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# the Socialist

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18-24 May 2023

formerly **Militant**

# RICH GET RICHER

# AND MAKE US POORER

- Sunak and Starmer on bosses' side
- Build a new mass workers' party

ELAINE BRUNSKILL  
SOUTH TYNE AND WEARSIDE SOCIALIST PARTY

**In working-class communities and among swathes of young people, there's a groundswell of anger and frustration against this rotten Tory government.**

Their almighty battering in the local elections was just a taste.

Incredibly, as 13 years of Tory attacks take their toll, Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer has bragged that 'Labour are the real conservatives' and promised to protect 'our way of life'. Also, to change his party's 'DNA' to be like Tony Blair 'on steroids'!

Exactly which way of life is Starmer seeking to preserve? Go to any pub, travel on public transport, visit any picket line, or queue alongside other workers and it'll not be long before you hear the sentiment, the rich are getting richer, while the rest of us are getting poorer.

In my home town of Gateshead, babies born today in parts of the borough are expected to live 12 years less than in more affluent parts of the country.



Teachers on strike for a fully funded inflation-proof pay rise in Gateshead ELAINE BRUNSKILL

There is now a record number of people reliant on food banks, including pensioners, NHS staff and teachers. It has been reported that staff and volunteers in food banks are so stressed they are suffering from burnout.

Across the UK growing numbers of workers and young people are living shorter, harder lives. Meanwhile, the rich and super-rich are rolling in it. The chasm between rich and poor is stark.

According to Oxfam, the richest 1% in Britain hold more wealth than 70% of the rest of us. Incredibly, just five super-rich Britons, who could fit into a family car, have more wealth than 20 million British people. Is this the way of life Starmer is wanting to protect?

The gap between the rich and the rest of us is wider than ever before, but the gap between Starmer's Labour and the Tories is virtually invisible to the naked eye.

Yes, we want to get rid of the Tories, but they need to be replaced with politicians prepared to fight in the interests of the working class, against those of the bosses. We need a new mass workers' party.

Socialist Party members are campaigning for such a party, and for a workers' list of candidates, backed by the trade unions, for the next general election as a start. We need a socialist alternative to capitalist greed and austerity.

**TAKING ON THE MARKETS - LESSONS FROM A GREEK TRAGEDY >>> p8-9**

**TURKEY PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION GOES TO SECOND ROUND RUN-OFF >>> p15**

**WE NEED A NEW WORKERS' PARTY IN WALES >>> p2**

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

Plaid Cymru crisis

We need a new workers' party in Wales

SOCIALIST PARTY WALES

The resignation of Plaid Cymru leader, Adam Price, in response to a damning report of misogyny and sexual harassment, has revealed a new crisis in the party.

The Proiect Pawb report by Nerys Evans paints a repulsive picture of harassment, bullying and gender-based discrimination in Plaid that was unchallenged and allowed to fester for years, even before Price became party leader, but which he also failed to challenge.

Price initially responded by refusing to resign following the report, but was forced to step down by the reaction. Llyr Gruffydd, the interim leader, has promised to implement the report's recommendations, but it is very possible that, given the reported widespread nature of the harassment, new allegations will arise and deepen the crisis.

The leadership crisis comes at a time when Plaid's progress has stalled. Despite a general increase in support for independence over the last decade, Plaid has failed to capitalise on or express the dissatisfaction with the capitalist status quo in Welsh and British politics.

Despite a different cause, the wider crisis in Plaid Cymru mirrors the crisis in the Scottish National Party (SNP). The nationalist parties have attempted to capitalise on the



Outgoing leader Adam Price speaking at Plaid Cymru conference

dissatisfaction with the social crises in British society, but when achieving positions of power have implemented capitalist austerity and failed to mobilise struggles for independence.

Support for independence in Wales has risen from below 10% in polls ten years ago, to as high as 25% in 2021. Despite falling to 18% in a poll in March (55% opposed), polls regularly record double the level of support than in 2015.

austerity-riven Tory Britain.

But the growing marches for independence, with 10,000 in Cardiff last October, are in stark contrast to the stalled support for Plaid.

Despite growing support for independence, Plaid gained only one more seat in the 2021 Senedd elections, but agreed to support the Labour Welsh government in a 'co-operation agreement'.

The Labour Welsh government has faithfully implemented Tory austerity. It has implemented spending cuts to the NHS, which is on its knees in Wales; to education, with

hundreds of teaching assistants facing redundancy this summer; and to council services. Its below-inflation pay offers to public sector workers have mirrored those of the Tories at Westminster.

Understandably, many workers recoiling from Labour have checked out Plaid Cymru, but neither Plaid nor Labour offer a way forward out of the huge social crisis developing in Wales.

New Labour council leaders promise to pass on Tory cuts



Campaigning against the cuts in Swindon

SCOTT HUNTER SWINDON SOCIALIST PARTY

Swindon has a Labour council for the first time since 2004. Disgusted by their rotten record in Westminster, Tory support locally has collapsed.

But what did the new Labour leader of Swindon council, Jim Robbins, have to say on the night of the local election victory? "We've got a tricky job... an unprecedented amount of cuts that we need to deliver, just in this year's budget."

Labour's 22 newly elected council leaders met with Keir Starmer to discuss an 'emergency cost-of-living action plan'. The cost-of-living crisis is leaving people cold, hungry and homeless right now.

Scandalously, Swindon's new

leader also wants to give more power to the Conservative opposition. Jim Robbins plans to rearrange the council's scrutiny committees to get more input from the Tories!

What people want is not a mystery. They want homes they can afford, to be able to put the heating on, food on the table, and pay that beats inflation.

These new Labour councillors should set emergency budgets that actually provide what we need, and fight the Tories in Westminster for the money. We need councillors who are prepared to stand up to the bosses, not do their dirty work!

That's why the Socialist Party was part of the over 250 Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) candidates in the local election, offering an alternative to Tory and Labour cuts. The unions should put forward a workers' list for the general election to do the same.

Tories take over TransPennine Express Fight for real nationalisation with workers' control



PHOTO: MATTHEW COO

IAIN DALTON YORKSHIRE SOCIALIST PARTY SECRETARY

With the company regularly unable to run substantial numbers of its services, it was only a matter of time before TransPennine Express would lose its contract.

Four English rail franchises are now run by the government's rail operator of last resort - DfT OLR Holdings. Major rail franchises in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland are also run by the governments there.

At the recent RMT and Aslef picket lines of rail workers in Leeds, we were struggling to find anyone who still works for a 'private' operator! But, as those strikers still pointed out, even though government subsidies are now not flowing directly into the pockets of shareholders, they are still run by almost exactly the same management as when they were private entities.

Indeed, the Tories have already said that their intention is for this nationalisation to be temporary, and for it to return to the private sector. The Tories intend to set up Great British Railways to do just that. Instead of bringing the railways into

public ownership, it will act as a public coordinating hub of the private rail operators.

The Tories' vision of Great British Railways - closing all ticket offices, driver-only operated trains, and guaranteed subsidies of private shareholders' profits - is in stark contrast to the vision of rail workers and the travelling public.

You can't control what you don't own. So taking these private companies into public ownership is vital.

But if the interests of rail workers and service users are to be realised, then the same old managements can't be left in charge. Nationalised rail must be under democratic, working-class control.

Instead of drawing up plans which seek to protect the profits of the private rail companies, we could focus on ensuring that services run on time, with staff properly paid.

until things fail. It would mean open and staffed ticket offices, and maintaining the safety-critical role of train guards. All have been on the government's chopping block.

Using the money that so far has been funnelled into the pockets of shareholders could fully electrify the railways. Only 30% has been done to date!

Or investing in new infrastructure to increase capacity. Under the Tories' system, Northern Power House Rail has been cancelled.

This all requires a political voice prepared to fight for it. Labour leader Keir Starmer has dropped almost all of Jeremy Corbyn's nationalisation pledges.

One of the few left is to bring rail companies into public ownership when their contracts expire, as the government is doing with TransPennine. But that could be as late as 2028 in the case of Great Western. We can't wait that long!

Moreover, Tony Blair was the last Labour leader to win a general election promising rail nationalisation. And he never delivered.

Build a movement to defeat Tory anti-union laws Join TUC lobby of Parliament 22 May, 6pm



Protesting against the anti-union laws in 2022

ROB WILLIAMS NATIONAL SHOP STEWARDS NETWORK CHAIR

The Tories' anti-union 'Minimum Service Levels' Bill could be just days away from becoming law, on the back of decades of anti-union legislation, going back to Thatcher.

The NSSN welcomes that the TUC has called a protest for Monday 22 May at 6pm in Parliament Square to coincide with the final Commons parliamentary debate. It must be a

massive show of strength. But the TUC and the unions must go much further, with plans for a national Saturday demonstration to build for mass coordinated strike action.

Join the discussion: 'How we fight the anti-union laws' at the NSSN conference in London on 24 June.

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

Advertisement for NSSN CONFERENCE 2023: HOW WE FIGHT THE ANTI-UNION LAWS. 11am-4.30pm, Saturday 24th June. Conway Hall in London, 25 Red Lion Square, WC1R 4RL. Registration fee: £6.

## Just 16% of maternal mental health boards meet minimum standard

ISABEL GRANT  
LEEDS SOCIALIST PARTY

One in five women develop a mental illness during pregnancy or within the first year after having a baby. And maternal death due to mental health problems is increasing. Suicide remains the leading cause of death in the first year after birth.

Yet, in England, only 16% of specialist perinatal mental health community teams meet the minimum standard of care set by the Royal College of Psychiatrists. None of the boards in Northern Ireland or Wales meet the standard.

This isn't just about a lack of provision of mental health services, but maternity services in general.

### Basic needs

There are numerous reports of women not receiving any food in hospital after childbirth, having to wait up to 12 hours until they can eat. This is just one example of women's basic needs being forgotten.

Regular home visits from a midwife or another professional who could potentially pick up on symptoms

early have suffered from austerity cuts. After the first few weeks, these visits are non-existent.

Other support services are now few and far between. Although some community groups, usually led by parents, are reopening, this is a fraction of what there was previously.

And this is not just due to the Covid pandemic. 13 years of Tory austerity to support services for new parents have damaged health and wellbeing. We can now see the devastating impact of those cuts.

### Staff shortage

There's a shortage of over 2,000 midwives. We need to fight for a fully resourced NHS, democratically run by staff, patients and the local community.

And we need proper funding to community services, including 'stay and play', parent support groups (not just for breastfeeding), children's centres and libraries.

Labour councils need to fight against cuts to budgets by Tory central government and for increased funding. If they won't, they should stand aside for those for will.

## Health inequality worsens under Tory rule



JUNE ANGUS  
WEST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

Health inequalities – avoidable differences in healthcare and health outcomes between different demographics of people – continue to deepen after 13 years of failed Tory health policies.

