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the Socialist

Issue 1210

19-25 January 2023

formerly **Militant**

Teachers join growing strike wave

STRIKE TOGETHER

TO BEAT

BOSSES

AND TORIES

- **Build for 1 Feb mass action**
- **Prepare for a 24-hour general strike**

UPDATES FROM THE STRIKE WAVE

▶▶ p4, 5, 6, 7 & 10

BUSTING THE BOSSES' 'NO MONEY' LIES

▶▶ p8-9

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formerly **Militant**

Issue 1210
19-25 January 2023

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

Karl Marx

Cost of living

Coventry Socialist Party member **Terri Rosser** explains how the cost-of-living crisis is taking hold for working-class people.

Record rent rise

Rents rose 4% in 2022 for tenants in the private sector, the highest since records began seven years ago. Landlords passed on higher mortgage rates to tenants. But tenants already pay 24% of their average weekly outgoings on housing.

The Socialist Party calls for democratically set rent controls and a programme of mass council house building to give us all a home we can afford.



Too expensive to own a car, too expensive not to

Workers face a lack of alternative transport to owning a car. 47% believe that there is no other option due to affordability so, on average, they are having to spend a fifth of their income keeping vehicles on the road.

There has also been a significant rise in those paying for cars through finance or a loan deal to 19%. And the Tory government has ended grants for environmentally friendly electric-car purchases, which are already too expensive for working-class people.

Why not take rip-off public transport out of private hands, invest in a high-quality expanded service and provide it for free?



Dying in poverty

The numbers set to die in poverty are growing. People of working age are twice as likely to spend their final year of life in poverty than those currently of retirement age. End of life charity Marie Curie estimates that allowing people with terminal illnesses to access their state pension early, to ease the cost of living, would cost just £114 million a year - a mere tenth of 1% of the annual state pension bill.

The Socialist Party supports boosting the state pension too, to meet the true cost of living.



Unpaid tax

There is £42 billion in unpaid taxes to the Treasury. A lot of this money is dodged by the rich, and could be used for vital public services and an above-inflation public sector pay rise.

No wonder so much is lost. In their austerity drive, the Tories closed down tax offices and sacked tax revenue collectors when they got into power in 2010.

The rich actually paying their taxes is a start. Why not tax the super-rich even more? Better still, take the wealth out of their hands by nationalising the banks and big business to be run under democratic working-class control and management. That's what the Socialist Party fights for.



Warrington council carer visits can be as short as three minutes!



PHOTO: PBC/CC

KENNY CUNNINGHAM
WEST CHESHIRE SOCIALIST PARTY

The unfolding crisis in social care starkly illuminates the human cost of government austerity and local authority penny-pinching.

A recent report by the Homecare Association, which represents care providers, pointed out the increasing use of short calls and said: "15-minute visits are inappropriately short". In that time two care workers are expected to wake a client, prepare a meal, ensure it is eaten, administer medication, provide any personal care and tidy the kitchen. Yet 313 people with care needs in Warrington borough council have received visits as short as three minutes!

To call this level of care 'inadequate' misses the main point - it is unacceptable. People with support needs are being drastically let down.

The local government and social care ombudsman, Michael King, said: "We are increasingly looking at complaints from a human rights perspective - and councils need to consider the rights of service users to have a private life when commissioning or delivering care."

But for these rights to be achieved we will need to see an urgent labour movement response.

Underfunded, under-resourced, and under pressure, care workers bear the brunt of this mainly privatised, undervalued yet crucial part of our society.

Until they are paid fairly, the sector gets the funding it needs, and it is taken out of profiteering hands and back into public ownership under democratic workers' control, people with support needs are going to continue to be drastically let down.

STARMER'S HEADING FOR NUMBER TEN...

CLAPS DON'T PAY THE BILLS

SO WHAT SHOULD WE DO AT THE GENERAL ELECTION?

TUSC AGAINST CUTS TUSC CONFERENCE

Saturday 4th February, 11am to 4-30pm
Room B34, Birkbeck College, Malet Street, London WC1E 7HX
See www.tusc.org.uk for the policy platforms and more

1 February: Hundreds of thousands of workers to strike together

Prepare for a 24-hour general strike



WHAT WE THINK

The massive vote to strike by education workers in schools in the National Education Union (NEU) is a potential game changer in the strike wave.

The NEU is the biggest national union so far to exceed the Tory undemocratic anti-union turnout threshold. The vote will be a boost to rail, postal and NHS workers who have so far been at the frontline of the strike wave.

And what a fantastic answer to the new Tory anti-union bill. Now building for big successful strikes will increase the confidence of all workers not to be cowed by the government's blunt-fisted attack on the ability of workers to defend themselves from a historic cost-of-living crisis, but to meet that attack with bold action.

NEU support staff in England voted overwhelmingly, 84%, for action but narrowly missed the threshold. Teachers' union NASUWT fell just short of the threshold with a 42% turnout, but a 90% 'yes' vote. The National Association of Head Teachers also just missed the threshold in England, but got over the threshold in Wales. The NEU result will be a

boost to education unions considering rebalots.

Nearly half a million public sector workers are set to coordinate strike action on 1 February, with civil service workers in the PCS, the University and College Union (UCU), and train drivers in Aslef and the RMT also taking national strike action. The Trades Union Congress (TUC) has called for a 'day of action' with regional protests on that day.

The most immediate task now is to campaign for that day to be a massive show of strength. Other workers and unions also fighting for an inflation-proof pay rise should mobilise for the demonstrations on that day.

1 February could be a stepping stone to potentially wider action on 15 March – a date being discussed by a bigger number of unions.

The crisis-ridden Tories are under enormous pressure to make some concessions on pay, at least to NHS workers, which is deepening the already huge rifts in the traditional party of the capitalists.

The cabinet is openly split, with health minister Steve Barclay reportedly asking unions to help him argue for more money. A section of Tory MPs are fearful of a public backlash if they don't give something. But prime minister Rishi Sunak and chancellor Jeremy Hunt are acutely aware that any concession made to health staff will spur on other workers.

The public sector strikes now



As a striking Birmingham RMT member said to the Socialist:
“Starmer says he’ll get rid of the anti-union laws, but you can’t trust a word that man says. He’s not for us!”



PHOTO: PAUL MATTISSON

Protesters packed into a tight crowd opposite Downing Street for the 16 January lobby called by the RMT union against the Tories' new anti-trade union laws. There was an atmosphere of determination as trade unionists and other supporters heard from numerous trade union leaders. Socialist Party members spoke to other activists about what is needed to defeat the new laws, arguing to use the 1 February strikes to build towards a 24-hour general strike. Report by June Angus, West London Socialist Party PHOTO: BERKAV KARTAV



taking place are directly against the government, but the Tories are also backers of the vicious private sector bosses in rail and Royal Mail. For workers to win their demands requires forcing the government to act.

That's why the Socialist Party has argued for generalising the action. Coordinate all strikes with a live ballot; prepare the ground for a 24-hour general strike.

Each dispute has its own industrial logic and union members will expect their leaders to strive to achieve their demands in negotiations. But at the same time, opportunities for coordination must be seized vigorously by all unions. The call for everyone to strike together is extremely popular and has been made from the picket line week after week by strikers themselves.

That includes nurses, many of whom will disagree with their leadership's opposition to coordination. While it is true that public support for nurses is particularly high, the pressure on the government to make concessions is much greater due to the scale and broad spread of strike action by several workforces, and the public support for it.

UCU leader Jo Grady has suggested in her messages to members that there is a risk that coordinating with others will reduce the press attention on their issues. On the contrary, the sizable press coverage of the strike wave has been precisely because of the extent of the action, with different sections of workers all fighting.

We welcome that the RMT rail union responded to the new anti-trade union bill with an initial protest at Downing Street on 16 January the day it was debated in Parliament. It

must be made clear to the Tories now that if they attempt to enact their draconian plans they will be met with a 24-hour general strike.

The re-emergence of the organised working class on the stage of national struggle that has developed since summer last year – which the 2016 Tory anti-union laws were designed to obstruct – has raised the real possibility of bringing down the Tories.

While strikers would be delighted to see the back of the Tories, there is also widespread recognition that a Keir Starmer-led government would still be an obstacle to winning real pay rises and an end to the crisis in the NHS, in social care and other services, on the railways, in Royal Mail. Starmer has made clear whose side he is on in his lack of support for picket lines and his warning that a Labour government led by him would not “open a big cheque book”.

As a striking Birmingham RMT member said to the Socialist: “Starmer says he’ll get rid of the anti-union laws, but you can’t trust a word that man says. He’s not for us!”

It is because of the pressure of mass action that Starmer felt compelled to talk of repealing new anti-union legislation. Generalised strike action would ensure pressure on the Labour leadership continues.

That would be stronger still if combined with a workers' list of general election candidates to give a political voice to the action, and force Starmer to be looking over his shoulder. Strikers, trade unionists, and working-class people generally need our own political voice. Standing candidates is an important step towards the new workers' party that is needed.

Tory A&E delays are killing us

ISLA DEFTY
LEEDS SOCIALIST PARTY

In December, A&E waiting times were the highest since records began in 2010. 54,532 people waited longer than 12 hours to be admitted to A&E. This is a 44.1% increase from November. And an increase of 355% from November 2021!

Worst ever

The NHS target is that 95% of patients should be seen within four hours of arriving in A&E. But less than 50% of patients are being seen within that time – the lowest this figure has ever dropped to.

On top of excruciating waiting times for patients in pain, the conditions patients are waiting in are horrifying. A 72-year-old woman spent three days being treated in a hospital

corridor waiting for a ward bed to become available.

