

£1 / £2 solidarity price

socialistparty.org.uk



the Socialist

Issue 1221

6-12 April 2023

formerly **Militant**

TORIES OUT

But Starmer's Labour doesn't fight for us

Unions must back Corbyn to stand



Jeremy Corbyn on the picket line with nurses on strike PAUL MATTSSON

- Prepare a union-backed workers' list for the general election
- Vote TUSC in 4 May local elections

What we think – read more on page 3

the Socialist

formerly **Militant**

Issue 1221
6-12 April 2023

DO YOU HAVE NEWS FOR US?

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

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

CONTACT US

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

DEADLINES

Friday before publication, or Monday morning for urgent news, unless otherwise agreed with the editors.

The Socialist goes to press on a Tuesday night. We publish online on Wednesday and in print on Thursday.

SUBSCRIBE

to the Socialist for weekly working-class news, analysis and fighting strategy socialistparty.org.uk/subscribe

- Paper subscription £4.50 a month, or £6.50 including Socialism Today
- E-subscription £2.50 a month, or £4 including Socialism Today

SOCIALISM TODAY

our monthly Marxist magazine socialismtoday.org

- Paper sub £3 a month, e-sub £2.50

SOCIALISM: THE PODCAST

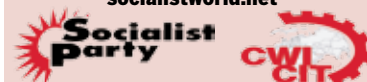
on all major podcast platforms

FOLLOW US

facebook.com/CWISocialistParty
Instagram @SocialistPartyCWI
YouTube - Socialist Party
Twitter @Socialist_Party

SOCIALIST PARTY

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



BOOKS AND PAMPHLETS

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

OUR NEWSPAPER TEAM

Editor of the Socialist : Josh Asker
Editorial staff : Scott Jones, Ian Pattison, Paula Mitchell, Mark Best
Circulation manager : Chris Newby

ISSN 1366-9621

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

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

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

UNIONS MUST BACK CORBYN TO STAND

Socialist Party WHAT WE THINK

The Labour National Executive Committee (NEC)'s decision, by 22-12, that Jeremy Corbyn 'will not be endorsed as a Labour Party candidate at the next general election' was the latest demonstration by Starmer that his 'New Labour Mark II' will reliably defend the capitalist status quo. The status quo means growing poverty, real-terms pay cuts, crumbling and privatised public services, and unaffordable housing. So, with Labour in the grip of the pro-capitalist Starmerites, the question of how the working class can create a party which stands for its interests is very sharply posed.

As Jeremy Corbyn put it, writing in the Islington Tribune: "Keir Starmer has abandoned his pledges to defend trade unions, bring key industries into public ownership, reverse NHS privatisation, raise corporation tax, protect free movement, abolish tuition fees. Solidarity is now saved for CEOs, not striking workers. Trust is placed in corporate interests, not party members."

However, yet again, the ruthlessness of the pro-capitalist Labour leadership has been met with silence, or open retreat, by most representatives of the Labour left. Jon Lansman, founder of Momentum (set up to support Corbyn's leadership), got press coverage for comparing Starmer's undemocratic actions to those

of Putin, but then proceeded to beg Corbyn not to stand. John McDonnell MP condemned the decision, but limited himself to calls for 'unity', when it is clear to all that Starmer will only be happy when the final embers of Corbynism within Labour have been pounded to ashes.

Corbyn himself has so far only obliquely referred to his next steps by saying: "I have spent my life fighting for a fairer society on behalf of the people of Islington North, and I have no intention of stopping now." This appears to be a hint that he will stand in the general election in Islington North, either as an independent or under the banner of a new party.

There would be a huge response if Corbyn was to now move beyond hints and publicly declare his intention to stand, as a step towards the formation of a new democratic workers' party based on the trade unions. Millions who are angry at Starmer 'wiping the slate clean' of Labour's Corbyn-era anti-austerity policies would be enthused by such a call. However, it seems that Corbyn's plans may not become clear until after the Islington North Constituency Labour Party has gone through the selection process, and probably been suspended for trying to select him as its candidate.

Working-class political representation

In the meantime, it is urgent that the workers' movement begins to address how to solve the crisis of working-class political representation. So far, the response to the NEC decision has been distinctly muted. Sarah Woolley, General Secretary of the Bakers' Union, BFAWU, which

disaffiliated from Labour in 2021, has made a statement of 'solidarity with Jeremy Corbyn' which concludes that if Jeremy stands as an independent her union will "support his campaign". The TSSA union also issued a statement, which quoted Nicola Jukes, TSSA Labour NEC member, saying: "The passing of this motion, on top of so many disappointing actions under Keir Starmer's leadership, will prompt difficult discussions about Labour affiliation within our union."

As well as Nicola Jukes, representatives from Unite, CWU, Aslef, and FBU all voted against Starmer's NEC motion, unlike the Unison representative - who abstained - and the GMB and Musicians' Union representatives who shamefully voted with Starmer. However, at the time of writing, BFAWU and TSSA are the only national unions to have made any public statement condemning the NEC's refusal to support Corbyn, never mind proposing next steps.

Some organisations on the left are trying to evade the question of what the unions should do politically, using the excuse that what happens in parliament is less important than strikes. In reality this superficially 'radical' argumentation gives cover for the majority of union leaders' failure to take steps towards a new mass workers' party.

While it is true that taking strike action can be a 'higher level' of struggle than voting in an election, although not necessarily in all circumstances, most of the million-plus workers who have been on strike in recent months see the interrelationship between the two. The experience of strike action has

strengthened the feeling that the working class also needs a political voice. CWU members can see how a party in parliament fighting for nationalisation of Royal Mail would aid their struggle, as rail workers want a party fighting for rail nationalisation. Across the whole workers' movement many can see that a mass party fighting for the abolition of the undemocratic trade union laws would be an enormous asset.

With no such party currently in existence, the dominant mood is to grudgingly vote for Starmer's New Labour in order to get the hated Tories out of office. However, if even a couple of unions were to take steps to found a new party, millions of workers and young people would be inspired by it.

New mass workers' party

Most importantly, the working class having its own mass party would be an important step towards understanding the huge potential collective strength of our class, and beginning to envisage how the working class could run society on a socialist basis, rather than being in a constant battle to win a few crumbs from the capitalist elite.

At many of this year's trade union conferences there are likely to be a variety of resolutions on agendas relating to political representation. Each union has its own rules and traditions. Some are still affiliated to Labour, others - the RMT and BFAWU - have already broken that link, others have a history of 'staying out' of politics. While these different starting points will have an effect, it is likely to be an issue of discussion in almost every union.

PREPARE A WORKERS' LIST FOR THE GENERAL ELECTION

Unions voting for resolutions to support Jeremy Corbyn standing would be an important and very positive step. However, what is needed is much more than support for one candidate in one constituency. The workers' movement needs its own political voice. That does not mean simply funding a new 'left project' but starting to build a mass democratic party based on the trade union movement.

At some affiliated union conferences anger at Starmer's pro-capitalist policies will mean that resolutions for disaffiliation from Labour will inevitably be on the agenda. Disaffiliating in order to 'stay out of politics', which effectively means leaving it to the pro-capitalist politicians, is not the answer. But any union disaffiliating to begin building something new would be a huge step forward.

It is possible, however, such resolutions might not mobilise the maximum support at this year's union conferences for the next steps that are needed. The drive to get the Tories out, and the desperate hope that continued affiliation might force an incoming Labour government to give a few crumbs to the working class, may lead delegates to hold back from voting to break their unions' link to Labour.

Also on the agenda of some conferences will, however, be resolutions - often moved by Socialist Party members - to open up political funds and to start backing, alongside Jeremy Corbyn, other genuine pro-trade union, anti-austerity candidates in the general election, as a step towards a mass party of the working class.



Corbyn speaking at Durham miners' gala 2019 PHOTO: PAUL MATTSSON

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 re-nationalisation, 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

Anti-worker bank boss sends warning to capitalists

JOHN MERRELL
LEICESTER SOCIALIST PARTY

Capitalist commentators, having seemingly convinced themselves that inflation had peaked, were shocked when it rose again in February to 10.4%.

During the months leading up to the start of the strike wave, Andrew Bailey, the Bank of England governor, recommended 'moderation' in workers' pay claims to prevent "inflation becoming embedded". Given Bailey's £500,000+ in salary and perks, his warning was readily and rightly disregarded by workers seeking to maintain their living standards.

Now Bailey has made a different plea, this time to bosses: 'Please don't keep rising prices, it will keep fuelling inflation.' A year into the

strike wave, he dares not provoke workers this time round.

Needless to say his 'plea' was roundly dismissed by capitalist companies, which are driven solely by profit. Consequently, 'business as usual' will mean BT increasing its broadband and mobile prices by 14.4%, Royal Mail increasing its first-class stamp by 16%, and supermarkets having raised food prices by 15% in the year to March.

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. So socialist policies - including the nationalisation, under democratic workers' control and management - are necessary as the only way out of the impasse capitalism has become.

Tories halve social care staffing funding



PHOTO: JOE D. MILES FOR CQC/CC

500,000 people wait for social care. One in ten care posts are vacant. Many of the hundreds of food bank queues in Britain's towns and cities will include some of the 1.5 million low-paid care workers, often on minimum wage - or even less with travel time and unpaid 'sleep-in' shifts.

But the government, led by the Tories, self-proclaimed party of 'hard-working people', has slashed money promised to tackle the social care

staffing crisis. £500 million in 2021 has become £250 million less than two years later.

Social care needs investment, its workers need a real minimum wage of at least £15 an hour, rising with the cost of living. Social care also needs to be taken out of the hands of the privatisers who leech profit from our services, and be brought back into local authorities to be run democratically by workers and service users.

Weak Tories fear raising pension age

CLARE WILKINS
SECRETARY OF EAST MIDLANDS NATIONAL PENSIONERS' CONVENTION (PERSONAL CAPACITY)

The state pension age is set to rise to 68 in 2044 - a decision made by the last Labour government. The Tories had planned to bring this rise forward to 2037-39. But now it looks like they won't.

The Tories are concerned about alienating older voters, with a general election looming. The decision not to raise the pension age now shows that the government is under pressure from strike action, rallies and protests, plus its own weakness and divisions. Events in France are having an effect here as well. Strikes and protests started in opposition to the Macron-led government raising the pension age from 62 to 64.

