

# STRIKE ON 1 FEBRUARY

# ALL OUT TOGETHER ON BUDGET DAY - 15 MARCH

# PREPARE FOR A 24-HOUR GENERAL STRIKE



- An inflation-proof pay rise for all
- Force out Tories and their anti-strike laws
- No trust in Starmer's Labour
- build a new mass workers' party

Socialist Party WHAT WE THINK

The 1 February strike will see up to 500,000 workers taking national strike action across five unions: NEU, UCU, PCS, Aslef and RMT. It is the biggest single day of workers' action yet in the strike wave that has developed in the aftermath of the Covid pandemic, and taken off especially since last summer.

Actually, it is the largest strike since the public sector walkout of 30 November 2011. That day of action, just over 11 years ago, was effectively a public sector general strike, when 2 million workers in 29 unions walked out together to defend their pensions from the Tory-led coalition with the Lib Dems.

Such action and more still will be needed to defeat the cost-of-living squeeze of the bosses and their Tory government, and Sunak's planned new anti-union laws. But this is a very important step towards what is needed.

The 1 February strike will show the power of workers taking action together, the fact that the schools will be closed and the rail network will be shut down in particular. It will raise the confidence of workers and prove beyond doubt that there is the potential for the unions to come together and co-ordinate mass joint strike action. The National Education Union (NEU) has recruited 22,000 members in a week after announcing its strike mandate, showing the appetite to join the growing strike wave.

Two days before the 1 February strike, the Tories will seek to move their anti-union legislation through the next parliamentary stage. This is on top of what are already the most restrictive and undemocratic anti-union laws in Western Europe. Grant Shapps tried to argue that they were commonplace in countries like

France but the beginning of mass strike action there against Macron's pension attacks have blown that lie away. Workers here and in France are moving in increasing numbers to take on big business governments, who want to make us pay for the capitalist crises.

The Tories' new laws would give the government and the bosses powers to dictate a 'minimal service level', demanding under threat of fines that unions ensure enough workers work, effectively asking unions to police their own strikes, even organise their own scabbing.

But one of the main demands of the striking nurses and ambulance workers is to ensure that there is a safe minimum of NHS workers in place every day. Such is the shortage of NHS staff because of the exhausting work pressures and low pay, caused by the Tory health cuts, with wages cut by around a fifth in the last decade.

It won't be lost on workers the clear class bias of the law. Last March, 800 P&O workers were brutally sacked, with bosses admitting to MPs that they knew they were acting illegally. Yet they have been allowed to go scot-free while the government looks to use the law to further restrict workers' rights.

The money is there

In the same vein, they say there is no money for workers' pay - yet the number of UK billionaires has risen by 20% and the scandal of Tory cronies Covid deals grows. The family of Tory peer Michelle Mone, who made millions in PPE contracts, has now been caught in tax avoidance scandal. So too Tory Party chair Nadhim Zahawi, who faces calls to resign after he made a settlement of £5 million with the tax authorities when he was chancellor. While they had their noses in the public trough, health workers who braved the pandemic to save lives are now attacked for being forced to take action to keep their heads above water.

For years, the unions were written off by some as a relic of the past. But now workers are fighting back, the Tories swiftly move to new repressive

STRIKE WAVE

1 February must be a start Build for wider action on budget day - 15 March Prepare for a 24-hour general strike

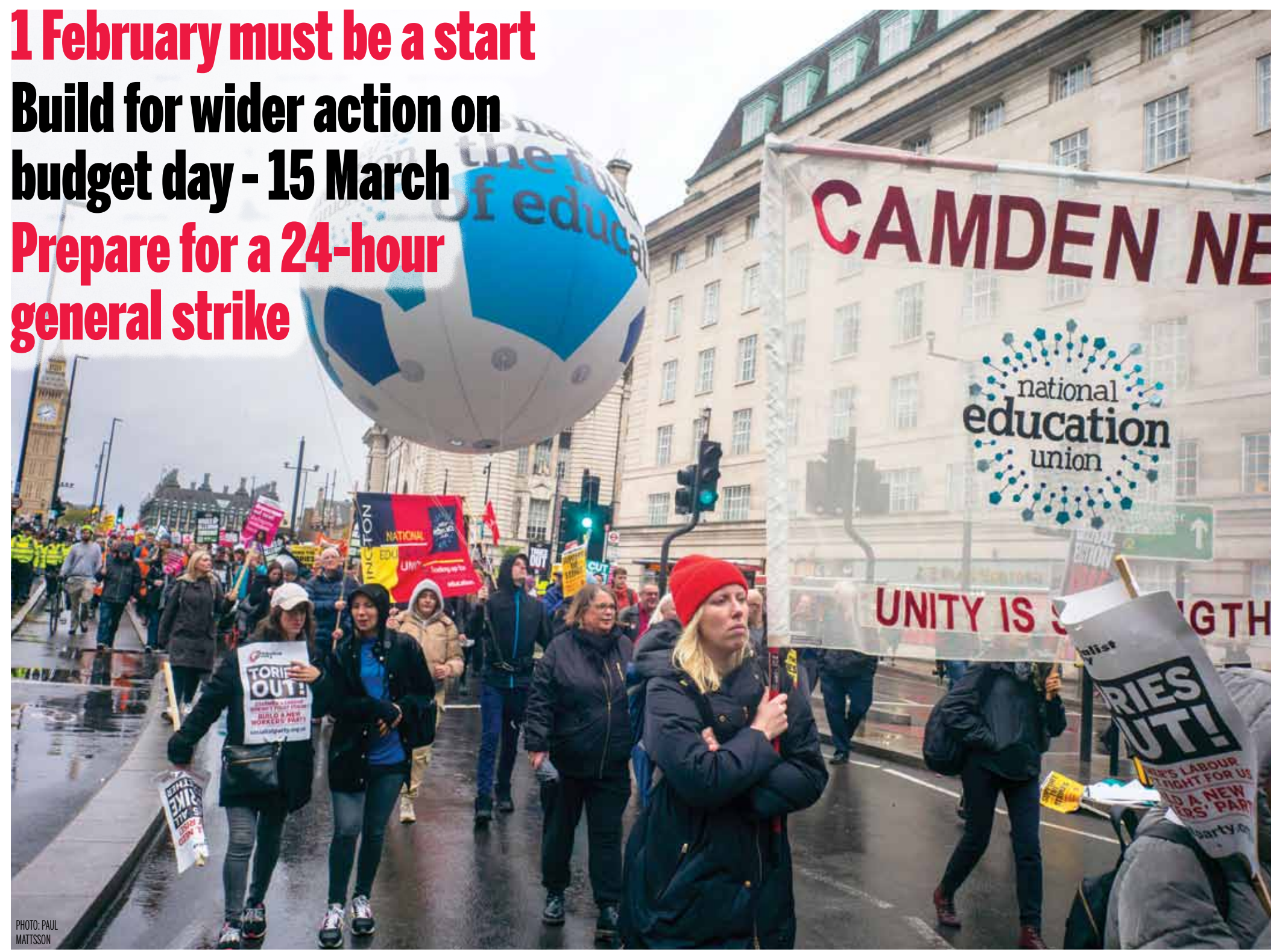


PHOTO: PAUL MATTISSON

STRIKE WAVE

legislation. But along with his lack of movement on pay, these aren't signs of the strength of Sunak's government. The opposite, he is terrified that giving an inch to one group of workers will establish a precedent.

