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the Socialist

Issue 1228

25-31 May 2023

formerly **Militant**

ALL OUR SERVICES WRECKED BY PROFIT

NATIONALISE

- For democratic workers' control
- Don't compensate fat-cat owners

REECE WILSON
BASINGSTOKE SOCIALIST PARTY

Across the board, under the Tories, services are wrecked. The Tories help their rich mates get richer, while we get inflated prices and deteriorating privatised services.

British Gas made £3.3 billion

profit, whilst millions of people live in unheated houses, unable to afford their bills.

The same is true of the water companies - £72 billion profit since they were privatised. They haven't used this money to stop an average of 825 sewage spills per day. Now they are allegedly 'sorry'. But still they're increasing our bills by 7.5%.

Royal Mail was only privatised ten years ago, and is threatening administration. As the Socialist Party has previously said, this is "directly due to gross mismanagement and privatisation, carving up the organisation to leech out huge sums from the most profitable parts".

Train operating companies have made more than £300 million 'profit' since the pandemic by attacking working conditions on the railways, cutting corners with safety, and refusing to give workers the pay rise they deserve. The privatised rail services are not providing a decent service to anyone other than lining the pockets of their shareholders.

Failing

The government has been forced to take some of these failing companies under its own control. Five rail franchises are currently run by a government operator, with two more on the way.

But the taxpayer should not foot the bill. We need to open the books of these racketeering companies. That way the public, workers' representatives and the trade unions can see where the money has gone.

We need socialist nationalisation that does not leave the old bosses in charge. That approach should only pay compensation to the previous owners on the basis of proven need, not to the fat cats. Public services should be placed under workers' control. We need decisions taken democratically by elected committees of workers and service users, so public services can be planned to actually serve the public.

This way, we could begin to end fuel poverty, invest into infrastructure so our waterways are not polluted, and provide free public transport that truly serves communities. Workers could get an inflation-proof pay rise, so they're recognised for the hard work they perform and are protected from the cost-of-living crisis. By fighting for a democratically planned socialist economy, we could ensure a decent life for all.

- Turn to pages 4-5 to read more
- Energy, water, NHS, Royal Mail and BT: 'Kick out the profiteers - fight for socialist nationalisation'

WHAT WE THINK - DEFY AND DEFEAT TORY ANTI-UNION LAWS ►►► p3

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

Why I am going to NSSN conference

"A vibrant organisation supporting the struggles of workers and debating the way forward"

MARION LLOYD
GROUP PRESIDENT OF PCS BEIS GROUP (PERSONAL CAPACITY) AND CHAIR OF THE BROAD LEFT NETWORK

I will be attending the NSSN conference on 24 June to help build solidarity across the broader trade union movement, in the context of the biggest industrial battle in the last 15 years. My union, the civil service union PCS, is campaigning to improve pay, defend jobs and protect pensions. There is huge support for our strikes, demonstrated by massive



picket lines, and a new young layer of members wanting to get stuck in and fight. They know this Tory government is weak and if we do our job properly we can deal them a hammer blow.

Conferences such as this are inspiring - socialist and good left trade unionists coming together to discuss and debate the way forward, arming us with knowledge and ideas to take back to our unions, our workplaces and our workmates.

The NSSN consistently supports workers in struggle, including PCS members, and coordinates activity, action and ideas. Disgracefully, the PCS leadership succeeded in getting the union to disaffiliate from the NSSN last year. Lies were told about the role this organisation plays in order to win that position at conference. Even so, the abstainers were many more than those who voted to disaffiliate and the vote was very close.

Despite this, I will continue to explain the role of the NSSN and encourage people to attend the conference so they can see the truth for themselves: a vibrant, campaigning, socialist organisation building and supporting the struggle of workers UK-wide. Solidarity!

nationalshopstewardsnetwork
NSSN CONFERENCE 2023
Discussions to include:
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

IT UPGRADE APPEAL

Help our party play its role in the fight for socialism

around a programme for socialism.

Today, with new forces currently joining the trade unions, our tasks include helping them to become consistent fighters to transform their unions and build a new workers' party, as well as winning them to the struggle for a new society.

Anyone who has spent time on the websites of the Socialist Party and Socialism Today, and on socialistworld.net, will know that vast archives of Marxist analysis can be found there, going back over decades and drawing on the accumulated experience of working-class struggle. It is not for nothing that the revolutionary party is called the 'memory bank' of the working class.

While history never repeats itself exactly, the collective experience of the working class in struggle casts light on today's and tomorrow's challenges. To produce, publish and protect for posterity those articles requires the efficient storage and management of data - and we strive to do

this to the best of our ability within the limits of capitalism.

Keeping the wheels of our party's internal functions turning is also important. This includes backing up and supporting our members on the ground, in the unions, workplaces, campuses, colleges and communities. Our ability to produce a weekly paper, a monthly journal, up-to-date leaflets and posters, and maintain a printshop is dependent on having functioning IT systems.

What will we get for the money? The £15,000 comprises a necessary upgrade of IT hardware at the national headquarters, the design and creation of the new system, and the migration of our data from the old system to the new.

The Socialist Party is also running a campaign to raise the regular income we generate from membership subscription payments by asking every member if they can up the amount they pay. There are many reasons why this is needed: funding the running costs of the new IT system; the need to take on new party organisers

in our national centre and on a regional basis; inflation! And more. These regular payments are in many ways even more important. Get in touch if you can raise your subs - or want to join and start paying one!

Be part of history: help fund the maintenance and development of our party organisation for the struggles to transform society today and for the future.

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Defy and defeat Tory anti-union laws

● Organise coordinated action in defence of unions punished by the law, including, if needed, a 24-hour general strike

● Labour authorities must refuse to issue work notices now



WHAT WE THINK

On Monday 22 May, with trade unionists demonstrating outside parliament, Tory MPs voted the anti-strike Strikes (Minimum Service Levels) Bill through the House of Commons, meaning that is set to become law within weeks. Fire, transport, health, education, border security, and nuclear decommissioning will be affected. However, as Onay Kasab, speaking for Unite the Union, declared to the crowds outside, the law is not only "undemocratic" but will prove to be "unworkable".

