivity savings' in the NHS. That is absolutely ludicrous.

We are talking about people who are working well beyond their contracted hours anyway, just to get the job done, because they can't hand patients over, and because they care so much.

For the government to be talking about 'productivity' in exchange for a pay award is an insult to every single one of our members. You all know what's going on in hospitals. You all know how hard everybody is working. Today is an insult.

The government have missed another opportunity to put this right. We came here in good faith.

What they want to talk about is productivity. Productivity when our members are working 18-hour shifts. How you become more productive with that, I do not know.

- And when asked if the strikes go on, Onay Kasab said: "Absolutely yes".
- See Onay Kasab's full interview on the Sky News channel on YouTube – 'Unite boss's anger at government offer over strikes'



Paramedics in Unison on strike in south London ANDY BEADLE

Below-inflation pay offers will not ease NHS crisis

JOHN MALCOLM
UNISON HEALTH BRANCH SECRETARY FOR TEES, ESK AND WEAR VALLEYS (PERSONAL CAPACITY)

Following unproductive talks between the government and a number of unions, there has been talk of a one-off payment for health workers, and a pay deal for next year, 2023-24, backdated only as far as January 2023.

This could effectively mean a two-year deal worth as little as 4%, far short of the above-inflation pay rise demanded by health unions.

A one-off payment would be an 'unconsolidated' lump sum. It wouldn't contribute anything to our pensions. And it would mean next year our pay would be just as low as it is now.

Not going away

The cost-of-living crisis is not going to go away, and the economy is heading for recession. Lump sums and below-inflation pay offers will not address the staff shortages and increase recruitment. Staff are leaving for less stressful and better-paid work in retail and other industries.

Unions should hold firm for what is needed. A real-terms 'consolidated' pay rise, proofed against future cost-of-living rises, and sufficient to tackle the staff crisis.

Coordinated strike action across the public sector and other industries is the way forward to win decent pay, massive investment in the NHS, and defeat the Tories.

Cuts mean our patients are not getting better

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

HELEN PERRIAM
NHS MENTAL HEALTH NURSE, SOUTH WALES

Our unit treats elderly people in crisis. They are at risk of being admitted to an inpatient bed, or the loved ones that care for them are at risk. Our service provides a vital role supporting those people to get better, through a range of therapies and treatments.

Although much in demand, we are often unable to provide the care we need to because of a lack of resources and funding. For example, we are often unable to offer patients enough time to complete treatment due to pressure on spaces.

Another crisis

These people will invariably have another crisis, because their first period of attendance was not long enough to treat the cause of their mental ill

health, and return to our unit multiple times.

Furthermore, when we reach the point of discharge, there are not enough community mental health nurses to support the person to continue to get better or remain well. In the area we cover, there are four community mental health nurses in post. There should be 12.

Another example of how patients are being let down is lack of access to community activities and therapies.

Those that are available are few and far between, tricky to get to with mobility problems, or the centre has closed due to lack of funding. The overarching problem that links all these issues is lack of funding, lack of resources and lack of nurses.

WHAT'S YOUR VIEW?
editors@socialistparty.org.uk

An anxious night in A&E with no doctors

I'm so grateful for the NHS, but at every level it is in crisis. The staff are working so hard doing what they can, but it's firefighting.

When our ten-month-old was unwell, we tried three pharmacies before we could get antibiotics. Our GP told us that if he got worse, to take him to hospital, which we ended up having to do at 10pm. We waited in A&E for over eleven hours before being seen by a doctor.

We are so glad our baby didn't deteriorate in that time. But we saw

other children become extremely sick while waiting. One became a medical emergency after having a seizure in the waiting room she had already been in for four hours.

At 4.30am emotions started to spill over. An off-duty paramedic waiting with his son questioned why no one was being seen, explaining he would miss his shift, further adding to the shortages. The receptionist answered there was no doctor on the ward.

During the night, the children's A&E shares doctors with adult services, and they had higher-priority cases there. No one was seen at all for three hours.

It wasn't just doctor shortages. I noticed the department stats showed

they have five nursing and three healthcare assistant vacancies.

Despite saying they would take regular observations, no one was checking on us. At 6am I became really worried, my son was burning up.

I tracked down a nurse to take his temperature, which turned out to be really high. I burst into tears, exhausted from a long night, worried about our son and anxious that, despite doing everything we had been told, he was getting sicker and no staff were in a position to help us. It was a further five hours until we were seen by a doctor.

This was just one night in one small emergency department. I never want to step foot in that place again, and

I'm sure many of the staff often feel the same.

The need for a fight to restore NHS services is clear. Supporting the NHS workers' strikes is a vital part of that.

Not the first time this has happened to us

JULIETTE FOGELMAN
ENFIELD AND LEA VALLEY SOCIALIST PARTY

Parents are being warned to be vigilant about Strep A and Scarlet Fever. So when I noticed my 16-month-old

son Tate had a rash and fever, I called the GP.

After being in the call queue for 35 minutes, there were no appointments. Then I waited 45 minutes on 111 to be told somebody would call back. Two and a half hours later I was told I should get him seen within 12 hours. But I had to call back the GP, which was now shut, to tell them this.

If the GP won't see us, then we need to call back 111 at 6pm, for an out-of-hours appointment, which you can't pre-book. All feels ridiculous!

It's not the first time something like this has happened to us. And it's not surprising considering how underfunded and understaffed the NHS is.

UCU debates uni strike strategy - step up the action

BEA GARDNER

SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBER IN UCU

University disputes are at a critical juncture as the University and Colleges Union (UCU) decides the nature of and timescale for future industrial action strategy in the two ongoing disputes over pay, pensions, and conditions. Socialist Party members in UCU call for a serious timetable of action to be announced, which utilises our current historic mandate. We also say the UCU should take the lead in co-ordinating action with other unions to build for a one-day general strike.

Across the union, members are engaged in serious discussion about the next steps. Members have made it clear they want to make effective use of our mandate, which has already seen 70,000 members called out in November - the largest-ever strike action taken by university workers. The employers have agreed to re-enter negotiations in the pay dispute, a critical question is: What strategy will force their hand?

Stop-and-start action

After years of stop-and-start action in these disputes, members are determined to see action extend into the summer term if necessary. Under current anti-union legislation, a fresh ballot will be required if a deal is not reached by 20 April when our current strike mandate expires.

A key question is whether or not to go ahead with a planned marking and assessment boycott from 23 January, followed by an all-out, indefinite nationwide strike from February. This was the strategy agreed at a



Higher Education Committee (HEC) meeting in November, but kept from members (for legal reasons, so we are told) until a controversial video was released by the general secretary in December. The video, posted across social media platforms, fired shots at the HEC in an attempt to win support for alternative, scaled back

proposals. The general secretary's actions risk undermining the unity and confidence built in November's strikes.

In branches, many members were understandably confused by the video and subsequent counter-proposal circulated to all members. Until then, we only had guidance from head

office outlining the planned timetable for negotiations until the end of January.

Importantly, the practical steps needed to build for both the boycott and indefinite action have not been carried out by union headquarters, such as taking steps to build the strike fund. Instead, many union

officials seem fixed on avoiding the action by pressuring the HEC to amend its strategy when it meets on Thursday 12 January.