Similarly, the anti-union laws he now seeks to roll out had been left on the shelf since Johnson won the election in December 2019, because they were worried at workers' reaction.

But the unions have to take this attack seriously. Cameron got his 2016 Trade Union Act, with its undemocratic 50% industrial action ballot thresholds, into law with no more than verbal opposition from the union leaders. If the unions limit the fight now to just lobbying Tory MPs, the same will happen.

But we don't share the fatalistic view of some, that if these new restrictions become law then the unions are hamstrung. The Tory anti-union laws of Ted Heath were effectively defeated by mass struggles in the early 1970s. While Cameron's Trade Union Act may have been an obstacle to national action, as the 1 February joint strikes show, they haven't prevented them. It is the very thing that the Tories want to curtail - workers' action - that can defeat their plans. But the fight against these laws and the cost-of-living squeeze must be linked together.

The strikes on 1 February must be the beginning, not the end of the joint action that is needed. On 30 June 2011, four unions went on strike together: PCS, UCU, along with NUT and ATL who have since merged to become the NEU. That day of strikes, and the rallies and demonstrations, was a powerful step that lifted the horizons of all public sector workers, leading directly to the 2 million strike of November that year.

Those unions are out again on 1 February and will be joined on the day by Aslef and the RMT, alongside many localised disputes. But the strike wave is growing with workers out every day. Nurses and ambulance workers will be striking both sides of 1 February, with joint strike action on 6 February being reported as the biggest NHS strike in history. The rail unions and the CWU in Royal

Mail have been taking national action since the summer.

Workers are already asking: "Why aren't we striking on the same day?" The idea of some union leaders that such generalised action may obscure their individual dispute is a mistake. It isn't about maximising publicity, but what action can win.

As big a day of action as it will be, 1 February could have been much bigger if the unions taking action had declared weeks earlier and publicly called on other unions to join them.

The strike itself will raise the sights of all workers. There needs to be an urgent meeting of the unions, particularly those with strike mandates, to call a strike date that maximises the numbers involved.

15 March

We support any such day of action, but the Tories will be moving their budget on Wednesday 15 March, and the NEU has already called action on that day. It is an ideal date that will inevitably be seen by workers as an opportunity to mobilise behind it. It also gives time for unions to discuss and agree coordination of their action. In addition, the TUC and the unions should organise a national demonstration on one of the Saturdays either side of 15 March that could fill the streets of London.

This action would cement the union movement as a pole of attraction to all workers, including those not currently organised in the unions, many of them young. Exactly a week before the 1 February strike, there will be the first official strike by Amazon workers in the UK, organised by the GMB in Coventry, after their walkouts around the country last summer.

A day of coordinated strike action - on the scale approaching that of a 24-hour general strike, particularly if, unlike 2011, there is a programme of escalating action - can lead to Sunak's Tory government being thrown out.

That would pose the political alternative that workers need. On the 16 January emergency protest called by the RMT at Downing Street, the day of the first reading of Sunak's

anti-union bill, the union's general secretary Mick Lynch attacked the Labour front bench for their lack of support.

The unions must demand that Starmer commits to repeal this and all other Tory anti-union laws - those of Thatcher and Major were maintained by Blair and Brown. But they should go further and demand that where Labour is the employer, as with the Welsh government, councils and mayors such as Sadiq Khan in London and Andy Burnham in Manchester, they publicly inform Sunak that they will not enforce any new Tory measures.

But Starmer is intent on showing big business that his New Labour is safe for them and their profits. He is choosing a side. His refusal to support strikes, and his sacking of shadow ministers who do speak out for striking workers, is symbolic of this. But he is confident to act in this way because there is no political challenge to him.

However, if a political vehicle with union support, unashamedly standing with workers in the workplaces and outside them on the picket lines, with a political manifesto of public ownership and scrapping the anti-union laws, it would strengthen the workers' action. But it would also be a down payment on a future Starmer government, that a mass workers' party will be built in opposition to his pro-capitalist New Labour. The Socialist Party would argue that such a party fights on a clear socialist programme.

The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition is holding its conference on Saturday 4 February. It is a vital forum in the building of a working-class political challenge, in both the upcoming local elections and the general election that could be forced at any time.

The growing strike wave is building workers' confidence and shaking the Tory government, the bosses and the whole capitalist establishment. The task now is to take it up to new levels to bring down the Tories, and in the process changing the class balance of forces in favour of the working class.

1926 general strike workers taste power... 1926 GENERAL STRIKE: WORKERS TASTE POWER by Peter Taaffe, £7.50 at LEFT BOOKS leftbooks.co.uk The bookshop of the Socialist Party New and second-hand Marxist classic books and pamphlets Visit leftbooks.co.uk or call 020 8988 8789 PO Box 1398, Enfield EN1 9GT

Civil servant - why we're striking: 'Defending services and our pay'



PHOTO: PAUL MATTISSON

PCS MEMBER AND JOB CENTRE WORKER

Like many who have voted in favour of strikes, civil service and local job centre workers are not striking just because of pay, but because we have had enough.

I will be striking because, across job centres, there has been a harrowing decline in resources to support our customers but an absurd spike in statistics to benefit management. It has become obvious that senior leaders are more interested in meeting targets via customer attendance and sanctions than providing a quality service to the public.

Treatment of staff is another reason I am striking. There are members of staff who are booked for up to 30,

ten-minute appointments a day. How can anyone provide fulfilling support to a customer in ten minutes? The only time some of our staff can take a toilet break is if a customer does not show up!

Finally, I am also striking for fair and better pay. In 2022 we received a 6% pay rise. On the surface this may sound reasonable, but when inflation has reached double figures - it is insulting.

Years have gone by with tiny rises that have failed to keep up with inflation, and after the pandemic it was civil service workers who had to pay the price with a two-year pay freeze.

Solidarity to all those who balloted 'yes' and are on the picket line on 1 February!

University worker - why we're striking: 'Pay, pensions, workload, inequality, casualisation, and more...'

RENATA MEDEIROS MIRRA CHAIR CARDIFF UCU

We are striking because our pay has lost value every year for over ten years; our pensions are seriously under threat; we have unmanageable workloads which lead many people to illness and desperation; our workforce is largely casualised; and there are still significant pay inequalities between different groups of workers across the sector. All of this creates a working environment that is unhealthy for staff and students, and where it is impossible for the sector to adequately fulfil its societal roles in research and education.

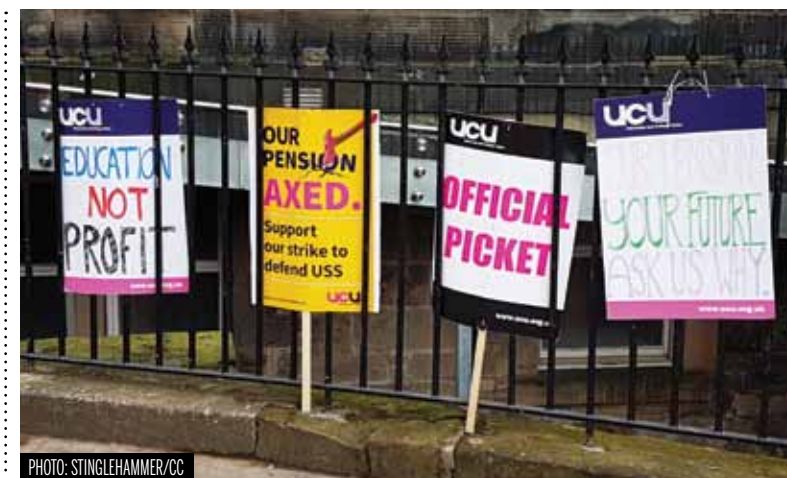


PHOTO: STINGHAMMER/CC

We are joining forces with workers from other sectors because these attacks on our working conditions are shared across the whole working class. Each time workers' pay loses value, it means more money is moving from the workers' hands and into the hands of the big bosses, whose already large fortunes have increased vastly in the last couple years. It is hard to understand why any of us should or would just accept this!