Amanda Pritchard, chief executive of NHS England, admitted that people were dying waiting to receive urgent treatment. The Royal College of Emergency Medicine estimates that 300 to 500 people are dying every single week due to ambulance and A&E delays.

Yet, the government refuses to do anything. Dr Ian Higginson, Royal College of Emergency Medicine vice-president said: “The organisations and political leaders who have the power and the ability to make change are simply trying to push back and... not accept that there’s a real problem.”

Instead, the Tories are choosing to attack the healthcare workers, desperately trying to save lives, who have asked for a pay rise.



NHS in crisis

Tory underfunding and understaffing is wrecking the NHS. And the numbers speak for themselves.

93 minutes was the average ambulance response for people with strokes, severe burns or chest pain – 5 times the operation target of 18 minutes

And they're missing their target for the highest-priority 'life threatening' category by over

60% – the slowest response time on record

12,000 people on cancer treatment lists have been waiting more than 3 months

The NHS waiting list has fallen by 27,000 but it's still

7,190,000 long

40% of ambulance crews had to wait at least half an hour to hand over patients in December – highest since records began

Pressure on NHS led to 120 patient safety incidents involving oxygen cylinders in 2022

The Tories will fund **0** places at a new University of Worcester medical school, set up specifically to deal with doctor shortages



Nurses in Leeds on strike in December

Labour will add to Tory NHS crisis with more privatisation

JON DALE
UNITE THE UNION NOTTINGHAMSHIRE HEALTH
BRANCH SECRETARY

Nurses and ambulance workers on picket lines want to know how Labour would rebuild the NHS. So do patients needing GP or dental appointments, queuing in A&E or waiting for surgery.

But statements by Labour leader Keir Starmer and Labour shadow health secretary Wes Streeting make it crystal clear the NHS crisis will not be eased by Labour. Instead, the drive towards privatisation will continue, following the failed pattern set by Tony Blair’s Labour government.

“Had a Labour government been in office this year, hundreds of thousands more patients would have been treated on the NHS in private hospitals,” according to Streeting. During the pandemic, the Tory government paid private hospitals an extra 25% to treat NHS patients. Yet 43% less healthcare was delivered by them than the year before the pandemic!

Waiting lists

Long waiting lists drive more desperate people to pay for private treatment. Private hospitals can make more money from self-funding patients than they’re paid by the NHS. So the NHS is likely to have to pay over the odds for the private sector to treat more NHS patients.

Private medical companies benefit from long NHS waiting lists and from NHS-trained staff. They cherry-pick patients, leaving complex cases to the NHS.

Few private hospitals have intensive-care beds. So if anything goes wrong, they send the patient back to an NHS hospital.

Instead of pouring more public money into private health industry

profits, as Starmer and Streeting advocate, the industry should be nationalised, and its facilities integrated with the NHS.

Streeting says: “Successive governments do run into resistance to change within the professions... the status quo is driven by provider interest, producer interest, and not by patient interest.”

Incredibly, he blames this crisis on NHS staff working round the clock under impossible strains, on much lower real pay than a decade ago. Instead, Labour should be blaming years of underfunding and privatisation. No health workers want this ‘status quo’ to continue.

Spot the difference

“We are not going to have a ‘something for nothing’ culture in the NHS with Labour... I’m not frightened to take on vested interests, and I’m not afraid to tell the BMA or other unions ‘no’. Try and spot a difference between Streeting and any Tory health minister!

Blair said much the same in 1999, speaking to the British Venture Capitalists Association: “People in the public sector are more rooted in the concept that ‘if it’s always done this way, it must always be done this way’ than any group of people I’ve come across.”

Labour’s leaders say nothing about increasing NHS funding beyond abolishing ‘non-dom’ tax status, and using this £3.2 billion to train more doctors and nurses. Welcome though this small step would be, where is the pledge to pay for these staff once trained?

NHS England says it is £7 billion short this coming year. But Streeting says: “The state of the public finances means that Labour will not be able to open the government cheque book.” So, more below-inflation pay ‘rises’ under Labour.

Health workers are becoming burned out after years of underfunding and growing need, due to an ageing population, increasing poverty and slashed public services. Recently trained staff are leaving.

Burn out

Older staff take early retirement, or sign up with an agency and go part-time. Training more workers without reversing past cuts won’t end this crisis.

It’s hardly surprising Streeting pushes more NHS use of the private health sector. Last January, he took a £15,000 donation from hedge fund boss John Armitage.

Armitage has previously given the Tories £3 million. His hedge fund owns \$580 million of shares in United Health, the largest US private health corporation.

Health workers and patients can’t rely on Labour to come to their rescue. We need a new party fighting to rebuild the NHS and socialist policies to do it. Trade unions should use their funds to build such a party, not prop up Labour with its big business allies.

Come and discuss at the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) conference – see page 2

- ‘Keir Starmer’s heading for No. 10. So what should we do at the general election?’
- Saturday 4 February, 11am-4:30pm, Room B34, Birkbeck College, Malet Street, London WC1E 7HX
- tusc.org.uk

Ambulance strikes - Workers fight Tory madness

KEVIN GREENAWAY
BROMSGROVE SOCIALIST PARTY

Bromsgrove in Worcestershire is often called a ‘Tory town’, as it’s elected Tory MPs for years. The reality is different. Strikes in recent months have shown that the working class is alive and well, and fighting to defend itself and our community.

Bromsgrove Socialist Party has been privileged to stand on picket lines with postal, health and now ambulance workers. All determined, all saying they’d never expected to be on strike like this, many for the first time.

Just like nurses, the ambulance workers, striking on 11 January, all stressed that they are there to fight for a safe service that is properly resourced. Some expressed confusion about what madness can be motivating the Tories.

They are used to madness though. The closure of ambulance stations across Worcestershire has left just two hubs: one in Bromsgrove in the north of the county, the other in Worcester. Bosses had wanted one hub, but unions fought that off.

Workers wore West Midlands Ambulance Service uniforms. Workers told me that the hubs and badge are effectively meaningless as short-ages of ambulance and NHS staff mean crews are sent to areas such as Gloucester, Shrewsbury (a 100-mile round trip) and Bredon.

All of this carries higher risk. Longer-serving strikers look back to days when services were local, more immediate and safer.

The picket was lively, got massive support from passing traffic, and will be back on 23 January - and Socialist Party members will be there in support.



Romford paramedics on strike in December

Pressures on workers mean there’s no choice but to fight

STEVE ION
MERSEYSIDE SOCIALIST PARTY

On their second day of strike action, ambulance workers in Birkhead, Merseyside, members of GMB and Unison unions, were determined and in good spirits. Support from the public was huge, with plenty of car horns and support from other unions. A delegation from the regional trade union council was also in attendance.

Concerns were raised that patients have been placed in corridors on arrival at hospital for a long time now. Strikers discussed the increase in patient numbers, as resources had not been put in place to give proper medical support prior to and during Covid; bed shortages in care homes, and staff shortages all round.

Workers on the picket line felt they

sadly had no choice but to take strike action. They explained that it’s not just about pay, but the conditions and pressures ambulance workers are under: unable to take breaks, long shifts, and with newer staff unable to enhance their skills due to being stuck in ambulance queues for hours.

Many supported the call for coordinated action of all the unions involved, not only ambulance workers but all workers in the health service. The current pay talks and government offers on pay were seen as totally inadequate, as workers have been suffering from 2% pay increases for years already.

Tory attacks cut no mustard with public

TOM BALDWIN
BRISTOL SOCIALIST PARTY

In Bristol there was torrential rain but the pickets carried on stoically throughout. Strikers described the latest planned anti-union laws as

“repressive” and “an attempt to finish what Thatcher started”, adding that it fits with the Tories’ long-held opposition to the NHS and the principles on which it was founded.

It was clear from the way they attentively listened to every announcement on their radios that they were providing emergency cover anyway. The constant beeping of horns showed that attempts to demonise them in the press weren’t cutting any mustard with the public.

NHS strike dates

- RCN nurses are striking on 18-19 January and 6-7 February
- On 19 January, Unite members in the Welsh ambulance services will strike
- Ambulance workers in Unison and Unite will strike on 23 January
- Northern Ireland health workers in Nipsa, Unison and Unite unions are striking on 26 January

• Turn to pages 6-7 to read more on strikes in other sectors



Gareth Bromhall and the striking ambulance workers in Swansea

Striking ambulance worker – why I proudly carry the Socialist on picket lines

GARETH BROMHALL
AMBULANCE SERVICE WORKER, SWANSEA

I stood on a picket line with my ambulance service colleagues outside our workplace for the first time on 11 January. Earlier that morning, along with other Socialist Party members involved in Swansea Trades Union Council, we visited a local ambulance station and the picket there.

Nine striking workers bought the Socialist, and we handed out our Socialist Party strike bulletin to every single picketing worker. Since the strike wage began in the summer, Swansea Socialist Party has visited over 100 picket lines from posties and rail workers, to civil servants and NHS staff. At every one, our members have proudly carried the Socialist.

What we stand for

The Socialist is a vital asset for the Socialist Party. It’s key to communicating both our day-to-day demands and our overall programme. It provides a tangible representation of the Socialist Party and the ideas for which we stand.

When people buy the Socialist, they help maintain its publication.

The nature of the ongoing strikes mean that we are coming across

the same strikers and organisers on picket lines. Our paper serves to identify our members as we continue to support these strike, organise solidarity events and participate in the workers’ movement.

The reports and other articles in our bulletins and paper contain the most up-to-date picture of our work and programme. This arms us in the ideas needed to participate in the battles already raging, and those to come.