A variety of alternative proposals has now been circulated, though branches have not been formally consulted on them.

The general secretary's proposal delays the marking and assessment boycott and proposes a strategy similar to that of previous years, with sets of two- and three-day strikes during February and March. It promises further escalating action down the road, but what confidence can members have that this will be realised? Back in November the general secretary claimed we would shut down universities this term but has since backed down on that.

Confidence

Members need to have confidence that the union's leadership will back the decisions made without further attempts to bypass union democracy.

Co-ordination with other unions should also feature in the strategy. UCU could take the lead on this to beat the Tories' latest anti-union laws and build for a one-day general strike.

There are twists and turns in any dispute, but we remain in a strong position. The large picket lines and rallies in November demonstrated the determination of members to utilise this mandate and to win significant gains in these disputes. With the Tories under mounting pressure from the strike wave and more unions entering the fray, now is not the time to scale back but to push on to victory.

Civil servants continue targeted strikes insulting government pay offer



Members of PCS union are taking strike action across government departments in January, including National Highways, Rural Payments Agency, DVLA and DVSA. Dave Warren, retired DVLA worker, reports from Swansea.

Socialist Party members joined around a dozen cold but determined pickets at 6am on Monday 9 January outside the DVLA premises in

Swansea. PCS members who process medical driving licence applications are on strike all week as part of the union's campaign of targeted industrial action. A local radio reporter who turned up to interview the pickets got a blunt reply when he asked whether the pay claim of 10% was realistic. "Of course it is," said one. "It's the government's insulting offer of 2% that's unrealistic. We have to live. We've got bills to pay."

Come to PCS Broad Left Network conference

KATRINE WILLIAMS

The PCS Broad Left Network (BLN) is holding its 2023 conference on Saturday 14 January on Zoom. The BLN is the socialist rank-and-file group in the union, which Socialist Party members support.

The conference will discuss all the key issues facing PCS members - most importantly determining a strategy to win the national campaign on pay and jobs. At a time when other unions are taking national all-member action, our union leadership's hesitation to call national action stands in stark contrast. This has to change - a major escalation of action is needed to win.

The conference will also agree the BLN programme and slate for the union's 2023 President and National Executive elections.

- The conference is on Zoom on Saturday 14 January, 11am to 4pm
- Meeting ID: 851 9331 3513
- Passcode: 672871
- The conference is open to all PCS members, BLN supporters, and those interested in finding out more about the BLN

Defend sacked CWU reps



STEVE SCORE

LEICESTER SOCIALIST PARTY

In their desperation to hamper the Communication Workers Union (CWU)'s battle for decent pay and to defend terms and conditions, Royal Mail bosses have turned to union busting tactics.

130 CWU reps have been suspended on trumped-up charges since the dispute began. Seven have so far been summarily dismissed, some just before Christmas, and more are waiting to hear if they will be sacked. Bosses want to take out the most effective union organisers.

A statement by CWU South Midlands branch points out: "These are targeted attacks orchestrated by senior managers at the very top of the company"

In Leicester for example, four have been suspended so far. The CWU's battle is not just about the current dispute, but also the right to effectively organise. It is an attack on the whole trade union movement in addition to the Tories' planned anti-union laws.

We are now in an increasingly bitter period of class struggle and we need a united response from the whole movement.

Rail strikes

Liverpool RMT picket stops strike-breaking management

ROGER BANNISTER
LIVERPOOL SOCIALIST PARTY

RMT strikers were joined by other trade unionists and supporters, including Socialist Party members, at Merseyrail's Kirkdale Depot on Saturday 7 January, where strike-breaking managers were undertaking the work of the strikers, including crucial signalling work.

Almost 100 people were present at 5.45 am, approximately fifteen minutes before a Network Rail van arrived leading a convoy of strike breakers.

These vehicles were unable to move for around two hours. Two police officers arrived, but left when assurances were given by local RMT leaders that emergency vehicles would be let through if necessary.

Pickets sang "RMT, RMT, RMT, RMT, send the scabs packing, RMT" to the tune of the Beatles song 'Let It Be'!

One striker told me that he had been given six months of intensive training before he was allowed to operate a signal box, but these managers had just watched a few videos!

There was understandable anger at Merseyrail compromising safety in this way.

Eventually the strike breakers abandoned attempts to drive in and relied on the police to get them across the picket line on foot. However, the action had closed Merseyrail's northern line, which services four separate destinations from the city centre, and led to the cancellation of at least fourteen trains.

Train drivers defiant in face of planned anti-union laws

Mark Sarson, train driver at Leicester and Aslef member, spoke to The Socialist on the fifth day of strike action on 5 January:

"The company failed to make a pay offer for 2022 and we have not had a pay rise for four years now. Leicester is strong and 100% and will remain that way until we get what we want from the dispute.

"I don't think the new government anti-union proposals on minimum service levels will work anyway, it's failed to work in other European countries where they've got similar kinds of service requirements on railways.

"But it's an attack on trade unionists and workers across the UK and our ability to strike. It tries to silence and control us. It's like going back to Victorian times and a draconian way of controlling workers."



Socialist Party members join Merseyrail RMT strikers and other trade unionists in support ROGER BANNISTER

Hackney library workers strike to save jobs and the service



JAMES IVENS
LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

"They are just like Tories." That's the judgement on Hackney's Labour council from a striking library worker on 10 January.

Members of public service union Unison picketed CLR James and Hackney Central libraries, then held a vibrant rally outside Central library, opposite the chief executive's office in the town hall.

The east London borough sent 99 library staff a letter in September kindly informing them their posts were deleted. The 'restructure' would mean only some of them can stay on in 'new' posts.

They all have to make the case for why they should be given the jobs they have done for years. One was up late into the night writing a 1,000-word essay.

That means the loss of quality jobs to the area. It means the loss of years of experience. In the end it will mean the further decline of a multifaceted service that many rely on.

The council talks it up as an upgrade in the jobs and service. You don't upgrade a service by reducing staffing!

The real reason for the cuts? It will 'save' £250,000 - money that the Labour council would rather let the Tory government take out of our services than mount a fight to defend.

At least, it was £250,000 to begin with. Then the council decided top management needed more pay. Suddenly, they needed to find £300,000 of cuts from library staff!

Another £145,000 has also been taken out of the staffing budget for so-called development purposes. So nearly half a million has been

slashed from the frontline staff budget. At the same time, around £800,000 will be paid out in redundancy, severance payments, and early retirement. All this from a Labour council!

But it's workers who actually make the libraries function at all. They deal with all sorts. Not just books, and looking after young people who need advice and study spaces.

Austerity in other services means homelessness, domestic violence victims, substance abuse, and more are regular issues librarians must navigate. They are understaffed as it is, and security doesn't even arrive at some sites till 3.15pm.

So this strike has been a long time coming. It follows strikes by other Hackney council staff in housing maintenance, refuse and SEND (special educational needs and disabilities) driving. The Labour council kindly put on "support" for "colleagues" who broke the strike - a 'training day' with free lunch. The Unison branch protested outside.