We need even more coordination, we need to stand firm and bring the country to a halt if needed. There is no turning back, almost every public service is reaching breaking point. Unless we fight for better, services will only get worse for us and those we serve.

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# STRIKE WAVE

## NHS workers continue historic strikes

Nurses and ambulance workers have continued their historic strike action with nurses walking out on 18-19 January across England and Wales, joined in Wales by ambulance strikers on 19 January and in England and Wales on 23 January. The nurses in the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) and ambulance workers in Unite, Unison and GMB unions are all fighting for above-inflation pay rises.

Socialist Party members have joined picket lines and protests.

In London 2,000 nurses came together on 18 January from their picket lines to march from University College Hospital through the city. As Ian Pattison reports, the support for them was phenomenal. The sound of car horns, buses and fire engines beeping in support was deafening. And support for the Socialist Party's call for everyone to strike together in a 24-hour general strike was unbelievably popular - from nurses, the public, and from patients!

Josie Shelley in Stafford reports that, despite the cold and the snow, over 80 members of the RCN were out on a very lively and determined picket line at St George's Hospital. Contrary to what some media outlets would have us believe, there was overwhelming support from motorists as they drove past. The nurses are calling for safer staffing levels and fair pay. St George's is a psychiatric hospital and it has seen many cuts to its beds and services over the years, along with other psychiatric hospitals in the area.

An RCN Derbyshire Healthcare Trust picket in Chesterfield told Jon Dale: "I started my first job as a qualified mental health nurse seven months ago and I'm already exhausted. We work two 14-hour shifts and a seven-hour shift every week. As newly qualified nurses, we're on a 'preceptorship' and supposed to be learning from more experienced nurses. But often there are just two of us new nurses running a ward of 30 patients. There's no time to learn and many who started with me have left. It's not so bad if there are healthcare assistants as they're often very experienced, but then they get taken off to other wards that are even more short-staffed."

Another said: "My friend took her 90-year old mother to King's Mill A&E (in Mansfield) and they'd run out of clean linen and pillows. She went to fetch a picnic blanket and a cushion from her car for her mother to lie on." And another added: "There's so many unfulfilled vacancies and no one applying for them. I remember when the miners came out on strike to support the nurses [in 1982]. We should all stick together."

On the second day of the nurses' strike, 1,000 workers in the Welsh Ambulance Service in Unite took strike action. Across Wales there were lively picket lines. Socialist Party Wales members reported that at every picket line workers were at pains to explain they did not want to strike, but had little option. Low pay



Clockwise from top: RCN nurses' picket line at UCLH; Unison ambulance picket line at Lawrence Hill, Bristol; and Unite ambulance picket line in Port Talbot  
PHOTOS: PAUL MATTSSON, MIKE LUFF AND ALEC THRANES

has demoralised workers and year after year nothing has been done. Even though the staff have received a real-terms pay cut for the last seven years, the action is not just about pay but the underfunding of the NHS which has angered workers, as paramedics are forced to wait at overstretched hospitals for hours. A paramedic in Cwmbran said: "One woman suffering from cancer was left lying on the floor for 12 hours last week after collapsing before I arrived at her home! How do you think that makes us feel? Something has to be done."

Unite paramedics on the Port Talbot picket line told us how angry and frustrated they felt over the scandalous way their profession is being treated by the Tories in Westminster and the Labour-led Welsh government in the Senedd who have devolved responsibility for the NHS. "Like everyone else who is being



forced to take action, our strike is of course partly about pay. But the continuing, long-term rundown of the NHS is definitely our primary fight. We are being stopped from using our professional skills because we are stuck outside A&E departments waiting to hand over patients for hours on end.

"On far too many occasions we can spend our entire 12-hour shift outside A&E. No good for us, no good for onboard patients, and definitely no good for those waiting in agony for an ambulance to arrive. All our training, all our skills, are being wasted and patients inevitably end up suffering and worse! Like our other health colleagues we are determined to defend our NHS and have the full support of the public."

Similarly in Cardiff, Rep Ian said: "People are quite rightly attacking the Tories over the state of the NHS

but we've got Labour running it in Wales and it's no better." Dominic, a Unite member, said: "Pay is one issue but it's not the whole story. We're all frustrated because we're not meeting the needs of the community. It feels like I'm on strike every shift. I'll spend hours waiting outside the hospital with patients that can't be handed over because of staff shortages. NHS workers need a pay rise so we can recruit and retain the staff we need."

At every picket line there was no time for the Welsh government who have stood by while the Welsh NHS is being run into the ground. Comments by Welsh health minister, Eluned Morgan, that people should live healthier lives to avoid needing hospital care were met with derision by paramedics who are on the front line of dealing with very sick patients.

There was a general desire for ambulance workers in all unions to strike together on the same day and to strike together with other public service workers.

At Birkenhead ambulance centre, members from GMB and Unison were all determined and in good spirits, reports Steve Ion. Support from the public was huge, with plenty of car horns and general support from the public and other unions. Concerns were raised that patients had been placed in corridors on arrival for a long time now, not just recently.

The current pay talks and government offers on pay were seen as totally inadequate as members have been suffering from 2% pay increases for years already. The trade union leaderships can make a massive difference now with the Tories in disarray. The determination and sacrifice of ambulance workers and other NHS staff, and all other workers fighting for decent terms and conditions, must be built on. Striking together with other workers on a day of further coordinated action would be a big show of strength. Union leaders, including the tops of the TUC, must take steps now to prepare for it.

● Ambulance workers and nurses are striking together on 6 February and both have further dates planned later in February. Midwife and maternity support worker members of the Royal College of Midwives working in the NHS in Wales will strike on 7 February

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# STRIKE WAVE

## Train driver - why we're striking: 'For pay, security and a green alternative'

ROB KITLEY  
EXETER TRAIN DRIVER, ASLEF AND SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBER



We are striking for an RPI pay increase after not receiving one for nearly four years, despite being hailed as key workers and working throughout the pandemic.

It is also about ensuring continued security in the industry, safety for passengers and staff alike, and to ensure that investment in the industry helps cement it as a green alternative to road transport.

## Teacher - why we're striking: 'the only option to defend education from Tory attacks'

STEPHEN BROWN  
NEU AND SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBER IN OXFORD

The NEU has reported that a teacher who was at the top of the main pay scale in 2010 has now lost in the region of £64,000 because pay has not kept pace with inflation.

That's a very good deposit for a mortgage that has been stolen by successive Tory administrations hell-bent on an austerity agenda.

Many teachers are now locked into the rental market, where prices in my neck of the woods have risen by as much as 20% in the past year.

We have two options. Sit tight, don't strike, and hope the cost-of-living crisis all blows over and the recruitment and retention crisis in schools miraculously improves. (If you think that will happen, then you probably haven't been paying attention for the last decade!)

Or, instead, join the nurses, railway workers, train drivers, posties, and other public sector workers out on strike. I am proud that my union will be taking part on 1 February.

