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the Socialist

Issue 1213

9-15 February 2023

formerly **Militant**

Strike together on Budget Day – 15 March

KICK THE TORIES OUT

No trust in Starmer's Labour Build a new mass workers' party



PHOTO: PAUL MATTSSON

TUSC CONFERENCE REPORT: Preparing a workers' stand against bosses' Tories and Labour >>> p2-3



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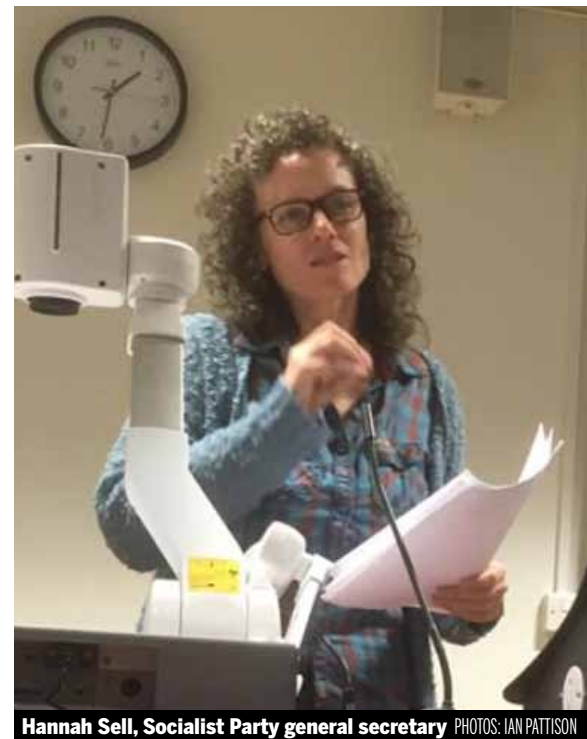
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"The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it."

Karl Marx



Hannah Sell, Socialist Party general secretary PHOTOS: IAN PATTISON



Hugo Pierre, Unison NEC member



Dave Nellist, TUSC chair



Carlos Barros, RMT NEC member

“We are meeting in momentous times”, is how former Labour MP and chair of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC), Dave Nellist introduced its conference in London on 4 February. Trade unionists and socialists discussed the tasks for TUSC in preparing for a general election.

Overall just under 200 registered for the event, with 120 attending in-person including national executive members of several trade unions such as RMT, Unison and Napo, members of groups and parties such as the Socialist Party, Turkish-Kurdish community group Day-Mer, Breakthrough and System Change, as well as individual socialists. All were given the opportunity to contribute to the discussion.

The conference heard speakers from across the TUSC coalition. This included Hannah Sell, Socialist Party General Secretary, as well as Carlos Barros, a member of the RMT union national executive (personal capacity), and Hugo Pierre, a member of Unison national executive committee (personal capacity), and representatives from the TUSC individual members' section - Tom Allen and Kirsty Smith.

Dave explained how, on the numerous picket lines he has visited, he has found widespread anger and “an absolute hatred of the Tories as a government.”

“A couple of days ago, Rishi Sunak reached 100 days. One of the papers did a league table of who has been the most unpopular prime minister at the 100-day mark, and by far he was the most unpopular prime minister of the last 30 years...”

“But that hatred leads on to a question which has been debated on the picket lines and within the working class more widely.

The by-election takes place on 2 March.

Paul Kershaw, chair of the Unite housing workers branch LE1111, explained how, ahead of last year's local elections, his branch had written to every Labour councillor in London, and some other major cities, asking them to support the official Unite policy that Labour councils should set “legal, needs-based no-cuts budgets”.

The branch offered: “We will put all our resources into campaigning for you in the forthcoming elections on this one condition, that you will fight on Unite's policy of no cuts”. Very few replied, and the branch has “so far identified nobody at all who would support Unite's policy.”

“If Unite is the biggest funder of Labour, and we haven't so far found a single councillor that will campaign on our opposition to cuts, we need a debate in Unite about our relationship to the Labour Party and how we can support candidates that will defend workers and will support Unite policies.”

Bill Reed, secretary of Hounslow Unison local government branch in West London, speaking in a personal

capacity, explained how the Labour council recently decided “just like that, to knock 12,000 people off the bottom of its council housing waiting list.”

He added: “Not a single council house has been built in Ealing during the time of the Labour council over the last eight years. That is a disgrace. It's certainly something that TUSC candidates exposed in the May local elections last year and will continue to do in the build up to the general election.”

“When we come to a general election we'll be ready. There are three right-wing Labour MPs in Ealing, and each and every one of them will be faced with a TUSC candidate. We'll be putting forward the TUSC programme that we agree on today. And there will be an alternative for people who have been let down by Labour in Ealing!”

• The conference discussed core policy platforms for both the general and local elections (see page 10-11). Both documents were approved resoundingly by the conference in a consultative vote, they can be read online at tusc.org.uk

TUSC conference 2023: Preparing a workers' stand against the bosses' Tories and Labour

“When there is a general election - with the splits in the Tory party who's to say how many weeks or months away that could be - what should socialists do given that Keir Starmer is more and more selling the Labour Party as an alternative Tory party, not an alternative to the Tory party?”

A feature of discussion was about which party is likely to win the next general election. Labour are 20 points ahead in the polls, Hannah explained: “The desperation to get rid of the Tories is palpable”. For many, “that is going to mean voting Labour in the next general election, as the only viable means that they can see to get rid of the Tories...”

“And while we will be out cheering with everybody else when the Tories are finally forced out of office, it could not be clearer that Starmer will not act in the interests of our class.

“There were around 50,000 strikers outside Parliament on 1 February. Inside Parliament, it was Prime Minister's Questions. Starmer did not ask one question about the strikes.

“He didn't even mention them, while all those thousands of workers were protesting outside!

“How could he? Because he agrees that below-inflation austerity pay cuts, in reality, are all that can be and should be on offer for the workers who are on strike.”

TUSC did not stand in the last two

general elections. That is because in those contests, working-class people had the option to vote for a Labour Party led by Jeremy Corbyn, and with an anti-austerity manifesto. A number of those attending the conference had been enthusiastic Corbyn supporters; some have since been expelled from Labour Party membership. The question was raised about whether or not there is any prospect of Labour being reclaimed as a party for the working class.

Hannah explained how the Labour Policy Forum is going to meet again this year, for the first time since 2015, to “rubber stamp the ditching of every remnant of Corbyn's anti-austerity programme”. Including, as Starmer has already signified, jettisoning the pledge to abolish tuition fees. But ultimately, the Labour manifesto will be decided by the Clause V meeting, made up of those hand-picked by Starmer.

“The endless refusal to support the strikes; his speeches about fiscal responsibility; ‘not fat cheque books’; going not just around the City of London but to Davos to suck up to international big business.”

“It is absolutely clear that a Starmer New Labour government will act, not in the interests of the working class, but in the interests of the capitalist elites.”

Carlos expressed the discontent



The task of fighting for the trade unions, the basic organisations of the working class, to have their own political vehicle is the fundamental task that we have to address

of thousands of trade unionists: “Frankly, I'm tired of asking Starmer. “Everybody's asking Starmer, from our general secretary, all the other general secretaries, everyone in the working class is asking him to support us, to stand on pickets, to not attack MPs that stand on pickets with us, and it's just a resounding silence.”

He went on to say: “There is plenty of money in this country, and we all know it... We need a workers' party. We need people understanding that what the workers want does not coincide with what business wants.”

Carlos later added: “We'll be missing a trick if we don't all strike together on Budget Day - 15 March.”

Hannah explained that the around half a million people who have signed up to Enough is Enough, launched by RMT General Secretary Mick Lynch among others, is an indication of the appetite for a “political alternative that stands for nationalisation, abolition of the anti-union laws, and so on.”

“If, between now and the election, significant forces in the trade union movement take a decision, that they will stand candidates - or back other candidates standing, call on Jeremy Corbyn to acknowledge he is never going to be a Labour candidate and declare that he's standing himself and the other Labour lefts that get forced out as well, if that was done - we could easily get a bloc of MPs elected.”

Hugo outlined how even a small group of MPs in Parliament, prepared to back strikers and present an alternative, would make more of a difference to working-class people than Labour simply replacing the Tories.

He said it would be a “lightening rod for the aspirations of ordinary working-class people in this country to begin to develop a programme that deals with all of the issues that workers face”.

Introducing the discussion on the core policies for the general election, TUSC national election agent Cive Heemsckerk said: “The task of fighting for the trade unions, the basic organisations of the working class, to have their own political vehicle is the fundamental task that we have to address.”

“And that's why the TUSC steering committee is in favour of a campaign for a new mass workers' party. But we also say that, in relation to the next period, if that isn't established, if even a couple of the most militant fighting trade unions - the RMT, the CWU, perhaps Unite, and the Bakers Union, which disaffiliated from Labour in 2021 - were to organise a list of trade union candidates, that would have the possibility of an electoral breakthrough... and could rapidly develop as a leading parliamentary pole of opposition under a Starmer government implementing an austerity agenda...”

“But if that isn't achieved, the view of the TUSC steering committee is that we have to have a plan B, and start working towards it now. That means the biggest possible list of trade unionist, anti-austerity, community campaigner, environmentalist, and socialist candidates (members of parties or individuals as well). This would have less chance of electoral breakthrough compared to a trade union-organised list. But at the very least it would force Labour candidates who face that challenge to look over their left shoulder...”

“The steering committee believes that, in order to have the biggest possible impact, we should aim to reach the broadcasting authorities' so-called fair media coverage threshold... that means 100 candidates standing under a common name or registered variance of that name, and of course that's what TUSC is for.”



Swansea TUSC campaigning during the 2022 local elections

Huge action on 1 and 6 Feb All strike together on 15 March, Budget Day!

Half a million workers struck on Wednesday 1 February: the National Education Union (NEU) in schools and sixth forms, the University and College Union (UCU) in universities, civil servants in the PCS, and train drivers in RMT and Aslef.

Then Monday 6 February saw the biggest strike in the NHS yet, involving the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) and ambulance workers in the GMB and Unite. In fact, the whole week has seen NHS strikes, with the RCN again on Tuesday 7 February, the CSP physiotherapists on 9 February, and ambulance workers in Unison on 10 February.

