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the Socialist

Issue 1215

23 February - 1 March 2023

formerly **Militant**

TORIES OUT

NO TRUST IN STARMER'S LABOUR

WE NEED A PARTY THAT FIGHTS FOR US!

PREPARE FOR A UNION-BACKED WORKERS' LIST FOR A GENERAL ELECTION



Food bank demand in January 2023 up on 2022 - a year in which millions of people in the sixth richest country on the planet already required emergency food parcels.

Food bank staff, burnt out, face people unable to feed their families for no reason other than poverty wages and benefits, combined with rising prices and bills.

Imagine if, like RMT leader Mick Lynch, Labour leader Keir Starmer was calling for workers and young people to 'refuse to be poor anymore'. Imagine if he committed to back the strikes and that a Labour government would renationalise transport and the post, and kick the profiteers out of the NHS. Imagine if, like Jeremy Corbyn did, he was presenting an alternative to austerity.

The reality is the polar opposite. Starmer is saying, if this is what you aspire to, if you support socialist policies, then here is the exit door. The Labour Party is not for you. And Corbynism is over. End of.

A columnist in the Independent summed up Starmer's successful re-Blairisation of Labour. His leadership pitch was: "Public services should be in public hands, not making profits for shareholders. Support common ownership of rail, mail, energy and water; end outsourcing in our NHS, local government and justice system. That

promise has been finessed out of existence."

Preparing for government, Starmer is slamming the door in the face of trade unionists and anti-austerity fighters, and opening it wide for big business.

So imagine this instead. MPs in Westminster who represent the workers' movement, who we can actually rely on to vote against cuts, privatisation, attacks on trade union rights, not imprisoned within Labour but fighting capitalist policies at every step - including those implemented by a Starmer-led New Labour government.

Imagine striking - but with a party in parliament that's actually got your back, even if it's just a handful of MPs at first.

Trade unionists fighting the bosses at the ballot box in the impending general election, and also in the local government elections on 4 May, as well as fighting them in the workplaces - let's not leave it to the imagination. Instead, let's do it!

▶▶▶ CONTINUED ON P2

▶▶▶ SEE PAGE 3 FOR A MODEL MOTION FOR TRADE UNION BRANCHES TO DISCUSS SUPPORTING AND STANDING CANDIDATES WHO WANT TO FIGHT FOR THE WORKING CLASS

BRIANNA GHEY: TRANS RIGHTS
▶▶▶ p4

STRIKE WAVE
▶▶▶ p5,6,7

UKRAINE WAR
▶▶▶ p8-9

STURGEON RESIGNS
▶▶▶ p15

the Socialist

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Issue 1215

23 February - 1 March 2023

DO YOU HAVE NEWS FOR US?

The Socialist is written, read, sold and bought by ordinary workers, trade unionists, young people and Socialist Party members. We want you to write for the Socialist.

Send us reports of your workplace and community campaigns, short letters on working-class issues, or ideas for other articles.

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

Socialist Party

WHAT WE THINK

▶▶▶ CONTINUED FROM FRONT

When Keir Starmer was elected leader of the Labour Party in April 2020, the editorial of the Socialist said his "victory represents a qualitative step in the capitalist class's campaign to make the Labour Party once again, as it was under Blair, a reliable vehicle for their interests. They were terrified by the 2017 election result, where Corbyn came close to being elected."

In December 2019, in the aftermath of the general election, the Socialist explained that Corbyn's defeat was first and foremost due to the sabotage by the right-wing defenders of capitalism within Labour. The Socialist Party had warned from the moment of Corbyn's election as leader, that the Labour Party was in the impossible situation of being two parties in one.

It still contained defenders of capitalism within it, especially a majority in the Parliamentary Labour Party, and among its councillors who refused to do anything other than pass on Tory cuts instead of fighting them, and in the tops of its structures.

But under Corbyn, Labour also contained the potential to become an anti-austerity party and therefore a voice for the working class. It was inevitable that a Corbyn government would have come under enormous pressure from the working class to further challenge the capitalist order of exploitation and poverty. This was unacceptable to the capitalist class and its defenders.

From this analysis flowed the need for action, to transform Labour into a workers' party with a socialist programme. But mandatory reselection of MPs was not introduced, and the democratisation of the party, including the restoration of the trade unions to their central role under the control of the members, was never carried out.

'Clean bill of health'

Starmer used the announcement by the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC), that Labour now has a 'clean bill of health' with regards to antisemitism, as the opportunity to announce that Corbyn is banned from standing as a Labour candidate in the general election that will take place before the end of 2024. The EHRC was not some independent body, but part and parcel of the ferocious campaign by the capitalist class to sabotage Corbyn and remove him from Labour's leadership.

Antisemitism must of course be taken seriously and combated. This, however, has been a cynical attempt to use false accusations of antisemitism to attack the left. As the Blairite shadow Northern Ireland secretary, Peter Kyle, said: "If you're antisemitic or you don't agree with support for business ... then this isn't the party for you."

Big business bosses recognise that Starmer's Labour is a reliable party for them. Writing in The Independent, former head of the Confederation of

STARMER BANS CORBYN

Prepare a union-backed workers' list for the general election



There should be the biggest possible trade union, socialist, environmentalist and anti-austerity election challenge mounted. This is why the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) is hosting local meetings to discuss what needs to be done, including, should that workers' list not be realised in time, standing trade unionists and socialists as TUSC candidates



Keir Starmer and Jeremy Corbyn PHOTO: RVIENLAND/CC

British Industry Paul Drechsler said: "Labour have set about convincing entrepreneurs and enterprise (and, whisper it quietly, profit)."

Rachel Reeves proudly tweeted that article, saying: "The Labour Party

is pro-worker and pro-business." But representing these diametrically opposite interests is impossible. Between 1937 and 1979, union membership in Britain doubled while the share of income going to the top 1% fell by two-thirds. Between 1979 and

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

FROM STANDING AS LABOUR



PHOTO: PAUL MATTSSON

workers, everyone affected by the cost-of-living crisis! The mass rallies Jeremy's anti-austerity programme in the 2017 general election mobilised indicate the very enthusiastic response this stand would get. The massive responses in rebalots of striking workers and votes by new sections to join the strike wave indicate a deep determination to fight the bosses.

But it would be a waste to make this only about defending Islington North from the neo-Blairites. If Jeremy put out a call for support in Islington North and for trade unionists and socialists to also organise challenges to the two pro-capitalist parties in their own areas, it could have an electrifying effect.

According to journalist Michael Crick, around two-thirds of Labour candidates for "winnable seats" so far are, or have been, councillors who have presided over the destruction of youth services, closure of domestic violence services, evictions, and misery, with roughly a quarter serving as council leaders or deputy leaders. Let's challenge them.

Workers' election list

The Socialist Party calls for trade unions to organise their own workers' list for the election, including debarred left Labour MPs. Instead of being silenced by Starmer in the hope of remaining in the party, the left in Labour should fight him. Such a list could succeed in getting at least a bloc of MPs elected at the general election, which could quite rapidly become a pole of parliamentary opposition to an incoming Starmer-led government.

But whatever happens next, there should be the biggest possible trade union, socialist, environmentalist and anti-austerity election challenge mounted. This is why the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) is hosting local meetings to discuss what needs to be done, including, should that workers' list not be realised in time, standing trade unionists and socialists as TUSC candidates.

Imagine if every election became a contest between the Tory and Starmerite defenders of a rigged system that is responsible for the cost-of-living and other crises facing us - and us, the working class, the youth, the socialists. In addition to the general election, the local government elections on 4 May offer this opportunity in hundreds of areas. Why not respond to Starmer's announcement by organising a discussion in your trade union branch, food bank, student society, or picket line about standing candidates in those elections who stand for us.



While opposing the attacks on democratic rights, Jeremy should also mobilise support for a bold socialist challenge in Islington North. But it would be a waste to make this only about defending Islington North from the neo-Blairites. If Jeremy put out a call for support in Islington North and for trade unionists and socialists to also organise challenges to the two pro-capitalist parties in their areas, it could have an electrifying effect

Model motion to move in your trade union

Support Jeremy Corbyn for MP

This union organisation/conference notes the announcement by Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer that Jeremy Corbyn will not be allowed to defend the Islington North seat, that he has held since 1983, as a Labour candidate at the next general election.

This union organisation/conference believes that:

- This is an utterly undemocratic act, removing Jeremy's right to take part in a selection contest
- As with Jeremy's suspension from the Parliamentary Labour Party, this is a political statement by the Labour leadership, moving the party to the right politically, proving its credentials to big business and the capitalist establishment. It follows the refusal of Starmer to support striking workers, and the sacking of Sam Tarry from the shadow cabinet for speaking up for union action from the picket line
- It is confirmation that, under Starmer's leadership, Labour does not represent the interests of workers and working-class communities
- Therefore, workers need political representation that supports their action against the cost-of-living squeeze, and stands for policies such as renationalisation, opposition to cuts, and for the repeal of the Tory anti-union laws

Therefore, this union organisation/conference agrees to:

- Instruct the union NEC/EC/Executive to give full support to Jeremy Corbyn, and if necessary change the rules of the union to allow the union to campaign for his re-election as the Islington North MP if he decides to stand in the next general election, including as an independent candidate

Where there are local authority elections in May 2023

- Encourage members to consider standing as anti-cuts candidates in the council elections scheduled for May. We note that there is nothing that prevents them standing as candidates, in a personal capacity, for any party which truly supports trade unionist and socialist principles

SOCIALISM TODAY

Monthly magazine of the Socialist Party

March issue includes...

- Ukraine war. How it came to this
- Electoral front. Wrong lessons from the US
- The Met Police. Can it be reformed?
- International Women's Day

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Lessons from the Corbyn experience

This Socialism Today special brings together just a small fraction of the articles Socialism Today and the Socialist, published at each stage of the Corbyn experience. Articles on many vital specific issues including antisemitism, Trident, Syria, Brexit, Corbyn's economic policies, and the differences in the political situation in Scotland, have not been able to be included. The selection stands as a record of the broad lessons of the five years of Corbynism, which will be vital for the battles ahead.