The movement in France has continued to grow. On the protests, many call for Macron to go.

The state pension is not enough to

live on. Workers pay National Insurance towards it all their working lives. We need real living pensions, not tax breaks for the rich.

Zero-hour contracts and precarious work do not provide workers with employee pension schemes. The pressure the Tories and Keir Starmer's Labour are under must be kept and stepped up, to ensure the increase in state pension age is stopped for good, and reduced to 55.

After steadily rising for 150 years, life expectancy in Britain is falling, particularly among the working class and the poor, even before the pandemic. Reducing life expectancy is another stark indication that capitalism is incapable of providing a liveable, let alone a decent, standard of life for working-class people.

Only a socialist transformation of society, taking the wealth off the super-rich, can ensure a decent life, retirement and old age.

Back the paper that backs the workers May Day Greetings in

the Socialist

**Final deadline
17 April**

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



SOCIALISM TODAY

Monthly magazine of the Socialist Party

April issue includes...

- Unite executive elections
 - Mass protests in Israel
 - Northern Ireland
- socialismtoday.org/subscribe 020 8988 8777
- Paper subscription £3 a month, e-subscription £2.50



Why I'm standing for TUSC

Labour came to my town, but their austerity-lite policies won't help me

ROBERT PETTEFAR
SWINDON SOCIALIST PARTY

After 13 years of Conservative government, we are worse off. Considering the previous Labour government continued Tory Thatcherism, looking back on just the last 13 years is not enough.

I watched the official national launch of Labour's local council election campaign in my town Swindon. A (not so) carefully stage managed affair.

Notice only went out to members at short notice. No doubt to avoid any of the glaringly obvious questions anyone watching would come away with.

Shadow chancellor Rachel Reeves, deputy Labour leader Angela Rayner, and Keir Starmer himself stood on a low stage to make empty promises.

Rachel Reeves said more money needs to be asked for from energy companies making huge profits. Although she said this would be from an increase in the windfall tax that even the Tory government has already implemented, rather than the kind of nationalisation that is required.

Council tax

Reeves also announced a 'big' hand-out to working people – a council tax freeze. But Labour councils could freeze council tax now. Instead, they're raising it. There was no word from the Labour leadership if the local council grants from central government – cut by the Tories – would be restored by an incoming Labour government.

Angela Rayner called out the Tories for allowing their friends to do naked profiteering. But she made no mention of the commitment by Labour's shadow health secretary, Wes Streeting, to expand the private sector's vampire fangs sunk deep into the NHS.

She stated that every Labour-controlled council has fought against cuts. However, 'inconvenient' facts run counter to this claim.

Gateshead Council is looking to close two leisure centres. Wirral Council shut nine libraries. Leeds Council even cancelled Bonfire Night to save money.

And, disgracefully, Coventry Council paid scab bin workers ten times the amount being asked for by its own striking bin workers in an unsuccessful campaign to break that strike. These are all Labour councils!

Rayner said that people are scared, because they cannot pay to heat their homes, put food on the table, or pay the bills. Labour councils should stop implementing Tory cuts, but instead use the power they have now to bring forward emergency measures to ensure no one is cold, no one is hungry,



no one is homeless. If Labour councils did that, the weak Tory government would be powerless to stop them.

According to Rayner, Labour will always put people first, and not big business. However, at its conference last year, Labour invited many businesses to hold stalls, including Royal Mail.

In the last year, Royal Mail workers have been forced to take strike action in response to the company sacking union reps, destroying working conditions and jobs, and refusing to offer a real-terms pay rise. In fact, Keir Starmer banned Labour's frontbench from supporting that strike.

On top, businesses could pay for access to Labour shadow ministers and officials. This was sold out, with more than 90 companies taking up the offer.

Inflation-busting pay

Keir Starmer's speech was sparse on content. He claims that only Labour can put more police on the streets, and train more doctors and nurses. But how, when he doesn't mention if they will be paid what they deserve?

Starmer asked: "Do you believe that Britain deserves better?" Yes. Britain deserves better than what is on offer from Starmer's Labour, and whatever crumbling remains of the Tories are able to limp to the starting line. I believe the working class deserves a socialist future, where the fruits of our work are in our own hands, and where democratic workers' control of society builds a bright future for everyone.

I will be running in the local council elections in Swindon, under the banner of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC). TUSC is the only option on the ballot paper not promising cuts, not promising a meagre future of empty promises.

Instead, TUSC calls for councils to set budgets based on our needs, and to fight central government for the money. Let's build a coalition of trade unionists, workers and community campaigners who want to fight for the resources our local areas need.



Tory energy plan won't save planet or help millions in fuel poverty

DAVE CARR
NEWHAM AND EAST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

Having been found guilty in the High Court last July of breaching its own legally binding carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions targets, the Tory government has recently churned out a 'new' 1,000-page energy plan.

But the plan is stuffed with recycled platitudinous guff about 'stepping up efforts' to achieve 'energy security' and 'affordable green energy'. It doesn't address the 15 million UK households in fuel poverty. And the Tories admit that their strategy of achieving a 68% CO₂ emissions cut by 2030, and net-zero CO₂ emissions by 2050, will fail.

Tax dodging

Hardly surprising when Sunak's government continues to sign off new oil and gas fields, and bung mega-profitable fossil fuel extraction companies massive tax breaks. 'Big energy' can offset 91p in tax savings for every £1 invested in fossil fuel extraction.

Prominent in the government's plan is 'carbon capture'. Unfortunately, such technology – involving sucking CO₂ out of the atmosphere and burying it under the North Sea – is unproven at the scale required. Moreover, it doesn't tackle the use of burning fossil fuel to generate electricity in the first place.

Ministers have also talked about using non-polluting, domestic hydrogen burning boilers to heat homes. However, a peer-reviewed

study in scientific journal *Joule* concluded: "Heating with hydrogen is a lot less efficient and more expensive than alternatives such as heat pumps, district heating and solar thermal".

Super-rich

Apart from super-rich people, who could afford to pay double gas prices? Moreover, hydrogen would have to be generated from fossil fuels.

Heat pumps have also been trailed. But an air-source heat pump costs between £6,000 and £18,000. Five million UK homes have gas boilers, and limited government grants will fund just 90,000 pumps.

The government has also promoted 'green nuclear power' – an oxymoron, given that highly radioactive waste must be safely stored for thousands of years.

Building the Hinkley C nuclear reactor in Somerset has generated a massive carbon footprint, and so far cost £23 billion from public funds. And it won't become operational until 2026 at the earliest – if at all! A similar Sizewell C plant in Suffolk is also planned.

Hinkley C and Sizewell C's design are based on a reactor by EDF – the majority French state-owned energy company. The Flamanville 3 nuclear reactor in northern France began construction in 2007, but has been dogged by safety concerns and construction delays.

In 2020, Flamanville 3 was five times over budget. And the 'ten-year project' isn't expected to actually start generating electricity until 2024.

Last year, nuclear-generated electricity in the UK was set at a guaranteed price of £102 per megawatt hour (Mwh), linked to inflation. It means that the cost of electricity from nuclear is more than double that of onshore wind power at £46 per Mwh, or solar installations at £44 per Mwh.

Even though the cost of electricity generated by renewables continues to fall – by 40% over the last decade – this isn't reflected in household bills. Under profit-driven speculative capitalism, the wholesale energy market price is set at the highest-priced generator of electricity.

Onshore wind power is the obvious route to go down for cheap electricity and quick construction – just 12 months. It is cheaper to maintain than offshore wind turbines.

Wind farm moratorium

But in 2015, under pressure from right-wing Tory backbenchers, then prime minister David Cameron imposed a moratorium on future onshore wind farms. That moratorium still stands.

To secure clean, cheap energy – involving wind, solar and wave power, along with subsidised heat pumps to insulate homes and workplaces – requires a national plan.

By removing the anarchy of the profit-based energy market through the socialist nationalisation of big energy producers and suppliers, a planned economy – run under democratic workers' control and management – would be able to provide cheap and sustainable energy.

NHS workers campaign to reject Tory pay offer

SALLY GRIFFITHS

NHS WORKER IN UNISON, PERSONAL CAPACITY

A rebellion is growing from below in the NHS unions. The pay talks that halted the strike action in the NHS have produced an offer from the Tory government which not only is an insult to health workers, but is also a divisive one.

While workers recognise the bribe, a significant section really needs the money. The Tories know this. Just one example: trusts across the country are reintroducing car parking charges, which will have a real impact on household budgets.

With the exception of Unite, the leaders of the main NHS unions representing nurses, ambulance workers, and other staff on 'Agenda for Change' contracts, are recommending acceptance in a ballot that runs until 14 April.

But on the ground, health workers are angry, and many are campaigning to reject.

For a band 3 worker this offer is a rise to £24,336. An offer in line with inflation would be £26,461. The offer is for a non-consolidated lump sum for 2022-23 and a pitiful unfunded 5% for 2023-24. It's a below-inflation offer for both years. This will do nothing to repair the savage cuts in pay that health workers have borne since 2008, nor will it improve the massive staff shortages in the service.

NHS workers are exhausted – we desperately need to get to safe staffing levels, not only to protect patients, but also for our own mental and physical health. There are 130,000 vacancies. There are seven million patients on the waiting lists. NHS health unions must demand a restorative pay rise to hope to meet this challenge.

The workers in our hospital are torn between refusing to be threatened and taking the much-needed cash. They are insulted by statements from union leaders like: "If you don't take this then you may not get anything". It's not the first time the government said they wouldn't negotiate – they said that in the autumn, but action forced them to the table. It can do that again!

Concerns

Members are concerned about the negative effect of a lump sum for Universal Credit claimants. They are angry about the rumours of a possible separate pay spine for nursing staff, and are clear that NHS workers need to fight together. Some are questioning the real aim of the Tories – that they are keeping pay low while they "privatise the shit out of our jobs".

Members are either angry about that or confused at their union's stance, following the campaign to get a 'yes' vote for industrial action in the last pay ballot. Members of various unions report that their branches are being pushed from the top to present an 'accept' position. They are asking for all the information to make their decision. There are reports of vague statements about "support for nursing staff" and "career development", and promises to deal with the increasing violence and aggression



PHOTO: PAUL MATTISSON

in workplaces. One worker said in a WhatsApp group: "This must be a joke".