As we go to press, the Fire Brigades Union is preparing to announce dates if there is no movement from their bosses. RMT rail workers and CWU Royal Mail workers continue their disputes, which have already seen substantial strike action.

While all the unions must prosecute their disputes, there is both time to prepare, and clearly a huge desire among all these workers, to all strike together. Coordinated action of all unions with a live ballot on Budget Day, 15 March, would pile the pressure on the crisis-ridden Tories and give confidence to millions of workers.

Wales NHS 'offer'

The pressure of the action has led to new pay offers for NHS workers from the Welsh Labour government which, in turn, ups the pressure on the Tories. The RCN, GMB, Royal College of Midwives and the physios' union suspended the action in Wales, but Unite went ahead. Unite general secretary Sharon Graham said it would be "wholly premature" for the action to be suspended.

The 'enhanced' offer of an additional 3%, taking the total to 7-8%, is still a significant pay cut compared to inflation. Only 1.5% of the extra is to be consolidated, the rest is a one-off payment. Nurses and ambulance workers are yet to see the details and discuss in meetings, but many will want to fight on. RCN and GMB members report having heard not one member supporting the offer or the suspension, and report ambulance workers joining Unite in order to continue the action.

National strike wave dates currently announced

National Education Union in schools and sixth forms

- 14 Feb: Wales
- 28 Feb: Northern, North West, Yorkshire and the Humber
- 1 March: East Midlands, West Midlands, Eastern
- 2 March: London, South East and South West
- 15 and 16 March: all England and Wales

With national demonstrations in London and Cardiff on 15 March

PCS

- 15 March national action
- Targeted action in February by workers at the British Museum, the Output Services Group of the DVLA, and the Animal and Plant Health Agency.

UCU in the universities

- 9 and 10 Feb
- 14, 15 and 16 Feb
- 21, 22 and 23 Feb
- 27 and 28 Feb; 1 and 2 March
- 16 and 17 March
- 20, 21 and 22 March

Unison has dates throughout February at various universities

Ambulance workers

In Unite

- 17 February in the West Midlands
- 20 February in the East Midlands, North East and Wales
- 21 February in Wales
- 22 February in the North West and Wales
- all five regions on 6 and 20 March

In GMB

- 20 February, 6 and 20 March.
- NHS campaigns have called a national NHS SOS demonstration on 11 March
- Northern Ireland:** 16 March could see massive coordinated public sector action

- See page 12 for an article on the latest developments regarding CWU action, and the voice of a firefighter preparing to strike.

STRIKE WAVE

6 February NHS strikes: 'We want to save the NHS for everyone'



Unite ambulance strikers in Swansea SWANSEA SOCIALIST PARTY



Nurses on strike in Sheffield SHEFFIELD SOCIALIST PARTY

On 6 February, members of the Royal College of Nursing in 73 trusts in England were joined by GMB ambulance workers in England, and Unite ambulance workers across England and Wales, in the biggest NHS strike yet. The RCN also struck on 7 February.

Socialist Party members visited the big picket lines all around the country. Members supporting strikers at the university hospitals in Bristol report that even with the numbers "a bit down" on the last strike day, there were still 60 on the picket line!

NHS on its knees

Strikers at Derriford Hospital in Plymouth told the Socialist: "Grant Shapps is lying through his teeth when he says that heart attack and stroke sufferers are being left without care during the strikes. I've attended one this morning.

"Ambulance response times have been really bad even before strike action began.

"We could do with a pay rise yes, but the main issue that we want to draw attention to is the fact that the NHS is on its knees. We've got great support from the public but it's not them we need to hear our message. The Tories aren't listening and I doubt Labour would either."

Better pay at Aldi

Amanda at West Bromwich ambulance picket was told by strikers: "A lot of people think we are on £28,000 a year. I'm on £10.30 an hour, just shy of £20,000 a year. We're losing a lot of people to illness and retirement; it's hard physical work which takes its toll on your body. Some people have left to go and work in Aldi, as they pay £13 an hour."

Elaine Brunskill reports from the RCN and GMB picket lines at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Gateshead: "I'm old! I'm militant! I'm out on strike!" was how one of the striking nurses greeted us.

Staffing below safe levels every day

A group of RCN members angrily told us how hospital bosses had insisted on larger numbers of strikers being pulled off the picket line to go into work because of supposed safety concerns. But this has led to more nurses being on the ward than on a normal working day! One commented: "They're saying eleven are needed on the ward today - there's usually seven."

At Good Hope Hospital in Birmingham, a striker told the Socialist: "We're not just on strike for more pay - we want to save the NHS for everyone from the Tories wrecking it!"

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STRIKE WAVE

1 February strikes: 'There's nothing more powerful than organised workers'

What it was like to strike on 1 February 'A huge spectacle that made us feel proud to be in a union'

The teacher

The strike day started early, leaving home at 6am to start the picket line. We quickly established a happy and purposeful atmosphere, derived from a mutual pursuit of some kind of justice and, not to be underestimated, the chance to chat and enjoy the company of people you don't get to talk to very often (nowadays).

A student kindly brought some doughnuts and sausage rolls (from his mum) and some lovely ladies from a neighbouring primary school appeared with an urn, tea, coffee, sugar and paper cups! A strike certainly brings out a bonhomie that tends to be suppressed by the pressures of day-to-day teaching.

We met up with our fellow Redbridge teachers in Ilford to travel to the rally in central London. Little prepared us for the huge spectacle that awaited us. We felt very proud to be in a union.

As you know, teachers hate noise, we seem to spend half our lives telling people to be quiet, but when it comes from a massive group of kindred spirits as we march towards Westminster, then it's ok!
ROY WILLS, NEU REP EAST LONDON

The civil servant

1 February saw 100,000 civil servants strike on a national level for the first time in over a decade. In our branch in Manchester, young workers were on strike for the first time. Young workplace reps were charged with organising picket lines for the first time. The experiences many went through on the 1 February will prepare them to escalate the struggle.

Dozens of new members joined in the days leading up to the strike. In one case in our branch, a young worker arrived at work to cross the picket line, only to be persuaded to join the union, and they ended up attending the massive rally of trade unionists in Manchester later in the day!

The rally attracted thousands of workers and included a range of speeches and a huge march around the city. Our rally was young, with hundreds of young workers holding union banners and flags and enthused by collective action.

Prior to the strike, PCS had reported the recruitment of 10,000 new members. However the central question upon our return to work was what is now needed to escalate the dispute, and we need trade union leaders to take on the task of leading the working class to victory!
CRAIG WORSWICK, PCS SECRETARY GREATER MANCHESTER DWP

The university worker

This week has seen the first day of an escalating strike strategy from the UCU, planned to coincide with the TUC rally in Leeds. The pickets were a bit smaller than before, with many of the university staff taking the day to look after their children as a result of the schools strike.

As usual, many students came to attend the pickets and give their solidarity, and together we made our way to join the TUC march and rally.

Some 2,500 of us marched through Leeds city centre, bringing many passers-by with us back to the town hall for the rally. The crowd was large enough that we filled the square. Overall the feeling in the city was of excitement and solidarity, with open support from the people of Leeds. A heartening start to this year's labour disputes!

ANTHONY, LEEDS UCU MEMBER

The train driver

Among the members of Aslef, from my local picket line to our city-wide rally in Birmingham, confidence in our dispute has only gone up!

Seeing that we were part of a 500,000-strong 'mega-strike', many members commented that they could see a shift in society was taking place. The Tories' divide-and-rule tactics are obviously failing.

But this is just the first step. We've seen the boost of morale a coordinated day of action can achieve. Now we need more! Drivers, guards, nurses, civil servants, teachers... this battle against the rising cost of living and attacks on jobs involves all of us, so it must involve all of our collective strength.

KO, BIRMINGHAM ASLEF COMMITTEE MEMBER



Wednesday 1 February was the biggest day of action yet in the growing strike wave over pay, terms and conditions, with five unions taking national action in England and Wales: Education unions NEU and UCU, rail unions Aslef and RMT, and civil servants' union PCS. In Scotland, teachers in the EIS were on strike.

There were rallies around the country against the Tories' new anti-union legislation - protests to defend the right to strike and show solidarity with the strikes. Over 50,000 marched in London. Socialist Party members across the country were on the picket lines and taking part in the demos - often as strikers, organisers and speakers.

(All reps write in a personal capacity)



NEU strikers in Waltham Abbey BEA GARDNER



PCS strikers at Arena civil service hub, Birmingham BIRMINGHAM SOCIALIST PARTY

'Picket lines are everywhere'

Bea Gardner reports from a school picket in Waltham Abbey: "When I arrived, someone shouted: 'A socialist paper, excellent!' Union membership has grown from 25 to 36 since the strike ballot result was announced and I saw someone join on the picket. The majority of people I spoke to have never been on strike before."

A school striker in Birmingham told Nick Hart: "Thanks to the staffing crisis, we've got no specialist science teachers left here. We're not just striking for ourselves but to get the funding schools need"

Labour

James Ivens spoke with two Labour councillors who were visiting a school picket line in Hackney, east London, and he invited them to join him to also visit the library strike picket line. Unison members were striking against the Labour council's cuts to the library service. James reports there was a "robust exchange of views".

A Plymouth NEU striker told Ryan Aldred: "Unfunded pay rises have meant they cut a third of my department to maintain pay. They're going to have to cut back on school trips and all sorts of things which ultimately means the kids suffer".

A London PCS member spoke to

Ben Goldstone. "We are striking because of the awful working conditions. We're here to defend members' interests, to ask for better pay, and to implement the court ruling against the government for their illegal action in increasing pension contributions back in 2017. We need to move to more strike action, I don't think this government is interested in negotiating or goodwill. The only thing that will help us is concerted and organised strikes."

Alec Thraves reports that there was big support for the PCS picket at Swansea DVLA, with just a trickle of cars going in and literally a handful on buses.

New members

Helen Pattison reports a really good mood on the PCS picket at Heathrow Airport. New workplace reps, who had stepped up in just the last year, discussed how they had managed to galvanise the mood. Lots of people mentioned how far back working conditions had been pushed in both the public and private sectors.