Stark disparities even exist between London boroughs. The average man living in Richmond will not develop his first major health problem, such as cancer or other serious illness, until age 70. In Barking and Dagenham, a much less affluent area, that age is 58.

One third of people in deprived areas suffer from long-term ill health, compared with 19% in more affluent communities. And the University of York found a shorter life expectancy

for people living in the north of England, and more limitations on finding and maintaining employment for those with health problems. Black women are also four times more likely to be at risk from maternal death in the six weeks after giving birth.

### Rampant profiteering

These health inequalities come as an inevitable result of wealth inequality, exacerbated by over a decade of Conservative austerity. The Covid pandemic served to highlight Tory incompetence, with privatised PPE and test-and-trace system, and rampant profiteering only worsening the crisis.

But these failures are wider than just the pandemic. Tory health policies have failed to dent obesity and addiction rates.

In fact, data now show that addiction rates have jumped, exacerbated

by the cost-of-living crisis. Brutal NHS budget cuts mean there is little support available.

When public health and welfare is pitted against profit in a capitalist economy, profit will always win. But what would a Starmer-led Labour government do? Wes Streeting, Labour's shadow health secretary, frequently promotes the disastrous ideas of NHS privatisation.

What's the real solution? A health service, democratically controlled by its workers, unions and patients to enact effective, evidence-based health policies that serve public interest and not profitmaking. An end to capitalism – the system that causes and exacerbates many health problems with poor working conditions, and poor access to affordable, nutritious food. And a socialist alternative to improve our quality of life.

## Obesity – 30 years of Tory and Labour failure

JOHN MALCOLM  
TEESSIDE SOCIALIST PARTY

Since 1992, there have been 14 strategies to tackle obesity by Tory and Labour governments. All have failed.

26% of adults and 34% of secondary school children are now classed as overweight or obese. And there is a stark contrast in the most deprived areas compared to the most affluent.

Between April 2019 and March 2020, there were over a million hospital admissions linked to obesity. But Public Health England research revealed that a high proportion of individuals seek a solution to managing their weight. So why does obesity remain so high?

### Spending cuts

Capitalist politicians have failed to address the underlying causes of obesity, and put the emphasis on personal responsibility rather than prevention. Public health spending has been drastically cut. Since 2015, public health grants given to local councils are 26% lower.

Under austerity, poverty has increased. Those in deprived areas suffer from a lack of decent housing, low wages, poor diets, and reduced access to sports facilities, worsened by council cuts. In some areas, life expectancy has fallen, and discrepancies in health and wellbeing have grown compared to more affluent areas.

Many families have little choice regarding what food they buy and eat. Those on low wages or benefits do not have access to shops selling fresh food. You pay more if you can't access supermarkets, and instead rely on local shops.

Public transport has also been cut, and families on benefits are less likely to own a car. Fast food outlets are likely to be close by, and the food industry heavily promotes this through advertising.

Inflation on food items has reached more than 19%. The major food producers and distributors should be nationalised, and democratically run, as part of an overall plan of production, to enable

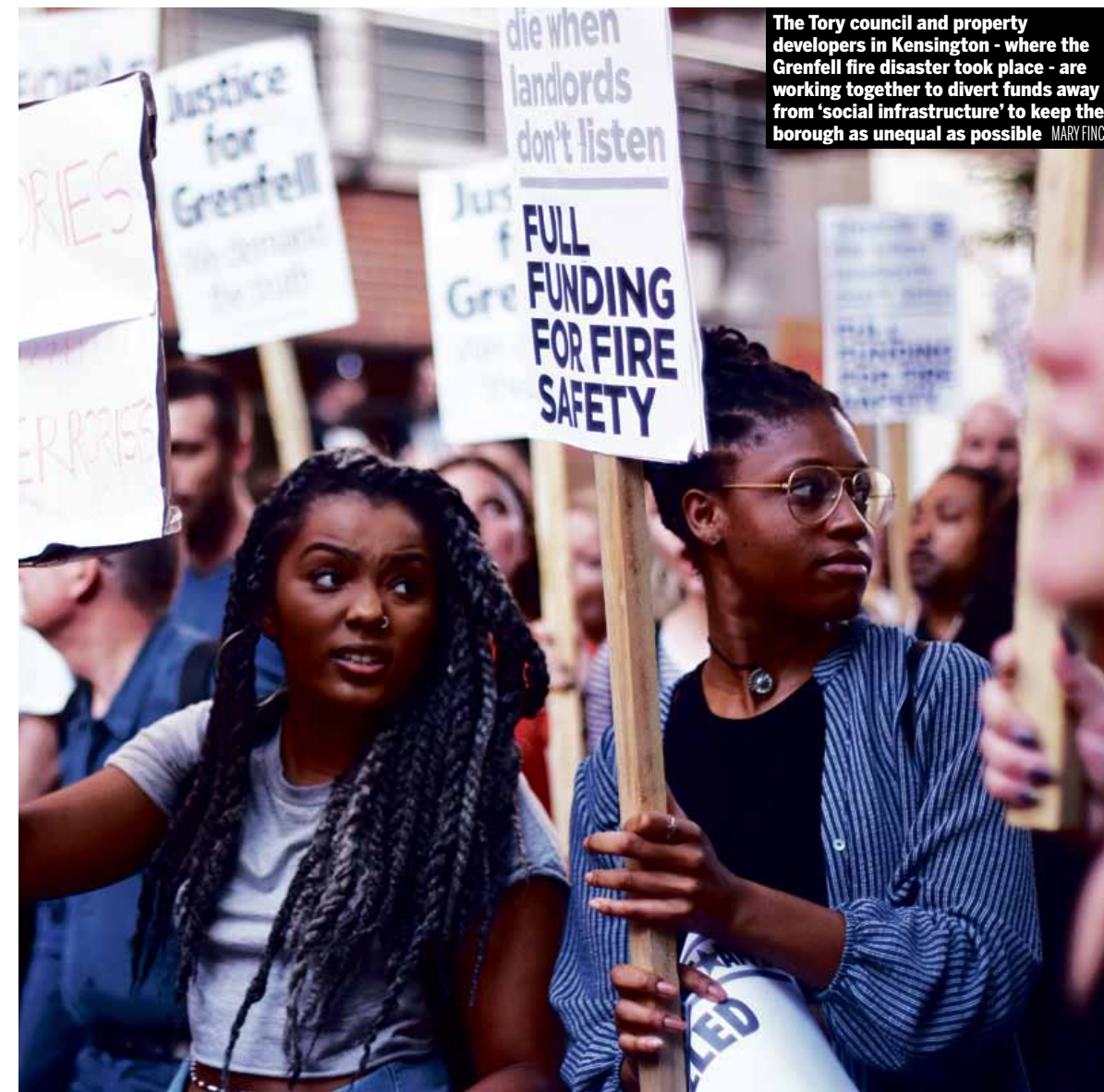
people to eat healthily at affordable prices.

But recent news has focused on quick-fix solutions to obesity, such as a slimming jab. Novo Nordisk, the firm which produces the jab, spent millions on a PR campaign, before it was approved by UK health regulator Nice.

### Privatisation

Novo Nordisk is now paying the salaries of staff on NHS obesity teams, and redesigning NHS obesity services. The firm has financial links to the co-chair of an NHS weight management advisory group, and paid her almost £50,000 in lecture, consulting and other fees in just two years.

Obesity is a complex problem, and solving obesity means tackling the underlying causes, such as poverty and inequality. The capitalist governments give in to the food industry lobby and the pharmaceutical giants, seeking to profit from obesity and other health problems. That's why we need a socialist alternative.



The Tory council and property developers in Kensington - where the Grenfell fire disaster took place - are working together to divert funds away from 'social infrastructure' to keep the borough as unequal as possible. MARY FINCH



One of many protests by the 'Save Our Square' campaign. PAUL MATTESSON

## 'No more Grenfells': Save Our Square meets to fight against unsafe tower plans

LINDA TAAFFE  
WALTHAM FOREST SOCIALIST PARTY

The juggernaut construction companies roll on. Tower blocks are invading the sky everywhere. Our public land is being handed over to private interests. Green space is disappearing at an ever-increasing speed. Waltham Forest is just one borough of many facing this onslaught, and the Labour council is only one of many that have cosied up to private profiteers, so they can rake in more council tax while the housing waiting lists remain as long as ever.

### Eight-year battle

Save Our Square has been battling for about eight years with all manner of actions and activities, opposing this model for housing in our town square. Unfortunately, the diggers moved in about six months ago. We expected the campaign to wind down, and, however disappointing, we could all be proud that we held the privateers off for so long... but no such thing. The campaign has found a new lease of life from the fall-out from the Grenfell inquiry.

Although the Grenfell report is now not due until early 2024 – a disgraceful delay in itself – there is a likelihood that building regulations will be reformed to lay down the law for two staircases to be required for tall blocks. The horrific experiences of Grenfell tenants exposed the need for firefighters and other responders to have a clear way up. Sadiq Khan has already sent a mandate around London authorities requiring that new plans submitted must contain two staircases.

Save Our Square called a public meeting called 'No Grenfells here' to highlight that the two tower blocks of

34 and 26 storeys proposed for our square would have only one staircase each! The construction must be paused to enable plans to be amended and allow greater local consultation. Over 40 people turned out and several other local land campaigns came too, like Save the Marshes and Action for Whippes (our local hospital). All those campaigns explained to everyone what was happening – or not happening – in their areas. Everyone mentioned how invisible and silent are the local councillors.

Our guest speaker, Paul Kershaw of the Unite Housing Workers Branch, pointed out that there is everything still to play for and described other similar campaigns. Speakers from the floor detailed how some prefabrication companies are going bust; how housing is a trade union issue; and how we must all make the councillors feel our pressure. They all received our letter and an invitation to come along. Not one did. Local Labour MP Stella Creasy replied saying she had no role in this process!

### Will we be safe?

We agreed to get supporters to visit their councillors' surgeries and demand answers; that we would urge Stella Creasy to raise the issue in Parliament. Where designs for tower blocks with one staircase have already been passed, there must be a fight for new regulations saying two have to be introduced immediately. Will the 500 tenants in these two new tower blocks be safe?

We also decided to hold a commemoration for the victims of Grenfell on Saturday 17 June in our town square under the trade union Health and Safety banner of "Remember the dead and fight like hell for the living". The fight goes on.

## Tory council and property developers siphon money from affordable housing

DARA FITZGERALD  
WEST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

The Tory council in Kensington and Chelsea is using funds supposed to be for 'social infrastructure' to buy two statues for £226,000 and £50,000. This money is being provided by Berkeley Homes. In the deal, the property developers will receive planning permission from the council to build 375 apartments at a new housing complex.

### Wealth disparity

Kensington is an extreme example of the disparity between living conditions that exists in London. It has the greatest income inequality of any London borough. And the rent for the lowest earners is the least affordable.