Unison branch chair and Socialist Party member Brian Debus pointed the finger at the town hall opposite. Senior managers there are on six figures, and paying strike-breakers over the odds, all while pleading poverty!

Instead, as National Shop Stewards Network chair Rob Williams and Unison national executive member Hugo Pierre pointed out, they could demand the money Hackney needs from the government, and work with the unions, not against them.

If they won't, we need representatives like those striking library workers fighting politically too. The unions should launch a new party for the working class to fight Tory and Labour cutters.

Shelter workers' strike leads to improved pay offer

NATHAN MURTAGH
SHEFFIELD SHELTER WORKER AND UNITE MEMBER

Following homelessness charity Shelter's unacceptable 2022-2023 pay offer of 3% plus one-off lump sums, Unite the Union members in Shelter planned industrial action for 12 days in December.

We are aware of the importance of the work we do, and how many thousands of people rely on our services. From our tireless frontline emergency advice lines to our brilliant policy team, from our fundraisers to our retail staff, Shelter is a valuable force. It shines light on

successive government inaction on providing safe and affordable social housing to a nation which is crying out for homes.

We knew that without a proper consolidated pay rise, the services we provide would suffer. Many, including myself, would have to consider taking better-paid work in other sectors of employment. We are well-used to the 'goodwill tax' that charity workers pay (putting up with low pay), but the cost-of-living crisis would push us past the boundaries of goodwill.

On the tenth day of planned action, union stewards returned to



ACAS talks and secured an offer of 7% plus retention of the majority of one-off payments. In a vote, this pay offer passed with a 95% acceptance rate on an 85% turnout of members.

Collective action is never easy, but without it, there is no doubt that we could not have achieved the pay offer that we have. A consolidated increase of 7% means that the dedicated and talented staff at Shelter can continue to fight for homes.

Withdrawing our labour and standing together in solidarity has given us the opportunity to re-emphasise the value of our labour, and through that ensure that we do not lose the expertise that keeps Shelter operating at the level required to continue to fight for those who rely on our services.

Get all the latest union news
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NSSN bulletin: shopstewards.net

NICK HART

SOCIALIST PARTY NATIONAL COMMITTEE

“Liz Truss resigns after failed budget and market turmoil”; “more than 40% of mortgages withdrawn as market reels after mini-budget”; “Sunak says higher taxes and spending cuts needed to satisfy markets”. For a period of weeks last autumn, the news was full of updates on the upheaval gripping the UK financial system following the unveiling of the Tories’ ‘mini-budget’ at the end of September.

Many working and middle class people were left wondering why the cost of their mortgage or credit card had shot up by hundreds of pounds a month in some cases, simply due to one speech made in parliament by Kwasi Kwarteng.

Who are these ‘markets’? How do they have the power to dictate the actions of governments and force out prime ministers? And what role have they had in the cost-of-living crisis?

The ‘markets’ in the broadest sense of the term can cover a wide variety of ways capitalists move their money about in the hope of accumulating more. These include shares in publicly traded companies on the world’s stock exchanges, claims on government and commercial debt through bonds, and trading in currencies, insurance, precious metals and commodities.

Like many aspects of capitalism, the trading activity carried out on the financial markets came about not in a way that was thought through, but unevenly and chaotically in response to the needs of the capitalist class to fund their business activities and thereby increase their personal wealth.

As the emerging capitalist classes launched ventures in the 17th and 18th centuries, such as the South Sea and East India companies to exploit the natural resources and people of the Americas, Africa and Asia, they needed money to fund these expeditions and the armed men on them. Later on in the 19th century, the early industrial capitalists would need to finance the setting up of factories, sinking of mines and laying of railways.

To allow them to do this, they developed the practice of selling a large number of small stakes in their companies, with the promise of a share in its future profits through the payment of dividends to the shareholders. These shares could then be sold on by investors to third parties, the price going up and down with the perceived future profitability of the company.

Stock exchanges

This led to the establishment of stock exchanges in London, New York, Amsterdam and elsewhere for the trading of shares and bonds, the birth of the incorporated company, and with it the modern capitalist speculator.

Then and now, individual capitalists could increase their wealth not through work, or even the supervision of others working, but simply by providing the capital used to bring together workers, equipment and raw materials. The workers then create something of value - manufacturing goods, delivering services - that can be sold to generate a profit for the capitalist.

But this extra value generated on top of that originally invested doesn’t appear from thin air, or as a result of

shares in the company being sold and traded. Rather it comes from the fact that the workers are being paid less in wages than the total value of what they produce.

Today, many workers for large corporations will go about their daily shift at the factory, shop or office unaware of the identities of those laying claim to the fruits of their labour as shares in their employer change hands by the minute.

Similarly, by outsourcing the management of their wealth to investment fund managers, the capitalist speculators do not need to directly concern themselves with which companies their money is invested in at any one time, let alone the day to day business of those they hold shares in. And thanks to the rise of software that can automatically trade stocks and other assets as market conditions change by the second, the active role played by traditional stockbrokers and fund managers themselves in managing flows of capital is decreasing.

As capitalist speculators have come to generate the greater part of their returns not through holding stock in companies and waiting to receive dividends, but by buying and selling the shares to other investors, the price of these shares has moved further and further away from the reality of the companies’ actual commercial activity and profits (or lack of them).

This is particularly true of the ‘tech giants’ such as Meta (formally Facebook), Amazon, Apple and Google which accounted for much of the growth in American stock markets in recent years.

At its peak at the start of 2022, the total price of shares in electric vehicle manufacturer Tesla in circulation was \$1.2 trillion. This was larger than the rest of the global car industry combined at a mere \$700 billion, despite Tesla making at best 2% of global passenger vehicle sales, with its shares trading at 88 times the price of its expected earnings.

This bubble has since burst, with Tesla’s total shares now being ‘worth’ only \$397 billion at the time of writing. No wonder Marx described this money invested in shares and other financial instruments as “fictitious capital”, divorced from real capital spent on wages and machinery.

Economic growth

The stock market doesn’t create economic growth or crises by itself. However, as capitalist economies periodically run into difficulty, investors lose confidence, sell up, and share prices come crashing back down to a closer semblance of reality, as in the infamous Wall Street crash of 1929 or more recently in the financial crisis of 2008.

This is not just a problem for the capitalists, but for workers who can see the size of their pension pot decrease as the investments made by the pension fund lose money.

In recent years, trade union members in UK universities and Nissan and BMW car plants have taken strike action to defend their pensions against a move from the guaranteed pay outs of a ‘defined benefit’ system to one of ‘defined contribution’, where the amount they receive in retirement would depend upon the fluctuations of the markets.

The fluctuations of prices and dividends offered by shares in companies mean that many of those who manage investment funds smooth out changes in the value of their share portfolio

WHAT ARE ‘THE MARKETS’ ANYWAY?



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

by also holding other more reliable investments, particularly government bonds.

Bonds were pioneered by the British government during the 1690s to finance its military expenditure as the developing capitalist state loosened its ties to the crown, before being adopted by companies as a way of raising money on top of the sale of shares.