Back the paper that backs the workers
May Day Greetings in the Socialist

Take out a May Day Greetings ad – email scottjones@socialistparty.org.uk

Let’s build a movement to fight for...

- An immediate inflation-proof pay rise for all health and care staff, including those in privatised sectors, and a £15-an-hour minimum wage. Scrap zero-hours contracts
- Reversal of all privatisations. Scrap the Private Finance Initiative and cancel all PFI debts. Bring all outsourced workers and services in-house on a permanent contract
- A fully publicly funded NHS and care system free at the point of use. Scrap prescription charges in England, dental and all health charges
- Nationalisation of private health-care, care homes, the medical

- supply industry and the pharmaceutical companies – integrate them into the NHS
- Reinstatement of student bursaries and scrapping of tuition fees in England
- No trust in pro-privatisation, pro-austerity politicians. Starmer’s Labour doesn’t defend our NHS. Fight for the building of a new workers’ party
- A socialist NHS and care system – democratically run by elected and accountable committees, including service workers and users
- A socialist planned economy to end oppression, poverty and inequality

Unison leadership must prepare for battle



Unison members on strike in the NHS... ANDY BEADLE



...and in higher education IAN PATTISON

HUGO PIERRE
UNISON NEC, PERSONAL CAPACITY

Nominations have opened for the Unison National Executive Council (NEC) elections. They take place against a background of the national strike wave, including among our members, as the cost-of-living crisis rages.

For Unison members working in public services, it is most definitely a 'lack-of-income' crisis. In some sectors the union organises in, such as local government, pay is now 20-25% below the level it was in 2009. That effectively means many are working for one day a week for free, compared to then.

Unison members in health, local government and higher education, along with other parts of the union, are in desperate need of a fighting leadership to deal with the cost-of-living crisis and a new Tory austerity onslaught.

It was precisely the previous, right-wing, leadership of Unison's failure to mount a fight on pay throughout the savage austerity pay freeze, and their capitulation in the 2011 pensions battle which united public sector workers against the Tory-LibDem coalition government, that led to the left capturing the Unison NEC for the first time in the 2021 NEC elections. The NEC is now led by the Time for Real Change grouping. Four Socialist Party members were also elected.

The then general secretary, Dave Prentis, was duly rewarded for his services to capitalism with a life peerage in the special honours list! Although the NEC was won by the left, the general secretary position was won by Christina McAnea, who was the candidate backed by the Prentis wing of the union, and promoted the 'partnership' approach with the employers.

Unison members on strike

Unison members in higher education have been in an ongoing battle for pay for large parts of last year.

They have been joined by workers in the health service, particularly the

ambulance service, who have now taken two separate days of action with more to follow. Where there is a clear call to action, Unison members have responded.

It is also clear that many more members in the health service want to take action. There was a clear 'yes' vote in the national disaggregated ballot, but the Tory anti-union thresholds were missed following years of inaction by the right-wing leadership in health.

The union has pledged to ballot more NHS members against the desirous settlement offered by the Pay Review Body. However, the determination of the membership is often undermined by the actions of the leadership – for example making no recommendation for action on a below-inflation offer for Scottish NHS members, rather than recommending a fight.

Local government

In Unison's largest sector, local government, members in Scotland took action earlier in the year and forced some concessions from the Scottish employers. In the rest of the UK, the two largest regions voted to reject the employers' below-inflation pay offer, but nationally the pay offer was accepted.

However, had the leadership waged a campaign of explanation of the offer and what was necessary to win, and recommended rejection, we could have seen close to half a million local government workers joining rail and postal workers on strike.

The left leadership of the NEC must now get a grip and show that they will make a difference to members in the cost-of-living fight.

Unfortunately, for much of the last two years they have been involved in a battle with the right-wing bureaucracy over complaints made against former president Paul Holmes, that was a sideshow for most members.

Not being seen to take seriously complaints made by mainly women members allowed the right wing to use this to mobilise opposition among a certain layer of activists.

The NEC has now had to reinstate disciplinary action against Holmes. Socialist Party members have been calling for a fair hearing to allow both sides to state their case.

Unison says it has to be 'strike ready' for the battles ahead. There has been an increase in levels of strike pay but that alone is not enough. Organisation and a fighting strategy have to be debated throughout the union and a clear fighting lead given.

That includes taking a lead on maximum unity between trade unions in all the sectors where Unison organises.

Political strategy

This includes the political as well as industrial strategy. It is clear that Starmer's Labour Party welcomes private sector involvement in health and is preparing to support the same in other sectors too. Starmer has made it clear that austerity in councils will continue under a Labour government led by him, with "tough choices" to be made.

- Campaign for a serious strategy of national action to beat the cost-of-living crisis, including coordination with other trade unions taking action, for inflation-proof pay rises and £15-an-hour minimum wage

- Oppose all cuts – fight for the funds for public services; for no-cuts, needs budgets in councils. No support for politicians who carry out cuts to services

- End privatisation and bring all services back into public ownership, under democratic working-class control and management

- Tories out – but Starmer doesn't speak for us. For trade unionists in action to stand as 'no-cuts' candidates in local and national elections. For a review of the union's political fund – Unison members need a political voice in our interests. We need a new workers' party!

We welcome the fact that the Time

for Real Change group has agreed not to stand candidates against sitting Socialist Party NEC members, and vice versa. But there remains a battle for the course the union has to take during these elections. That's why it is vital to elect fighting, socialist candidates to the NEC.

The following Socialist Party members are seeking nomination:

April Ashley, sitting NEC member, national black members female seat

Naomi Byron, sitting NEC member, London low-paid members seat

Jim McFarlane, sitting NEC member, Scottish male seat

Hugo Pierre, sitting NEC member, national black members male seat

Adrian O'Malley, national general health service group seat

Anthony Hunt, East Midlands male seat

David Maples, national disabled members general seat

Mary McCusker, Scottish female seat

Nominations close on 13 February

Universities: Striking forces better offers – so let's fight on!

MARY FINCH
UNISON REP, PERSONAL CAPACITY

Strikes get results! That's been proven again by the improved offer for higher education workers.

After the historic national University and College Union (UCU) strike of academic staff, jointly with professional services staff in Unison, we've been offered a pay rise of 4-6% for most members in 2023-2024. Not only that, but the University and Colleges Employers Association has offered to implement part of the pay rise early in February, with the rest to come as usual in August.

Unison and UCU members in universities have been taking action over below-inflation pay rises for almost a year. Our bosses are clearly feeling the effect of the disruption.

In 2021-2022, we were given a tiny 1.5% pay rise. After several rounds of strike action, the offer in 2022-2023 was double, at 3%. This is now the second time that the university bosses have doubled their pay offer – and implementing a pay rise early is unprecedented.

6% is still far below inflation, however, and only for 2023-2024. They have not made an improved offer on the 3% increase that was imposed in 2022-2023. UCU and Unison do not accept that pay negotiations for 2022-2023 are finished with. We're fighting for a better pay offer this year and an improved backdated offer.

UCU has already announced another 18 days of strike action, including 1 February.

Under the existing anti-trade union laws, unions need to reballoon for strike action every six months. Unison's current strike mandate will run out in February. Unison should urgently begin campaigning nationally to mobilise members for the reballoon, and build for another round of strikes, focusing on branches that almost met the threshold in previous ballots.

Unison members at only 20 universities took strike action before Christmas. It's a tiny proportion of our actual membership. This isn't because members don't want to strike – branches have struggled to meet the Tories' undemocratic requirement for a 50% turnout.

But even with only 20 branches taking action, we've managed to force the employers to increase from a 1.5% to 6% pay rise. If we keep growing the dispute, we can keep winning more!

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Massive NEU ballot result launches school strikes

MARTIN POWELL-DAVIES
LANCASHIRE SOCIALIST PARTY AND NEU MEMBER

Around a quarter of a million members of the National Education Union (NEU) will be taking a first day of national strike action across England and Wales on Wednesday 1 February.

It will be followed by four days of rolling action, firstly in Wales, then by English regions, followed by a two-day strike across both nations, coinciding with budget day on 15 March.

The strike, called as part of the NEU's dispute over pay and funding, will provide a significant new impetus to the ongoing wave of strike action demanding real-terms pay rises.

In the NEU Cymru/Wales ballot, both teachers and support staff achieved the required turnout of over 50% to take official strike action, voting 92% and 88% to strike respectively. The biggest number of votes

to be returned was among teachers in England. Despite all the barriers to be overcome in getting such large numbers to return their postal ballot, over 120,000 (53%) did so, voting for action by a huge 90.4% majority.

This was no mean achievement, particularly for a union with a membership spread over 20,000 different schools and colleges. A vital role was played by individual workplace reps, backed up by their local branch and district officers, chasing up members to return their votes.

Unfortunately, the support staff ballot narrowly missed the legal threshold with a 46% turnout. However, with so many NEU members taking action, many schools will still be closed to most or all classes by strike action.

Rallies and demonstrations will be organised in many towns and cities, with the strike also coinciding with national action taken by the civil servants' union PCS.

A support worker in Unison told the Socialist: "As school workers in Unison we wholeheartedly support the teachers in this dispute and the battle they are fighting to defend our education system, currently in total funding crisis. We are seeking assurances from school leaders that support staff will not be asked to cover striking teachers' duties and that refusing to cross a picket line will not be met with any disciplinary action but will be treated as being on strike. Only by sticking together can we turn the tide."