Kensington is also a prime location for foreign investment in high-priced housing. Oligarchs can redirect funds from their own country to invest into mansions, apartment blocks, and commercial buildings.

The Shard is owned by the state

of Qatar, the Gherkin by a Brazilian conglomerate, the Fenchurch building by a Hong Kong company. City Hall, which the mayor moved the London government out of in 2021 as the rent was too high, is owned by a Kuwaiti sovereign wealth fund.

These billionaires have worsened the problem. But the main issue is the commodification of housing. After World War Two, council house building boomed, with nearly 200,000 council homes being built in 1954 alone.

Then, in 1980, Thatcher's Tory government brought in legislation to restrict the number of council homes being built. With 'right to buy', council tenants could purchase their property.

The policy was designed to create a new generation of Tory-voting homeowners. The idea was if your asset is tied up in your property, you are more likely to vote for proposals that will maintain or increase its value.

But the decline of council housing stock has sent house prices skyrocketing. In London, the average house

price is £484,716 – 14 times the average annual wage.

I live and rent in west London. I make above the average wage in my area, which now is £33,000. I have a stable job in the tech industry, and it comes with a few benefits.

But even in my relatively advantageous situation, I will need to save for many years to be able to afford the deposit on a flat in London. And I'm nearing my 40s.

### Council homes and rent control

We need better solutions to actually provide affordable housing for those that need it. There must be a huge project of council house building, with lifetime tenancies. We need rent controls that cap the level of rent, and to improve the current council accommodation and replace dangerous cladding.

The large building companies, banks, and land should be nationalised to ensure good standard housing and affordable mortgages. And we need a democratic socialist society to ensure decent homes, jobs, and services for all.



Ashfield Academy strike. STEVE SCORE

## Pay strike at special needs school in Leicester

STEVE SCORE  
LEICESTER SOCIALIST PARTY

A huge and lively turnout on the picket line at Ashfield Academy special school in Leicester reflected the determined mood of school support staff. The majority of the Unison union members who are taking strike action for fair pay were out on the picket line.

Two of them spoke to the Socialist to explain why they were on strike.

Chris Fryer: "We've fallen about £1,000 behind other special needs schools since academy status came

in five years ago. We want to redress that. We had low pay already and now we are even lower paid."

Jess Greengrass: "People assume our job is somebody sitting with a child reading for a little bit, and that's not what the job is anymore. It is a highly skilled job, it is emotionally draining, it's physically draining, and we love it. We love being here with the kids, but we can't do it on love alone. We feel we aren't valued properly. We are stressed, broke and we are struggling. These schools don't run without support staff."

## St Mungo's homelessness workers set for month-long strike



PAUL KERSHAW  
CHAIR, UNITE HOUSING WORKERS BRANCH LE 1111

Unite members at the homelessness charity St Mungo's have voted to take a month-long strike from 30 May. Over the last decade the charity has increased its spending on senior managers by 350%. It has recently recruited a team of highly paid 'transformation managers' under a director who is paid around £130,000 per year. Management says this is part of 'rethinking our operating model.' The rethink does not include protecting workers against inflation. St Mungo's refuses to reveal the pay of newly appointed CEO Emma Haddad, but her predecessor was on £189,000 - representing a 77% increase in CEO pay since 2013.

In contrast, since 2010 frontline workers have seen their real pay fall by a quarter. Their annual leave has been cut and their hours increased. The current pay offer means a further cut in real pay. Management recently

increased its pitiful 1.75% pay offer to a still pitiful 2.25%. The offer was put to members and rejected by a margin of 91%.

On 11 May the government released figures showing a 22% increase in homelessness among people in full-time work, and St Mungo's workers say they fear losing their homes due to the long-term attack on pay.

High-paid executives' attempts to moralise about strikes has only fuelled workers' anger. One worker comments: "Everyone in my team has really angsted about the decision to strike - we see our clients every day, so we know better than anyone how much they need us. But you can't pour from an empty cup, and it's getting to the stage where we can't look after them the way we should anyway. Low pay isn't just a problem in practical terms, though we are all struggling with skyrocketing rents and energy bills - it's also pushing up our workloads as people

go off sick with the stress of it, and some just leave."

Unite general secretary Sharon Graham said: "Charity workers who are on the streets helping the homeless are now prepared to go on strike for a month for a decent wage. This shows what they think of the way they've been treated by St Mungo's management. The pitiful pay offer has just made everyone in the union angrier. So, if the management at St Mungo's want to avoid a month-long strike they have the answer in their own hands. Make Unite members a decent pay offer. Their indifference to the financial pressures facing their own staff is quite frankly astonishing."

Unite Regional officer Steve O'Donnell commented: "Management's behaviour is really backfiring. New members are joining in droves."

• Support the hardship fund:  
[justgiving.com/crowdfunding/unitesmstrike](https://justgiving.com/crowdfunding/unitesmstrike)

## Rail workers hold the line for pay, terms and conditions

Rail workers walked out again - train drivers in Aslef on 12 May, and rail workers employed by the train operating companies in RMT on 13 May.

The government and the bosses "put forward an insulting offer to Aslef members and the executive rejected it, rightly so. That's why we're back here today on the picket line today, with further days planned for 31 May and 3 June", as Mark Sarson, Aslef company council representative put it on the picket line outside Leicester rail station.

Socialist Party members visited picket lines on both days. Tom Porter Brown reports that support for striking railway workers at Birmingham New Street remained strong,

with one office worker stopping to tell pickets how his commute today had taken three hours - and he still backed the train drivers!

"We've been negotiating nationally with representatives of the train companies since February. But even though we've had no pay increases since 2019 their pay offer of just 4%, with strings attached on our terms and conditions, is an insult and not acceptable", a picket told Alex Thraves in Swansea.

One Aslef member told Melanie Dent in Reading that, in their opinion, if the TUC had called a general strike after the Truss-Kwarteng experiment, then a general election would have been called the next day.



Northampton RMT picket line  
PHOTO: NORTHAMPTON SP

## Posties claim scalp of Royal Mail boss... now reject the deal



A ROYAL MAIL WORKER

Royal Mail boss Simon Thompson has resigned. Due to go in October, but in reality he's gone already, kept on the payroll for now, and leaving with a payoff as big as £700,000. Meanwhile, we are facing a real-terms three-year pay cut, a reduction in sick pay, new attendance standards to make it easier to manage postal workers out of the business, and ill-health retirement being more than halved. A reduction of indoor hours will increase outdoor time, making it even more difficult for our aging workforce. All of this, along with seasonal hours and flexibility, and the establishment of a two-tier workforce.

Darren Jones MP, who was the chair of the select committee that did a job in holding Thompson to account, today 'wishes him the best' for his future.

We'll I cannot wish him the best. He has led Royal Mail in its attempt to smash the CWU and our members.

He was in charge of the company at a time when it went out to attack members and reps, and has overseen around 400 members and reps suspended and sacked by his 'gold command' of union busters.

So I don't 'wish him the best', and we cannot expect the next CEO to be any different. Their role is to satisfy the shareholders and not the workers or the customers. That will only change by bringing Royal Mail back into public ownership and sweeping aside all of the senior management. A renationalised Royal Mail could be run as a real public service, and as part of the community.

If it wasn't for the determined action by postal workers, Thompson would still be doing his job trying to smash the union. Now we've got to keep up the pressure, save the jobs of the 400 victimised reps, and keep pushing the bosses back. That means voting to reject the offer and preparing members for the scale of strike action needed to win.

## PCS: Keep up the fight - for a national strategy that can win

The following is an edited extract from the Socialist Party bulletin for PCS conference taking place 23-25 May 2023

The 88% 'yes' vote declared after the closure of our national strike re-ballot on 9 May is a clear instruction from PCS members to get serious about the fight on pay, pensions, redundancy rights and jobs. Despite the blow of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) group going so close but not getting over the 50%

participation threshold, tens of thousands of members have renewed their mandate to fight back.

This can be no surprise. The cost-of-living crisis has continued, as the prices of basic necessities continue to skyrocket. The official measure of inflation is around 10%, but for millions of working-class families, price rises will be higher. The government has stepped away from its commitment to halve inflation by next year.

Members know very well, therefore, that the recent Treasury Pay Remit for 2023-24, allowing for 4.5% to

5% average pay rises for departments, is going to mean a further real-terms pay cut. On top of the obvious attack on pay, the removal of the 91,000 job cut quota has not changed the threat of redundancies, even while the civil service grows.

The union's National Executive Committee (NEC) made a mistake in not immediately announcing national action when our initial strike mandate was won on 7 November 2022. This was in contrast to every other major union, from the railways to the posties, from the nurses to the

teachers, and it left members wondering when we were going to act.

Instead of acknowledging their error, the 'Left Unity' (LU) majority on the NEC have argued that members will not support sustained national strike action since it will mean losing pay.

Socialist Party members in PCS do not accept the view that union members won't tolerate losing pay. There is no evidence for this. Members are smarter than LU give them credit for; first and foremost, members want tactics that work.

Equally mistaken has been the NEC's repeated failure to add 'action short of strike' to the ballots. This too is under the misapprehension that members would not be willing to lose overtime payments, in pursuit of the biggest prize - a pay rise that protects us against inflation and agreements on all of our other major issues, including jobs.

This error on the part of the NEC has allowed for the undermining of

our selective strikes. If a small number of key sites take five, ten or thirty days of strike action, but other sites merely put on overtime to clear the backlogs, or the striking sites go back to work and clear the backlogs on overtime, it massively reduces the pressure on the Tories to negotiate.

As yet, there is no evidence of any movement on the part of the government on any of our key issues, including pay. The recent Pay Remit was imposed after the most cursory discussions imaginable. Socialist Party members in PCS call on all delegates at PCS Conference 2023 to vote for the measures needed to force the government back.

Delegates, vote for a programme of sustained national strike action; vote for targeted action that really hurts the government; vote for action short of strike action; vote to put maximum pressure on the government to secure our 10% pay claim for 2022 and at least a guaranteed inflation proof increase for 2023.



## Conference set to debate strategy, union democracy and political representation

JP ROSSER  
BRANCH SECRETARY HMRC WEST MERCIA PCS  
(PERSONAL CAPACITY)

Top of the agenda at PCS conference is the national campaign on pay, pensions, jobs and the compensation scheme. Activists worked tirelessly resulting in a successful re-ballot in over 100 employer groups, despite the anti-union laws, ensuring the campaign can continue.

Broad Left Network (BLN) supporters have consistently argued that the scope of the current dispute needs to go further to include issues such as jobs, office closures, and workloads. Despite the Left Unity group decrying this for years, in 2022, under significant pressure, it finally adopted some but not all of our approach. Now we need to urgently discuss and agree the best strategy to win. The BLN will be putting forward an emergency motion to address these matters.

