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PRICES UP



WE ALL NEED A PAY RISE

TORIES OUT

Keep up the fight for inflation-proof pay rises

Build a new mass workers' party

MICHAEL JOHNSON
LEEDS SOCIALIST PARTY

Every week I wince as I reach the checkout for the weekly shop. The cost of the basics, things like milk, pasta and bread, keep shooting up. In fact the Office of National Statistics has confirmed what we all already knew - food prices are rising at their fastest rate in over 40 years!

The Tories promised inflation was on its way down. No, CPI inflation was at 10.4% in February, up from January - and this measure is typically an underestimate for working-class households.

Households that already cut back on the bare essentials a few months ago, are now having to plan more drastic measures. Parents skip meals to make sure there's enough for their children. Just how much more can we do without?

But not all of us are suffering. Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has paid more than £1 million in tax since 2019. How much is he earning! He's not buying Morrisons Savers range to avoid going into his overdraft. Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer has paid £118,000 tax in the last two years - he isn't scrimping and saving either!

Both defend the interests of big business raking in bumper profits - 89% higher than before the pandemic. To prove his party is a safe pair of hands for the bosses, Starmer has blocked Jeremy Corbyn from standing for Labour - backed by the party's NEC leadership body.

This can't continue. The fantastic strikes show the way forward. We need inflation-proof pay rises and a minimum wage of at least £15 an hour, without exemptions. We need real living pensions and benefits that keep up with the rising cost of living.

We need a political force that backs the strikers and fights for what's needed to end the cost-of-living crisis. That's why the Socialist Party calls on the trade unions to back Corbyn standing in a general election, independently of Labour and as part of a union-backed workers' list of candidates, as a step towards a new mass workers' party.

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

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

Over 250 TUSC candidates to take on cuts councils

Nine out of ten councils in England are raising council tax in April, many to the maximum amount they can without going through a referendum. On top of this, 52% are cutting spending, 93% are increasing fees for services such as parking and waste, 67% are plugging gaps with reserves and many are selling off land and other assets. These were the results of a recent survey conducted by the Local Government Information Unit.

This shows at the same time as bosses are attempting to protect their profits by increasing our wages below the rate of inflation if at all, we will be forced to pay more money to fund local government and receive a more expensive worse service.

That's why for this year's local elections the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC), which the Socialist Party takes part in, has endorsed over 250 candidates. All candidates pledge to fight for no-cuts needs budgets and campaign with local trade unions, campaigners and residents to get back the money taken by over a decade of Tory austerity to restore the jobs and services we need.

There is still time to stand as a candidate, in order to receive your certificate of endorsement to stand for TUSC, get your application form, which you can find on www.tusc.org.uk, sent to the TUSC steering committee before 4pm on Friday 31 March.



PHOTO: NICK CHAFFEY

Plymouth council leader resigns after tree felling travesty

KATIE HOLDEN PLYMOUTH SOCIALIST PARTY

On the afternoon of 14 March, Richard Bingley, Conservative Plymouth council leader, issued an executive decision (not subject to council scrutiny), to begin chopping down 110 trees to 'regenerate' the city centre. Save the Trees on Armada Way (STRAW) was set up to stop this felling. Over 10,000 signatures were collected opposing the chop.

The council started cornering off the area with metal fences at 6pm, a time when most people weren't there to witness it. They began cutting the trees down a few hours later lasting until late in the evening.

There is so much anger in Plymouth at what Armada Way now looks like and the damage done by the Tory administration. All parties represented on the council claimed they opposed the felling but Labour, Greens and the Independent Alliance (mostly former Tories) did not

table a no-confidence motion in the council leadership until after the felling had been carried out. Just as there was no alternative to the Tory budget which this year included £23 million cuts and a 4.99% tax increase. Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) and Socialist Party members were the only political organisation to physically oppose the felling.

Richard Bingley has now resigned, and two Tory MPs have called on Labour to take over the running of the council, which they refused! At the full council meeting on 27 March, Labour even voted against nominating a new leader meaning that the Conservatives continue to run the council despite being in a minority.

The Socialist Party does not oppose the regeneration of the city centre but the pre-existing natural environment should have been considered. We need democratic workers' control of planning and the resources and infrastructure we need.



STRAW protest PHOTO: PLYMOUTH TUSC



PHOTO: BERKAY KARTAV

"I am angry, I definitely would like to get involved," said one Croydon resident to Socialist Party members campaigning against the 15% council tax hike and £36 million of cuts. We say, build a trade union-led mass movement to win the funding Croydon needs for our jobs, homes and services. These demands tapped into the anger local people feel as none of the pro-establishment parties offer an alternative to austerity - Tory or Labour.

Grimsby TUSC launches election campaign

NATHAN NEWTON GRIMSBY SOCIALIST PARTY

The Grimsby branch of the Socialist Party hosted a Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) public meeting on 22 March, which 25 people attended.

Alex Hutchinson spoke from Hull trades council, which has adopted a policy of supporting anti-austerity candidates in elections. Grimsby Socialist Party member and Unite shop steward Mark Gee gave a personal account of his disillusionment with the Labour Party and campaigning to help the local community as a TUSC candidate. Dave Nellist, national chair of TUSC, confirmed that twelve TUSC candidates for North East Lincs council elections had been approved by the steering committee.

With several new people at their first TUSC meeting, including two directly from the leafleting, this was a great way to launch our election campaign.

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.

Starmer attempts to bury Corbynism

Unions must back Corbyn to stand and prepare a workers' list for a general election

Socialist Party WHAT WE THINK

The day before the March 2023 meeting of Labour's National Executive, Labour leader Keir Starmer declared to the press that he would be putting a motion to the meeting reiterating his insistence that Jeremy Corbyn, the previous Labour leader, will not be allowed to stand for Labour in the general election. The resolution was passed 22-12.

The resolution's argumentation was ludicrous. No reason was given other than that, in Starmer's view, Corbyn being a Labour candidate would lose the party votes. This is justified on the much-repeated myth that Labour's 2019 election result was unprecedentedly bad, and that Corbyn was responsible for that.

Never mind that in 2017, also under Corbyn's leadership, the Labour vote increased by 3.53 million, the biggest increase for any party in a single election since 1945. That is wiped from history. True, in 2019, Labour lost 2.6 million of those votes, in part because Corbyn gave into relentless pressure - not least from Starmer himself - to move towards a pro-capitalist remain position on Brexit, allowing Johnson to cynically claim that he alone would 'get Brexit done'.

However, even in 2019 Labour polled over ten million votes, something not achieved by Gordon Brown or Ed Miliband in 2010 and 2015, or by Blair in 2005. But far from being expelled from Labour's ranks, Blair and Brown - the architects of New Labour Mark I - are praised to the skies, while Miliband is in the shadow cabinet.

Starmer argues that "the Labour Party's standing with the electorate in the country" will be "significantly



Jeremy Corbyn addresses rally in Derby in 2016 PHOTO: STEVE SCORE

diminished should Mr Corbyn be endorsed by the Labour Party" but what does he actually mean by that? It is not the electorate as a whole that Starmer is concerned about pleasing with this measure, but his reputation with the elites as having made Labour into 'New Labour Mark II', a party that can be relied on to act in the interests of the capitalist class.

Hatred of the Tories, rather than anything Starmer has done, has now put Labour ahead in the polls. However, along with Corbyn the man, Starmer has eradicated Corbyn's policies. Renationalisation of mail, rail, energy, and telecoms are gone. At a time when Labour pledging to immediately renationalise Royal Mail after a general election victory could be decisive for the postal workers' fight! And the working class is being told by Starmer that - under his government just as

under the Tories - that austerity and real-terms pay cuts will be the diet on offer.

Of course, millions will still vote Labour in order to get rid of this rotten Tory government. But how should the workers' movement respond to this situation? Trade unionists in the Labour-affiliated unions should demand their representatives on Labour's national executive are held to account for how they voted on Corbyn's right to stand. GMB, Usdaw and the Musicians' Union voted for Starmer's motion, Unison abstained.

However, it is absolutely clear that Starmer will not allow Corbyn to stand, and more broadly that a Starmer-led government will not act in the interests of the working class. Therefore the trade unions need to take the first steps to build a new mass workers' party.

The Socialist Party calls for trade unions to organise their own

workers' list for the general election, including Jeremy Corbyn and other debarred left Labour MPs. Such a list could succeed in getting at least a bloc of MPs elected at the general election, and could quite rapidly become a pole of opposition to an incoming Starmer-led government.

But whatever happens next, there should be the biggest possible trade union, socialist, environmentalist and anti-austerity election challenge mounted. This is why the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) is hosting local meetings to discuss what needs to be done, including, should that workers' list not be realised in time, standing trade unionists and socialists as TUSC candidates in the general election. TUSC will also be standing in the upcoming local elections, and there is still time to show your opposition to Starmer's New Labour by becoming a candidate (see page 2).

Plymouth RMT votes to support anti-austerity candidates

CHRIS BLIGH RMT RAIL MEMBER

At my most recent RMT (transport union) branch meeting I submitted a motion calling on the branch and union to support Jeremy Corbyn at the next general election if he stood as an independent candidate against Starmer's Labour. It also called on the union branch to encourage members to consider standing as anti-cuts candidates in the local elections taking place this May.