The events are leading NHS staff to look closely at our terms and conditions, and older members say they feel that the 'Agenda for Change' reforms to pay in 2004 were always meant to keep wages down. Socialist Party members opposed the reforms at the time (see 'Reject Agenda for Change' at socialistparty.org.uk).

Workers also see the need for unity and don't want to see different roles getting different pay spines in the future.

Keir Starmer's Labour Party's silence on our pay has been deafening. Workers are wondering, who is there to support us and fight for us?

It's the grassroots of each health union that have pushed both their

unions and the government on pay. It's the grassroots who are now pushing their unions for transparency on the offer.

Members of the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) are calling for an emergency general meeting. Other health unions' conferences are coming up and emergency motions to discuss the pay offer are expected.

Health workers have seen the struggles of other workers and their strength and resilience. They have seen other workers fight for and get double-figure pay offers. Many health workers recognise that they deserve and should fight for significantly more, and want to be out on the picket lines alongside their junior doctor colleagues. Even hospital consultants could now be joining them on strike!

RCN leaders under pressure

Union leaders who want to draw a close to the dispute are clearly worried that it might be on a knife-edge. Outrageously, the leadership of the RCN – which was originally a non-strike organisation but, due to the mountain of pressure in the NHS, took strike action for the first time ever in England and Wales – is reported by the Guardian to have called in the police to investigate some of its own members!

Two members launched a petition calling for a vote of no confidence in the leadership, including chief executive Pat Cullen, which has now exceeded the 1,000 signatures necessary to trigger an extraordinary general meeting. The leadership claim some of the signatures are not valid. They have also deleted WhatsApp messages and Facebook posts of RCN members campaigning for a reject vote, saying they are intimidating.

Instead of calling the police on their members, union leaders should listen to them, and step up to lead the fight that is necessary. If they are not prepared to do so, they should step aside for those who are willing to lead!

No to Blacklisting: Reinstate Lee Fowler!

ROB WILLIAMS
NATIONAL SHOP STEWARDS NETWORK CHAIR

Lee Fowler, a Merseyside blacklisted construction worker and long-standing fighter against the victimisation of trade unionists in the construction industry and beyond, has himself been sacked by electrical contractor Bilfinger.

Before his dismissal, Lee had raised safety issues at the Cargill Refinery site in Merseyside. The job is next to the construction site of the new Everton FC football stadium. Lee commented after his dismissal: "I got four lads a 14% pay rise and raised health and safety concerns about the Cargill site. And for that I was sacked? I've fought for workers' health and safety for over 30 years. They won't silence me!"

Lee has a proud record of defending other workers from blacklisting, travelling all around the country. In the last few weeks, Lee came to London to support the 'Murphy 4' victimised Unite reps, and then again when Unite member Dan Collins, who was sacked on Crossrail, won a victory at the High Court.

Earlier this year, Lee was on the protest in Glasgow that helped force Scottish energy giant SSE to reinstate Greig McArthur, branch secretary of the biggest Unite construction branch in Scotland, and two of his colleagues.

This success, as with others going back to the reinstatement of Frank Morris on Crossrail a decade ago, is a warning to Bilfinger that the Blacklist Support Group, including the Unite Rank and File, will take the fight to the bosses, determined to force them back.

Unite the Union is representing Lee. Frank Morris and Tony Seaman, Unite Executive Council members for construction, have issued a joint statement:

"It is really disappointing that, in 2023, we continue to see workers who are prepared to raise genuine concerns about safety being targeted. Despite all that was promised by major contractors in the High Court in 2016, this issue continues to blight our members' lives.

"Blacklisting is one of the reasons that the construction sector has such a horrendous safety record. We cannot stand by and watch union members be repeatedly victimised. Unite will never stop fighting the harassment faced by workers who stand up for their rights. An injury to one is an injury to all!"

The Blacklist Support Group has also issued a statement:

"Lee Fowler is a leading member of the Blacklist Support Group - having first been blacklisted after becoming an OILC safety rep in the North Sea in the early 90s.

"Construction workers who raise concerns about potential hazards that could affect people onsite and the surrounding community should be applauded. The industry has glossy posters that encourage workers to speak out. But time and again, workers who are conscientious about safety get sacked.

"Get your banners ready, another blacklisting dispute is about to kick off."

● Protests will be called against Lee's victimisation and we will publish details.

CWU in Royal Mail: Members still want action

SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBERS IN CWU

The threat of Royal Mail administration still hangs over Communication Workers Union (CWU) members. The union has informed members that talks are continuing. But there is growing frustration among members.

We are facing the most anti-union management, that has now suspended over 400 reps and activists, with a number now sacked. We have seen a rep winning their internal appeal, but Royal Mail has refused to bring them back to work.

This is clearly a sign that Royal Mail bosses are still going forward with their plans, and it's still very clear that their aim is to smash the CWU as an organised, militant trade union in the workplace.

Management are pushing ahead with their 'executive action', which will see changes to start times and duty structures, and leave many members on vastly reduced terms, which is clearly unacceptable.

The national union leadership keeps pushing the company's own narrative about the financial state of Royal Mail. Instead, it should be demanding renationalisation of Royal Mail and the complete removal of the board.

There has been silence from the national leadership since they announced that in principle they would call strike action in response to administration threats. It is clear that members are crying out for strike action against the onslaught of management, in this fight of our lives.



Mitcham, November 2022 APRILASHLEY

Heathrow security guards on strike

CALLUM JOYCE
SOUTHERN AND SOUTH EAST SOCIALIST PARTY

On 31 March, security guards at Heathrow, members of Unite, began a ten-day strike after a below-inflation pay offer.

This comes after many workers were victims of fire-and-rehire during the pandemic. One worker said they have lost over £600 a month in wages under their new contract. Especially for young workers living in the area, the high cost of housing means that many are unable to manage on the low wage.

Meanwhile the company continues to make huge profits, enough to hire replacement workers for the strike and put them up in a nearby hotel. The CEO of Heathrow Airports Ltd was given an 88% pay rise for 2021, but the company claims that there is no money for the additional 2% rise that workers are asking for on top of what has already been offered. One striker said: "If you want a world-class airport, then pay your staff properly".

Many of the security staff recalled how the job was much better before the airport was privatised. As a striker said: "Once it's privatised, they only care about profit".

If the private companies involved in running the airport are not willing to provide a decent standard of living for staff, then the airport should be renationalised and run under democratic workers' control. The huge profits made by the airport could then be reinvested. That way, a high-quality service could be provided to passengers, and staff could work without fear of the cost-of-living crisis.



Callum supporting the strike NICK CHAFFY

Get all the latest union news
nationalshop
stewardsnetwork
NSSN bulletin: shopstewards.net

Teachers say 'No' to the Tories and announce more strike dates

98%

say 'reject' the Tories' latest puny pay offer! That's the result of the consultation of teachers carried out by the National Education Union (NEU).

Socialist Party members on the union's national executive had voted for the consultation to take place, with a recommendation from the executive to reject. That has involved and mobilised members, and the result is an even bigger mandate than in the original strike ballot.

The ballot shows members are willing to fight on. Now NEU conference has voted to take five more days of national strike action in England: on 27 April, 2 May, and three more days later in the summer term.

Socialist Party members moved an amendment to strengthen this decision and escalate the action further. Unfortunately, because only 40 minutes was allotted to debate this most important of issues, the amendment was not reached in the agenda.

The timetable of action agreed at the conference includes a campaign to win the rebalot that is required by Tory anti-union laws, and that will be necessary for the battle to continue into the autumn term if necessary.



Lancaster MARTIN POWELL-DAVIES

SHEILA CAFFREY, NEU NEC MEMBER

This year we have shown there is power in the union and we have shown the government that we are a power to be reckoned with. But they're not backing down yet, so neither must we. We need to show whatever they saw last term, that ain't nothin'! We are coming back stronger with a larger mandate from the consultation to fight for our pay. We need to continue to coordinate with other unions. But we also need to escalate our own action.

Fighting for the pay that retains teachers, and the funding that means that we retain support staff, and have enough resources to teach and support our students, is fighting for our students. We can ensure those facing exams have support. We are the ones that know the students, so we can say if they need revision sessions, if they need online support - whatever it is that they need.

But what they don't need, is three-fifths of us leaving the profession in the first five years. What they don't need is dedicated, experienced teachers facing burnout and being forced from their roles. We need to win our fight for fair pay and funding as soon as possible, and we'll do this by escalating with more days in a shorter period of time.

But members are struggling. We need to take an appeal for strike funds to our communities, our trade union brothers and sisters in other unions and trades councils, to ensure no-one has to make a decision on whether to strike or not due to money.

Our 57,000 support staff members are some of the lowest-paid in our society. Let's rebalot our support staff as soon as possible - this month - using the momentum of the teacher reject vote. Let's ensure support staff can join the picket lines for action in June and July.

The following Socialist Party members are standing in the NEU national executive elections:

Sheila Caffrey, Sean McCauley and Steve Scott, all sitting NEC members, plus Anna Scott.

If successful, they will join Louise Cuffaro, already elected unopposed

PCS: Passport Office strike against poverty pay

The PCS civil service union is continuing targeted action, with a five-week strike of 1,000 workers in the Passport Office. Other strike action includes National Highways, the British Library, British Museum, the Animal and Plant Health Agency, Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency and the Government Digital Service. They will be joined by 700 Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency call centre workers on 11 and 12 April. A national strike has been called for 28 April.



Simon Elliott, branch chair PCS North West Passport Office, spoke to Steve Ion

"Our members are striking for a 10% pay rise. For over a decade or more we have effectively suffered a real-terms pay cut of approximately 25%. On top of this, our members have overpaid their pension contributions for a number of years. A judicial review was found in favour of our members, but the government has refused to give us back what we are owed.

"Our members suffer hugely due to the cost-of-living crisis. Some have to miss meals or turn off heating simply to afford to get to work. Those working from home are having to

choose between heating their home or having more than one meal a day. A meal that, for around 40,000 members, has been garnered from a food bank. A further 45,000 members have to claim extra benefits, and thousands more are taking on second jobs on top of looking after a family.