The last year has shown a new generation why the right to strike is vital. Workers have suffered the biggest fall in living standards in over half a century, and strikes have been the only way on offer to counter that trend. The result has been the highest level of strikes in thirty years.

Had the Trades Union Congress (TUC) coordinated all the strikes, and built for a 24-hour general strike against the new anti-union laws, it would have been possible to prevent the legislation even reaching the statute book. Now the task is to ensure that the minimum service legislation is not allowed to cut across workers' struggle to defend public services, wages and conditions. If we do this the legislation will, in reality, be rendered null and void.

When the last raft of Tory anti-trade union laws was introduced in 2016, many trade union leaders concluded that the undemocratic hoops introduced would make widescale national action impossible. The last year has shown how wrong that was, with workers repeatedly smashing the legal turnout requirements in national ballots.

That legislation was introduced a time when strike action was at an historic low. Today we are in a different world. The Tories are leading a zombie government, on its way out of office and consumed by their internal civil war, while the workers' movement is on the rise.

Even from the capitalists' point of view, to introduce new anti-union legislation in that situation is rash in the extreme. Fear that workers will



Socialist Party placard at the TUC rally against the minimum service levels bill held on 22 May. PHOTO: IAN PATTISON

defy the new laws, and then also begin to defy the existing undemocratic anti-union laws, is the main reason that the House of Lords attempted to gut the legislation of most of its repressive content. This short-sighted Tory Party seems, however, to have put virtually all of it back in.

Minimum service

Nonetheless, the legislation is extremely loosely worded. It is left to the minister to specify the "minimum service" that must legally continue to function during a strike. However, the responsibility for issuing "work notices" to ensure this happens is left to the employers, who are not obligated but "may" do so.

The Scottish National Party First Minister Humza Yousaf told the Scottish TUC that the Scottish government will not be issuing work notices. It should be held to that commitment. Across Britain the trade union movement should urgently demand that all local and regional authorities do the same. At the moment the Labour-run Welsh government has only said that it "will work with trades unions and employers" to "explore every possible option to avert any prospect of work notices being issued in Welsh public services". The trade union movement

in Wales should answer by demanding the Welsh Labour government immediately and publicly commits to the 'option' they clearly have of pledging not to issue work notices. The same is true for mayors and local councils up and down Britain.

If work notices are issued, trade unions locally will undoubtedly discuss their tactics to make sure strikes are as effective as possible. The reality is - given the hugely overstretched, understaffed state of public services, and the resulting high sickness levels due to stress - the minimum service levels which have been agreed between unions and employers during health strikes are often higher than normal staffing levels! This shows that it is health workers, not government ministers, who actually care about patient safety, but also that, in this situation, this legislation will not be able to prevent effective action. But the leadership of the trade union movement cannot just rely on the overstretched state of public services and the ingenuity of workers.

Speaking to the crowd outside parliament, Mick Lynch, general secretary of the RMT transport union, correctly said: "We will not obey work notices issued by the employer or issued by the government". It is necessary to make clear that the

whole workers' movement will come to the defence of our class, taking action in solidarity - if necessary a 24-hour general strike - if unions are threatened with fines, or groups of workers are sacked.

Starmer's Labour

Undoubtedly many national trade union leaders will hope they can just wait for a Labour government to repeal the laws. It is true that the Tory government is on its way out, with Starmer looking set to be the next prime minister. However, that may still be over a year away, and public sector workers need to be able to take effective action in defence of pay and conditions in the course of that year.

In addition, while millions will rightly cheer to get rid of the hated Tories, Starmer has made clear that he will not govern in the interests of the working-class majority, but will act to defend the capitalist system. Sharon Graham, general secretary of Unite, has rightly called on Labour to commit to nationalising the energy companies, but Starmer has made clear that his 'New Labour on steroids' will not be nationalising them or other privatised public services, including Royal Mail. On the contrary, they intend to increase the role of the private sector in the NHS and elsewhere.

In these circumstances, to test out Labour's promise to repeal the new legislation, the TUC should demand that Starmer immediately pledges that an incoming Labour government will not only repeal the legislation but reverse any attacks carried out on the workers' movement using it. If he was to say publicly now that his government would repeal the law and repay any trade unions fined under it, it would - in reality - make the legislation completely ineffective.

If Labour is not prepared to make this pledge nationally, or to pledge to issue no "work notices" at local and regional level, the trade union movement will need to draw the necessary conclusions about what Starmer would do in office. Blair's New Labour, which Starmer is emulating, did not repeal any of the previous Tory anti-union legislation.

Key to ensuring this legislation is repealed will be the fighting strength of our movement. Back in 1971 the Tory government introduced the anti-union Industrial Relations Act. It was repealed by Labour in 1974, but in reality it was defeated in 1972 when, in response to the jailing of five dockers' leaders under its auspices, a general strike began to develop from below, which resulted in their release. Those traditions have begun to be rebuilt in the last year and need to be developed further in the coming period.

A militant, fighting trade union movement can defeat this legislation, and will be vital to defending workers' interests under both the Tories and a future Starmer-led Labour government. Given our current choice between politicians who defend the capitalist elite, it will also be vital for the workers' movement to begin to build a political arm that can fight for our class' interests in parliament.

St Mungo's housing workers strike



On strike in 2021. PAUL MATTSOON

The strike of workers at St Mungo's is due to start on 30 May. St Mungo's is a sector leader in the field of homelessness. That is why their strike is so important to other homelessness workers. A victory for the St Mungo's workers would be a huge victory for workers across the sector, and would inspire other workers in less well organised workplaces. Members of Unite housing workers' branch explain.