The debate and vote were split evenly, reflecting the uncertainty about a way forward. Those who spoke against the motion didn't see Labour as their party but were determined to see the Tories gone.

With the vote split, the Chair had the casting vote. They supported it and gave recognition to the fact that the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) and the Socialist Party have supported our striking members. With that it passed and will be sent to the National Executive Committee of the union for consideration. I am proud to be endorsed as a TUSC candidate, along with others from across the trade union movement, including local striking National Education Union (NEU) and University and College Union (UCU) members. We intend to stand in every ward in Plymouth.

By consistently visiting picket lines, and engaging in a dialogue with strikers, the Socialist Party has earned their respect. The same can't be said for local Labour MP Luke Pollard. Support was given to placing a May Day greeting in The Socialist alongside Plymouth NEU Branch who will also be taking out a greeting.

Model motion for trade unions:

This union organisation/conference believes that:

- This is an utterly undemocratic act, removing Jeremy's right to take part in a selection contest
• As with Jeremy's suspension from the Parliamentary Labour Party, this is a political statement by the Labour leadership, moving the party to the right politically, proving its credentials to big business and the capitalist establishment. It follows the refusal of Starmer to support striking workers, and the sacking of Sam Tarry from the

shadow cabinet for speaking up for union action from the picket line
• It is confirmation that, under Starmer's leadership, Labour does not represent the interests of workers and working-class communities
• Therefore, workers need political representation that supports their action against the cost-of-living squeeze, and stands for policies such as renationalisation, opposition to cuts, and for the repeal of the Tory anti-union laws

Therefore, this union organisation/conference agrees to:

- Instruct the union NEC/EC/Executive to give full support to Jeremy Corbyn, and if necessary change the rules of the union to allow the union to campaign for his re-election as the Islington North MP if he decides to stand in the next general election, including as an independent candidate
• To also provide political and material support to other genuine pro-trade union, anti-austerity candidates in the general election

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

20% discount ends 31 March Final deadline 17 April



email scottjones@socialistparty.org.uk or visit socialistparty.org.uk/mayday

Reject the NHS pay offer!

HOLLY JOHNSTON
NURSE, NHS WORKERS SAY NO!

The recent pay offer from the Tory government to NHS staff on Agenda for Change (AfC) contracts has caused much anger among trade union members.

They have learned what the threat of a 48-hour strike by the Royal College of Nursing resulted in, and that was pay talks after weeks of deliberation and delay. The strikes have also brought the highest offer made so far and we should take great confidence from this.

However the facts are laid bare. The 2022-23 non-consolidated lump sum of £1,400 for 2022-23) will soon be eaten up by tax, national insurance and the cost-of-living squeeze that is still very much ongoing.

The 5% for 2023-24 is an improvement from the original 3.5% stated but is still way below inflation, which even on the government's CPI

figure is currently running at 10.4%. The offer for both years does nothing for pay restoration after over 12 years of real-terms cuts and freezes to our pay.

The offer ties us into a two-year deal, at the same time as they are trying to force through their minimum service anti-strike legislation. The lump sum is a deliberate bribe to workers struggling in a cost-of-living crisis, hoping they will feel they cannot afford to keep striking, that they may have lost confidence in the process, and that they will feel they need that lump sum in their next pay packets.

All the major health unions representing AfC staff are recommending acceptance, apart from Unite.

NHS Workers Say NO! - a rank and file campaign group formed in 2020 - has been recommending members reject, and has distributed thousands of bulletins and materials through growing and existing networks on the ground.

We say we need to reject the pay offer, escalate strike action, and coordinate between the health unions, as well as with others on strike, and build towards a mass 24-hour general strike.

If, following the campaign from the union leaderships to vote 'yes', members decide to accept the pay offer, there will still be a lot of angry health workers. More cross-union groups have been created and more and more people are engaged to fight for the NHS.

Many health workers are understanding that we need to stay united as an NHS workforce, and will stand in solidarity with the junior doctors.

Health workers are learning from the strikes and there is massive spotlight on the trade union leaderships and questions over undemocratic processes. We need to put pressure on our leaders -

and that includes standing in union elections and supporting fighting, socialist candidates.



SHEFFIELD SOCIALIST PARTY

Unison NEC elections

The following Socialist Party members are standing for election to Unison's National Executive Council, in elections that start on 17 April:

- April Ashley, sitting NEC member, national black members female seat
- Naomi Byron, sitting NEC member, London low-paid members seat
- Jim McFarlane, sitting NEC member, Scotland male seat
- Hugo Pierre, sitting NEC member, national black members male seat
- Adrian O'Malley, national general health service group seat
- Paul Couchman, national local government male seat
- Anthony Hunt, East Midlands male seat
- David Maples, national disabled members general seat
- Mary McCusker, Scotland female seat

Socialist Party members are also standing for election to the EC of Unite, see page 11

Junior Doctors set more strike dates

Showing what is possible, junior doctors in the BMA and HCSA have announced another four days of strike action from 7am on 11 April to 7am on 15 April, in every hospital in the country.

The BMA negotiators report that the government made "no credible offer".

Junior doctors are not included in the Agenda for Change offer but the same pattern that has been offered to other public sector workers is being floated: a lump sum for 2022-23 and a small percentage increase for 2023-24. Junior doctors, who currently get paid just £14 an hour, are demanding 35%.

PCS strike on 28 April

Vote 'yes' in the PCS strike rebalot

PCS BROAD LEFT NETWORK MEMBERS

On 28 April, the civil service union PCS will take its third day of national strike action since we won our mandate on 7 November 2022.

The Treasury only funded a 2% pay rise for 2022-23. Some employers may have topped this up, but even with this, we have had a sharp pay cut this year. This follows on from the pay freeze in 2021-22. We want the union's demand for 10%, and we want an inflation-proof pay rise for 2023-24.

Tory anti-union laws require a rebalot, which opened on 20 March. Vote 'yes' to halt civil service pay cuts, to defend our pensions, and fight to save jobs and services.

The national action on 1 February and 15 March was extremely well supported across the union. While of course we welcome the calling of the 28 April strike, it is not sufficient on its own and should be part of a real fighting strategy with a programme of escalated action. Further, PCS should be discussing with other unions with live strike mandates, such as the NEU, to coordinate with them, as it did on 1 February and 15 March.

But the current Left Unity leadership - standing in the upcoming national elections in the 'Democracy Alliance' along with the PCS

Democrats - has gone all-in on a strategy of selective, targeted action. Small parts of the union's membership are asked to take long periods of strike action, and paid strike pay, in the hope of maximising disruption to the government.

This has not been enough to shift the government. We can do better than scraps from the Tory table. We need a national executive that fights with a serious national strategy.

The Broad Left Network (BLN) has, from the beginning, demanded national strike action, where all members strike together, and for the union's campaign funds to be used in support of members who cannot afford to strike, in addition to targeted action.

We have also argued for a ballot to enable the union to call action short of strikes, for example an overtime ban, to support and maximise the effectiveness of strikes.

Vote 'yes' in the rebalot, then vote for a leadership that can win the campaign.

The BLN is standing on a joint slate with the Independent Left group.

- Vote Marion Lloyd for PCS President.
- The full list of BLN NEC candidates can be seen here: 'Unified left to fight PCS national elections' at socialistparty.org.uk



DWP strike SOCIALIST PARTY

Get all the latest union news...



Royal Mail declares all-out war

Victory to the CWU!

SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBERS IN THE CWU

As we go to press, there is a strong possibility that serious strike action will be called by the Communication Workers Union (CWU) postal executive, as Royal Mail senior management threaten to take the company into administration.

This is clearly a major threat to the jobs of the 115,000 CWU members, but also to the other staff in Royal Mail, including managers who are represented by Unite, and who have been used by senior management in the dispute. The CWU must now call an urgent meeting with Unite for a united battle against Royal Mail bosses and the Tory government that is backing them.

Whole trade union movement

We can't allow the parasitic privateers to put Royal Mail into bankruptcy, putting 150,000 jobs at risk along with the complete destruction of a 500-year-old national service.

This is clearly an attack aimed at smashing the CWU as an organised force in Royal Mail and must be met by militant industrial action. The union must up the ante by re-launching and escalating strike action by postal workers.

But it must go further, and issue an immediate appeal to the whole of the trade union movement to come to the aid of the CWU. The posties have a proud record of refusing to cross the picket lines of other unions and their members, and have received huge support in our eleven-month struggle.

The union leadership must demand an emergency TUC General Council to coordinate strike action with CWU members, and to support mass solidarity rallies which the CWU should call in major cities all over the UK. The CWU's strike fund must be publicly launched and used to mobilise fellow unions, their members and working-class communities.

Privatisation

The threat of administration is direct due to the privatisation of Royal Mail. We have seen £1.9 billion given to shareholders in the nine years since the company was sold off. In the last 12 months around £600 million has been given to shareholders and the directors.

They also spent millions trying to break the CWU. They paid agency workers to work during strike action, and gave management redundancy payments worth two years' wages and then offered these same managers £40,000 to come back as 'consultants' for nine months to help introduce their changes. This role of the managers has been opposed by the Unite national leadership.