Available from leftbooks.co.uk



Trans rights: Brianna Ghey death sparks widespread anger

MICHAEL JOHNSON

SOCIALIST PARTY LGBTQ+ CAUCUS CONVENOR

The death of Brianna Ghey has sparked not just mourning but anger across the country. 16-year-old Brianna was killed in Warrington on 11 February; her death is currently under investigation after two teenagers appeared in court charged with murder. Brianna was a transgender girl and it has been reported that the police are investigating whether the killing could be a possible hate crime.

Brianna's death has led to mourning not just from those who knew her but among the LGBTQ+ community and wider society. Vigils for Brianna in the days since her death have seen hundreds come together, to remember her and to stand against attacks on trans people.

For trans people, Brianna's death has come at a time of increased attacks across society. The proposed Gender Recognition Reform in Scotland, which would make it easier for trans people to get a gender recognition certificate, was blocked by the Tories using Section 35 of the Scotland Act. This act continued the weak Sunak Tory party's attempts to sow division through so-called "culture wars". During the first post-Johnson leadership elections, we saw candidates fall over each other to express the most anti-trans statements.

And trans people are finding little support fighting against the transphobia of the Tory party from Starmer's Labour Party. When it comes to trans rights, Starmer is only willing to make vague promises to look at the gender recognition process. Under Starmer Labour is reliable only to big business - not workers

and young people fighting the cost-of-living crisis or for our rights. He has ruled out making it easier for trans people Brianna's age to have their gender recognised and get the support they deserve.

The attacks faced by trans people from the Tories and the media can be challenged even if the supposed opposition from Starmer refuses to do so. Friends of Brianna have spoken about the bullying she was receiving at school prior to her death. Unfortunately this is not unique to Brianna and takes place up and down the country. School student unions and workers in trade unions, like those in the National Education Union (NEU) currently taking strike action, could join together to oversee and monitor anti-bullying and harassment policies and action to tackle it when it happens. (See 'Surrey community condemns brutal racist attack on pupil' on socialistparty.org.uk for an example of how organised workers in trade unions can take the lead against, in this instance, racist bullying).

Much space has been found in major pro-capitalist newspapers to attack trans rights and whip up division. Many people have drawn links to the 'moral panics' against gay and lesbian people in the 1980s at the height of the battle against Thatcher's homophobic Section 28. Even in reporting Brianna's death, newspapers have removed the word 'girl' to refer to Brianna and reported her name prior to transition, further fuelling anger towards the capitalist media.

The media of the bosses, regurgitating their ideas and the politics of division, can be countered. Trade unionists taking strike action will be able to empathise with trans people as both face attacks from sections



London Trans Pride 2022
PHOTO: LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

of the capitalist media. The Socialist Party calls for the nationalisation of newspaper printing facilities, radio, TV and social media platforms with access to these facilities under democratic workers' control.

Papers like The Socialist, written by and for working-class people, can tackle the real issues affecting working-class people, including trans people. They can put forward a programme to unite and fight for the

resources workers and trans people need. This would include fighting for a fully funded healthcare system, including the services needed by trans people, decent well-paying jobs and high-quality, affordable housing, alongside extending the legal rights necessary to self-identify.

Brianna's tragic death has sadly highlighted the ongoing issues trans people, young and old, experience. There is a real alternative to the

transphobia of the capitalist system and their political representatives. The building of a new mass workers' party would allow LGBTQ+ people to join forces with workers who are also struggling and taking action, together we can fight for our interests and win a real change in society, for a socialist society based on democratic planning and cooperation instead of the divisive capitalist system of today.

Socialist Party members attended vigils, offering to those who wanted it a leaflet on the fight for trans rights and a fighting programme for a working-class and socialist alternative. Below are reports from some of them:

Scott Hunter, Socialist Party Swindon reports:

"People of all ages, extremely angry and concerned about the state of trans rights, gathered outside Swindon Central Library to mourn Brianna Ghey's death.

"I was able to say a few words on behalf of the Socialist Party. The word 'Tories' was a curse at this

vigil but I pointed to Labour's chequered record on trans and LGBTQ+ rights. Trans people are already more likely to live in poverty and, like other workers, need political representation. I pointed out that the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC), which the Socialist Party takes part in standing in elections, holds LGBTQ+ rights as a core part of its platform. I advocated fighting as part of a broader political and industrial movement of trade unionists and the working class.

"As Sunak plans to fight the next election over so-called 'culture wars', the Socialist Party and TUSC will continue to stand in solidarity with LGBTQ+ people everywhere and fight for a real working-class alternative."

Vigil outside
Department
for Education
HELEN PATTISON



Helen Pattison reports from the vigils in London on 18 and 25 February:

"The road was already full outside the Department for Education (DfE) when the vigil was scheduled to start. Yet streaming down the road were hundreds of young people joining it. It was a sombre event but Socialist Party leaflets were well received. The protest had been organised outside the DfE because Brianna Ghey's family had raised about bullying repeatedly with the school. Hate crimes against trans people saw a 56% rise in 2022.

"Videos appearing on social media of the event included chants of 'Fuck the Tories' and 'Fuck Keir Starmer'

showing the need for a political alternative.

"Our leaflet made the call to build a mass movement against transphobia. Such a movement would also have to fight to get rid of the Tories, end austerity and for the investment in all the services we need. As well as standing for the legal rights necessary such as to self-identify."

Jas Molloy, Northampton Socialist Party:

"Attendance was high at the vigil in Northampton, an event in which trans and queer people were able to process the very strong emotions attached to this kind of tragedy.

Speakers at the vigil voiced their fear, despair, and frustration. We know that Brianna will not be the last under our current political system."

Protesters said to **Nick Hart** attending the Birmingham demo: "No great government is going to give us our rights, we have to fight for them. Fuck the Tories and Fuck Keir Starmer"

And: "The media and politicians are playing a dangerous game of divide and conquer. They profit from our lives and treat us as a political football - we are fed up. Our society needs to be corrected."



NICK HART

Wales – first coordinated ambulance strike is just the start



Bromsgrove ambulance strike BIRMINGHAM SOCIALIST PARTY

GARETH BROMHALL
WELSH AMBULANCE SERVICE WORKER

20 February saw the first coordinated strike action of ambulance staff unions in Wales. Members of Unite and GMB unions rejected the latest below-inflation pay offer from the Welsh government.

The latest offer would have seen an extra consolidated increase of 1.5% and a 1.5% lump sum from Welsh Labour, on top of the already-imposed pay settlement from the Tories.

This is still far below inflation. And not enough to retain or recruit staff to a collapsing NHS.

The RCN and Unison – the other recognised unions within the Welsh Ambulance Service – are still balloting on the offer. All four unions will have a mandate for strike action if the offer is rejected.

Labour

Welsh Labour health minister, Eluned Morgan, has angered many by chastising Unite members for continuing action, while members voted on the deal. She maintained that the 'latest offer was the final offer'. She also proclaimed that there was not money available to improve on this year's award, suggesting next year would be much harsher.

In order for ambulance workers in Wales to win the pay deal we, and the rest of our NHS colleagues, so desperately need, coordinated action is key. 20 February is just the starting point.

Pressure must be kept on the Tories in Westminster. But in Wales, where health is devolved, it's also essential that we hold Labour to account.

Any suggestion that social

partnership – between the Welsh Labour government and the unions in Wales – is successful at present is laughable. Health and education unions find themselves in direct dispute against said 'partners'!

The fight for better pay and improved conditions is vital. But NHS staff also recognise that this is also the fight for the future of the NHS itself.

NHS workers need to coordinate action together. But also link up with unions in transport, communication, education and the civil service, and build for a 24-hour general strike that many workers now see as necessary. 15 March – Budget Day – is a great opportunity to strike together as a step towards that.

Ambulance workers continue the fight

Ambulance workers in GMB and Unite trade unions took strike action in different parts of England and Wales on 17 and 20 February. Welsh ambulance workers in Unite continued their strike to 22 February.

And Northern Ireland ambulance staff are striking too. Socialist Party members – down on the picket lines, supporting the strikes – tell us what's been said.

Swansea

A Unite union rep, and paramedic for over 20 years, spoke to Socialist Party member Alec Thraves.

"I picked up an elderly gentleman with no family. We spent my whole

12-hour shift outside A&E waiting to offload.

"The next shift, we also waited for 12 hours to offload. The following shift, waited another 12 hours to offload. And this poor man was still there when I started my next shift!

"Over 40 hours in an ambulance, causing misery and pain for our patient, and preventing paramedics doing the essential job we have trained for."

Mansfield

A striking ambulance worker told Socialist Party member Paul Tooley-Okonkwo: "We are losing money every time we strike. We are doing this for a reason. Our losing out has to mean we get something out of this."

Birmingham

As with every picket I've attended, they all had ideas on how unions could organise the disputes, and how their industries could be run, without PFI privatisation and lack of investment holding them back.

These workers are focused on their dispute and getting rid of Tories, but definitely sympathetic to the need for a new workers' party, if Labour can't come up with solutions.

JOE FOSTER

Do you agree?
JOIN THE SOCIALISTS
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RCN nurses' strike 'The Tories have spat in our faces'

● **BREAKING NEWS: RCN has announced its planned 48-hour strike in England from 1-3 March has been suspended for talks. We print Charlie's article, written ahead of the announcement.**

CHARLIE KENNEDY
NURSE AND RCN MEMBER

Why are nurses striking? 40,000 nursing vacancies. A 20% drop in nursing applications from 2022 to 2023. Growing waiting times in A&E. A crippling cost-of-living crisis.

These are just some of the many barriers that the NHS has faced in recent years. Despite this, there has been very little action to address the core issue at the heart of this crisis.

Nursing pay has been fallen by 20% in real terms since 2010. So we took action, as nurses, to fight for improved pay, better staffing and better care for our patients.

But the Tories have failed to come to the table. They have spat in the faces of nurses, and every service user and worker in the NHS.

This has left nurses, like myself, infuriated and angry at the government in Westminster for refusing to acknowledge the work that we do.

Healthcare services are being broken apart, and are becoming busier and busier. Many members now say that they don't feel they can even provide safe care, let alone high-quality care.

This has left us with no choice, but for the RCN to announce a 48-hour strike – 1-3 March. We don't want to impede patient care. But if we continue to be ignored, the Tory government will leave us with nothing.

The time is now for workers to unite against this new wave of austerity and fight the suppression of the working class. We must stand up and show the power that we have together.

Striking health workers joining teachers and civil servants on strike on 15 March would be a great step forward. We cannot stand down until we have the outcome that secures the future for the NHS and all workers.