Equally important are the issues around democracy and lay control. The national campaign is an illustration of the top-down, full-time officer controlled approach of the current leadership. Meanwhile, lay activists can't access membership

details to help us build and organise effectively. Without this we are fighting with one hand tied behind our back. We also see Left Unity, in an echo of the right-wing Moderates of the past, seeking to water down annual elections.

There are BLN motions to give lay activists access to members' data, transfer control of website and social media to the editorial board, campaigning for workplace ballots, and extending elections to ensure increased accountability among the currently unelected full-time officers.

### Trans rights

Another significant debate will be the issue of trans rights. Left Unity has deliberately sidelined 'Proud' (PCS LGBT+ equality group) to stifle criticism of the general secretary's gender critical views. Now Left Unity is seeking a 'compliant' Proud structure and has pre-empted the debate, producing a branch briefing to justify their actions.

The briefing is full of inaccuracies and attempts to hide from the legitimate criticisms raised by Proud members. The NEC motion must be defeated to restore the trust of PCS

LGBT+ members.

Left Unity's watered down political 'strategy' put at the 2022 conference amounted to asking Keir Starmer to be nice to us while PCS might criticise his failings. This demonstrates a complete lack of understanding about how a political plan might support winning policies and gains for members.

We will be putting forward an emergency motion to support Corbyn if he chooses to stand as an independent, together with other genuine pro-trade union, anti-austerity candidates in the next general election.

The Tories' minimum service levels bill could become law during conference. PCS must take the lead in demanding that the Trades Union Congress calls a huge national demo to prepare for mass co-ordinated strike action to defeat the Tory anti-union laws and their cost-of-living squeeze.

This conference agenda illustrates the growing divide between the BLN and Left Unity. If PCS is to reclaim its mantle as a left-led, campaigning union that wins for members, then a new leadership equipped with BLN policies will be essential.

## Election results - left increases NEC representation

DAVE SEMPLE  
PCS BRANCH SECRETARY WIGAN  
(PERSONAL CAPACITY)

Left-wing representation on the civil servants' union PCS National Executive Committee (NEC) has doubled from two to four. The majority group in the union's leadership remains the 'Democracy Alliance', of which 'Left Unity' is part, with 31 seats.

Socialist Party members in PCS and fellow independent socialists organised in the BLN had established a united slate with 'Independent Left' (IL) for the 2023 elections. Both sides recognised it was necessary to challenge the current leadership.

The electoral coalition clearly yielded results; in addition to the four elected, four others standing on the united left slate received enough votes to be elected but fell short due to limits on the total number of NEC members from the same department. Work remains to be done, but this is a promising start for an alliance built on political principle.

BLN and IL agreed a united programme geared towards escalating the union's strike campaign, including through national action and action short of strike action, which the

existing leadership has frustrated at every turn. The programme also focused on the election and accountability of the union's full-time officers.

Turnout in the elections was 7.6%, a small uptick from the previous year's 7.2%, but still very low given the massive efforts unleashed across the union, at the same time as the elections, to win a strike re-ballot.

The Democracy Alliance leadership has leant on the increased profile afforded to it by the strikes. Individuals who have played a part in frustrating the campaign for national action have been able to appear on social media and in the union's mailings heading up picket lines.

They have been forced to do so by the determination of members to fight, and under pressure from the BLN-IL challenge.

The Democracy Alliance leadership can't stop members and reps learning from experience - drawing lessons from setbacks about what kind of action and what kind of leadership is needed to win. They can't stop the reorganisation proceeding at the bottom of the union.

The work continues, and membership of the Broad Left Network and the Socialist Party in PCS is steadily rising.

In response to the article: 'What are 'the markets' anyway?' published in the Socialist issue 1209, and available online at [socialistparty.org.uk](http://socialistparty.org.uk), we received an email from Cathy in Nottingham asking:

"Could we have an article which explains how the markets, or propaganda about the reaction of the markets has been, or would be, used to put pressure on left-socialist governments... and specifically how our programme would deal with this."

**Nick Hart**, Socialist Party national committee member and author of the original article, writes to address Cathy's points, explaining the role of capitalism's global financial institutions and exploring the experience of the Greek working class, which went head-to-head with these institutions in the early 2010s.

IMF forecasts UK recession"; "Britons need to accept they're poorer, Bank of England chief economist says"; "Moody's lowers UK outlook to negative".

Scrolling through the news or switching on the TV or radio, announcements from representatives of bodies like the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Bank of England or credit rating agencies like Moody's can seem like so much background noise from an interchangeable parade of smartly dressed talking heads.

But who are these people? Who put them there? And what for?

Rather than simply being neutral bodies operating in the background of the financial system, these 'institutions' of global capitalism play a part in protecting the interests of big business by policing the actions of individual capitalist governments and guiding the financial markets.

On top of this, they also play a propaganda role in their messages aimed at you and me via the capitalist media - 'don't ask for a pay rise', 'don't expect more money for public services or a decent pension'!

That's why, as Cathy describes in her email, it's important for us to discuss what steps an incoming socialist government would need to take to overcome attempts to undermine it from the IMF, ratings agencies, and the bond- and currency-trading vultures.

### Capitalist institutions

The IMF, World Trade Organisation (WTO) and the World Bank are bodies sponsored collectively by the world's capitalist governments. Officially, their remit is to ensure the steady and stable functioning of the capitalist system worldwide, and promote economic growth.

But a key feature of capitalism is competition. Competition between individual capitalists vying for a market to sell their goods, and competition between capitalist states acting in the dominant interests of their own capitalist classes.

The IMF and World Bank were established in 1944 as part of the Bretton Woods agreement. As World War Two was drawing to a close, US capitalism was seeking to cement its role as the principal world capitalist power. Both institutions are dominated by the political influence of US capitalism. In the case of the IMF, each member country pays in based on the size of its economy, and receives voting powers on its committees in proportion to this. As the largest capitalist economy over the last 80 years, the US has been the dominant voice in the IMF since its establishment.

Most notoriously, the IMF acts as a lender of last resort for national governments unable to meet repayments

on their existing debts, or running low on the foreign currency reserves needed for essential imports. However, these loans come at a heavy price.

IMF officials will in return demand 'structural adjustment programmes' - code for austerity measures, including the sell-off of state assets, cuts to public services, pensions and benefits, and removal of food and fuel subsidies.

As well as ensuring that the working class and small farmers shoulder the burden of paying off their government's debts to international finance markets, through privatisation and deregulation these policies also pave the way for the exploitation of the economy, public services and natural resources by multinational companies (especially those based in the US and the other main IMF powerbrokers).

The IMF is infamous for the role it has played alongside home-grown capitalist governments in impoverishing working-class people, including in Argentina, Indonesia, Pakistan, and elsewhere in the neo-colonial world.

### Greece

But this has rarely been forced through without mass resistance. In Greece during the 2010s, resistance to IMF-approved austerity took the form of a whole series of general strikes, political upheavals, including the rise and eventual coming to power of a left-wing Syriza government in 2015. The working-class of Greece went head-to-head with the capitalist markets and Syriza had its political programme tested.

In the wake of the 2008 banking crisis, the Europe-wide recession particularly hit the economies of Greece, Ireland, Portugal and Spain, with already-low tax income dropping off and government debt ballooning.

These countries' membership of the euro, and the rules associated with the common currency, restricted the room for manoeuvre for the governing capitalist parties. Measures available to nations with a sovereign currency, such as creating more money to buy back government debt, were ruled out.

Euro membership also imposed strict rules on things such as the size of the deficit between government income and spending, and the ratio of debt to overall economic output.

Greece came under attack by the finance markets as major banks and investment funds around the world enthusiastically bought up Greek government debt in the form of bonds as the global economic crisis was developing in 2010. The credit rating agencies, for-profit companies that publicly assess the ability of governments and other large borrowers to

# TAKING ON 'THE MARKETS' - LESSONS FROM A GREEK TRAGEDY



Protester showing solidarity with the Greek working class voting Oxi (No) against austerity in 2015. PHOTO: DCS BYRNE/CC

pay back their debts, began downgrading the status of Greek government bonds to 'junk'.

This created a doom loop. The cost of further government borrowing shot up due to bond traders demanding higher interest payments (yields). No doubt those large investment companies that held Greek bonds as well as shares in the rating agencies scoring them had no complaints!

The Greek government, at that time headed by former workers' party PASOK, came close to being unable to make its debt repayments.

In 2010 and 2011 it agreed a pair of rescue packages with the 'Troika' - composed of the IMF, the European Central Bank (ECB), and the European Commission acting on behalf of the European Union (EU).

Styled as 'bailouts' in the media, these amounted to two loans of €107 billion and €130 billion each, plus an agreement that private holders of Greek government bonds would take a 'haircut' and write off half the value of their outstanding debt. In return, the Troika demanded sweeping

austerity measures totalling over €50 billion.

These included massive cuts to the wages of public sector workers and pensions, a 22% cut to the minimum wage, over 150,000 public sector job cuts, and increased income and sales taxes for even the poorest workers. At the same time, over €50 billion of state assets and two thirds of state-owned companies were sold off, creating an opportunity for both Greek and international capitalists to buy former public property at knockdown prices.

However, the Greek working class didn't take this lying down. Over 40 days of general strike action were called between 2010 and 2015, accompanied by mass demonstrations of up to 500,000 workers and the occupation of city squares.

### Syriza

Significantly, these struggles gained a political expression through the rise of Syriza, a self-described 'coalition of the radical left'. At the start of the crisis, it was a minor party, polling 5% in the 2009 parliamentary elections.

In just three years, during which a coalition of the ex-workers' party PASOK and traditional capitalist party New Democracy governed, Syriza rose to be the second largest party in 2012. The imposition of deep cuts as part of the Troika-approved 'economic adjustment programme' continued apace, as did strikes and protests throughout Greece. By January 2015 it rose to be the largest party and was able to form a government, promising to reverse many of the previous five years' austerity and a repudiation of the debt.

Led by prime minister Alexis Tsipras and finance minister Yannis Varoufakis, operating alongside a host of careerists fleeing the rapidly disintegrating PASOK, the Syriza leadership already planned to abandon its election programme.

Varoufakis gave a preview of what his approach in government would be when, in a 2013 speech discussing how to deal with the crisis gripping Greece and the eurozone, he declared: "If this means that it is we, the suitably erratic Marxists, who must

try to save European capitalism from itself, so be it".

The initial thinking of Syriza in negotiations with the Troika was that, by presenting an easing of austerity as being in the best interests of capitalist stability in the long run, they could secure further loans, this time without the strings of further cuts to public spending.

Any such hopes were quickly dashed when German finance minister Wolfgang Schäuble, who unofficially directed negotiations on behalf of the Troika, told Varoufakis: "We can't possibly allow an election to change anything".