"One of the knock-on effects of the poor pay is the department's reliance on casual and agency labour, and thousands more are taking on second jobs on top of looking after a family. "One of the knock-on effects of the poor pay is the department's reliance on casual and agency labour, and thousands more are taking on second jobs on top of looking after a family. "One of the knock-on effects of the poor pay is the department's reliance on casual and agency labour, and thousands more are taking on second jobs on top of looking after a family.

Socialist Party members are standing in the upcoming PCS leadership elections as part of the Broad Left Network, on a joint slate with the Independent Left.

Marion Lloyd is standing for PCS president. There are BLN candidates for the NEC and group elections, including DWP and HMRC.

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

UCU: overwhelming reballot result

Vote 'no' to the latest offer!

BEA GARDNER
UCU MEMBER

On Monday 3 April the University and College Union (UCU) announced that members have overwhelmingly backed further national strike action in two ongoing disputes: one over pensions, and one over pay and conditions. 89% and 85.6% respectively. To act on this renewed mandate members must first vote 'no' in the member consultation on the employers' latest proposals.

The Higher Education Committee (HEC) has rightly recommended members reject the proposals in the pay dispute which, as we previously reported, offer no improvements on pay since they were rejected by members in January, and have already been rejected by Unison.

However, the HEC offers no recommendation in the pensions dispute. While it does seem that more substantial progress has been made in those talks toward employers restoring pensions, which reflects the power of strike action already taken, further action is needed to force the employers into making more concrete commitments. Rallying members to vote 'no', alongside a proper campaign of preparation for further action, with campaign material and mass workplace meetings, would rebuild the unity and strength of the disputes and give members confidence that more can be won.

Notice for a nationwide marking and assessment boycott has been given. For this to be effective it must be delivered alongside further strike days, and the lay higher education sector leaderships of all the campus unions should urgently meet to discuss a strategy of coordination, to include further strike dates.



SOCIALIST PARTY

MET POLICE CASEY REVIEW AND CAPITALIST INSTITUTIONS' CRISIS OF AUTHORITY

SARAH SACHS-ELDRIDGE
SOCIALIST PARTY EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

The findings of institutional racism, misogyny and homophobia in Louise Casey's Review into London's Metropolitan Police have grabbed media headlines. The 363 pages, based on a year's research, contain case studies and examples of horrendous discrimination, abuse, and violence carried out both against members of the public and those who work in the Met.

This is not Louise Casey's first 'warts-and-all', fact-filled report. In July 2012, under David Cameron's Tory-Lib Dem coalition, she published a report into 'troubled families'. Following the 2008 crash, a decline in living standards for most people ran alongside a steep incline in billionaire wealth. The cumulative wealth of the top ten billionaires in the UK grew by 281% between 2009 and 2022.

A decade on from Casey's 2012 report, the number of hungry children in the UK doubled in a year to four million. In the context in which both these reports were produced, the era of austerity and capitalist crisis, recommendations that remain within the existing framework of capitalism won't bring the change needed by workers and young people.

To be shocked by the latest report you would need to have spent the years of the 21st century under a rock. Awareness has largely been down to the campaigning by brave survivors, families and organisations. The crime sheet ranges from the sexism and misogyny revealed by Sarah Everard's murder, Charing Cross WhatsApp rape jokes, and David Carrick's attacks; to the horrific experiences of young people as seen in Child Q's traumatic strip-search; to the racism of stop-and-search and police killings from Jean Charles de Menezes to Chris Kaba; to the homophobia revealed in the botched investigation into Stephen Port's murders in Barking; to the evidence of many Met whistle-blowers on its tolerance of discrimination and abuse. And more.

In addition, there have been the revelations of 'spycops' undercover police joining political and campaigning organisations - including Militant, the Socialist Party's predecessor - and environmental and anti-racist organisations, with the aim of disrupting and discrediting them and, outrageously, even forming false relationships with women activists. The names of trade union activists were passed on by the police to construction company



PHOTO: PAUL MATTSSON

bosses who barred thousands of workers from employment, causing enormous hardship for them - and attempting to weaken the trade union movement.

It's important to note that Keir Starmer's Labour leadership - that also wants to play its role in defending the capitalist system - did not oppose Boris Johnson's protection of current and future spycops from prosecution if they commit crimes while undercover.

Dual role

These experiences contribute to the shattering of the appearance of the police as a public service for everyone to avail of when needed. In reality the police play a dual role. When workers suffer crime, who else can they turn to, even while being aware of the

system and replace it with democratic socialism. The illusions that the capitalist class has nurtured in the democratic nature of society and the idea of the neutral and fair nature of the forces of the state, such as the police, cannot withstand reality forever.

But in order to maintain its system of exploitation of the majority by the minority, the capitalist class has more than one tool in the box. Because the working class is not one homogenous block, means to divide us and therefore weaken our collective strength, using racist, sexist, homophobic, and other discriminatory ideas, have been developed throughout class societies. The Tory Immigration Bill, for example, is an attempt to direct blame for falling living standards on to desperate migrants and asylum seekers rather than on Tory policies and the capitalist system they defend.

Racist policing

Racist policing can reinforce these ideas. However, it can, like the racist murder of George Floyd in the US, provoke a mass response which can begin to undermine the ability of racism to divide workers and young people. The shared experience of capitalism also cuts across the divisions, accelerated by participation in and organisation of collective struggle - the current strike wave brings workers of all backgrounds together in common cause - and especially the development of a programme for that fightback.

It is inevitable that, given the capitalist establishment has no solutions to our problems, trust in its institutions is eroding, especially when class struggle is on the agenda. The Edelman Trust Barometer 2023 found that 57% of the British public think their standard of living will get worse in the next year - up 16 points from last year. Three-quarters of people now say that the UK is on the wrong track. Trust in government to help alleviate issues caused by the cost-of-living crisis declined nine percentage points in four months to 21% in January 2023.

This is the context in which trust in the police is falling rapidly. A February 2023 YouGov survey found that, by 51% to 42%, Londoners don't trust the Met. Only 6% say they trust them "a lot". Public confidence in the Met to do a good job for London fell to 36% in March 2022. The Casey Review touches on some of the factors that contribute to this fall. As well as the institutional discrimination and abuse, and deep-seated resistance to criticism and accountability, the effects of austerity on the Met are also outlined in the Review - and their impact.

London boroughs' spending on crime reduction has fallen by 58%. The context includes, for example, that "domestic abuse-related crimes have doubled over ten years to nearly 100,000 a year and the number of

reported rape cases have increased fourfold." The Review reports that "the sanction detection rate [proportion of crimes 'solved']... for domestic abuse, rape, and other sexual offences has dropped over 75% in the past ten years". The rate for "violence offences, drug offences, robbery, hate crime and violence with injury" has halved.

Throughout the Review there are references to the 'Peelian principles'. Named after the founder of the Met Police, Robert Peel, a Tory pro-free trade politician, they outline what's known as 'policing by consent'. But the basis for public trust in the police to protect workers and young people is being eroded. Unchallenged racism and sexism damage the legitimacy the police require to fulfil their roles.

The Review talks of how evidence of sex offences, difficult for victims to provide, is made unusable being kept in fridges unable to close, and insufficient staffing - consequences of cuts under Cameron and privatisation started under Tony Blair's New Labour. Meanwhile, "specialist units and functions have been prioritised, including through ring-fenced government funding."

The Casey Review's recommendations will not transform the Met, any more than the Macpherson report did. That was triggered by the Met's role in the aftermath of the racist murder of Stephen Lawrence and found the force to be 'institutionally racist'. The Met claimed that 67 of the 70 recommendations were implemented, but clearly nothing fundamental changed. Similarly, while some of the Casey recommendations may be welcomed, such as investment, specialisation for rape and sexual offences, and 'effectively' disbanding the Parliamentary and Diplomatic Protection, the team in which Wayne Couzens and Carrick worked, there is nothing which will lead to fundamental change. The recommendations point to the question of accountability and include a "new, independent, multi-disciplinary team of officers and staff to reform how it deals with misconduct cases", but there are no qualitative steps towards democratic control of the police.

Strike wave

The strike wave has demonstrated, however, that there is a force in society willing to make sacrifices to defend public services and fight the cost-of-living crisis - the organised working class. That's what striking postal workers, teachers, rail workers and health workers represent.

The Met Police must be abolished. But in a world where the rottenness of capitalism is expressed in violence, drugs, and theft, with working-class people making up the large majority of the victims, the next question is what will replace it?

The Casey Review cites a recent report examining the experience of Black communities nationally on stop and search. It shows a complicated situation. Less than half of those who had been stopped and searched felt that the police had communicated well with them or explained what would happen. The research showed that larger numbers of Black people felt traumatised and humiliated by the experience of stop and search than other ethnic groups. But it also found that 77% of Black adults support the use of stop and search in relation to suspicion of carrying a weapon - most likely out of fear for their family members and themselves. In February

2022 the London Assembly reported that, "despite making up only 13% of London's total population, black Londoners account for 45% of London's knife murder victims".

How can both the rottenness of the police be addressed as well as the need for safety? The Review says: "Londoners' voices are missing from how London is policed. Existing structures do not provide a clear way for local authorities and their residents to hold the Met to account for how they police and tackle crime on a Borough basis." It recommends "a new borough-based approach... to ensure structures allow for greater transparency and challenge, including democratic representatives through local authorities, provide the ability to access high-quality data and review case handling, and deliver strong and consistent community engagement."

This leaves existing structures in place. What is needed instead is the establishment of police forces in the local areas, linked to a programme for democratic working-class control. This means advocating for local police forces to be under the control of elected committees, composed of representatives elected by the trade union movement and local community organisations and accountable to the local community. The Edelman survey found that 65% trust "people in my local community". These committees should be given control of all the key decisions including policing priorities, hiring and firing, disciplinary processes and measures. How else can local people have confidence in the removal of racists and rapists, in the focus on their children's safety, than by the running of the police being in their hands democratically?

Through what other measures can the working class gain influence over

those who work in the police? A recent post on the Police Federation blog reported: "Nearly one in five police officers plan on handing in their resignation as soon as possible or within the next two years... The most frequently cited reasons respondents gave for intending to quit were low morale (98%), how the police are treated by the Government (96%) and low pay (95%)." This Review will not improve that situation. Significantly, the blog post goes into great detail on how many obstacles there are to the police winning the right to strike, from which they are currently banned.