A striker at the St Mark and St John University picket in Plymouth commented: "There needs to be a change in the funding formula. Our staff need a pay rise but we also need to maintain educational resources. It can't be right that every year someone studies with us they get thrust into £9,000 more debt".

On the Southampton University

picket line, Nick Chaffey spoke with a UCU member who explained the cynical outlook of management: "The latest offer includes an 8% increase for the lowest grades. It sounds good for their PR but the truth is that no one is employed on these grades anymore. It's an offer to nobody!"

Tories disconnected

"There's no way we can accept attacks on the terms and conditions we've fought for 140 years to win, in order to revive a pay cut," was the clear message from Aslef members in Leeds, according to Iain Dalton. There was anger at how disconnected the Tories are from the reality faced by ordinary people. As one picket joked: "Not paying your taxes and having to pay a £5 million fine - who hasn't had to do that!" With another replying: "I think the last time I did that, I was in the back of a car without a seatbelt on".

Steve Score reports from the Aslef picket line in Leicester: "When you are in a fight you find out who your friends and enemies really are. Leicester's Labour City Mayor walked past the Aslef picket line without even stopping to say hello. When Starmer bans frontbenchers from speaking out on picket lines, and local Labour leaders shun workers in struggle, it underlines why we need a new workers' party!"

On the Southampton University

▶▶▶ CONTINUED ON P6

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Rallies in the hundreds and thousands

Mike Whale reports that rural **East Riding**, a Tory 'heartland', saw more than 20 NEU picket lines followed by the biggest demonstration in Beverley since the anti-poll tax demonstrations in the early 1990s.

The rally in **Hull** city centre was rammed. The local secretary of the NASUWT told the rally that she was gutted that members of her union were not out, having voted overwhelmingly to take strike action but missed the restrictive Tory turnout threshold.

Speakers included Socialist Party member and Hull NEU secretary Ken McCall. One feature of the march that followed was the response from school students. Many of them were shouting anti-Tory slogans - some of which it would not be polite to print!

FBU members join the rallies

The **Sheffield** demo, Alistair Tice reports, had thousands on it - some said 3000, some said 5000, some said 6000! An experienced trade unionist said: "I can't believe it. It's fantastic!" Teachers in their hundreds, UCU lecturers, PCS civil servants and Aslef train drivers were joined by 70 firefighters who aren't even on strike yet.

Marion Lloyd, the left candidate for PCS president (see page 13) came from a 40-strong picket outside the Department for Education, and called for coordinated strike action and a one-day general strike.

Stuart Davies and Pete McNally report that well over 200 people squeezed into a local church hall in **Worcester**. Sean McCauley, a Socialist Party member and NEU executive member, got the event under way, highlighting the weakness of the Tory government and the need to defend education from Tory attacks.

A speaker from the local FBU branch said: "If you live in Worcester and you need the fire service during the night, you can be sure they will be there for you. All four of them. If someone else needs them around the same time, they will have to wait." The fact that there were no Labour Party representatives at the event was also highlighted by one of the crowd.

24-hour general strike

Several hundred trade unionists marched in **Gloucester**, says James Collett, chair of Gloucester and District Trades Council. The Socialist Party's call for a 24-hour general strike got a great response on the picket lines, as workers got a taste of how powerful coordinated action could be.



Over 50,000 marched in London

"That's what we need," said one Aslef striker. "A massive show of strength by the unions so the government knows they can't win." Another striker said: "The politicians think their money makes them powerful, but there's nothing more powerful than organised workers."

Sacrifice

Socialist Party member Lluís Bertolin, a PhD student and striking UCU member, spoke at the **Birmingham** rally. "There comes a moment where all the passion, sacrifice, and enthusiasm for teaching, however immense, is not sufficient to mitigate the effects of appalling work conditions. Management is more worried about opening and maintaining campuses in countries with dubious human rights standards than giving students a proper education."

Rich reports that workers came out in force in **Wolverhampton** to show support for the right to strike. Educators, railway workers, firefighters and more marched and gave speeches in opposition to the new laws.

Tom Baldwin says of the **Bristol** rally: "There were over 70 picket lines across Bristol; on every line we visited workers told us they'd be going

to the rally, but I was still blown away by how big it was. Streams of people coming onto College Green became a flood, and still they kept coming. Many of them were young workers with little or no experience of striking before. Everyone we spoke to wanted the strikes to continue coordinating and building."

Struggle

Socialist Party member Sheila Caffrey chaired the rally, as president of the Trades Council and NEU executive member. She compared the obscene profits made by big business and the struggle for people to afford to eat and heat their homes. She said: "If this society can't afford to pay, house and feed us, then we can't afford this society."

Laurence Dunn reports from **Guildford** that around 200 striking workers packed a meeting space and its hallways, with two Socialist Party members speaking. As a first-time striker and education worker put it, the turnout to the rally was inspiring, and made her feel reassured, encouraged and confident.

NEU executive member Louise Cuffaro reports that about 500 strikers and picketers came to Stratford

Old Town Hall for the **Newham** NEU rally, between picketing their schools and then marching in central London. So many of them Early Career Teachers and support staff, and many from scary anti-union academy trusts.

Around 500 trade unionists attended **Swansea** Trades Council rally. Mark Evans reports that the Labour leader of Swansea City Council, Rob Steward, got a less than enthusiastic response, particularly as some of the strikers present, in the NEU, were taking action against the Welsh Labour government.

Four Socialist Party members spoke at the rally, with Ginny from Socialist Students calling for a one-day general strike as the next big step in the fight to win the pay claims, to defeat the anti-trade union bill, and kick out the Tories.

According to Richard Worth, the **Exeter** march was led by Aslef train drivers, with PCS civil servants, NEU teachers, UCU university lecturers, students and children in support. Getting big public support, the march ended with a meeting of over 500, where Rob Kitley of the Exeter branch of Aslef called for rail, Royal Mail, energy and water to be nationalised.

NHS staff support

Lancaster's streets were filled with striking trade unionists and their supporters as up to 500 marched to a rally, reports Martin Powell-Davies. As they passed the hospital, they were applauded by NHS staff.

The day had started with lively NEU pickets at a dozen or more local schools, boosted by some NASUWT members refusing to cross the picket lines. Lancashire Socialist Party gave out hundreds of strike bulletins and our message that we all needed to be out together on Budget Day was well received.

Jean Thorpe spoke to over 2,000 people marching in **Northampton**.

Sue Atkins, speaking in **Southampton**, made the case for coordinated action on 15 March, Budget Day, to prepare for a 24-hour general strike to drive out the Tories. She raised the need for a trade union-led socialist alternative to Starmer's 'no blank cheque'.

Socialist Party members spoke at many more rallies around the country.

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One million forced onto prepayment, 3.2m switched off



JAMELAH E/CC

One million of the poorest and most vulnerable people in the country have been forced onto prepayment meters by the courts in the last two years. These people were in debt to their energy companies, because they couldn't afford to pay their bills.

Energy companies aren't allowed to just switch off your supply. So, instead, they work with the courts to force you onto prepayment. That way you 'switch yourself off', when you can't afford to pay. This happened to 3.2 million people last year.

1,500 a day

The rules were changed in the last few years to make it much easier for the energy companies to get away with all this. Last year, courts were switching over more than 1,500 a day.

The Tory government is weak, under pressure from the strike wave, and fearful of provoking further

working-class anger. So it has now temporarily been made harder to force customers onto prepayment meters. But a whistleblowing magistrate judge said that even under the old system, the energy companies got their way in the vast majority of cases.

We can't rely on the whims of a Tory government, the capitalist courts or the energy companies to look after vulnerable customers. They all put profit before people.

Nationalise

The energy giants should be nationalised, under the democratic control of the working class, with no compensation paid to the fat-cat owners.

And we can't trust this partial pause on one type of pre-payment switch. Working-class communities, coming together to defend families, could forcibly block energy companies and bailiffs when they try to install prepayment metres.

JOHN BUNN
SHEFFIELD SOUTH EAST SOCIALIST PARTY

With water companies making £2.8 billion in profits in 2021, we need to ask, how long can this go on? How much longer can we afford the robbery of the water companies taking profits from such an important resource? It has got so bad even the right-wing Daily Mail has criticised the water companies.

With new figures showing increased profits of privatised water companies, large handouts to investors, and record payouts to executives, it is time to take back water into public ownership.

It is not as if we are getting a reasonable service – with decaying infrastructure, a poor record of fixing leaks, and record levels of sewage

discharge into our rivers. Our bills are set to climb to a record high – an average of £448 a year – in April.

It is clear that the profit taken out by the water companies is a fetter to solving these problems, and developing a service that benefits us all.

In the summer, there were pictures of people swimming in rivers in France. This reminded me of when I was young swimming in the River Wye in Herefordshire.

I went back there last summer, and found large stretches of the Wye biologically dead, covered in green algae. This is because the run-off from chicken farms has put high levels of phosphates into the river. This, along with record levels of sewage discharge, has created a perfect storm of destruction.

With less resources being put in

by the government to monitor water standards, it is clear that water, along with other vital services like power and transport, can only be run effectively by being nationalised. While they're privately run, profits are maximised, investment limited, and decisions are made for the benefit of investors rather than society.

With socialist nationalisation, compensation is only given where there is proven need, not to the fat cats, and it's run under democratic workers' control and management, with local users having a say in decision making.

Only then can we have a service that truly benefits us all, and where pollution can be tackled, so that we can begin to enjoy our rivers and beaches again.

Record profits for Shell, record bills for us

ALEX PENSON
WALTHAM FOREST SOCIALIST PARTY

Oil and gas giant Shell has announced profits of £32 billion for last year, double the previous year's total, and the highest in its 115-year history. BP's profits have also doubled to £23 billion.

Meanwhile, Tory chancellor Jeremy Hunt confirmed that under

his budget to be announced on 15 March, domestic energy bills are expected to soar by another 40% from April.

Shell often boasts of its "ambitious" plans to switch to green energy. But it paid out almost six times as much to shareholders, in the fourth quarter of last year, as it did to its 'renewables and energy solutions' division – this includes controversial hydrogen and

carbon capture and storage projects. And Shell has made clear that it does not plan to increase investment in this division next year, citing the need to "reward our shareholders".