98% of junior doctors vote to strike!

45,000 junior doctors in the British Medical Association (BMA) will strike for 72 hours in mid-March – the longest strike so far in the NHS. In a massive turnout of 77.5%, 98% voted 'yes'!

The vote to strike follows 15 years

of effective pay cuts. The BMA says it has been impossible to reach an agreement with the Tory government as they refuse to meet.

This ups the pressure on the Tories even more. Imagine the effect if all the health unions came out together!

11 March - Join 'save our NHS' national demo

MICK SUTER
SHEFFIELD SAVE OUR NHS, CHAIR

The enthusiastic mood to support all NHS workers was graphically shown during the last strike. 100 RCN pickets at Hallamshire hospital were joined at lunchtime by workers pouring out of the hospital to support the strike.

Striking Shelter workers, Royal Mail staff, and teachers spoke, alongside lots of different NHS workers. Striking nurses told us they had been inspired.

And, on 28 January, the 'Save Our NHS' stall was surrounded by local people demanding a living wage for NHS staff, and proper funding for the NHS.

I used the microphone to explain the need for £20 billion of NHS emergency funding. And the need to end privatisation, and bring services, including social care, back into public ownership.

Weak Tories

The 'SOS NHS' campaign has called a national demonstration in London on Saturday 11 March. With the powerful NHS strikes, a massive show of support would have an enormous impact on this weak Tory government, and build the confidence of all workers.

● Assemble midday, Tottenham Court Road, London, and march to Westminster

NEU regional strike action

Yorkshire and Humber up for the fight

STEVE SCOTT
NEU NEC MEMBER (PERSONAL CAPACITY)

Teachers and support staff in the Yorkshire and Humber region are very much up for continuing the fight, to put school and college funding at the top of the government's agenda, and secure a fair pay deal for everyone who works in education.

Following on from successful rallies across the region on 1 February, members of the National Education Union (NEU) seem galvanised to set up bigger and better picket lines and head to Leeds for a huge regional demo on 28 February.

On 1 February, members in the East Riding came out in force, with over 20 schools having vibrant picket lines. A successful demonstration and rally saw close to 300 educators come together. This is quite possibly the largest demonstration to ever happen in Beverley, and certainly shows the strength of feeling of members, even in the rural Tolly shires.

Many then went on to Hull for a second rally and larger march organised by the Hull and District Trades Council. It's really important that local unions can rally members again and get large numbers to Leeds for our second day of action, and London for the next, on 15 March.

These large collective demonstrations of members are critical in showing the government that we are serious. They also give members, many of whom have never been on strike before, an understanding and sense of solidarity, and serve to further strengthen their resolve in continuing the fight.

School staff know how important it is that we beat the government in this fight. While no teacher wants to strike, they know that they must in order to safeguard the education of their students, and education for generations to come. They know school budgets cannot be cut further, nor can we continue to lose so many excellent teachers from the career without being able to replace them.

If the government want to talk about 'minimum service levels' in education, we should absolutely take them up on it. These minimum service levels should be a guarantee by the government to the country of a qualified teacher in every classroom, funding so that schools can afford the resources the children need to learn, and funding so that every child that needs support can have access to a teaching assistant and the specialist services that they require.

This is what members of the NEU are fighting for, and this is why they are ready to stand together and win the battle.



Yorkshire and Humber TUC marching on 1 Feb YORKSHIRE SP

New generations learning working-class traditions in Newham



Newham NEU rally on 1 Feb EAST LONDON SP

LOUISE CUFFARO
NEU NEC MEMBER (PERSONAL CAPACITY)

The mood after our resounding ballot result was determined and expectant. But after many years of no national strikes, we knew that many education staff had little or no experience of what was needed to turn the ballot into successful strike action, involving all members making a stand and winning over the public.

In Newham, we called all existing and would-be reps to a Zoom meeting to fully discuss, prepare and begin training. 70 reps attended.

We explained that no-one should tell their head who is striking. The national union gives the required information 14 days before any strike date. Each school cannot expect to know how many people will be on strike on the day. They have to make a decision in the light of health and safety and possible numbers of strikers whether they will be able to open. Our reps pointed out to heads that, besides existing NEU members, other teachers can and do join right up to the morning of a strike.

But most importantly, whether or not the school was closed, the union was set to reintroduce one of the most powerful strike tools at as many schools as possible - the picket line! Having a picket line allows you to engage non-striking staff to explain one of the oldest acts of solidarity: why you should never cross a picket line, but join it! Our support staff needed there to be a picket line, for them not to cross.

The law is clear that once you don't cross the picket line your employer has to treat you

as a striker - you should not be victimised, but you will lose a day's pay just like the strikers. Although many heads threatened, in the run up to the strike, that they would 'discipline', we acted collectively to say to staff that you can choose not to cross a picket line.

In the run up to 1 February we had over 70 members turn up for placard making. Newham officers and volunteers drove around to deliver picket supervisor jackets, and NEU hats, flags, and leaflets to hand out to parents.

As a result we had at least 50 schools with a picket line and other schools completely closed.

At 9:30am, around 500 strikers attended a Newham rally before the central London demo. First-time strikers and new reps were invited to speak. Young teachers told us it was their first strike action, and that they felt a growing confidence that the union has an historic task in fighting for state education. The local rally was a great bridge between the picket line and the London demo.

Newham NEU has held an important meeting for support staff to build on the 1 February action: to consolidate and extend the lessons of the picket lines and to increase the numbers of striking teachers, support staff, parents and carers that will be out on the regional action on 2 March.

More and more new trade unionists are learning the traditions of the past, and how we won state education, the NHS, public and social services, council housing, etc. Making our fight stronger to restore and improve the pay, conditions and services for all.

Strike together and march together!

RMT announce programme of national rail strike action

Following members' resounding rejection of the latest 'offer' by the rail bosses (see 'RMT: time to escalate and generalise the fightback' at www.socialistparty.org.uk) rail union RMT has announced more strike dates: 16, 18 and 30 March and 1 April.

The significance of the 16 March strike day is made clear in the letter to members from general secretary Mick Lynch:

"This is an important date, which is the day after the Chancellor's budget and the mobilisation of thousands of workers taking strike action on 15

March at a mass demonstration in London by those workers on strike.

"We will run the national railway on 15 March to facilitate this mobilisation of our fellow striking workers and carry out our own strike action the following day.

"This will be a powerful message of workers' solidarity, but also a message to the government that they must fund our railway properly in order to create a resolution to this dispute."

This announcement makes it all the more important that members in all other unions with a live ballot

campaign for their unions to strike together and march together on 15 March in central London.

That could mean hundreds of thousands of striking workers filling the streets outside parliament while the Tory budget is presented. What better answer to the Tories' plans to further attack workers - and what better pressure on Keir Starmer as he responds to the Tories!

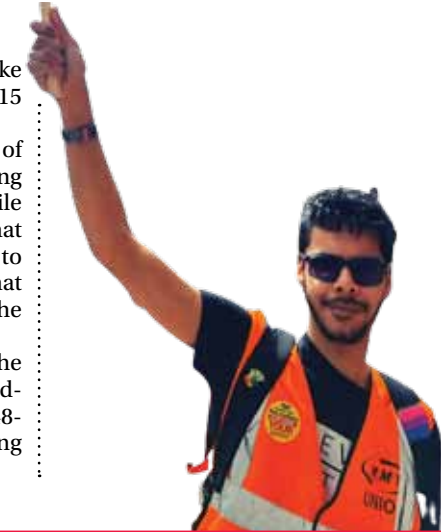
It also raises the stakes with the potential scale of the action mid-March - imagine the effect of a 48-hour coordinated strike involving both 15 and 16 March!

15 and 16 March

Currently striking on 15 March:
National Education Union (NEU), PCS civil service union

Currently striking on 16 March:
RMT on the railways, NEU, University and College Union in the universities

There are also many localised strikes taking place, including Amazon workers in the GMB in Coventry on 15 and 16 March, as part of a week of action.



CWU stunning strike vote



Wigan gate meeting DAVE SEMPLE

SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBERS IN CWU

Communication Workers Union (CWU) members in Royal Mail have yet again returned another stunning vote for strike action, after six months of struggle involving 18 days of strikes.

During the reballoon, required by Tory anti-trade union laws, Royal Mail bosses bombarded the members with propaganda, hoping to break the members' resolve. But CWU reps held thousands of gate meetings with the members. 82,792 voted in favour of strike action, with only 3,517 voting against, on a 77.3% turnout.

This gave CWU members a huge lift and sent shock waves through Royal Mail senior management.

Workers' fight is deciding factor

Reps gathered in Manchester to get an update from the senior negotiation team. Dave Ward, CWU general secretary, reported that former Trades Union Congress (TUC) general secretary Sir Brendan Barber had been approached by Royal Mail chair Keith Williams for a confidential meeting. Williams is the former chair of British Airways, and he and Barber negotiated their dispute.

Many CWU members will rightly have concerns about Barber, knighted by Tory prime minister David Cameron, and the role he played as TUC general secretary, including in the sell-out of the 2011 public sector pensions dispute. He has more recently been involved in negotiations over the pensions of London Underground workers.

We have to remind ourselves that it is the tenacious fighting capacity of postal workers and the union that

has forced these talks, and our willingness to maintain the action that will be the deciding factor in getting an acceptable resolution.

Dave Ward proposed that we re-enter into negotiations, and that Royal Mail CEO Simon Thompson would not be involved in the talks. This is clearly a significant change and could signal that Thompson will be shortly removed as CEO.

The view of the union leadership is that Royal Mail wants a deal, and time should be given to see how the negotiations develop. The mood of members in the briefing was that time must be of a short period, and that the postal executive should consider announcing potential strike dates to add more pressure on the bosses.

It should be remembered that Royal Mail is still pushing ahead with its 'executive action', including imposing changes to start times. Also important is the job security agreement, which Royal Mail has recently completely ignored.

Suspended reps

There are now over 300 reps suspended or dismissed, and we urgently need to stop their union-busting tactics. The CWU leadership cannot allow any agreement without dealing with all cases for reps, officials and any members who are under attack.

The CWU must take the lead in calling for all unions, particularly those with a live strike mandate, to coordinate action against employers and their Tory government backers. We also must continue to demand the renationalisation of Royal Mail.

Any agreement must meet the aspirations of members. We must be prepared for further action if required.