Right to join a union

Supporting the right of rank-and-file officers to join a trade union (which the Police Federation is not) and to strike is not an abstract question. It's part of the question of how, without letting up on opposition to repressive policing, can the working class build its influence on the police rank and file? The ban is in the interest of the capitalist class not the working class. Ending it will not by itself transform the police, but any means by which the working class can gain influence over rank-and-file officers, bringing them into the orbit of the organised working class and thereby undermining the influence of police bosses can assist in weakening the capitalist class's ability to use the police against workers in struggle. In 2008, although banned from striking, there was nonetheless a mass police demonstration against the public sector pay freeze. Rank-and-file police officers joining the current battles for inflation-proofed public sector pay would strengthen the workers' movement, and further undermine the government.

Also posed is the need for the

building of a new mass workers' party and the fight for councils to represent the needs of the local population - by fighting all cuts and refusing to act in the interests of big business bosses and billionaires, the capitalist class. The Edelman Trust Barometer found that 61% of respondents want a new type of political party, almost double the 31% who trust Starmer.

However, the Review reveals clearly the resistance from the Met leadership, backed by the defenders of capitalism in Westminster and across the state machine, to any interference with the state institution over which it presides. It would be a mistake to imagine that the capitalist class will stand by and watch the Met be replaced by a working class-controlled alternative. The struggle to abolish the Met and replace it is part of the fight for an alternative to the capitalist system it defends.

To end the misery of austerity and the crisis of capitalism, which are destroying lives, therefore means being armed with a socialist alternative. That starts with nationalisation of the banks and 150 biggest corporations under democratic working-class control and management as a step towards a socialist planned economy which can begin to organise society in a way that meets the needs of the overwhelming majority and the environment.

Such a society would, unlike capitalism, not be based on oppression and economic exploitation, and therefore could also begin to end the need for the police and the other institutions of the state.

Further reading

- "The state: a warning to the labour movement" at socialistparty.org.uk
- "Can the Met police be reformed?" at socialismtoday.org.uk

Protesting against the murder of Sarah Everard in 2021
PHOTO: SOCIALIST PARTY





Sheffield Socialist Party stall

NHS nurse: 'We do job because we care, but this shouldn't be used to exploit us'

Holly Johnston is an organiser with the 'NHS Workers Say No!' campaign, a nurse, a GMB union rep, and a member of the Socialist Party.

Today all NHS staff, like all workers, are squeezed by the spiralling cost-of-living crisis, on top of seeing their wages decline in real terms by 20% since 2010. The latest pay 'offer' from the Tories is far below what is needed.

Significantly, the Tories are refusing to confirm that any pay 'rise' will be backed by increased funding, posing further huge cuts to come. So, many NHS workers, like myself, are campaigning to reject what's been offered.

On top of being underpaid, a substantial NHS gender pay gap exists, with women receiving an average of 30% less than men. Women, particularly black women, are more likely to be on zero-hour contracts, to be outsourced and work for private companies. The NHS, like so many jobs, has become increasingly inflexible for parents.

The 1982 health service strike over pay involved the largest employer in the whole of Europe, challenged new

anti-trade union legislation, gained mass public support, and was backed by solidarity action from across the workers' movement.

Like now, nurses found themselves striking, as their pay was eroded. Inflation and limited public sector pay increases left nurses' pay lagging behind.

30%

the amount women in the NHS earn less than men

Nursing in the 1980s was treated by the capitalist establishment as a 'second income'. Bosses leaned on sexist stereotypes to try to keep wages down. The majority of nurses were women, and the main income for most families was provided by men.

However, nearly one third of nurses were single. And, like today, one wage wasn't enough to sustain one person, never mind a family.

Gender stereotypes around 'devotion' and 'self-sacrifice' are carried through to today. This government

doesn't care for carers - whether in healthcare, care homes, carers in the community, or carers of children and other family members.

77% of NHS workers are women. But that doesn't mean that the qualities required to do a certain job should be used to exploit us.

Gender discrimination does play a part. Roles such as care work or teaching fall subject to gender stereotypes too.

The notion of the 'caring vocation' takes away from the complex skills that health workers possess, and it devalues the emotional labour required to do the job. Sexism positions us to take on more than we should. But all NHS workers are standing up to attacks on the NHS.

The gender pay gap, sexism and inequality are perpetuated by the capitalist system based on profit. It's no wonder that working-class women are fighting back in their workplaces, and are at the forefront of public sector strikes. We need to win inflation-proof pay rises.

Women have a key role in fighting back against the oppression and inequality that exist in capitalism. We need to unite as the working class to fight for a new socialist society.

Target smashed! Help fund the fight for socialism

CHRIS NEWBY
SOCIALIST PARTY FIGHTING FUND ORGANISER

We have smashed our fighting fund target for the first quarter of 2023 raising over £33,000, and we couldn't have done it without you.

This quarter's target received a significant boost from the tremendous appeal at the Socialist Party's congress. But we have also had many reports across England and Wales of an increase in the donations we are receiving from workers on our campaign stalls. All of our regular street campaigning is on top of the support we have given workers in struggle on the picket lines, demonstrations and protests. Socialist Party members have been discussing with workers the most effective strategy for fighting back against the government and bosses' attacks. But we can't let up now in our fundraising efforts.

The rejection by teachers in the NEU of the insulting pay offer is one indication that workers are determined to continue their struggle. One of the key issues that workers on the picket lines and demonstrations are raising is the need for a party that genuinely stands up for the working class. In the upcoming elections on 4 May hundreds of candidates including Socialist Party members will be standing as part of the Trade Unionist

and Socialist Coalition. This will give many thousands of workers the opportunity to vote for genuine anti-austerity and socialist candidates. We also call on Jeremy Corbyn to publicly declare to stand in the general election, as part of steps towards the formation of a new mass workers' party backed by trade unionists. This could be a real inspiration to workers and young people.

The Socialist Party is determined to fight for an anti-austerity socialist programme for working-class and young people, but we need your help to ensure we have the resources needed. If you agree and want to help fund the fight, please donate to us today.

If you already a member of the Socialist Party, contact your branch to find out how you can help us raise funds to fight for socialism.

**Fund the fightback
DONATE TODAY**

- Visit socialistparty.org.uk/donate
- or call **020 8988 8777**
- or make cheques payable to Socialist Party, PO Box 1398, Enfield EN1 9GT

SOCIALIST PARTY FIGHTING FUND

AREA	£ RECEIVED	£ TARGET	%
Northern	1,703	750	227%
South West	3,685	1,800	205%
Eastern	1,979	1,200	165%
East Midlands	2,801	1,850	151%
London	6,606	4,600	144%
Southern & SE	3,235	2,350	138%
Wales	3,136	2,300	136%
West Midlands	3,229	2,600	124%
Yorkshire	3,147	2,550	123%
North West	1,311	1,150	114%
Other	2,407	3,850	63%
TOTAL	33,240	25,000	133%



East Midlands Socialist Party conference PHOTO: HEATHER RAWLING

East Midlands conference gears up for election campaigns

YASMIN HOWIE
NORTHAMPTON SOCIALIST PARTY

Socialist Party members from across the East Midlands gathered in Leicester on 1 April for a successful regional conference. Several Northampton branch members arrived earlier in the day to take part in a campaign stall ahead of the conference, with a socialist message of hope and change for the people of Leicester who have both council and mayoral elections this May, which Socialist Party members intend to stand in as part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC).

Lenny Shail, national campaigns organiser, started the discussions with an overview of the capitalist crisis in Britain and worldwide, painting a picture of a chaotic system that serves the elite at the expense of all else. He spoke about the work of the international organisation Socialist Party of England and Wales is part of, the Committee for a Workers' International, and the building of support for world socialism.

This conference took place against the backdrop of a cost-of-living crisis with workers being expected to pay the price for capitalist strikes, and the response of the ongoing strike wave.

Socialist Party members will continue to discuss a socialist alternative with workers and young people, including those on strike, in workplaces, local campaigns and on the streets.

In addition to Leicester mayor, Socialist Party members will also stand as part of TUSC in the Mansfield mayoral election and over 30 council seats. Discussions took place throughout the day to sort travel plans to support local branches in campaigning.

With a lot of work ahead of us, we raised £295 for the fighting fund and left the conference determined and energised.

Manchester students continue to fight despite bailiffs' forced removal

ZAKK BROWN
MANCHESTER SOCIALIST STUDENTS

University of Manchester (UoM) rent strikers took direct action against the university by occupying an accommodation security office for a number of days, after protesters were outrageously carried out by bailiffs from another university building.

This action comes off the back of an occupation called by the group UoM Rent Strike 2023, alongside organising students to cancel their accommodation direct debits by 20 April. The occupation, which began on 9 February, is in solidarity with university workers' union, UCU, and demands a 30% reduction in rent. Students typically pay 68-74% of their maintenance loan on accommodation costs!

The university has started legal action against the occupiers, using

a court order to allow bailiffs to remove the occupiers, resulting in the scenes of students physically lifted out of buildings while singing "solidarity forever".

Socialist Students supports the actions of the rent strike and condemns the university using bailiffs to remove them. We support demands for a lowering of rent, but you can't control what you don't own. We need public ownership of university accommodation to make it affordable and fit for purpose. Students must not be forced to live in mice-infested buildings while landlords profit. This, alongside a mass council house building programme, can meet the housing needs of all.

• Search socialistparty.org.uk for 'Student housing mess - What's the socialist solution?' for a socialist programme on student housing



Adam (centre) campaigning to raise the minimum wage PHOTO: OXFORD SOCIALIST PARTY

Reading Socialist Students win campaign to be allowed to meet!

ADAM GILLMAN
READING SOCIALIST PARTY

Earlier this year, Reading College, privately run by Activate Learning, banned Socialist Students from using meeting rooms, saying we can only meet in the canteen and weren't able to give out leaflets or put up posters relating to Socialist Students.

They claimed the college had to remain "politically neutral" and that staff issues were behind their decision. They stated if Socialist Students had more attendees then they could justify staff supervision. The college also said that the posters needed to be agreed from a marketing perspective!

We want to meet to discuss with fellow students about socialist ideas and to campaign for our education. We want to stand alongside striking workers and fight for the education system we deserve.

We got in touch with the University and College Union (UCU) branch at Reading College who agreed to help. We drafted letters against this political discrimination.

