£1/£2 solidarity price
socialistparty.org.uk
Socialist Party CWI CIT

the Socialist

Issue 1219 23-29 March 2023 formerly Militant

STRIKING WORKS!

KEEP UP FIGHT FOR INFLATION-PROOF PAY RISES

- Reject unfunded insufficient pay offers
- Make the super-rich pay
- Prepare for a 24-hour general strike

SCOTT HUNTER
SWINDON SOCIALIST PARTY

The average worker is £11,000 a year worse off than they would have been had wages continued to grow at the same rate as before the 2008 financial crisis. In that time, the super-rich have only got richer.

Profits of Britain's biggest companies are 89% higher than before the pandemic, and the government can afford to give pensions tax breaks to the richest 1% of earners.

Inflation-proof pay rises, at or above the rate of RPI inflation, are absolutely possible, and necessary to stop the more than a decade-long assault on our living standards.

Budget Day, 15 March, saw the biggest day of strike action yet in the ongoing strike wave, with over 600,000 workers taking action.

The strike wave has boosted the confidence of millions of working-class people, demonstrating our power when we act together. It has shaken the rotten Tory government.

From a position of 'no compromise' in January, in just a few short months Sunak's government has been forced to the negotiating table with new pay offers.

The Socialist Party campaigns to reject insufficient pay offers. None of the deals offered so far make any clear commitment to increase funding for schools or the NHS - key demands of striking health and education workers.

The fact that new offers have been extracted from the government is proof that striking works. Further strikes - with further days of coordinated action, backed up by a huge trade union-organised weekend demonstration between now and the May elections – can force the Tories to concede more. Action up to and including a 24-hour general strike could be enough to topple them.

The trade union leaderships must work together to organise this. The Socialist Party calls on the trade union leaders to immediately organise a conference of the elected leaderships of all unions involved in strikes – to discuss the next stages of coordinated strike action, but also to prepare a working-class political opposition, starting by preparing a list of workers' candidates to stand in the next general election.

NHS PAY DEAL: VOTE NO! ▶▶▶ p4
BRITAIN'S BOSSES' BUDGET AS WORLD TEETERS ON BRINK OF BANKING CRISIS ▶▶▶ p2
STRANDED ASSETS - HOW CAPITALISM IS PREPARING FOR CLIMATE CHANGE ▶▶▶ p8-9

Britain's bosses' budget as world teeters on brink of banking crisis

PAUL MATTSSON

Socialist Party WHAT WE THINK

As tens of thousands of workers brought much of London to a standstill on 15 March - alongside hundreds of thousands more, around 600,000 striking in total - chancellor Jeremy Hunt announced his something of a nothing budget. A 'minimalist masterclass,' Bloomberg reporters called it.

With his head in the sand to the real problems and crises across British society, his budget was mainly an attempt to satisfy the fears and concerns of 'the markets' - the spivs and speculators.

It was the third economic 'plan' in a year. Anything that didn't result in the PM or chancellor resigning and Britain paying a new 'moron premium' on its gilt/debt repayments (as Kwarteng's budget did), would have been a success for the crisis-ridden government and Tory Party.

But there is still no gloss that the Tories can put on the cold reality of the situation in Britain, that Hunt's budget did nothing to address. Despite calls from the likes of the Institute for Fiscal Studies to spend £14 billion on pay rises for public sector workers, or to give the NHS the funding it so desperately needs just to get by, Hunt preferred to scrap plans to make mega-rich sovereign wealth funds pay corporation tax as they do even in the US!

More Tory cuts

Real terms cuts to public services and further attacks on disabled people surprised no one, but increasingly even sections of the capitalist class are becoming alarmed by the deteriorating health of workers in Britain, which is an additional reason for the woeful productivity of British capitalism. Productivity growth is at its slowest since the 1820s, and even the government's own Office for Budget Responsibility admits British standards of living have seen no improvement in 20 years. Life expectancy is deteriorating in a society getting rapidly sicker.

The Bank of England's predictions for no real economic growth by the end of 2025 is a brutal reality check to the Tories' 'think happy thoughts' attempts to revive what is, in the eyes of the capitalist class globally, an ailing economy with increasing public and private debt.

But it's not just Britain. Recent events have seen the first tremors of a new stage of global economic crisis, brought on in the main by the record levels of both sovereign and corporate debt. The consequences of the huge debt levels in the economy are now beginning to be felt as central banks attempt to 'turn off the taps,' and end 'cheap money' via rapid hikes in interest rates.

Bank failure

In the space of just a few days, the second and third largest bank failure in US history took place and the US authorities stepped in to close Signature Bank and Silicon Valley Bank (SVB).

While Signature had placed one too many bets on crypto, SVB was a victim of the impending crisis in the tech bubble. A crisis fuelled by loss-making companies propped up by cash-burning venture capital that used SVB as its bank of choice. SVB itself invested heavily in what is supposed to be the safest and strongest possible asset, long-dated US government bonds.

However, the rapid increases in interest rates in the last year by the US Federal Reserve to counter inflation caused huge drops in the value of the lower interest bonds. SVB faced a doom loop. It tried to sell bonds to raise cash quick enough to meet its depositors' withdrawal requests, leading to a run on its reserves, before authorities stepped in to close the bank and try to stop further bank runs.

The idea that SVB was unique and an isolated incident was quickly jettisoned as the Fed and US government stepped in with emergency insurance coverage for all depositors. They also established a new liquidity loan facility for banks to borrow from.

The US Fed, alongside other central banks, has introduced a new daily 'credit line' to improve dollar access and liquidity for banks across the world.

US banks, in panic, borrowed \$164.8 billion from Federal Reserve backstop facilities in a week. A record high, up from \$4.58 billion the previous week. The previous all-time high was \$111 billion in 2008.

In Europe, Credit Suisse has been the headline victim so far, but won't be the last. A \$54 billion lifeline emergency loan from the Swiss government was still not enough to bolster the bank, which has been in a state of crisis for over a year now.

Bank bailout

In a hastily put together bailout in all but name, it was bought by Swiss arch rival UBS with backing and insurances again from the Swiss government.

But in the same fashion as the lifelines given to banks failing in the USA, the can has just been kicked down the road. Described by economist Nouriel Roubini as a 'too big to fail monster that is 220% of Swiss GDP,' Credit Suisse is still riddled with all the problems - debt, bad bets and assets - that led to its demise.

\$17.3 billion of Credit Suisse riskiest bonds, meant to give bondholders equity/shares in the event of a default, have been wiped out. This 'crossing of the debt rubicon,' as a Bloomberg commentator labelled it, and the potential precedent it sets, has sparked outrage from other banks and further contagion fears.

Central banks, governments and the biggest banks have desperately taken on more debt to hold off this current rupture. Even if they succeed temporarily, the crisis in the finance markets is increasing the already developing trend towards world recession in the 'real economy.' We are in a new period of increasing geopolitical and economic fragmentation, trade and currency wars, inflation, stagnation, climate crisis and corporate and sovereign debt crises.

As always, the capitalists will try to make sure it is working people globally who suffer and are made to pay for the effects of the sheer brutality of capitalism.

Further sovereign defaults, like Sri Lanka, will become the new norm. But so will the development of revolutionary opportunities as the working class reacts.

What is clear more than ever is the need to take the huge wealth, resources, assets and power that rests in the hands of the capitalist class into public ownership through nationalisation.

But not the 'nationalisation lite,' that in 2008 left all the power and control in the hands of the very bankers, spivs and speculators that sparked the crisis, while ordinary people were made to pay.

Socialist nationalisation

Socialists fight for the nationalisation of the banks and major companies and industries that dominate our lives. Democratically controlled - with majority trade union representation at all levels, drawn from workers, including from the unions in the industry and the wider working class and labour movement, with the government also represented - the economy, including the banking system, can be run to meet the needs of the majority.

To end 'business secrets,' which the bosses say should be kept hidden to maintain 'competition' and 'not to frighten the market,' there should be a complete opening of the books to elected committees of workers, trade unionists and communities. Let's see where the profits have really gone, what the financial situation really is, and only pay compensation on the basis of proven need, to protect workers' pension funds and so on.

Socialist nationalisation should be just a first step towards the unification of all the banks into one democratically controlled system, to provide the vital lever to take on the many problems and crises affecting working-class people in Britain and internationally.

On this basis, working people can begin to reorganise society on socialist lines, to provide what is needed: jobs, services, health and housing, for all. To be able to live a decent enjoyable life with the freedom to develop, learn and explore the many untapped talents and potential that exists among the working class.

Another Tory budget for the rich

Tory childcare plans – too late, unfunded and not enough

TERRI-JAY ROSSER
CHILDCARE WORKER AND PARENT

At the moment, eligible parents can claim up to 30 hours of free childcare for three to four year olds, and 15 hours for some two year olds. The Tories are changing this, introducing their plan in stages:

- Eligible parents of two year olds get 15 free hours from April 2024
- From September 2024, this is extended to many children nine months and older
- In September 2025, it'll be increased to 30 free hours

But the Tories' plan fails on funding, staff recruitment and the availability of childcare spaces.

Funding

Nursery providers state that the amount the government pays for the current funded hours does not cover costs. The Women's Budget Group says the shortfall is £1.82 billion. A majority of nursery settings make up the difference by increasing fees for things like food.

The hourly rate that the government pays to local authorities for funded places for two year olds is increasing by 30%. But for three to four year olds it's only going up by 4%, way less than the rate of inflation.

The government has promised £4 billion by 2027-28 – way after its proposals come in – to cover the plan. That's far lower than what is needed.

Lack of qualified staff

The sector is already struggling to recruit and retain staff. Low pay is putting people off. In September, the Tories will relax ratios rules. The number of two year olds one adult can be in charge of will increase from four to five.