UCU university strikes: Keep the fight on!



Aston BIRMINGHAM SP

SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBERS IN UCU

The University and College Union (UCU) has suspended planned strike action for two weeks, calling off seven planned strike dates in the two disputes over pensions, pay and conditions.

Other campus unions, including Unite and Unison, have also called off strike dates while a period of 'intensive negotiation' is entered in the pay dispute.

It is a mistake to suspend the strikes given no offer has been made. The momentum is with us and the strike is solid.

The general secretary, Jo Grady, herself tweeted in 2018 that continuing action during ACAS negotiations was a clear message UCU will not back down. Now in office, she has abandoned this approach.

Grady says: "We will not take the foot off the gas pedal." What is a 'pause' if not doing just that?

What's in the detail?

Grady framed the suspension as a victory, brought on by "significant progress". However, the details do not justify the celebratory tone. This, combined with the lack of consultation, is contributing to concerns that Grady and the apparatus around her are preparing to capitulate.

The employers' statement says that an "impasse" has been reached over pay, not an agreement, with no substantial change from the offer previously rejected. Grady says that action on the use of hourly-paid contracts is a "down payment" for further movement on insecure work. But members are not striking for a promise of progress down the line, or for another real-terms pay cut.

There does appear to be more substantial movement on pensions, with a potential reversal of cuts - though, again, nothing is confirmed.

Reps and members must decide!

There must be transparency. There must be a national reps meeting to discuss where we are with the employers and what happens next. This is what unions such as the Communication Workers Union have done throughout their Royal Mail dispute. As we go to press, the suspension isn't even on the union's website.

When the previous UCU leadership tried to stop the 2017-18 pensions dispute prematurely, it led to a revolt by members and then, ironically, the election of Jo Grady as union general secretary.

Grady says she knows for most members the most important issue is trust. That is, trust that UCU

is not about to repeat the 2018 attempted capitulation. Yet, in 2018, the decision to call off the strike was put to members. This time, not even our elected negotiators have been consulted.

Ultimately, it is not Grady or the UCU full-time apparatus that will decide the outcome of these disputes. If the offer falls short of what we need, members have the power to push back, reject the offer and keep up the fight.

Vote 'yes' in the reballoon

This means success in the reballoon, which has now opened, is absolutely vital. It would extend our mandate into the summer term and beyond.

As it stands, we will next strike on 16 March. We should come back strong by coming out on 15 March as well, on Budget Day, to strike and march together with the National Education Union and civil service union PCS, on the day the Tories outline their plans to further attack workers.

Elections

Important too are the National Executive Committee elections, which close on 1 March. It is vital to elect candidates with a fighting programme, to counter the rightward travel of Grady's supporters.

NIPSA election: Massive victory for the left

MILITANT LEFT (CWI IN NORTHERN IRELAND)

The largest trade union in the north of Ireland has gone through a very significant election campaign. In public sector union NIPSA, the Broad Left and Democracy Now candidates achieved a real victory in the elections for the ruling executive, the General Council.

Their numbers surged from five on the outgoing council to 16 on the incoming one. They will join Militant Left supporter Carmel Gates, elected general secretary.

The left campaign was focused on defending living standards and rebuilding the union's battered democracy.

All Militant Left supporters who stood in the election were elected.

The campaign stated:

"The General Council is the body that should be steering the union through the pay disputes. Instead, while the rest of the union is engaged in the most important battles in years, we have a General Council that is completely out of touch and asleep at the wheel."

In their election material, Militant Left candidates made clear they stand for a "socialist, working-class, cross-community labour alternative".

The left stood for a general council that:

- Fights for inflation-busting pay rises
- Properly supports members who are on strike
- Keeps sectarian division out of NIPSA
- Gives back democratic control of NIPSA to members



NIPSA members taking action, including Padraig Mulholland, deputy general secretary and Militant Left supporter (second from left)

JUDY BEISHON
SOCIALIST PARTY EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

As the war in Ukraine approaches its first anniversary, there is no let-up in the relentless bloodshed. The Russian military assault on Bakhmut and surrounding areas in the country's east has drawn comparisons with the horror of World War One attacks and trenches. The untold death toll of troops on both sides has continued at a high level throughout the winter, with many civilians killed as well.

More residents have been forced to flee their homes but with nowhere safe to go in Ukraine, as Russian missiles have hit densely populated urban areas. The killing of 45 residents of Dnipro in January, including children, when a Russian missile hit their block of flats, is among recent atrocities. A new bloody phase of the conflict now seems imminent as both sides prepare to launch a spring offensive.

It goes without saying that the landscape of Ukraine - the human suffering, infrastructure destruction, shattered economy and everything else - has been dramatically changed during this year of war. It has also impacted significantly on the global economy and relations, marking a negative step-change for stability in a world in which tensions between the imperialist powers were already worsening. It has divided them into a wide spectrum of different positions on the war, ranging from the staunchest support for the Ukrainian government to allying with Putin's Russia.

Before the war, the competition between US imperialism in decline and China in economic and military ascendancy was already a major destabilising factor. Now, after a year of the war, although the US has managed to assert itself as the de facto leader of the western intervention, providing by far the largest amount of aid and weapons to Ukraine, the war also marks a further

stage in the process of the world becoming more multipolar, with increasing division, shifting alliances, and social, political and economic volatility.

No end in sight

The course of the war over the last 12 months was largely set by its initial stage, when the Russian forces dramatically failed to occupy Kyiv and the whole of Ukraine. Putin and his advisors had greatly underestimated the resistance of Ukraine's people and the Zelensky presidency, and the foreign aid they would receive for it.

Further setbacks for the Russian invasion followed during the course of 2022. But Russia still occupies a sixth of Ukraine today, and in recent weeks has increased its troops on the ground to over 300,000 to try to make advances.

It isn't possible to predict whether they will succeed. The Ukrainian forces have higher motivation than Russia's, as they are defending territory against foreign aggression, while a large number of the Russian troops have been reluctantly conscripted. But there are reports of exhaustion on the Ukrainian frontlines and many other issues on both sides will influence the course of the war.

From an economic point of view, Putin's regime is able to push on with it for now because, although Russia is an energy exporter facing lower world energy prices, plus an oil price cap imposed on it by the G7 countries, there are also countervailing factors. These include record levels of bilateral trade with China.

However, Putin's powerful state regime of crony gangster oligarchs will come to face a crisis as the war drags on. A rising Russian body count and casualties together with the impact of sanctions and other developments, could eventually lead to the outbreak of a mass movement to remove him, or a move against him from within Russia's ruling elite.

Prigozhin, the head of the private Wagner militia in Russia that is playing a leading role in the fighting, recently said that Russia's focus is on fully taking the Donbas region. This could mean that Putin will aim for a ceasefire on the basis of gaining Russian control of that entire eastern region as well as further solidifying control of Crimea, and the link areas between those territories.

At some stage, though not necessarily soon, pressure will grow stronger for ceasefire talks - internationally as well as in Russia and Ukraine. But the aims and interests of the capitalist leaderships in both Russia and Ukraine, and the scope of the issues involved, are such that even a temporary agreement may not come about. Instead, there could be a period of 'frozen conflict', punctuated by localised clashes which would inevitably break out.

Meanwhile, at present the war continues because both sides believe they can still make military gains, and both face great

THE DEVASTATING WAR IN UKRAINE ONE YEAR ON

BUILD WORKERS' UNITY AGAINST WAR AND CAPITALISM

difficulties in any moves to end it. Attitudes in Ukraine to making concessions would inevitably be very forceful and polarised following the massive loss of life from keeping or retaking land. In Russia, Putin can't ignore right-wing nationalist support for the war, including criticism that it isn't being conducted sufficiently skilfully or ruthlessly.

But as the war grinds on, opposition to it is likely to creep up in both countries and in the countries supplying arms to Ukraine too. In the US and Europe, inflation, along with wages being held down, has led to more questioning of the expenditure on Ukraine.

Zelensky felt it necessary to warn against 'support fatigue' during his recent rapid tour to London, Paris and Brussels. An Ipsos poll conducted in 28 countries late last year showed 42% of respondents believing "the problems of Ukraine are none of our business and we should not interfere" - with Germany having a particularly marked increase in that response. 64% thought their own country "couldn't afford to lend financial support to Ukraine". While the public finances of the countries sending weapons and aid come under greater strain from doing so, arms manufacturers and investors are rolling in money and able to test out their latest deadly products, an additional sickening consequences of wars under capitalism.

The Russian invasion

When ordering troops into Ukraine in February 2022, Putin's regime was seeking to protect and advance the business interests in Ukraine of Russia's capitalists and their trade routes across Ukraine and the Black Sea. It also had a security viewpoint: to try to head off the prospect of Ukraine developing closer military links with the western imperialist powers and Nato. Ukraine had

been entering more and more into the orbit of Western capitalism, to which Putin and the most nationalist wing of the Russian elite reacted with propaganda harking back to the 19th century vast 'greater Russia' empire and before.

They claimed to be defending the rights of ethnic Russians in Ukraine and the Russian language, which was being limited by Ukraine's government. However, Putin is no defender of national minorities, as his regime's treatment of minorities in the Russian Federation has shown. And in any case only a future democratic socialist society in Ukraine will be able to give full rights to minorities, no capitalist regime will do so.

No socialist should give any justification whatsoever to Putin's invasion. But that doesn't mean at the same time we don't recognise and oppose the manoeuvres by the western imperialist powers for economic and political influence in Eastern Europe since the collapse of Stalinism at the start of the 1990s. Their greed for potentially profitable markets played into an inter-imperialist conflict with Russia's post-Stalinist capitalist elite, which proved unwilling to accept a second-tier role in their own region.

That self-interest has been the overriding motive for the arms and funding sent to Ukraine by western governments. As with Putin's lack of genuine concern for ethnic Russians in Ukraine, neither do the western powers have humanitarian concern for the Ukrainian people or with ordinary people anywhere else. The amount the US administration has budgeted for weapons and other aid to Ukraine's government in the next fiscal year is a phenomenal 500 times more than it has so far offered the millions of homeless people in Turkey and Syria following the recent

devastating earthquake.