Now Royal Mail bosses claim to be making substantial losses. We demand to open the books to show us where the profits have gone.

What limits the bosses' ability to



Postal workers' rally in Parliament Square, December 2022. ROB WILLIAMS

extract profit from the postal service is the Universal Service Obligation (USO), to deliver to every home in the country six days a week. The parliamentary Business, Energy, and Industrial Strategy committee has written to Royal Mail to say it has "systematically failed to deliver" the USO.

How could it be otherwise? Over years, the service has been divided up, separating different sections, such as Parcelforce.

Now the bosses plan to hive off profitable parts of the business, such as the GLS international delivery service, leaving the 'loss-making' mail universal service to function on its own - unlike in other countries such as France and Italy, where even privatised services receive government subsidy. Bosses want to abandon USO so they can concentrate on delivering packets, gig-economy style.

Nationalise

The CWU should not only be demanding that the notorious CEO Simon Thompson, who was totally exposed before MPs, be removed, but the whole board. The company should be brought back into public ownership, re-nationalised under socialist democratic control. A publicly owned, integrated service would precisely ensure that essential aspects of a service would be

maintained, and defend workers' jobs and communities.

In fact, as the pandemic showed, the service is a tremendous public asset. Imagine what could be achieved with a service that visits every home, with public buildings in every community.

This is a weak and divided Tory government, facing the biggest strike wave for years. If governments can step in to rescue banks, then we must demand that they act to preserve and extend a vital public service like Royal Mail.

The CWU leadership is due to meet Keir Starmer and they must demand that he publicly commits to the policy passed at last autumn's Labour Party conference, that the next Labour government will bring Royal Mail back into public ownership.

The threat of administration can have an impact on a section of the membership who will be worried about the threat of compulsory redundancy on statutory terms, capped at the legal rate set by the government of around £17,000, and their pensions put into the Pension Protection Fund at reduced levels.

Suspensions and sackings

This brutal threat is par for the course for Royal Mail senior management. We now have around 400 reps and activists either sacked or suspended.

It is outrageous that Thompson and co are trying to use them as leverage against the union and the membership to force through a deal.

It should be pointed out that the CWU had a victory against management when a rep won his appeal against dismissal. Yet Royal Mail has refused to bring him back to work. Does this sound like they want a reasonable resolution to the dispute? No deal can be done until we secure a way to get all members and reps who have been attacked back to work.

But a serious strategy, appealing for support across the union movement, can give confidence to members, who just six weeks ago gave a further mandate for action by an incredible 96%, on a 77% turnout, in the rebalot. There must be meetings in every workplace to discuss stepping up the action.

This is not a time to retreat - these attacks must be met with militancy by calling a week-long strike action. Any negotiations should be in full view of the membership and if there are no more concessions by the management then preparations towards an all-out strike must be put in place. If they try and carry out administration then we must be prepared to occupy all Royal Mail buildings, as they belong to us - we are the Royal Mail!

Victory to the CWU!

Retired headteacher: 'Abolish Ofsted' 'It's worsened life for staff and pupils'



Liz Filer (front, centre) led a strike against school cuts in Southampton

LIZ FILER
SOUTHAMPTON SOCIALIST PARTY

The tragic suicide of Ruth Perry – the headteacher of Caversham Primary School in Reading – has led to a furor about school inspectors Ofsted, and the pressure it puts on headteachers, teachers, school staff and children.

I have recently retired from headship, after 36 years in the profession. The poisonous triangle of Ofsted, exam/test results and league tables played a major factor in my decision to retire a couple of years early.

Dreaded call

When you know that you are due an Ofsted visit, the stress really starts to ramp up. Every time the phone rings at 11am, a rush of adrenaline courses through your body as you think it may be the dreaded call. Then when they do come the stress is unbearable.

These visits are so high stakes. If you don't do well, as a headteacher, your job will be at risk, and the very future of the school may be under threat of forced academisation. This puts pressure on school staff and children to perform well.

But the lower the number of children eligible for free school meals in a school, the more chance you have of getting a good or better Ofsted judgment.

I worked in a school with a high number of children with free school meals, and with children who sometimes struggled to manage their feelings and emotions. Their needs had often been failed at previous schools. Due to the approach, culture and ethos of my school they would often thrive.

During an inspection, based on this information, I asked why we were not given an 'outstanding' judgment for behaviour. The reply was that behaviour at the school was not 'exemplary'.

That sums up everything that is wrong with Ofsted. The whole system is based on values and beliefs where children are expected to be compliant.

The other major stress is that Ofsted suddenly decides to have a focus on a particular issue, and then schools all rush around trying to achieve well in that area, or else face a 'requires improvement' or 'inadequate' judgment.

A one-word judgment will never sum up what it's like to attend a particular school. Schools are complex organisations with all schools having different needs, things they do well and things that need to improve.

Ofsted has not 'raised standards'. It has narrowed the curriculum through an emphasis on exam results and league tables. Ofsted needs to be abolished, along with league tables and all testing in primary schools.

Democratic control

All schools should be brought back into local authorities, and under democratic control. Proper resources need to be given to schools to enable them to meet the needs of children and communities they serve.

A self and peer review system, based on trust and confidence, rather than competition, needs to be developed. A system where school workers, parents, students, and local communities have a democratic say in how schools are run.

In the meantime, schools that refuse to let Ofsted inspectors in should have the full support of the trade union movement.



Free school meals for every pupil everywhere

NANCY TAAFFE
WALTHAM FOREST SOCIALIST PARTY

'Feed the kids you Tory rats.' So proclaimed a wall in Manchester after the Tories ignored Marcus Rashford's call for free school dinners.

The issue of hunger – whether it's food banks, or people skipping meals to pay electricity or gas bills – looms large. Hunger stalks Tory Britain.

So the announcement by London Labour mayor Sadiq Khan of free school dinners for an extra 270,000 state primary children in London for one year is welcome.

Remember, as a single parent of two primary school children in the mid-noughties, I never claimed free school dinners for my children, although I knew I was probably entitled to them.

Stigma

My instinct to protect my children from the stigma and cruelty that can accompany early school life, was strong. I scrimped and saved, and never claimed a penny.

Instead of being limited to primary pupils for just one year, free school meals should be permanently extended to all school students, and throughout the holidays.

That would ramp up the pressure on other politicians, and address the very real issue of stigma that parents like me face.

But Khan's temporary announcement is not eating into any of the profits of the rich and big business. It's coming out of our pockets.

London's school dinners' announcement is funded by increases in council tax and business rates. So the little people in the capital pay.

Despite the pandemic, the super-rich in Britain managed to spend around £2 billion on 'super-prime' property – homes costing more than £10 million. If Khan added his voice to sequester that money, alone it could pay for free school meals for every pupil in the country for the next 15 years!

The cost-of-living crisis is putting capitalist politicians under pressure. London bus drivers and tube workers have taken strike action against pay, job and pension cuts by the mayor and transport companies.

Local communities in London are up in arms against a disastrous housing policy, which has intensified the suffering of the poorest, along with local anger at things like LTNs, incinerators and the extension of ULEZ.

Corbyn

Khan was one of the first out of the traps to attack Jeremy Corbyn as Labour leader, and Corbyn's programme, which included free school meals. Labour councils are refusing to collectively implement even Khan's limited school meals plan.

There are no local elections in London this year. But, around the country, Socialist Party members are standing as part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) in May's local elections.

If TUSC councillors are elected, at the first opportunity they would put forward a vote in the council chamber for immediate emergency measures for the council to take against cost-of-living suffering, saying "no one to be cold, no one to be hungry, no one to be homeless".

NEU conference:

Escalate the fight for fully funded inflation-proof pay rises for all education staff

Vote for fighting, socialist candidates in the executive elections

SHEILA CAFFREY, LOUISE CUFFARO, SEAN MCCAULEY, STEVE SCOTT AND NICKY DOWNES
NEU NEC MEMBERS, PERSONAL CAPACITY

National Education Union (NEU) conference will be meeting at a critical juncture in the union's battle to win fully funded inflation-proof pay increases for all education staff.

Two further days of solidly supported strike action by NEU teacher members in England, coinciding with the massive London demonstration that filled Trafalgar Square on Budget Day, forced the Tory government to accept that it would have to talk to the NEU after all. This was the biggest day of coordinated action in this strike wave, with over 600,000 workers taking action together. The NEU estimates that over 50,000 of the union's members took part in the London demo, with many others on local picket lines.

Funding

Yet, after six days of talks with teaching unions, the best 'offer' that the government was prepared to make for teachers in England was derisory. The only thing that was offered to improve on the 2022-23 pay award was an unconsolidated £1,000 one-off lump-sum. For 2023-24, the offer was just 4.5% and with just 0.5% in extra funding to pay for it. In other words, it amounted to an offer of two further years of cuts – both to school funding and real-terms pay.

In reality, this 'offer' is an insult to education workers, and also to the families and schools that we work so hard to support. Socialist Party members on the NEU National Executive (NEC) made clear that offers like this have to be refused! Correctly,



NEU teachers on strike this year ESSEX SOCIALIST PARTY

the whole executive agreed members should reject it.