The government claims this will give providers flexibility. But most providers say they will not implant these changes due to safeguarding and workload concerns.

Shortage of childcare spaces

When the plan is rolled out, more parents will be looking for a space for their child in a nursery or childminders. But there is a shortage of spaces now, plus long waiting lists for availability. Almost half of areas across England do not have enough spaces for children under two, and a third don't have spaces for three to four year olds.

The government is promising incentives to encourage people to work as childminders. But over the last five years, over 10,000 childminders have closed down, due to inadequate government funding – it's too low to meet growing childcare demand.

The government's plans do not solve Britain's childcare crisis. The way forward is to bring privatised childcare under local authority control. This must be fully funded, affordable, flexible nursery and childcare services, democratically run by elected committees of parents and childcare workers.

Childcare services should be made available for all from birth, including after-school and holiday clubs. And we should be paid a wage we can actually afford to live on, that rises with the rate of inflation, reflecting the social contribution made by the workforce.

FMS/CC

Other parents in the Socialist Party respond to the budget.

● 'Far too late for me'

CATHERINE
MILTON KEYNES

"Disappointed" and "underwhelmed" were the responses of mothers in the online support groups I frequent. Jeremy Hunt's childcare reforms are lacklustre and will be implemented far too late for anyone like me who already has a baby.

The 30 hours paid childcare is not available to those on Universal Credit despite the fact that many are only claiming benefits because they cannot work or can only work part-time as a result of high childcare costs.

And the 'catch-22' of being too poor to be entitled to claim free hours remains. The government is also bringing in stricter rules for stay-at-home parents claiming benefits. Rather than encouraging women back to work, they are trying to force us back without the support we need.

● 'Tories fail parents again'

HELENA BYRNE
LONDON

Again the government has failed parents with young children. Childcare costs are above what many women are paid, so it's not surprising that many don't return to work after maternity leave.

30 hours or 15 hours free childcare hours 'per week' is misleading. The hours only cover term time – 38 weeks over the course of a year.

The government has also done nothing to stem the closure of nurseries. Many have closed their doors because of rising costs. If the government was serious about getting more people working as childcare professionals, it would provide free training for all childcare qualifications, and pay childcare workers a decent wage of at least £15 an hour.

"Tax cuts for rich, tax rises for us"

"The Tories announced more taxes for ordinary people and tax giveaways for the wealthiest. What a kick in the teeth to those struggling to keep public services afloat, to hear that on top of everything, they will now have to pay more for crumbling services, while the rich are helped to dodge even more tax."

Dan Smart, social worker in adult care

Tory benefit changes – more draconian sanctions

"The Tories' benefit changes amount to more pressure on the already unwell to take up work. Plus draconian sanctions where you lose all support if you can't."

Lindsay Morgan, Socialist Party and Unite member

● Read more working-class people respond to tax cuts for the rich, benefit cuts, and the rest of the Tory budget on pages 6-7

NHS pay deal: vote no!

Tories in retreat but more can be won

Socialist Party

WHAT WE THINK

After months of refusing to talk about the current year's pay for health workers, the Tory government has been brought kicking and screaming to the negotiating table by the fantastic strike action across the NHS. Junior doctors in the BMA and HCSA unions were the latest to join the action with a 72-hour stoppage on 13-15 March.

This strike comes after nurses, ambulance workers, physiotherapists, midwives, and other NHS staff have either taken to the picket lines or at least voted to do so.

Not what is needed

But the offer on the table, which health workers, not including junior doctors at this stage, will now vote on, is not what is desperately needed. NHS staff, like all workers, are squeezed by the spiralling cost-of-living crisis, on top of seeing their wages decline in real terms by 20% since 2010.

Initially, the Tory government imposed the recommendation of the so-called independent NHS Pay Review Body (PRB) of a meagre consolidated £1,400 for 2022-23. For a number of health workers that meant a 4% pay rise – 10% less than where the more realistic RPI inflation rate has been for most of the year.

The latest pay offer of an additional one-off lump sum equates to roughly 5-6%, still well below inflation. But, as it won't be consolidated on to the pay rate, the 5% rise for 2023-24 will be calculated using the PRB award instead.

Further, the government says that 5% is sufficient for 2023-24 because they claim that inflation is expected to fall. But RPI inflation is still at 13.4%, even CPI is 10.1%, and the new pay year begins in two weeks!

NHS workers should vote to reject the offer, which is being recommended by all the health union negotiators, apart from Unite. However, this doesn't mean that there is enthusiastic acceptance.

Reject

The Unison Health Service Group Executive, meeting hours after the proposed deal was announced, only voted 20-15 to recommend the offer, with Socialist Party members among those who voted against.

Emergency workplace or union meetings should be held wherever possible to discuss the reality of the offer. We demand that all 2022-23 pay is at least the level of RPI inflation and consolidated, and that for 2023-24 the award should be 5% or RPI inflation, whichever is the greater, to ensure that wages are inflation-proofed.

The fantastic three-day strike by junior doctors, along with the responses of many NHS workers to the pay offer, shows that the mood exists to fight for what is needed. On 13 March, an estimated 8,000 junior doctors protested at short notice outside Downing Street, as the occupant Rishi Sunak was in California announcing increasing defence spending by £5 billion. Many of these striking doctors took part in the massive Budget Day strike demonstration, over 70,000 strong.

A number of the unions involved in the 15 March mass strike of over 600,000 workers, the biggest since the public sector pensions strike of November 2011, have also forced the Tories to talk pay.

There is a definite move on the part of the government to try and get a whole number of the disputes, especially in education, over the line, using the mantra of 'intensive talks'.

But, as with the NHS, the Tories are putting pay offers far below the real rate of price rises, and there is a clear risk that the NHS offer of non-consolidated lump sums could set a precedent. Very significantly, the Tories are not confirming that the pay rises will be backed by increased funding, posing further huge cuts to come.

Starmer warning

The Labour-controlled Welsh government has also set a yardstick in such below-inflation pay offers. This is a warning of the role that Starmer's Labour will play in office, and shows why it is essential that the unions are not only prepared to take action against a New Labour government, cutting workers' pay, but that they build a political alternative for their members and the wider working-class.

Last autumn, this crisis-ridden Tory government, with three prime ministers in a few months, was intent on refusing to negotiate with the public sector unions on pay. This attempt to tough out the rising tide of strikes has been accompanied by the Tories proposing new attacks on the right to strike. The UK already has the most restrictive anti-union laws in Western Europe.

This has to be taken seriously by the unions, with preparations for mass coordinated strike action on the scale of a 24-hour general strike. The tumultuous events in France, after Macron's undemocratic presidential decree to force through pension attacks, are a warning that workers will not tolerate moves here against their right to strike.

Tory weakness

But, as with the government's 'strong' stand on pay, these anti-union measures are a sign of their weakness rather than their strength. Sunak has been concerned not to give anything to one section of workers, risking opening the door to all others. However, the scale of workers' action has forced the Tories to table these pay offers.

They aren't sufficient and should be voted down, but they are a sign of how workers have pushed the Tories back. Whole layers, many of them taking action for the first time, will draw the conclusion that action gets results and they should fight on. A sign of this determination is the decision of the UCU national Branch Delegate Meeting to reject suspending action during negotiations.

> **The offers aren't sufficient and should be voted down, but they are a sign of how workers have pushed the Tories back**

Bigger coordination

The coordinated strikes could and should be on an even higher level. The TUC and the unions should call a mass Saturday demonstration, before the May local elections, on the fight for a real pay rise and against the anti-union laws. It could be massive and would inject further impetus into the struggle.

This is what the most militant union reps and activists must fight for, and shows why the upcoming national executive elections in a number of unions are so important. Socialist Party members will be standing in order for the unions to have the fighting industrial and political strategy that's needed.

The 2011 pensions strike was called by 29 public sector unions after meeting together to plan joint action. This has not happened in the same way this time, not even after 1 February. If this had taken place, the Budget Day strike could have been twice the size and more. But given the anger of workers in all sectors, that potential still exists to build mass workers' action to defeat the Tories. That fight is still on.

BUDGET DAY 15 MARCH

Mass strike and demos

On 15 March, as the Tories proposed their anti-working class budget, over 600,000 workers went on strike. This action mainly involved nine unions: teachers in the National Education Union (NEU), junior doctors in the BMA and HCSA, civil servants in the PCS and Prospect, university teaching staff in UCU, London Underground members of the RMT and Aslef, and journalists working for BBC Local in the NUJ. Localised action was also taking place, including a week-long strike at the Amazon warehouse in Coventry by GMB members. Over 70,000 marched in London, and thousands more demonstrated around the country.

The scale of workers' action in the national strike wave has forced the Tories to the negotiating table in some of the public sector battles. These offers are not inflation-proof, and Socialist Party members have argued for rejection and that more could be won. Big layers of workers will nonetheless draw the conclusion that action gets results. And new swathes of workers are still potentially joining the fray. For example, Unison members in local government are now to be balloted over pay.

PCS members in Nottingham
NUJ members in Sheffield
Junior doctors in Newcastle
PHOTOS: SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBERS

NEU members travel from Leicester to the London demo
NEU and UCU in Truro
Prospect members in Plymouth
RMT and Aslef on London Underground
PHOTOS: SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBERS

RMT members on Network Rail vote to accept offer

Members of the RMT rail union working for Network Rail have voted to accept the latest offer from rail bosses. In a consultation, 76% voted to accept the offer. The RMT national executive has announced that this ends the dispute with Network Rail.

The determined strike action since June 2022 put the bosses under pressure and has forced them to increase their offer. Other workers will undoubtedly draw the lesson that strike action works.