IAN CLEMENTS
HESTIA STRIKER

The situation at St Mungo's is typical of the charity and housing sectors. The CEOs are paid more than the prime minister, while frontline workers have to claim Universal Credit and use food banks. St Mungo's workers are fighting for us all, and for a society in which human beings' basic needs, like food and housing, are met by fair wages and a proper welfare state, not dependent on the 'charity' of rich people who exploit workers.

Solidarity from Unite members at Hestia, please remember and support our dispute!

BEN GOLDSTONE
SUPPORT WORKER CURRENTLY EMPLOYED BY THAMESREACH

I support striking St Mungo's workers because it's a horrid irony that those working in the homelessness sector are being paid a wage that doesn't allow them to afford their rent or mortgage payments, among other bills and outgoings.

Meanwhile the CEO has seen their pay packet soar over the last few years! This in itself shows that it's not that the money isn't there, it's just being kept out of the hands of workers and going straight into the pockets of the bosses. Workers are striking to help rebalance this and receive a wage they can actually live on.

UCU conference For lay control as disputes in universities and colleges develop



LIVERPOOL SOCIALIST PARTY

BEA GARDNER
UCU MEMBER

The 2023 congress of the University and College Union (UCU) meets 27-29 May, the first in-person congress since 2019. It takes place following unprecedented national strike action and during the first-ever national marking and assessment boycott (MAB) in higher education, and as the union prepares to ballot members in further education.

Workers across higher and further education face the cost-of-living squeeze alongside ongoing issues of high workloads and casualisation. The two sector conferences taking place during the congress will be important opportunities to evaluate the action already taken and prepare for the next steps.

In universities, members have made it clear they are willing to keep fighting. We have won two national mandates for strike action and – despite the best efforts of the general secretary to win acceptance – members rejected the latest employer proposals in the pay dispute. Alongside the immediate tasks of maintaining the MAB, we must also ensure our strike mandate is renewed so we can take strike action from day one of autumn term if needed.

Coordination with other unions should also feature in the strategy. UCU should take the lead in calling for the lay higher education sector leaderships of all the campus unions to urgently meet to discuss a strategy of coordination.

In further education, members are discussing the best way to maximise

a ballot turnout. Socialist Party members agree with an aggregated ballot on workload and for national pay bargaining. But given that currently pay is negotiated college-by-college, there is a legitimate discussion to be had amongst members to assess whether disaggregated ballots on pay would be better at this stage.

A consequence of rampant privatisation, alongside chronic underfunding by the government, is a huge variation in the financial position of colleges. So any campaign on pay has to be linked to a political campaign for increased funding for further education and an end to privatisation.

Democracy

On the wider congress agenda are critical debates over democracy in the union. Two motions criticise the role of the general secretary during the undemocratic 'pausing' of strike action: one calls for censure and the other for 'no confidence'. The two motions are listed on the congress agenda with a warning from the union apparatus that "the union has received legal advice that the debate of these motions is not appropriate".

This mirrors the situation in 2018, when similar motions levelled at then-general secretary Sally Hunt evoked protest from UCU staff members organised in the union Unite, which led to the suspension of congress. As we said then, it is entirely appropriate that branches and delegates want to use our democratic congress to hold the leadership of our union to account.

Jo Grady was elected following

those events, on a platform that supported making the general secretary more accountable to members, including supporting proposals recommended by the union's Democracy Commission. Yet her record has included numerous attempts to override the elected lay leadership of the union, including the union's elected negotiators.

Another critical discussion will be how members make decisions about disputes. There are calls from a small number of branches for increased use of e-consultations and surveys. Such tools can play a part in helping appraise the mood of members and their appetite for action. But the danger is they can be used by a leadership that is looking to stifle debate.

We have seen this take place within UCU this year, with centralised surveys asking questions that conflate issues or do not include an option that members would have wanted to see. Results have been used to criticise decisions taken by the lay leadership, or strong-arm them to follow a course of action predetermined by the general secretary.

National dispute committees comprising elected representatives of every branch involved in a dispute would be a step forward, with such bodies having control over the agenda and decision making.

The strike wave is far from over and more unions are set to join the fight, with local government union Unison now balloting. Now is not the time to scale back our fight. But UCU members need to have confidence that the union's leadership will back the fight of the members.

96%! RMT tube workers vote to continue fighting

SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBERS IN RMT ON LONDON UNDERGROUND

RMT members on London Underground have voted again to renew our strike mandate in defence of jobs, pensions and agreements.

96% voted to strike on a turnout of 56%. Over 50% of all eligible voters were in favour of strike action. We have smashed through the anti-union thresholds for the fourth time in this dispute.

The rebalot gives the strongest mandate yet in a dispute that has seen six days of all-grades strike action and additional days to resist 600 job cuts on stations.

The fight to stop management cutting staff on stations has been put into sharp focus in the last few days with a serious assault on an RMT member on a station gate line.

Station staff find themselves lone working more, and unable to cope with reduced staffing levels at busier stations, as a result of the job cuts.

Members who drive trains are now

also facing management plans to cut over 300 jobs and enforce flexible working to cover the gaps.

Reorganisations also loom across London Underground's engineering sector as the Labour London mayor Sadiq Khan and Transport for London (TfL) management seek over £1 billion in cuts.

On top of all these cuts programmes is the threat to the TfL pension. Management continues to prepare for the transfer of our scheme into the Local Government Pension Scheme, which would cut the pension most TfL members receive by around 30% and increase contribution rates.

RMT members on the tube will now meet on 30 May to consider our next steps. That should include calling on other tube unions to join with us.

The only way to resolve this is for the mayor to refuse to implement pension cuts, and to stop the job cuts and flexible working demands. RMT has challenged the mayor to fight with us for proper funding for public transport in London, not against his tube workers.



GAMDEN SOCIALIST PARTY

NEU executive plans next steps Striking works: Let's keep up the pressure!