Some teachers rightly worry that they cannot afford to lose several days' wages by going on strike. No one takes this step lightly. But the reality is that we can't afford not to strike.

If this dispute is lost, it will be a green light to the government to continue its attacks on the state education system. This strike is about forcing the government to start showing more respect for our profession. Maybe then we can attract more teachers and deal with the recruitment crisis.

We are not striking alone. When we all strike together the impact is greater and the chances of winning increase. The picket lines and rallies all over the country on 1 February are also about building solidarity between teachers and other workers. Hopefully, if needed, it will be a step towards building further coordinated action in March.

## Young people stand with striking workers

GINNY BAYLISS  
SWANSEA SOCIALIST STUDENTS

With pitiful increases to student loans and youth-targeted exploitative labour practices, the bosses have demonstrated their attitude towards young people. Supporting striking workers on 1 February is an opportunity to fight back, shoulder to shoulder with the rest of the working class,

in what will be one of the largest days of industrial action in many young people's lifetimes.

As the capitalist crisis continues to deepen, our right to protest and strike will become more crucial than ever to fight back. So we need to resist the government's proposed anti-strike laws and the new Public Order Bill. It is only through the power of the united working class that we can challenge these authoritarian crackdowns.

Today's students are tomorrow's workers so, as this strike wave builds momentum, we must be actively involved. That's why Socialist Students groups have been and will continue to visit picket lines during the strike wave. These disputes have the potential to be a turning point in the fight for our futures.

## 'I'm on strike, who could I vote for at a general election?'

Come to Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition conference

- Saturday 4 February, 11am-4.30pm, Room B34, Birkbeck College, Malet Street, WC1E 7HX
- For more details including the TUSC policy platforms see [tusc.org.uk](http://tusc.org.uk)



Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition supporters join an RMT picket line in Plymouth in October 2022 PHOTO: DUNCAN MOORE

AMANDA  
WEST MIDLANDS SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBER AND TRADE UNIONIST

The strike wave sweeping the UK, across education, health, civil service, postal and many more sectors has been an inspiration. In February and March, I will be proud to be taking strike action with the National Education Union, alongside teachers across the country who are calling for decent funding and pay after more than a decade of austerity. The Tories in power have made our living standards worse. However, the decision to make cuts is a political one, so it is not enough to fight on the trade union front alone - the working class needs political representation.

Many workers might be tempted to vote Labour to get rid of the Tories. However, it is clear that Keir Starmer wishes to separate the Labour Party

from working-class struggle and from the anti-austerity legacy of Jeremy Corbyn. Not only has he refused to commit to meeting striking workers' demands, he has also punished MPs who have been on picket lines. His solution to the record numbers of patients on NHS waiting lists has been to propose allowing the private sector to make even more profit from our ill health. He has also refused to recommit to abolishing tuition fees if Labour came to power, stating that all Labour's pledges need to be fully costed and affordable.

If Starmer is unsure where the money will come from to improve the lives of the working class, perhaps he should look to the record number of billionaires in the UK! Last year, their combined wealth rose to £653 billion and is still rising. Even some of that money could fully fund education, health, transport and other public services which have been crippled by austerity and privatisation.

Neither the Tories, who thousands of us are striking against, nor Labour, will put forward the policies needed to reverse the vicious attacks on public services, pay, pensions and more.

This is why the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) is campaigning to build a political voice for working-class people. TUSC is an electoral alliance of socialist organisations (including the Socialist Party), trade union and community activists. It is holding a conference at Birkbeck College in London on Saturday 4 February, to prepare for standing in upcoming local and national elections. TUSC's no-cuts platform will form the basis of the policies to be agreed at this meeting.

In a time of heightened trade union struggle, and continued attacks to our living standards, there has never been a better time to participate in this important event and fight for a new mass party of the working class.

## STRIKE WAVE

## NEU: National schools strike for pay and funding

Girls' schools strike to defend pensions, 2022 LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY



## SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBERS IN THE NEU

Wednesday 1 February will see around a quarter of a million members of the National Education Union (NEU) taking national strike action across England and Wales. The union reports 22,000 new members joined in the week after the announcement was made.

Joint rallies and demonstrations will be organised in many towns and cities, with the strike coinciding with national action taken by the civil servants' union PCS, the UCU in universities, and train drivers in Aslef and the RMT.

In the NEU Cymru/Wales ballot, both teachers and support staff achieved the required turnout of over 50% to take official strike action. Members of the headteachers' union NAHT also beat that legal threshold in Wales, and will be starting 'action short of strike action'.

53% of NEU teachers in England - 120,000 people spread over tens of thousands of workplaces - returned their postal ballots, breaking through the Tory threshold and voting for action with a huge 90.4% majority.

Unfortunately, the ballot of support staff narrowly missed the legal turnout threshold in England, with a 46% turnout. Members of the second biggest teaching union, the NASUWT, also voted 9 to 1 in favour of action, but were unable to get over

the threshold imposed by anti-trade union legislation.

With the biggest unions organising support staff, GMB and Unison, having mistakenly agreed to accept an unfunded below-inflation deal, it was always going to be harder to persuade NEU support staff to vote for action, even though these lowest-paid members are most at threat of job cuts when school budgets are cut further by unfunded pay awards.

However, with so many NEU teachers taking action, many schools will still be closed to most or all classes by strike action, particularly where other staff have made clear that they do not want to cross NEU picket lines. Boosted by where the NEU has succeeded, rebalances of those sections who failed to reach the 50% threshold this time could see strike numbers growing further in future action.

## Role of reps

The ballot results have again confirmed the crucial role played by individual workplace reps, backed up by their local branch and district officers.

Many busy school staff will have initially ignored the vital envelope containing their voting paper, not realising that the anti-union thresholds are designed to make sure that unreturned votes effectively count as 'no' votes. Some had moved home and then had to order replacement

ballots to be sent to their correct address.

That's why this ballot result required so much hard work from reps and activists, boldly explaining why a big 'yes' vote was so vital, then meticulously chasing up every member in a workplace to return their vote.

## Pay cut

The need for a fully funded above-inflation pay rise for school staff is unarguable. Years of below-inflation pay awards have cut incomes in real terms by 20% or more since 2010. No wonder many leave and look for work that can pay better, certainly without the unremitting workload that faces staff in the 'exam factory' conditions imposed on our underfunded schools.

Of course, as in any dispute, some members will have had doubts about whether to vote for action. After all, the government has continued to peddle the line that "the country can't afford to pay workers more".

What the Tories really mean is that their backers among the super-rich want to keep hold of their enormous wealth at the expense of the workers, in both the private and public sector, who actually generate that wealth and provide the services society needs.

Those doubts can be answered by giving trade unionists confidence that a determined struggle, with different unions striking together to bring maximum pressure on the

weak and divided Tories, can force them to use some of that accumulated wealth to fund pay rises and school and college budgets.

## Full funding

In fact, just as nurses and ambulance workers are also recognising, without strike action budgets will continue to be cut, pushing schools and hospitals into deeper and deeper crisis. That's why the NEU has been absolutely correct in stressing that the dispute isn't just about pay but also about demanding school budgets are increased to fund pay rises.

The ballot results have vindicated all of those NEU activists, not least Socialist Party members, who had argued that if the union called a national ballot for strike action it could be won.