Nonetheless, despite the increase in the pay offer, Socialist Party members had argued for rejection. See 'Rail bosses under pressure so the RMT must fight on' at socialistparty.org.uk

We argued that as the pay deal is over two years it is still well below inflation. Most importantly, Socialist Party members pointed out that, while the RMT does not accept the 'Modernising Maintenance' programme, which means big attacks on terms and conditions of work, and will continue to negotiate over it, according to general secretary Mick Lynch acceptance of the offer means that "no further strike action can be taken".

The dispute with the Train Operating companies is still on, with strike action planned for 30 March and 1 April.

- See socialistparty.org.uk for future articles.

UCU has the employers under pressure and must fight on

BEA GARDNER
UCU MEMBER

On 15 March, a University and College Union (UCU) strike day, when thousands of members were participating in Budget Day demonstrations, UCU HQ released the much-anticipated details of the employers' latest offers in the two ongoing disputes, over USS pensions, and pay and conditions.

The announcement came in the form of an hour-long podcast with an 18-page transcript, during which the general secretary Jo Grady did the employers' job of trying to convince members this was as good a deal as we could get.

The bold, sector-wide strike action UCU has taken this academic year has pushed the employers into talks they had refused previously. The employers agree that pension benefits should be restored and that a better valuation mechanism is needed. They have recognised that casualisation is a significant issue.

However, the offers deliver no concrete commitments on any of the issues in the disputes. In the pay dispute, there are no improvements on the pay offer that members rejected by 80% earlier in the year. On the issues of workload, casualisation and equality we only have agreed terms for further talks. Notably, another higher education union, Unison, has rejected the pay offer and announced it would move to a strike ballot.

Though there are more promising developments in the pensions dispute, nothing is binding and the details rest on the outcome of the next valuation.

We can push the employers much further if we can unite over a strategy for further action which escalates into the summer term and coordinates with the other campus unions.

At the same time as the proposals were announced, UCU HQ launched a snap consultation of members and branches in the form of an "informal e-ballot", with a branch delegates meeting on 16 March.

Strike action stays on

The branch delegate meeting voted in favour of members having a vote (54%), but not to pause the strikes (70%). In the e-ballot, in which just under half of the members involved in the disputes participated, there was a majority in favour of putting the offer to a vote and, because the two questions were rolled into one, to pause the strikes (67%).

The HEC then met, and decided not to suspend the strikes or to put the offer out to vote. It was correct to continue with the strike action scheduled for 20-22 March.

But given these consultation results, in our view the HEC made a tactical mistake in deciding not to put the employers' offer to members. The HEC decision, going against the views expressed in the consultation, may be used to try to undermine the body and the dispute.

Some HEC members have reported that they wanted to put separate votes to members over the pay and conditions, and pensions disputes, but that this was blocked by the union's full-time apparatus.

The HEC and other elected lay leadership bodies must be able to exercise democratic control over the union and its disputes, including setting their own meeting agendas and communications. The explanation for HEC decision-making should have gone out with the results; members should not have to seek this out for themselves on Twitter.

The primary objective for the union must be to maintain the strength of the industrial action, and members' confidence in the union as a whole.

Achieving the 50% threshold in the current reballot is vital to enable the action to extend beyond our current mandate, which expires on 1 April. So is boosting the union's fighting fund by making a serious appeal to the wider trade union movement.

Working alongside the other unions and coordinating action is critical. Joint meetings of branch executives of the campus unions should be convened, but so too meetings of the sector executives of the unions nationally, to plan and coordinate the further action needed to take on university employers.

- This is an edited version of a longer article at socialistparty.org.uk

> **The primary objective must be to maintain the strength of the action, and members' confidence in the union**

Strike action by local government workers can win our pay claim

MARK EVANS
MEMBER OF UNISON LOCAL GOVERNMENT SERVICE GROUP EXECUTIVE (PERSONAL CAPACITY)

The Local Government Association (LGA), the local government employers' body, thought it was being clever in basically making the same £1,925 flat-rate pay offer for 2023-24 to local government workers as it did last year.

It obviously thought that Unison's body responsible for pay, the National Joint Council (NJC) committee, would put this offer to members, as it did last year without making a recommendation - an abrogation of leadership if ever there was one.

However, no person walks in the same river twice - things have changed! The cost-of-living crisis continues to impact on members and it has not gone unnoticed that many unions have been taking industrial action. Unison's NJC committee was under greater pressure this time to fight on pay due to the mood of members. Consequently it voted to reject the pay offer and move straight to a ballot for industrial action in May, without a consultative ballot first.

Our previous pay award and this year's offer represent a real-terms pay cut for all members, when we have already suffered a fall in the real value of our pay of well over 25% on average since 2010. What is on the table would be around 9% for the lowest paid, but as you go up the pay scale it is worth less and less.

The consequence of the declining value of our pay is that much of local government is in crisis, as they cannot recruit and retain workers for many jobs. A significant percentage of jobs advertised don't even get any applications!

The joint claim of Unison, GMB and Unite is for 12.7%, which equates to what inflation was at the time the claim was submitted plus 2%. The NJC committee, and the 'Time for Real Change' leadership of the local government service group executive and national executive, all now need to mobilise the whole of the union to get over the 50% turnout threshold imposed by the Tories.

While passing the voting threshold will take hard work it is achievable, and there is little doubt that members will vote for strike action.

That would mean over 350,000 Unison local government workers would join the many other unions taking strike action on pay. Unison members, like other workers taking action, see the need for coordinated strikes, and many also the need for a 24-hour general strike to step up the pressure on the Tories.

Hopefully, Unison, GMB and Unite will all vote for strike action and demand that the Tories fund our pay claim in full.

theSocialist
formerly Militant
Issue 1219
23-29 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.

CONTACT US
editors@socialistparty.org.uk
020 8988 8777 - ask for the editors

DEADLINES
Friday before publication, or Monday morning for urgent news, unless otherwise agreed with the editors.
The Socialist goes to press on a Tuesday night. We publish online on Wednesday and in print on Thursday.

SOCIALIST PARTY
The Socialist is the weekly newspaper of the Socialist Party, the England and Wales section of the Committee for a Workers' International
socialistparty.org.uk
socialistworld.net

BOOKS AND PAMPHLETS
Socialist Books: our publishing house
socialistbooks.co.uk
Left Books: Marxist classics bookshop
leftbooks.co.uk

OUR NEWSPAPER TEAM
Editor of the Socialist Josh Asker
socialistparty.org.uk Mark Best
Circulation manager Chris Newby
Editorial staff Scott Jones, Ian Pattison, Paula Mitchell, Mark Best

ISSN 1366-9621
Published by Socialist Publications, PO Box 1398, Enfield EN1 9GT
Registered as a newspaper at the Post Office
Printed by trade union labour at Reach Printing Services

Militant issue 1: October 1964
The Socialist issue 1: 7 February 1997

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

Stop the Tories from depriving our kids

TOWER HAMLETS SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBER

The opening lines of the response to the 15 March budget by one of the UK's leading children's charities, Barnardo's, reads: "The cost-of-living crisis is getting worse and more frightening every day. We know that families who once had to choose between heating or eating are now worried about providing warm beds for their children or losing their homes altogether."

They're not wrong. The Tory government has plunged us deep into a cost-of-living crisis which is having a seriously negative effect on children and increasing poverty. The figures below from a Barnardo's report - 'A crisis on our doorstep' - highlight the deepening impact of the cost-of-living crisis on children and young people in the UK:

- 1 in 4 of all children in the UK now live in poverty, up 3% from October 2022.
- As of February 2023, 1 in 4 parents are struggling to provide food
- 1 in 7 parents said they had fallen into arrears with payments or gone into their bank overdraft, an increase of 2% from October 2022

These figures are staggering. They are an unacceptable and cruel symptom of this government's cutbacks and the accumulation of wealth at the very top of society.

I want to give a small snippet of just how bad things are from a recent example. I live in Tower Hamlets and just a few weeks ago in early March 2023, when on a Socialist Party campaign stall in Bethnal Green, I witnessed a queue of families just over the road snaking all the way around the block. Local families of up to six members were lining up for hours to claim a £1 kebab on promotion. These were not young students looking for a good one-off deal, they were all grown adults with a number of kids, desperately looking for a cheap dinner.

I go home, and the next day see a similar problem in my local Bow supermarket. Kids and their parents having to form a long orderly queue, snaking around aisles on a Sunday afternoon. They're waiting for the supermarket worker to put the fourth round of yellow labels on products for people to buy cheap before the food becomes unsellable and is thrown out.

Because of the disgrace we're seeing around child poverty, we're calling for:

- Free school meals for all children, including during holidays
- Real living benefits that increase in line with the rising cost of living
- A minimum wage of at least £15 an hour
- Councils must stop cuts. For mass campaigns involving trade unions and local communities to demand from the Tories the money needed to fund local services

Nationalisation not privatisation will save our buses

ADAM GOULCHER
GLOUCESTERSHIRE SOCIALIST PARTY

Labour has promised that if it wins the next general election, it will give councils powers to franchise bus services – setting routes, fares and services, as the Greater London Authority does in the capital – and set up public, municipal, bus-operating companies.

Will this finally reverse the chaos and damage of nearly 40 years of privatisation and deregulation?

Four decades of failure

Buses outside London were privatised and deregulated in 1986. 70% of services ended up operated by the 'big 5' operators as local monopolies, with high fares and poor services.

Fares have doubled in real terms since 1987. And bus trips halved from four billion to two billion.

Outside London, where services are not profitable, they are subsidised by councils. 40% of operators' income is public subsidy. But council-funded spending on these services has fallen by 45% in real terms since 2008, meaning many people have lost access to health services, education, work and shops.