The Socialist Party stands for nationalisation of energy companies, like Shell and BP, under democratic workers' control, and an urgent switch to green energy while securing workers' rights and livelihoods.

Virtual wards – latest Tory NHS cuts scam

PIRIYASHA
BIRMINGHAM CENTRAL SOCIALIST PARTY

The Tories – instead of dealing with overcrowded hospitals, and funding the NHS properly, – are putting the responsibility on families to look after patients in their homes. Another way to get away with further cuts to the NHS.

'Virtual wards' will supposedly be supported by already understaffed

and overworked home clinicians. So how does the government expect to meet its new two-hour target to respond to home calls?

A hospital is where all the necessary facilities should be available, including the necessary healthcare staff and life-saving equipment. But the Tories are not increasing funding to the NHS to combat 13 years of government cuts.

Healthcare should not be a luxury,

it is a necessity for life that all should have access to. The Tories, and the Labour Party under Keir Starmer, are not able to provide us with necessities we need.

We need a free National Health Service, fully funded, and run by the working class. And for that, we need a socialist system that is democratically run by the working class for the benefit of all, and not just for the profits of the bosses.

SOCIALISM TODAY

Monthly magazine of the Socialist Party

February issue includes...

- Britain on the boil: Perspectives for the economic crisis and class struggle
- The fight for trade union unity
- 20 years after the Iraq war began

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Devastating earthquake kills thousands in Turkey and Syria

More than 5,000 people have been killed, and tens of thousands injured, by a huge earthquake.

It struck near the town of Gaziantep, in south-eastern Turkey, near the Syrian border, in the early hours of 6 February morning. It

was followed by numerous aftershocks – including one quake which was almost as large as the first.

Capitalist crisis, and the poor infrastructure and quality of the buildings in Turkey, and especially

war-torn Syria, has exacerbated the scale and difficulty in responding to the quake.

• See socialistparty.org.uk and socialistworld.net in the coming days for articles on the disaster.

TOM BALDWIN

SOCIALIST PARTY NATIONAL COMMITTEE

In 2022 the world's population hit the landmark figure of eight billion. How can the world support this growing number of people? Is overpopulation a challenge to be overcome, or does the problem lie elsewhere?

The birth of the eight billionth baby marked a doubling of the human population in just 47 years. However, the rate at which it grows has been slowing for even longer, since 1968. Long-term projections estimate that the world's population will peak at over ten billion, but that it will begin to fall before the end of the century.

Numbers have already begun to fall in China, long the world's most populous country. Last year its population declined for the first time since 1961 and it is set to be overtaken this year by India. China's birth rate is below that of the UK, despite the ending of the one child policy. This oppressive attempt to control population was scrapped seven years ago and the government is now pursuing contrary policies to keep the birth rate up.

The rising world population is not due to rising birth-rate. This peaked in 1990 and is not expected to hit the same level again. Last year there were 8.5 million fewer births than that peak, despite the total population being significantly higher. Instead, the growing population is a result of people living longer.

Overpopulation?

Worries about overpopulation are not as widespread as they once were. In 2007, Boris Johnson wrote an article on the subject arguing that the "single biggest challenge is not climate change" but "the reproduction of our species itself", adding that "you can smell it in the traffic jams of the Middle East". A wide range of public figures have also described the problem of overpopulation. These arguments miss the point, perhaps deliberately, but there are still some that would make similar claims today.

Of course, there are burning issues of starvation and the overcrowding of some cities, the rapid consumption of the world's resources and the impact on climate change. But as a recent article in the Guardian by the prominent social geographer Danny Dorling put it: "Our concerns over food, healthcare, education and housing should not be our numbers, but instead our inequality, greed and waste. These are the real problems of our time."

He's right, but he does not name the cause of these problems - capitalism. The unplanned economy, run for the profit of a tiny minority, leaves billions suffering. Resources are hoarded by the super-rich and squandered due to unnecessary competition. A rational, socialist plan of production would instead allow these resources to provide a decent standard of living for everyone.

Since 2007 a majority of the world's population has lived in urban areas. The figure is now around 57% and the numbers living in cities has grown faster than the population in general. Poverty and a lack of planning has forced many of these people to live in cramped and overcrowded conditions. But there is no need for it to be like this. The vast majority of the land on earth is uninhabited. With democratic socialist planning of population distribution there could easily be enough space for everyone.

The United Nations Environment Programme has written an article titled 'How to feed ten billion people'. In it, it states clearly in bold type: "There is enough food for everyone." Yet under the current system more than 10% of the world's population go hungry. This figure has been rising again since 2015. Even in a wealthy country like Britain increasing numbers are forced to rely on food banks.

One third of the food produced in the world is lost or wasted before it makes it to people's plates. That's 1.3 billion tonnes every year. Capitalist food producers aim to produce large quantities in order to make as much profit as possible, there is no coordinated planning to meet demand. Food is produced for profit, not need; if it can't be sold profitably then it is destroyed.

Capitalism

In line with capitalism's general trend towards monopolisation the drive in agriculture has been to 'get big or get out'. We've seen the growth of huge agribusinesses. Intensive farming methods are employed to try and turn the biggest possible profits in the short term, as the logic of capitalism demands. However, these methods actually undermine the productivity of the land in the longer term. They are incredibly environmentally damaging, causing soil erosion, pollution from agrichemicals and damaging biodiversity as well as being a net producer of greenhouse gases. Factory farms see animals kept in cramped and cruel conditions and contribute to diseases that are resistant to antibiotics. Yet despite all of this, medium and small farms generally perform better when efficiency is measured in production per unit area.

Across all sectors of the economy the imperative to make profits at all costs causes enormous waste. Big businesses' drive to keep us buying more of their products means things are designed to be thrown away rather than mended or reused. Efforts are duplicated by competing firms, wasting resources that could otherwise improve people's living standards.

The rich are rich because they exploit us. It's workers that create the wealth but the less the bosses pay us the more profits they can hoard for themselves. Under capitalism there would be poor living standards at the bottom regardless of how many people there are in the world. Scarcity is a problem of the system and not of population.

The same is true of climate change. There are environmentalists, including David Attenborough, who have raised concerns about whether the planet can sustain the rising



population. Some would argue that more people inevitably means more emissions of greenhouse gases bringing devastating consequences.

However, this ignores the exceptionally unequal distribution of responsibility for climate change. The wealthy have a far bigger 'carbon footprint' than poorer people but by far the biggest culprits are big businesses, not individuals. 71% of climate emissions in the last 30 years have been by just 100 companies.

Many of those are fossil fuel firms. The dominant position of these companies and capitalism's demand for profitable sources of energy have hindered the development of cleaner alternatives. Goods are shipped half way around the world on polluting container ships because production in low-wage economies means more profits. Big business greed consistently comes before the environment in this system. Yet, by taking the energy firms and other big businesses into public ownership and adopting socialist planning, a rapid shift to a carbon neutral economy could be achieved, even on the basis of population growth.

Expressing concerns about overpopulation can spill over into suggestions for population control, some of them extremely reactionary. Prince Philip once said: "In the event that I am reincarnated, I would like to return as a deadly virus, to contribute something to solving overpopulation." There have been real-life attempts to control population growth by oppressive measures - most notably the one child policy in China. In 2017 the Tory government limited child benefit to the first two children in a family in most cases.

Families

Socialists fight for the right to decide when and whether to have children. This means opposing any policies that attempt to put a limit on the size of families, and fighting for families to have the resources to be able to provide for their children: free quality childcare, decent housing, decent pay and so on, on the one hand. On the other hand, we also oppose policies that restrict access to contraception or abortion. That includes the recent overturning of the Roe v. Wade decision in the US Supreme Court.

Population growth is mainly due to increasing life expectancy. People living longer should be a cause for celebration but capitalism cares only about profits, not people. Its representatives often see an ageing population as a problem. If people

are no longer productive, which in their eyes means working to make money for a boss, then they're seen as a burden.

A UK parliament research publication from 2015 entitled 'Challenges of an ageing population' says 55% of welfare spending goes to pensioners, with the state pension being the lion's share of this. That's despite the UK paying one of the lowest state pensions in Europe, leaving many pensioners in poverty. The Tories' answer has been to raise the retirement age, making us work longer. Attempts by French president Emmanuel Macron to raise the retirement age have been met with mass protests and strikes through January.

The question of how much of your life is your own and how much is your boss's is an incredibly significant one for socialists. The length of the working week and the age of retirement have been the subject of big struggles of the working class. By eliminating the waste and duplication inherent in the anarchic production of capitalism, a socialist society would require people to work fewer hours. This would allow more free time during your working life and the choice of retiring earlier. By planning production to meet need, everyone could be guaranteed a decent standard of living, even in old age.

Another issue the parliamentary report identifies is the additional pressure on health and care services. MPs have got some cheek! The NHS would be in a far better position to deal with additional demand if it wasn't for decades of underfunding. There are over 100,000 unfilled positions in the NHS. Successive governments have increased the role of private companies leeching profits out of the service, including saddling NHS trusts with huge debts for Private Finance Initiative (PFI) deals.

The care sector is even more burdened by the problem of profiteering. Councils used to be the main provider of care. By 2019, just 3% of care beds were council-owned, 84% were run for profit by private providers. This often means staff are limited and corners are cut to improve the bottom line, while service users can still pay through the nose.

Socialism

Public ownership of these services, as part of a socialist society which prioritised people's health and well-being, would ensure decent services for all who need them and be able to plan adequately for improved life expectancy.

Under capitalism, rising life expectancy cannot be taken for granted. With the crisis in the NHS and the growing numbers of people who can't afford to heat their homes we may see a rise in excess deaths this winter in the UK, a relatively wealthy country. The long-term effects of the cost-of-living crisis on people's health due to changing diets and increased stress have yet to be seen. Climate change represents an even bigger threat to human life.

Capitalism is bad for our health as individuals and as a species. There are eight billion reasons why it has to go. Its overthrow and the building of a socialist society to replace it is the most important task facing humanity. Socialist planning can ensure people live in greater harmony with nature and forge a future that provides a good standard of living for all eight billion of us and more.