PHOTO JOSHASKER

100,000 civil servants to strike on 1 February

Driving examiners on strike as part of the PCS targeted action SOUTHWEST SP



KATRINE WILLIAMS
PCS MEMBER

The PCS union's executive meeting in January called a national one-day strike on 1 February. The strike will coordinate with the first day of national action by the National Education Union, and coincide with a day of action called by the Trades Union Congress (TUC), against austerity and further anti-strike legislation threatened by the Tories. Aslef is also striking on this day and there may be others.

On 7 November, PCS secured a historic mandate for over 100,000 civil service members to take strike action in support of our 2022 pay claim, in defence of jobs, and other issues.

The union's leadership announced a programme of selective strikes which started in mid-December and are continuing. But no plans were made at that stage for calling out all

members with a mandate in national strike action of the sort being taken by other unions. Calls for a strategy capable of winning, including national action, made by the PCS left group Broad Left Network (BLN – in which the Socialist Party participates) were ignored.

Socialist Party members in PCS welcome the 1 February strike, and will continue to work tirelessly in the weeks ahead to make the strike a huge success.

BLN conference

On Saturday 14 January, the BLN held a successful conference of activists from all parts of the union.

The conference sent solidarity and support to all strikers across the movement and, in particular, to PCS members who had been on strike, including those present at the conference.

It welcomed the decision to call a national strike on 1 February, but made clear this should not be

a one-off isolated piece of national action.

The conference called for a major escalation of the action taken by the union. Central to this must be a programme of national all-member strikes, supported by selective (targeted) strikes and action short of strikes. The message from the conference was the urgent need for a strike strategy that can win our demands.

The union's current strike mandate runs out on 7 May and the BLN conference agreed this should be renewed with a fresh statutory ballot no later than 7 April if our demands are not met.

Membership control of our pay and jobs dispute is vital, which is why the BLN conference called for a special union conference to be held mid-March to review progress and strategy.

An emergency motion called on the TUC to "... prepare for the maximum coordinated industrial action, up to and including a 24-hour

general strike, if the Tory government moves to implement new anti-union laws and restrictions".

A range of other issues were discussed at the conference including tax justice, no to privatisation and outsourcing, and the steps needed to ensure trans equality.

Sheila Caffrey, who is on the National Education Union executive committee and part of that union's left group Education Solidarity Network, brought a message of support to the conference. Sheila anticipated that her union would win its statutory strike ballot and looked forward to sharing picket lines with PCS members.

The need to have a union leadership that can face up to the attacks of the Tories and their civil service bosses, unlike the current 'Left Unity' leadership, was a consistent theme running through conference deliberations. The BLN approach, and candidates to fight the 2023 union elections, were agreed.

PCS Driving Standards Agency strike

A STRIKING DRIVING EXAMINER IN THE SOUTH WEST SPOKE TO THE SOCIALIST

We're striking because we put our lives at risk every day, and yet we're not rewarded and haven't been for a long time. One of my colleagues found an old pay slip from 14 years ago and it showed that our pay has only gone up 76p in all that time.

One of our members spent November and December 'eBaying' their stuff just to be able to afford Christmas.

We've only recently had a 5p increase in our fuel allowance, despite how much that has gone up in recent months, and we're still overpaying into our pension fund, which the government doesn't seem too quick to want to bring back in line.

After more than a decade of pay freezes, our members have rejected the 2% pay rise we've been offered. We are calling for a 10% pay rise as well as a £15-an-hour minimum wage rate. We smashed the anti-trade union 50% turnout threshold, with 92% voting in favour of strike action across the DVSA (Driving and Vehicle Standards Agency), which shows the strength of feeling on it.

Support from the public has been great, and practically every driving instructor has shown their support, beeping as they go by. We would certainly be in favour of seeing coordinated strike action across the different unions taking strike action.

SARAH SACHS-ELDRIDGE
SOCIALIST PARTY EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

A new report has found that Britain, one of the richest countries on the planet, is becoming a hostile place to have children. The Observer reports: "Even if both parents work full time at the minimum wage, they will fall more than £1,700 a year short of the income needed to attain a basic minimum standard of living."

"This," it continues, "reflects the fact that as wages have stagnated over the last decade, the cost of living, including housing, food and energy, has increased and government support for low-paid parents has been significantly scaled back since 2010." "Them-and-us' capitalism means workers can't afford to give their kids a basic start in life.

But it isn't for a lack of money, it's that the power and wealth in society are in the hands of the capitalist class not the working class. The Socialist Party offers a programme around which we can fight to transform the situation in the interests of the overwhelming majority of society who are currently suffering.

The findings of the above report are part of the background to the current strike wave of workers in the public and private sector demanding pay rises in line with galloping inflation - and to address the impact of Tory and Blairite governments on pay and incomes. If wages had continued to grow at their pre-banking crisis rate in 2007 they would be £15,000 a year higher.

The Socialist Party calls for 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

The Trades Union Congress (TUC) has found that the cost of childcare, for example, has risen £2,000 a year since 2010. 84% of childcare is delivered by for-profit providers and the 'childcare market' was valued at £5.5 billion in 2017-18. As recently as 1993, 95% of care at home was provided by councils. Today, the majority is in private hands with companies expecting a 12% profit margin for caring for people. There's a similar picture across social care.

The Socialist Party calls for private social care and childcare facilities to be brought into public ownership under democratic control, in order to provide free, high-quality services for all who need them.

This profiteering gives a hint at how the number of billionaires in Britain has increased from 29 in 2010 to 177 in 2022. Billionaires' combined wealth grew from £58

BUSTING THE BOSSES' 'NO MONEY' LIES

billion to £653 billion from 1990 to 2022, an increase of 1,000%. Between 2020 and 2022 alone, their cash pile increased by almost £150 billion.

The Socialist Party says: 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

While government support for working-class families has fallen, government measures like quantitative easing and bailouts for big business during Covid - as well as increased exploitation of workers - are factors in this obscene growth of the wealth of UK billionaires. In 2019, the five richest families owned more wealth than 13.2 million people. The richest 1% of people in the UK owned the same wealth as 80% of the population.

It's predicted that in 2023 the amount paid to shareholders in dividends and share buybacks by the UK's largest companies listed in the FTSE 100 will hit £130 billion. In the austerity decade up to 2019, the amount going to these fat cats doubled. The bankers' bonuses are up 28%.

Bosses' pay at the largest 100 companies is up 39% on 2022's figure, now meaning they earn 103 times the average salary of UK full-time workers, £33,000 according to the Office for National Statistics. So many of us earn so much less even than that. So why is it unreasonable that nurses, playing a vital role in society, demand 19% if twice that is acceptable for the bosses privatising our public services or profiteering from environmental destruction in energy and mining! After all, 19% is only the start of clawing back what's been lost while the rich have raked it in.

And yet the line from the two main parliamentary parties is that there is no money to

transform this situation, that nothing can be done, that it's just the way things are. Rishi Sunak has said the nurses' pay claim is "obviously unaffordable".

The Tories' cold cruelty, their unwillingness to intervene to relieve the poverty and suffering of the working class, derives from the fact that their party exists to defend the interests of the boss class. Labour was formed to represent the opposite interests - those of the working class. However, under Keir Starmer, following in the footsteps of Tony Blair and Gordon Brown who also held power in the period of billionaire wealth explosion, Labour is again a 'second eleven' for the bosses.

The Socialist Party calls 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

It wasn't for nothing that the Guardian skit writer did a spot the difference between Keir Starmer and Rishi Sunak's New Year speeches and found nothing of substance to report. Yes, Starmer talked about things like giving "people a sense of possibility again", "showing light at the end of the tunnel" etc. But the most important line in Starmer's speech for the working class was when he said: "None of this should be taken as code for Labour getting its big government chequebook out again." He said, "we won't be able to spend our way out of their mess". He is putting clear lines between his leadership of the Labour Party and that of Jeremy Corbyn.

But this claim that there is no money to pay what is demanded by striking workers is false. There's plenty of money for inflation-proofed pay rises and to fund our public services. But it has to be fought for. The 150 tanker drivers who make

fuel deliveries to Valero petrol stations across the UK were undoubtedly told by their bosses that there was no money for real terms pay rises. But their strike won increases of 20-37%. When confronted by the no money claim from private sector bosses, workers should demand that the account books be opened to scrutiny by the trade unions as part of the negotiations.

The Socialist Party says: 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

Until 1945, there was 'no money' to fund publicly provided healthcare - until the working class organised, including politically, and won the NHS. The argument that money can't be found for pay and public services doesn't hold. For example, Tax Justice UK argues that equalising Capital Gains Tax rates with income tax rates and reforming the non-dom status would raise over £17 billion a year. That's estimated to be more than enough to give public sector workers inflation-proof pay rises. Tax Justice also says that a mere 1% tax on assets over £10 million would raise up to £10 billion a year.

This is not only a question of wages but of how public services are funded - the social wage. For example, if UK spending per person had matched the average of the 14 longest-standing EU member states (not models by any means) between 2010 and 2019, an average of £40 billion more would have been spent on our health service.

Let's not forget that large chunks of spending on public services are just passed over to the profiteers. Over the coming two decades, around £200 billion is due to be paid out by the public sector to private companies involved in private finance initiative (PFI) schemes. NHS trusts spent close to half a billion

pounds on PFI interest charges alone last year - equivalent to the salaries of 15,000 newly qualified nurses. In other words, it's part of the transfer of wealth from us to them.

It isn't like it's the bosses who are the ones creating this wealth, is it? The trade body UKHospitality has estimated that rail strikes, for example, might have cost the sector £2.5 billion since summer 2022. That is an indication of the wealth created by workers. But workers don't have control over how that money gets spent. It is produced collectively by the working class, but owned privately by the bosses. The capitalist class, assisted by capitalist politicians, do all they can to maximise that profit. Driving down wages and cutting public spending are the logic of maintaining their 'them-and-us' system.