By June 2015, the real prospect of the Greek government defaulting on its debts was present, and with it expulsion from the euro.

The Troika used this as a threat against Syriza's leadership, who were desperate to remain in the Euro at all costs. However, the most militant layers of the Greek working class came to correctly see a break from the strait-jacket of the single currency as an opportunity to write off the public debt

and cancel the austerity plans laid out in the Troika 'memorandums'.

On the mass demonstrations urging Tsipras and his advisers to reject further austerity in return for a bailout, Syriza's previous slogan of "no more sacrifices for the euro" became a much-chanted phrase.

As co-thinkers of the Socialist Party argued at the time among the workers' movement in Greece, a return to the previous independent Greek currency, the drachma, wouldn't have been enough in and of itself. Within the context of Greece attempting to operate as a normal capitalist economy, the drachma would have been subject to devaluation by international currency markets, sparking rapid inflation in the cost of imported goods, and wiping out the value of what savings ordinary Greeks had left.

### Socialist Programme

What was clearly needed was a break from capitalism as a whole. As well as a repudiation of the debt, this would have required controls on large movements of capital to stem the flow of hundreds of millions of euros out of Greece that took place following the election in 2015.

This could have been coupled with a state monopoly on foreign trade to guarantee the import of essential goods and their supply to ordinary consumers at an affordable price. With shipping forming a large part of the Greek economy, a socialist government could have gained leverage with the nationalisation of the port infrastructure and shipping firms under democratic workers' control, along with impounding of their cargo, to make up for years of tax dodging by their owners.

Similarly, nationalisation of the banks and their foreign currency reserves, along with large food producers and other big players in the Greek economy, would have been the best safeguard against economic sabotage by the money markets and governments of the remaining EU countries.

With the real material and human resources of the country secured, Greek workers could then have been able to begin to plan democratically how to use these for the benefit of the masses, rather than enriching their native oligarchs and international bond holders. A taste of this was given with the 'work-in' occupations that took place in hospitals, the state TV broadcaster, and other workplaces during the height of the anti-austerity movement.

With an appeal to workers in other European countries and around the world, also victims of austerity, to take similar steps themselves, Greece could have been the beginning of a second revolutionary wave following the ripple effect of the Arab Spring a few years before.

Despite Tsipras and many other leading members of Syriza having at one time described themselves as

'Marxists' and 'communists', when given the chance they were unwilling to provide leadership to a mass movement that could have ended capitalism in Greece.

But the Greek working class continued to demonstrate its determination to fight the Troika to the end, and the energy that could have been used in a mass movement to face down the institutions of international capitalism.

Facing a financial cliff edge and a dead end in negotiations with the Troika, Syriza called a referendum for 5 July 2015 on whether to accept the latest austerity package in return for a third bailout, or reject it and face ejection from the eurozone. Expecting to use it to buy time and extract some concessions from the Troika before a narrow vote in favour of accepting whatever deal was on the table, Tsipras and his advisers were taken by surprise when the Greek masses voted 61% in favour of rejecting it!

In the process, city streets and squares were filled with workers holding placards and chanting "Oxi" - "No".

Just four days after the referendum, completely ignoring its decisive result, the Syriza cabinet voted to accept the Troika's new memorandum. Despite Varoufakis later being a dissenting voice, he had fulfilled his mission of saving European capitalism from itself. And what for?

The next austerity package, this time voted through by a government of the 'radical left', raised the retirement age to 67, increased pension and national insurance contributions made by workers, and raised VAT. And all in the hope that Greece might finally finish paying off its loans to the IMF and ECB by 2060!

As a result of the austerity measures implemented by PASOK, ND and Syriza governments in turn, 20,000 Greeks became homeless, and unemployment peaked at 27% between 2008-2016.

The rise in inflation and interest rates along with a breakdown in the 'rules' that have governed capitalism during the last 30 years threaten to expose the cracks in the system and spark a new economic downturn around the world. The spotlight will once again fall on the IMF and other institutions and their role in managing crises to the benefit of the capitalist class, with the burden placed on workers.

The workers' movement needs to have its response ready - in the form of working-class political organisations with a socialist programme to break the dictatorship of the markets and their institutions once and for all.

● For more on a socialist programme to take on the EU, including 'the currency question' see 'Lexit is not enough', Socialism Today issue 225 available online at [socialismtoday.org](http://socialismtoday.org)

## Come to a Socialist Party meeting near you

The Socialist Party has regular meetings in towns and cities across the country, in which we discuss socialist ideas, past events in working-class history and how we can apply those lessons to the fight for socialism today. If you would like to participate:

- Go to [socialistparty.org.uk/join](http://socialistparty.org.uk/join)
- Or text 07761 818206 with your name and postcode.
- Or scan the QR code:



# TV: Evicted

## 'Priced out, pushed out' - the harsh reality of renting, and why a bold social housing programme is needed



Evicted PHOTO: BBC

PHOEBE COX  
MANSFIELD SOCIALIST PARTY

'Evicted' is a four-part BBC Three documentary, unearthing the harsh realities many renters face as rent and living costs soar across the UK.

The Socialist Party believes that the Tory and Blairite model of privatised provision of housing has failed working-class people - with mass working-class action needed to fight for an imminent solution.

We need a bold council housing programme to provide decent homes for all.

This documentary exposes the horrors of the housing crisis, along with pressures from the rising costs of living, as many working-class people are unable to afford rising rents, facing homelessness as a result.

Words such as "dehumanising", "unfair" and "anxiety-inducing" were used by the interviewees throughout.

As the average house now costs more than ten times the average salary, and renting costs are higher than ever before, this documentary does not shy away from these realities and shows the fightback from tenants.

Thai from Bristol received support from Acorn (a campaign group) in her fight back, after she was issued with a 66.6% rent increase for a new six-month contract by her landlord for a 'tiny' flat in the city. This would take her £450-a-month rent up to a shocking £750 per month.

She said: "That's not a rent

increase. That's a coveted eviction." I agree.

Throughout the series, more stark facts are shown on screen. Including how 'no-fault evictions' are still legal in this country (this allows a landlord to evict a tenant without giving a specific reason, as long as the proper notice has been given).

And with figures such as "four in ten young people are spending more than 30% of their wages on rent", and "eviction from a private property is the biggest cause of homelessness in the UK", this shows why mass working-class organisation is needed, along with a strong socialist policy on council housing.

Many of the renters are unable to find affordable alternatives, resulting in poor mental health and financial pressures.

It is refreshing to see a documentary on a mainstream platform showing these realities, as it's vastly different to your usual 'positive' and 'polished' property programmes.

Yes, this documentary does present a clearer picture of the housing crisis we face, but interviewing eight young people sadly only scratches the surface of a widespread problem plaguing working-class people of all ages, being pushed out by private landlords in 'coveted evictions'.

It is well worth a watch, but I do hope this is just the start of what is a very topical, overdue and important conversation to have when it comes to the brutal reality of renting in modern-day Britain.

# Book review: Two Clouds Too Many

## How a working-class community took on a multinational and won

JON DALE  
MANSFIELD SOCIALIST PARTY

The story of an ex-mining community of 9,000 taking on and beating a massive multinational corporation is told in this gripping account by John Moran, the local milkman, and a leader of the campaign.

On the Derbyshire-South Yorkshire border, Killamarsh's two mines closed under Margaret Thatcher's Tory government. It still had a chemical recycling plant, SARP - built on the site of another long-closed mine.

For years this plant blighted the village with fumes and smells. 60% of school children needed asthma inhalers. The schools (close to the plant) had 'sniffer patrols' checking if it smelt safe for children to play outside. There were high rates of cancer, miscarriages, birth defects, dying hedgerows and gardens.

After an explosion in 1986 there had been a big protest campaign. Local councillors (all Labour), MPs and the Environment Agency assured residents things would change - but nothing did.

So when an acid tank exploded on 14 May 1998, sending up a huge orange cloud and resulting in a village curfew, people were already angry. When a second toxic orange cloud went up on 30 May, it was 'two clouds too many'.

The day after the second explosion, John noticed two or three people delivering leaflets. "The words leapt off the page... 'after two huge explosions and incident after incident is it not time to do something?'"

John spoke to a leafleter, Alistair Tice from Sheffield Socialist Party, who said he wanted to help. From then on the Socialist Party, Alistair in particular, played a key role in the campaign.

The council called a public

meeting with Health and Safety Executive and Environment Agency officials, once again trying to assure the packed hall that the situation could be left to them. When the meeting was finishing people remained unconvinced and angry. Alistair stood up and said: "They haven't done it in the last twelve years, do you trust them again? The only way is that you, the people, will have to do it on your own, you will have to organise yourselves."

200 people squeezed into a meeting two days later, which Alistair chaired. Residents Against SARP Pollution (RASP) was set up. John became press officer and Alistair, campaigns officer.

Over the following months, the relentless community campaign held protest after protest - over 200 times at the plant gates (and once on the roof) - frequently blocking the movement of tankers in and out, at the county council (taking over a council meeting), at the parent company Vivendi's Paris HQ (taking over the directors' boardroom). They were constantly on local radio and TV, and in newspapers.

Tactics that had been used in the miners' strike and anti-poll tax campaigns, like telephone trees (pre-social media!), were used again to mount big rapid responses to the never-ending errors SARP kept making. Large weekly meetings discussed and planned events.

As community pressure grew, anonymous inside information led to more shocking revelations - rocket fuel stored in rusting drums, waste from Sellafield nuclear power plant dumped down old mineshafts, environmental regulations continually broken...

Meanwhile, Labour councillors stayed away (with one exception - until he too broke away shortly before becoming chair of the education

committee). However, a lot of help was given by Labour MEP Ken Coates, including setting up a community inquiry as the official response was so inadequate. Disagreeing with Tony Blair's New Labour, he was expelled from the party months later.

When local elections were held, the campaign decided to stand its own candidates. "Never had local elections in Killamarsh created such interest... this was the first time in many years that [Labour] had been opposed." Two RASP members were elected to the parish council.