Long before a ballot timetable was eventually agreed in the autumn, the five Socialist Party members on the NEU executive had been consistently arguing for that to happen. However, it took the lead shown by the RMT and CWU, in winning national ballots, to convince the 'NEU Left' group majority on the executive that it could be done.

We will help build for the biggest participation possible on 1 February, and for a programme of action that can make sure our demands are won.

The plan that has been agreed for now is to follow up the 1 February strike with four days of rolling regional action, followed by a two-day

national strike in mid-March, including Budget Day, Wednesday 15 March.

Correctly, NEU districts have been asked to put aside funds to assist members in the greatest hardship through prolonged action - although a wider appeal to the movement could help boost that further.

## Escalation

Socialist Party members argued for a quicker escalation to two- and three-day national action, so that we can show both the government and our members that we're serious about winning. There is a risk of momentum being lost if action is too drawn out.

Unions with live ballots striking together, in what could amount to a partial 24-hour general strike, coordinating independently of the TUC if they refuse to lead on this, would also escalate the pressure on Sunak and the Tories to find the funding needed.

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## STRIKE WAVE

## We need a strong, fighting leadership

At the same time as NEU members are striking, important elections will be taking place. Voting for the new NEU national executive takes place in April but, first of all, in February and March, an election is being held to elect a new NEU general secretary.

It's vital that NEU members vote for a leadership that can build the strength of the membership below, whilst leading and motivating from the top.

## General secretary

When it comes to general secretary, there is a clear choice to be made between two candidates: Niamh Sweeney, the current deputy general secretary, and the left candidate Daniel Kebede, who has most rank-and-file backing, winning over 100 nominations.

Socialist Party members will be backing Daniel as the candidate who wants to organise a strong union, that has the strength to take the action needed to win on pay, workload and funding. However, his campaign slogan, "for a strong, united union" raises a question about whether Daniel realises what he will be up against if he is elected.

Of course, "unity is strength". But it

has to be unity around a programme to organise to win. That means boldly challenging, rather than meekly compromising with, those elements within the NEU, from both the former NUT and ATL unions (education unions which merged to form NEU), who are not up for the fight.

A victory for Niamh Sweeney would strengthen the hand of those who simply hope that they can persuade a future Starmer government to 'do the right thing', instead of recognising the necessity of building a fighting union at every level.

## Executive

If Daniel Kebede is elected NEU general secretary, as we hope, then he will come under enormous pressure as the capitalist backers of both the main political parties seek to cut public spending even further and ratchet up attacks on trade union rights, pay and conditions.

The harsh reality is that NEU members face the fight of our lives, whoever is prime minister. The re-election of a solid bloc of Socialist Party members onto the NEU executive is therefore vital to provide a counterbalance to those who would try and persuade the union to retreat.

The following Socialist Party members are seeking nomination to the NEU national executive:  
**Sheila Caffrey** district 12 (sitting NEC member)  
**Nicky Downes** district 7 (sitting NEC member)

**Sean McCauley** district 8 (sitting NEC member)  
**Steve Scott** district 3 (sitting NEC member)  
**Louise Thompson** district 16 (sitting NEC member)  
**Anna Scott** district 3

## Support staff and the 1 February action

**Hugo Pierre**, chair of Unison's schools committee in London, has issued guidance to support staff, much of which has become national Unison advice. We print an extract here.

The Department for Education has published advice to schools: 'Handling strike action in schools'. It is clear this is non-statutory advice. Therefore schools do not have to follow this.

The advice is written for headteachers to "keep the school open for as many pupils as possible." At various points the document also mentions keeping the school open for 'vulnerable' pupils.

It is important to note that this is not the Covid situation, this is an industrial dispute where teachers are taking lawful industrial action as part of a trade dispute over pay and school funding, and the whole point of their industrial action is to close schools.

This advice to Unison members is to make clear that they should not

be covering any work that would be done by a teacher on any day of strike action.

Higher Level Teaching Assistants (HTLAs) should only do specified work with support and/or supervision of a qualified teacher. Cover supervisors supervise students who are working to a lesson prepared by a qualified teacher, usually a classroom teacher. If you are in either of these roles, you should not be expected to take whole classes on the day of a strike if the teacher who normally supervises, supports or prepares your work is on strike.

Teaching assistants are not responsible for teaching whole classes or students within the class, even if they provide 1:1 support. Some teaching assistants may provide individual support to students outside of the classroom. However, this is under the direction of the class teacher. If the teacher is on strike that day then they cannot provide that support.

All other staff should not do any work that is normally done by a teacher on any strike days.



## Supply teachers and the 1 February action

**Martin Powell-Davies**, NEU member and supply teacher, has published this advice to other supply teachers and NEU members.

The initial response of the government to the NEU calling action is to issue 'guidance' aimed at bullying heads into undermining action.

As every anti-union employer has done over centuries, one way the government wants heads to try and break strike action is to use even poorer-paid workers - in our cases support staff and supply staff - to do the work of trade union members on strike days.

Support staff are being backed by their unions to refuse to cover the work of striking colleagues.

But what about using agency supply teachers? The government has made it lawful to use agency workers to break strikes - before July 2022 it was illegal to do so.

Legally, because we aren't employed directly by schools, NEU agency supply staff couldn't be balloted, so we aren't formally included

in the action. Many will come under pressure from heads.

NEU reps in schools must involve supply staff in their strike discussions and pay campaigning. Remember, supply teachers will be the worst paid qualified teachers in your school. Agencies milk school budgets but then take a huge cut before paying their teachers. They don't get teachers' pension contributions paid on top of their salary either.

If agency teachers refuse to work on a strike day, we won't just be losing a day's pay (at 1/365) but more like two days' pay (at 1/195) - because we can only find teaching work on the days that schools are open. We don't get paid in the holidays.

Many supply staff feel aggrieved that their low pay rip-off hasn't really featured in the union's pay campaign so far. My appeal to NEU reps is to make sure that we put this right over the next few months of strike action.

Talk to supply staff, find out how little that they are being paid, invite them to join you on the picket line,

and support their applications to local hardship funds when they face particular financial difficulties for refusing to be used by the government to break strikes.

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# UCU escalating the action

## We need a leadership that will stay the course

BEA GARDNER  
UCU MEMBER

On 1 February, University and Colleges Union (UCU) members will take an important step in our escalating programme of action – taking the first of what will be 18 days of strike action across February and March.

University workers are determined to see this action through, having taken three days of nationwide strike action this academic year, on top of extensive action on a disaggregated basis since the autumn of 2019 in our pay dispute, and since 2018 in the USS pension dispute.

2022 marked the first time UCU members met the Tories' anti-democratic 50% turnout threshold nationwide, bringing action at 150 institutions.

We are drawing a line to say we refuse to accept another year of our terms and conditions being driven down, through rocketing workloads, real-term pay cuts, the proliferation of casual contracts and attacks to our pensions.

Staff pay has fallen in real terms by 25%, but vice-chancellors' pay has soared: they now earn an average of £315,000 a year! Universities sit on combined reserves of over £40 billion, while 90,000 academic and

professional service staff struggle on insecure contracts.

USS cuts made last year will see the average member lose 35% from their guaranteed future retirement income, despite the scheme being in surplus.

University bosses can afford to implement a real-terms pay rise and use reserves to restore our pensions.

The protracted nature of the disputes, spanning years, shows the need for escalation. If the members' demands are not met, the calendar of escalating action includes a marking and assessment boycott scheduled for the summer term, and further strike action into the next academic year.