Socialist Party members supported the proposal that the membership should be surveyed to see if they agree with that recommendation. After all, it's the union members who will have most to lose from a poor deal, and they need to feel that the decision to reject is theirs, not just the executive's. By NEU conference we will know if that is the case.

In the week that the negotiations were taking place, interest rates were hiked up once again, and the government's own CPI inflation measure jumped to 10.4%. The annual price increase for many essentials, such as milk, rose over 30%!

That's why we have to make clear

to the Tories that they need to come back to us with a real offer, not an insult. And that means not just a fully funded inflation-proof offer for 2023-24 but also a backdated award that does the same for 2022-23 too.

What next?

The key question facing NEU conference delegates is what action now needs to be taken to make sure the government has to improve its offer?

The NEC proposal, in the first instance, is for two further days of action each side of the May Day bank holiday weekend. But, for the government to know we are serious, more dates will need to be named to follow that. To increase the pressure, more two- or three-day strikes and/

or a more regular calendar of action is going to be needed in the summer term, including in the exam period if needed, to maintain momentum. The incredible figure of 50,000 new members recruited during this dispute shows the massive potential to escalate.

Of course, some teachers will have understandable concerns about the cost of ongoing strike action on their already stretched incomes. But that's why the Socialist Party has been arguing that a plan for escalated action also has to be combined with a plan to address genuine hardship. As well as NEU districts using their own reserves, an appeal to the wider trade union movement should be made to boost

strike funds to make sure our action remains strong and solid.

Equally, to get the maximum impact from days of strike action, the NEU should seek to coordinate strikes with other unions taking action, such as the junior doctors and postal workers.

But coordination with the rest of the school workforce – support staff – would have the biggest impact of all. Local government unions are opening action ballots for their support staff members. All unions with members in schools need to put their differences aside and make sure that support staff are able to fight together alongside their teaching colleagues, in a joint fight for pay and funding. Reballoting the NEU's 50,000 support staff members will be a key part of that struggle.

NEU conference is perfectly timed to agree the programme of escalating strike action that will be needed, and to then go back into schools and local districts and branches to build for it!

● Breaking news – headteachers could strike too

The union representing headteachers, NAHT, has described the government's pay offer as "inadequate". The NAHT has also said that if its members reject what's on offer, "it is clear that industrial action will be necessary".

The NAHT will now ask its members whether it should accept or reject the offer, and if they would be prepared to vote in favour of industrial action if the offer is rejected.

Wales

CATH PEACE
NEU CYMRU MEMBER

If only the NEU executive had discovered the same united determination to oppose an inadequate offer for teachers in England when it came to teachers in Wales!

Negotiations with the Labour-led Welsh government produced a proposed deal that, while at least offering something extra for 2022-23, still

meant another real-terms pay cut. On top of that, it tied teachers into a two-year deal with a 5% award for 2023-24 that is still far below current inflation rates. There was also nothing offered at all on support staff pay.

But, while strikes in England had been consistently built, in Wales they were mistakenly postponed on two separate occasions, seriously undermining momentum and member confidence that NEU Cymru was serious about winning its demands.

Against that background, and in the absence of a strong rank-and-file left within NEU Cymru willing and able to make the case that a better

deal could be won, the deal was accepted in a vote by 73% to 27%.

Of course, the 27% who opposed the deal contains the majority of the most active reps and members who had made sure the ballot had been won and firm strike action then built across Wales. Many now feel that their union has let them down.

Instead of demanding the Welsh government fights alongside the unions to win more funding from Westminster, the dispute has been settled on the basis that this is the most that the Welsh government can afford. That not only sells members in Wales short, it also means we can't now act alongside colleagues in England in

a joint struggle to win the pay and funding we all need.

Many of us feel that this again shows the danger of trying to rely on keeping friendly relations with Welsh Labour. 'Partnership working' with the Labour-led Welsh government should be abandoned because, in reality, it works against us.



NEC elections

The following Socialist Party members are standing for election to the NEU National Executive. The ballot runs 6 April – 2 May

● Re-elect to the National Executive:

- Sheila Caffrey, district 12
- Sean McCauley, district 8
- Steve Scott, district 3
- Also vote for: Anna Scott, district 3
- To join Louise Cuffaro, already elected unopposed in district 16

BANKING CRISIS MARKS NEW PHASE OF CAPITALIST TURMOIL

BOLD SOCIALIST POLICIES MORE URGENT THAN EVER

TONY SAUNOIS
CWI SECRETARY

The global and multifaceted crisis of capitalism has entered a new phase with turmoil in the financial markets, and the collapse of banks in the US and Credit Suisse in Switzerland.

It is likely that many features present in the current systemic crisis will now be accelerated. A global economic recession in 2023-24 is now a very strong possibility, although not a certainty. The working class and Marxists need to be prepared for dramatic economic, social, and political consequences which flow from this. In particular, an even sharper form of class and political polarisation, and more social upheavals.

The ruling classes are terrified of the prospect of banking crises in the US and Switzerland spreading, and triggering a major global financial meltdown, such as unfolded in 2007-08.

The crisis in 2007-08, like many other financial and economic crises, developed not as a single act. The recession in 2008 was preceded by a series of crises and financial implosions in February, September, and October 2007. What is certain, however, is that the global financial system, like capitalism as a whole, is in a systemic crisis.

The underlying problems faced by capitalism following 2007-08 have not been resolved, and are now exploding in turmoil and upheavals. The trigger of the current financial turmoil is not the same as in 2007-08. That was primarily caused by massive dodgy loans and speculative bubbles reflected in the subprime mortgage catastrophe.

The recent events were triggered by different factors and in an entirely different world situation with increased geopolitical conflict, the rise of inflation and hiking of interest rates, the ending of the era of 'cheap money', and other factors.

The collapse of Silicon Valley Bank (SVB), Signature, and Silvergate banks in the US, followed by the crisis at First Republic and the collapse of Credit Suisse, occurred as the banks, in essence, were faced with a run, as investors withdrew funds and their share prices fell.

According to some commentators, this run on the banks has been the biggest and most rapid ever. Credit Suisse saw €10 billion a day withdrawn in the run-up to its collapse. On 7 March, a few days before SVB collapsed, \$42 billion was withdrawn by depositors. This also flowed from the impact of the change in policy from the Federal Reserve, European Central Bank (ECB), and other central banks, when they began to increase interest charges a year ago. The consequences of this change of policy - an attempt to deal with inflation - are now being felt throughout the banking system.

The collapse of SVB and other banks was largely triggered by the ending of the era of cheap money. The banks, including SVB, invested vast assets in long-term government bonds, which were seen as a safe bet when interest rates are low. Once interest rates were raised, the bonds lost value, exposing the banks to insufficient liquidity. While each bank has its specific issues, this exposure against the background of higher interest rates now threatens other banks.

SVB saw its deposits grow from \$62 billion in 2019 to \$189 billion at the end of 2021. Their investment in government bonds was essentially a \$100 billion one-way bet on low interest rates, which was lost once interest rates rose.

The ruling classes, partly learning from the crisis in 2007, responded rapidly and stepped in to try and prevent contagion from spreading and triggering a collapse of the banking system. The US Federal Reserve and President Biden reverted to a form of quantitative easing (QE) by the back door, to guarantee and bail out the banks in the US. The banking crisis in the US has, thus far, only affected smaller or medium-sized banks which are generally far more numerous and significant than in Europe. An added factor with SVB was its importance to the tech sector. According to SVB's own figures, 25% of tech start-ups are linked to it.

The initial injection of cash in SVB, Signature, First Republic, and Credit Suisse, was not enough. In each case, more and more has been poured into the system. US banks, in panic, borrowed \$164.8 billion from the Federal Reserve backstop. It was \$4.58 billion the previous week. Morgan Stanley estimated that in the US approximately 50% of what was injected into propping up the banks in 2007 has been drawn on in mid-March 2023. The capitalist classes are desperate to prevent a meltdown. They have, at best, bought time. Further bank collapses are a near certainty in the coming period.

Credit Suisse

The collapse of Credit Suisse is a major international development. The 167-year-old institution was one of the '\$1 trillion banks', and a major pillar of the global financial system.

The brutality of the Swiss government in imposing the takeover of Credit Suisse by UBS, has been striking - even to the extent of tearing up the government's own previous regulations. Commentators' references to the "merger" of the two banks are farcical. Credit Suisse collapsed and there is no more! This points to another tendency that may develop further with more banks collapsing - an even greater monopolisation of the banking system in some countries. The massive conglomerate that exists from the take-over of Credit Suisse



by UBS is equal to 220% of the GDP of Switzerland.

The protestation of US Treasury Secretary, Janet Yellen, that the US banking system is "sound" belies the reality of the situation and the vulnerability which exists. The US banking system has \$620 billion in unrealised losses - accounting for 28% of bank equity. In smaller banks, it is closer to 50%. Overall, the US banking system's market value of assets is \$2 trillion lower than suggested by their book value of assets. Should half of the uninsured depositors decide to withdraw funds, almost 200 banks are at risk.

US imperialism has vast resources to step in and prop up the banks should the crisis grow. The EU, should it be confronted with a bigger banking crisis, will struggle to further contain the crisis. This is partly because of the resources of the ECB and also the prospect of national divisions and conflict arising between the governments of the Eurozone, all of which

have differing economies and banking systems.