The capitalist media across much of the west tries to mask the real motives for sending arms, by adopting a cloak of Ukrainian nationalism - 'freedom for Ukraine' - and constantly saying they are being sent to defend western, democratic values. They are silent on why arms aren't sent to aid many other populations that are repressed by, or fighting against, dictatorial regimes. The real priority slipped out in a Financial Times editorial that bemoaned the low ammunition stock levels in Nato countries and added: "But defence industrial capacity is a vital component of security underpinning the international order and global trading system. Maintaining it is also a way of deterring aggression."

Stepping up arms

Throughout the war, the western powers backing Ukraine have placed strict limits on the arms supplied and objectives, in the main to try to prevent the war from spreading beyond Ukraine, but also to restrict the Russian regime's response within Ukraine - including to counter Putin's oblique threats to consider use of a 'battlefield' nuclear weapon.

In December US Secretary of State Antony Blinken reiterated that US policy is to help Ukraine regain territory seized since the Russian invasion last year, and not the Crimea and areas in the east occupied previously. Governments in western Europe have the same position - only Poland and the Baltic states call for Ukraine to retake Crimea.

But the type of weapons and equipment supplied has gradually been stepped up, and at present, with Russian forces poised to make possible advances, western governments have been faced yet again with the dilemma of whether to go a step further. It was only in January that the UK, Germany and the US conceded to sending tanks, and just a few weeks later they were pressed by Zelensky to consider sending fighter jets and long-range weaponry.

Each government bases its criteria for making a decision on the interests of its own national capitalist class, including domestic electoral considerations. Self-congratulatory praise among them for a 'united response' in support of Ukraine is in part a smokescreen as, in reality, their disagreements over what to supply have been increasing - both within some governments and between them.

Capitalism in Ukraine

They send the arms and equipment firmly into the hands of Ukraine's government. Being staunchly pro-capitalist itself, that means the defensive battle led by that government against Russia is not primarily aimed at protecting working-class Ukrainians from oppression, but rather is in the class-based interests of Ukraine's capitalists and their international backers. After the war they intend that a capitalist ruling elite will continue to own and control most of the resources,

services and industries. On the basis of capitalism Ukraine will be a poverty stricken, severely war-damaged country, dependent on trying to attract foreign aid and investment for reconstruction in a crisis-ridden world where astronomical debt levels are the norm and economic growth is meagre at best.

Zelensky has adeptly behaved as a leader 'uniting the nation' against the terrible onslaught from Putin's Russia. He has also attracted support for pledges to curb the power of Ukraine's oligarchs and to tackle the massive level of corruption at the top - last year Ukraine was labelled the second most corrupt country in Europe by Transparency International. But as his political ideology is firmly capitalist, he - or any pro-capitalist successor - will not be able to deliver what the Ukrainian people will demand when they eventually emerge from this war: good housing, services and living standards, and everything else needed for a decent quality of life.

Even during war conditions Zelensky's government has enacted neoliberal anti-labour laws restricting workers' rights, and it has banned a number of left-wing organisations. The mantra of 'national unity' will come to be seen as the cross-class mask it is, a cover for enrichment of those at the top of society through exploitation of the overwhelming majority.

So, for socialists, the fight in Ukraine against foreign aggression can't be separated from the need for Ukraine's working class to build a movement that can remove capitalism and replace it with public ownership of the main pillars of the economy; and socialist planning of reconstruction and the economy.

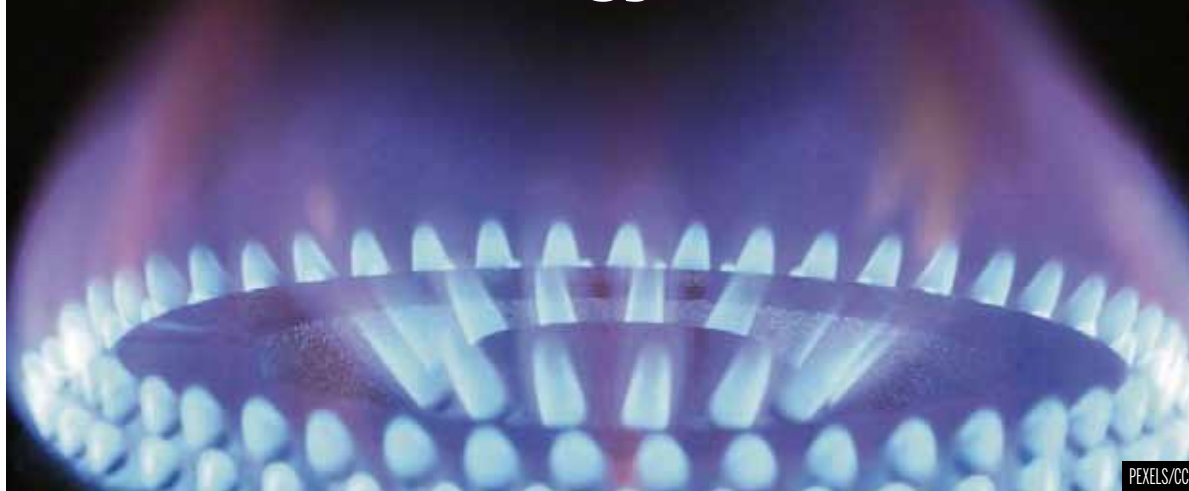
It is not socialist to write, as the Stop the War Coalition in Britain repeatedly does, that "the only real solution to the war lies in a ceasefire and a negotiated settlement". That would be a settlement agreed between the ruling classes on both sides, which at best could bring some respite from the bloodshed, but would be no real or lasting solution. Capitalist interests, competition, territorial claims, exploitation and repression of minorities would remain.

It is not a question of calling on capitalist representatives to decide which capitalist class should have control of Crimea, or Donbas, or anywhere else, but of saying clearly that the people in those areas should have the right to democratically decide their own future - the right to self-determination.

Workers and socialists in every country of the world, including in Russia and Ukraine, can place no trust in the actions at home or abroad of their own country's capitalists or the governmental representatives of those capitalists. Confidence can only be placed in building working-class based democratic socialist organisations, completely independent of capitalist interests, and in building solidarity between those organisations internationally.



Nationalise energy to cut our bills



FARHANA MANZOOR
CAMDEN AND HARINGEY SOCIALIST PARTY

Every working-class household is being hit by the energy crisis. Local businesses report in my local paper, the Camden New Journal, that large numbers of people are joining gyms and swimming pools with the need to bathe at their facilities because they simply cannot afford the high costs of bills.

Meanwhile, oil-giant Shell has made record profits of £32 billion, the highest in its history. BP's profits have also risen to £23 billion. And Centrica, owner of British Gas, which 'fired-and-rehired' thousands of its workers in 2021, has tripled its profits.

There is no excuse for this sheer extortion!

Prices for working-class households have not fallen, but global

prices of gas and petrol have. Why are we being made to foot the bill and line the pockets of super-rich shareholders?

40%
rise in energy costs when
Energy Price Guarantee ends

On Budget Day, 15 March, Tory chancellor Jeremy Hunt is planning to raise the Energy Price Guarantee to £3,000 per household, for all households except the very vulnerable.

In addition, £400 that was given to help households between October and March will come to a stop. In effect this means a 40% rise in energy

costs, at a time when people can least afford it, with record inflation, and pay falling well behind.

We cannot and will not be made to pay the bill, by sacrificing our quality of life, making stark choices between food and heating, all to hold up the profit-driven capitalist system. Privately owned energy companies, run for profit at the expense of all else, cannot give us fair prices or take the measures needed to transition to green energy.

Nationalisation, under democratic workers' control and management, would mean resources and production could be planned, and ensure prices are affordable. Taking the energy industry into public ownership, with no compensation to the fat cats at the top, is the only way to make sure they don't run off with the profits.



Drax picket line
PHOTO: ALISTAIR TICE

Drax power plant strike: fighting the race to the bottom

YORKSHIRE SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBERS

On 20 February, permanently employed production workers at Drax power station, near Selby in Yorkshire, took their first strike action since the 1980s.

And this was a good old-fashioned 1980s-style strike! The 180 Unite members who had balloted to strike were joined by up to 300 contractors, also Unite members, who refused to cross and joined the picket lines.

This united action was all the more impressive as the company didn't expect the contractors to strike. Shop

stewards and members have been threatened with disciplinary action, and workers not only lost a day's pay, but two weeks' bonus and lodging money. Unite steward Dean Preece was blown away by the solidarity action.

The strike is for a RPI-plus pay rise, after rejecting the well-below-inflation 8% offer from Drax Power Limited (DPL).

Due to the hike in energy prices, Unite estimates that DPL made £680 million profits in 2022, a 50% increase. As Unite officer Shane Sweeting told a mass meeting: "We're not entering a race to the bottom. Why

should we accept the crumbs off their table?"

Unite has named eight Mondays from 27 February for further strike action. The contract workers, who have only had a 5% pay rise over the last three years, could be joining them in April. They are gearing up for action, as the employers are now refusing to pay the national industry-agreed NAECI bonus rates.

As contractors' steward Richie Foster said: "They're trying to split the workforce, but we're not having it. The bosses have tried to kick us down the road, but it's time we threw them down the road!"

Priced out of parenthood

A survey of new parents, reported in the Guardian, has found that the majority would delay or even forgo having another child due to the extortionate costs of childcare.

The UK is the third most expensive country in the world for childcare. And costs are set to spiral as government funding falls in real terms and energy bills rise.

A group of childcare providers has signed a letter to Rishi Sunak calling for radical changes to government funding. They cite rising labour costs among the causes of their charges rising.

The reality is that most people who work in childcare are extremely low paid, and are often on zero-hour contracts. The average pay for this most important of jobs is only £13 an hour.

The Socialist Party also campaigns for more government funding for childcare. But unlike the

childcare bosses, we fight for at least £15-an-hour minimum wage, pay rises that are RPI inflation-proof, and which are fully funded.

But why should that public money be handed over to private providers to make profits? This situation is the result of decades of cuts and privatisation, demanded by Tory and Blairite Labour governments alike. Instead of refusing to make the cuts, Labour councils have meekly carried out closures and privatisation of council-run and workplace nurseries. It was inevitable that would lead to low pay, poor quality, and rising childcare prices.

The Socialist Party fights for all such provision to be reopened and brought back in-house; massively expanded, fully funded and run under democratic control. That is the only way to ensure free, high-quality childcare for all who need it.

That, along with genuinely liveable wages and decent housing, are the prerequisites for people to make real decisions when and whether to have children.