### Prepare

The union's leadership must prepare for this, including by strengthening the strike fund. Members also need to have confidence that the union's leadership will stay the course, rather than publicly cast doubt on the democratically agreed strategy for the dispute, as general secretary Jo Grady has done recently.

A strong and effective 'broad left' in the union is also needed to bring activists together to discuss and fight for a militant programme. This includes a political programme: against marketisation, for free education, and for the funding needed to run higher education as a public good.

That the 1 February strike day

coincides with other trade unions is significant. Piling further pressure on the Tory government will strengthen the confidence of workers in the universities and elsewhere. Additional days of coordinated strike action could be powerful enough to hasten the end of the Tory government. Budget Day, 15 March, is an opportunity for all of us to strike together.

UCU has named its 18 days of action, which include 16 and 17 March but unfortunately not 15 March. We call on the leadership to modify the plan, so that the UCU can go out with the NEU and potentially other unions on Budget Day.

Under the leadership of Jeremy Corbyn, Labour's 2017 general election manifesto put forward free higher education. But now, Labour's new leader Sir Keir Starmer has refused to pledge its inclusion in a future manifesto. He has made it clear that he does not support workers getting a pay rise to keep up with the cost of living.

In the event of a general election, university workers need candidates prepared to fight in our corner for pay rises and in defence of our terms and conditions, and that fight for free, fully funded higher education. That means preparing now to put up a workers' alternative to Labour at the ballot box, including UCU members as candidates alongside other trade unionists and working-class fighters.

# STRIKE WAVE



LIVERPOOL SOCIALIST PARTY

# STRIKE WAVE

# PCS: fight for pay, pensions and our rights at work

## 'Let the government tremble!'



DAVID SEMPLE  
SECRETARY, PCS BRANCH SECRETARY, WIGAN,  
PERSONAL CAPACITY

On 1 February, 100,000 members of the Public and Commercial Services (PCS) union, representing civil servants and workers on privatised government contracts, will be on strike. This is the first national action to be called by the union's leadership after 126 bargaining areas beat the Tory anti-strike turnout threshold on 7 November.

PCS members have a lot to be angry about. Across the UK civil service, which answers to the Westminster government, the Cabinet Office imposed a 2% cap on pay rises, with an additional 1% available where departments could demonstrate that this addressed "specific priorities". Some departments worked with PCS to maximise the amounts, others did not.

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), the largest government department, was among the most regressive in how it allocated even this amount of money.

For the year 2022-2023, senior civil servants will receive bonuses of £7,500 or more. Meanwhile, the lowest-paid grades in DWP, administrative assistants (AAs) and administrative officers (AOs), are so poorly paid that both will receive an automatic pay rise in April due to the fact that their wages will fall below the new national minimum wage, £10.42 per hour!

### Anger

Tens of thousands of staff across the UK civil service have to claim a state benefit, Universal Credit, to top up their wages, so dire is the pay situation. AO grades in DWP are the workers who ensure people receive their pensions and benefits, like Universal Credit, and who answer the vast majority of telephone calls. This is a highly skilled role.

By forcing down pay to the point at which it meets the national minimum wage, the government is making a clear statement about how little it values the work these staff undertake.

They are justifiably angry, all the more so because across the civil service – and not just at AO grade but at all grades – workloads have rocketed as jobs are cut.

When 100,000 civil servants take strike action on 1 February, this anger will be made manifest. Branches across the union are preparing mass pickets, they are working with the other striking unions – including the National Education Union, University and College Union, and rail unions Aslef and RMT – to organise rallies in towns and cities across the UK. Members will finally have an opportunity to hit back nationwide.

This opportunity would have come a lot sooner if the PCS National Executive Committee (NEC) had shown a bit of courage. Despite the best turnout in the union's history, in a national strike ballot (56% voting, 86.2% voting 'yes'), the NEC majority faction – known as PCS 'Left Union' – shied away from calling national action for three months.

In place of national action, the NEC called a series of smaller, targeted actions in the Border Force, DVLA, Rural Payments Agency, Highways Agency, and across fewer than ten sites in the DWP. Targeted action, involving paid strike action over extended periods, can have a role to play in bringing the government back to the table, but it is not enough on its own.

### Broad Left Network

Socialist Party members, working alongside fellow socialists in the PCS Broad Left Network (BLN), have been calling for national strike action since the ballot result was announced. The potential to unify members behind a strong campaign in which everyone had a direct role to play was an opportunity the NEC squandered.

This was one of a series of errors, including the failure to include 'action short of strike action' in the national ballot, as well as the bungled launch of a mandatory levy of £3 or £5 per month (depending on whether members earn more or less than £24,000 per year). Reps across PCS have been working hard to reinforce members' belief that we can win and to fully support the levy.

To put the industrial campaign into perspective, the railway workers in the RMT have taken 19 days of unpaid national strike action, to oppose pay cuts, job losses and attacks on their working conditions. The railway companies and Network Rail have only been able to hold out because the government has pledged to cover all of their losses, a total in the hundreds of millions of pounds.

### National strike action

The civil service is central to the government's ability to run the country. Substantial action can force a retreat – but we need to prepare members for the necessary scale of action, which goes beyond isolated national action supplemented by targeted action.

An immediate, serious campaign of escalating PCS national action, rolling geographical action (where different parts of the country go out in sequence, one after the other), and targeted action all have a role to play.

Victory is possible all the quicker if those unions preparing for, or now taking, action work together. Across all of the unions, including in PCS, Socialist Party members are making the case for coordinated action – after 1 February, we are arguing for all unions with live ballots to strike together on Budget Day, 15 March – and for the preparation of a 24-hour general strike, to demonstrate the unbreakable determination of workers in this battle with the bosses.

### Leadership elections

1 February will put mass coordinated strike action on the agenda but the campaign for it has to be maintained. It is vital that broad lefts are built across the trade unions to bring activists together to fight for it, and in PCS the BLN is continuing to put forward the strategy members need.

In PCS, elections to the NEC begin in April and we will be backing Broad Left Network candidates with a proven track record of campaigning. Immediately, however, the road to serious coordinated action lies through making 1 February as big and as loud as possible.

Let the government tremble at the sound of our strike!

# A message of solidarity from Marion Lloyd, chair of the BLN



"I will be out on 1 February and on the picket line. I will also be calling on the PCS leadership to escalate the action in support of our campaign for a 10% pay increase and in defence of jobs and services.

"Our national strike on 1 February has to be a stepping stone to further all-member national action – as much as is possible with other unions.

"It's important we show the government we are serious about our pay demands. But the strikes will also send a warning to the government that we will not take lying down any attempt to impose further anti-union strike laws. We have had enough.

"The Broad Left Network, the PCS socialist rank and file group, fully supports the 1 February strike. On behalf of BLN I send a message of solidarity and support to all strikers and especially PCS members."

# Civil servant - why we're striking: "Pay is so low we have no choice"

KATRINE WILLIAMS  
PCS MEMBER

27,000 members in the largest government department, the Department for Work and Pensions, are paid so badly they'll get a pay rise when the 'living' wage goes up in April.

We have no choice but to unite with all workers across the public sector to fight on pay.

As well as our pay being held down, workloads and pressure are going up, as we are expected to do much more with less.



# RMT: reject the bosses' offer

## Protect jobs, pay and conditions for current and future generations



MARTIN POWELL-DAVIES

RMT MEMBER IN WEST MIDLANDS

"I haven't spent over 40 years working on the railway to give away my terms and conditions for a few pounds," is how one Train Operating Company (TOC) employee responded to the latest 'best and final offer' from the employers.