In effect, a bond is a loan made by an investor to a government or business for a fixed annual percentage payment of interest before the term of the bond expires and the original investment is returned.

A bond can then be sold on many times over before it ‘matures’ at the

end of its term for more or less than the sum lent by the original bondholder. These changes in the price of bonds can depend on many factors, not least the confidence of the market that the government or company that issued it will be able to cover the cost of the remaining interest payments due, along with repayment of the original loan.

If there is the possibility that the bond issuer may go bankrupt before they can do this, the price of the bond drops and the ‘yield’ - the total remaining payments due divided by the price of the bond - shoots up. This in turn makes it more expensive for the bond issuer to borrow more money, as bond traders demand a higher

return in exchange for taking on the supposed risk of lending.

When Kwasi Kwarteng announced a series of tax cuts to be funded by the UK government taking on further debt, and the yield on ten-year bonds issued by the Bank of England (gilts) shot up from 3.5% to 4.51% overnight, it was interpreted by many as the financial markets voting down the Tories’ mini-budget.

Though gilt yields have returned to the level they were at before the mini-budget (along with the relative strength of the pound against the dollar), capitalist politicians and their outriders in the media are already attempting to use the movements of the financial markets during one single

month of 2022 to justify up to £60 billion worth of further austerity in the name of ‘the markets’.

Such situations give the unelected bond traders and the credit rating agencies which advise them significant influence over government policy.

Greece

This was demonstrated sharply during the Greek debt crisis of the 2010s. As the size of Greek government debt increased following the 2008 banking crisis (in no small part due to widespread tax evasion by the wealthiest Greeks), they increased the number of bonds issued to cover the shortfall between spending and income.

The large ratings agencies awarded these bonds ‘junk’ status in 2010, sending the yields on them ever higher and requiring still more government borrowing to service the debt. To be sure of being able to pay the bondholders without defaulting on the debt entirely, successive Greek governments negotiated a series of bailouts from the ‘Troika’ of the International Monetary Fund, European Central Bank and European Commission totalling over €300 billion.

With the ever-present threat of a Greek government default leading to further transfers of capital out of the country and the potential collapse in value and breakup of the euro, the capitalist institutions of the Troika demanded a heavy price for these bailouts. A series of austerity cuts totalling €72 billion - 40% of the size of the Greek economy - were imposed alongside looting of public property by the Greek capitalist class through a series of cut-price privatisations.

In a referendum on the third of these bailout packages in 2015, 61% of the Greek people voted ‘no’ to further austerity in the name of servicing the bondholders and remaining within the euro. However, the ‘radical left’ Syriza government refused to mobilise the energy behind this vote and take the necessary measures to defy the Troika including: capital controls and nationalisation of the banks and other big business, all under democratic workers’ control and management.

Instead, it implemented the package anyway, bowing to the demands of the financial markets as represented by the capitalist institutions.

Today in Britain, after 12 years of service cuts and pay stagnation in the name of controlling the government deficit to appease markets, workers here have also decided that enough is enough.

However, at a time when bond traders have forced up the cost of rent and mortgages for workers, and speculators on the commodities markets

have driven up the price of everything from electricity to staple foods, Labour has rushed to show that it’s on the side of ‘the markets’ as much as the Tories are.

In the aftermath of September’s mini-budget, Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer said: “I’ll tell you what will stabilise the markets, it is an incoming Labour government, with absolutely clear fiscal rules and Rachel Reeves as chancellor,” code for further cuts to pay and services. Speaking in July he declared: “We need real partnership between state and market.”

If there’s a reason Tory and Labour politicians and the media seem both devoted to and fearful of ‘the markets’, that’s because these flows of money in stocks and bonds represent the mood and confidence of the capitalist class that both parties set out to defend the real material interests of.

They’re well rewarded for this, with businesses and individuals from the City of London’s finance sector donating £15 million to the three main parties in 2020 and 2021, as well as dishing out £2.3 million in payments to 47 individual MPs.

Despite the well-organised lobbying and influence over politics of big business and the finance sector in particular, these ‘masters of the universe’ have limited control over their own system. The markets themselves, as made up collectively of the traders and computer programs employed to maximise quick returns for investors, are capable of both irrational exuberance, and of panic selling at the first sign of trouble.

The wild swings that are a regular occurrence on financial markets, and the real-world consequences flowing from them, are signs of an increasingly chaotic and dysfunctional capitalist system. Today’s stock markets can no longer efficiently channel capital towards developing new technology and more productive ways of working than capitalism can take society as a whole forward.

Socialist change

Real socialist change would mean breaking the dictatorship of the markets by taking over the physical assets and cash reserves controlled by big companies that populate the world’s stock exchanges into public ownership. Rather than the management of the corporations that dominate the economy and our lives being left to directors chosen by shareholders, they could instead be run democratically by the workers who built them.

Then the fantastic riches currently trapped in financial markets could instead be used for the benefit of the real wealth creators - not capitalist investors, but the working-class majority.

WHAT THE SOCIALIST PARTY STANDS FOR

This Socialist Party manifesto sums up our main demands on the different issues that face the working class. It outlines what is necessary to begin the process of achieving a socialist society in Britain and internationally, able to meet the needs of humanity and to protect the planet.

Available from Left Books: www.leftbooks.co.uk or scan above

INTRODUCTION TO MARXISM

The basic concepts

Marxist ideas can help gain clarity on events and processes, and use lessons of past struggles to build independent workers’ organisations that are capable of leading the working class to power.

Standing to put a socialist alternative in Plymouth

Andrew White (right) campaigning in Plymouth
PHOTO: PLYMOUTH TUSC



ANDREW WHITE
TUSC CANDIDATE FOR MOOR VIEW PLYMOUTH

I'm standing as a Socialist Party member for the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) on Thursday 12 January. Two local government by-elections have been triggered in Plymouth as two Tories resigned after it was discovered that both had moved 150 miles away to live and work, essentially vacating their seats.

As an NHS worker I've seen the cuts made by the Tories in the last 13 years first hand, decimating public services and overworking the staff in already difficult situations. I've been proud to stand on the picket line with nurses in the RCN as they took strike action and I fully support ambulance staff doing the same. The same can't be said of our local Labour MP who hasn't been on a single picket since this wave of strike action began in the summer. This hasn't gone unnoticed, particularly by striking rail and postal workers.

At Plymouth City Council, successive Tory and Labour administrations have made over £90 million in cuts since 2014 with a proposal for a further £37 million (nearly 20% of the annual budget) to be axed this February. We can't afford these cuts and we certainly can't afford the year-on-year hiking of council tax, making us pay more for less.

We need councillors who are going to defend our public services and stand up to austerity, stopping the cuts now with reserves and borrowing powers and building a movement to demand the funding we need. We need our bus services brought back into public control, we need investment in community centres and youth centres, and we need to defend council jobs.

It's clear speaking to people on the doorsteps that there is a desperate need for an alternative. I'm standing for TUSC on 12 January to provide a socialist alternative to the axe wielders, whether they're from Starmer's Labour or Sunak's Tories.