The organisational strength of workers to defend their pay and rights at work are central to whether the 'no money' for pay rises and public services lie stands or not. Between 1937 and 1979, union membership in Britain doubled, while the share of income going to the top 1% fell by two-thirds. But when, between 1979 and 2014, membership of unions halved, the share of income for the richest 1% more than doubled.

Tax the rich seems like a no-brainer. A one-off 50% wealth tax just on those 177 billionaire families would raise £326.5 billion. Would they even notice the difference? We would! To put it in context, Jeremy Corbyn's 2019 manifesto included extending free school meals to all primary pupils, abolishing tuition fees and restoring maintenance grants for full-time and part-time students, free broadband, free care for the over-65s, public sector pay catch up, and more. It came with an £82.9 billion price tag and we were told it was an impossible utopian dream.

Unfortunately, a just cause and a good argument are not enough. Look at the windfall tax on the energy companies. Energy profiteers BP and Shell come out on top this year in terms of dividend payouts to their shareholders but threatened to withhold investment in green energy when the windfall tax was proposed - in which they have found many loopholes to avoid payment.

The Socialist Party calls for 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

Similarly, the corporations that have bled our public sector dry will not easily give that money up. What's more, they have laws and governments aiding and abetting them. Is it any wonder that increasingly people see capitalism as a rigged system? In 2017 alone, five countries received recommendations from the EU to privatise state-owned companies. Labour's shadow health secretary Wes Streeting has actually committed to expanding NHS privatisation.

Where such measures are prevented or reversed it is only as a result of determined struggle by workers and service users. The low-paid workers, porters, cleaners, catering staff and security organised in Unite at Barts NHS Trust won a famous victory that brought 1,800 workers back in-house and a pay rise beyond what profiteer contractor Serco said was 'affordable'.

For the working class, capitalism means economic exploitation; workers therefore have a collective interest in bringing about its end. The working class also has the collective power to do that flowing from the collective role it plays in producing the goods and services we all need. This shared experience also contributes to building solidarity, cutting across the ideologies of capitalist division.

Fighting to end capitalism, the 'them-and-us' system, which would condemn working class families to greater and greater poverty, has got to be done in the workplaces, but also on the political plane. Workers getting organised to fight for our interests is about building the strike wave - demanding the trade union leaders coordinate a 24-hour general strike as well as fighting to win each separate dispute. It's also about demanding the trade union leaders take decisive steps towards providing a voice for workers at the ballot box. The Socialist Party, as part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, will do all it can to assist in taking steps in that direction, including by standing candidates in the next general election.

The Socialist Party fights for a new mass workers' party. But for that party to liberate humanity from the misery of capitalist crisis, it means fighting for a democratic socialist plan of production based on the interests of the overwhelming majority of people, in a way that safeguards the environment, and with an internationalist approach.

Hackney library strike shows who does the real work



BRIAN DEBUS

CHRIS NEWBY
HACKNEY SOCIALIST PARTY

Striking Hackney library workers in Unison were again in a determined mood as they took part in their third day of strike action in their dispute with Hackney's Labour council.

On 16 January, library management attempted to open three libraries. In the Central library, despite five managers going in, management could not get any library worker to cross the picket line. As a result, the library was not able to be opened, in

spite of the fact that the minimum staffing level is three.

This really highlights who's important to running the library - and it's clearly not the managers!

There will be one more day of strike action on Friday 20 January, with further strike days being discussed. Library workers in Unite the Union will be striking in the week beginning 30 January.

The strikers are angry that the proposed huge job cuts are coming from a Labour council, with some of them calling for the setting up of a new party for the working class.

Protest against cuts to Birmingham special education service

CLIVE WALDER
BIRMINGHAM SOCIALIST PARTY

Several dozen parents and children demonstrated outside a meeting of Birmingham City Council on 10 January to protest against swingeing cuts and the possible outsourcing of SENDIASS (Special Education Needs and Disability Information Advice and Support Services).

SENDIASS is an arm's length council body that helps pupils with Special Educational Needs access appropriate support for their education. Parents, anti-cuts campaigners and trade unionists gave moving accounts of the help it provides.

Previous cuts to the Special Education budget by the Labour-run council led to the service being given

a 'poor' rating and consequently it is now being run by a government commissioner.

Speakers at the protest outlined how out of touch the commissioner is and feared that pupils wouldn't get the appropriate support in future. Hypocritically, two Labour councillors spoke at the rally attacking the decision to cut and outsource. It would have been much more useful if they had refused to implement cuts in the past and adequately funded the service!

Local trade unionists, Birmingham Socialist Party, and Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition supporters will continue to demand accountability from the council and the adoption of a no-cuts needs-based budget.



JAMES IVENS

SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBERS IN CWU

It's clear that Royal Mail believed that financial pressures from the 18 days of strike action, alongside the use of agency and casual staff to stop the vast majority of overtime, would break the back of the Communication Workers Union (CWU) postal strike.

This clearly failed. The strikes remained solid, resulting in Royal Mail writing to the CWU on 23 December, requesting negotiations, and a removal of the vast majority of agency staff.

We met in London

CWU postal reps from all around the country have met in London for an update on the talks, and to help prepare for the rebalot required by the anti-trade union laws.

There was a clear mood of defiance among those there, and we are

prepared to go again. The strike was not just for Christmas!

It was reported that there had been some movement by the management since their "best and final offer". For example, bosses had extended 'no compulsory redundancies' to the end of year, and withdrawn their changes to the ill-health retirement procedures. But Royal Mail was still a long way off presenting an agreement that would be acceptable to the CWU.

Although management had stated in letters to the CWU that they would "pause" their revision changes, this had clearly not flowed down to all local management, as they were still progressing with revision plans in some areas. This caused some major issues, but management have now pulled back.

Reps also raised that victimisation of CWU reps and activists must be resolved, and there can't be any

agreement while we have reps and members sacked or suspended. Another issue was the cuts to the Customer Service Point (CSP) jobs, where a lot of work is performed by disabled members, which in practice would mean compulsory redundancies for these members.

Labour

The lack of support from the Labour leadership was highlighted by reps. Branches also raised that, although they were raising money themselves for the hardship fund, we need to have a big public appeal for a national hardship fund.

Now reps must get around all the members to make sure there is a huge 'yes' vote in the rebalot, which closes on 16 February. Every office will be holding gate meetings. Members hope to win an agreement but must get ready to fight again.

Confident and optimistic – Successful women and LGBTQ+ national meeting

CORINTHIA WARD
SOCIALIST PARTY BIRMINGHAM

On Saturday 14 January, Socialist Party members from England and Wales met for the Women and LGBTQ+ national meeting.

Strike wave

With over 80 people taking part, the meeting opened with a discussion on the family and the origins of gender oppression, sexism and homophobia. Time was also dedicated to discussing our perspectives for the current political and economic situation in the UK and how this impacts women and LGBTQ+ people. As well as how we may see these sections' struggles as part of the upcoming social upheavals. Lively and confident contributions followed each talk, with a focus on how sections of these oppressed groups are finding their voice in the current wave of industrial battles, but also how we can grow the confidence of our own members.

Caucuses for both women and LGBTQ+ members went on to organise



plans for how to build our party among these sections and what steps our party should take in campaigning on certain topics.

Ideas and programme

It was a meeting which helped kick start the year in an enthusiastic and determined way. Members will now go out to their regions, branches, student groups and unions to provide both reports from the day but also with the ideas and programme necessary to end the oppression of these groups. There was a large new young layer in attendance, reflecting not

only how many young people today see capitalism for the broken system it is, but also that the Socialist Party is able to explain why this oppression came to exist and point a way forward to how it can be defeated.

Ultimately, what stood out most was the steadfast optimism that there can be a better system for society, free of oppression. And how the working class has the ability to fight for this. Our members left the meeting ready for the opportunities ahead where they can raise the banner of socialism and confidently say 'it doesn't have to be like this'.

SAT | 28.01.23 | 3-5PM

THE STRUGGLES FOR SOCIALISM WORLDWIDE

YMCA Indian Student Hostel, 43 Fitzroy Square, London W1T 6AQ

Speakers include socialist activists from:

- South Africa, Weizmann Hamilton
- Nigeria, Soweto
- Sri Lanka, Siritunga
- Britain, Isai Marijerla
- Chaired by Deji Olayinka

Public meeting organised by Socialist Party Black and Asian group

Ireland: Opposing far-right anti-refugee protests - fight for a socialist alternative

MILITANT LEFT (CWI IRELAND)

2023 has opened with a sharp and substantial upsurge of activity by far-right, and even some fascist, forces in the south of Ireland. These forces are seeking to capitalise on the seething anger over the housing, healthcare, and cost-of-living crises that are devastating the lives of working-class communities. It is a development that poses urgent questions for the workers' movement.

Thousands of working-class people across the country are now actively involved in protesting against the presence of refugees in their communities. Many more are active on social media in support of the protests. While this might subside, it is more likely that further protests will develop.

At the heart of this development is a far-right/fascist network of small, fractious political parties like the Irish National Party, the Irish Freedom Party, and a small but vociferous periphery of supporters. These groups tried and failed to take advantage of the Covid lockdowns to advance their agenda. They have also staged violently homophobic rallies outside the Irish parliament, the Dáil. None of these gained any political traction.

Now, however, they are in danger of making a breakthrough. By turning their attention to the accommodation of refugees, they have identified a route to push their dangerous agenda of racism and division. Their immediate agenda is to divert the blame for the housing crisis onto refugees. They are clearly learning to refine their message and it is also obvious that they have access to substantial sources of funding.