In the past, RMT rail union members would be offered some money when asked to give up terms and conditions, otherwise known as 'productivity'. This time we are being asked to give up pages and pages of hard-won rights in return for a two-year pay cut!

While they have taken driver-only operation off the table (for now), it is clear that the railway employers have done a 'shopping list'.

All of the legacy agreements going back decades – rights which make the railway a better place to work than many others, rules which prevent the bosses from having total control over every minute of every day – are for the chop.

In addition to this, the employers wish to instigate a permanent cut in the pay of new entrants.

Other 'highlights' include a continued commitment to shut every booking office, trainee guards on reduced pay for four years before reaching the full salary (which will be permanently lower than established

staff), and a decimation of rostering agreements.

We must make it clear that we reject any division, and that we stand for the protection of jobs, pay and conditions for current and future generations.

The government is weak; they know their time is nearly up. More and more sections of workers are balloting for strike action.

The pressure on the Tories continues to rise, and they know that if they are seen to give in to one section of workers, others will gain the confidence to demand their share.

The trade unions are gaining in strength and can put it to best use by coordinating strikes up to and including a 24-hour general strike.

We support the coordinated strike on 1 February, which involves RMT train drivers alongside Aslef drivers, education staff in NEU and UCU, and civil servants in PCS.

The Tories are moving their budget on 15 March and NEU has already called a national strike that day. We and all the other unions should look to strike with them.

Reject this dreadful offer and name more strike dates.







# France: Two million strike against Macron's pension 'reform'

CÉCILE RIMBOUD

GAUCHE RÉVOLUTIONNAIRE (CWI FRANCE)

**19** January was a huge day of mobilisation in France against plans to raise the retirement age to 64. Close to two million people demonstrated and took strike action across the whole country. In Paris, several metro lines were 'struck shut', and the unions had organised dozens and dozens of coaches to carry striking workers to the 300,000-strong demo. The streets were so packed that the demo had to be split into two boulevards. There were also 140,000 in Marseille, 50,000 in Toulouse and St-Etienne, 25,000 in Orléans, and 20,000 in Rennes, Brittany.

Many people liked our placard: 'Macron out!' In Nancy, Lorraine, 13,000 turned out. It was the biggest demonstration there in a very long time (bigger than the one on 5 December 2019, which had kicked off the previous successful battle against President Macron on pensions).

In Rouen, Normandy, a big demonstration of 18,000 people was very imposing. Slogans said "no to the reform", but also "back to retirement at 60", and for "a good pension".

There was much discussion about everyone's personal situation and the importance of the demonstration, which gave everyone confidence. No one expected such a large strike.

In Montélimar, Drôme, we heard: "6,000 in Montélimar, compared to cities like Paris it's very small, but it's historic for this city!"

Many smaller cities, like Gap in the Alps, had several thousand demonstrators in a mobilisation on a scale not seen for a long time.

And the vast majority of the population are supportive of the strike, (two thirds, according to one poll), which indicates even larger numbers of workers may yet join the struggle if they can see that it will effectively challenge Macron and his pro-capitalist policies.

## Young people

It is the same with young people, who also participated in demonstrations but in smaller numbers. Before the strike, while leafleting and talking to young people, we found that they were very sympathetic to the mobilisation but did not see yet the point in joining the struggle themselves. Many see the issue of pensions as a very far off subject.

We have been discussing how they needed to fight along the workers for their own conditions and a future. With demonstrations as powerful as this, and 75% of 18-24 years old supporting the strike, there is no doubt that bigger numbers of young people will be electrified, and will consider joining the next demonstrations. This could bring new waves of energy to further strengthen the struggle.

Many workers, both from public and private sectors, were on strike. Rail traffic was very disrupted throughout the country. The strike



PHOTO: GAUCHE RÉVOLUTIONNAIRE

was very well attended by energy workers at EDF - electricity production dropped by 7,000 megawatts and the CGT-Énergie union announced that it would cut off the electricity to any MPs who voted for the reform!

One in four workers were on strike in the public sector, education had a 40% strike rate. In the private sector, some big companies were out: car manufacturers Renault and PSA, in the metal industry, dockers in the ports, workers in retail companies like Carrefour and Darty, glass workers, cement workers, construction workers, 'sans-papiers' (undocumented) precarious workers... too many to name!

The strike had been called barely a week before, which left little time to prepare for it and organise general assemblies in the workplaces and study places. Many workers then went on strike and came to the demonstration in small groups, not organised in a workplace contingent but with their trade union federation. We spoke to workers who told us they had gone on strike, just two or three of them in their workplace, without even having talked to a trade union rep.

So, why was this protest so important? It is important to note, first and foremost, that all trade union federations are opposed to Macron's project, and this brings a sentiment of strength and unity.

But is also because the issue of pensions in particular is very important. It affects the very functioning of society. The vast majority in France refuse an 'every one for themselves' approach to health, unemployment, retirement, and public services in general, and want to keep a pension system based on inter-generation solidarity. We want a society based on solidarity, where everyone has a

quality job and where older workers can enjoy life without working, from 55 years old for jobs that are labour intensive, and 60 years old maximum for all. It is because this is such a fundamental question that the mobilisation was so massive, but not the only reason. The new pension reform, once again, was the very big straw that broke the camel's back.

It came in the context of many strikes taking place in various sectors for pay increases. As we underlined in our leaflet: "They are being successful, such as at the SNCF (railway) or GRDF (gas company), which have obtained 200 euros a month, for all. There have also been successes at many small companies in the private sector which have demanded wages to at least match the level of inflation."

This mass mobilisation was very clearly a reflection of the degree of anger and frustration that exists in

the working class and the general population. This is why, along with demands on pensions, we had demands on wages, funding for the public sector (the striking firefighters' contingent received applause from other demonstrators in Paris), and for better jobs.

As we have been putting forward, what is needed is to build a determined, mass struggle against Macron and the capitalists.

La France Insoumise, left-wing leader Mélenchon's movement, and other organisations (some trade unions but not the main confederations) are calling for a national demonstration in Paris against the pension reform. We will, of course, participate in it and discuss these demands and tactics to build the mass strike which is needed to defeat Macron.

• See [socialistworld.net](http://socialistworld.net) for more



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# Tories block Scottish parliament's gender recognition reform

SINEAD DALY  
SOCIALIST PARTY SCOTLAND

**O**n 22 December 2022, the Scottish parliament overwhelmingly passed the Gender Recognition Reform (Scotland) Bill (GRR).

In response, the Westminster Tory government has undemocratically blocked this legislation.

This move comes at the same time as Sunak and his increasingly authoritarian government push ahead with more anti-union legislation.

These are the actions of reactionary political forces clamping down on democratic rights. They hope to sow division as part of the so-called 'culture wars' and to undermine support for the Scottish National Party (SNP) and independence in Scotland ahead of a general election that the SNP wants to fight as a de-facto referendum.

It is the first time any legislation from Holyrood has been blocked by Westminster.

SNP first minister Nicola Sturgeon said: "If there is a decision to challenge, then in my view it will quite simply be a political decision and it will be using trans people, already one of the most vulnerable stigmatised groups in our society, as a political weapon."

The Tories blocking of the GRR will be widely seen as completely undemocratic. It sends a loud message that effectively Westminster can arbitrarily overrule decisions made at Holyrood. This will provoke protests across Scotland which Socialist Party Scotland will support.