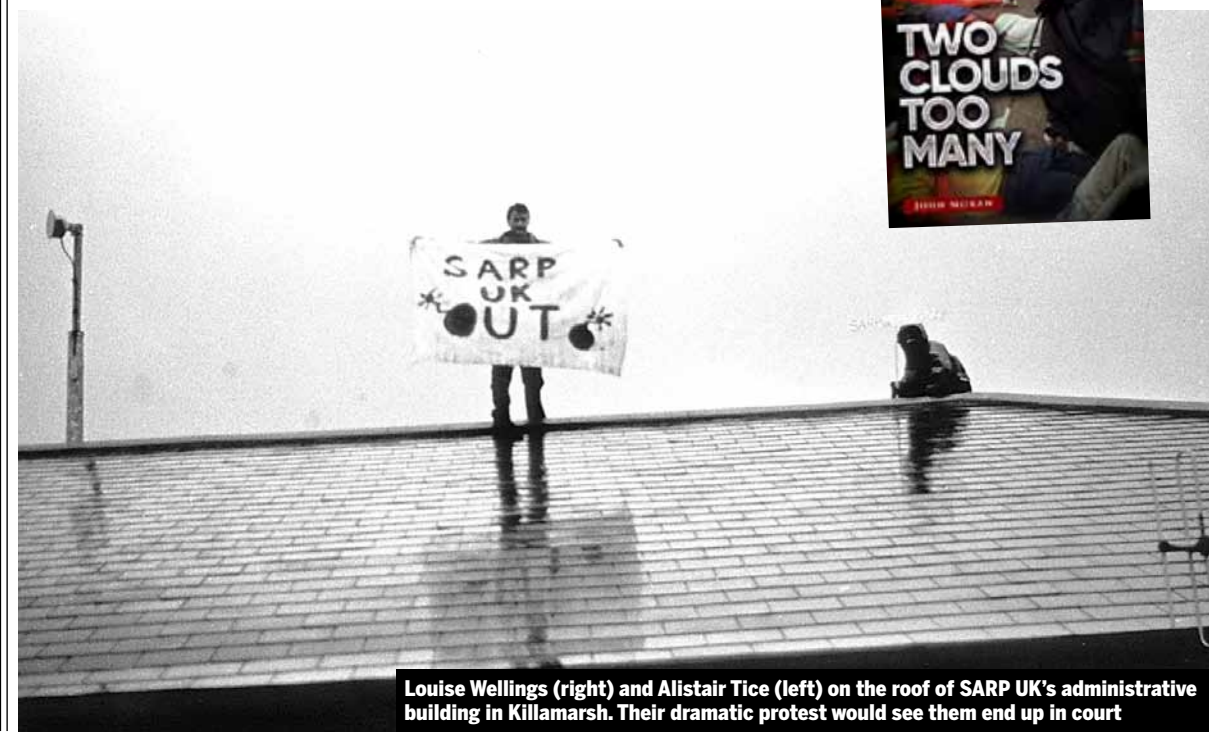
After 18 months of relentless campaigning, Vivendi (now called Veolia) finally announced it was closing the incinerator - a tremendous victory.

John remarks how ordinary people like care workers, checkout operators and caretakers grew in confidence during the campaign to challenge company directors, government ministers, official agencies and councillors. The book gives a glimpse of how working-class people could quickly learn to run society in its interests, if given the opportunity.

This book should be read by anyone living near a pollution site. The key lesson is the importance of acting quickly when public mood is at its height and building a mass campaign which democratically decides its actions.

It should also be read by environmental activists to see how mass community support can be achieved. And how working-class communities can be mobilised to win.

• *Two Clouds Too Many* by John Moran, published by Amazon, £10.50, available at leftbooks.co.uk



Louise Wellings (right) and Alistair Tice (left) on the roof of SARP UK's administrative building in Killamarsh. Their dramatic protest would see them end up in court

# LESSONS FROM THE 1984-85 MINERS' STRIKE

## Coordination and fighting union leaders would have been decisive

As part of our occasional working-class history series, Scott Jones looks back at the 1984-85 miners' strike and some of its lessons for today

As part of its coverage of the current strike wave, BBC Wales recently interviewed veterans of the 1984-85 miners' strike to reflect on how current disputes compare to their titanic struggle. One word that stands out is coordination.

The strike began almost 40 years ago in March 1984, when miners in Yorkshire walked out against Tory government plans to carry out a huge programme of pit closures - the start of an all-out war to destroy the coalmining industry, the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) and pit communities.

The other overriding sentiment is that "we had to fight the fight," as one says. And the miners, their families, communities and supporters, did heroically for a whole year. Some of the veterans of the miners' strike still embody this and have taken part in the current strike wave, with former miners working at coalmining museums, PCS and Unison members, in South Wales and Yorkshire walking out.

There was immense solidarity from the trade union movement and the wider working class. But the leaders of other trade unions were found wanting and, along with the right-wing Labour leadership of Neil Kinnock, refused, and failed to join the battlefield.

### A war

It was a war in which the Tory government under Margaret Thatcher went to extraordinary lengths, brutally using the full force of the state against the miners, their communities, and supporters.

Nigel Lawson, recently deceased former Tory chancellor, even went as far as admitting that Tory preparation for the dispute was "just like rearming to face the threat of Hitler in the 1930s." The miners had been at the forefront of trade union struggle in Britain for generations, and in 1972 and 1974 defeated Ted Heath's Tory government, resulting in him losing power in the subsequent general election when he asked: "Who governs Britain?", and Britain responded by voting him out!

The Tories returned to power in 1979 under Margaret Thatcher, determined to defeat the unions in order to carry out a vicious programme of cuts and privatisation on behalf of capitalism. This time they prepared for attack on the miners by stockpiling coal, introducing new anti-union laws, and preparing the police to be used against the miners.

The economic claims the Tories put forward in public to justify the



Miners and Militant supporters lobby TUC Congress for a 24-hour general strike (above) and "Your class needs you" (below) PHOTO BY DAVE SINCLAIR, CARTOON BY ALAN HARDMAN



closure of the pits are proven to be nonsense when looking at the economic impact of the strike on government finances. The Tories later admitted that it cost nearly £6 billion to win the dispute - £26,000 for each miner! And billions more have been spent in redundancy and benefits payments, or lost in mothballing pits and importing coal instead.

The working class led by the miners showed fantastic, fighting spirit against this onslaught. Over 11,300 miners and supporters were arrested, picket lines were mercilessly attacked by the police but over £60 million was raised for the miners, and warehouses full of food and toys were donated.

The miners' strike was not only justified but could have been won. Six months into the strike, only six weeks of coal stocks remained as winter approached. It was at this moment that a proposed strike, by the pit supervisors' union Nacods, threatened to close down the few remaining working pits in the Midlands. Shamefully it did not

take place. Nacods settled for a rub-bish deal, which the Tories later went back on anyway!

But it was the biggest example during the strike of how crucial solidarity action and coordination is, and how, at all stages of the strike, it

could have helped the miners to win. At the time in the pages of the Militant newspaper (forerunner of the Socialist) article after article showed the tremendous struggle and solidarity, but also, we outlined how the dispute could be won. Militant, on a number of occasions, called for a 24-hour general strike in support of the miners. When the South Wales and national NUM funds were threatened with seizure we called for an all-out strike.

### Solidarity action

The NUM bravely fought alone for a year as leaders of other unions and the Labour Party tops treacherously refused to deliver coordinated solidarity action that could have resulted in victory for the miners - victory that would have been seen as a win for the whole trade union movement and working class.

Under the leadership of Kinnock, Labour and the right-wing union leaders retreated and compromised with the Tories, bosses, and capitalism. But the left leaders also failed to deliver solidarity action. Conditioned in an era of winning concessions by negotiation and compromise, they were unprepared to match the militancy of the Tories. The miners were victims of this failure.

The miners knew at the time that they were fighting for more than their jobs. Social devastation followed the closures in the coalfields.

In a recent oral history of Wales in the second half of the 20th century, 'Brittle with Relics', Kinnock acknowledges this, and he should know. Not only was he an MP for a mining town (my hometown of Blackwood!) but he had a hand in the defeat and consequences, and that hasn't been forgotten. Neither has the struggle in the coalfields; the tens of thousands of ordinary miners who stayed out for a whole year rightly feel pride and are an inspiration to those who have come after them.

But also, the lessons for today's struggles for current workers and future generations are huge. That, when given a lead, workers will fight, as the recent strike wave has shown. That it is coordinated action that can win demands, defeat new anti-union legislation, and bring down today's Tory government. And that the working class needs its own party and leaders prepared to fight.

Today's Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer has sacked a frontbencher for speaking out on a picket line, and Labour's shadow health secretary said of the junior doctors' strike: "I don't support the strike!"

That's why we need a new mass workers' party to learn the lessons of the past and to fight today's battles. And the use of all arms of the state machine against the strike in 1984-85 also shows that we need to change society and fight for a socialist future.



### Read further



- *A civil war without guns - the lessons of the 1984-85 miners' strike* by Ken Smith, £7
- *Red Violet - a brief memoir of the 1984-85 miners' strike* by Violet John, £5
- *Ken and Violet were both members of Militant and members of miners' support groups during the miners' strike in South Wales*
- Buy from leftbooks.co.uk

# Socialist Party

## WHAT WE STAND FOR

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Do you agree? Join the fightback! JOIN THE SOCIALISTS**
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all workers involved in the production, processing, distribution and retail of food.

### DEMOCRATIC RIGHTS

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

### SOCIALISM AND INTERNATIONALISM

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

## Time for a new socialist intifada

### LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

On Saturday 13 May, thousands marched through central London to mark 75 years since Nakba, (see 'Nakba 75 years on - fight for socialist change to end Palestinian oppression' on [www.socialistparty.org.uk](http://www.socialistparty.org.uk)). Members of the Socialist Party took part in the protest, giving out leaflets calling for a new socialist intifada as the only way to challenge the occupation and repression faced by ordinary Palestinians. The crowd was loud and determined as it marched to Downing Street for a rally, in which Jeremy Corbyn spoke

alongside speakers and solidarity messages from a number of trade unions. This year's protest took place against the backdrop of the recent anti-government and pro-democracy protests in Israel, as well as the recent attacks on Gaza which resulted in the killing of three children and others. There is currently a ceasefire, but this is not a long-term answer to the conflict which has taken thousands of Palestinian lives. Only through the coordinated struggle of Palestinians alongside the Israeli working class can a peaceful socialist future be posed.



Socialist Party members campaigning in Swansea

## In elections and on picket lines - donate to help spread socialist ideas

CHRIS NEWBY SOCIALIST PARTY FINANCE DEPARTMENT

Socialist Party members have been busy, standing in the recent local elections as part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, supporting striking workers and much more. Our papers and material put forward a programme for what's needed next to win the struggle. In the elections we raised the need to vote for anti-austerity candidates who represent the interests of working-class people. On the picket lines, our strike bulletins raise the need to co-ordinate action and to fight for inflation-proof pay rises.

For this, we produced thousands of leaflets and other material. As a reader of the Socialist can you support our vital work by making a donation to fund the fight for socialism? Have you bought the Socialist on picket lines or from Socialist Party members out campaigning, and are prepared to donate a fiver or tenner

to help the Socialist Party's campaigning work? Socialist Party branches are looking at many different ways to help raise the funds we need. In Northampton we organised a very successful Eurovision social raising £82.50. Following the elections, several branches held post-election socials where they raised £74.20 in Birmingham and £50 in Southampton. Socialist Party members in Bristol watched a documentary on Militant in Liverpool and raised over £35 and in Camden, north London, £32 was raised at a hummus feast. All of this is on top of the many campaign stalls we hold across England and Wales every week. Please donate and help us to continue to produce our campaigning material.