SHEILA CAFFEY
NEU NEC, PERSONAL CAPACITY

The rebalot for teachers in the National Education Union (NEU) is the union's main priority right now. This rebalot is demanded by the Tories' anti-union laws after six months. If it is successful, it will enable us to continue the pay and funding battle in the autumn term if necessary.

Can we win again? Of course we can! We're 25% bigger than the previous ballot, thanks to the increase in membership. Will it be easy? No, but we're more organised in schools than we've ever been, with 3,500 more reps than we had in October. But we still need to win hearts and minds. And we do this by showing we're still resolute in taking action to win!

The government is aware that education workers remain furious, and committed to fighting on pay and funding. Now a report has been leaked from the 'independent' pay review body, a government-appointed panel of so-called experts which makes recommendations to government on pay, suggesting a 6.5% pay rise for teachers for 2023-24.

Let us be clear. This would be the highest pay offer teachers have had and a vast improvement on the pittance offered by Tory Education Secretary Gillian Keegan before Easter, clearly showing our strike action has had an effect. Our members should gain confidence from this.

Keep fighting

Let's press home our advantage! We have to continue to fight. With no extra funding, this would drive schools to cuts and redundancies. The offer also does nothing to address 2022-23 pay, or the decade of cuts that leaves us with a real-terms pay cut of 24%.

If the government addresses this year's pay and funding, we will happily meet them at the negotiating table; but until then, we must keep up the pressure.

At NEU conference in April, we voted for three strike days in June or July. Socialist Party members warned of the risks of losing momentum, with delays in announcing dates, long gaps between action, and the lack of a clear lead outlining what was needed to win. Some members are questioning: should we wait to see what other school unions' ballots are like? Will strike action in the summer term have a good turnout and impact? All genuine questions and concerns that deserve consideration. It is essential we discuss tactics to ensure we have the strongest plan to win.

The other unions are balloting for action because of NEU members' strong lead. By showing that we're continuing to fight, we will give their members confidence, just as we ourselves were boosted by the action taken by rail, health and postal unions. In our view, by keeping these three summer strike days, we send the message, following the pay

review leak, that we are determined to win.

The National Executive (NEC) of the union met on 18 May and unfortunately decided not to name actual dates; instead, agreeing they will be in the week of 3 July. Socialist Party NEC members argued for clear dates, so that we can plan in our schools to ensure action doesn't impact on children's end-of-term treats and trips, but continues to impact the government. This decision won't now be made until mid-June, but hopefully having the week named will still allow for planning.

Support staff

There was a key discussion about our 57,000 support staff members. The NEU conference voted to campaign for negotiating and bargaining rights for support staff, and the NEC will discuss how to pursue this in June.

The leadership of the Trades Union Congress (TUC) has outrageously imposed a big penalty fine on the NEU, following a complaint made by other support staff unions against the NEU for campaigning for action among its support staff members.

When this complaint was first raised, Socialist Party members on the executives of both Unison and NEU signed a joint statement against it. All our members are struggling with the cost-of-living crisis, schools are grossly underfunded, workers are fighting back on a scale not seen in years – and yet some union leaders



London ELLEN KENYON PEERS

are attacking other unions instead of all fighting together! (See 'Unison and NEU: For maximum unity not division' at socialistparty.org.uk).

Socialist Party members are against the decision taken at the NEU executive to pay the fine and put a statement (written by the other unions) on the union website saying we don't have negotiating rights.

However, the most important thing is the need to ballot support staff, something Socialist Party members on the executive have long campaigned for. We took a motion to the executive last week written by support staff activists.

It was agreed that an indicative ballot would begin as soon as possible, closing on 7 June when, dependent on the response, the formal ballot will be launched. This will allow support staff to join teacher members and other education unions in action in the autumn term.

In line with the TUC agreement, the NEU will send a letter to the other support staff unions saying that we want to ballot to support their action. We're hoping for a positive response that allows all education workers to move forwards in a united position of strength to win on the pay and funding we all vitally need.

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Book review: Silent Coup - how corporations overthrew democracy

NATION STATES AND CORPORATIONS - WHO'S REALLY IN CHARGE?

TONY SAUNOIS
CWI SECRETARY

Silent Coup - how corporations overthrew democracy' is a devastating critique of the power and control wielded by major conglomerates, and the secretive institutions and global legal systems they have built up over decades. They have constructed institutions and little-known legal systems which have the potential power to overrule governments and peoples.

Silent Coup is written as a narrative of the journey the authors took to all continents collecting evidence. They present a case of the totally undemocratic control exercised by powerful multinational companies over national governments and local populations in the pursuance of the interests of profit and exploitation.

The book is documented evidence of one aspect of the dystopian nature of how monopoly capitalism in the 21st century functions. It is a warning to workers and socialists of the power wielded by the ruling capitalist classes if they are to be confronted. It poses the question: "Who really controls power and decision-making in our world today?"

Both Claire Provost and Matt Kennard - members of the Centre for Investigative Journalism - are exposing much that is rotten and corrupt in modern-day capitalism. Matt Kennard is co-founder of Declassified UK, a news outlet investigating British foreign policy. It produces material that is valuable to follow in a critique of capitalist society today.

The authors argue that the facts they reveal are "about corporate justice, corporate welfare, corporate territories, and corporate armies - all on a global scale. This is a story that affects you no matter where you live."

The Committee for a Workers' International (CWI) in our analysis has pointed to some trends in modern capitalism: for multinational conglomerates developing their own parallel legal system of government, private armies, private cities - a modern version of 'company towns', and acquiring some features almost of nation states. These trends have their limits, yet they have developed a lot further in the recent period and reflect a new era of capitalism. These are all vindicated by the details of how modern capitalism is functioning in this book.