A few weeks into our campaign, we have had a victory. On 23 March we came to a deal, Socialist Students can now meet monthly.

We have built important links with our local UCU branch and now plan to meet to discuss with other students interested in a socialist alternative to capitalism. And plan how we can campaign to fight back against Tory austerity in Reading.

200 protest to save Folkestone Library



Folkestone library protest PHOTO: SOUTHERN SP

ERIC SEGAL
KENT SOCIALIST PARTY

When Tory-controlled Kent County Council (KCC) announced that Folkestone Library was to be permanently closed, South East Kent Trades Union Council (SEKTUC) made a public call for a demonstration against this decision. As well as book services, the library is the centre for registering births, marriages and deaths. It has a significant reference library and valuable local historical collections.

Local activists spread the word for a protest and within 24 hours of the call, a demonstration of around 120 people gathered outside the library demanding that it must be kept open. Anger against the threatened closure has spread quickly, shown by the support for the 'Save Folkestone Library' Facebook page.

We decided that the pressure must

be maintained and so we called another demonstration and rally. Over 200 people, mums and children, young and old, marched from Tory MP Damien Collins's offices, through the centre of Folkestone, to a rally outside the library. Red Unite the Union flags and the SEKTUC banner led the way.

The speakers demanded that the library remains open, pointing out that it has been the negligence of KCC and its elected representatives to fail to carry out the necessary maintenance on the 135-year-old Grade 2-listed library building that has caused damage to the building, not nesting seagulls.

KCC has proudly announced that it's cut £820 million over the past twelve years and is now looking at further cuts including the library.

Collins, former minister in the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, says he has a plan to

save the library. But it is completely insufficient.

He says: "When libraries like this were first created they were very often the only places that people could access news, information or get hold of a book they wanted to read."

He says "the world is very different now". We say: "No it isn't!". Not everyone has a laptop or tablet or can afford to have Wi-Fi and access to the internet or afford to buy a book. Not everyone has a warm and secure place to study or read. That's why we must fight to keep this library, not just for ourselves but for future generations. The fight continues against the cuts in Folkestone!

Do you want to get involved in the fight back?
JOIN THE SOCIALISTS
socialistparty.org.uk/join

Workers in Wales push the far-right back

CARDIFF SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBER

On Saturday 25 March, hundreds of protestors gathered in Llantwit Major to oppose the far-right. Campaigners stood alongside workers from the community to make clear they didn't want racist ideas being spread around their homes. Around 10-15 fascists had made the trip to Llantwit hoping to spread division. The far-right group ended up finding no audience for their rhetoric - they were outnumbered and out chanted by anti-racist protestors.

Tails tucked between their legs, and escorted by police, the fascists left Llantwit just as they had in Hull the week before. It is vital that local

people and the trade unions are mobilised to drive them and their ideas out of communities.

Socialist Party Wales members put forward the slogan "jobs and homes not racism", that resonated with people, cutting across the idea that resources are scarce and people have to fight amongst each other, instead of taking the wealth and resources from the bosses to provide housing and a decent standard of living for all.



PHOTO: PAUL MATTSOON

Radio: BBC lets housing associations off the hook



PHOTO: BBC FILE ON 4

ALEX FORBES
SOUTH WEST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

File On Four, aired on BBC Radio 4 on 22 March, investigated allegations of degrading treatment by social housing providers, and was a great exposé of issues facing housing association tenants. One report was of sewage running through a flat. The show captured tenants' feelings of frustration and powerlessness. One housing association only responded to complaints after the BBC investigated for the programme.

It was however a very frustrating programme. The BBC allowed the National Housing Federation (NHF)'s statements to go completely unchallenged, such as that "these situations affect a tiny minority of tenants". The NHF, representing housing associations, made loads of false claims and tenants commented later that tenants' own rebuttals of those claims were not put out on the programme.

Others were irritated by the statement: "Tenants complaints get lost in the system", and feeling strongly that housing associations actually deliberately ignore complaints and victimise tenants who make them.

Some housing associations also refuse to disclose the usage and justification of service charges, with tenants left wondering what their rent and service charges are even paying for, with repairs reduced to as little as once every seven years.

Housing association Notting Hill Genesis has a surplus of £447 million for 2020-21 which was enough to maintain its existing properties. But the housing associations just used the BBC programme as a platform to hustle the government for more investment, despite their considerable budget surpluses!

Peabody owns many derelict sites that it is doing nothing with, but at the same time is proposing to redevelop the occupied homes of furious former tenants of Bexley Council from the Lesnes Estate in London - homes which Peabody was handed during the New Labour years.

Peabody's actions against former council tenants, who don't wish to move or take out mortgages to stay in their area, seem a far cry from the almshouses roots of Peabody over a century ago!

● Available on BBC Sounds

Readers' opinion Hotel workers forced to front up for bosses' overbooking policy

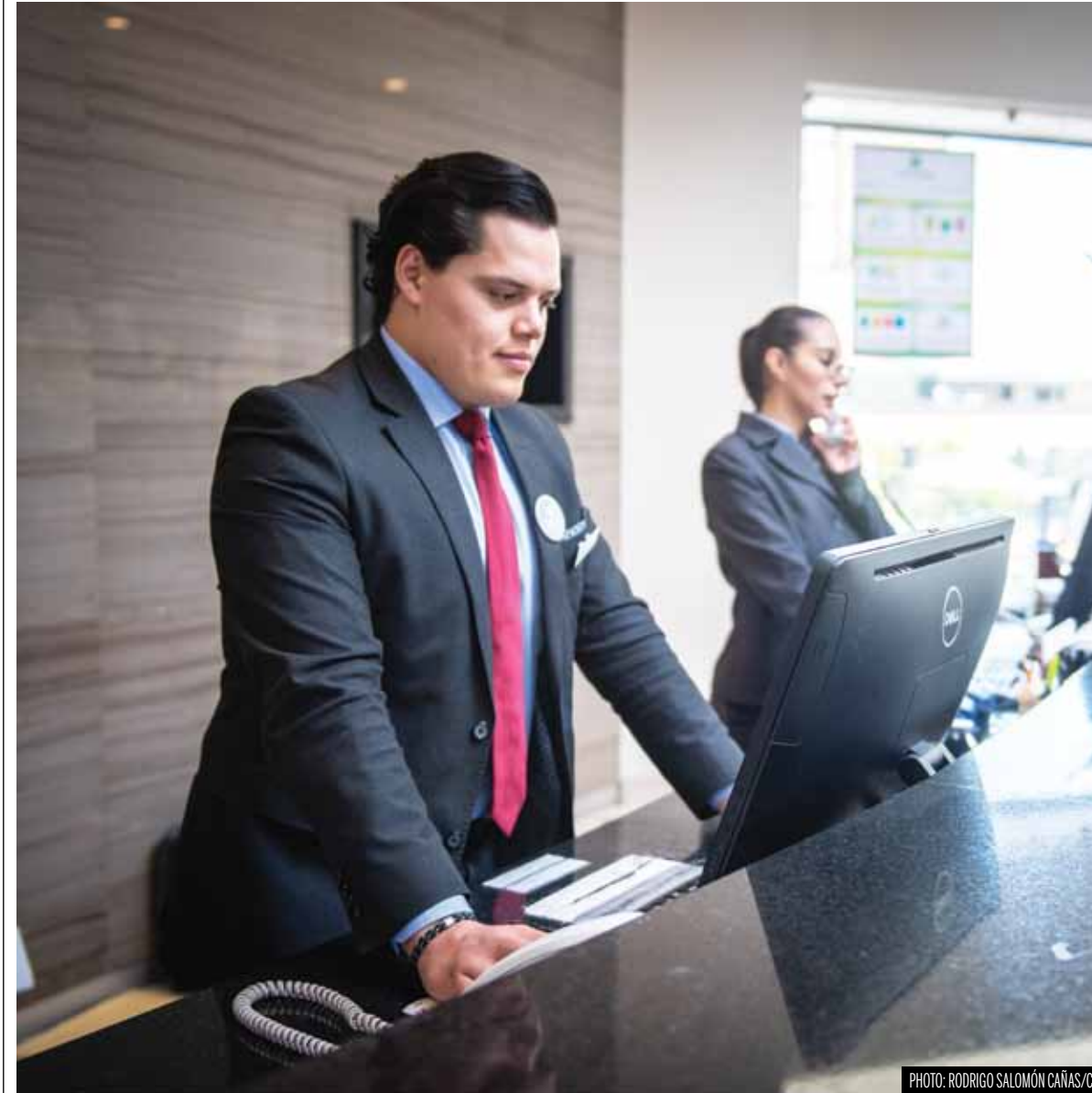


PHOTO: RODRIGO SALOMÓN CÁÑAS/CC

MAYA
BRISTOL SOUTH SOCIALIST PARTY

Checking into a hotel is something many of us are familiar with. You stand in a queue, give your booking reference and, all going well, you are assigned a room number and key card. Unfortunately, it's not always that simple.

During a recent trip, I was informed by the staff at the major budget hotel chain I was staying at that, although I had prepaid for a room over two weeks prior, the hotel was overbooked. There were no more rooms and I would need to go to another hotel that might have more availability. Through an unexpected and extraordinary series of events, I ended up travelling to four different hotels in London over the course of two hours before finally being granted a room - all because the company has an exploitative and unethical practice of overbooking rooms.

I was tired and annoyed by the time I got to bed that night, but my thoughts are with the hotel workers who have to deal with this on a regular basis. This was not a fluke or tragic mistake, overbooking customers is official policy!

The company makes millions in profits every year for its investment firm owners. They have this policy of overbooking because the bosses say this is the best way to squeeze every penny out of the system, but also because they know they will never have to hear anyone cry, scream or complain about it. Those making these decisions are far removed from the realities faced by both their customers and employees.

The toll this takes was evident in the two staff members I spoke to at my original hotel - one was nervous and overly apologetic, as if she was scared of what my reaction would be, the other, the young man who initially told me I had no room for the night, was armoured with a carefully honed coping mechanism. I learned he went through this very situation all night long every night when he worked the late shift. He told me customers often reacted poorly, and some people said truly cruel things to him.

If a co-worker bullies you and makes work dangerous, we call it a hostile working environment. What do we call it when it's the official policy of the business putting workers in these situations? As workers struggle with the

cost-of-living crisis, we are seeing them start to stand up and vote for industrial action. As the current strike wave continues, we must keep an eye on the sectors where things are still rumbling under the surface - sectors like customer service and hospitality.