These protests are taking place while Irish capitalism fails to deal with two profound social crises. The public health system seems closer than ever to complete collapse, and the housing crisis shows absolutely no sign of resolution and looks instead to get even worse.

Many communities never benefited from the economic 'boom' years, but took the full force of austerity after the economic crash of 2008. Despite Ireland ranking as one of the richest countries in the world, hundreds of thousands of workers remain mired in low pay with scant public service provision, atrocious public transport infrastructure and now the prospect of never having secure housing. All of this while looking on at the grotesque spectacle of TDs (MPs) like Damien English and Robert Troy lying and scamming their way to owning oversized mansions and huge property portfolios.

There is a constant simmering anger among the Irish working class. The mass revolt over water charges demonstrated its huge political power. This successful mass movement showed what is possible when the working class, community groups, the socialist left and trade unions work together to defeat the government.



Militant Left on the protest in Drogheda and (inset) the Militant Left leaflet

PHOTOS: MILITANT LEFT

Support for the far right and the response to these anti-refugee protests is only possible because of the lack of a mass working-class socialist political alternative that could build the struggle around the health, housing and cost-of-living crisis. The trade unions taking a lead on these issues would also help turn the tide against the far right. As it is, Peter Casey's right-wing populist presidential campaign in 2018, where he gained over 23% of the vote, demonstrated the existence of a layer of largely passive support for anti-immigrant rhetoric and language.

The mainstream right-wing parties are sitting firmly on the fence at this moment. There can be absolutely no doubt that if the far right's ideas make a leap forward, then these parties will not hesitate to incorporate them and use them. Taoiseach (prime minister) Leo Varadkar's comments on introducing harsher border controls against 'illegal' immigration are a clear and distinct echo of the far right's demands.

This year there are constitutional referenda scheduled on issues of women's rights and the family. This potentially offers the far right another

opportunity to publicise their views, as they will be legally entitled to access 50% of media coverage during these campaigns. This represents a priceless propaganda opening for them. The workers' movement must be on high alert and ready to counter this.

Immediate tasks for the workers' movement

Successful counter-protests in Drogheda (in which Militant Left supporters played a role), Limerick and Drimnagh have taken place against anti-refugee demonstrations. Communities across the country have declared their support and solidarity with refugees. 'For All' groups are springing up across the country.

The trade union movement must now move into action and come in openly and forcefully behind campaigns to oppose the far right. It is clear that this spike in far-right activity does not represent, for the time being, majority feeling among the working class in Ireland. There can be no complacency, however. The need to build a mass anti-racist and anti-far right movement is urgent. But this movement also needs

to provide answers on how to solve the social and economic crisis facing working-class people if it is going to undercut the potential for the far right to grow.

No solutions under capitalism

These health and housing crises are not going to be resolved quickly, if left in the hands of the capitalist establishment. Indeed, there is almost no indication that the government intends to resolve them at all. The government and its supporters in the media are crowing about a €5 billion government surplus for 2022. This could pay for 20,000 public homes to alleviate the housing crisis and leave enough funds to support the accommodation, health and education needs of refugees. The state has the capacity to borrow billions, if it wanted to, to fund a massive public house building programme and to fund a comprehensive public health system.

Ireland is one of the richest countries in the world. Yet, under capitalism, the Irish political establishment refuses to use the wealth created every year by the workers of Ireland to fund adequate housing and healthcare provision. Instead, over €150 billion in profits are shipped to offshore tax havens every year. There are clearly ample funds available to address the housing crisis and the A&E crisis, as well as to look after refugees. The capitalist class which owns and controls this wealth refuses to do this, however.

The present crisis in accommodation for refugees, which sees people housed in completely inappropriate settings, is yet another example of the delinquent nature of the Irish establishment. Refugees and asylum seekers did not cause the current housing and healthcare crisis. The far-right and fascist elements in our society have no answers or political programme to address the huge problems we face. Instead, they do the dirty work of the capitalist class by trying to turn the justified mass anger over housing and healthcare against refugees.

Militant Left calls for a massive programme of public investment to build the homes that are needed, to establish a fully funded public health system and for increases in pay and incomes that fully match the cost of living. The money is there. By taking the wealth from the super-rich through a programme of public ownership and democratic control of the banks, construction companies and big business, the money could be found immediately.

The current economic crisis is just another example of capitalism working as normal. Ultimately, the only way to end deep social crises, like the one we are experiencing in housing, health and incomes, is to take the power, ownership and control of wealth and capital out of the hands of the tiny capitalist class through democratic public ownership and control. A socialist plan would remove profiteering and greed from the provision of housing and focus instead on human need. That is why we need to build a new party for the working class and trade unionists, to fight for these and other essential socialist policies, and to defeat the ideas of the far right.

Facing down the far right is an urgent political task. Militant Left will play an active role in this task and will work with all forces opposed to far-right and fascist groups.



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

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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.

SOCIALISM AND INTERNATIONALISM

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

Amazon workers take historic strike action in Coventry



Rally outside Coventry depot November 2022 PHOTO: COVENTRY SP

MAX MCGEE
NUNEATON SOCIALIST PARTY

GMB members in Coventry are taking strike action on 25 January – the first time the online retail giant has seen official strike action in the UK. This comes after wildcat actions that swept the country over the summer rejected a meagre 35p-an-hour pay increase. Workers in depots including Bristol, Tilbury, Dartford, Belvedere and Rugeley took part in sit down protests in Amazon canteens against the offer that would amount to just £10 a week for the average worker.



Workers have voted for strike action to demand £15 an hour!

Now workers in Coventry represented by the GMB are going forward with strike action, supported by 98% of those who voted in the ballot to demand £15 an hour!

To show the support of the public, Coventry GMB has set up supporters' meetings. At a recent one, a night-shift worker recounted how low-paid security guards at the

warehouse are instructed to search workers' clothes, bags and even turn their gloves inside out in search of union leaflets. This shows just how scared management is about workers getting organised.

The way the actions over the summer spread via photos and videos on social media, and now the winning of an official dispute show the potential that's there to organise and win in this sector. Lone union members can take inspiration that when a lead is given and the anger bubbles over, workers will get organised and take on the bosses.

There are important opportunities to link workers across the warehouse and distribution sectors. Tesco workers at Hinckley warehouse in the Midlands voted in favour of strike action in December 2021 and were eventually met with an improved pay offer. Workers in warehouses and delivery centres across the country will be watching Amazon workers in Coventry and be inspired.

Activists from the National Shop Stewards Network and Youth Fight for Jobs will be at Amazon warehouses across the country on the strike day. We will be discussing with workers the lessons of the strike wave, how to organise in the trade unions, and how to fight for action to improve workers' lives.



PHOTO: MARY FINCH

Student maintenance loans inadequate – we need free education!

DEAN YOUNG
LIVERPOOL SOCIALIST STUDENTS

Student maintenance loans will only rise by 2.8% for the 2023-24 academic year, rather than in line with RPI inflation, measured as 14% in November 2022. Many students will be wondering if they can afford to attend or continue going to university. This decision will cost students up to £1,523 per year, when the education system and funding model is already in crisis.

There are many problems within education. Underfunding and marketisation mean we are already seeing course closures, and the collapse of individual universities is posed. During the pandemic, no help was offered to students, and we were forced to pay tuition fees for remote, online learning. Tuition fees, introduced under New Labour and subsequently tripled by the Con-Dem government in 2010, come to a whopping £9,250 a year. And on top of this the elite Russell Group universities have demanded the cap for domestic students is raised.

Maintenance grants? They have been replaced by loans. The average

debt of an undergraduate student, measured as £45,800 in December 2022, is subject to an annual interest rate based on RPI, currently capped at 6.5%. This may increase if the cap is lifted in February.

This paints a bleak picture for students amidst a cost-of-living crisis. So, what is to be done? 22 Labour student societies have written a sternly worded letter demanding an end to marketisation. Is this enough? I don't believe so. What is needed is a new mass movement capable of representing students and fighting for free education. Socialist Students is fighting to build that movement.

We also need a new mass workers' party, one which represents the interests of the working class rather than the capitalists.

With the announcement of 18 days of strike action by the University and Colleges Union (UCU), we can see how striking workers are giving a lead. In Liverpool Socialist Students we have taken the approach of seeking a united front of all student groups to support our UCU members in struggle, and to continue building a fighting student movement.

Student housing mess What's the socialist solution?

AMY SAGE
BRISTOL SOCIALIST STUDENTS

Student housing has reached crisis point. The number of UK students facing homelessness is on the rise. A study conducted by Student Beans – a discount website – revealed that one third of students face housing insecurity. Students are struggling to secure themselves a place to stay for their studies. Instead, they are being forced to live in Airbnbs or hotels, couchsurf, or even live in their cars. This is only set to get worse.

Since 2021, demand for university education has risen by 8%. There are now over two million full-time students currently studying at UK universities. Many universities, faced with a funding 'black hole' due to a fall in student numbers during 2020, have been desperate to cram more and more students onto courses, particularly more lucrative international students. However, they have been over-recruiting to courses knowing these students with residential accommodation.

There is a student housing shortage across all UK universities with an estimated shortfall of 207,000 student beds. For those fortunate

enough to have found accommodation, one third say that they don't think they will be able to afford next month's rent. University students now spend between 68% and 74% of their student maintenance loan on accommodation (private and university-owned housing respectively) with rents rising faster than inflation. Leaving, on average, just £150 per month for food and other living expenses, it is forcing one in ten students to use food banks.