The story begins in El Salvador and the 'legal' case taken by a Canadian-based company called Pacific Rim. This is a tale of an attempt by the government to limit mining which was causing water shortages. Which body was to act as jury and executioner? It

was the little-known 'International Centre for the Settlement of Investment Disputes' (ICSID). This is a branch of an agent of imperialism - the World Bank - in which the US, Japan, China, Germany, and the UK have the most voting power out of over 180 members. The World Bank was established in 1944, along with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), as part of the Bretton Woods agreement. The ICSID is hidden away from prying eyes in the complex of offices of the World Bank in Washington DC.

There has been an explosion in the number of cases heard by it in recent years. By mid-2014 it had heard nearly 500 cases almost all since the mid-1990s. This was the era when neoliberal free market capitalism was let off the leash following the collapse of the Stalinist states in the former USSR and Eastern Europe. This temporarily opened an era of a unipolar world dominated by US imperialism, which by the early 21st century gave way to the multipolar world we have today.

By 2021, the number of cases heard by the ICSID had risen to almost 900 - with more than one new case a week that year. This growth reflects the new multipolar world and the growth of the power of multinational giants. It is part of the international investor-state legal system.

Little-known legal system

What has developed over decades allows investor access to a little-known legal system. Through thousands of treaties, a state gives advance consent to allow foreign investors to take them to international tribunals, such as the ICSID. This means that countries that signed up contracts for foreign investors were also signing up to resolve any dispute between the national government and companies by agencies such as the ICSID - a subcommittee of the World Bank and other imperialist institutions. A huge lucrative legal industry has sprung up around this system.

In the early period of the ICSID, most cases were from companies taking legal action against countries in the neocolonial world. Now, as this book reveals, this is in the process of changing. German investors had filed cases against countries in the neocolonial world. But in 2009, Germany found itself in the dock, when the Swedish company Vattenfall filed a case against Germany with the World Bank's ICSID over its controversial new coal-fired power plant near Hamburg. This change illustrates the growing power of these enterprises, to the point where they come into conflict with competing nation states.

The international investor-state dispute system has evolved over decades;

possibly being traced back to a conference of international bankers held in San Francisco in 1957. Around 500 of the world's senior bankers, industrialists, and politicians gathered together and began campaigning for a new 'capitalist Magna Carta' to enshrine and protect the rights of private investors worldwide. A key figure at this gathering was the German banker, Hermann Josef Abs, head of Deutsche Bank and director of several giant corporations like Daimler-Benz and Lufthansa. His rise in the financial world took place under the Nazi regime in Germany, but it didn't end with its fall. Although he never joined the Nazi Party, Deutsche Bank had handled its accounts.

World events in this era in the neocolonial world, such as the nationalisation of the oil fields in Iran in 1951 and the Suez Canal in 1956, were undoubtedly events that drove the ruling capitalist classes in the imperialist countries to instigate steps to try and

protect their interests. The current system evolved over a period of decades but illustrates the power of the conglomerates which now exists.

The trade deals secured by modern-day conglomerates, which protect the interests of foreign investors, span every continent. Silent Coup reveals some of them. In South Africa, the then new post-apartheid African National Congress (ANC) government introduced a law requiring mining companies to be 26% owned by "black Africans". This was part of the ANC leadership's policies to use their newly won control of the capitalist state to change the racial composition of the capitalist class. Cyril Ramaphosa, now president, used his control of a 'black-owned' investment firm to become a billionaire on the basis of these laws that did nothing to ease the exploitation and suffering of black mine workers.

The Italian investment company Foresti asked for a case it had taken out against the South African

government to be dropped, and was instructed to pay hundreds of thousands of dollars in legal fees to the Nelson Mandela government. The case lasted three years and the government faced a legal bill of millions. While the South African government claimed this as a victory, the investors behind the scenes had secured a deal with the government compelling them to transfer only 5% of their ownership to black South Africans rather than the 26% mandated by the new post-apartheid mining laws.

This development of the global power of the multinational corporations, in effect overriding nation states or governments, exposed in stunning detail by Kennard and Provost, is a clear trend of increasing significance. However, they do omit to identify the limits of this trend and the continued crucial role of the nation state in capitalism. In one respect, some sections of the capitalist class have come into conflict with the limitations of the nation state.

However, capitalism and imperialism have not overcome the nation state. The growth of national antagonisms and conflicts in this era of capitalism in crisis reflects this.

Kennard and Provost do not only deal with the issue of the global legal system protecting financial investment by powerful companies. They also explore how the so-called 'development' policies in the neocolonial world are used for the benefit and to increase the profits and influence of corporations worldwide. This is done through a web of institutions, like the International Financial Corporation - yet another branch of the World Bank. Again this is not a new institution but its size and reach have hugely expanded. It is funded by contributions from 184 member countries - from state finances, which, in effect, are then recycled to major companies for 'development' projects, often dressed up as 'aid'. In one case, in India, a private healthcare company marketed

'specialty hospitals' to the local elites and international 'medical tourists'. The private healthcare company is controlled by the billionaire brothers Malvinder and Shivinder Singh. For international "aid and development", it received US\$100 million from the IFC!

Trends

Silent Coup also highlights other trends and developments of modern dystopian capitalism. The increasing ties between charities, NGOs, and big business are one aspect of this. Corporate funding of NGOs is not new, as the authors point out. Coca-Cola in the US has been doing it for thirty years. But this process has mushroomed in recent years. Save the Children, in 2013, unveiled an unprecedented partnership worth £15 million with GlaxoSmithKline. One year earlier, the same company was fined US\$3 billion in the US for bribing doctors and encouraging the prescription of antidepressant drugs for children, which were unapproved and unsuitable for them! Following the crash of giant corporations in 2008, intervention in 'aid' projects reached new levels. CEOs sit on United Nations panels discussing 'development priorities'. Agencies like the United States Agency for International Development boast of partnering with the likes of Walmart and Chevron.