Trade unions should campaign with members and potential members on fair pay but also on fair conditions and the need to fight against the bosses' unsafe, demoralising policies (for example the routine overbooking of hotel rooms). These policies degrade employee morale and put stress and risk directly on workers. We need to stand with them for better working conditions to create a fairer system for everyone.



● editors@socialistparty.org.uk

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

Migrant crisis: Don't let the bosses divide us! Jobs and homes, not racism

APRIL ASHLEY
SOCIALIST PARTY AND UNISON NATIONAL
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEMBER,
BLACK MEMBERS' SEAT (PERSONAL CAPACITY)

By the end of 2021, the number of people displaced because of conflict, violence and oppression stood at 89.3 million, 27 million of them refugees, according to the UN Refugee Agency. This is double the 42.7 million who were displaced in 2012, and before the war in Ukraine which is estimated to have led to 6 million Ukrainian refugees.

In mid-2022, an estimated one in every 77 people worldwide were forcibly displaced. This is more than double the rate a decade previously and is set to continue to rise. War, poverty and climate destruction - all symptoms of a capitalist system in crisis - continue to plunge increasing numbers into devastating circumstances, forcing them to flee their homes.

The first months of 2023 have seen a series of protests against migrants being housed in hotels around the country, many with far-right groups taking part or playing a role in organising.

As of September 2022, 37,142 migrants were being held in hotels, of the 143,000 people awaiting an initial decision on their asylum claim. Many are forced to live in intolerable conditions, with reports of rat infestations and child migrants being targeted for exploitation. Contractors making the arrangements make record profits. The backlog of asylum cases continues to grow, and decision making has slowed despite the number of caseworkers increasing.

Rwanda

Home Secretary Suella Braverman has stated it is her "dream" to see a flight full of asylum seekers taking off to Rwanda. However, so far the Tories' plans have been thwarted, although last year the High Court ruled that the scheme was lawful and the government had acted rationally! However in January campaigners won permission to challenge the policy at the Court of Appeal, so no asylum seekers have yet been sent. The Rwandan cruelty is just another example of the government's hostile racist immigration policies.

Rishi Sunak has made ending English Channel crossings a priority for the Tory Party. The fifth of his five pledges in January was: "We will pass new laws to stop small boats, making sure that if you come to this country illegally, you are detained and swiftly removed". More than 45,000 people crossed the channel on small boats to come to the UK in 2022, the highest figure since records began, but still only 0.17% of the world's refugee population.

40% of those on the small boats in 2022 came from just five countries: Afghanistan, Iran, Syria, Eritrea and Sudan. "The reality is that people who come to the UK by taking terrifying journeys in small boats across the



PHOTO: PAUL MATTSSON

Channel do so because they are desperately seeking safety having fled persecution, terror and oppression", says the Refugee Council.

Many choose to risk their lives in the hands of people traffickers and get into small boats with no alternative safe route to reach the UK. Asylum in the UK cannot be claimed from outside the country.

The government's latest legislation; the Nationality and Borders bill and the Illegal Migration bill, is a continuation of the 'hostile environment' which led to the Windrush scandal a few years ago. This saw hundreds of Caribbean immigrants living and working in the UK deliberately targeted by immigration enforcement as 'illegal immigrants' and stripped of their rights as UK citizens. They were barred from working, denied access to the NHS and welfare benefits. In some cases, they were even detained and deported as they

couldn't provide documentation. Documentation they could provide, such as the 'boarding cards' when they entered the UK, were unbelievably destroyed by the Home Office.

The Windrush scandal continues. The failed Windrush Compensation Scheme has seen only 5.8% of people eligible to claim receiving the insultingly small compensation. Twenty-three people have now died without receiving a penny of compensation they were owed. (See 'Windrush scandal Tories and Blairites must go' at socialistparty.org.uk)

Labour voted against the Nationality and Borders Act, and is set to oppose the Illegal Migration Bill. But, according to Labour shadow chancellor Rachel Reeves, the problem is that there has been a lack of deportation: "They need to process claims faster, get people out of the country if they've got no right to be here and get a grip of their failed immigration

system which is not working for British people and it's not working for genuine asylum seekers either." In fact, Blairite Alan Johnson was the first to use the phrase 'hostile environment' back in 2010, when he was Home Secretary in Gordon Brown's Labour government.

The bosses use immigration policies to try to divide the working class, blaming asylum seekers and refugees for a lack of housing, low pay, and collapsing public services - all the ills of capitalist society. They do all they can to distract from the responsibility of big business and the government for economic crisis and austerity.

Cynically using the issue of migrants risking their lives on boats, the Tories can give confidence to far-right racist extremists to carry out anti-migrant attacks, like the petrol bomb attack on the migrant centre in Dover last autumn. Far-right activists have also participated, to different extents, in recent demonstrations outside hotels housing asylum seekers.

By failing to put forward an alternative fighting for council homes, inflation-proof pay rises and fully funded services, and when in power locally carrying out cuts, Labour gives these forces a chance to get a foothold.

A major trade union campaign opposing racism, and uniting all workers in a struggle for real pay rises and for the services we need, is needed. It could play an important role bringing migrant workers into the trade union movement, and ensure all workers are paid the rate for the job. A trade union-backed, new mass workers' party would further undermine the ability of the far-right to grow.

What we think

The Socialist Party demands an end to racist immigration controls. Asylum decisions cannot be left in the hands of this callous government. We demand that elected committees of working-class people, including representatives of migrant organisations and the trade unions, have the right to review asylum cases and grant asylum.

Defending the rights of asylum seekers is linked directly to the fight to improve the living conditions of all working-class people. It's not enough to say 'refugees welcome here'; we have to fight for a decent standard of living too. We call for mass investment into jobs, homes and services for all. There is enough money to provide these things but it's in the wrong hands. We need to take the wealth, major industry and the banks off the super-rich so it can be planned democratically to meet our needs.

The only way to permanently end the refugee crisis is to fight for a democratic socialist world. On the basis of capitalism, there will always be people forced to flee their country, not by choice but out of desperation.

A socialist world would bring an end to war, environmental catastrophe and starvation. A democratic socialist world plan of production would be able to harness the enormous science and technique created by capitalism, and the world's natural resources, to meet the needs of the population in every part of the world. Those deciding to move to other parts of the world could therefore do so out of genuine choice.

● April is standing for re-election in the upcoming Unison national executive election. Ballot runs from 17 April to 19 May



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.

- 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.

- 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.

- 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.

- 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.

- 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.

- 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.

- 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.

- 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.

- 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.

- 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.

- 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.

- 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.

- 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.

- 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.

- 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.

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.

- 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.

- 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.

- 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.

- 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.

- 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.

- 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.

- 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.

- 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.

- 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.

- 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.

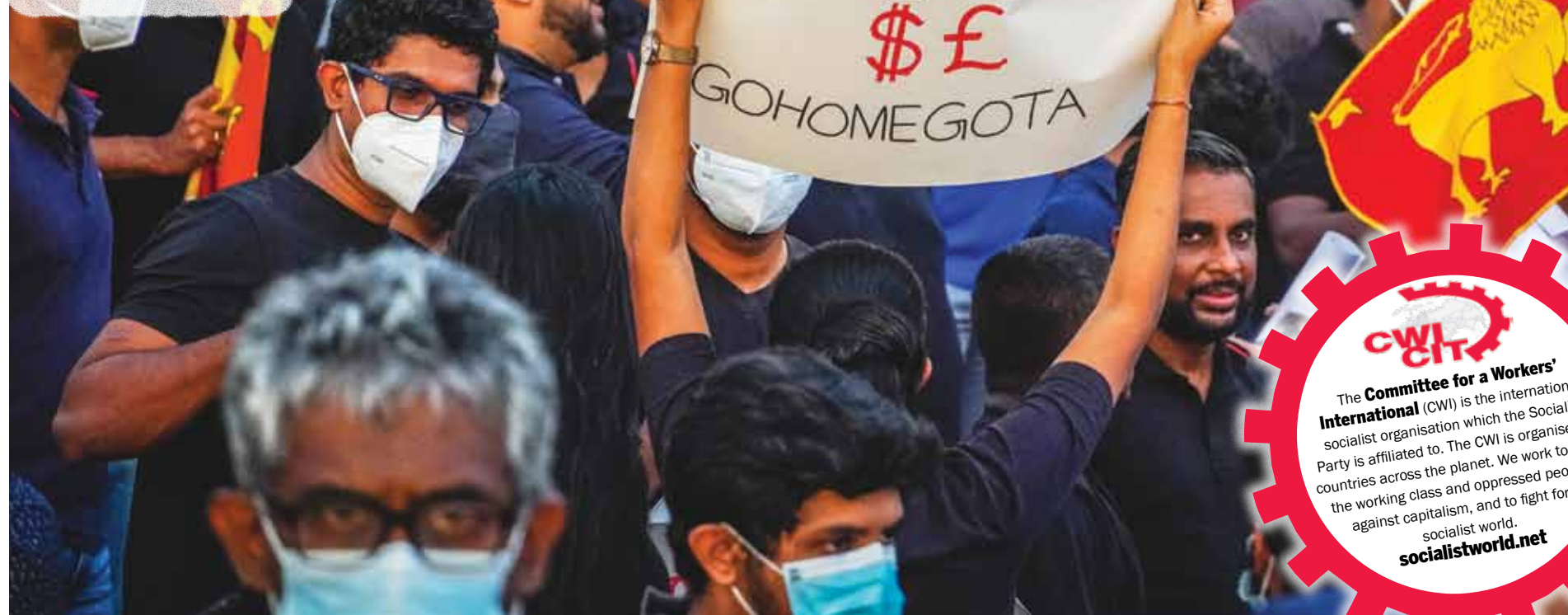
- For a new mass workers' party, based on the trade unions, and drawing together workers, young people and activists from workplaces, and community, environmental, anti-racist and anti-cuts campaigns, to provide a fighting, socialist political alternative to the pro-big business parties.

- 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.

- 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.

- 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.

Sri Lanka IMF deal is not a solution - restart decisive struggle against government attacks!