Bigger profits for banks - job losses and closures for us

Britain's biggest bank HSBC has doubled its quarterly profit to £4.3 billion, as it announced figures for the last three months of 2022. It means profits are up more than 90% from the same time a year earlier.

The astronomical figures have been boosted by rising interest rates.

This comes after HSBC has been shedding jobs in recent years to help cut costs - with more planned

this year, including the closure of 114 more branches in the UK. It will mean hundreds of potential job losses and, as Unite the Union puts it, "abandoning customers."

Chief executive Noel Quinn has hinted at even more job losses in the pipeline too, saying on 21 February: "There will be no easing off at all on costs."

The bumper profits should be used to save jobs, keep high street stores open, and help ease the cost-of-living crisis for its customers by cutting overdraft and loan interest.

But to guarantee this and the same for other banks, we need to nationalise them to be run under democratic workers' control, as part of a socialist plan.

Councils must act on damp and mould

More than half of private renters in England asked are living in cold, damp or mouldy homes, a survey by Citizens Advice found. That's 2.9 million households! And on average someone privately renting will pay £350 more a year on heating because of badly insulated and damp homes.

Cold and damp homes have a direct, adverse impact on people's health. We need homes that

we can live comfortably in and not pay through the roof on rent or energy bills. We need a mass, high-quality council house building programme. These new homes should be fitted with insulation and energy-efficient appliances to keep them damp-free.

Local councils should use their powers to take unsafe housing into public ownership and make them fit to live in. Councillors could do that now, and build a movement involving the unions and local community to demand the resources from the Tory government to do so.

ORGANISING **FIGHTING**

STRIKING BACK
AGAINST THE

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Socialist Students
Conference 2023

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SATURDAY 18 MARCH
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Birmingham, B3 3BS

Email socialiststudents@gmail.com or text 07515921699 for more info

Trades councils and the strike wave

Building coordination and solidarity at a local level

LINDA TAAFFE

WALTHAM FOREST SOCIALIST PARTY, FORMER SECRETARY OF WALTHAM FOREST TRADES COUNCIL

After several decades of workers facing cutbacks and wage squeezes while being hamstrung by anti-trade union restrictions, 2022 saw the logjam well and truly busted wide open.

Activists, including delegates to trades councils, who helped keep trade unions together and campaigning over many years, have all got a welcome boost. Thousands of workers have taken as much as they can bear. The fightback has begun. The slogan 'All strike together' has found a huge echo among strikers and supporters alike.

After a lifetime of trade union activity and having been secretary of Waltham Forest Trades Council (WFTC) for nine years, I recently stepped down at our AGM. Looking back over the role of myself, Socialist Party members, and other active trade unionists, we helped to develop the trades council through many campaigns up to the present strike wave.

Trades councils are part of the structure of the Trades Union Congress (TUC) and they can play a very useful role in supporting trade unionists in all kinds of ways, both in day-to-day issues like fighting cuts, and on big national issues, like campaigning against the new Tory anti-trade union bill.

The highlight of my time was definitely 'Butterfields won't budge', when we campaigned with local tenants to defeat the attempts of a venture company to evict tenants en masse. We declared very early on that housing was a trade union issue, and



set up a WFTC housing sub-committee. Nowadays the situation is even more dire, with rocketing rents. The last family we helped resist eviction is still in the council house she was allocated "temporarily"!

On the huge 1 February strike, there was a big demo in London, and around the country striking unions held local rallies and demos. In many areas trades councils took the initiative to call demonstrations. Swansea trades council organised a lively, successful demo - boosted by its authority as a TUC body. The same is true in Bristol, Hull, and many other places.

1926 general strike

In the 1926 general strike, many trades councils broadened out to become in effect 'councils of action', where local unions came together to ensure strike policies were maintained. In some areas, like the North East, parts of London and Liverpool, the formation of councils of action had trades councils at their heart. In some instances elements of 'dual power' existed, where vehicles with necessary goods only moved with permission of the council of action.

In the nine days of the general strike, there were 400 trades councils and 147 councils of action involved. In Cowdenbeath in Fife, "all motor vehicles had to get permission from the trades council before travelling up the Great North Road. We had pickets on various parts of the road to ensure that no-one passed without permission of the trades council." (1926 General Strike: Workers Taste Power - see left)

It is reported in the history of the TUC how our Walthamstow trades council at that time got the electricity workers to shut off the power to the

local cinema, because it was showing biased and negative Pathé news of the strike. They reported everything to the TUC leadership.

An old Militant (predecessor of the Socialist) supporter, Herbie Bell from Tyneside, was a dispatch rider for his trades council, collecting reports of what was happening and where help was needed in various areas of the North East.

In Liverpool during the 1970s, the Liverpool Trades Council drew together local tenants' associations to fight the Tories' Housing Finance Act, and was then joined by various organs of the labour movement. For a while it became a joint body with the District Labour Party.

By the time of the marvellous 47 Labour councillors who, in 1983-87, refused to cut the city's budget and roused a whole city against Tory prime minister Margaret Thatcher, the District Labour Party was in constant session, with not only Labour members but masses of trade unionists, on vital issues about what to do next, how to consolidate the campaign and much more.

Despite many differences, there are relevant parallels today with 1926. A 24-hour general strike, a partial general strike or rolling generalised strike action could well happen. In the face of the cost-of-living crisis, with the prospect of winning more pay, trade union membership is starting to climb. 40,000 teachers and support staff joined the NEU between the announcement about the national strike on 1 February and the day itself. The TUC has had an 800% increase in enquiries about how to join a union.

Trades councils are local bodies representing the TUC and are keen

Linda with the Waltham Forest Trades Council banner at an RMT picket line at Walthamstow Central during a 2022 tube strike
PHOTOS: WALTHAM FOREST TRADES COUNCIL

for affiliations for a relatively small sum. If you are a member of a union, then get your branch to affiliate to a trades council in your home or work area and ask to become a delegate. It's a simple and well-recognised procedure. If you can't get to your own union branch meeting for any number of reasons - working hours, distance etc - then ask your branch to affiliate to the local trades council so you can be involved in trade union activity near to your home.

Trades councils very much need younger members to get involved, as well as those in the gig economy. The BFAWU bakers' union who recruit in McDonalds, pizza places, bars and cafes are very friendly towards trades councils. Unite organises hospitality workers and GMB has just organised the first-ever strike in Amazon in the UK in Coventry. Today there are fewer big industrial workplaces; but the small local workplaces are just as important.

WFTC used the strike wave to open as many lines of communication with unions as possible. We got a lapsed CWU Royal Mail workers' branch to renew affiliation, two new affiliations from an RMT London Underground branch and an ASLEF rail branch, as well as encouraging some existing delegates to start coming along again.

We would like to keep in contact with picketers, and for them to come along and make the trades council a vibrant 'council of action', based on the ground, in local workplaces, and ready for discussion and debate about the way forward in the coming class struggles, whatever form they take.

Can you help to build your local trades council? Contact the Socialist Party for info and assistance!

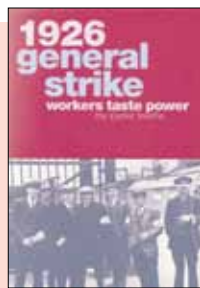
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WHAT WE STAND FOR

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

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

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

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

WORK, PENSIONS AND BENEFITS

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

PUBLIC SERVICES

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

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

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

ENVIRONMENT

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

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

DEMOCRATIC RIGHTS

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

SOCIALISM AND INTERNATIONALISM

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

Lively Socialist Party public meeting in Guildford

LAURENCE DUNN
STAINES SOCIALIST PARTY

Building from the action taken by striking teachers and civil servants on 1 February, the Socialist Party held a public meeting on the 15 February in Guildford. Before the meeting we paid respects at a large vigil for Brianna Ghey (see page 4), with Paul Couchman expressing solidarity to those gathered and all victims of discrimination, on behalf of Unison and the wider trade union movement.

Attendees of the vigil who saw the ties between violence, division and the capitalist economic system also joined the meeting. The mood of the evening, which began sombrely became uplifting as we each realised how large the meeting was in an area like Guildford – with over 20 attendees. The majority of people who came to the meeting were young people, alongside union reps from Unison, UCU, RMT and NEU.

Nick Chaffey, Southern and South East Socialist Party organiser,

opened the discussion by explaining what the Socialist Party is and how it has been active fighting for socialist ideas in the workers' movement here and around the world with the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI).

This was followed by a lively discussion where attendees expressed their thoughts and feelings on topics from frustrations in convincing people of socialist and socially progressive ideas, to concerns about right-wing populism and how to fight it, and questions around internationalism, imperialism and how to get involved and organised around fighting for a socialist programme locally.

At the end of the discussion there were talks about plans to organise campaigns, meetings and stalls in the area in the coming weeks. A number of those in attendance joined the Socialist Party or are in contact with local members. The Socialist Party is growing in Guildford with trade unionists and young people joining.



PHOTO: PAUL COUCHMAN

AREA	£ RECEIVED	£ TARGET	Q1: JANUARY-MARCH 2023	DEADLINE: 31 MARCH 2023
South West	2,246	1,800		125%
Northern	839	750		112%
Wales	1,914	2,300		
West Midlands	1,467	2,600	56%	
London	1,886	4,600	41%	
North West	445	1,150	39%	
Southern & SE	893	2,350	38%	
Yorkshire	871	2,550	34%	
East Midlands	555	1,850	30%	
Eastern	147	1,200	12%	
Other	1,934	3,850	50%	
TOTAL	13,197	25,000	53%	

South Yorkshire protest against far right

SIMON JENKINS
SHEFFIELD SOUTH EAST SOCIALIST PARTY.

On 18 February, a far-right group called 'Yorkshire Rose' called a protest outside a Holiday Inn in Manners, Rotherham, against the housing of asylum seekers in the hotel.

After the events in Knowsley, a campaign was organised by Sheffield Trades Council to show opposition to this protest.

Three coaches went up from near-by Sheffield. On arrival, the police had plans for us and kept us in one part of the main car park and had sectioned off another for the so-called 'grassroots' Yorkshire Rose so we could stare at each other across the driveway.

There were around 350 of us in opposition to racist division, compared to around 50-80 on the far right's side.

As for the event, it was passed by

exchanging 'pleasantries' with the far right through the fences, singing songs and chanting solidarity. There were some touching moments when asylum seekers waved to us through the window. We left after about three hours when the far right, with ever depleting numbers, gave up.