Enfield Campaigners highlight unsafe tower block development

MIRA GLAVARDANOV
ENFIELD AND LEA VALLEY SOCIALIST PARTY

A lesson of the fire at Grenfell Tower is that high-rise flats need two staircases so that firefighters can do their job and residents can escape. Local campaigns in Enfield gave an unusual Christmas present to senior planners to remind them of this. The Labour-run council has given approval to a number of high rises with single staircase escapes on the troubled Meridian Water regeneration scheme. They were presented with copies of the book 'Show me the bodies: how we let Grenfell happen.'

This is the latest scandal of many surrounding this controversial project. Meridian Water is being built on public land and the council is the master developer. If there was a will by the Labour-led council, this could mean providing a community that has exceptionally high homelessness figures with high-quality council housing.

Instead, the council's priority from the start has been developer profits. Most of the properties will be sold privately. No properties will be available at social rent. The latest decision to build the tower blocks with a single staircase is another example of prioritising profits, this time at the expense of safety. This shows utter disregard for people's lives, especially significant after the deadly experience of Grenfell – for which, nobody has been made responsible. Perhaps that fact gives confidence to Enfield council to neglect safety.

Following the council's approval of single staircases last September, the London Fire Brigades Union (FBU) has written twice to express concerns. The FBU and the National Fire Chiefs Council have both called for buildings over 18 metres to have second staircases, and even the government has recently announced plans to mandate that tall buildings in England have second staircases. These developments give more confidence to the campaigners that the

council's shameful decision can be overturned.

The scandal is not unique to Enfield, 60% of proposed new high rises cause the Health and Safety Executive concern, according to an Inside Housing report based on Freedom of Information requests. The fact that it took investigative journalism to extract this fact exposes the passivity of the regulator. We need construction, fire and housing workers along with local residents to have democratic oversight of all developments.

Unite's Housing Workers branch took part in the protest along with local campaign groups including Better Homes Enfield, Meridian for Council Homes and Black Lives Matter Enfield. Further campaigning is planned on fire safety. Clearly though, the Labour council is not putting the needs of local people before profit. We need councillors who will stand up for working-class communities. That will be the focus of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition hosted meeting in Enfield on 8 February.

Enfield TUSC-hosted public meeting
Enough is Enough! But what do we do at the ballot box?

Wednesday 8 February, 7-30pm
Vincent House, 2e Nags Head Road, Ponders End, Enfield, EN3 7TN
Zoom Meeting ID: 872 7535 5659

PHOTO: UNITE HOUSING WORKERS BRANCH



Gateshead TUSC standing against leisure centre closure

TOM ALLEN
TUSC INDEPENDENT SOCIALIST

Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) members including myself attended a demonstration against the proposed closure of Dunston and Gateshead Leisure centres outside Gateshead Council offices on 20 December last year.

As a frequent user of Dunston leisure centre's swimming pool, I see on a regular basis how valuable this is to the local community. It is

packed with young and old, both free swimming and having swimming lessons.

The closure of these would have a severe impact as the next nearest pool is Blydon, over 5 miles away! This would impact those who cannot drive due to lack of suitable public transport. Service users at Blydon would inevitably see a much busier pool with long waiting times.

Candidates standing under the TUSC banner commit to fighting all cuts to jobs and services. I was

extremely frustrated with the council's poor public consultation. Attending this meeting was the catalyst for my intention to stand in the next council elections.

Over the next few months myself and others will be out and about campaigning, putting forward a real working-class alternative to the current Labour-run council. We are also urging all those interested in coming to stand with us, to put as many TUSC candidates on the ballot paper as possible.

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!



Socialist Students groups campaign in solidarity with youth in Sri Lanka

SÉAMUS SMYTH
SOCIALIST PARTY EAST MIDLANDS YOUTH ORGANISER

The Aragalaya (Sinhalese for “struggle”) protests in Sri Lanka, fuelled by a cost-of-living crisis, inspired students and young people across the world. People saw images of masses of protesters taking over the presidential palace and swimming in the presidential pool! These protests led to the resignation and flight of the president Gotabaya Rajapaksa and his family.

But his replacement, President Ranil Wickremesinghe has announced more cuts and austerity measures. It is obvious that this new government holds no solution for the people of Sri Lanka. Rather than changing the economic situation after he was brought into power, he has intensified the crisis through further mass repression and financial instability. He is representing the interests of the bosses not the mass of workers and poor.

Ultimately, this reflects the rottenness of capitalism. A crisis of a profit-driven system where the vast majority of wealth is accumulated by a few, and the inflating prices of goods means that people can’t afford food, fuel, or energy. And one in

which former colonial countries are shouldered with massive debt from the advanced capitalist countries, and the masses pay the price.

Just like Sri Lanka, workers and young people here in Britain and around the world are experiencing a cost-of-living crisis. In Britain, one in ten students has to rely on the use of food banks as they enter third level education.

In Sri Lanka, after the protests ebbed, the government turned to repression. Many have been detained under the draconian Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA). Among them, Wasantha Mudalige, convenor of the Inter University Students Federation (IUSF), the largest student’s union in Sri Lanka, has been detained for over 140 days.

Socialist Students has been campaigning in solidarity with the movement in Sri Lanka and those facing repression. We want to learn the lessons from the struggle to forward socialist ideas for workers and students fighting against brutal repression and the economic crisis.

We have organised stalls and public meetings where we put forward student and trade union motions which called for the release of protesters detained under the PTA, the repeal of all oppressive laws, and to

fight for the freedom of assembly, free speech and protest.

At Nottingham Trent University, we organised stalls, and mobilised on campus when the IUSF called for an international day of action on 9 November.

Prasad Welikumbura, one of the leading organisers of the movement and a member of the United Socialist Party, came to Nottingham and Leicester as part of a national speaking tour and described how the movement was developing and how the government attempted to suppress the protests. Parallels can be drawn between the Tories’ plans for new anti-strike laws to try and head off the movement here.

Socialist Students will continue to campaign in solidarity with the workers and students in Sri Lanka. With further public meetings around the country, we will continue passing motions and raising this in the movement. The solidarity campaign will be a feature of the upcoming Socialist Students conference on 18 March.

We say that the only way for workers and young people to have any future, whether in Sri Lanka, Britain or internationally, is to fight for socialist change, where society can be free of continuous economic hardship and oppression.



Solidarity meetings held by Southampton, Bristol and Leeds Socialist Students

Start the year off by funding the fight for socialism

CHRIS NEWBY
SOCIALIST PARTY FINANCE DEPARTMENT

As we go into 2023 the increase in the number of workers prepared to take strike action to improve their pay and reverse the attacks on their working conditions shows no sign of abating. New groups of workers, including teachers, firefighters and junior doctors are currently balloting for strike action. The strikes of rail, postal and health workers are clearly inspiring people across Britain that something can be done to stop brutal attacks on wages and services. This is clearly seen on Socialist Party campaign stalls with many comments from members of the public supporting the striking workers.

In our leaflets and in the pages of the Socialist we fully support these strikes – issues of this paper are full of reports of our members visiting picket lines. We also provide a clear strategy of what is needed. To unite these struggles in a 24-hour general strike, fighting for a new mass political voice for the working class and for a clear strategy to not only defend the NHS but to dramatically improve it.