TU SENAN
COMMITTEE FOR A WORKERS' INTERNATIONAL

On 20 March, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) announced a four-year \$3 billion bailout for Sri Lanka. The deal is nowhere near enough to solve the deep crisis that Sri Lanka faces. Despite declaring bankruptcy, the Sri Lankan government continues to promise to pay back its debt of over \$35 billion. Parts of the repayment have only temporarily been suspended by lenders. The government may need to spend much more than what the IMF had offered each year just to service its debt.

The IMF deal is presented by the government, the right-wing opposition, and a section of the so-called left as the 'ultimate solution'. This is particularly due to the so-called 'structural reform' agreement that the government has made with the IMF. These measures, which had already started to be implemented, are creating enormous misery. A wage freeze and reductions, slashing of overtime payments, increasing interest rates for all borrowing, tax increases and so on, are in full swing already as 'preparation' to secure the IMF deal.

Plans have already been made to sell Lanka Hospital, telecoms, and other services. These measures will not only create more hardship but will also further deepen the crisis. IMF deals have a proven history of making conditions worse rather than actually solving anything. The IMF's involvement in Argentina is an example of how it continues to wreck living conditions.

Six months of negotiations with the IMF were also centred on another key aspect – geopolitical conflict between the US and China. Though the government now claims that it has obtained support from China for the deal, it is still not clear to anyone what 'deal' it has made. Lack of transparency is not something new in Sri Lanka, and is another trait that the current president, Ranil Wickramasinghe, inherited from the Rajapaksa family. Based on the brief statement the president made to parliament, it is clear that these deals are only temporary postponements, rather than concrete improvements.

Extending the repayment period is presented as a solution with the perspective for 'growth', without mentioning where this imaginary growth is going to come from. None of the economic problems that led to the country's bankruptcy last year

are resolved. The economy continues to survive only on the basis of 'handouts' and further borrowing from any country that is willing to offer anything. The developing world economic crisis and the sharpening geopolitical tension in the Asia-Pacific region further add to the complications.

Worsening conditions

As a consequence of these policies, tens of thousands of workers face a reduction in living standards which the country has never faced before. There are reports of starvation and of families forced to choose which children will receive an education, etc. "When I cook rice in an electric cooker, my heat becomes noodles," commented Abdul Raheem, a worker following the enormous electricity price hike that took place in mid-February this year. It has gone up further by 65% (an increase of 300% in a year). Many simply do not have any choice but to switch off electricity completely as they cannot afford to pay. This is in addition to further price hikes of fuel and other key commodities.

Consumer price inflation remains at about 50% since June last year. The government continues to preach that workers, farmers and the poor must

PHOTO: NASLTAHMED/CC

accept the hardship if they want to feel better sometime in the distant future. "I am aware of the hardships that the people of this country have had to suffer. As a government, we apologise for that," said Ranil recently in parliament, as though this bogus apology will bring comfort to those starving. The government has made no effort so far to curtail the enormous profits still being made by the capitalists. While asking workers to tighten their belts, the government is making all efforts to maximise profit and fatten the capitalists' stomachs.

Workers must refuse to pay massively inflated electricity bills. Poor farmers and small traders should refuse to pay the macro-debt they have. Campaigns should be built to organise such non-payment. We must demand that the government refuses to pay debt and invest that money into essential industries producing essential commodities, including food items, and establish an adequate, democratically controlled distribution mechanism. We must reject the conditions imposed by the IMF deal.

Political instability

The current government is extremely unpopular. The president was not elected but appointed through emergency measures. He lost his seat in

the last election and his party could not even win a single parliamentary constituency. But he managed to obtain a single seat for his United National Party (UNP) through the national list mechanism. In a statement made to parliament on 22 March, he admits that he has no support but claims self-belief is enough! The UNP has no support in parliament but relies on the disgraced Rajapaksa clan to carry through policies to attack the masses. A mammoth mass movement forced out the Rajapaksa clan and the whole cabinet during the July uprising last year.

However, the current president used emergency powers and the military to suppress the mass movement and bring the old regime back into power through the backdoor. Not even 'formal democracy' exists anymore.

The president's attempt to hold a provincial election recently backfired. Ranil, trapped in his small Colombo bubble, assumed that somehow the people had 'bought into' what he was doing and believed in the possibility of him winning the election before the IMF deal, bringing some sort of 'mandate' to the deal, as demanded by the West. However, soon after calling the election, when the election rallies started, it was clear how unpopular the Rajapaksas, including Ranil, are in the country. They could not get any decent turnout at the election rallies. As soon as it became clear that the ruling party was likely to lose the election massively, it was called off. The attempt to promote

the ex-president's son, Namal Rajapaksa, as a 'new leader' was a spectacular failure. Even his former ally, Wimal Weerawansa, called him a "premature boiler chicken" as he went around empty stadiums speaking to empty chairs.

The opposition Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB - United People's Power) was also unable to fully benefit from the enormous unpopularity of the ruling party because they do not have a clear alternative to Ranil's policies. Their slightly increased popularity was linked to lesser-evilism rather than proactive support for them. In this vacuum, the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP - people's liberation front) and its coalition, the NPP, were the main force that gained significant support. Although the NPP also does not have a clear alternative and offers indirect support to the IMF deal, it is gaining popularity due to its left rhetoric and anti-corruption position (see 'Sri Lanka - Is the 'National People's Movement' a viable mass alternative' at socialistworld.net).

Although the JVP-led NPP has adopted more right-wing policies, including openly supporting the privatisation of education, their gains will still be regarded as a blow to capitalist interests. However, the JVP has not presented a decisive challenge to any of the government's policies. Their position now revolves completely around calling for a new election. The establishment's position is now to call the election only if they can win.

Everyone, including the JVP, knows how unpopular this government is. Recently, JVP leader Anura Kumara Disanayake even challenged President Ranil to organise a meeting of at least one hundred

people to demonstrate support. It is not an exaggeration to say that Ranil could not even pull such a small, genuine mobilisation. Despite knowing this weakness and the mood of a mass uprising and anger that exists, the JVP continues to be a barrier to mounting a decisive fightback.

Mood for struggle emerging

Various unions came together to call for a 24-hour general strike on 15 March, with the aim of continuing the strike if their demands for a wage raise are not met. The Government Medical Officers' Association (GMOA), the Ceylon Bank Employees Union, along with teachers and various other small unions, have joined forces to push back against the government's massive wage cuts. Militancy among the unions is on the increase, and further strike action, including a general strike, is possible in the coming days or months. Workers have no other option but to escalate the fightback.

University students and youth continue to hold various protests regularly, despite non-stop brutal attacks and arrests by government forces. It is this brutal repressive measure that has so far held back further movements from developing. The government is also bringing in legislation dressed up as 'anti-terrorist' laws which can be used against protesters and opponents, to use in future struggles. However, the anger and frustration against the regime is reaching a tipping point.

Need to build an alternative

The United Socialist Party (CWI Sri Lanka) is calling for a one-day general strike and mass mobilisation, with the aim of restarting the decisive struggle against the ongoing attacks by the government. A generalised fightback must be built not just by demanding improvements in conditions but also with the aim of building a clear workers' alternative. Demands such as non-payment of debt, capital control, the establishment of democratically controlled distribution of essentials and worker-controlled nationalisation must be implemented. An emergency economic policy needs to be implemented that will benefit the workers and poor in opposition to the punishing policies protecting big profits. But unless a viable mass workers' alternative is built, such policies will not be implemented.

The call for Aragalaya-2.0 (Struggle) should be linked to clear demands and organisational proposals to build peoples' assemblies across the country. The existing peoples' assemblies and various organisations that emerged during the last Aragalaya should adopt such a strategy and call for establishing a democratically elected constituent assembly to reorganise society. The slogan "Go home Ranil and take 225 MPs with you" is gaining popularity and gives an indication of how capitalist institutions have become very unpopular. We must work to build a new, real alternative for workers, farmers, youth, and the poor, that can help to defend living standards and organise the election of a constituent assembly. What should follow such slogans should be proposals for a socialist alternative. The collective action of unions and mass mobilisations can expose the outright lie of the capitalists that there is no alternative to misery.

£1/£2 solidarity price

socialistparty.org.uk



the Socialist

Issue 1221

6-12 April 2023

formerly **Militant**

SAVE OUR NHS

BACK STRIKING WORKERS

FULLY FUNDED PAY RISES FOR ALL



PHOTO: PAUL MATSSON

“Real life people – not martyrs; “no scab can heal this wound”; “we need complete pay restoration”...

Just some of the homemade placards held high by junior doctors on the first days of strike action by their unions BMA and HCSA in March.

The reasons given to Socialist Party members bringing them support on the picket line: extreme stress. Constantly apologising to patients for the long waits. Working day and night shifts for £14 an hour. An NHS under impossible strain.

Junior doctors are the latest on the front line in the fight to save the NHS, and in the

national strike wave against the cost-of-living crisis. Young people who have dedicated years to study in order to become doctors, and who in the past would not have been seen as part of the working class, now find themselves adopting working-class methods of struggle, joining the national strike wave begun last summer by rail, postal and BT workers.

Action has forced the government to the table in some disputes. Not every strike develops at the same pace or at the same time. There are ebbs and flows.

But the strike wave is absolutely still on. Teachers in the National Education Union have voted to reject the latest paltry offer from the government by a whopping 98%.

University workers in the University and College Union have voted overwhelmingly to continue striking in the rebalot demanded by Tory anti-union laws. The civil service union PCS has announced another national strike date as well as continuing targeted action.

The BMA has announced that hospital consultants have also voted, in a consultation, and the result is that they are to be balloted for strike action! Nurses, ambulance workers and other hospital staff are currently balloting on an offer from the Tories. Many of them are angry and want to join the junior doctors on the picket line.

The weak and divided Tories can be beaten.

A national trade union-led demo, before the local elections on 4 May, calling for Tories out and inflation-proof pay rises, would ratchet up the pressure.

Escalate the fights, coordinate the action – let’s defeat the bosses, save the NHS and public services, and kick out the Tories!

National strike wave dates

- Junior doctors in BMA and HCSA: 7am 11 April - 7am 15 April
- Teachers in NEU: 27 April and 2 May and three more dates in summer term
- Civil servants in PCS: 28 April
- See pages 5-7 for more on NHS, NEU, UCU and PCS

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



9 771366 962103

ISSN 1366-9621