Bus reform

Several 'Transport Acts' have tried to address the failures of deregulation – fewer services, high fares, poor integration, excess profits etc. But these have always followed the 'free market' model, with the emphasis on 'partnerships' between councils and private operators.

Without democratic public ownership and control, virtually nothing has changed. Lobbying by the privatised bus operators, major funders to the Tory Party, helps ensure progress does not take place.

A 'London model' could be introduced by Labour councils under existing powers. But they haven't.

Greater Manchester's 'London-style system' is yet to be delivered by Labour mayor Andy Burnham. Work began on this arrangement in 2008!

Labour's limited plans

But Labour's franchising plans leave operations in the hands of the major bus companies. They take profit from the sector, whilst exploiting bus workers. To provide improvements, additional public funding is required.

Council powers to own and operate municipal bus companies are welcome. However, many questions are unanswered by Labour.

How will councils acquire the fleets and depots required? Will Labour offer compulsory purchase powers and the funds to use them? What compensation will be paid to the private operators? Will funding be provided to expand routes and frequencies, and reduce bus fares?

Without funding, the proposed measures will change little. Labour has refused to commit to the spending levels required to transform public transport services.

Socialist alternative for transport

The Socialist Party calls for a different approach. We demand a fully funded, free, integrated, green, publically owned and operated public transport system, run democratically. Transport companies should be nationalised, with compensation provided only where there is proven need – not to the fat cats. This would provide the backbone for an efficient needs-based socialist economy.

Bus workers protest PHOTO: SOCIALIST PARTY

Another Tory budget for the rich

Tax cuts for rich, tax rises for us
Tory policies are why we're striking

Part of the 70,000+ London strike demo on Budget Day LEN SHAIL

DAN SMART
SOCIAL WORKER IN ADULT CARE AND UNISON SECRETARY IN SOUTH GLOUCESTERSHIRE (PERSONAL CAPACITY)

As 70,000 striking workers marched in London on 15 March (see page 4), Tory chancellor Jeremy Hunt was announcing more taxes for ordinary people and tax giveaways for the wealthiest.

What a kick in the teeth to those struggling to keep public services afloat to hear that, on top of everything, they will now have to pay more for crumbling services, while the rich are helped to dodge even more tax.

Under the Tories' plans, the tax-free allowance on pensions will be raised from £40,000 to £60,000, and the £1 million lifetime tax-free allowance will be abolished entirely.

The Tories are attempting to dress this up as encouraging older workers back into the labour market. But Hunt can't hide that this is really a transfer of wealth to those at the top, worth billions.

For the rest of us, income-tax thresholds and tax-free allowances have been frozen. This means that 1.7 million people, who have been hardest hit by the cost-of-living crisis, will now start having to pay. Those on the lowest incomes will soon be paying £800 per year more.

I work for a local council as a social worker. We have had the worst pay growth of any section of workers. A survey by our local Unison branch showed that two thirds of our members frequently or occasionally have difficulty with living costs.

This budget served to aggravate the perfect storm of rapidly eroding pay, staff shortages, and the retention crisis. Vital services will continue to be cut – not just to the bone, but into the bone! This budget increases taxes for the majority, and still means a 10% cut in government spending.

This is why Unison in South Gloucestershire has just balloted social workers and occupational therapists for strike action, with an emphatic 94% voting 'yes'. We also smashed the anti-union turnout thresholds. Our strike committee just met to plan several strike days in April.

The spark for this action is being underpaid compared to neighbouring councils. We're paid £3,000 less than local social workers for children, although we have the same qualifications and work in the same offices!

Social care workers, like many low-paid workers, are ready to join the fightback. We won't be made to pay for tax cuts for the rich, while our own taxes and bills soar, and pay and quality of services plummets. It's time the super-rich were made to pay instead.

Tory benefit changes – more draconian sanctions

LINDSEY MORGAN
SOCIALIST PARTY AND UNITE MEMBER

One million disabled people could lose £350 a month each, under Tory plans that amount to more pressure on the already unwell to take up work. The Work Capability Assessment is set to be scrapped.

This is the barbaric test which has caused undue hardship and stress to many disabled people. They were forced to prove their disability to be granted Employment Support Allowance (ESA). Personal Independence Payment (PIP) remains unchanged.

The Tories' new 'voluntary' Universal Support will mean up to £4,000 a year for just 50,000 disabled people – nowhere near enough. Plus there are more draconian sanctions where you lose all support if you can't work.

A claimant I know asked their work coach what they had to do on the new scheme. They were told just sign up, and they'll get in touch.

When they then said they needed to know, their work coach admitted they didn't have the details. But this claimant, who had caring responsibilities, was told that if they didn't sign up, it would be counted as 'refusal to do work-related activity'.

Although the claimant offered to do other work-related activity, they were advised they would need to appeal. If the course is 'voluntary', why aren't work coaches being advised to give claimants a choice?

Tory chancellor Jeremy Hunt said: "Conservatives believe work is a virtue". With all their resistance to pay increases, and weak help with the cost of living, clearly they don't think work is a virtue, or that people deserve to live a good life.

Capitalist employers put profit first, and are resistant to making adjustments in the workplace for disabled people. And the capitalist system, which exacerbates disability and misery, has made thousands of potential workers too ill to work.

The NHS is in dire straits from cuts and privatisation, with huge waiting lists. People aren't able to do the jobs they want to do, and get the support they deserve to have.

Hunt's budget is socialism for the rich and barbarism for the poor. The benefits system needs a complete overhaul, with living benefits that rise with the cost of living, and genuine, practical help to support people into work who can work, and stop punishing those who can't.

- *Read more working-class people respond to inadequate Tory childcare plans, and the rest of the budget on page 3*

Disabled people fighting austerity PAUL MATTSSON

FOSSIL FUEL 'STRANDED ASSETS' HOW CAPITALISM IS FACING UP TO CLIMATE CHANGE

JIM HENSMAN
COVENTRY SOCIALIST PARTY

"A banking crisis worse than 2008" could face the world economy, caused by measures to deal with climate change, a Guardian newspaper headline warned in January 2023. The article outlined economic losses worldwide, often referred to as 'stranded assets', as high as $6.8 trillion (about £5.6 trillion). To get a feel for the size of this, the GDP of the UK in a year is currently about £3.2 trillion. About 13.6 million jobs internationally were estimated to be at risk in one case, 18.7 million in another. Given the critical necessity to deal with global warming, is this a real threat and if it is, how can it be dealt with?

The report highlighted a key issue. To meet even the limited targets set by the Paris Agreement in 2015, which set an upper limit of a 2.0°C rise in global temperatures and hope to achieve one of 1.5°C, greenhouse gas emissions have to peak by 2025 and fall by over 40% by 2030. By 2050, nearly 60% of oil and natural gas and 90% of coal would have to remain unextracted.

Ownership

Authors of the report 'One for One' implied that the necessary move towards net zero would mean "the price of fossil fuel assets could plummet". The world's banks hold fossil fuel assets worth about $2 trillion, according to the report's estimates. Would massive bank losses require similar bailouts to those made in 2008? In the UK, this amounted to £457 billion - which was ultimately paid for by us of course. To prevent this from happening again, one of the policies it suggested was that banks and other financial institutions should be required to hold one pound in reserve for every pound they invest in fossil fuel projects.

It's not just banks, fossil fuel assets are owned by any number of financial institutions, and even nations too. A study into where ownership ultimately lay, and who would face potential losses, found unequal distribution. In the US, for example, it was estimated that the wealthiest 10% of households would sustain about 82% of losses. But such is the scale of their wealth overall, it was found they would face insignificant effects. Poorer oil-rich nations such as Nigeria and Kazakhstan would be affected - mitigated by the fact that much of these nations' wealth is owned externally by capitalists based in richer capitalist nations.

In the UK, the risk to pension funds and other investments was noted. However, this must be put into perspective. When BP and Shell argued that tougher taxes on their profits would affect ordinary people's pension funds, the Common Wealth think-tank responded to show that less than 0.2% of their shares were held by UK pension funds!

Banks and other institutions have started to 'stress test', trying to simulate different possible climate change policies and outcomes. Even taking up the banks and financial institutions within their own economic framework, capitalism, one important point is that not dealing with climate change will lead to far greater losses and stranded assets!

As one major insurance firm put it in the title of a report: "No action not an option". This report went on to state that, "The world stands to lose close to 10% of total economic value by mid-century if climate change stays on the currently anticipated trajectory". Projections in the longer term, if climate change is ignored, are rather more alarming. As one bank put it, the situation would be such that "all financial and real assets would likely be worthless". Another analysis wittily observed that global warming would mean that many 'assets' would be physically 'stranded', with major cities situated by the sea flooded.

Fundamentally, globally energy needs can be met by renewables. "The land required for solar panels alone to provide all global energy is... less than the current land footprint of fossil fuel infrastructure", according to the climate think tank Carbon Tracker.

According to the International Energy Agency, in its last review in November 2022, record-high energy prices mean "Global net income from oil and gas production is anticipated to reach nearly $4 trillion in 2022, which is double the level in 2021. If the global oil and gas industry were to invest this additional income in low-emissions fuels, such as hydrogen and biofuels, it would fund all of the investment needed in these fuels for the remainder of this decade" to achieve net zero emissions by 2050.

Profits

In fact the soaring profits of the fossil fuel companies gives them even less incentive to invest in renewable energy. As Tyler Hansen at the Technical University of Denmark concluded in a detailed analysis of energy profits: "The fossil fuel industry, in general, has enjoyed substantially greater profit margins than the renewable energy industry over the past decade". To add insult to injury in the case of the UK's limited 'windfall tax', companies get a 90% reimbursement if they make investments in the UK, not in renewable energy, but in fossil fuel production!

But shouldn't the fossil fuel companies at least fear the future threat to their profits from stranded assets and act accordingly?