Capitalism is now faced with an irreconcilable dilemma. Do the capitalist central banks lower interest rates to stave off and try and contain the developing financial crisis, or do they maintain higher interest rates to combat inflation? They cannot do both.

Whatever they do will not resolve the underlying problems in the economy, including the inflationary features. The idea that the adjustment of interest rates alone will somehow magically resolve the inflationary and other problems is false. Should they attempt to squeeze inflation out of the system, it will need a brutal recession; a course of action that some of the capitalist class are prepared to resort to. The rise in interest rates can also wipe out many of the so-called 'zombie' companies.

None of the measures taken have helped lift the confidence of the capitalists, as they hoped. Massive hoarding, rather than an investment, that

started to take place before the run on the banks, continues. The current crisis in the banking sector will further strengthen this trend. The squeeze on loans and liquidity arising from the banking crisis can also add to recessionary pressures.

The ECB, faced with an inflationary spike, opted to increase interest rates by 0.5%. However, this was before the banking crisis had fully developed. Jay Powell, chair of the US Federal Reserve since 2018, was robustly supporting raising interest rates, prior to the onset of the banking turmoil. These decisions would drive the economy towards recession and possibly a depression.

Now Powell and the Fed have raised interest rates by 0.25%. Both Powell and Christine Lagarde, President of the European Central Bank since 2019, have now made it clear they will raise rates further should inflation not be tamed, despite the consequences that this may have.

The rise in interest rates is crucial

given the explosion of global debt, both public and private. Defaults by countries, institutions or individuals, will impact on the financial crisis. This applies to the industrialised West, and especially to Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

Now a furious struggle is taking place between different wings of the ruling class over what they should do. It is possible that they will pause interest rate rises for a period in the future. An immediate cut in interest rates is highly unlikely. Within days, 'QE by the back door' has been stepped up, and the higher interest rate rises discussed by the Fed scaled down, for now. Events have forced them to change policy. The turmoil unfolding is likely to see the ruling capitalist class oscillating, floundering around from policy to policy.

Apart from the massive increase in state intervention that has already taken place, attempts to regulate the banks are possible, especially in the US, following former President

Trump's weakening of the measures introduced after 2007-08. However, the systemic crisis facing the financial system cannot be reduced merely to the question of regulation, albeit it can have a temporary effect. The switch from 'cheap money' to higher interest rates is a crucial ingredient that cannot be simply overcome in an era of rising inflation.

State regulation?

The prospect of more state regulation will not be uniform however, given the different conditions which exist in each country. The UK, for example, prior to the current crisis, was looking for less regulation. This arises from the changed situation that the financial sector in the UK now finds itself in, particularly within the European context. The balance has shifted away from London to the Netherlands, Frankfurt, and elsewhere. In an attempt to attract back financial capital, the British Tory government, and prime minister, Sunak, who represents and is directly linked to finance capital, may still drive for even less state regulation, but this is not certain.

Global capitalism is facing a series of interconnected crises, economically and politically. These developments cannot be separated from the geopolitical conflicts that are taking place, which can and will impact on the immediate economic prospects for capitalism.

The threat of a rapidly developing banking crisis in the US drove US imperialism, Japan, Canada, Britain and the ECB to coordinate measures.

China

Following 2007-08, world capitalism was able to benefit from the growth and developments of the Chinese economy, underwritten by relations with the US. This escape route is not present today. China faces a domestic economic and social crisis, which means it cannot play the same role as it did after 2007-08 and previously. The reduced 5% target growth rate announced by the regime illustrates this. China is also being hit by the ban on important microchips from the US, which is crucial for the development of the economy. Taiwan's domination of the production of advanced microchips is crucial for future developments in the world economy and also geopolitical relations.

Chinese banks, largely directed by the state, and to an extent insulated from the world financial markets, may not be hit directly or dramatically by the current banking crisis. However, the vast debt owed to them in Asia, Africa, and Latin America means that it will be hit, at a certain stage, by the impact of other global developments. Reflecting the crisis faced in China, the international mega projects of the 'belt and road' project have largely been placed on hold.

Along with all of these developments, the consequences of the war in Ukraine and other possible military clashes, such as is possible in the Middle East, will impact on the world economic situation, and threaten to add to the prospect of a recession in 2023 or 2024. The ruling classes may be able to take some empirical measures to 'kick the can down the road', for a time. Yet they are running out of road.

Dramatic changes

This will result in massive polarisation and heightened conflict. Bitter class battles are already breaking out, reflected in the heightened class struggle in Britain, France, Germany and elsewhere. The recession in 2008 eventually gave rise to the mass movements around Bernie Sanders in the US, Jeremy Corbyn in the UK, and saw mass revolts and upheavals in Asia, Africa and Latin America. It also led to the election of Trump in the US, Bolsonaro in Brazil, and other reactionary regimes.

As the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI) has explained, the weakness and ideological collapse of the left in the recent period, and its failure to put forward an alternative to capitalism, has left a political vacuum. The far-right populists will attempt to capitalise on the current banking crisis and attack the bailouts of the bankers. The fear of further banking collapses can be very powerful, especially in countries where the trauma of what this meant historically is part of mass consciousness. A deep recession can also 'stun' sections of the working class, should unemployment rocket, along with other attacks on living standards. It can also lead to crucial political radicalisation and polarisation.

The building of mass workers' parties with a socialist alternative programme to capitalism, to offer a way out of the contradictions and dilemmas of the profit system, is posed even more urgently as this crisis is unfolding.

The demand for nationalisation of the banking system, under democratic workers' control and management, as an alternative to capitalist bailouts, is a central demand. A struggle to help fight the ravages of inflation through the establishment of a living wage, adjusted to match inflation and price increases, is essential. For committees of workers, consumers and trade unionists to determine in each country the real rate of inflation is a demand that is necessary to struggle for. We cannot trust the fixed inflation figures of capitalist economists and politicians. These policies, together with an emergency socialist programme to break with capitalism and introduce a democratic socialist plan, is the only road out of the impasse that capitalism finds itself in.

Anti-worker court case binned



Gary's arrest SOUTHERN SP

DAVID MAPLES
BRIGHTON SOCIALIST PARTY

There was jubilation at Brighton Magistrates Court on 24 March as the case against Gary Palmer, Declan McIntyre and Carl Turner collapsed (see 'Interview with arrested Sussex bin picket: "We must continue to stand fast"' at socialistparty.org.uk). The 'GMB 3' had been arrested whilst picketing and charged with obstructing the highway. The Crown Prosecution Service failed to bring any evidence so the case was dismissed.

However, the use of the law against striking workers continues, and the police clearly demonstrated their role in class society in this case, protecting employers' interests.

Although this case was dismissed, employers can still turn to a raft of Tory anti-trade union laws which Starmer's New Labour has not pledged to appeal. GMB Sussex has pledged to continue fighting for decent pay for refuse workers. They also need a political voice which backs them unreservedly.

Gary Palmer has been invited to speak at the National Shop Stewards Network conference on 24 June.

RMT and national rail disputes: Fighting leadership needed so that rail workers don't suffer to boost bosses' profits

SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBERS IN THE RMT

The dispute between RMT rail union and Network Rail is now officially over. But members must prepare for future battles.

After 20 days of strike action, along with limited, periodic overtime bans, 76% of members voted to accept Network Rail's most recent offer. Our Train Operating Company (TOCs) members remain in dispute, but the strike action previously booked for 30 March and 1 April has been called off following a new offer from the employers.

Network Rail

The strike action forced employers to improve the original Network Rail offer. However, despite the majority on Network Rail voting to accept, there is clearly a significant number of members who are immensely disappointed with the outcome of a battle which commenced last June and, along with the Royal Mail postal workers, launched the current strike wave.

This accepted offer is only a slightly improved version of a previous offer which was rejected, as very strongly recommended by the National Executive Committee (NEC), as recently as December. However, this time the new offer, still a below-inflation pay rise and ending the national fight against Network Rail's 'Modernising Maintenance' cuts agenda, was put to members without a recommendation.

It is clear from the referendum result that the majority of members felt that the deal was the best that could be achieved at the moment. This feeling would have been encouraged by the video for members fronted by Senior Assistant General Secretary Eddie Dempsey, which, although not explicitly recommending acceptance, presented the offer using tone and language which implied that it should be accepted.

This is despite National Maintenance Council reps having asked



A SIGNALLER SAYS:

"In signalling and operations, there was much disappointment that a proposed overtime ban was twice called off. The signalling staff were shocked, as this would have had the company scrambling for cover, causing massive disruption without costing the members, and they believed that Network Rail was dreading this course of action."

"There was no meeting with area reps from Network Rail, whereby we could have appealed to the NEC to implement the overtime ban. Many from signalling chose to vote to accept when they realised their voices were being ignored, and the tactics were poor. That mistake should not happen again with the TOCs."

Newcastle ELAINE BRUNSKILL

the NEC, only days beforehand, to put more strike action on at weekends.

Be prepared to fight modernisation

The result is undoubtedly a setback for Network Rail members, in particular for those on the maintenance side who will face the biggest attacks from 'Modernising Maintenance'. Mick Lynch's letter to members on 9 March argued that accepting the offer would mean 'Modernising Maintenance' couldn't be resisted with industrial action.