Particularly revealing are the chapters covering the establishment of special economic zones - SEZs - across the world. Special deals were made on tax for investors; labour rights are weak or non-existent, to benefit the conglomerates investing in the zones. Over the last 50 years, more than half of the world's countries have carved out pieces of territory to form SEZs. According to the international trade union organisation ILO, more than 66 million people work in 3,500 zones. From China to Chile, such zones, in one form or another, have been established. The pilot scheme for them was Shannon, in Ireland, established in 1959. From Beijing to Myanmar, thousands of SEZs can trace their history back to Shannon.

In India and elsewhere, other forms of private carve-outs are made. Lavasa, outside Mumbai, India, was the first of the country's cities built and entirely run by a corporation. Instead of a mayor, a city manager would be appointed by the board of Lavasa Corporation Limited. No mayor but a CEO! If such projects are to be completed is another question but the trend is clear. Amazon and other multinationals have also raised the prospect of such company towns and private cities being constructed.

The 'privatisation of borders', with private security firms policing them,

and the explosion of private security firms as a global phenomenon, is well documented in the book. In one survey, in 2011, there were approximately 19.5 million private guards across 70 countries. Today there are far more. In the US, 1.1 million private security guards compare with 600,000 police officers. This has gone, side by side, with a massive growth of mercenary forces and a de-facto privatisation of the military in many countries. Although not mentioned in this book, the notoriously vicious Wagner Group in Russia is an extreme version of this trend. The authors point out that in



The book does omit to identify the limits of this trend and the continued crucial role of the nation state in capitalism. In one respect, some sections of the capitalist class have come into conflict with the limitations of the nation state. However, capitalism and imperialism have not overcome the nation state. The growth of national antagonisms and conflicts in this era of capitalism in crisis reflects this

Hereford, in the UK, they found more than a dozen private security and military companies located near the headquarters of the British Army's Special Air Service (SAS) headquarters.

Provost and Kennard do a service to the reader in detail about how the powerful corporations operate and the threat they pose, along with other vital trends present in modern capitalism. This information is a weapon to be used to expose capitalism in this era. They do not offer an alternative or solution. However, the information they provide can assist those who are advocating a socialist alternative to the rule of corporations and capitalism.

● *'Silent Coup - how corporations overthrew democracy' by Claire Provost and Matt Kennard, Bloomsbury Academic; 1st edition (4 May 2023)*



WHAT WE STAND FOR

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

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

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

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

WORK, PENSIONS AND BENEFITS

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

PUBLIC SERVICES

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

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

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

ENVIRONMENT

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

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

DEMOCRATIC RIGHTS

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

SOCIALISM AND INTERNATIONALISM

- No to imperialist wars and occupations!
- Take the wealth off the super-rich! For a socialist government to take into public ownership the top 150 companies and the banking system that dominate the British economy, and run them under democratic working-class control and management. Compensation to be paid only on the basis of proven need, not to the fat cats.
- A democratic socialist plan of production based on the interests of the overwhelming majority of people, and in a way that safeguards the environment.
- No 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.

Do you agree? Join the fightback!

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Buybacks – the rich get richer

JOHN MERRELL

LEICESTER SOCIALIST PARTY

Amidst all this profiteering resulting in bumper bonuses for bosses and bumper dividends for shareholders, a third way of super-enrichment has become apparent. Buybacks – when a company buys its own outstanding shares to reduce the number available on the open market – took off during the years following the 2007-09 financial crisis.

The Times says: "Gargantuan chunks of company cash are now used not to reinvest in the business, nor to pay conventional dividends". According to the newspaper, globally buybacks have almost tripled in ten years, even outstripping the growth in dividends.

UK buybacks have grown from \$9.4 billion to \$70.5 billion. The world's

richest company, Apple, spent \$89 billion on buybacks in 2022.

This is a win-win for shareholders. Those who give up their shares are generously rewarded, whilst the remaining shareholders get a larger share of future profits.

Unsurprisingly, The Times regards this super-enrichment as "a good thing", although it admits that bought-back shares "can too easily be diverted into management bonuses".

However, there is another 'third way', which does not benefit bosses or rich shareholders. Nationalisation of these top companies under workers' control and management, ensuring the wealth they create provides decent pay and conditions, and goods and services at affordable prices.

These socialist policies would make the cost-of-living crisis history.

WHAT'S YOUR VIEW?

• editors@socialistparty.org.uk

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

Train drivers vs Tories

PETE MCNALLY

PROUD TO HAVE BEEN A MEMBER OF ASLEF

I have heard a number of Tory MPs refer to train drivers pay rates recently as though they are too high.

I do not know what qualifications, if any, Tory MPs need, but I worked as a train driver for 17 years. The training took about a year. I had to be capable of following the rules for train drivers, know in detail the types of traction I would be driving, be able to diagnose various faults, deal safely and effectively with any safety issues, obey signals, control the speed of the train, know and carry out the procedure for coupling units, be able to communicate with signallers, shunters, other train crew and rail personnel, know the speeds applicable to the routes I was qualified to drive over, along with gradients and other features, points for shutting off power, and braking and stopping points. I had to be able to take trains safely onto any depots, stop blocks and stabling points that I would have to use.

I also had various dealings with the

public. On a number of occasions I volunteered to do extra work so that the service customers needed was available, and I witnessed countless times when other staff did the same.

The pay I got was agreed with the employer, it was not imposed upon them. Perhaps the most pertinent point for Tory MPs to note if they want to become train drivers, is that the first starting time at the depot I worked at was 03:54.



Unison members who are support staff at Ashfield College special school in Leicester are taking three further days of strike action. (See 'Pay strike at special needs school in Leicester' at socialistparty.org.uk). Negotiations took place on Monday 22 May, but management failed to offer anything new. The threat of strike action had previous won concessions, but staff still point to the £1,000 wage deficit compared to local authority-run schools. They are making clear that one-off non-consolidated lump sums are not the same as a proper increase in wages.