We need to get this message out as widely as possible through the pages of the Socialist and through our

many leaflets, posters and placards. All of this costs money, which is why it is vital that we build on last quarter’s tremendous fund raising, by making sure we smash through the first fighting fund target of 2023.

Socialist Party branches will be planning how they can reach their targets. These plans should follow the example of our members in Cardiff who, this week strove to get as many members involved in their weekend campaign stall with brilliant results (see right).

All our branches should try to organise a similar stall once during this quarter on top of regular weekly campaign stalls. Contacting as many of our local members and supporters to get as big a turnout as possible, getting plenty of posters to decorate stalls, if possible using a PA system to attract the passing public, and planning to stay out a bit longer, all will have real results. Each branch doing this would enormously boost the Socialist Party’s fighting fund and we would meet many more people interested in socialist ideas and potentially joining the party.

If you need any ideas or help in organising such an activity you can contact the Socialist Party’s finance department.

Off the mark in Cardiff

RHYS DAVIES
CARDIFF SOCIALIST PARTY

This weekend, our campaign stalls in Cardiff, the first of the new year, showed there’s no let-up in public support for striking workers in our hospitals and elsewhere.

Nine Socialist Party members rallied support for NHS workers with two stalls, a loudspeaker,

and Socialist Party flag under the Nye Bevan statue (for added symbolism!).

One supermarket worker who is an activist in the Usdaw union stopped to say he’s grateful to those who are striking because it has panicked his bosses into offering a double-digit percentage pay rise!

Even the council wardens that are usually hostile to our presence and

have challenged our activity on several occasions stopped to sign our petition and even donate to the fighting fund.

A visitor from California who described herself as a socialist stopped to contribute, showing that the importance of the NHS is known globally, and the fight for its existence and funding has international support.



Fund the fightback
DONATE TODAY

- Visit socialistparty.org.uk/donate or call 020 8988 8777
- or make cheques payable to Socialist Party,

PO Box 1398, Enfield EN1 9GT



May Day greetings: Back the paper that backs the working class

SCOTT JONES
MAY DAY GREETINGS CAMPAIGN ORGANISER

The 1.5 million days lost to strike action in 2022 will be built on this year as workers continue to fight back. Picket lines are now part of the landscape almost everywhere – outside stations and hospitals and on industrial estates and high streets.

A feature of many of these picket lines is the Socialist newspaper, as Socialist Party members join these workers in struggle as supporters, or as workers on strike themselves. These hundreds of struggles, including many victories, are reported every week in the pages of the Socialist. The Socialist carries reports of these strikes, quotes by the workers, and an industrial strategy to take disputes forward and win.

It's clear that the rest of the media does not do this, either repeating misinformation or only putting forward the bosses' side of things. We need organised workers to support the alternative – the Socialist.

So celebrate International Workers' Day 2023 in the traditional workers' movement way by sending May Day greetings to help fund the Socialist.

May Day is an annual celebration of workers' struggle against capitalism. Its origins lie in the general strike for an eight-hour working day. Each year, we ask groups of workers and trade unionists to support the Socialist newspaper and its ideas by financing a May Day greeting.

Can your trade union branch, community campaign, workplace colleagues, trade union council, or student society send us a donation and short message of solidarity? We publish these each year on International Workers' Day to help fund the socialist press.

The Socialist says that we all need to strike together. Help us get that message out there and continue to report and support workers in struggle by backing the paper that backs the working class.

- Send greetings, see prices and make payments: socialistparty.org.uk/mayday
- Resources and enquiries: scottjones@socialistparty.org.uk

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The Socialist on the picket line PHOTO: NORTHAMPTON SOCIALIST PARTY

Video game review: Pentiment - set during the peasant wars of 16th century Germany

IAIN DALTON
YORKSHIRE SOCIALIST PARTY

16th century Germany is an unusual setting for a video game. But in recent years themes of revolution have been increasingly common across all forms of media reflecting an increasingly volatile world, with multiple uprisings in different countries. Hence why the peasant revolts of the 1500s are the latest period to face adaptation.

Friedrich Engels famously wrote his book 'The Peasant War in Germany' reflecting on these events, in the light of the 1848 revolutions across Europe. Ultimately, uprisings against the intolerable conditions facing the peasantry at the time were unable to replace feudalism with a society that could meet the needs of the oppressed, due to the limited social development of society and the scattered nature of the peasantry that made it possible to isolate different uprisings.

You take the role of Andreas Maler, an artist visiting the fictional Keirsau Abbey near the town of Tassing, when your friend is accused of murdering a local baron also visiting the abbey. Future chapters see you investigate incidents in different periods of time.

This structure of the game allows you to see before, during and after the revolts take place. In the earliest section you see how the traditional means of the abbey sustaining itself, such as manuscript commissions from its scriptorium, are struggling in competition with new technology, such as the invention of the printing press. This contributes to pressure to increase tithes (taxes) on peasants, leading to the revolt.

Later sections deal with the revolt

itself and its aftermath. These show the revolts not only from the differing perspectives of the peasants themselves, and their landlords (in this case the abbey's leader Father Gernot), but also from the perspectives of others, such as tradespeople in the town, other monks, and travellers at the inn.

Moreover, unlike some other games that have dealt with revolutionary periods, there is no attempt to demonise the leaders of the revolt and, despite the tragic events that take place, several characters defend the necessity of the revolt against their intolerable conditions.

The final section also points to how history is recorded, as you have decisions to make about how to commemorate the town's history, including the revolt itself. This is a comment on how 'official' history is generally recorded to serve certain interests and what gets left out as a result.

The game is also a love letter to the illustrative art of the period, to look like pages of an illuminated manuscript.

Large studios, such as Pentiment's creators Obsidian Entertainment, typically produce generic games in search of a big audience and more profit. Pentiment is a welcome exception.

Imagine what could be possible if that profit motive was removed through bringing the big media monopolies into public ownership. If run under the democratic control of video game development workers, gamers and representatives of the wider working class, then resources could be planned into a varied content of entertainment experiences not subject to the need to make a quick buck.



Pentiment PHOTO: OBSIDIAN ENTERTAINMENT

Unite the Union:

Elect a leadership to back Sharon Graham's fighting stance

Sharon Graham speaking to striking Liverpool dockers LIVERPOOL SOCIALIST PARTY



KEVIN PARSLAW
SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBER IN UNITE

2023 will be an important year in Unite. Branches and committees are drafting and discussing motions for policy conference, and will later debate possible changes to the rules.

But before these conferences in July, there will be the elections for a new Executive Council (EC) for the union, the first since Sharon Graham became general secretary in August 2021.

Sharon Graham has been a fierce opponent of the bosses and government.

She recently said: "This UK government is presiding over a broken economy that works just for the rich and not for everyday people. The truth is that it is bandit capitalism that's holding the country to ransom."

Resisting the onslaught

During her period in office, Unite members have been backed in resisting the onslaught of the bosses, first through 'fire and rehire' - attacks on terms and conditions - then through fighting for cost-of-living pay rises.