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.

- 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.

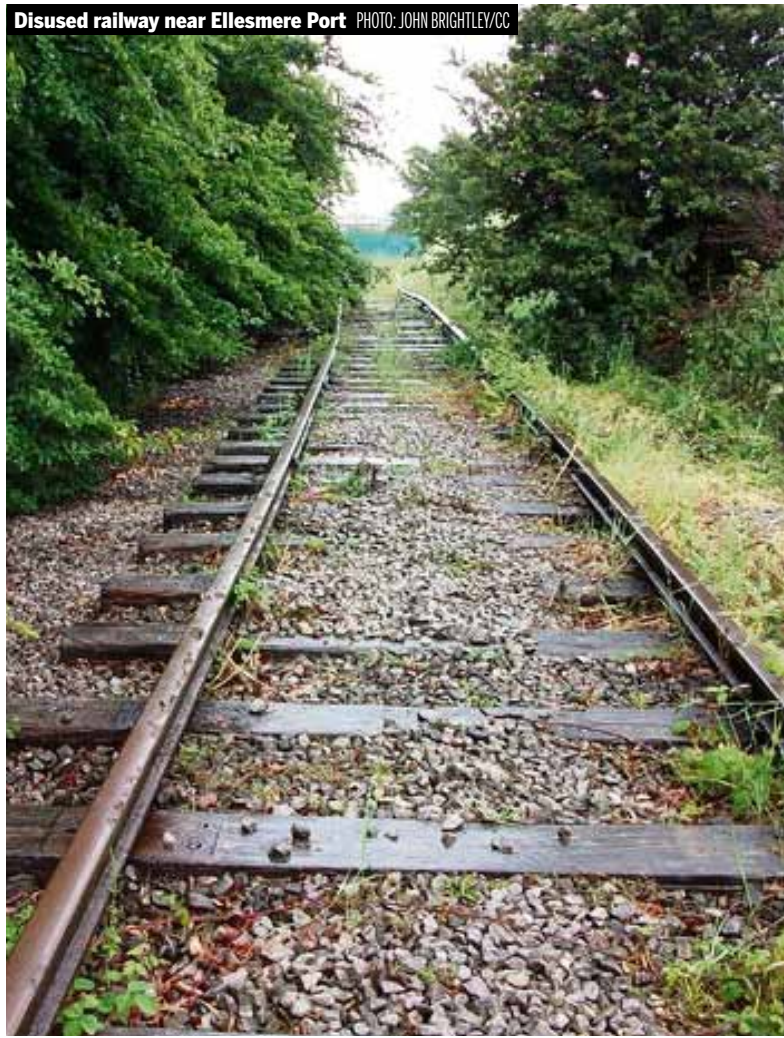
SOCIALISM AND INTERNATIONALISM

- 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.



Tory 'Levelling Up' is not what we need

ZAKK BROWN
MANCHESTER AND SALFORD SOCIALIST PARTY

The government has put aside an additional £2.1 billion into its 'Levelling Up Fund' – a pittance of what working-class communities need. In order to secure some of this money, the government operates a bidding war, with constituencies vying for funding.

This process is inherently unequal. Without any form of local democratic say, securing funds is dependent on the whims of the Tory government. This was even echoed by West Midlands Tory mayor Andy Street, calling it "broken begging-bowl culture".

Of the poorest 10% of local authorities, 17, almost half, haven't received a single penny. Many other areas have received less than what they would have, had the fund been distributed equally across the UK.

North-west England has secured £355 million. However, areas like Rochdale, where 50% of children live in poverty in the Milkstone and Deepshill ward, won't see any of it. Surprising no one, the biggest winners in this bidding war are Tory-held constituencies.

Michael Gove, levelling-up secretary, claimed that hated Tory prime minister Margaret Thatcher is an inspiration for the policy. Some working-class communities and industries still haven't recovered from Thatcherism.

Gove cited Thatcher's London Docklands Development Corporation as an example, claiming that the "government created the environment, the private sector created the

jobs". However, east London gentrification has driven up the cost of housing, and forced many residents out.

The reliance on free markets to solve inequality is the tried and tested Tory method that has yet to succeed. We need devolution, but not to MPs or Tory mayors.

In their hands, funding will just be put into private sector hands, which won't benefit workers. Real 'devolution' would give working-class communities a democratic say over what money is needed, and how it is used.

Labour councils – prepared to lead the fight against austerity, refusing to implement cuts, and demanding the funding that is needed – could force the Tories to cough up more than the insufficient levelling-up funds.

We need investment in council housing and not private housing companies; publicly owned transport services; and not privatised rail industries; and money put into public education and not privately run academies and private schools.

If Labour councils won't implement the policies we need, we need workers' candidates independent of Labour to stand against them.

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NICK CHAFFEY AND BILL NORTH
SOUTHERN AND SOUTH EAST SOCIALIST PARTY

Towns and cities, cold and hungry, full of fear and anger as this cruel Tory government of the super-rich tries to beat down on working-class communities to protect their wealth and profits sucked from the pockets of every worker. But now, workers are striking back in greater and greater numbers, determined to defend themselves and their families.

More and more people are asking what can we do, how can we make sure no one goes cold, hungry or homeless? Next month councils across the country will have the chance to take action; to use their powers to set needs budgets that provide free school meals, open school kitchens at weekends and holidays to feed families, introduce rent controls and no- eviction policies, and provide grants to those facing energy bills they can't afford.

Mobilising the anger of local communities, they could link up with striking trade unions and demand the Tory government pays the balance and restores the billions stolen from local councils since 2010.

Alongside the cost-of-living crisis, council services that have survived twelve long years of cuts are in a state of collapse. Many communities are left with nothing but an under-funded, overstretched school, with families in crisis and nowhere else to go. We need to reopen council-run youth clubs, day centres for the elderly to eat and socialise, libraries and care homes, and rebuild our communities.

Added Covid costs that the government didn't meet in full have increased deficits, and inflation has sharply increased costs. Even Tory council leaders hypocritically speak out as they fear the electoral backlash from cutting services further!

Labour councils are in prime position to take on and defeat this weak and divided Tory government. 20% of public spending is spent by local councils. And just the Labour-controlled council budgets put together would be the sixteenth largest economy in Europe.

Councils can fight back

Recently the Green-Labour coalition in Brighton launched a 'Give It Back' campaign with the local Unison trade union branch demanding the millions stolen in central government cuts since 2010 are returned. But rather than defiantly refusing to carry out more cuts, the Brighton councillors have written to Sunak and effectively said: "Pay us the money or we will carry out more cuts." Not much of a threat considering Sunak wants the cuts to go ahead!

If the council adopted the fighting national policy agreed by Unite the Union in 2021 – campaigned for by Socialist Party members, and part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) local government platform (see box) – that councils set balanced, no-cuts, needs budgets, using their reserves and borrowing powers and implemented a programme so that no one goes cold, hungry or homeless, they would gain huge support which could force Sunak and the Tories to retreat.

Councils have a choice: either fight or collaborate. Under the 2011 Localism Act, councillors no longer face

Councils must use their powers to fight against cost-of-living crisis



The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) conference (see pages 2-3) endorsed a platform for the upcoming local elections. To see the list of councils up for election in May visit www.tusc.org.uk/txt/473.pdf and if you agree, consider standing yourself. This platform includes:

"Upon election TUSC councillors would, at the first opportunity, put forward for a vote in the council chamber the following immediate emergency measures for the council to take against cost-of-living suffering:

NO ONE TO BE COLD

Top up the Tory's miserly Household Support Fund to provide grants for those unable to pay their bills; an emergency programme of home insulation; extend the opening of public buildings, including libraries, to provide staffed warm spaces and youth facilities.

NO ONE TO BE HUNGRY

Fund kitchens in schools and other services to introduce free breakfasts, lunches and evening meals; expand food banks and distribution of safe food 'waste' under democratic council control; fund public provision of high-quality free care, including childcare, to prevent care cost-related hunger.

NO ONE TO BE HOMELESS

Use council licensing powers to cap rents, including for students, and ban evictions of those who fall into cost-of-living-related arrears; use compulsory-purchase orders to take over empty homes to house working-class families and young people in housing need; for an emergency shared-ownership programme to support struggling mortgage-holders; expand specialist domestic violence refuges and services."

the threat of surcharge the heroic socialist councillors in 1980s Liverpool faced, or the risk of imprisonment as 1920s Poplar councillors did. Government powers to use commissioners have been utilised in Slough and Liverpool in recent years, but this was on the basis of right-wing Labour councillors capitulating rather than leading a fightback.

In the 1980s Liverpool council, led by Militant supporters (now the Socialist Party), mobilised mass support for its programme to build 5,000 council homes, leisure centres and parks, control rents, create jobs and improve pay. Organising a city-wide general strike on budget day, with 50,000 marching to city hall in support, Thatcher was forced to retreat and award an extra £60 million to fund the council's budget. What chance would Tory commissioners

have of taking over from democratically elected fighting councillors carrying out a defiant approach like Liverpool?

An even bigger retreat was forced on the Tories in 1991 in the face of the Militant-led 18 million-strong Poll Tax non-payment campaign, organised around the All Britain Anti-Poll Tax Federation. Working-class people were unable and unwilling to pay the same in tax as the millionaires. Thatcher, the Iron Lady, was removed and the Tories forced to find £4.1 billion to pump into local councils and reduce Poll Tax bills. We've seen during Covid, or more recently with the limited energy caps, that the money is there if the government is under sufficient pressure to use it.

While millions of workers across the trade unions strike for better pay, Starmer's Labour fails to back the

strikes, or support calls for nationalisation of energy, rail and mail, or campaigns for free school meals. His Labour councils are preparing to carry through a new round of brutal cuts. They must be opposed.

No-cuts needs budgets

As part of TUSC, Socialist Party branches are organising People's Budget meetings to discuss the alternative to council cuts and preparing to lobby council budget meetings to build support for a fightback.

This year marks ten years since rebel Labour councillors in Southampton, Leicester and Hull moved balanced, no-cuts, needs budgets, showing what is possible. As left Labour councillors are deselected by the right across the country they should use their new-found independence to take a bold stand, refuse

to vote for cuts and lead a fightback. Such a stand would give them the best chance to be re-elected in May and provide a voice to those fighting back. We appeal to them to make an anti-cuts stand, discuss and join with TUSC in building that alternative.