However, the union has not signed up to the 'modernisation' programme and we must be prepared to go back into industrial dispute, using strike action if necessary, to fight attacks from management.

TOCs

It remains to be seen how the result will affect the TOC members. They are all still in dispute, but removing Network Rail from the national

dispute does reduce the impact of having the majority of operational railway staff striking together.

At the time of writing, the NEC is considering a new offer from the employers, but once again it comprises a below-inflation 5% followed by 4%, tied to acceptance of a raft of very serious attacks on jobs, terms and conditions. This time this is to be negotiated through each separate TOC's collective bargaining machinery, instead of one body representing them all.

RMT must reject any offer which involves paying for a pay rise by selling members' jobs and conditions.

It is vital that the upcoming rebalancing of TOC members returns a massive 'yes' vote. The NEC should not use the Network Rail settlement as an excuse to dilute our previous demands for an inflation-proof pay rise for our TOC members and for terms and conditions to be protected.

A national meeting of reps from the TOCs should be called, along with special meetings of branches

and regions, so that the campaign to defend our jobs, pay and conditions can be built.

The strike wave isn't over. Over 600,000 workers took action together on Budget Day in the single biggest strike day yet. This included RMT and Aslef members on London Underground, who are fighting to defend their jobs, pay and pensions.

Nationalisation

The NEC must provide the leadership that is so urgently needed and not allow the government and rail bosses to get away with their agenda of making rail workers suffer to boost their profits.

We must fight for maximum coordination of action against the bosses and the Tory government, and raise the clear demand for socialist democratic nationalisation of the railways. If Keir Starmer were to commit an incoming Labour government to this now, the pressure on the bosses and Tories would be intensified.

Unite executive elections Vote for campaigning, socialist candidates supporting Sharon Graham's manifesto

SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBERS IN UNITE

This election is of critical importance. Unite members will elect the executive that will work with Sharon Graham, who became Unite General Secretary in August 2021. The ballot runs from 27 March to 25 April.

Socialist Party members in the union campaigned for Sharon because she was the candidate with the industrial programme best equipped for this tumultuous period for workers and their families.

Unite and the strike wave

The Covid pandemic saw workers fighting for safe workplaces and against a brutal offensive by the bosses, particularly fire and rehire. Unite was to the fore, and led the strike wave that grew as the economy opened up.

Workers now face the Tory cost-of-living crisis, but Unite can play a leading role in mass coordinated action, a 24-hour general strike, to break the Tory pay cap and anti-union laws.

Since Sharon's election, Unite has led over 500 disputes, of which 80% have already brought success, gaining around £250 million in improved pay for members.

Unite's reps now have more opportunities to get involved in planning for action, for better pay and conditions, and for fairer workplaces. Further democratisation is planned and needs to be supported by the new executive.

These positive steps have alarmed the employers, who now seek to undermine the fighting spirit in Unite. The newly elected executive will need to support a fighting leadership for the union.

Unite policy on Labour councils: no cuts!

Members need a union that takes on employers who attack our members, even when that means Labour councils. Last year, Coventry Labour council spent over £7 million trying to break Unite members' action on the bins. They won a victory after an eight-month strike.

The union was prepared to

suspend Labour councillors who were Unite members and part of this attack on the bin drivers.

After Sharon's victory, Unite adopted a policy proposed by Socialist Party members, urging Labour councils to refuse to make further cuts to services, instead passing no-cuts needs budgets, supporting struggling communities.

Political strategy

There is growing support among Unite members for the union to support candidates prepared to fight alongside members in industrial struggles and who support our policies, whichever political party they belong to.

They no longer believe Starmer's New Labour offers a voice for workers. A political alternative is needed with socialist policies.

We call for nationalisation of the profiteering energy, utility and transport companies. We demand fully funded NHS, education and other services, and the end of privatisation. We need rent controls and affordable public housing.

This Executive Council election is the chance to consolidate the advances made in Unite since the election of Sharon Graham. The candidates below, including, but not only, Socialist Party members, are standing as part of the slate of candidates who supported Sharon's election.

South West region seat: Suzanne Muna

Rep at City of Bristol College; previously secretary of the Housing Workers Branch and five years on the EC

Health seat: Len Hockey

Secretary of Unite Bart's Health branch in east London, led the victory which returned 1,700 workers, including porters and cleaners, to direct NHS employment

West Midlands region seat: Antony Allen

HGV refuse collection driver, on the strike committee of the Coventry bin strike

Not-for-profit seat: Tanis Belsham-Wray

Campaigned for union recognition in a number workplaces, chair of regional young members' committee, Yorkshire TUC young trade unionist of the year



Above: Coventry bin strike. Below: Barts strike, Len Hockey (centre) PHOTOS: SOCIALIST PARTY



Victory for West Midlands National Express workers



WEST MIDLANDS SOCIALIST PARTY

SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBERS IN THE WEST MIDLANDS

Just six days into indefinite strike action, National Express West Midlands bus drivers have won a 16.2% pay rise. This begins to reverse years of declining real wages.

The deal includes an improvement to overtime rates being made permanent, an increase in the length of accident pay, and improved rates for some public holiday working.

Unite members showed rock-solid support for the strike in the face of management pressure and, at some garages, having the police called to the picket line.

As one driver at West Bromwich told Socialist Party members: "Management never thought we'd go on strike - they got a nasty surprise".

The success of the strike, in winning a pay rise well beyond what the company was originally willing to give, puts down a platform to win future improvements to pay, working conditions and rostering agreements.

The momentum from the current dispute can be built on to strengthen the union. A renewed committee of garage and route reps to talk through the shared issues across the company, along with regular meetings in the garages to hear from and feed back to the membership, is the best way to hold management to any commitments made.

One driver in Coventry on the picket told us: "If they try and mess with us again, we can fight back harder than ever!"

The fact that National Express has lost millions in revenue per strike day shows the money that drivers generate for the company every time they show up for work.

The victory of bus drivers will be an inspiration to workers across the West Midlands currently struggling for a living pay rise.

Commenting on the number of beeping horns from posties and bin workers on the picket at Yardley Wood, one driver put it best: "Everyone's feeling the pinch - everyone should go on strike!"

- Supporting Sharon Graham's manifesto
- Active support for Unite members - properly resourced reps and activists
- A member-led, democratic, diverse union
- Collective power and coordinated action
- Strike together against the bosses' offensive, the Tories' cost-of-living squeeze, and their anti-union laws
- Socialist policies, for a real political alternative for workers - support candidates who support Unite members and policies

To help in this campaign, contact: ECUnite23@gmail.com

SOCIALISM TODAY

Monthly magazine of the Socialist Party

April issue includes...

- Unite executive elections
- Mass protests in Israel
- Northern Ireland

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ALL STRIKE TOGETHER

FIGHT THE TORY COST-OF-LIVING SQUEEZE AND THEIR ANTI-UNION LAWS!

2023 National Shop Stewards Network Conference
Saturday 24th June
Conway Hall,
London WC1R 4RL
11am-4.30pm



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.

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Humza Yousef elected SNP leader

Build a real political alternative for workers

SOCIALIST PARTY SCOTLAND

Humza Yousef, the favoured candidate of the party establishment, has been elected as the new leader of the Scottish National Party (SNP). He will now also be the Scottish government's first minister at Holyrood. His victory, however, was very narrow. In fact, a majority of the 50,000 SNP members who voted gave their first preference vote to either Kate Forbes (41%) or Ash Regan (11%). Yousef won 48% of the first preference vote. After Regan was eliminated and her preference votes redistributed, he ended up on 52% to Forbes' 48%.

Decade of cuts

Yousef becomes SNP leader, following Nicola Sturgeon's resignation, at a time of turmoil in the party. Its support base is shrinking. It has increasingly clashed with the organised working class through the recent strike wave. This is on top of a record of more than a decade of passing on Tory cuts which have devastated local government and the NHS. Yousef, therefore, is first minister of an SNP-Scottish Green government that will be, from day one, resting on a crumbling social base of support, including inside the SNP itself.

Indeed, if Regan had not stood Forbes could well have won the election. Standing on the right of the party on social and economic issues, Forbes - the current finance secretary who opposes equal marriage, a woman's right to choose, gender recognition reform and sex outside marriage - is also a passionate neo-liberal conservative on economic

policy and had virtually no support among SNP MSPs and MPs.

Yousef, in contrast, had the backing of the Sturgeon-Swinney leadership and scores of elected representatives who will be highly relieved that Forbes did not win. Had Forbes won, the end of the coalition with the Greens would have been inevitable, as well as the potential loss of thousands more members, particularly from a younger cohort of the party.

As Socialist Party Scotland pointed out during the election, the SNP membership is heavily weighted to the older, middle class and rural areas of Scotland. This factor, and the evident dissatisfaction among SNP members at the failure of the leadership to make any headway over independence, gave Forbes in particular a stick to beat Yousef with, alongside his woeful record in government. "Continuity won't cut it" was her main slogan.