While it was good to see the low turnout of the far right, their banners used the Tory rhetoric of "small boats" and "invasion" showing the demands of the far right are reflected to some extent in the Tory government.

As the Labour Party has decided to move to the right to satisfy the boss-class, and moved away from a party for the working class, there is a yawning chasm which the far right can step in to fill. This further proves the need for a mass party that will draw together the working class to rise above the divide-and-rule tactics of the establishment.



Socialist Party placards at protest in Manners
PHOTO: YORKSHIRE SP

Help fund the socialist printing press

Readers and subscribers of our monthly theoretical magazine, Socialism Today, will have noticed that the latest March issue (No265) has been printed on higher quality paper. This is because a vital piece of our printing equipment, the finishing machine, has broken and, as it was not possible to repair it in time, we had to send out the magazine to be printed commercially.

There's no doubt that the better quality paper greatly improves the appearance of the magazine and will be appreciated by our readers. But unfortunately this has significantly increased our print and postage costs for this issue. In addition, we are facing a possible capital expenditure of at least £5,000 to replace the broken equipment if we are not able to fully repair it.

This has highlighted just how vital having our own printing press is for the Socialist Party. In particular, it allows us to produce campaigning material to respond quickly to

events as they arise. And with the current strike wave, this is becoming more important than ever. Without the press our campaigning work and our ability to put forward our programme for taking strikes and struggles forward would be seriously impacted.

We're not launching a special appeal for our press, but we are asking all branches and members and supporters of the Socialist Party to do everything they can to reach and smash through this quarter's fighting fund target. We're confident that, with planning and energetic campaigning, we can get the money we need. Can you help in raising more fighting fund? Can you make a donation? Every extra pound we raise is a crucial contribution to the fight for socialism.

Help fund the fightback

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Merseyside - 'Unite and fight for jobs, homes and services for all!'

ALEX SMITH
LIVERPOOL AND DISTRICT SOCIALIST PARTY

Socialist Party members have a history of combating right wing ideas in Knowsley, including standing in elections – under the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition banner – against the governing pro-austerity Labour Party in the area.

The decades-long refusal of Knowsley Labour council to defy anti-working class central government diktats and cuts has created conditions of hopelessness and anger among many local working-class youth. For example, as the Socialist has previously reported, A-level provision no longer exists in Knowsley due to Tory cuts implemented by the local Labour party.

The feeling among many local young people, that they have limited future prospects, has created a reservoir of anger. A small number of far-right protesters recently tapped into and exploited this reservoir by organising a demonstration against a hotel in the area housing refugees.

Following this, Socialist Party

members felt it necessary that we maintain and build on the campaigning work we do in Knowsley. At our usual campaigning stall in Kirkby town centre, this week we raised slogans to cut across the anti-refugee poison spread by the far right.

We raised the need to fight against racism alongside the need for a united fight for a mass council house building programme, more social facilities, and decent jobs for all. We pointed out that there is enough wealth in society to achieve these goals and to help refugees at the same time – we just have to take the wealth from the real enemy: the capitalist class, and to do that we need a new trade union-backed mass workers' party, armed with a socialist programme.

LEWIS REES

LIVERPOOL AND DISTRICT SOCIALIST PARTY

On 18 February, campaigners, trade unions and Liverpool Trades Council, joined together in solidarity to organise the 'Merseyside anti-racists

unite' demonstration against the racism and division spread by the far right and on display at the demonstration in Kirkby on 10 February. (see 'Far-right attack Kirkby migrant hotel - build united workers' movement against racism' on www.socialistparty.org.uk).

Over 500 people attended the demonstration compared to a small group of around ten far-right demonstrators who gathered.

The support from trade unions including the Fire Brigades Union and UCU, show the importance of the workers' movement in the fight against racism and the conditions that allow racist ideas to gain support.

Throughout the demonstration, calls for a political alternative were raised. Jeremy Corbyn spoke at the event after earlier in the week Keir Starmer made clear he would not be standing as a Labour MP (see pages 1-3). Socialist Party members put forward a programme of jobs, homes and services for all, no to racism and to build a new mass workers' party to fight for this.

100+ people attended meeting in Highfields, Leicester
PHOTO: HEATHER RAWLING



Local anger at Leicester Labour council plan to raise heating bills

HEATHER RAWLING
LEICESTER SOCIALIST PARTY

As if it is not enough that the cost of living has soared, Leicester City Council is proposing to raise rents for its 19,000 tenants by 7% and the council tax by the maximum of 5%, as well as cuts in services and redundancies. Piling on the misery, 2,500 homes on the district heating scheme face a tripling of their heating charges on top of their other fuel bills. A family living in a three-bedroom property on the District Heating Network currently pays £951 a year for gas on average, which will rise to £3,141 if plans are given the go-ahead!

An angry meeting of upwards of 100 tenants in the Highfields area of Leicester made their views on Leicester Labour council clear. Highfields has some of the city's poorest paid workers and highest levels of deprivation. Many work in the sweatshop textile industry for well below the minimum wage. Tenants said

they felt forgotten, ignored and neglected. Many of them were already using food banks and struggling to pay their bills.

The demand raised by a Socialist Party member that people should stand against any councillor that is in favour of increasing the charges and imposing cuts on services, received enthusiastic applause. Some were prepared to put their name forward as candidates.

At a similar meeting, also organised by Enough is Enough in St Matthews, residents also expressed their anger. It is possible that some councillors will vote against the proposals.

Peter, sorry, Sir Peter Soulsby, Labour city mayor, has said: "There is no doubt that painful cuts will be required over the coming years." Yet the council has over £200 million in 'usable' reserves! Anyone who genuinely wanted to defend and fight for the working class would use that money to protect services and keep down rent, council tax and heating

charges. They would organise a mass movement of workers to demand extra funding from a weak Tory government.

And don't tell us that the money isn't there. They can find money for fighting wars - £2.3 billion for Ukraine in 2022. £10 billion in contracts was awarded by government departments to private companies, often owned by friends, family and supporters, during the pandemic.

Labour has abandoned the working class. Starmer is doing everything to show the rich and powerful that he will look after their interests. We need to build a new party of the working class, the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition will be standing candidates in the upcoming local elections as part of that process. You can help by supporting candidates in the local elections or even better putting yourself forward as a candidate to stand up for the working class and oppose all attacks on our living standards.

Socialist Party members speak at UK Kashmiri conference

Socialist Party and Committee for a Workers' International members were invited to a conference of the UK branch of the left nationalist Jammu and Kashmir National Awami Party. Around a hundred and fifty attended the meeting in Luton, Bedfordshire, on Sunday 12 February.

Among a long list of invited speakers addressing the meeting, mostly about the struggle for democratic, social and economic justice in Kashmir, was **Mark Pickersgill** from the Stevenage branch of the Socialist Party. He briefly described the strike wave taking place in Britain over the ever-rising cost of living.

But, looking in the direction of the Kashmiri Labour representatives present, he made the point that, a future government under Keir Starmer's leadership would still operate in the interests of the bosses, just as the Tories have been doing for the last thirteen years. Building a socialist alternative is as vital in Britain as everywhere else in the world, he insisted.

Clare Doyle, speaking on behalf of the Committee for a Workers' International, to which the Socialist Party belongs, spoke of the long-running tragedy of the struggles and sacrifices of the Kashmiri people. She underlined the inalienable democratic right of any nation to self-determination and the importance of the workers and poor people of all countries fighting landlordism and capitalism.

Her emphasis on the need for international socialism was warmly appreciated after warnings against capitalism of all varieties. "We are democratic socialists," she emphasised, "not social democrats!" Referring to ongoing struggles in other parts of Asia and the world, Clare emphasised the importance of building struggle movements that link up on a local and national level, and even an international level in a united struggle for socialism.



Turkey-Syria earthquake exposes Erdogan's failing capitalist state

Socialist plan and working-class organisation needed

BERKAY KARTAV
LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

The video footage of a woman, just rescued from under the rubble, pleading with ambulance workers not to take her to a private hospital went viral in Turkey, almost two weeks after two powerful earthquakes hit south eastern Turkey and northern Syria on 6 February.

This footage of an earthquake survivor more concerned about her hospital bills rather than her health is yet another example that exposes everything that is rotten with capitalism.

According to official figures, the death toll has surpassed 41,000 in Turkey and 5,000 in Syria. More than 100,000 people are injured, thousands are still beneath the rubble, and a huge number of people are left homeless. The true scale of this disaster is not yet clear, but the death toll is likely to dramatically increase still.

Even though the ruling party led by Turkish President Erdogan is doing its best to hide all of its faults, there is widespread anger as people blame Erdogan for the scale of this disaster.

In 2013, Erdogan tweeted: 'Buildings kill, not earthquakes'. And he's right. His government turned a blind

eye to building contractors and construction companies who cut corners to maximise their profits.

The 'zoning amnesty' of 2018 enabled the registration of millions of illegally built properties that breached safety and licensing standards. This was one of Erdogan's populist policies and he boasted about the amnesty during his election campaign in 2019. Those buildings in south eastern Turkey have now become graveyards for tens of thousands of people.

Cynically, Erdogan has now overseen the state issuing 113 arrest warrants for building developers.

Lack of help

A vacuum has formed in the affected areas after the earthquake as the government fails miserably to provide the basic necessities for local people.

The vacuum in some areas has been filled by trade unions, left-wing organisations and volunteers from day one. But despite the best efforts of the volunteers, there are still shortages of toilet facilities, tents, sanitary products and electric heaters in the area.

In the chaos that followed the earthquake, some people who felt like they had no choice looted

supermarkets. A mother said she had no choice but to steal nappies from a supermarket as there was no help from the authorities.

Far-right groups are spreading rumours that it is Syrian refugees who are looting shops and stealing valuable items from the rubble and empty buildings. Some Syrians, or people who were mistaken to be Syrians, have reportedly been lynched by small groups and police officers.

The far right wants to scapegoat Syrian refugees for the looting and lack of resources in the area. This is in the interest of the government as it wants to channel the anger towards the refugees rather than the government officials, building contractors and construction companies who are responsible for the scale of this disaster.

With over four million refugees, Turkey hosts the world's largest refugee population. Anti-immigration sentiments were already high in Turkish society before the earthquake. Capitalist politicians use refugees as scapegoats for the lack of resources and homes provided by mainstream pro-capitalist opposition parties.