If Labour won't fight, we call on the trade unions to stand strikers as candidates in the upcoming May council elections. Unite members could campaign for the union's no-cuts policy and appeal for others to join with them.

The potential exists to drive this government from office and every opportunity must be seized. Protests against the cost-of-living crisis are set to grow in every community, and council action will be demanded. Socialist Party members will play their full part in helping to build and lead that fightback.

Postal workers enter vital stage in long-running dispute with Royal Mail



PHOTO: PAUL MATSSON

SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBERS IN CWU

The Communication Workers Union's (CWU) long-running dispute with Royal Mail is entering a vital stage.

CWU had announced a 24-hour strike for the 16-17 February which is just at the end of the latest six-month ballot period - and as the union was due to announce the latest strike ballot result. But a legal challenge was put in by Royal Mail and, with legal advice, the CWU has withdrawn the strike notice. This means the last strike date was Christmas Eve, and the earliest next strike date will now be early March.

So, just as we have seen protests against the Tories' latest anti-trade union proposals over the right to strike, Royal Mail has used the existing anti-trade union laws to stop CWU members defending our terms and conditions.

The CWU has been in talks with Royal Mail, and had suspended industrial action after Royal Mail pledged; not to carry out any compulsory redundancies, a return to the pre-existing industrial relations framework, a full review of all disciplinary cases arising from the dispute, and a commitment to meaningful negotiations during January.

But Royal Mail backtracked and there have been more reps and activists suspended, and some have now been sacked. We are seeing union-busting tactics by Royal Mail which has made many reps scared to speak from fear and intimidation by management.

Royal Mail seems intent to try and smash the CWU and, to rub salt into the wounds, the company has just offered managers - who were recently given voluntary redundancy of two years' wages, which for many would be a six-figure sum - a nine-month £40,000 contract to come back as 'consultants' to implement the changes it aims to introduce. This is at a time when it says it has 'no money' for ordinary postal workers.

CWU members are now crying out for us to take further industrial action and members are angry that yet again we have been forced to withdraw planned strikes.

The CWU needs to take the lead in calling for an immediate meeting of unions, particularly those with a live strike mandate, to organise to strike together on Budget Day - especially given the clear support of the Tory government for Royal Mail management.

STRIKE WAVE

National Express West Midlands workers prepare to fight

CLIVE WALDER
BIRMINGHAM SOUTH SOCIALIST PARTY, AND FORMER VICTIMISED NATIONAL EXPRESS WORKER

Following bus workers in several parts of the country recently winning substantial pay rises, National Express West Midlands bus drivers and admin staff in Birmingham, the Black Country and Coventry, members of Unite the Union, will ballot for strike action on pay between 8 February and 1 March.

Drivers are furious at what they correctly describe as a 'real-terms pay cut'. The company says it has offered a 14% pay rise, but that includes 6% already paid last November, leaving the real offer at 8%. Some drivers earn as little as £11.80 an hour. It seems a long time since bus drivers were hailed as Covid heroes.

The admin staff (many of who only earn just above the minimum wage) haven't even received an offer, despite suffering from the same cost-of-living crisis as the drivers.

Unite general secretary, Sharon Graham, said: "National Express brings in huge amounts of money while its workers are struggling with the cost-of-living crisis. It can afford to pay a decent wage to its workers and that is exactly what it needs to do."

This could be the first bus strike in the West Midlands for decades. National Express runs 93% of bus services in West Midlands and so a dispute would have a big impact on the regional economy.

The company made a profit of £15.8 million in the first half of 2022, so there is plenty of money for an inflation-proof pay offer.

Passengers will likely be frustrated at the effects of a strike. Unite should appeal to the public for support, explaining the workers' case and placing the blame for any inconvenience firmly on the company's shoulders.

Strikes will start in the near future if the ballot returns a 'yes' vote.

FBU members: Fired up to strike!

GEORGINA LEWIN
FIREFIGHTER, NORTH BIRMINGHAM
SOCIALIST PARTY

The outstanding Fire Brigades Union ballot result of firefighters across England, Scotland and Wales was published on the 30 January. Another group of workers to smash the anti-trade union threshold, with a 73% turnout and an 88% vote for strike action.

Fire and rescue is one of the most respected and dangerous professions. The World Health Organisation ranks firefighting as a 'class one' cancer-causing profession. During the Covid pandemic firefighters took on extra duties, including assisting paramedics. This was on top of existing duties, which include handling heavy and complex equipment for house fires, high-rise fires, car crashes, water resources, building collapses, animal rescue, trauma care, hazardous materials, body retrievals, lift rescues... the list goes on!

Firefighters train and dedicate their lives to the service. Many of my colleagues feel anger and frustration that their loyalty is not being recognised. 11,000 jobs have been lost in the Fire and Rescue Service over the last twelve years of austerity cuts. Attacks to our service don't just affect firefighters on the front line, they affect all the public and the service they get from us, which can result in injury and death.

Inflation is going up but our pay isn't matching this. Firefighters are using food banks, and can't afford heating, water or basic bills, after a 48-hour week of working to protect the public from having what could be the worst day of their lives. Some of

my colleagues can't even afford the fuel to get into work. One worker told me this is a "stressful enough job as it is, without worrying about getting what we deserve". The FBU has calculated firefighters have seen a real-terms pay cut of £4,000 per year since 2010.

But as technology and combustible materials become more complex and dangerous, our jobs will become even more demanding. Not to mention the growing climate response we will need to prepare for future generations. At a time where money should be invested into the service and its workers, we are seeing the opposite.

We work in one of the richest countries in the world, so for us to be told there isn't enough money to pay public sector workers is a lie. The government of the 1% are so far removed from the rest of us that they don't have to worry about their medical future or their safety. I'd like to see any of them do a day in the job of a firefighter!

It takes a special type of person to be a firefighter and their service should be treated with respect so the workers can live with dignity. The government needs to put money where their mouth is, and if they don't we'll boot them out.

Get all the latest union news

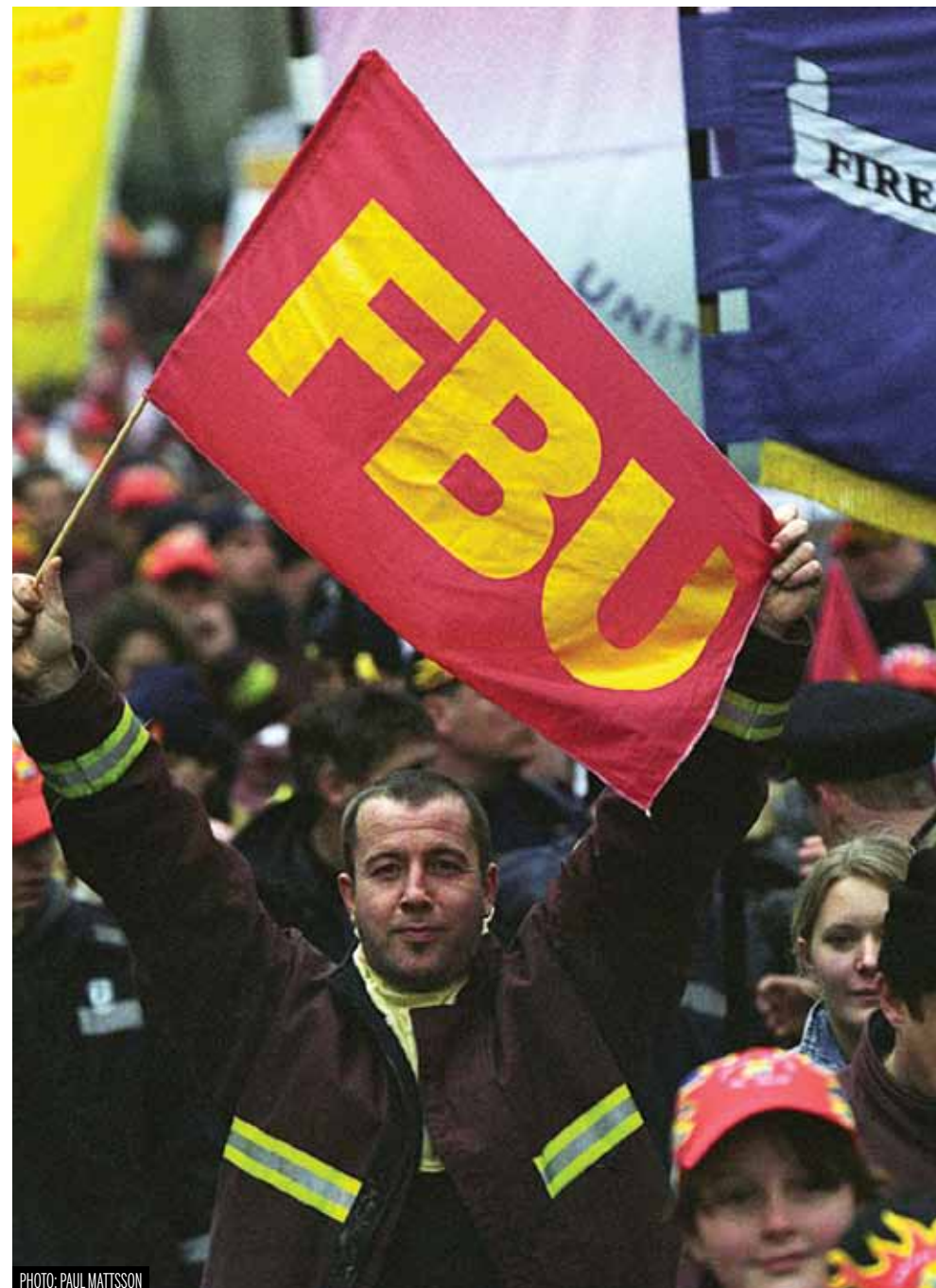


PHOTO: PAUL MATSSON

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

Unified left to fight PCS national elections



PHOTO: PAUL MATSSON

KATRINE WILLIAMS
PCS MEMBER

In this year's PCS leadership elections, the ruling Democracy Alliance leadership, made up of the 'Left Unity' group and the PCS Democrats, will face a unified left opposition.