Membership drop

Socialist Party Scotland argued that tens of thousands of working-class people who joined the SNP after the indyref had dropped away. During the leadership contest this was brought home in spectacular fashion when the leadership was forced to admit that the membership now stood at just over 72,000, a 53,000 drop since 2015.

Yousef has been a central figure in the SNP administration for the last decade, as transport minister, justice secretary and health secretary. He has presided over a catastrophe in health, with record waiting lists for appointments and waiting times for A&E admissions. As the 'continuity'



After a decade of the SNP passing on Tory cuts, new leader Humza Yousef faces a party in turmoil, collapsing membership and mass dissatisfaction among voters SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT



Scottish trade unions marching against cuts to public services ROY SMITH

leadership candidate, it will be business as usual for his cuts-making Scottish government.

None of the SNP leadership candidates were remotely on the left. There is therefore no basis for the Scottish Trades Union Congress (STUC) general secretary to claim, as she did in a media interview prior to the result being announced, that Yousef was a candidate most aligned with the aims and policies of the STUC. That will come as news to the tens of thousands of workers who have had to take strike action against the Scottish government and SNP-run councils over the past year.

New party

What the SNP leadership contest underlined most clearly was the need for the trade unions to forge a new political vehicle for the workers' movement. Rather than seeking to work in partnership with the Scottish government, why not strike out in the direction of building a real workers' party that would most certainly be aligned with the aims and policies of the trade unions?

There is no question that hundreds of thousands of current SNP supporters, as well as many from Scottish Labour, would rally to a

real independent working-class political alternative. Such a workers' party could lead a real mass struggle for democratic rights and a second independence referendum, as well as advocating policies to tackle the cost-of-living crisis. For example, inflation-proof pay rises, nationalisation of energy, and massive investment into health, education, housing and local government.

Capitalism

It was clear from the SNP leadership contest that none of the candidates had any intention of taking the road of mass working-class struggle to achieve these aims. And no wonder. They all support a continuation of capitalism in an independent Scotland.

The new SNP first minister will be no different in policy terms to the previous two SNP incumbents. Unlike Salmond and Sturgeon, however, he faces a party in turmoil, a collapsing membership and mass dissatisfaction among its electoral base.

The need to build a new mass working-class party is urgent. Socialist Party Scotland will do all it can, both inside the trade unions and by standing worker and socialist candidates in elections, to make that case.

'Partygate' – Johnson's lies reveal Tory contempt for us

JOHN WILLIAMS
HOSPITALITY WORKER

It's been nearly 18 months since the first revelations of 'Partygate' – ex-prime minister Boris Johnson and his cronies partying, whilst the rest of the UK was in strict Covid lockdown. People are still furious, and will remain furious for years to come.

Question Time host Fiona Bruce asked the audience: "There are more people in this audience who voted for Boris Johnson and the Conservative Party than for any other party here... who believes Boris Johnson was telling the truth?"

Not a single person put up their hand. That just shows the utter contempt people now have for the Tories who go from one scandal to another.

Hospitality

I work in hospitality, and we remember how frustrating it was trying to implement the constantly changing rules. It was almost as if Boris Johnson had read the 'How to piss off hospitality workers and destroy the industry for dummies' guidebook, and took his government policies from there.

Did Johnson ever abide by these rules that we had to? His comments at parliament's 'privileges committee' are laughable and incredibly frustrating. "The rules were followed at all times... Covid guidance was followed at all times".

He obviously thought his own rules didn't apply to him. I had to put off seeing my late Nan for months,



ANDREW PARSONS/NO 10/CC

when she probably needed me the most, because I wanted to keep her safe. I'll never forget or forgive Boris Johnson for that.

Since then, in another bizarre statement, he has gone on to say that the gatherings were "essential for work purposes", in order to maintain "morale". No one believes this.

Johnson clapped for the NHS once a week. But did he give health workers inflation-proof pay rises and properly fund the NHS? To make sure the over 150,000 and rising NHS vacancies were filled? Of course not.

It's disgraceful that we've had to wait well over a year before Johnson was even officially interrogated by MPs – and when we all know the truth anyway. And it shouldn't just be left to establishment MPs to do this.

The working class needs its own party to stop self-serving careerists like Boris Johnson, and other capitalist politicians that put profit before lives and livelihoods during the Covid pandemic. Instead, we need working-class representatives who will fight for us.

Banning 'nos' won't help us – where's funding for youth services?

KATIE SIMPSON
DRUG AND ALCOHOL WORKER

The Conservative government, with the backing of the Labour Party, has gone against the advice of the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs, by introducing a blanket ban of Nitrous oxide (nos).

The drug is also known as 'laughing gas'. You would have seen its canisters littering the ground.

There have been 45 deaths related to the drug since 2010, and other cases of young people becoming permanently disabled. Any death or disability caused by this gas is a tragedy.

Yet rather than providing more addiction support services, rather than investing in youth support, rather than funding more rehabilitation clinics, the government is just appearing to be doing something by criminalisation of another substance. This does not tackle the reasons young people use nos, such as trauma, boredom or a lack of connection with their communities.

Criminal convictions for minor

drug offences make it infinitely harder for young people to find work, and feed into a cycle of poverty, a major cause of drug use. The Tories' decision to ban nos is clearly a political move, rather than a genuine attempt to protect young people and reduce anti-social behaviour.

As a drug and alcohol worker, I have supported many people through addiction. The vast majority of deaths, disability and anti-social behaviour are a result of heroin and alcohol addiction. There were almost 10,000 UK deaths from alcohol in 2021, and almost 5,000 deaths from drugs in England and Wales the same year.

Schools should be provided with resources to educate young people. Councils should stop cutting and privatising jobs and services, and instead invest in youth centres.

Ultimately, only with socialist policies to eradicate poverty, and when people have a genuine democratic say in how their communities are run, will we see the end to the causes that drive drug-related deaths, crime and anti-social behaviour.



'nos' canisters HANSMULLER/CC

French mass strikes against pension attacks continue



JAMES IVENS
SOCIALIST PARTY NATIONAL COMMITTEE MEMBER
REPORTS FROM PARIS

Over a million workers and young people protested in cities and towns across France on 23 March. This enormous day of action was provoked by the latest stage in the government's campaign against pension rights, and especially its use of undemocratic constitutional powers like 'Article 49.3' to force measures through against parliamentary and public opposition.

President Emmanuel Macron's unprecedented TV appearance the day before poured more fuel on the flames. His prime minister, Elisabeth Borne, had just survived two no-confidence motions by the skin of her teeth, the first by just nine votes. Macron made no pretense of an attempt to conciliate. Rather, it was a flat insistence that the counter-reform will go through come hell or high water, no matter who opposes or how.

The demonstration in Paris comprised 800,000, by the estimation of the CGT union federation. Blocs of striking workers packed the streets on two huge converging march routes, interspersed with big groups of students.

Gauche Révolutionnaire (CWI France) members marched with 30,000 in Rennes, 25,000 in Valence, up to 20,000 in Nancy. 10,000 marched in Montélimar – a town of just 40,000 inhabitants!

Slogans opposing Article 49.3, demanding Macron get out, and that the pension age return to 60, dominated the protest. One demonstrator carried a giant papier-mâché bin containing a papier-mâché Macron.

Refuse workers have been on strike

for weeks in some areas, most of all in Paris. Great mounds of uncollected rubbish bags loom over street corners. No smoke rises from the incinerator chimneys. The public sector is the most represented in the strike wave and on most demos for now – rail, education, sanitation, electricity, public services. The private sector is also involved, including in private-sector public services, and very significantly the oil refineries with their record profits.

Chants also rang out through the Paris crowds for a general strike. This is necessary, and could certainly overturn Macron's attacks. But the question is who can organise it and how.

Union leaders have consistently been pushed by the anger from below to call coordinated actions and further strike days. But there is no planned, pre-announced programme of action. This is badly needed, to show both the movement and the bosses that the unions are in it to win it.

A new generation of strikers is now learning the methods of working-class struggle. Picket lines are rare but reappearing. The tradition of 'general assemblies' at workplaces to discuss demands, tactics and how

to spread the strike also needs to regroup. A Gauche Révolutionnaire member and union rep at a Paris lycée (secondary school) has shown what is possible with these methods, bringing big numbers out on strike and leading discussion on strategy and politics.

Mass workers' party

Pickets at an incinerator in Paris expressed the view that the traditional parties all stand for the same thing. It's true! There is no mass party where the working class can discuss a programme to solve society's problems and struggle together to beat the capitalist politicians. Gauche Révolutionnaire members have found the escalating movement in 2023 is becoming more open to these ideas than in previous years.

Yet in many areas, the union activists and left political activists are the same people or work closely together. The need for such a party requires wide discussion in the workplaces, on picket lines and at general assemblies.

In many areas, university and lycée students joined the marches in much bigger numbers than yet seen in this year's movement. A Gauche

Révolutionnaire member at Inalco university in Paris was with a contingent of just a dozen students on the previous strike day – but left with a group of 100 on 23 March. Still more significant were the dozens of Paris lycées blockaded by students for the first time, often alongside striking teachers.

Young people are angry on multiple issues. The cost-of-living crisis and increasing state repression affect all parts of society. Macron has also pushed through anti-working class university selection procedures, and attempted to extend a version of national service. The government recently postponed the latter to try to avoid provoking occupations and blockades by young people – showing that fighting back gets results.