The first steps have been taken to

establish combines in a number of industries and sectors of the economy, bringing together shop stewards and activists to campaign on common issues.

The union has taken on Labour-run authorities, most notably with the victory of refuse workers in Coventry against the council. Unite now has a policy demanding that Labour councils propose legal, needs-based no-cuts budgets.

Under Sharon's leadership, Unite has placed itself on the fighting wing of the trade union movement. Of the 450 strikes called in her period of office, a large proportion has been in one workplace or a few.

However Unite has been involved in national disputes, as a minority union, including on the railways and Transport for London, and has called ballots in health and local government.

In local government, although the pay offer was accepted by the other unions, 75% of Unite members rejected it, and the union has reserved the right to call local disputes on pay when there is demand, like in Coventry.

To build on this, the union needs the election of an EC that leads officers to support and take forward this strategy for building the union. Only a small number of current EC

members backed Sharon for general secretary. Most of the rest, and all ten of the union's regional secretaries, promoted Steve Turner, the candidate of the union's United Left group, which has been the dominant force on the EC since Unite's formation.

However, Steve favoured working closely with Keir Starmer, the Labour leader.

Starmer

It is correct that Sharon has been critical of Starmer and it is vital that Unite continues to put pressure on Labour at national and local levels. Socialist Party members in Unite will keep arguing that the union needs to be at the fore of building a working-class political alternative to Starmer's New Labour.

Sharon's strategy of organising and building in the workplace has been important in the strikes that Unite has called in her period of office. This needs to be built on and expanded.

Unite must be to the fore in the fight for mass coordinated strike action against the cost-of-living squeeze and Sunak's planned new Tory anti-union laws.

This means electing an EC which can implement Unite's programme and make Unite a fighting force for socialist ideas.

Fighting candidates

Socialist Party members in Unite campaigned for Sharon's victory. We have been prominent in calling for a new left, fighting organisation in the union, which would be democratic and discuss the socialist ideas needed to take workers forward. Unfortunately, despite there being opportunities to do so, this has not yet materialised. This is still an important step to be taken. Nevertheless, through a series of discussions, a slate of candidates for the EC has been agreed, which includes Socialist Party members.

Each candidate needs three valid nominations to stand. Nomination meetings must be held by 3 February, and nominations received by 8 February. The election itself takes place from 27 March to 25 April.

Unite's EC is elected through a combination of territorial (regions and nations), industrial sector and equalities representatives. Socialist Party members standing in these constituencies include the following, with their Unite membership details (necessary for nomination). If your branch falls in these constituencies, you can nominate:

SUZANNE MUNA
SOUTH WEST REGION
BRANCH SW/001732, MEMBERSHIP NUMBER 15692878

Suzanne was previously a member of the EC representing the London and Eastern region, and formerly secretary of the housing workers' branch, which backed its members in a number of disputes against housing association employers. She now lives in Bristol.

"Unite members in the South West region, as elsewhere, are involved in the rising number of disputes, extending our record of winning better pay and conditions. To build on this momentum, and to keep on winning disputes, we need to properly resource our reps with the right facilities, information, support, and training. I also want Unite to work in solidarity with other unions taking action, emphasising unity, coordinated action, and collective strength."

ANTHONY ALLEN
WEST MIDLANDS REGION
BRANCH WM/7116, MEMBERSHIP NUMBER 15588340

Anthony is a rep on the Coventry refuse team, which last year won a protracted and bitter dispute against the Labour-run council on pay and conditions.

"As the driver's representative at Coventry City Council I took part in one of Unite's longest disputes, a dispute that was successful with the support of the union and our general secretary Sharon Graham."

"The strike revealed how employers today treat their employees, my involvement in the strike has given me the opportunity to gain further experience and realise what is important for all of us fighting for the rights we deserve."

LEN HOCKEY
HEALTH SECTOR
BRANCH LE/7384L, MEMBERSHIP NUMBER 20025170

Len was a key leader of the dispute in the Barts Health Trust in London, which won a pay rise and the transfer of contracted-out workers back in-house from this April.

"Health workers' growing anger at the real-terms pay cuts ongoing, urgently needs to be harnessed and given a powerful, organised expression nationally. The landmark win of Barts strikers in east London in 2022, that won in-sourcing back into the NHS of over 1,700 support workers, including cleaners and porters, demonstrates the potential that exists."

The Socialist Party will campaign to elect these and all fighters on the slate.



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

- 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**
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Help fund the fightback! DONATE TODAY

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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.

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South Africa: ANC re-elects scandal-ridden Ramaphosa as party leader



Cyril Ramaphosa PHOTO: KREMLIN.RU/CC

SHAUN ARENDS
MARXIST WORKERS PARTY (CWI, SOUTH AFRICA)

The African National Congress (ANC) December conference re-elected Cyril Ramaphosa as party leader for a second five-year term. Therefore, he will almost certainly lead the ANC into national elections in 2024. Although Ramaphosa remains 'the most electable' ANC leader, the party is expected to lose its governing majority next year, opening up an unstable era of coalition government. The ruling class faces a general crisis of political representation. This is ultimately a

product of the crisis of South African capitalism and the razor sharp tensions between the classes this gives rise to.

The ANC has been completely transformed since coming to power in 1994. Having once been the most important banner for the mass struggle that brought down the racist apartheid segregation system, it is now little more than a criminal racket for looting state funds.

In the weeks before the congress convened, South Africa hovered on the edge of a constitutional crisis. Ramaphosa was on the brink of resigning following a scandal

SAT | 28.01.23 | 3-5PM
THE STRUGGLES FOR SOCIALISM WORLDWIDE
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• Sri Lanka, Siritunga
• Britain, Isai Marijjerla
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YMCA Indian Students Hostel, 43 Fitzroy Square, London W1F 8AQ.
Public meeting organised by Socialist Party Black and Asian group

around the theft of large sums of undeclared dollars from his luxury cattle-breeding farm. His own claim to being an anti-corruption crusader was smashed overnight. However, despite this, and with limited alternative options, the ruling class still views Ramaphosa and his faction as the safest pair of hands for South African capitalism. Determined that he should continue as president, he was persuaded to remain in office.

Had Ramaphosa resigned, the presidency would have been handed back to the openly corrupt forces that coalesced around former president Jacob Zuma during his 2009-18 tenure. Out of power and under pressure from criminal investigations, these forces have fractured. However, most of them eventually backed former health minister Zweli Mkhize for party leader. He was forced to resign in 2021 - during the pandemic - over massive transfers of money from the health budget to companies linked to friends and family. Mkhize nevertheless received enough nominations to get on the ballot and 43% of congress delegates voted for him.

ANC degenerated

The ANC congress long ago degenerated into a desperate scramble for positions to gain access to government budgets. Delegations are little more than rent-a-mobs. Massive amounts are spent on hotels, food and drink to secure votes, alongside brown envelopes of cash.

The commissions that were meant to discuss policy were attended by mere handfuls of delegates. But there is no longer any serious debate with

in the ANC about the issues of most concern to the working class and poor. There is complete unity across ANC factions, for example, on legislation attacking the right to strike and the now multi-year attack on public sector pay which led to strike action last year. Despite unemployment of 34%, no faction has any serious policies for job creation. Incredibly, central to the Mkhize camp's campaign was a call to scrap the so-called 'step-aside rule' that requires criminally-charged leaders, ministers, MPs etc to resign.