After the UK Supreme Court's decision that the Scottish parliament cannot hold a legal referendum on Scottish independence, this latest move will further inflame the national question and increase support for independence.

## Labour won't fight for trans rights

Labour leader Keir Starmer gave succour to the Tories when he said: "I have concerns about the provision in Scotland, in particular the age reduction to 16".

On the threat by the Tories to block the legislation, Starmer said he wanted to wait and see what UK ministers decided to do.

This puts him at odds with Scottish Labour MSPs who voted to back the legislation at Holyrood, including the decision to lower the age to 16.

The GRR is a limited reform but it is an important step forward. Socialist Party Scotland supports measures to make it easier to self-declare in relation to gender.

In reality, being able to legally change gender has been in place in Scotland since 2005. The GRR doesn't change that but it does make the process much simpler.

Scotland is the first nation in the UK to have a system of self-declaration, alongside nine other European countries which already have

self-declaration systems for legal gender recognition.

What is missing from the SNP-Green Scottish government is any commitment to provide the resources to support trans people and all those facing lack of access to health, housing, education and services generally, particularly as a new round of savage cuts to public spending is being implemented.



**The view of Socialist Party Scotland is that a step forward for trans people does not mean a loss of rights for women**

The new legislation will mean trans people will be able to apply for a gender recognition certificate after having lived in their acquired gender for three months - or six months if they are aged 16 and 17 - rather than the current two years.

It also removes the need to have a diagnosis of gender dysphoria from doctors before transitioning - which meant trans people have had to live for years without having their gender legally accepted.

## Hypocrisy

The Tories in Scotland, never known previously as defenders of the rights of women, claimed that women's 'sex-based rights' and access to 'safe spaces' would be threatened by the GRR.

Alba, the nationalist party led by Alex Salmond, used the same language. Alba claimed the GRR was an "ultimate betrayal of hard-won women's rights buried in a harmful piece of toxic legislation called the Gender Recognition Reform Bill."

Yet many women's organisations, including Women's Aid and Rape Crisis, have pointed out they had long operated a policy of working with all women who sought out their support, including trans women.

The view of Socialist Party Scotland is that a step forward for trans people does not mean a loss of rights for women.

It's noteworthy that the SNP-Scottish Green government that proposed the GRR also slashed the Scottish budget by £1.2 billion in October, cutting services that trans people and working-class people need the most.

The current crisis in the NHS in Scotland, with massive waiting lists and shocking lack of support for mental health services, a vital resource for trans people, falls at the feet of not just the Tories but Nicola Sturgeon and the Scottish government.

In reality, all of the oppressed and the working class generally are under attack because of the failures of capitalism.

The cost-of-living crisis, massive underfunding of health, housing, education and social care impact

Glasgow trans rights protest 21.1.23  
SOCIALIST PARTY SCOTLAND



Socialist Party members in England and Wales have raised the following demands on our leaflets at the protests:

- **Fight for the right to self-identify and all the services, facilities, and rights trans and LGBTQ+ people need**
- **Fight all cuts to women's services. For councils to set needs-based budgets to fund our services, including domestic violence services**
- **Fight for full public funding for the health services we need, including mental health. Save our NHS**
- **Build the strike wave to win on pay and get the Tories out. Prepare for a 24-hr general strike**
- **Build a new workers' party to represent the interests of workers and the oppressed, and unite our struggles. No trust in Starmer's Labour**
- **Solidarity with workers and young people fighting for an independent socialist Scotland**
- **Fight for a socialist alternative to the capitalist system and its division, poverty, exploitation and oppression**

working-class women, men, trans and LGBTQ+ people.

Scottish government cuts and Tory cuts to budgets impact massively on the services we need.

The key task socialists and trade unionists face is to unite the struggles of the working class, as the current strike wave is doing.

As well as demanding pay rises that at least match inflation, we also need to fight for council and government budgets that equate to the needs of working-class communities.

Coordinated strike action and the building of a new workers' party, which fights for socialism to deliver the fundamental economic and social change we all need, is essential.

Only that will put an end to all forms of oppression, including the class exploitation that is the lifeblood of this rotten capitalist system.

## Protest for trans rights in London

JULES RUSEVICA  
SOUTH WEST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

On 18 January an emergency protest was organised by London Trans Pride, and hundreds of people gathered at 10 Downing Street to show their anger towards Westminster blocking Scotland's Gender Recognition Reform (GRR) Bill.

People stood for hours to make their position clear - we need trans liberation now!

We need a movement which will truly defend the interests of the most marginalised communities and not play political football with our lives!

The Labour Party has been completely useless - most Labour MPs abstained on the vote on whether to

veto the decision of the Scottish Parliament, only eleven voted against.

We will stand for trans rights and workers' rights.

They can't stop us with their lies, scare us with the police or deter us with the new anti-protest laws.

This wave of protests to defend trans rights has rippled through all of the UK, and shows that people are ready to fight and are ready for an alternative!

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## Overworked and underpaid

# BACK NHS STRIKES



PHOTO: TOMMY LIVERPOOL

**HOLLY JOHNSTON**  
NURSE AND GMB UNION REP

**W**hat is happening to our NHS? Staff have been sounding the alarm on pay for well over a decade, often becoming so burnt out and disillusioned that they walk.

We have 135,000 NHS vacancies, and applications to nursing have fallen by 30%. Newly qualified nurses are coming out with up to £70,000 worth of debt.

The government is refusing to negotiate on pay. People are now starting to see what the Tories' motive is - a devastating ramp up of privatisation, and charging people for GP appointments and for attending A&E.

Labour's Keir Starmer and shadow health secretary Wes Streeting offer no solutions, and simply argue for allowing more privatisation.

On the RCN picket lines, nurses speak about how they had PTSD from working during the height of the pandemic, unable to care for their dying patients adequately. They say it's not much different now. There's still not enough staff to give safe care.

Staff are striking over pay, but are also making the link between striking and the fight for the NHS as a whole. Decades of deliberate underfunding has led us to this crisis.

In my own area, oncology, we are struggling to staff the teenage cancer unit, and give the patients the specialist services they should have. 12,000 people on cancer treatment lists have been waiting more than three months. The delays of investigations and diagnosis are undoubtedly leading to more deaths and less treatment options.

Staff are unable to meet the demands of their workloads, and many are unable to pay bills. 27% of hospital trusts now have staff food banks. Working agency shifts to attempt to make ends meet is the norm.

Student nurses are qualifying and leaving within months of starting. And there is no workforce plan to replace our experienced colleagues, a third of whom will retire in the next five years.

Underpaid and overworked social care is having a massive impact on the NHS too. There is no care available for people to be discharged home to, so they end up staying in hospital longer than is needed. Much of the social care sector is

privatised, non-unionised, and it has 165,000 vacancies.

We must all get behind the strikes by NHS staff. On 6 February, RCN nurses plus ambulance staff in GMB and Unite unions are all striking together - set to be the biggest strike action seen so far in the NHS.

The government has condemned the strikes as unsafe. Yet union members say that the NHS is not safe every day of the year with Tory austerity.

The only solutions to fix the NHS crisis are:

- **Immediate inflation-proof pay rises for all health and care staff**
- **Reinstate student bursaries and scrap tuition fees**
- **Starmer's Labour or any privatisation and pro-austerity politicians won't defend the NHS - we need to fight for the building of a new mass 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**

See 'NHS workers continue historic strikes' on page 4