This is the generation which entered secondary education under Covid, and had yet to raise its head following the experience of lockdown. Students too are relearning the traditions of struggle of the French workers and youth, bringing great energy with them. But many more are still to join the movement. One lycée student told us he hadn't because it seems it's only about pensions – and he's not alone in thinking this. More and more students understand that this struggle is about fighting for their own future. It's important the movement extends its demands to encompass all the big issues facing workers and young people, to draw more in.

The anger is palpable throughout society. If passion alone could stop Macron's attacks, it would have done so. But without serious organisation to channel all these currents of struggle towards a conscious strategy of escalating action with a broad programme of demands, the outcome is an open question.

In the meantime, frustration is rising. The fire-setting and vandalism of a small minority was more of a feature on 23 March, which the state is using to increase repression. In Rennes, Brittany, demonstrations were banned in the city on 25 March. Unprovoked attacks by the police are already more of a feature. One striking teaching assistant in Rouen lost her thumb to a rubber bullet.

Macron had virtually no public support to start out with. He has less now. Whatever the outcome of this battle, a new generation is quickly learning the lessons of struggle and has no choice but to fight on issue after issue. Things will not be the same again. But right now, the battle over pensions is still very much alive.

Over a million demonstrated in France on 23 March
CÉCILE RIMBOUD

'Popular initiative referendum' won't strengthen the struggle

Some parties, like the PCF (Communist Party), are actively campaigning for a 'popular initiative referendum' – a poll of the population to advise parliament. The trade union leaderships, and left political leader, Jean-Luc Mélenchon, have also called for it. But this proposal does not strengthen us at all. We don't need to show that we are in

the majority to oppose this attack on pensions and Macron's other policies. So why put the power to decide back in the hands of the government?

The state institutions are on the side of Macron and the government. Everything they do is to try to prevent our victory. Even if we manage to collect the nearly

five million signatures needed, there is nothing to force the MPs to pass our opinion into law. We need to inflict a major defeat on them, on a par with the one Macron wants to inflict on us. And it is only through mass struggle, discussion and organising ourselves politically that we can achieve this.



Strike and organise to kick out Macron!

The following is an edited extract from the special bulletin distributed by Gauche Révolutionnaire, CWI France during the 23 March strike

We need to develop the movement on pensions as a rallying point to get rid of Macron and his policies. Power is being challenged. It's time to take the right to decide on our lives out of the hands of this government and the capitalists. In this context, quite logically, many workers and young people look at the parliamentary activity of the left alliance, NUPES, with sympathy.

Even some who are further from the struggle see that the far-right RN, under its guise of opposing the pension reform, does not support the movement at all and, on the contrary, opposes the strikes, hoping to capitalise on the anger later, while frustrating the movement today.

A government truly at the service of the workers would have to come from the struggle, its trade union and political organisations. It would be necessary to discuss widely what programme is capable of competing with the capitalists and getting them out of the way. It would therefore be a question of not settling for a programme that accepts capitalism or of forming a coalition with the PS (ex-social democrats) and EELV (Greens), who are complicit in carrying out policies like Macron's in local government.

Instead, we need a government that defends our interests as intrinsically as Macron's defends those of the capitalists – a government that has a firm programme against the capitalists.

We need new elections. But ultimately the current institutions favour the rich and give us no control over those we elect. We need a government that defends the interests of workers and pursues policies to meet the needs of the people, with

democratic and environmental planning of the economy.

Elected officials should be recallable, and paid the average worker's wage. Those who are leading the current struggle, with the support of the parties that oppose capitalism, and trade unionists and youth activists, should form the basis of a new government.

Such a government would need to renationalise privatised public services, and put the major sectors of the economy under public ownership, under the democratic control and management of the workers and the population, especially finance, energy, transport and distribution.

The hundreds of billions of euros from the wealth of the ultra-rich and the profits of multinationals and tax evasion should instead be used to provide jobs and housing for everyone. This would set in motion a real transition to a socialist economy, free of private ownership of the means of production and exploitation.

But today, workers and young people do not have a mass party to fight for such a class programme. So, in the course of the struggle, all this must also be discussed between strikers, activists, trade unionists. From now on, a broad and public discussion is needed between the forces rejecting capitalism in order to form a political united front against Macron and the capitalists.

Strengthening the struggle and more broadly the organisation of workers and young people, proposing a programme for socialism, this is the objective of Gauche Révolutionnaire.

Israeli Government crisis ignites general strike

ANNON COHEN
COMMITTEE FOR A WORKERS' INTERNATIONAL

Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu's sacking of defence minister Yoav Gallant on the evening of Sunday 26 March unleashed a spontaneous eruption of protests. 600,000 poured onto the streets, blocking highways with burning barricades. In Jerusalem, protesters broke through the barriers surrounding Netanyahu's house. With universities, doctors and high school students already on strike, Arnon Bar-David, the General Secretary of the Histadrut, the largest trade union body, announced a general strike the following day in the presence of bankers and corporate CEOs, who gave Bar-David a standing ovation.

Public transport has been exempted from the general strike to allow people to travel to the anti-government demonstrations.

Netanyahu was expected to announce the freezing of his controversial judicial reforms (which would have allowed the government to pack the High Court with its supporters). But his announcement was postponed after his ultra-nationalist coalition parties threatened to bring down the government if Netanyahu surrenders to the "anarchists on the streets".

Netanyahu is under siege, paralysed by his dependence on his ultra-nationalist coalition partners. He has tried to escape the protests by spending his weekends on lavish and unnecessary trips abroad – to Rome, to Berlin, and last weekend to London. But at each destination he has been hounded by protests of hundreds of Israelis and members of local Jewish communities.

The demands of the Histadrut general strike were unclear. Bar-David demanded that the legal reforms be

frozen and the sacking of Gallant reversed. But the turmoil in society will not be solved by the freezing of judicial reform, or by a ministerial appointment.

The Netanyahu government says it was democratically elected only a few months ago. But it has lost all legitimacy. The hundreds of thousands on the street protesting against the government are the true expression of democracy.

It is necessary to bring down the capitalist government of ultra-nationalist settler zealots. But the experience of the administrations formed after five elections since 2019 shows that the capitalist politicians are incapable of forming a stable government which can tackle the crisis in society. None of the capitalist parties who make up the Knesset can solve the crisis in Israeli society – they are all part of the problem. Now there is the chance to begin to undermine the popular support of populists like Netanyahu, the far right and ultra-nationalists by offering a real alternative to them.

The general strike has forced the government to postpone the legal reform. But as long as this government

stays in power, it will return to attacks once the protests subside. The experience of the previous Lapid-Bennett government shows that a different constellation of capitalist politicians, or a national unity government, will not solve the crisis in society.

Clearly many Israeli capitalists want a different government, one which serves their interests better. But workers' organisations like the Histadrut, other trade unions and popular bodies should form a workers' government, not made up of rotten MKs (MPs) but based on elected representatives from every workplace, school and community – religious and secular, Jewish and Arab.

Such a government must end the repression of the Palestinians, the attacks on the working class and defend the national and democratic rights of Palestinians and Israelis. It must nationalise the wealth of society and organise it to provide a decent life for everyone, while being the basis for Palestinian and Israeli working people to agree a socialist solution to the national conflict that has dominated the region for decades. This is the only way out of the crisis.



Socialist Party members joined protests in London as Netanyahu visited on 24 March
SOCIALIST PARTY



Mass protests in Israel
OREN ROZEN/CC



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the Socialist

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formerly **Militant**

FRENCH PENSIONS ATTACKS

Workers and students unite in mass protests and strikes



French president Emmanuel Macron's decision to force through a rise in the retirement age from 62 to 64 has driven levels of anger to new heights in France. Millions have continued to take to the streets, and strikes continue. Socialist Party member **Ruby Cunningham**, who is studying in France, reports from the protests:

"A week since the pension changes became law, the biggest crowd yet assembled in Clermont-Ferrand with one clear objective: to make their voices heard.

"Student groups and trade union branches from around the region mobilised once again to show their anger at the current government. Slogans included 'no to 64', among other criticisms of the pension reforms, Macron's 'contempt' for working people, and concerns about the state of democratic process in France.

"Chants and speeches took up a number of pressing issues: hospital workers' pay, working conditions, gender equality and police brutality, as well as a call for working-class solidarity.

"One sign read 'you give us 64, we'll give you May '68' - referring to the historic general strike that took France to the brink of revolution.

"The cost-of-living crisis and precarity of minimum wage workers and students is a recurrent theme both on campus and in the streets. A group of art and architecture students from a nearby university assembled to protest on their homemade float, with a coffin reading 'our retirement'. At the Université Clermont Auvergne, student activists blockaded entrances with bins and upturned tables, asking students to support the movement.

"The French government's attack on pensions is just one example of a widespread campaign against the working class. The French workers' determined strike movement, backed up by the protests of youth, is an inspiration to workers in Britain and around the world."

• For more reports from France see pages 14-15

PHOTO: JAMES IVENS

WHAT WE STAND FOR: THE SOCIALIST PARTY'S MAIN DEMANDS >>> see column on p12



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