**Help fund the fightback DONATE** [socialistparty.org.uk/donate](http://socialistparty.org.uk/donate)

AREA	£ RECEIVED	£ TARGET	Q2: APRIL-JUNE 2023	DEADLINE: 30 JUNE 2023
Wales	1,841	2,300		80%
Eastern	939	1,200		
South West	869	1,800	48%	
London	2,016	4,600	44%	
Southern & SE	991	2,350	42%	
East Midlands	474	1,850	26%	
Yorkshire	610	2,550	24%	
Northern	136	750	18%	
West Midlands	410	2,600	16%	
North West	143	1,150	12%	
Other	890	3,850	23%	
TOTAL	9,320	25,000		37%

## Action needed to fight Croydon 15% council tax rise

DEJI OLAVINKA SOUTH WEST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

In March, Croydon Council passed a shocking 15% council tax hike in a budget proposed by their Tory Mayor that included a further £27 million of cuts to services. If Labour councillors had voted against the budget and organised against the threatened government commissioners, they could have stopped it. Instead they abstained, allowing Tory attacks on the working class to pass.

The Tory central government has cut around 50% of funding to Croydon council over the last decade. Previous Labour-controlled councils facilitated these attacks by cutting jobs and services. They also 'gambled' money on property speculation while doing nothing to address the housing crisis. All of this led to the council's section 114 notice two years ago, providing only statutory services since.

The new council tax bills have already arrived, but the truth is many people simply can't afford to pay it in this cost-of-living crisis. A mass campaign needs to be built by trade unions and the local community to defend non-payers from bailiffs, to fight against the 15% council tax hike, and get the resources that Croydon needs. The council must set a no-cuts

needs budget based on ending austerity, fully funding our services and giving our young people a future.

The Tories knew that the people of Croydon would never vote for this tax hike, so the government granted special permission to allow a council tax rise above 5% without a referendum. The betrayal by Labour councillors enabled this but it could have been very different if fighting working-class representatives were in those council chambers. In Liverpool in the 1980s led by Militant, the predecessor to the Socialist Party, councillors refused to pass through cuts and led a campaign alongside unions against Thatcher, that won funding for services and built thousands of council homes.

We need workers fighting for socialist policies that will challenge pro-austerity politicians and stand up for ordinary working-class people at elections. We need trade unionists, socialists and other activists to stand with that kind of programme in Croydon. The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) exists to bring this kind of electoral challenge together. Socialist Party members will be fighting for such a stand in Croydon's next council elections. We support the protest outside the council meeting on Wednesday 17 May.



Campaigning against 15% council tax rise in Croydon



Socialist Party members attending a protest against an anti-trans rally on Sunday 14 May

## University of West Scotland stands against student cost-of-living crisis

DANIEL LAUHLAN UNIVERSITY OF WEST SCOTLAND (UWS) SOCIALIST STUDENTS

A demonstration against the student cost-of-living crisis at UWS took place on 9 May and was well supported. Members of the Socialist Students society stood alongside the women's liberation organisation, the LGBTQIA+ society, members of Socialist Party Scotland, and various unions, showing their support for the demonstration.

We focused on the ways in which students are being impacted by the crisis, and advocated for cost-of-living compensation to be distributed to all students, as well as for the university to take over management of third-party student halls and place caps on the absurdly high rents that students are required to pay. The programme we are fighting for is:

- For emergency cost-of-living grants to be made available for all the students who need them. Scrap all student debt
• For subsidised university canteen meals for students
• No early closures of campus spaces due to energy costs. For heated and safely staffed campus spaces available 24/7 to students and staff who need them.
• Take third-party student halls under the control of our universities, as a step towards introducing democratic rent controls
• No more cuts to our education! Back striking workers



UWS protest

- Campaign and fight for the funding our universities need from the central government - fight for free education and make the super-rich pay for it! Fight for socialist change!
• For subsidised university canteen meals for students
• No to all tuition fees, for free, fully funded education for all including international, rest of the UK, and Erasmus students
• For properly funded support services, including for mental health and victim support, non-exploitative housing, and clear and democratic reporting procedures for abuse and harassment. A trade union and student-led inquiry into the true extent of sexual harassment and

violence on UK campuses, as well as in schools and colleges. Democratic oversight of sexual harassment reporting procedures by joint trade union and student-led committees
• No cuts in NHS services. For above-inflation pay rises for all NHS staff and the funding of our health service needs
• For a minimum wage of at least £15 an hour on campus, rising with the cost of living, with no exemptions
The demonstration attracted the attention of a large number of staff and students, and was the first step to build a fightback against the cost-of-living crisis.

## Socialist Students help organise protest against 110 redundancies at University of Brighton

JOSHUA BOYLE SOCIALIST STUDENTS BRIGHTON

On 15 May, 250 students protested against the planned redundancies at the University of Brighton. The protest, partially organised by Socialist Students Brighton, marched from the Level in Brighton to the Moulsecoomb Campus, where an open mic was held. Security barred students from entering university buildings, resulting in heated clashes.

The protest was called in response to the announcement that the University of Brighton would be making over 100 academic and professional services staff redundant. This decision was made to allegedly make up the shortfall from the reduction in value of tuition fees. However, the University has spent an eye-watering £40 million on the 'Big Build' as well as £17.9 million to reclaim the lease on the Virgin Active Gym at Falmer Campus. The university says it is in severe debt, so open the books to trade union and student inspection. Where is the money going? Why is the University prioritising shiny vanity projects over investment in staff?



time again across the University sector, with vice-chancellors running universities into the ground by attempting to run education as if they were a business. If these cuts were to go ahead, modules from all courses will be cut and the exceptional work of academics will grind to a halt. There is already a sector-wide surplus of unemployed academics due to a lack of funding for teaching and research. Staff who stay at the university will have their workloads increased, and there will be more students per staff, negatively impacting the quality of

students' education. Brighton is already ranked 97th in the UK for its student-staff ratio. In addition, some departments are losing up to 50% of their staff which will also have an impact on the wider community. It will hit courses such as teacher training and nursing, when the country is at a crisis point with NHS staff and teacher recruitment numbers.

**Join the student fightback JOIN socialist students** [socialiststudents.org.uk/join](http://socialiststudents.org.uk/join)

# Ghana's debt crisis a failure of capitalism

## Trade union federation must provide platform for united actions against IMF's attacks and high cost of living

PELIOLA ADEWALE  
DEMOCRATIC SOCIALIST MOVEMENT (CWI NIGERIA)

Ghana is in a serious debt crisis. The country defaulted on its external debts in December 2022, shortly after it had imposed a restructuring programme in line with the dictates of the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

Also, as a condition for a \$3 billion IMF loan, it has to restructure its eurobonds and bilateral components of the external debts. This deal makes it the eighteenth time Ghana has gone to the IMF, something which is a bold signpost of the failure of capitalism in a country once described as Africa's shining star by the World Bank.

Indeed, the debt crisis is just a pronounced feature of the major economic problems currently afflicting the country. The economic indices are scary and unenviable. Inflation reached a record 54% in December 2022, the highest in 22 years. Ghana was ranked as the country with sub-Saharan Africa's highest food prices by the World Bank's 2022 Africa Pulse Report. The report, which was released at the end of October 2022, indicated that food prices have gone up by 122% since January 2022. The fuel price shot up by over 140% in 2022. The Ghanaian cedi lost nearly 52% of its value in 2022 and was ranked the worst-performing out of 148 currencies worldwide.

### 'Malevolent forces'

Given the enormity of the crisis, President Nana Akufo-Adodo lamented that he "cannot find an example in history when so many malevolent forces have come together at the same time". But the "malevolent forces" are not unnatural. They arose from the corrupt system and profit-first nature of capitalism.

Credit rating firms such as Moody's downgraded Ghana to 'junk' status in 2022. As a result, Ghana was unable to raise money on the international market and only had a sanctuary in the domestic debt market, where borrowing costs soared. The interest rate was as high as 32%.

In December 2022, Finance Minister Ken Ofori-Atta revealed that interest payments were consuming between 70% and 100% of government revenues. Other than default-stricken Sri Lanka, that is the worst statistic in the world, according to credit rating agency Fitch.

### 'Home-grown solutions'

Grandstanding to keep to its 'Ghana Beyond Aid' mantra, the Akufo-Adodo government did not initially openly welcome the IMF option, even when everything indicated that the fiscal crisis was getting worse. The government did not approach the IMF until July 2022. It preferred what the finance minister called 'home-grown solutions'. But as expected, on the basis of capitalism, especially in a



Makola Market, Accra, Ghana  
PHOTO: BENGRIF/CC

neocolonial economy, the so-called solutions only compounded the problem with measures that made working people and the poor, who were already under crushing cost-of-living pressures, pay more for the crisis.

The 'solutions' included a new electronic transaction tax, introduced in April 2022, which was meant to help raise \$900 million in much-needed revenue along with spending cuts. However, as of June 2022, the tax, which triggered some protests, had only generated 10% of estimated revenues. The electricity tariff and VAT were also hiked by nearly 60% and 20% respectively.

Indeed, the 'home-grown solutions' were like a demonstration to the IMF of the readiness of the Akufo-Adodo government to force the IMF's bitter pill down the throat of the masses, in order to win its bailout.

The anti-poor IMF programme, a condition to the \$3 billion loan, is expected to last for at least the next five years, having targeted bringing the debt level from the current estimated 105% of GDP to 55% by 2028. This will mean a heavy package of tax

cuts and spending cuts on education and health care, as well as an intensification of neoliberal policies such as currency devaluation. The last such programme which ended in 2019 included a freeze on salaries and the removal of oil subsidies.

While it is correct that both the Covid-19 pandemic and Ukraine war were major contributors to the current economic mess in Ghana, just like many countries, they are not the only ones. The external shocks only compounded the effects of some actions taken by the government in the interest of private profits, but which constituted a dead weight on the economy.

For instance, in 2021 Akufo-Adodo's government provided a \$3 billion bailout essentially to private power producers. From August 2017 to December 2018, the government spent more than \$2.1 billion on what it called the "banking sector clean-up". By 2022 the government had also lavished \$58 million of public money on the National Cathedral - a \$100 million prestige project - conceived in 2018.

### Fightback

However, the working people of Ghana have not just resigned themselves to their fate over the economic hardship without putting up a fightback. In the last year the country has witnessed a series of protests over the cost-of-living crisis, fuel and electricity price hikes, and outrageous taxes including the electronic payment tax.

Public sector workers were also in action. After some unions had been on strike for over a week, the government finally agreed on 15 July to provide a 15% cost-of-living adjustment allowance to all public sector workers effective from 1 July. The government was also forced to exempt pensions from the IMF-dictated domestic debt restructuring programme by the opposition from trade unions, including a threat of a general strike in December.