Strategic debates begin at PCS union conferences



Wigan strike demo NORTH WEST SOCIALIST PARTY

DAVE SEMPLE

PCS BRANCH SECRETARY WIGAN (PERSONAL CAPACITY)

Civil servants and workers in privatised central government areas, 180,000 of whom are represented by the Public and Commercial Services (PCS) union, met in Brighton for a four-day conference from 22 May. The week began with group conferences, covering each government department.

Conference convenes during a pause in the union's national campaign on pay, pensions, redundancy rights and jobs. On 9 May, PCS' national rebalot concluded with 106 different areas within the civil service clearing the 50% participation threshold imposed by the Tories' 2016 anti-union laws.

In the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), despite around 88% voting yes to strike action, because 48.7% voted in the ballot, the strike mandate was not renewed. This affects around 45,000 members. DWP group conference overwhelmingly agreed an urgent rebalot, but was split on the use of action short of strike action.

Since 9 November when the first strike ballot result was achieved, with 100,000 members getting over the line, the union's leadership (based around a grouping known as Left Unity) has called only three days of national strike action, and has opposed backing strikes up with action short of strikes.

DWP strikes

In the view of the Broad Left Network (BLN - the rank-and-file socialist organisation in PCS in which Socialist Party members participate) in DWP this has undermined the impact of our strikes.

In Bolton and Stockport, Universal Credit workers took nine days' strike action. The key work from those sites was moved to other sites, except in a small number of sites where Socialist Party and BLN reps got agreement that members could opt out of covering strike work.

The strikes still created disruption, but they could have been more successful if backed by national boycotts of strike work. This would only be possible if the ballot included action short of strikes.

Similarly, faced with selective strike action (where small areas take weeks of strike action and are paid strike pay by PCS), the response of the government has been to turn on the overtime taps.

An overtime ban would quickly curtail this ability of the government to cope with our strikes. Other unions, such as Aslef and UCU, and even sister civil service union Prospect, have used action short of strikes.

Left Unity supporters elected to the union's DWP group executive committee argued that members can't afford unpaid national strike action, and can't afford overtime bans. Despite the leadership motion suggesting action short of strike action would be kept under review, they said openly in

speeches that they opposed balloting on this.

Our concern is that the leadership of the union risks creating demoralisation, which it then leans on to argue against action.

In outgoing general secretary Mark Serwotka's contribution as a guest speaker at DWP conference, he nonetheless stated that the NEC will support any group seeking to ballot for action short of strike. Those NEC members have opposed that, but members should take Serwotka's words and fight for that to happen.

The leadership motion was passed on a hand vote, which we estimate at 45-32.

Jobs

Positively, in contrast to 2022, the leadership in DWP has accepted the need for a group-wide campaign on staffing. Jobcentre work coaches face 360 minutes of face-to-face appointments; Universal Credit case workers face caseloads of up to 2,000 claimants in a system designed for 900; Retirement Services workers are similarly deluged. It is therefore vital that this develops as a bold campaign including action.

All through DWP group conference, small groups of reps have said that not enough is being done, for example, to oppose victimisation of union reps, to fight for Universal Credit members who are under enormous pressure, and on green issues.

A layer watches to see what the impact of selective action has been.

So far there are no serious talks on 2022-23 or 2023-24 pay and nothing on pensions, redundancy rights and jobs.

Socialist Party and BLN supporters will continue to work to build a fighting, democratic union, and to build the strongest national campaign possible: to overturn a decade and a half of pay austerity, to reverse the attacks on our pensions, to protect our redundancy rights, and to win a national staffing campaign.

We call on all reps, at conference or not, to join us in this struggle.

Mark Serwotka retirement

PCS general secretary Mark Serwotka has announced his retirement, to take effect on 31 January 2024. The NEC is proposing to hold a special election for both General Secretary and Assistant General Secretary.

The Broad Left Network (BLN) argues that elections for these posts should take place together with the NEC elections early next year. This makes sense for reasons of cost, and to avoid running these elections at a time when reps and members are totally committed to winning the critical dispute on pay and jobs.

The BLN believes a left challenge in these elections is vital in the interests of our members and the future of the union.

BBC journalists in Northern Ireland walk out over cuts

ANTON MCCABE

BRANCH SECRETARY, NATIONAL UNION OF JOURNALISTS, DERRY NORTH WEST IRELAND (PERSONAL CAPACITY)

A 24-hour strike by BBC journalists in Northern Ireland was 100% solid on 19 May. Workers in the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) walked out on one of the busiest news days of the year as the count for local elections took place (see page 15).

This meant there was no coverage of the count on BBC radio or television. That was despite the BBC announcing coverage on their schedules.

Management could not find a single scab from over 200 journalists to read the news so Adam Smyth, director of BBC Northern Ireland, read news bulletins himself but he did not say who he was!

The strike is against cuts to services, forced redundancies, and the near-destruction of BBC Radio Foyle in Derry. That has produced a huge reaction in Derry. The NUJ organised a public meeting in the city hall in protest which over 250 attended. There has been huge support from the community, other trade unions, and politicians of all parties.

NUJ members have campaigned strongly, particularly in Derry. There, a new chapel (workplace organisation) has been outstanding.

New members

The union has attracted new members - in the week before the strike, 42 new members joined in Belfast. There, too, cuts are threatening journalists. To date, those cuts are not as severe as in Derry but journalists know that management will go for them also.

Because Derry is in the front line of cuts, the picket line at BBC Radio Foyle was very strong. No programmes at all were broadcast from the station and the building was locked.

Non-journalistic staff joined the picket, as did trade unionists from Derry Trades Union Council, Unison, Unite, the INTO teachers' union and Irish Writers' Union. Members of the public came to give support. A leading campaigner against the abuse of children in residential homes came to personally thank the journalists for their coverage of his campaign to expose the abuse, and local small businesses arrived with donations of food, soup and coffee. Passers-by honked horns in support.