The Broad Left Network (BLN), supported by Socialist Party members, and the Independent Left (IL), in a hugely significant step, have issued an agreed platform and unified slate to fight the elections.

Local PCS branches, at their annual general meetings in February through to early March, will nominate candidates. We urge support for the BLN and IL joint slate, headed by Socialist Party member Marion Lloyd for president.

The general record of the present leadership, and in particular the failure to act decisively in implementing and escalating action over pay, defence of jobs, and other issues, has convinced many members and union activists that they need to go.

It's clear from recent elections that the BLN and IL together have enough support to replace the current leadership, and they are aware of this. They will attack us with scurrilous accusations in a desperate attempt to cling to power.

Our opponents will call us out for criticising them and seeking to replace them in the midst of the pay campaign. Our answer is that we are standing to win these elections. We want a leadership capable of building

and implementing a strategy to win the pay campaign. If in the meantime, by standing, we act as a pressure on the leadership to conduct the dispute properly, that can only be a good thing. We give total support to PCS members taking action and support the union's pay and jobs demands, while at the same time we make clear our view that national action could and should have been taken much earlier than 1 February, and we need to escalate the action to win.

As for campaigning to replace them, well that surely is the point of elections - it's called democracy!

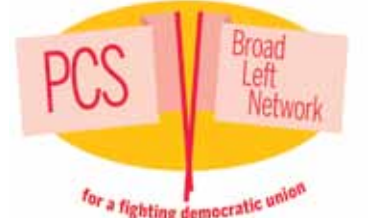
Our opponents will accuse us of 'opportunism', due to BLN and IL agreeing a platform and unified slate. There is nothing opportunistic about us joining together to oust a leadership whose policies we disagree with and in which we have no confidence. BLN and IL have a shared view of what needs to be done to win this fight with the government on pay and jobs, and to defend union democracy, and we are seeking support for our joint slate around this agreed platform.

Our opponents should remember their leadership is based on an electoral pact between two groups, Left Unity and the PCS Democrats. They would much prefer the opposition to them to be divided. Well this year, that's not going to happen.

We can win on pay and jobs. Support the selective strikers and the levy, escalate the national action, ballot for action short of strikes. Make Budget Day a day of coordinated action - all out on 15 March!

"I send solidarity to all strikers across the movement, in particular PCS members. The Tories' response to the cost-of-living crisis and the strikes is more anti-union legislation. The TUC must prepare the maximum coordinated industrial action, up to and including a 24-hour general strike, to defeat any new anti-union laws. "Our union needs a new leadership, with a fresh approach. This can be achieved by supporting the unified slate of candidates agreed by the Broad Left Network and the Independent Left"

Marion Lloyd, BLN chair



Broad Left Network's appeal for nominations Action not words - a leadership to win!

We are in the middle of a major dispute with our employer. It is vital we have a leadership which will build our campaign, with a strategy capable of winning. The Broad Left Network and the Independent Left have come together to do just that.

Together we will:

- Support the strikes
- Develop a serious escalating programme of national, targeted and selective strike action to beat the Tory cost-of-living squeeze and the anti-union laws, including action short of strikes, to maximise the pressure on the government
- Ensure that PCS takes the lead in calling for mass coordinated action
- Strengthen democracy and accountability, including extending elections to include full-time officers and bringing their pay more in line with the members they represent

President

- Marion Lloyd - BEIS

Vice Presidents

- Fiona Brittle - Scottish Government
- Bryan Carlsen - HSE
- Bev Laidlaw - DWP
- Jon-Paul Rosser - HMRC

NEC members

- Dave Bartlett - MOJ
- Tom Bishell - DWP
- Rob Bowers - Defence
- Fiona Brittle - Scottish Government
- Alex Brown - Health Group
- Sarah Brown - Met Police
- Bryan Carlsen - HSE
- Josh Chown - Home Office
- Eleanor Clarke - Cabinet Office
- Chris Day - National Archives
- Alan Dennis - Defence
- Nick Doyle - HMRC
- Matt Exley - Culture
- Chip Hamer - Culture
- Rachel Heemskerck - DWP
- Karen Johnson - DLUHC
- David Jones - DLUHC
- Bev Laidlaw - DWP
- Marion Lloyd - BEIS
- Chris Marks - DWP
- Vijay Menezes - Jackson DWP
- Nick Parker - Acas
- Rob Ritchie - Shared Service Commercial Sector
- Jon-Paul Rosser - HMRC
- Dave Semple - DWP
- Gary Spencer - DLUHC
- Saorsa-Amatheia Tweedale - DWP
- Paul Suter - DWP
- Matt Wells - DEFRA
- Colin Young - Education

Labour and Tory NHS privatisation



Kick out the privatisers! PHOTO: MARY FINCH

I enjoyed Jon Dale's article graphically showing Labour's continuity with Tory NHS privatisation (See 'Labour will add to Tory NHS crisis with more privatisation' at socialistparty.org.uk). At the same time, it prompted me to recall a shocking statistic from a BMA journal. The total number of NHS hospital beds in England has more than halved over the past 30 years from 299,000 in 1988 to 141,000 in 2020. A significant proportion of that bed loss was previously allocated to mental health patients and those with learning disabilities. Over the same period for general and acute care, the reduction was 44%. Again, a significant proportion of that bed loss was previously for long-term care of older people. Those people who are now called 'bed blockers'. Among Boris Johnson's biggest lies during the pandemic was the claim that the NHS was not overwhelmed. However, the best explanation for the relentless rise of NHS privatisation and the NHS's downfall is in Steve

Score's 'Marxist Economics' in the Socialist Party's new book 'Introduction to Marxism': "Anything that goes on in society that makes a profit for the capitalist is seen by them as productive. So the work of a nurse in a public sector hospital... is viewed as 'unproductive labour', whereas the work of a nurse employed by a private health company is 'productive labour'".

With a general election potentially imminent, and the prospect of an incoming Labour government, Jon quotes Wes Streeting, Labour's shadow health secretary: "The state of the public finances means that Labour will not be able to open the government cheque book." In 2010 following defeat in the general election, Liam Byrne, a senior Treasury minister, left a note for his Tory-Lib Dem replacement stating there was "no money left". 13 years later, another New Labour politician and the same old story.

JOHN MERRELL

'I owe the NHS my life - lets fight for it!'

Despite years of chronic underfunding, and by backdoor privatisation, overworked and criminally underpaid NHS staff still battle on daily to save lives.

We need the NHS. Speaking as someone with Type 1 diabetes, I owe my life to the NHS and its dedicated staff. No way do I have the financial means to afford the insulin I need simply to live.

Enough people have already died due to benefit sanctions, austerity, and Tory mismanagement of the pandemic. The Tories have blood on their hands, which no amount of scrubbing will remove.

I am not prepared to let this heartless profit-driven government sign my death warrant. I might not live to see global socialism, but I will keep on with the fight to make it happen! Who's with me?

MELANIE DENT



editors@socialistparty.org.uk

or, if you're not online, write to the Socialist Inbox, PO Box 1398, Enfield EN1 9GT



Film: The Banshees of Inisherin

A tale of two friends and an allegory for the Irish Civil War

NIALL MULHOLLAND
EAST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

The Banshees of Inisherin has garlanded Golden Globe awards and is nominated for nine Oscars. The film by writer-director Martin McDonagh brings together actors Brendan Gleeson and Colin Farrell following their successful 2008 movie, 'In Bruges'. Set on the fictional island of 'Inisherin' in 1923, the new film is about two male friends who abruptly fall out, with dire consequences. It is intended as an allegory for the Irish Civil War ('Inisherin' translates to 'Island Ireland'), which was in full rage at that time.

Colin Farrell plays Pádraic Súilleabháin, a small farmer, and Brendan

Gleeson plays Colm Doherty, a fiddle player who scores traditional Irish music.

Sensing that life is marching on, and that he must do more creative work, Colm abruptly ends his daily pub outings with Pádraic. When asked repeatedly by Pádraic why he has taken this drastic action, Colm cruelly tells Pádraic that he is a "boring" and a "limited man". Other characters include Dominic, a young lad who wants to escape his thuggish policeman father. Dominic has romantic feelings for Siobhán (played by Kerry Condon), Pádraic's sister, who is the most rounded character in the film.

The more Pádraic desperately attempts to re-establish a friendship with Colm, the more the older man

takes drastic action to prevent it, which includes threats to carry out self-mutilation. The falling out escalates into violent actions by both men.

The Banshees of Inisherin has received widespread acclaim for its spare dialogue, beautiful cinematography and acting. As with other Martin McDonagh tragic-comic films, it lends itself to grotesque and cartoonish violence.

McDonagh's writing is infused with postmodernism, and perhaps audiences are meant to assume he is cleverly subverting Irish stereotypes. But many Irish people will wince at some of the depictions of life on the island that, at times, veer a bit close to the 'Stage Irish'. Pádraic's dotting love for his donkey which he allows

to wander freely inside his cottage; Dominic is the village 'ejjit'; the pub entertains a host of jiggling drunks; and an ancient female in a black shawl is the island's doomsayer.

Most problematic is the politics. References to the Civil War raging on the mainland, as shown by far-off explosions and sounds of gunshots, do little to illuminate why this conflict is taking place. It is treated as an almost inexplicable breach. The policeman is proud to be asked to go to the mainland to help oversee state executions of prisoners yet he says he has no view on the civil war. One character on the island says at least during the war of independence everyone knew they were "fighting the English", but no one knows what this civil war is all about. The audience, unless they have prior knowledge of the historical events, will be at a loss.

Is writer-director Martin McDonagh trying to avoid controversy in modern-day Ireland, where the main two bourgeois parties, Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael - currently in government together, for the first time - have their roots in civil war politics?

To be generous to McDonagh, perhaps Colm's desire to reject small farmer Padraic can be taken as symbolic of the bourgeois nationalist forces that coalesced around the new

Free State in Ireland after partition and 'abandoned' the six counties in the north? The fledgling militarised state, backed by British imperialism, fought a ruthless war against the radical republican forces that refused to recognise partition and the bloody creation of the six-county Unionist-dominated northern state and the oppressive 26-country Free State.