A few years ago, J.P. Morgan explored the 'stated policies scenario', based on the policies governments said they would implement. Global temperatures could still rise by 3°C, with catastrophic implications - and even these policies aren't being adhered too! The analysis found that, although there were stranded assets for coal, there were none for oil or natural gas - and in fact extraction could be expanded! At the same time as Fatih Birol, the executive director of the IEA, was saying in 2021 that: "If governments are serious about the climate crisis, there can be no new investments in oil, gas and coal, from now", fossil fuel companies were committing to $58 billion worth of new investment!

Background colours: Warming stripes graphic depicting annual mean global temperatures (1850-2018, from World Meteorological Organisation data) CREDIT: ED HAWKINS/CC & OTHER PHOTOS: UWE ARANAS/CC & PAUL MATTSSON

Oil and gas companies start with what is 'acceptable' for their profits, and then formulate their climate policies accordingly, whatever the consequences to humanity - with governments accepting or even endorsing this.

A network of international legislation exists to obstruct countries carrying out measures to deal with climate change that threaten profits. For instance, under the Energy Charter Treaty (ECT), which over 50 countries are signed up to, five energy groups are suing four European governments for nearly €4 billion. Even if countries withdraw from the treaty, they are legally bound to its conditions for 20 years under a so-called 'sunset clause'.

In January 2023, the prestigious academic journal 'Science' published an article analysing documents that the oil company, Exxon (now ExxonMobil) had produced in the past on climate change, and concluded that: "Since the late 1970s and early 1980s, ExxonMobil predicted global warming correctly and skilfully". The article also stated that other documents had shown that the "US oil and gas industry's largest trade association had likewise known since at least the 1950s, as had the coal industry since at least the 1960s". The twist was that these were internal documents kept secret, that were only unearthed by investigative journalists. Exxon, for example, just from documented sources, has spent around $40 million financing scores of climate denial organisations and disinformation campaigns.

Even where there is no direct individual connection with fossil fuel interests, capitalism as a whole and the political parties which accept it can be relied on to support the quest for profit and all that it entails. The German firm Volkswagen (VW), once the highest-valued company in the world, was slow to get into electric or hybrid cars, compared to rivals like Toyota. When it came up against emissions regulations, it decided that the cheapest and most profitable way to meet these was to cheat. It fitted a mechanism to 11 million cars to fool testing equipment. Emissions were up to 40 times the legal limit. Studies estimated that about 1,200 premature deaths could be attributed to VW's actions. But although the company was fined heavily and a VW executive arrested and subsequently jailed for seven years, the German government and establishment rallied round to protect VW, and nobody was found legally culpable in Germany.

Of course, the fossil fuel industry and other industries connected to it, will talk the talk of environmentalism, while undermining measures to combat climate change in practice. Similarly, because of public concern about global warming, political leaders want to display their green credentials and make grandiose proclamations, as we saw with Boris Johnson at the COP26 summit in 2021. This hypocrisy was also demonstrated by Canadian prime minister Justin Trudeau, who has boasted about his commitment to the 'green agenda'. However, speaking to a conference in Texas which included energy company executives, he stated: "No country would find 173 billion barrels of oil in the ground and just leave them there" - referring to Canadian fossil fuel reserves.

Any realistic strategy to combat climate change must therefore be willing to challenge the agenda of the fossil fuel companies and political forces and parties that openly or tacitly accept it. This is what is missing in proposals such as the one made by the 'One for One' campaign.

Their suggestion, that financial institutions set aside $1 for every $1 invested in fossil fuels, and others like it, are interesting theoretical possibilities, but are ultimately utopian. What motivation is there for these capitalists to take such measures?

Capitalism is based on private ownership of production, for profit rather than for need. Even though, in the relatively near future, it is apparent that climate change risks the survival of humanity, short-term profit motivation means that the necessary and feasible measures to deal with climate change are not carried out.

Taking the energy industry out of private hands, by nationalising it under democratic working-class control and management, would make it possible to plan investment and a transition to renewable energy production. With a democratic say in the measures taken, workers in the existing industries could have confidence in a future with a well-paid secure job for them and future generations.

Organised on the basis of competing nation states, themselves acting in the dominant interests of their own capitalist classes, capitalism undermines the international collaboration needed to tackle climate change.

There are huge inequalities between nations' contributions to fossil fuel emissions, their consumption of energy, their capacity to take measures to deal with climate change, and the vulnerability to the effects of climate change.

China has the most greenhouse gas emissions, followed by the US, India, Russia and Japan. When looked at per capita, Canada takes top spot. Although these leading fossil fuel users are not immune to the effects of climate change, the league table of countries which are most affected is quite different, and includes countries that could disappear entirely under projected sea level rises, such as Kiribati or the Maldives, and countries like Pakistan where one third of the country was under water during floods in 2022. The contradiction this leads to is that, as one newspaper put it: "Nations most responsible for the problem have the least incentive to solve it".

Increasing conflict worldwide, itself driven by rival capitalist nations seeking to extend their influence and maintain the best-possible conditions for their own capitalist classes to make profits, makes the situation even worse. One report described how "as Europe scrambles to replace the Russian natural gas that funds Moscow's war effort, fossil fuel companies are using this moment to push for new gas projects all over the world".

Dealing with climate change needs global collaboration impossible under capitalism. Collaboration between nations can only be on the basis of the shared interests of the international working class. Democratic workers' states, with nationalised banking systems and publicly owned, democratically run planned economies, would be able to write off so-called 'stranded assets', without fear of financial meltdown - the other assets of the big capitalists incorporated into the planned economy and the wealth used to meet the needs of people and planet.

Numerous reports have emphasised the economic and social breakdown that the worsening effects of climate change are creating relating to food, water, health and living conditions generally. These crises will compel the working-class and poor masses into struggle, increasingly drawing the conclusions about the type of social and economic change needed - socialist change.

Research has shown that every degree that the earth warms means that a further billion people are unable to live where they currently are, threatening them with destitution and the need for mass migrations. The political implications of this were highlighted by a study led by Stanford University in the US, which estimated that "climate has influenced between 3% and 20% of armed conflict risk over the last century and that the influence will likely increase dramatically". Rosa Luxemburg's phrase, "Socialism or Barbarism", has never been more relevant and it is a race against time to build the movement which can create a socialist world.

Further reading

- *Global Warming: Socialism and the climate crisis - Socialism Today issue 262*
- *How to save the planet - Socialism Today issue 253*
- *Search online at socialismtoday.org*

Fighting fund target reached! Can you help fund the socialist fight?

CHRIS NEWBY
SOCIALIST PARTY FIGHTING FUND ORGANISER

Congratulations to all Socialist Party members and supporters for making sure that we have already smashed through our fighting fund target with just over a week to go. We urge all members to continue their fundraising efforts with campaign stalls and other activities, and to pay in all money urgently, including outstanding pledges from the marvellous fighting fund appeal at the recent Socialist Party congress, before 31 March.

Since the strike wave started, Socialist Party members have visited of picket lines and demonstrations offering support and solidarity with all those workers fighting back. But we also bring a clear strategy on how these struggles could be strengthened, through uniting the strikes, the building of national strike funds and the struggle for a new mass workers' party. We do this through our discussion on the picket lines, the Socialist newspaper, hundreds of thousands of leaflets and thousands of posters and placards. This material is welcomed on the picket lines and the debates that workers are having about how they can win their disputes are regularly featured in the pages of the Socialist.

The production of this material costs us thousands of pounds, but it is vital that we continue to produce and distribute it to as many people as possible. The Socialist Party's fighting fund campaign each quarter is a way of making sure we have the resources to continue do so. We urge every member and supporter to think what you can do to help us raise money to meet the target this quarter and the next.

Help fund the fightback
DONATE
socialistparty.org.uk/donate

SOCIALIST PARTY FIGHTING FUND

Q1: JANUARY-MARCH 2023 — DEADLINE: 31 MARCH 2023

AREA	£ RECEIVED	£ TARGET	%
Northern	1,592	750	212%
South West	3,309	1,800	184%
Eastern	1,676	1,200	140%
Wales	3,035	2,300	132%
London	5,754	4,600	125%
West Midlands	3,086	2,600	119%
Southern & SE	2,745	2,350	117%
North West	1,140	1,150	99%
Yorkshire	2,433	2,550	95%
East Midlands	1,627	1,850	88%
Other	2,014	3,850	52%
TOTAL	28,410	25,000	114%

Show solidarity with a May Day greeting
20% discount deadline approaching

PHOTO: LIVERPOOL SOCIALIST PARTY

CLIVE WALDER
SOCIALIST PARTY AND UNITE MEMBER

May Day is a day that workers celebrate the past gains of the labour movement and show solidarity with current struggles. With the ongoing strike wave, solidarity among the working class is needed more than ever.

The Tories and their 'kept' media have misrepresented the strikes and tried and failed to turn the public against them. But the overwhelming experience of most workers is of support for their strike action. Most people see that workers have been shafted by the government and are pleased to see someone is fighting back.

But public support doesn't win disputes on its own. That requires an effective industrial action strategy. Socialist Party members have been on picket lines at all times of the day and in all weathers with the Socialist. We have been discussing why we need co-ordinated action by all workers with a live ballot, building towards a 24-hour general strike and making the case for for a new workers' party.

To enable our ideas to be heard by a wider audience of workers we need the resources to do so. That's why the Socialist is asking all union branches, anti-cuts, student and community groups to place a greeting in the May Day edition of The Socialist. Get a 20% discount if your greeting is sent before 31 March. Please see www.socialistparty.org.uk/mayday for details and rates.