The spread of the rumours, however, can lead to dangerous escalation

of tensions between different communities. The workers' movement in Turkey must combat this 'divide-and-rule' tactic by fighting for a united movement for jobs and homes for all.

Turkey is one of the richest countries in the world. It does have enough resources to provide decent living standards for all. But the money that exists in society goes into the pockets of the rich, not working-class people.

Rather than using the more than one million empty homes and hotels in the nearby area, the government is building tent camps or kicking students out of university halls.

There must be an emergency housing programme, developed in consultation with local people, to rebuild the area and house people. But there cannot be any trust in this government or construction companies to carry this out.

Nationalisation of the housing sector, under the democratic control of the working class, is necessary to build genuinely affordable earthquake-resilient houses.

There cannot be any trust in Erdogan or the pro-capitalist opposition parties. Not only are these pro-capitalist politicians responsible for the devastation caused, but they will want working-class people to pay for the economic cost of this disaster.

There is an urgent need in the workers' movement in Turkey to begin the discussions on forming a new mass workers' party armed with a socialist programme. Such a programme would include fighting for jobs, homes and decent living standards for all, including those who are abandoned and neglected after the earthquake.



Rescue work at destroyed buildings in Diyarbakir and Rob Williams speaks on behalf the National Shop Stewards Network at a London protest PHOTOS: PUBLIC DOMAIN AND LONDON SP

SCOTLAND STURGEON RESIGNS AS PRO-CAPITALIST POLICIES UNDERMINE SNP SUPPORT

SOCIALIST PARTY SCOTLAND

Nicola Sturgeon's resignation as Scottish National Party (SNP) leader and Scotland's first minister has underscored, in spectacular fashion, the multifaceted crisis that has engulfed the Scottish government recently.

In power since 2007, the SNP administration was regarded as being among the most stable and popular capitalist governments in Europe.

The SNP has won the last four Scottish parliament elections, been the largest party in Scotland in three general elections, and is the largest party in Scottish local government.

Sturgeon herself was seen as a highly skilled politician with significant public support, not least for her performance during the Covid-19 pandemic which contrasted hugely with the calamitous Boris Johnson in Westminster. Nevertheless, many of the same mistakes were made by both governments during the pandemic.

Following the 2014 independence referendum, the nationalists completely eclipsed an already declining Labour Party as the electoral vehicle for a majority of the Scottish working class. In 2015 the SNP won 50% of the vote at the Westminster election, securing 56 of the 59 Scottish MPs.

Even as late as the 2021 Scottish parliament election the SNP won 1.3 million votes, the highest number for any party in the 24-year history of the parliament.

But as Socialist Party Scotland pointed out in our Scottish perspectives document in March 2022: "It is no exaggeration to say that if a genuine workers' party existed in Scotland with a sensitive attitude to the national question, the electoral base of the SNP would be shattered overnight."

Roots of the crisis

The crisis facing the SNP is rooted in its implementation of austerity and anti-working class policies generally. The recent strikes have played a decisive role in exposing and undermining Sturgeon's government.

Wave after wave of strikes, and threats of strikes, in the public sector have been taking place against SNP politicians. The NHS is in an unprecedented crisis - the result of decades of underfunding. A recent opinion poll underlined the scale of opposition to the Scottish government that now exists.

There is also significant public opposition to the Gender Recognition Reform (GRR) bill, which the Tories have based themselves on by blocking the bill at Westminster.

Sturgeon will have been shocked by the polling that indicated large support for the Tories' actions. 50% think the UK Government was right



Nicola Sturgeon PHOTO: FIRST MINISTER OF SCOTLAND/CC

to block the GRR with 33% opposed. Incredibly, 31% of SNP supporters supported Rishi Sunak.

Around 55% in current polling oppose the specifics of the bill, while only 25% support it. This is despite the fact that in February 2022, 57% backed the general idea of making it easier for trans people to obtain a gender recognition certificate, which Socialist Party Scotland supports.

The strident and intolerant way in which the SNP and the Scottish Greens have dealt with concerns over the GRR - added to by their record of anti-working class policies including making cuts to public services needed by women, LGBTQ+ people and the working class generally - has made it much more difficult to win support for self-ID. Sturgeon's resignation could also lead to a reconsideration of the GRR by a new SNP leadership.

Against this background the SNP has begun to see its support fall, with backing for independence also dipping back to around 45%.

Splits within the SNP, for example on the strategy for winning a second referendum, have also come to the fore. The decision of the UK Supreme Court to rule against Holyrood's right to hold indyref2 in late 2022 opened up further tensions.

Ian Blackford, a Sturgeon loyalist,

was effectively removed as Westminster leader by the SNP group of MPs and replaced by a more Sturgeon-critical leader in December last year.

A special policy conference in March - if it goes ahead - will debate whether to make the next Westminster election a de facto referendum on independence, or the next Holyrood election.

It is likely that Sturgeon's preferred option of using the Westminster election as a referendum will be defeated. Not least because of fears among the SNP that a 50% plus one share of the vote being a mandate for an agreed referendum is just not achievable.

These divisions, at root, reflect the incapacity of the pro-capitalist leadership of the SNP to overcome the entrenched opposition of the ruling class in Britain to Scottish independence.

The break-up of the UK would be a huge blow for the capitalist class and they will fight tooth and nail to try to avoid it. To overcome that obstacle requires mass struggle and the mobilisation of a united working class against those capitalist interests which the SNP leadership is deathly afraid of.

This points to a reality that Socialist Party Scotland has emphasised again and again: that the SNP's big business policies are an obstacle to

winning a majority in Scotland for independence.

All of these factors have played a role in Sturgeon's decision to resign. The SNP as a whole will now be thrown into a crisis. Sturgeon was party leader and first minister for eight years and was the anointed successor to Alex Salmond when he resigned in 2014. Today, there is no clear and obvious replacement.

Splits to come

Elements of the SNP privately critical of the direction taken by the leadership will be emboldened to speak out. Open splits and divisions against the backdrop of falling support for the SNP are inevitable.

It is also possible that the coalition with the Scottish Greens could come undone, if not immediately then in the run up to the next Holyrood election in 2026.

What Sturgeon's resignation underlines is that even a seemingly stable and popular political party can be undermined in the maelstrom of events.

Following the 2014 indyref the SNP was seen as an anti-establishment force that swept all before it in a series of spectacular electoral successes.

Yet, such is the acute nature of the economic and social crisis today that any party that bases itself on capitalism, which the SNP does, will ultimately come into collision with the interests of the working class.

That's why it was a mistake for the Scottish Trades Union Congress to release a statement immediately after Sturgeon's resignation that said of the first minister: "We deeply valued our working relationship, working collaboratively on behalf of Scotland's workers."

This was on the same day that Sturgeon's government offered an insulting 6% pay offer to Scottish teachers in their long-running dispute.

Nor will there be anything 'collaborative' about the estimated £700 million in cuts being made in the next few weeks by Scottish councils that will massively impact the jobs and services provided by council workers.

New workers' party

The SNP will still likely remain the largest party in Scotland, for now, and will continue to use the national question to bolster its waning support. But the space for a new party based on the working class - with the trade unions playing a decisive role in its formation - has grown even larger.

Socialist Party Scotland has advocated the building of such a workers' party consistently. Even in 2015, when the SNP was sweeping all before it, we stood in the 2015 general election as part of the Scottish Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, as we did in the 2016 Scottish parliament election, putting forward the case for fighting socialist policies and for an independent socialist Scotland.

Many other left and socialist groups when faced with the SNP juggernaut buckled under the pressure and opposed standing socialist candidates.

Today we continue that pioneering work in preparation for the next general election. We would appeal to all those who want to see the building of a new mass working-class party to help lead mass struggle against capitalism and for socialist change to join us.

£1/£2 solidarity price

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the Socialist

Issue 1215

23 February - 1 March 2023

formerly **Militant**

ALL STRIKE TOGETHER ALL MARCH TOGETHER

ON BUDGET DAY TO DEFEAT THE BOSSES AND BRING DOWN THE TORIES



PHOTO: PAUL COUCHMAN

“We’ve been working so hard just to qualify into this career, and now we’re faced with the reality that our future jobs and lives look bleak and stressful. If this strike is what it takes so that the next years as junior doctors look more liveable, then the majority of medical students will 100% stand behind that and will be on picket lines!”

So says a medical student, about to qualify as a junior doctor.

She is one of hundreds of thousands of young people – teachers, NHS workers and more – on the picket line for the very first time.

Forced to fight due to the cost-of-living crisis and savage austerity, young people have been inspired by the rail and post strikes, and are learning the traditions of working-class struggle. Whatever happens in this strike wave, for these young people things will never be the same again.

March will see the biggest action yet – and it could still get bigger. Members of unions are delivering strong messages to their leaders to fight on. Rail workers resoundingly rejected the latest ‘offer’ by bosses. Postal workers have voted ‘yes’ to strike action in stunning numbers in the rebalot enforced by Tory anti-union legislation. In Wales, ambulance workers, teachers and school

support staff have overwhelmingly rejected the meagre offers from the Welsh Labour government.

15 March is Budget Day, when the Tories will outline their latest plans to attack the working class. They will be met by a massive strike of school and civil service workers. Members of the RMT union are running the railways that day so that thousands of workers around the country can demonstrate in central London.

Then on 16 March, they will join education workers in schools and universities on another day of national strike action.

There’s still time for all unions with live ballots to join in on 15

and 16 March, to deliver the biggest blow yet to the bosses and the Tory government.

National strike wave

National Education Union regional action

- 28 Feb: Northern, North West, Yorkshire and Humber
- 1 March: East Midlands, West Midlands, Eastern
- 2 March: London, South East, South West, Wales

NHS

- Ambulances: 6 and 20 March
- Junior doctors: 72-hours mid-March

15 March: Budget Day

- National Education Union
- PCS civil service union
- National demonstrations in London and Cardiff

16 March

- RMT national rail
- National Education Union
- UCU in universities

The UCU is also striking on 17 March. PCS is taking targeted action at various employers. Local action will be taking place including a week-long strike at Amazon Coventry from 13-17 March

WHAT WE STAND FOR: THE SOCIALIST PARTY’S MAIN DEMANDS >>> see column on page 12



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