Quality housing needed

It is not just the price of housing that is an issue, however. Many students find themselves living in poor quality, unsafe accommodation. Problems with damp or mould, lack of water or heating, and rat and insect infestations are just some of the problems students face.

Others have found themselves forced to live far away from their university. In Bristol, for example, students have been offered accommodation in Newport – about an hour away from Bristol on the train. Of course, the stress and isolation this situation causes will only exacerbate the existing mental health crisis among students.

It is clear that there is a structural undersupply of student

accommodation across the UK. This shortage of housing stock has allowed predatory pricing and exploitative practices by both private landlords and third-party student accommodation providers. Universities have a responsibility to provide good-quality, affordable housing to all their students.

An expansion of purpose-built student accommodation should not be done at the expense of local communities. To stop working-class people being priced out of their cities, and to reduce strain on austerity-hit local services such as bin collections, healthcare etc, we need a democratic plan. A socialist society based on democratic public ownership of big business and the banks would be able to plan and provide good-quality homes, jobs, and services for all, students and local residents alike.

It is also clear that students need a political voice. Starmer's Labour has ditched its pledge to scrap tuition fees for university students and offers no clear solution to the problems faced by students and working-class people, including the housing crisis. Students and young people need a new political party that can fight for its interests and fight for a socialist alternative.

Socialists Students demands:

- Scrap fees, cancel student debt, and replace maintenance loans with living grants tied to the rate of inflation
- Bring third-party halls into ownership and control of the university with compensation paid only on the basis of proven need
- Introduce rent controls in all student accommodation, to be decided by democratically elected committees including campus trade unions, staff and students
- For councils to use their powers to compulsorily register all private landlords as a means to improve housing standards and implement rent controls
- No evictions for students who can't afford rent. Ensure access to emergency cost-of-living grants for all
- Ban agency and contract fees
- Launch a mass building programme of good quality, affordable student housing under the democratic oversight of students and local communities, alongside building the council housing people need
- For a fully funded higher education system to end the student housing crisis – take the wealth off the 1%

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Panto review: A Cost-of-Living Crisis Christmas Carol



MICK GRIFFITHS
WAKEFIELD AND PONTEFRAC TRICT DISTRICT
SOCIALIST PARTY

After 30 years of performing, Wakefield Labour Club's socialist troupe 'The Red Shed Players' latest panto is one of their most uproarious yet.

Bob Cratchett is sacked on Christmas Eve, and a visit to the food bank is necessary to put together a family Christmas dinner. Tiny Tim is outraged and demands that Scrooge and all the bosses should be sacked so that their profits can be redistributed.

Cratchett is a lifelong Tory voter and still thinks that his family is blessed. Mrs Cratchett is of the view that in these tough times looting stops being a crime and becomes a necessity. She joins a mob of food rioters in the local supermarket. In defiance of price rises they liberate some food, free of cost.

Bob Cratchett is visited by the spirits of Keir Hardie, a founding member of the parliamentary Labour Party (certainly dead), and Keir Starmer (either dead or doing a great impression!)

In essence, a full frontal attack on both capitalism and Starmism.

Disgracefully, in some areas local right-wing labour bureaucrats have ordered members not to attend these shows even though they are all fundraisers for various local worthy causes!

• **Showing for the final time**
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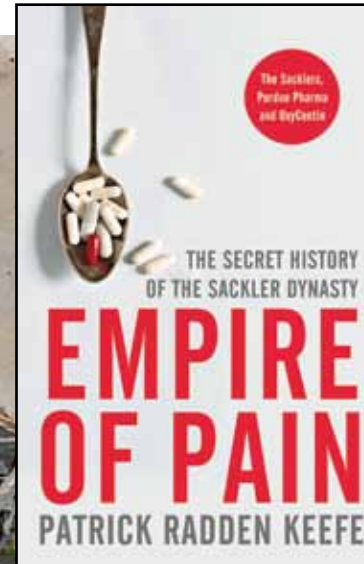
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Non-fiction review - Empire of Pain: The Sackler dynasty and the opioid crisis



PHOTO: CHRIS VARZAB/CC



NIALL MULHOLLAND
EAST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

Visitors to museums and educational establishments, such as the V&A Museum in London and Oxford University, will be acquainted with the name of Sackler. This is the billionaire family from the US which, for decades, has funded many aspects of these institutions, and other world-renowned galleries and universities, like the Louvre, Yale, and Harvard. Less well known until revelations in recent years is that the Sackler's great wealth comes from the suffering of many people, particularly the poor.

An estimated half a million Americans have died from opioid-related overdoses since 1999, and millions more have become addicted. The Sackler family, through their company Purdue Pharma, made a painkiller in the 1990s called Oxycodone, which is twice as powerful as morphine. They sold it as a slow release drug and claimed that it was less addictive than other opiates.

Scandalously, the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved Oxycodone without testing the company's claims. This created the conditions for an opioid epidemic in the United States and elsewhere. Not only was the drug addictive for many users, addicts soon discovered that by crushing the Oxycodone pills they could ingest it much faster and get an immediate high.

All of this is brilliantly described in Patrick Radden Keefe's book, 'Empire of Pain'. Keefe's last book, the acclaimed 'Say Nothing: A True Story of Murder and Memory in

Northern Ireland', is also well told. It centred around the disappearance of Jean McConville in 1972, a widowed mother of ten abducted from a home in Belfast by the IRA and never seen alive again, and the Price sisters who were at one time world-famous Irish republican prisoners in an English jail.

In 'Empire of Pain', Keefe traces the history of the Sackler dynasty beginning with Arthur Sackler, the eldest of three boys born to a Ukrainian Jewish grocer in Brooklyn in 1913. Arthur funded himself through college and medical school, partly by working in advertising and, with his two younger brothers Mortimer and Raymond, established or bought a number of businesses, including one which would change its name to Purdue Pharma.

Arthur used his advertising experience to aggressively market his pharmaceutical products, including Valium, with often misleading and false information. Valium sold widely in the 1960s and 1970s, and made the Sackler's rich.

Arthur liked to work behind the scenes concerning his company but he was a keen collector of Asian art and a high-profile philanthropist. He drove hard to get the Sackler name on the walls of art galleries, universities and museums throughout the world. This granted the family name a veneer of respectability that belied the sordid origins of its enormous wealth.

Richard Sackler, the son of Raymond, became de facto head of the family business after Arthur's death in 1987. Once the company had devised Oxycodone, it followed Arthur's

policy and mounted an aggressive and false publicity campaign, employing an army of sales people to lobby medical practitioners hard to sell Oxycodone, and including enticing them with material inducements. The plan was a great success. It is estimated that since Oxycodone went on sale, the Sackler family profited by \$14 billion, which was often put into offshore shell companies and bank accounts.

Keefe describes the heroic efforts of a journalist, Barry Meir, of the New York Times, to expose the Sackler's role in the opioid epidemic. However, with their huge wealth and influence, the Sacklers were able to lobby the Times, which subsequently took Meir off the subject.

Public pressure

But as the death toll continued to grow from opioids, public pressure forced the US government to finally take action. This was half-hearted, to say the least. A US attorney who raised alarm bells about Oxycodone went on to become a consultant for Purdue. Yet after many years of litigation and action by some attorney generals of US states particularly the Sackler family filed Purdue Pharma for bankruptcy. This allowed the family to avoid any criminal charges or to accept any liability for the opioid crisis. It also took place as the patent for Oxycodone was reaching its end. The Sacklers successfully gorged as much profit as possible from the drug and then discarded Purdue Pharma when it became too much of a liability.

Keefe has drawn on thousands of

court documents, internal company emails, and hundreds of interviews that he conducted, to write a devastating portrait of the greed of the Sackler family, and their unwillingness to take any responsibility or show any remorse for what Oxycodone led to. When addicts could not get Oxycodone and a new version of the pill proved harder to break up, they went on to heroin. In this way, Oxycodone acted as a boost for the Mexican drug cartels selling heroin.

Richard Sackler, who was president of Purdue Pharma from 1999 to 2003, along with the rest of the family, attempted to obscure the family's involvement in the opiate disaster. Big law firms were ruthlessly deployed to threaten litigation against any perceived threat to Purdue's reputation. If necessary, others took the blame; three Purdue Pharma executives pleaded guilty to a misdemeanour count of misbranding in a 2006 settlement with the Justice Department. They were later given large financial pay-outs by Purdue.

This superbly written book is an engrossing account of the immoral Sackler dynasty, which has a striking resemblance to the fictional Roy family from the TV hit show, Succession (with a similar ensemble of the ruthless and the alternative living-type family members, all of whom happily live off the company profits). Intentionally or not, 'Empire of Pain' is also a searing indictment of the system of capitalism itself, at its most corrupt and sordid.

• **Empire of Pain - The secret history of the Sackler family, by Patrick Radden Keefe (Picador paperback, 2022)**

FA Cup crush at Hillsborough - fans still waiting for stadium safety

DAVE WALSH
LIVERPOOL SOCIALIST PARTY

At the FA Cup third round match between Sheffield Wednesday and Newcastle United at Hillsborough stadium on 7 January, Newcastle fans in the Leppings Lane end reported serious safety concerns about overcrowding and poor crowd management.

Fans complained they were crammed through narrow entrances on their way into the stadium. Once inside, many said they were unable to head towards their allocated areas as they were carried along through a narrow bottleneck on the stairwell by the force of the crowd behind them. Even after fans reached the stand, many said these areas were overcrowded. A number of fans also complained that stewarding was poor, with too few stewards, leaving many being misdirected causing narrow exits to become blocked.