Socialist Students conference
PHOTO: ADAM POWELL-DAVIES

Angry and optimistic – Socialist Students conference meets to plan fight against cost-of-living crisis

OSCAR PARRY
SOUTH EAST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

Socialist students from across the country gathered in Birmingham on 18 March. The conference opened with a session on organising and fighting back against the cost-of-living crisis, introduced and replied to by Theo Sharieff and Adam Powell-Davies. The government's measly 2.8% increase of maintenance loans for next year is far below the rate of inflation. 11% of students are using food banks and 28% are skipping meals, while 40% are considering stopping their studies due to financial difficulties.

Student loans now make up 10% of government debt. The options available to the Tories' attempts to reduce this - limiting student numbers, lowering repayment thresholds for loans, and targeting arts and humanities courses for cuts - will penalise students and their ability to learn.

How can we convert student anger at these attacks into meaningful action? What is needed are student organisations that can build a mass movement for the resources students need and for free education.

Socialist Students discusses socialist ideas and links what we fight for and how we can get organised today. The conference held discussions on Marxist economics, fighting sexism on campus, campaigning for a 24-hour general strike, and fighting for a new mass workers' party.

Motions from Socialist Students groups were discussed and voted on including: fighting the student mental health crisis, ending violence against women on campus, solidarity with the student struggle in Sri Lanka, building a new mass workers party, the student housing crisis, and fighting for trans rights. A steering committee was also elected for the upcoming year.

Rally for socialism

The day ended with a rally titled: "The struggle for socialism across the globe", which heard from socialist organisers fighting here and around the world.

Michael Lenin gave a report from the Democratic Socialist Movement (DSM) in Nigeria, where the casualisation of work and privatisation of public education has led to mass protests and disaffection of youth with the capitalist regime.

Prasad Welikumbura presented the work of the United Socialist Party (USP) in Sri Lanka, where there are continued protests following the mass movement which occupied the presidential palace last June. Socialist Students groups hosted meetings with Prasad and have passed motions showing solidarity with the struggle in Sri Lanka and against the repression of student organisers including Wasantha, convenor of the Inter-University Student Federation.

The rally also heard from Lluis Bertolin, a striking university worker who gave an update from the UCU dispute, and Oisin Duncan from the Socialist Party who spoke on the need for socialist change here and across the world.

The mood was high across the weekend, with many students making contributions to the discussions. Georgia from UAL ended the day with the statement: "Students haven't given up, they just don't yet know who to turn to."

That's why Socialist Students groups agreed at the conference to launch campaigns against the cost-of-living crisis, linking up with trade unionists and other campaigners to demand emergency cost-of-living grants, the resources needed to provide a high-quality education and the abolition of tuition fees.

Meeting in Highfields
PHOTO: LEICESTER SP

Anger in Leicester at Labour council's energy price increase

STEVE SCORE
EAST MIDLANDS SOCIALIST PARTY REGIONAL SECRETARY

50 people crowded into a hall in the Highfields area of Leicester, at a Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) meeting to discuss a working-class electoral challenge in the city council elections. Organised at short notice with limited publicity, the turnout reflected the anger against the Labour-controlled city council, especially over the huge hike in district heating charges on a number of city estates.

The council had originally planned to quadruple the charge to £2,760 a year for a one-bedroom flat for example, more for more bedrooms. This figure would not include electricity, cooking etc. and many residents are on very low incomes. The Highfields area is the centre of the garment industry, which became national news during the pandemic because of thousands being paid wages well below the minimum wage, with no health and safety provision - leading to longer Covid lockdowns in Leicester.

A campaign by residents, activists from 'Enough is Enough Leicester', and local councillor Gary O'Donnell, which included big estate meetings and a lobby of the city council meeting, forced concessions from the council. But the charge now being implemented will still more than double from April.

Everyone at the meeting agreed that this attack was connected to the huge cuts to services made over years by the city council, and that the time had come for the community to stand against those councillors who had gone along with it. Socialist Party members and TUSC supporters at the meeting explained we needed to take the first steps to create a new party of the working class, as more people become aware that the Labour Party doesn't play that role.

Cllr O'Donnell, who represents another affected area, spoke at the meeting. He voted against the rise and the City Mayor's cuts budget when they were put to the council. He has resigned from Labour and will stand in his area as an independent, but agrees with us that there needs to be a city-wide alliance of candidates opposed to cuts.

Labour turmoil

The Labour Party is in turmoil because selection of council candidates was removed from local party control and handed to a Labour National Executive-appointed panel. A tranche of sitting councillors are being removed only days before nominations open for this year's local elections, including any who have shown dissent.

Some Labour councillors supported a motion to abolish the role of City Mayor, which was described by one as "making councillors almost redundant." They were immediately suspended from the Labour group and therefore automatically excluded as candidates in these coming elections, although the group was given no opportunity to discuss its position.

The apparent excuse for national intervention was the disastrous recent ward by-election where Labour lost a huge majority to the Tories after selecting a candidate who supports Indian Prime Minister Modi and the far-right BJP. Several Labour councillors in Leicester East support this position and are backed by the ex-Labour MP Keith Vaz. The by-election took place while there had been violence and conflict on the streets between a minority of Hindu and Muslim youth initiated by far-right Hindu fundamentalists of the semi-fascist RSS.

> **"The energy charge will still more than double from April this year"**

However, the councillors who have been removed across the city have nothing to do with that. It has been used as an excuse by the Starmer wing of the party to carry out a purge of any dissenters. Even before this crisis, Leicester West Labour Party, for example, had already lost 45% of its membership since Starmer was elected, many of whom had actually voted for him in the first place!

TUSC will be standing candidates in these elections arguing that all cuts to services, penalising rises in charges and rents must be opposed. The city council could use the more than £200 million it has in available reserves to stop and reverse cuts, while building a mass campaign to force more from the government. We will seek to build an alliance with any councillors or candidates who sign up to that programme. Never has it been clearer that a new mass workers' party is needed.

Come to a Socialist Party meeting near you

The Socialist Party has regular meetings in towns and cities across the country.

If you would like to participate:
- **Go to socialistparty.org.uk**
- **Or text 07761 818206 with your name and postcode.**

Socialist Party placards at anti-racism demo in London 18 March. (top) PHOTO: JANE NELLIST
Photo of a Hull Trades Council anti-fascist demo which succeeded in pushing the far-right activists into the far corner of the square where they were protected by the police. (bottom) PHOTO: YORKSHIRE SP

Youth Fight for Jobs protests against Tory budget in York

ABIGAIL WATSON
YORK ST. JOHN SOCIALIST STUDENTS

Youth Fight for Jobs and York Socialist Party held a demonstration protesting against austerity on 15 March at Exhibition Square in York. Austerity was one of many issues discussed. Anyone present was encouraged to speak about why they were supporting the demonstration and the numerous strikes taking place around York that same morning.

Speakers at the demonstration came from various organisations including the University and College Union, civil servants' union PCS, York trades council, and students from York St. John University. Speakers criticised the austerity policies since 2010, lack of development of sustainable energy, mass unemployment, and the record profits of energy companies.

Speakers spoke in support of the various unions participating in industrial action in the strike wave, and called for the nationalisation of utilities, economic equality through democratic workers' control of industry, and social equality fighting against sexism, racism and LGBTQ+phobia.

There was a strong feeling of solidarity and unity in the air at the demonstration, as people came together to fight for a better future.

JOIN THE SOCIALISTS
socialistparty.org.uk/join

Coventry 'City of Culture' goes bust!

JANE NELLIST
COVENTRY SOCIALIST PARTY

When Coventry was awarded the City of Culture in December 2017, there were huge hopes that this would be a fantastic opportunity to showcase the rich cultural history and life of the city and surrounding area, as well as giving a much-needed investment boost to local arts companies and artists.

While there were some amazing events in Coventry over the year, it is now overshadowed by huge controversy, and there is growing anger and frustration due to the recent announcement that the Coventry City of Culture Trust has gone into administration. It owes millions of pounds to arts companies and the city council, and is now unable to deliver the three-year legacy plans which would have seen continuing investment in our arts and cultural spaces that many were relying on for new productions and work in our city. Jobs have been lost and livelihoods threatened.

Anger

Local people are angry and seeking answers as to why and how it all went wrong - and where the money has gone. People are demanding that those responsible be held to account. According to the accounts, only £5,000 was spent on community funding, a paltry amount considering the millions of pounds the Trust had to spend, but hundreds of thousands were spent on travel and advisers.

Anger has turned on the city council and councillors who were part of the Trust. A £1 million loan of council money was made to the Trust only in September, when it was clear from the accounts that there were serious issues. With council services stretched and cut, it's outrageous that this money was wasted! The scrutiny board which took place to discuss the council's decisions and role was met with anger from local people when it was closed down abruptly.

It was always going to be difficult, given the impact of Covid and lockdowns in 2021, delaying the start. But that's not the real reason. There were fundamental difficulties right from the start, such as brochures outlining events being sent out to homes late, meaning that many of the events advertised had already happened. Many events were poorly attended because people didn't know about them. Many established artists and groups in the city were ignored and more deprived areas of the city were completely left out.

Bradford, which was recently awarded the City of Culture status for 2025, must learn from the huge mistakes made in Coventry and ensure that local cultural organisations are at the heart of the planning. There must be proper democracy, transparency and scrutiny of the spending so it goes to the people that matter.

With years of austerity and massive cuts in the culture sectors, libraries and schools and adult education, many of our towns and cities are losing their cultural heart. We need a huge investment of funding across the country to enable that to be revived and thrive. Schools and colleges need to have investment in art, music and drama so that all young people can participate and fully discover their talents.

PCS leadership elections

Marion Lloyd for PCS President

DAVID SEMPLE
PCS BRANCH SECRETARY WIGAN, PERSONAL CAPACITY

The deadline for nominations in this year's PCS elections closed on 9 March. Two separate slates will contest the elections for the National Executive Committee (NEC) when voting starts on 20 April.