The anti-Treaty forces lacked a developed social programme and the mass mobilisation of the working class to win. The Communist International warned, in December 1922, while still under the leadership of Lenin and Trotsky: "Armed struggle alone, without its extension and support through economic and political actions, will end in failure. In order to achieve success, the masses must be mobilised against the Free State."

Siobhán's dilemma, between staying living with her brother in a poverty stricken and small-minded community or taking off to the mainland for a job, could be a reference to the mass emigration from Ireland that took place from the 1920s onwards. During this period, the triumphant pro-Treaty Irish bourgeoisie consolidated its rule over an impoverished state and worked hand-in-hand with an ultra-conservative Catholic Church hierarchy.

In reality, the people of the islands of the west coast of Ireland were not, by any means, confused bystanders to events taking place on the mainland. Some of them played an important role in the revolution and counterrevolutionary events between 1913 and 1923.

The renowned Irish novelist and short story writer, Liam O'Flaherty, who was born on one of the Aran Islands off the coast of Galway (where Banshees is filmed), was an active anti-Treaty republican, a founder member of the first Communist Party of Ireland in 1921 along with James Connolly's son Roddy Connolly, and was editor of its weekly paper, the 'Workers' Republic'. His brother Tom O'Flaherty, also a writer, emigrated to America where he was active in the Wobblies, an early member of the Communist Party, and a supporter of the American Trotskyist, James Cannon.

Liam O'Flaherty wrote novels and stories set during the civil war, including on the Aran Islands, where he shows the lives of working people affected by the civil war. Now, wouldn't it be great to see these made into screen adaptations?

• The Banshees of Inisherin is out now on Disney Plus



PHOTO: FILMA PRODUCTIONS

Film: Nobody Loves You and You Don't Deserve To Exist

An untraditional portrayal of class warfare and life under the Tories

ZAKK BROWN
MANCHESTER AND SALFORD SOCIALIST PARTY

Brett Gregory's existential, Gothic, class-based tragi-comedy 'Nobody Loves You and You Don't Deserve To Exist' is built on contradictions. It eschews traditional filmmaking tenets like 'show, don't tell' by having its story delivered by a series of monologues and direct audience address like Alan Bennett's 'Talking Heads', interspersed with narration. These narrations are accompanied by shots of modern decay in Manchester juxtaposed with an archaic-sounding Gothic score which utilises harpsichord plinks over an eerie, distorted ambience.

Carried by stellar performances, particularly by a rare standout performance from a child actor, the plot follows Jack across three time periods in his life under Conservative rule, in 1984 under Thatcher, 1992 under Major and 2020 under the current government. We are treated to

a grieving, depressed, alcoholic old Jack in the beginning of the film and learn what led to this pain throughout his life through monologue. That's about the extent of the threadbare plot. This isn't a disservice to the film, however, as it is more interested in its thematic and symbolic storytelling than narrative.

The film uses art and literature to express class struggle over direct storytelling. It opens up with a quote from Jorge Luis Borges 'The Circular Ruin', a short story in which people are brought into the material world by being conjured through dream. Following that, the opening credits are a slow scan over Bosch's triptych 'The Garden of Earthly Delights', which portrays creation, pleasure and decay across its three panels. The presence of this painting throughout the film reflects Jack's life in three parts - his creation in youth in the 80s, his hedonistic uni days in the 90s and his personal hell in 2020. When paired with the Borges quote,

and the Gothic occult and biblical references throughout its runtime, we see a film concerned with its subjects as creations by other, powerful beings.

These 'powerful beings' are alluded to as the closure of the pits under Thatcher, inflation, economic struggle and Black Wednesday under Major, the mass Covid deaths under Johnson. It gives the idea that working-class people and the struggles they face are manifested by powerful people behind the scenes. That criminals, drug addicts, depressed and anxious people aren't their way by nature, but are created out of material conditions beyond their control.

Nobody Loves You is a brilliantly crafted film, managing to wring out a masterpiece from its minute budget and offers a fresh, metaphysical and spiritual portrayal of class warfare.

• Nobody Loves You and You Don't Deserve To Exist is out now on Amazon Prime

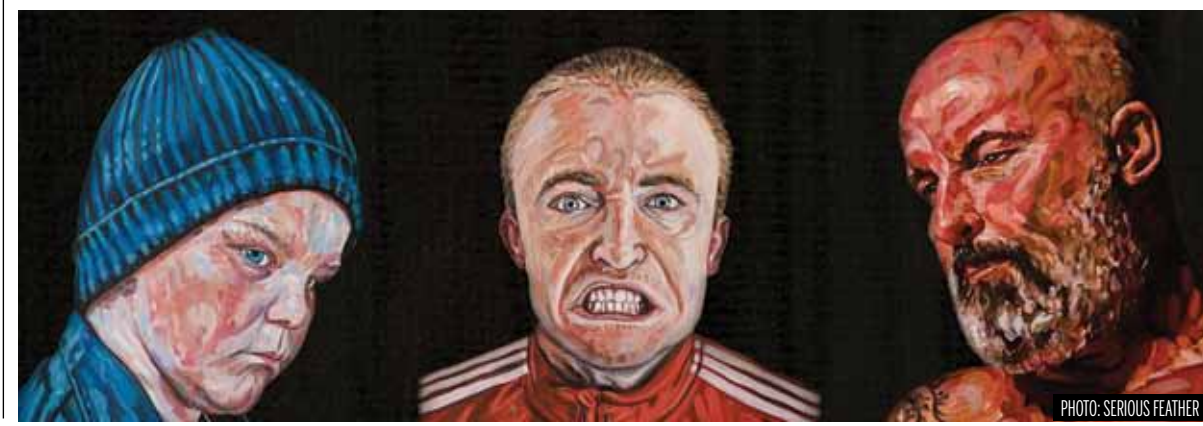


PHOTO: SERIOUS FEATHER

Tamil Solidarity protests against 75 years of repression



Tamil Solidarity on the protest PHOTO: TAMIL SOLIDARITY

LAWANYA
TAMIL SOLIDARITY

On Sri Lankan Independence Day, 4 February, Tamil Solidarity organised a protest to oppose the repressive Sri Lankan regime at the Sri Lankan High Commission in London. The protest was organised with the slogans: "75 years of repression"; "Unity of the masses - not with the government and elite"; "Fight for freedom continues, we demand our independence".

Despite the cold weather, more than 400 people took part with other diaspora organisations also organising protests at different times.

We chanted: "Release release political prisoners, we defend right to protest, we defend self-determination", and for the removal of current President Ranil Wickremesinghe. While we chanted outside, the high commission attempted to drown us out by playing music very loudly. We showed our anger at this by chanting even louder as the high commission kept increasing their speakers' volume to try and keep up!

Afterwards we organised a public meeting which heard from Siritunga Jayasuriya (Siri), general secretary of the United Socialist Party (section of the Committee for a Workers' International in Sri Lanka). Siri spoke about the situation facing the masses in Sri Lanka in the aftermath of the mass movements which took place last year.

He spoke of how protests were organised across Sri Lanka in the preceding days against the Independence Day celebrations. In the

predominantly Tamil-speaking north and east of Sri Lanka a Hartal (general strike) had successfully shut society down. Protests organised in the south around the slogan: "Where is the freedom?" were brutally attacked by the state, while peacefully protesting against the repressive regime. Some of the protesters were injured badly.

Siri spoke of how people in Sri Lanka are still struggling in their day-to-day life, because of high prices and inflation. People in the south protested because they were angry at the government spending money on celebrations while one third of children are below the poverty line. With austerity and privatisation demanded by the IMF and others in exchange for bailing out the elite, the Aragalaya (struggle) of people in Sri Lanka is not likely to be over.

- Tamil Solidarity demands:**
- Repeal the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) immediately - and all other oppressive laws. Drop all charges on protesters. Release all political prisoners
 - Allow freedom of assembly, free speech, and freedom to dissent
 - Give back all the land occupied by the military and government authorities
 - We demand an independent war crimes investigation
 - Withdraw troops from all occupied Tamil areas
 - Stop privatisation in education and health
 - Allow the right to self-determination of the Tamil-speaking people

STUDENTS FIGHT BACK AGAINST COST-OF-LIVING CRISIS

Stand with striking workers

GEORGE PHILLIPS
CARDIFF SOCIALIST STUDENTS

1 February saw members of the University and College Union (UCU) join over 500,000 workers across the country in the largest day of industrial action in over ten years. As they did in November, university staff are taking action over pay, pensions and working conditions. University bosses refuse these workers the pay rises needed to tackle the high level of inflation hitting all workers hard.

Each of my four years at Cardiff University has seen disruption from strikes, Covid or both. Students are understandably frustrated at more disruption. But the biggest disruption to our studies is the cost-of-living crisis. Student maintenance loans are set to increase by just 2.8% in the 2023-24 year, compared to RPI inflation of 14% in November 2022.

Universities should not be run like profit-making businesses, they should be run by students and staff, for students and staff and wider society. Socialist Students campaigns for free education - scrapping tuition fees and the return of university grants, available to all and funded by the government. All third-party student accommodation must be brought into university ownership and rent controls put in place, so

students are not being ripped off by money-grabbing landlords. The money is there but those in power make a choice not to use it.

Strike or no strike, many students do not feel we are getting the quality of education £9,000-plus a year warrants due to the conditions faced by staff. The learning conditions of students is directly related to staff working conditions. Lecturers and staff who are overworked and underpaid are not able to deliver the quality of teaching they desire and we deserve.

Students should join picket lines and show support for UCU members. Students need to be organised too, so we can more effectively link up with striking workers and fight for our own demands - for cost-of-living grants, free education and rent control.

On 15 March, Budget Day, the National Education Union has called its next nationwide strike day and is organising a mass protest in London, civil servants' union PCS will also be taking national strike action. Other unions could join to have a day of strikes even bigger than that on 1 February. We are all on the same side, in the same fight against the bosses. Why not make this a massive day of coordinated action with students in schools and universities organising walkouts alongside striking workers?



Cardiff Socialist Students at the 1 February strike rally PHOTO: ROSS SAUNDERS