Thankfully no one was injured but the incident raises serious questions about safety at British sports stadiums. Particularly given this was the very stadium and stand where the 1989 Hillsborough disaster (search

'Hillsborough disaster' at socialistparty.org.uk for previous articles) occurred, leading to the unlawful killing of 97 Liverpool fans. After that, authorities claimed 'lessons would be learned' and significant changes would ensure fan safety, but this incident shows that not enough has been done and that profit is still the priority of the capitalist owners of the game.

The claim that 'lessons were learned' always rang hollow when, after years of campaigning by the Hillsborough Family Support Group and the Hillsborough Justice Campaign, no one was brought to justice for the unlawful killings.

The fact that not one police officer was convicted after the verdict shows who the law really serves and what lessons were really learnt.

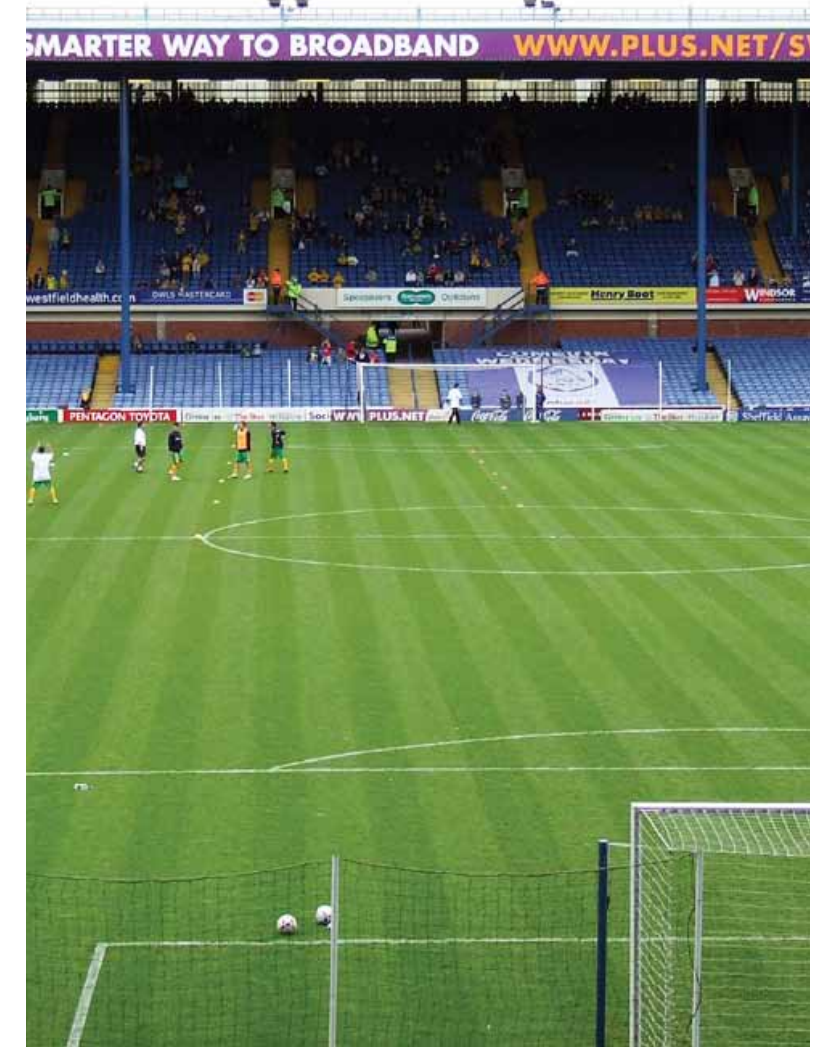
Reading the accounts of the Newcastle fans reminded me of that terrible day in 1989 and the chaotic scenes inside the stadium, and I feel angry that the warning signs of another tragedy are being ignored. Just like the incident in 1981 was ignored when 38 Spurs fans were injured in a crush at the Hillsborough Stadium. I remember that day in 1989 feeling

helpless at the back of the stand as I watched bodies being laid out on the pitch while traumatised fans did whatever they could to help victims. And I remember the aftermath, feeling outrage at the relentless lies and propaganda that saturated the capitalist media.

The Newcastle United Supporters Trust has asked fans to come forward with more information and I hope they do, so their experience won't be ignored. Sadly it is not an isolated incident of fans still being put in danger at games, as the Champions League final in 2022 shows (see 'Eye-witness: Champions League final - lying Uefa, politicians and brutal police to blame for chaos' at socialistparty.org.uk).

The justice system failed to provide justice after the Hillsborough disaster and will always fail while it's controlled by the capitalist class. Fans can never be confident that they will be looked after while the game is controlled by billionaires and private corporations. We need democratic workers' control over the justice system and football to be taken into the hands of fans, so that decisions that affect them are made by them.

The West Stand (Leppings Lane end) at Hillsborough PHOTO: DANIEL BAGSHAW/CC



Government U-turn on Channel 4 privatisation

Channel 4 HQ PHOTO: STEVE CADMAN/CC



NEIL ADAMS
READING SOCIALIST PARTY

In yet another U-turn, the Tory government has ditched plans to privatise the broadcaster Channel 4. This is significant when we consider that current prime minister Rishi Sunak campaigned for the Tory leadership on the basis of carrying out the privatisation plans.

This must be welcomed, but what were the factors that led to this decision by a government ideologically opposed to public ownership?

As previously reported in the Socialist, all other attempts to privatise this service have failed. Even as far back as Margaret Thatcher whose government oversaw its creation!

The latest privatisation plans originated under the Johnson government, proposed by the then culture secretary Nadine Dorries. As stated in the Guardian newspaper recently: "There had been suggestions, including from Tory MPs, that the proposed sale was motivated by political opposition to Channel 4's output rather than a sound business case." This certainly would appear in keeping with the right-wing populism of Johnson's government.

The plan to sell the broadcaster for a possible £1.5 billion had faced opposition from Channel 4 executives and much of the TV industry. Dorries' successor, Michelle Donelan, said that she had reached her decision "after reviewing the business case and engaging with the relevant sectors."

But the growing mood of militancy

in society as whole, as seen in the magnificent strike wave that saw 1.5 million work days lost in December of last year alone, and pressure from entertainment unions, has checked the Tory government, which does not want to open up another front.

However, new legislation proposed will enable Channel 4 to make its own shows for the first time in its 40-year history. This is contentious, and Pact - the trade body that represents British television production companies - said: "Any relaxation of Channel 4's publisher-broadcaster status will be a blow to the sector, who are already facing increased production and business-related costs."

Independent production companies are concerned. Channel 4 currently has a quota to commission at least 25% of its programmes from independent producers, but in practice the real figure is around 60%, according to the broadcaster's latest annual report.

No matter what decisions are made around Channel 4, the interests of workers in the industry or those of the consumers will never be fully met under a capitalist business model.

As socialists we must consistently argue for a publicly owned and democratically accountable media, where workers in the industry receive a fair wage and enjoy decent terms and conditions and society as a whole can have a say in what is produced.

WHAT'S YOUR VIEW?

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NHS workers:

'WE WILL STRIKE UNTIL WE WIN'



RCN strike Merthyr Prince Charles Hospital 15.12.22 PHOTO: CARDIFF SOCIALIST PARTY

BETH WEBSTER
NURSE AND RCN MEMBER, SOUTH WALES

As the NHS crisis worsens, more health workers are voting for strike action, backed by strong public support.

Nursing on a cancer care day unit, I can see how every level of the NHS is under severe strain. It's unusual for us to be fully staffed, meaning chemotherapy and other treatments are often delayed.

Whenever we need to admit patients, there is a struggle for beds. We often have to send them to an understaffed A&E, or send people home knowing they may deteriorate

overnight. When we try to arrange community care, we can see GPs and community services are overwhelmed.

Cancer diagnoses are delayed as there aren't enough radiographers to do scans or radiologists to read them. And there aren't enough pathologists to read biopsies.

There aren't enough lab workers, so blood test results and transfusions are delayed. And lack of pharmacy staff causes chemo delays. Shortages of paramedics mean people can't get in for planned or emergency treatments.

Much of my job now is apologising. Apologising for delays caused by lack of staff and resources, for things I can't control.

I'm constantly doing the work of two or three people, skipping lunch breaks, and working hours of overtime, much unpaid. We are all exhausted.

The NHS is haemorrhaging experienced

staff, and overburdening those newly qualified, which is unfair to them and unsafe for patients.

On top of this, NHS staff worry about paying the bills. Some claim benefits and use food banks, or opt out of their pension contributions.

Because of all this, we will keep striking. Nurses, ambulance workers and physios are all set to take strike action this month. Midwives in Wales have secured a mandate, and junior doctors are currently being balloted.

The strikes are working. The Tory cabinet is split. Tory health secretary Steve Barclay is reportedly pressuring Rishi Sunak to provide more money for a pay deal.

In Wales, the Labour-led Senedd have offered a one-off payment. This is an insult, which will do nothing to improve recruitment and retention. But it does show that

governments can find money when they want to. The Welsh government should pay NHS workers and join the unions in fighting for the money from Westminster.

Keir Starmer says that the NHS must reform or die, but his reforms would be death to the NHS. He blames doctors for the current crisis, wouldn't give NHS workers an above-inflation pay rise, and wants to increase privatisation.

If we want the NHS to continue, we must fight for it ourselves. We must increase the pressure on the Tory government, and a possible future Labour government in Westminster, with coordinated strike action among not just health unions, but all striking workers.

1 February will bring together other sections of workers already taking strike action. This should be used as a big step in preparing for a 24-hour general strike.

• See more on NHS p4-5