Socialist Party member Marion Lloyd heads the Broad Left Network/ Independent Left list of candidates, with 55 branch nominations for president.

Current president, Fran Heathcote, has 75 nominations and is supported by the Left Unity/PCS Democrats grouping which currently leads the NEC.

The current union leadership's limited strike strategy, focusing principally on targeted action and with only two belated days of national action so far (1 Feb and 15 March – months after the ballot was won on 7 November), has been criticised by the Broad Left Network (BLN).

From the outset the BLN has pressed for a strategy to win, fought for by the BLN supporter on the NEC, based on a programme of national strikes, backed up by selective action and action short of strikes, such as overtime bans - which the leadership didn't ballot members about and so doesn't currently have a mandate for.

The leadership's approach has failed to move the employer, a fact confirmed by PCS General Secretary Mark Serwotka when he told the Guardian: "In sharp contrast with other parts of the public sector, ministers have failed to hold any meaningful talks with us..." (17/3/23)

Beginning on 20 March, the union will reballot to continue the dispute beyond 6 May, when the current six-month strike mandate runs out. We will be working tirelessly to clear the anti-democratic 50% turnout threshold and for a massive 'yes' vote.

A big part of convincing members to vote 'yes' will be spelling out a bold strategy to win. More of the same will not be enough.

The pay and jobs dispute is bound to be a major issue in the election, but as Marion Lloyd has made clear, it's not the sole reason why a change of leadership is required. If elected president, she says she "will not lose sight of other issues: office closures, equality, privatisation, workloads, stress, bullying, harassment and working conditions."

The 55 nominations for Marion are from all parts of the union. Members will have a choice between the existing leadership that has not risen to the challenge of the national fight needed against this government, and a fresh start with a bold socialist leadership committed to a fighting programme and rebuilding a democratic union.

- *For more information about the Broad Left Network go to bln.org.uk*
- *The list of BLN/IL candidates can be found here: Unified left to fight PCS national elections at socialistparty.org.uk*

Marion (centre) at a PCS picket line in Sheffield on 15 March PHOTO: SHEFFIELD SP

West Midlands National Express workers start all-out action

Blocking buses from leaving Birmingham Central bus garage PHOTO: NICK HART

NICK HART
BIRMINGHAM SOCIALIST PARTY

There was an incredible display of workers' power on Monday 20 March, as 3,100 bus drivers at National Express West Midlands began all-out strike action for a living pay increase, after years of declining real wages.

The strike follows management attempting to tie workers down to a three-year deal on pay, while employing underhand tactics, including attaching leaflets to duty cards recommending acceptance of the deal, in the snap ballot organised by Unite the Union last week.

The rock-solid support for the strike was shown in the mass pickets from 3am at garages around Birmingham, the Black Country and Coventry. Socialist Party members report that, despite the company's attempts to run a skeleton service, at most locations the number of buses that went out could be counted on one hand.

In a desperate move, managers at Birmingham Central called the police to try and disperse the 40-strong picket. Drivers were quick to point out the irony of being unable to get back-up to deal with violent and antisocial passengers while at work, but having three riot vans called to stop union members enforcing the strike! Meanwhile, at Perry Barr, pickets were stood stationary in front of the gate as management tried to guide a bus slowly out of the garage. The bus nudged a picket, so was stopped and reversed back into the garage.

One driver at Birmingham Central summed up the mood as being "undervalued, underpaid, overworked and underappreciated". To emphasise the point, one of the drivers showed us his four licences, each for a different vehicle class, and described it as insulting that some describe his job as being low-skilled.

Talk also turned to the conditions of the job. One worker at Yardley Wood said: "It's not even about the money, it's the amount of time we're in the saddle. You're lucky if you get a break for a coffee." Their workmate added that there are drivers going through divorces thanks to the pressure of the job and the amount of time they spend in work.

We heard how drivers don't get access to proper toilet facilities while away from the depot. In other countries, such as Denmark, bus companies have to provide these by law. This is despite the fact that unpaid breaks of up to four hours during the day are common, with eleven hours between the start and end of duty.

A driver at Coventry explained: "I've been working here for 15 years, and it feels like all the time management trust us to do our jobs less and less". Other workers there were angry at National Express making millions in profits while claiming to be unable to afford to pay drivers a living wage.

Drivers at Acocks Green enthusiastically received the second edition of the Socialist Party's strike bulletin, and agreed with the demand for a 24-hour general strike to win a living pay rise for all workers.

At the time of writing, Unite members at National Express West Midlands are set to stay on strike continuously until a satisfactory deal is reached. In just one day of action, bus drivers have succeeded in emptying out a number of town and city centres around the region, showing their vital role in keeping the local services and businesses running.

Time for these essential workers to be paid a real living wage, as a step towards fully funded, free-to-use, and massively expanded public transport for all.

RMT protest one year on from mass sackings at P&O

NICK CHAFFEY
SOUTHERN AND SOUTH EAST SOCIALIST PARTY

One year since 800 P&O seafarers were sacked via a 15-minute video call, RMT members organised protests in London, Dover and Hull to mark the ongoing fight to defend jobs, pay and working conditions at sea on 17 March.

A year on, the empty words of Tory condemnation from government ministers and Dover MP Natalie Elphicke, who joined initial protests in Dover, have come to nothing. Despite admitting breaking the law, P&O chiefs walk free, richer than ever as profits of £1.5 billion were announced, up 35%, with dividends of over £3 billion paid to a handful of shareholders.

Meanwhile, Elphicke and the Tory government are trying to implement new anti-trade union action to allow agency workers to break strikes and impose minimum service levels during strikes. A year ago, the P&O bosses felt confident to get away with the sackings, but now a strike wave is fighting both the government and the bosses.

The P&O sackings anniversary was shared with the 36th commemoration of the Herald of Free Enterprise disaster where 193 passengers and crew died as the ship left Zeebrugge bound for Dover. Conditions for seafarers and safety for passengers come second to profit-hungry private shipping companies competing for business.

Scandalous treatment of seafarers is not limited to British waters. During the Covid pandemic, over 300,000 seafarers were stranded aboard vessels after their contracts had expired. Currently 331 seafarers are trapped on 62 ships in Ukrainian ports. Many are abandoned on board ships where owners walk away from costly repairs or unprofitable voyages. Without wages or visas, many are left aboard vessels with no food or heating. Cases are rising sharply affecting 118 ships involving 1,841 seafarers last year.

P&O parent company DP World is hugely profitable yet receives government Freeport tax breaks. Only by nationalising the ferry companies, docks and global shipping giants can passengers and workers ensure safe and affordable travel delivered by well-paid, well-trained crews, alongside global shipping planned to meet the needs of all and the environment.

Marching against the attack in 2022 PHOTO: ISAI

Clydach teachers walkout over bullying


PHOTO: ALEC THRAVES

Members of the NASUWT education union at Clydach primary school near Swansea have embarked on six days of strike action in protest against a long-term bullying culture and mismanagement at the school.

A lively picket line was supported by Swansea Socialist Party members and Swansea Trades Council, of which the local NASUWT branch is an affiliate.

Pickets had a big boost when NASUWT president Angela Butler arrived from mid-Wales to show her support and solidarity for this local dispute.

Teachers just want an end to their continuous harassment and to be treated with respect and dignity.

ALEC THRAVES, SWANSEA SOCIALIST PARTY

Save Orchard Day Nursery!

ROGER BANNISTER
MERSEYSIDE SOCIALIST PARTY

In a shock move, the director of Orchard Day Nursery in Huyton, Knowsley on Merseyside announced that the nursery was closed with immediate effect, initially with a sign posted on the gates on 18 March - a move that left parents in the lurch and angry, and putting jobs at risk.

For several months now, Knowsley Unison has been seeking to represent workers at the nursery in respect of issues ranging from work-related stress to pay, submitting a claim that sought to have workers paid £15 an hour. During negotiations, the claim was reduced to the Real Living Wage of £10.90 an hour for the lowest-paid staff.

This anti-union employer initially refused to deal with Unison, but was forced to recognise the union when the vast majority of workers joined the union, which under law gave the employer no other option.

Despite constant pleas of poverty, Orchard Day Nursery's latest accounts show profits in excess of £100,000. The same director also runs a group of nurseries under the company Brightstart Day Nurseries which had recorded profits in excess of £1 million!

The owner made some movement but refused to budge on what Unison members decided was their red line, £10.90 an hour for the lowest-paid and £11.50 for qualified staff. This resulted in strike action by the workers.

Unison contacted the owner through conciliation service Acas, asking for a meeting to resolve the dispute, but was totally ignored.

This fight is not over, a public meeting has been organised in Huyton on 23 March to decide on the next stage of this campaign.

Leeds picket line PHOTO: IAIN DALTON

BBC local journalists walk out against cuts

IAIN DALTON
YORKSHIRE SOCIALIST PARTY

Hot on the heels of the unofficial walkout by football pundits and commentators over Gary Lineker's suspension, BBC local journalists in the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) walked out in a 24-hour strike, from 11am on 15 March.

Local radio and TV channels across the BBC were forced to play messages explaining that planned programming had ceased due to the industrial action, taken over the plans to reduce local radio broadcasting on weekdays by eight hours, to just 6am-2pm, rather than at 10pm at present, and with no content at all on weekends.

This is supposedly justified on the basis of providing more digital content. Strikers on the picket line in Leeds explained that they're not against greater production of digital content, in fact proposals for digital content often don't get taken up by managers. But as a picket in York explained, increased digital content won't come from cannibalising local radio and forcing workers to reapply for their own jobs.