The overwhelming majority of the working class sees the ANC as the chief architect of its poverty, exploitation and suffering. Having already split in 2015 over support for the ANC, the issue is back on the agenda of the Cosatu trade union federation. At its 2022 congress, delegates refused to allow the ANC to speak. In May, a special congress will debate ending support for the ANC. But Cosatu members will have to campaign to ensure that their leaders do not retreat from this and organise to ensure the ANC is ditched.

This would pose the possibility of politically reuniting with the Saftu federation formed from the 2015 Cosatu split. Saftu has passed resolutions in favour of creating a workers' party, but the leadership refuses to implement them. Delegates from all trade unions and federations, workplaces, communities and the youth, need to come together and plan the launching of a socialist mass workers' party. This could lead mass campaigns for job creation, decent pay and public services, preparing the way for the end of the ANC's corrupt rule and offer a socialist alternative to South Africa's rotten crony-capitalism.

Brazil: Bolsonaristas storm Congress For mass counter-mobilisations and a socialist alternative

TONY SAUNOIS
COMMITTEE FOR A WORKERS' INTERNATIONAL (CWI) SECRETARY

Brazil has been plunged deeper into a continuing political and social crisis, only days after Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva was sworn in as Brazil's new president, following his narrow victory over the far-right incumbent Jair Bolsonaro.

Thousands of Bolsonaro's supporters marched in the capital Brasília and stormed the Congress, the presidential palace and Supreme Court. For a time they took control of these centres of power, although without any clear plan or objective. After some hours they were ejected.

Significant development

This significant development is a pointer to the struggles that lie ahead in Brazil. The electoral defeat of Bolsonaro, as the CWI has warned, does not mean either the end of him, or the powerful far right-wing forces, including fascistic elements, encompassing his movement.

Lula won the election by the narrowest of margins. The right is the largest bloc in the Congress and has 21 of 27 governors. It was only in the northeast where Lula won a clear majority victory. Bolsonaro, despite leaving the country and currently residing in Florida, like his buddy

Donald Trump, has never conceded defeat in the election. His supporters initiated roadblocks throughout the country following the election. Encampments of his supporters were set up outside military barracks demanding that the army intervene and carry through a military coup - a demand repeated by those who stormed government building.

These dramatic events are an anticipation of the upheavals to come under Lula's government. The struggle against the far right in Brazil is far from over. Bolsonaro's family is known as the 'família' because of its proximity to the militias of Rio de Janeiro. These are armed gangs with a long and increasingly close link between them, the police and the armed forces, forged largely around the sale of drugs.

Under Bolsonaro, the militias were strengthened. He also encouraged the formation of CACs - citizens with the right to possession of firearms and ammunition for 'collecting, shooting and hunting' - and made arms sales to them much easier. Up to one million are organised in such groups - more than in the armed forces (360,000) or the police (406,000). Most are supporters of Bolsonaro.

Lula, hated by Bolsonaro supporters, put together a coalition of the PT (Workers' Party), left parties and sections of the ruling class and

bourgeois parties. His government is divided and diverse. However, despite promising some reforms, it is wedded to remaining within capitalism. Lula has pledged to "focus on attracting foreign investment", especially direct investment.

Arousing the opposition of the ruling class, he has argued his government would use Petrobras, the state oil company, and the national development bank as engines of economic growth. Divisions are certain to rapidly open up in the new government. The right may block these measures. The PT remains distrusted and is tainted by massive corruption scandals.

Trying to prove its reliability for capitalism, Lula, in response to this crisis, denounced the protestors as "fascist" and threatened them with prosecution. At the same time he has given the military free reign in Brasília and called for calm. The military, with many links to Bolsonaro and the right, cannot be trusted. Rather than launch a call for mass protests and mobilisation of the working-class and poor masses, Lula and the PT simply called for calm. They do not want the masses on the streets!

Brazil faces massive social inequality and polarisation. 33 million face hunger. 125 million face varying degrees of food 'insecurity'. During



The Committee for a Workers' International (CWI) is the international socialist organisation which the Socialist Party is affiliated to. The CWI is organised in countries across the planet. We work to unite the working class and oppressed peoples against capitalism, and to fight for a socialist world.
socialistworld.net

Lula's first term in office between 2003 and 2010 a massive boom in commodity prices took place, meaning there was room to introduce some reforms and give concessions. This option is far narrower today against the background of a global economic downturn and recession threatening in 2023.

Socialist alternative

The need to build a mass socialist alternative is more urgent than ever. Unfortunately, the left party PSOL has mistakenly voted to allow its members to join the Lula government rather than oppose the far right and build an independent working-class socialist alternative. Unfortunately it will now become trapped within a capitalist government, threatening its future.

Explosive battles lie ahead, as these events have already demonstrated. The need to rebuild a mass socialist alternative to confront the far right is more urgent than ever.

This is the road forward, not compromising and building alliances with the ruling class and capitalism.



Lula following his victory PHOTO: INDIA NINJA/CC



Bolsonaro supporters PHOTO: EDITORIAL/CC

Sunak and Starmer promise more of the same

WE NEED A WORKING-CLASS ALTERNATIVE

Come to TUSC conference, 4 February, London



Local election campaigning
PHOTO: WALTHAM FOREST SOCIALIST PARTY

JACK JEFFREY
SHEFFIELD SOCIALIST PARTY

UK household disposable income is likely to fall by £2,000 this year. No wonder the Tories are trailing in the polls and Rishi Sunak is desperate to pick his ratings off the floor.

His empty five-point plan will not undo over a decade of austerity and wage restraint.

Sunak's refusal to increase public spending and give workers an inflation-proof pay rise means we will be worse off.

Instead he has shown his main priority

– taking on workers fighting back against the cost-of-living crisis by pushing through more anti-strike legislation. Recent polls show the majority of people support the current wave of strikes and blame the government for forcing workers into action.

But Keir Starmer's Labour is little better. He started the year also refusing to commit to more public spending, showing that his pledges to "take back control" and give communities "the chance to control their economic destiny" ring hollow.

The current wave of strikes in health, transport, mail, universities and education

demonstrates clearly that workers have had enough of falling pay, deteriorating conditions and rising workloads. They are already 'taking back control' not through empty slogans but collective action. We need a new mass political voice for working people, organised around their needs - not safeguarding the status quo and profits for the wealthy. Keir Starmer is clearly indicating to the bosses – that a Labour government would be a safe pair of hands for them and their profits.

The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) is an electoral alliance of socialist organisations (including the Socialist Party),

trade union and community activists acting to build an independent voice for working-class people. In preparation for the upcoming local elections in May 2023 and the likely general election in 2024, TUSC is holding a conference at Birkbeck College in London on Saturday 4 February. We will be building on our clear 'no cuts' platform, and agreeing a core policy platform for the upcoming elections.

This is an important event for all those who want to challenge the parties of the status quo and give working-class people the political voice we need.