Unfortunately, the Ghana Trades Union Congress (TUC) has not called a general strike and mass protests that would aggregate all the issues and unite different isolated actions. This would help build a formidable force to defeat many of the anti-poor policies. Workers and activists should call on the TUC to organise such action.

There has also been opposition against the entire IMF deal within trade unions and the working people in general. History has proved that the IMF deal cannot fundamentally resolve the crisis. Yaw Baah, Ghana TUC general secretary, said: "The solution to Ghana's problems doesn't lie in Washington. This is a tragic mistake by the government". By Washington, he meant the IMF and World Bank. What is missing, apart from a centrally organised programme of mass action, is a genuine alternative to the IMF and the building of a mass movement that will drive it.

### Socialist alternative

However, the needed alternative cannot be found in any form of 'home-grown solutions' built on a capitalist model, something the TUC leadership themselves believe despite the failure of Akufo-Adodo's 'Ghana Beyond Aid'.

What is needed is socialist planning, which will make possible the use of human and material resources for the development of the country and the needs of the vast majority. This is the task for working-class people. Though at present there is no widespread socialist consciousness, the continued failure of capitalism in Ghana and globally, and resistance against capitalist attacks, could make workers and youth in search of an alternative reach a socialist conclusion.

By and large, the return to debt crisis as a result of the failure of capitalism is not limited to Ghana. 22 countries in sub-Saharan Africa were rated by the IMF to be in debt distress or at high-risk a debt distress. The figure was up from just eight countries in 2015. The system that makes a continent that is enormously rich in natural resources remain in a perpetual crisis has to be ended. But achieving this requires a socialist revolution together with international working-class solidarity. Building forces for such a revolutionary task not only in Africa but globally is the major objective of the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI).

● This is a shortened version of the article published on socialistworld.net

BERKAY KARTAV  
LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

In a highly tight presidential election on 14 May, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Turkey's right-wing populist leader, managed to secure the highest votes for himself and his Justice and Development Party (AKP).

Even though the AKP and the electoral alliance it leads now has a comfortable majority in the parliament, Erdogan did not manage to win more than 50% of the votes to secure a victory in the first round of the presidential elections.

While Erdogan received around 49.5% of the total votes, the candidate of the pro-capitalist Nation Alliance Kemal Kilicdaroglu just scraped 44% of the votes. Sinan Ogan, the far-right nationalist candidate, got around 5%. The results so far show that Turkey remains a highly polarised society.

This means the Turkish presidential elections will be going to a runoff on 28 May.

The presidential and parliamentary elections took place amid a historic cost-of-living crisis where inflation is predicted to be over 120%. The living standards of the working and middle classes have eroded significantly since the economic crisis of 2018, which the pandemic has intensified.

The crisis for Erdogan's regime and Turkish capitalism was further deepened after two powerful earthquakes hit south-eastern Turkey in February this year, killing over 50,000 people. Not only was this rotten pro-capitalist government led by Erdogan responsible for the scale of this disaster, the lack of rescue teams and basic necessities such as tents and water added to the anger.

Given this situation, Erdogan fared better than expected and received around 49.5% of the total votes in the presidential elections. Even though this is a slight drop compared to the votes he received in 2018, Erdogan still got more votes than all other candidates.

Erdogan managed to do this by an incredible mobilisation of state resources. He was able to consolidate his base through a series of populist policies, including a significant pay rise for civil servants, early retirement for some workers, and free gas bills for every household for a month. Erdogan also whipped up Turkish nationalism through the announcement of the discovery of natural gas in the Black Sea. This was combined with homophobic and sexist rhetoric.

The national question was a key feature in the election campaign. Erdogan used 'divide-and-rule' tactics to whip up anti-Kurdish sentiments, especially targeting the pro-Kurdish HDP and its jailed ex-leader Selahattin Demirtas. This is despite the fact that Erdogan's electoral alliance includes Hudapar, a Kurdish nationalist Islamic fundamentalist party that is closely affiliated to Kurdish Hezbollah.

The initial results could have a demoralising effect for a period, especially among young people who are fed up with Erdogan's rule and who are desperate to see his back after the first round.

Their hopes were raised by the overly optimistic campaign by the Nation Alliance, led by the Kemalist Republican People's Party (CHP), as they were predicting they would win in the first round.

# Turkish presidential election goes to second round run-off



Erdogan  
PHOTO: ASTRO MEDIA/ORG LTD

The failure of this alliance to harness the anger in society is due to the fact that it offered nothing apart from saying it is 'not Erdogan'. This is an unstable 'united' alliance that involves several right-wing parties, including the parties formed by the former finance minister, Ali Babacan, and the former prime minister, Ahmet Davutoglu, who both served under the leadership of Erdogan, as well as another newly formed political party called the Good Party (IYP) that split away from the far-right Nationalist Movement Party (MHP).

Clearly, an election campaign almost solely based on 'not being Erdogan' was not enough to win votes from the disgruntled electorate that usually votes for Erdogan. This was also a failed strategy in 2014 and 2018 presidential elections. The right-wing candidate who stood against Erdogan and was endorsed by the CHP in the 2014 presidential elections, Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu, later became an Erdogan-supporter!

The popularity of the Nation Alliance amongst certain layers, including youth, was not due to any enthusiasm for the alliance but a desperation to get rid of Erdogan, given the economic crisis and attacks on democratic rights. Kilicdaroglu, who comes from an oppressed religious group called Alevism, has also got his highest votes in Kurdish cities, as he was backed by the pro-Kurdish left People's Democratic Party (HDP).

Although it seems unlikely, it is

still possible that Kilicdaroglu could make a comeback in the runoff elections. He leads a broad opposition against Erdogan and is backed by more far-sighted capitalist. The mouthpieces of capitalism such as the Economist magazine have openly endorsed the candidacy of Kilicdaroglu. But at the moment, Erdogan has the upper hand as he has a strong grip over the state bureaucracy and media.

### Parliamentary elections

In the presidential elections, the People's Alliance led by Erdogan - which is made up of several far-right parties - was able to gain the overall majority. While the AKP's vote share has significantly decreased compared to previous elections, other right-wing parties in the coalition were able to increase their votes. This includes three seats for Hudapar.

Although the self-claimed 'social democratic' Kemalist CHP was able to increase the number of their MPs to 169, some of these seats will be allocated to the smaller right-wing parties in the Nation Alliance. This means the overall makeup of the new parliament will be predominantly right-wing and far-right parties.

However, it is positive that the left-wing Labour and Freedom Alliance, which is made out of the HDP and the newly formed Workers' Party of

Turkey (TIP), has now got 66 seats in parliament, with around 10% of the total vote. The TIP was able win a million votes in its first elections, it managed to keep its four seats in the parliament.

This small number of left-wing MPs in the parliament can act as a springboard for the workers' movement if they use their positions effectively. But rather than putting forward left-populist policies, the TIP should raise a socialist programme by putting forward class demands.

Further steps should now be taken to strengthen and potentially extend this alliance to offer a socialist way out of this crisis. Discussions need to take place with other workers' organisations to discuss the next steps in building an independent working-class movement with a socialist programme, not only to get rid of Erdogan but to take the power out of the hands of the super-rich and transform the living standards of the majority.

### Building the forces of socialism

Whatever the result on 28 May, it is clear that the right had a breakthrough in the Turkish parliamentary elections. Objectively speaking, this is a defeat for the left.

The failure of the left to put forward a socialist alternative and build a strong base in working-class areas in these elections, including in the presidential elections, has allowed the far-right to make important gains.

However, even if Erdogan wins the runoff elections, the next five years will not be a stable period for him. The day after the elections the Turkish markets slumped and the Turkish currency, the lira, depreciated. Erdogan is seen as an unreliable representative of the capitalist class.

There is no prospect of economic recovery, at least in the short term. More vicious attacks on the working class, including democratic attacks, are on the way. There can be no faith in the pro-capitalist opposition parties to bring an end to Erdogan's rule or what he represents.

It is crucial for the left to build an independent mass working-class movement, with a socialist programme, to be prepared for the fight to come. This would include raising democratic demands, in a transitional way, and defending the national and democratic rights of Kurdish people. Such a movement has the potential to enthuse the working-class, including those who are voting for Erdogan because they see no alternative.

We are approaching the tenth anniversary of the magnificent Gezi Park resistance at the end of this month, where millions of people were out on the streets against Erdogan's authoritarian regime. Similar struggles, on a much bigger scale and with even broader aspirations, are on the agenda.

Learning from the past defeats will be vital in this period. A serious discussion needs to take place within the workers' movement to politically arm the working class and prepare the forces of socialism for what is going to be an unstable period, with many opportunities for Marxist forces to grow.



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socialistparty.org.uk



# the Socialist

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formerly **Militant**

## Overcrowding, poor quality, unaffordable

# ▶ CAP RENTS

# ▶ BUILD COUNCIL HOMES



**LAURENCE DUNN**  
SURREY SOCIALIST PARTY

**L**ike everywhere, the economic squeeze of the working class is clear to see in Guildford and the surrounding areas. Contrary to popular belief it's an area rife with poverty, especially on the outskirts of the town - anywhere the rich live, those of us who make them rich live in crowded, expensive and poor accommodation. Workers spend well over half their wages on necessities.

Homelessness is everywhere; every road in the town centre has people sleeping on mattresses and sitting on street corners begging.

Desperation exists side by side with the affluence Surrey is known for.

Previously secure jobs have been replaced with zero-hour contracts and agency work. Young people who grew up in the area see no option but to move away rather than live in overpriced and cramped house shares.

In the south east, 32% of wages go on rent alone. Working-class people struggle to make ends meet, transferring ever increasing sums into our landlords' bank accounts. The Socialist Party fights for rent controls, with rents capped at a democratically decided level, and with housing quality standards set and enforced.

In the 1970s, 42% of British people lived in

council homes. Then, people spent roughly 10% of their income on housing. Today just 17% live in council homes. Hundreds of thousands spend years on waiting lists. Millions can't even get accepted onto the list.

Thatcher and subsequent governments led by Labour and Tories have promoted homes as commodities, something to be hoarded, traded and speculated on.

We need to bring empty homes into council stock, build new environmentally sustainable council homes, and take housing out of the hands of the big landlords.

Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer, with his eye on Number 10, is pandering to the bosses. By calling for a "DNA change" of the Labour Party

he is making it clear a government led by him will act in the interests of the bosses and landlords. Jeremy Corbyn's 2019 election promises to build 100,000 council homes and introduce rent controls no longer stand.

We need a new workers' party that represents the true interests of the working class, and will fight for democratic public ownership and a new generation of high-quality council homes.

**Do you agree?**  
**JOIN THE SOCIALISTS**  
[socialistparty.org.uk/join](http://socialistparty.org.uk/join)



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



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