As BBC York NUJ Father of Chapel Richard Staples told the Socialist: "The BBC's plans will bring long and lasting damage to local radio. NUJ members' determination was shown by the superb support for the strike. We're now working to rule and want senior managers to begin meaningful talks with our officers about our union's counter-proposals."

Socialist Party

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 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.

Do you agree? Join the fightback!

JOIN THE SOCIALISTS

- Visit **socialistparty.org.uk/join**
- or call **020 8988 8777**
- or text your name and postcode to **07761 818 206**

to find out more today!

Help fund the fightback!

DONATE TODAY socialistparty.org.uk/donate

Israel-Palestine: Netanyahu visits Britain in a time of crisis for both

Jerusalem protest PHOTO: UZI D/CC

AMNON COHEN

Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu visits Rishi Sunak on 24 March, at a time when both Israel and Britain are in unprecedented crisis. Half a million Israelis protested against Netanyahu's plans to neuter the judiciary. The same week, 600,000 civil servants, teachers, rail workers and doctors took strike action demanding a pay rise in Britain on 15 March.

Both governments are attacking democratic rights. Both are undermining the right to strike. And both governments have been forced to retreat in the face of mass opposition.

Netanyahu, Ben-Gvir, and Smotrich in Israel, like Sunak in Britain, are products of the crisis of a diseased capitalist system, which cannot provide a decent life for the majority, and where politicians try to bolster electoral support by inciting division (in Israel against Arabs, in the UK against immigrants).

The threat to turn Israel into a despotic theocracy has brought half a million onto the streets. Attempts to intimidate the demonstrations using horses, water cannon, percussion grenades, and denouncing them as "anarchists", has only strengthened protesters' resolve, with greater numbers pouring onto the streets every week.

And Netanyahu has now been forced to try to placate the demonstrators by toning down his anti-democratic reforms. Rather than removing the power of the courts to block government actions, he now plans merely to take control of the judicial appointments committee, which will appoint a majority of right-wing judges who will green-light Netanyahu's actions.

The Israeli and international capitalists are terrified of developments. Bankers, judges, tech CEOs, retired generals and secret service chiefs have joined the opposition. Their opposition to the government's actions is not due to a sudden concern for the rights of Palestinians, or of the Jewish working class, but a fear that the government's reckless actions will ignite new uprisings, or further conflict in the region which will threaten the value of their investments.

Hundreds of thousands are on the streets, but the leadership of the movement has been seized by capitalist establishment figures. The speaker lists at the democracy rallies are dominated by generals and security chiefs responsible for crushing the democratic rights of Palestinians for decades.

The masses did not take to the streets in order merely to win a gentler destruction of democracy. We need to bring down this racist anti-democratic government. But we cannot replace it with Yair Lapid, or any of the capitalist politicians who, until a few months ago, ruled in the interests of the billionaires, and whose failure paved the way for the return of Netanyahu.

New workers' parties

In Israel, as in Britain, the working class needs to take control of its own struggle. This means a new workers' party, with a socialist programme to tackle the cost-of-living crisis, and to unite working people, secular and religious, Jewish and Arab. Netanyahu and the far right won support from some of the most impoverished Jewish working-class communities. But the capitalist crisis will compel Netanyahu to attack their conditions even further. 10,000 demonstrating in Beer Sheva shows cracks in the support for the right. A workers' party with a socialist programme to seize the wealth of the tycoons and corporations and improve the lives of working people can undermine support for the right.

The Palestinians are set to suffer the most from the government's policies, and can be the most determined fighters against Netanyahu and Ben-Gvir. They should be welcomed into the movement. But this requires that the movement opposes not only the judicial reform, but also the oppression of the Palestinians, and the occupation itself. It is necessary to bring down not only the corrupt capitalist Netanyahu in Israel, but also the corrupt capitalist regime of Abu Mazen in the Palestinian Authority, and Haniyeh in Gaza. We need a socialist Palestinian state alongside a socialist Israeli state - linked together in a voluntary socialist federation.

The Hawara pogrom and its supporters in the government express the depth of the crisis of capitalist society. The powerful mass protest movement points to the solution. Only the struggle of the working-class masses, led by their own independent party, uniting all sections of the working class behind a socialist programme, can avert the descent into barbarism.

On the website

Interview with a young German rail worker: "Ready to fight like we haven't done in years!" at socialistworld.net

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

socialistworld.net

France: Mass protests and continued strikes confront Macron government's pushing through of pension reform

Gauche Révolutionnaire on the 16 March protest PHOTO: CWI FRANCE

French president Emmanuel Macron and his Élisabeth Borne-led government, unsure whether they would have a majority to win a vote on its pension reforms, have finally resorted to using the constitutional article 49:3 to force through the breakup of pensions without a vote of the National Assembly. Plans include raising the retirement age from 62 to 64. The French government subsequently and narrowly survived a vote of no confidence.

Mobilisations in opposition have been massive. Thousands of people have demonstrated all over France, very determined, with some chanting "Macron démission!" (Macron, resign!).

The powerful struggle and strikes that have been going on since January put the working class back on its feet and put pressure on the MPs, leaving Macron and Borne unable to secure enough votes. It is the use of 49:3 that marks Macron's isolation and the lack of support for his policies. The next national strike day is 23 March.

Below is the text of the **Gauche Révolutionnaire (CWI France)** leaflet given out during protests as Macron forced through the law on 16 March.

After the use of constitutional article 49:3, by our mobilisation, we can defeat Macron and the capitalists. Let's get organised!

Opposition to the retirement law has not weakened, quite the contrary. The gigantic demonstrations, the strikes by the hundreds, confirm a complete rejection of Macron and all his policies in the service of the rich. The working class is raising its head.

This reform has been a very big last straw for many of us. Big business has reaped €172 billion in 2022 thanks to his policies. The money is there to solve all social problems! So we say stop! We do not want to put up with the unemployment of the old and the suffering of the young, the dismantled public services, the low wages while prices and profits are exploding... and the permanent authoritarianism of Macron.

49:3: Macron and the capitalists are feverish

He tries to appear inflexible, but in reality he is very weak. The strike has again shown that his policies have no support among the population. It is explosive. The use of 49:3 shows that Macron has, in a way, already lost. The workers and the youth have raised their heads!

All our urgent demands are now on the table: for higher wages, price freezes, the repeal of anti-unemployment laws, racist laws... and the struggles will continue.

The strikes show that it is the workers who run the companies, the buses, the trains and the whole of society, not the handful of the super-rich and the politicians who serve them. They show the social strength of the workers when they collectively enter into struggle. This force has the means to change society, to get rid of Macron and all his policies. Enough of losing our gains one by one and being crushed by the capitalist machine and its dictatorship of profit!

Against capitalism, let's fight for socialism

To satisfy our demands, we will need another government that will oppose the capitalists and their parties. A government that will have a firm programme, starting with the sinews of war: to bring into public ownership the big sectors of the economy that the big shareholders own today (energy, banks, large scale retail, pharmaceuticals and so on). This should be the role of a government born of struggle, that is to say of its general assemblies, together with representatives of trade unions and political organisations.

We want a society where we decide in a democratic way how to manage the economy, production and distribution, culture, education, health, and so on - a socialist society. It is by fighting for such a society that we will be able to lead this confrontation against the capitalists... and win!

Come discuss and organise with Gauche Révolutionnaire to fight for socialism!

£1/£2 solidarity price
socialistparty.org.uk
Socialist Party CWI CIT

the Socialist

Issue 1219 23-29 March 2023 formerly Militant

Tory budget for the rich

FIGHT FOR NATIONALISATION TO SAVE OUR NHS! FUND OUR SERVICES

PHOTOS: MARY FINCH AND NUMBER 10/CC

RICHARD GINGELL
BLACK COUNTRY SOCIALIST PARTY

The Tory budget won't solve the cost-of-living crisis facing the majority of us, but it does look after the bosses. It ignores the hardship of the working class while moving more money to the wealthy elite and continuing to shred our services.

Included in the budget is: abolishing the £1 million tax-free limit to pension contributions, which no working-class person reasonably expects to reach; cuts in fuel duty to disproportionally benefit those with large, gas-guzzling cars or fleets of business vehicles; and raising taxes on alcohol, tobacco and plastic packaging, which will disproportionately tax poorer workers higher.

It is clear who this budget is for – the rich, big-business backers of the Tory party.

The extension of the energy price cap, costing the government £29.4 billion in total, has been a bailout for the energy bosses to enable them to continue making huge profits, and we still can't afford our bills. Instead, we need to nationalise the energy companies, with compensation only paid on the basis of proven need, not to the rich.

The Tories have included an increase in the eligibility for 30 hours free childcare. See page 2 for the reaction from parents - if your family needs help immediately, you won't get it from the Tories.

Buried in the budget document there is a pitiful increase in funding for the NHS specifically to "tackle waiting lists". There is no mention of the ongoing systemic problems of NHS privatisation and funding. Absent is any increase in funding to improve the pay and conditions of health staff or indeed any public-sector worker.

The government is not increasing public spending beyond the 1%-a-year agreed previously. Inadequate when our hospitals, are crumbling, education funding is in crisis and all the services we need are under attack.

It will do nothing to address the cost-of-living crisis and is a continuation of the last 13 years of Tory austerity that got us in this dire situation in the first place. Keir Starmer's Labour take their cues from the same big-business backers: "I know we're going to have to be fiscally disciplined" translates to austerity under Labour too.

What we need is a socialist alternative – to nationalise the banks and big business and put that wealth to use. To democratically discuss and plan what we actually need in society, not what makes a profit for those at the top. And we need a mass workers' party that will fight for this.

WHAT WE STAND FOR: THE SOCIALIST PARTY'S MAIN DEMANDS ►►► see column on page 14

9 771366 962103 ISSN 1366-9621