BBC management is still refusing to move so journalists will have to take further action.

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Croydon protests 15% council tax rise



BERKAY KARTAV
LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

On Wednesday 17 May, around 40 local trade unionists, socialists and Croydon residents held a protest against the 15% council tax hike and council cuts outside Croydon Town Hall, where the council's annual meeting was being held. Both Tories and 'Tory-lite' Labour councillors have passed on brutal cuts for more than a decade. Activists from the RMT, Unison, CWU and Unite unions spoke at the protest about the need for an electoral challenge to get rid of these pro-austerity establishment politicians. Socialist Party members raised the

point about the need to build a trade union-led mass movement to organise in the community and to defend those who won't be able to pay a 15% council tax rise in their bills amid a historic cost-of-living crisis. We welcome trade unionists and socialists to stand under the banner of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) to challenge these pro-austerity politicians at the ballot box in the upcoming elections, as part of a wider electoral challenge across the country.

WHAT'S YOUR VIEW?
editors@socialistparty.org.uk

Save Batley Baths!

JOHN VASEY
WAKEFIELD SOCIALIST PARTY

A march and rally of about 100 protesters against the closure of the public swimming baths in Batley, West Yorkshire was held on Saturday 20 May.

Three leisure facilities were closed in the Kirklees local authority area, two of which have been reopened following successful protest campaigns. This campaign aims to do likewise for Batley Baths.

The demonstration was well supported by Huddersfield TUC and trade union branches Unison, Unite and Unite Community, alongside local residents.

The council set up Kirklees Active Leisure to run (and close) many of its leisure facilities. A Unison petition was signed by demonstrators, appropriately calling for these facilities to be brought back in-house and end the threat to public services and jobs.

Speakers at the rally stressed the vital need to save Batley Baths, especially for women and disabled people.

Speaking on behalf of the Socialist



Save Batley Baths demo
PHOTO: ROGER BRADLEY

Party, I encouraged those present to find people from their ranks to stand against those Batley councillors who voted through the closure of the baths. Many of them are Labour councillors, including the council leader whose seat is up for election in May 2024. I explained the benefit

of the national anti-cuts platform afforded to such a challenge, by coming under the banner of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition. This would mean standing alongside campaigners against cuts and closures, trade unionists and socialists across the country.

Leicester TUSC meets to continue to fight against cuts

ALEX GILLHAM
LEICESTER SOCIALIST PARTY

Leicester Socialist Party hosted a Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) public meeting on Tuesday 16 May. The meeting was held to respond to Leicester's local election results, and coordinate efforts with independents and other anti-cuts activists in Leicester.

The meeting had an attendance of 25, including TUSC candidates, supporters and independent campaigners, and ex-Labour councillors Rita Patel, Gary O'Donnell and Jacky Nangreave. Patel ran in the mayoral election race, campaigning to remove the mayoral post. Overall, there were more votes for candidates running against the mayoral system than for, including TUSC candidate Steve Score who ran on an anti-austerity socialist programme. (see 'Anti-cuts stand cuts through Leicester Labour turmoil' on socialistparty.org.uk)

Patel highlighted the damage the mayoral system was causing to the city and is launching a campaign to

include a mayoral referendum at the next elections which requires 12,000 signatures from registered voters in the city. (The petition can be found at leicesterdemocracy.org.uk/)

Sital Gill of the Indian Workers' Association, who ran for a seat in Troon ward, also joined, and expressed solidarity and a wish to build anti-cuts and socialist campaigns with TUSC supporters.

Overall, there was a sense of optimism that these groups can work together over the coming years to build anti-cuts alliances. Gary O'Donnell, who ran as an Independent in Western Nangreave. Patel ran in the mayoral election race, campaigning to remove the mayoral post. Overall, there were more votes for candidates running against the mayoral system than for, including TUSC candidate Steve Score who ran on an anti-austerity socialist programme. (see 'Anti-cuts stand cuts through Leicester Labour turmoil' on socialistparty.org.uk)

Patel highlighted the damage the mayoral system was causing to the city and is launching a campaign to

Dudley marches to save libraries

RICHARD GINGELL
BLACK COUNTRY SOCIALIST PARTY

In Dudley, on Thursday 18 May, the community was out in force to protest against the 30% cuts to the libraries and archives service, which would see libraries scaled down, or even closed entirely. The hit 'saves' £1.5 million over the next four years - less than 1% of the Tory-run council's operating budget.

Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) supporters and Socialist Party members joined the 70-plus people at the protest outside the council chamber, organised by Dudley Unison branch. Also in attendance were Labour councillors, despite the then Labour-run council cutting the opening hours of multiple libraries in 2016.

Libraries provide a vital service to the education of our children, places for local community groups to meet, and warm spaces during the winter. Not to mention giving internet access to the millions of people that have had to surrender their broadband access to the ongoing cost-of-living crisis.

What we need is a socialist alternative and a new mass workers' party to fight back against the cuts from central government, and to allow us to democratically decide how we run our communities rather than simply slashing them to ribbons. This has been done in the past, and funding can be won when communities refuse to accept cuts. Part of this fight is electing anti-austerity representatives, like those who stood for TUSC in the 4 May council elections in Dudley, and getting involved in building a political voice for workers in the Black Country and beyond.



Leicester TUSC public meeting

Nigerian socialist speaking tour begins



Nigerian Socialist and member of Democratic Socialist Movement (the sister party of the Socialist Party in Nigeria) Hassan Soweto (second from the right) has kicked off his speaking tour in London. Soweto is speaking around the country on the political situation in Nigeria and the dire need for socialist change. See if there is a meeting near to you:

- Wednesday 24 May, Cardiff, 7:30pm, Cathays Community Centre, Cathays Terrace, Cardiff
- Thursday 25 May, Swansea, 7:30pm, Dyfatty Community Centre, Chapel Street, Swansea, SA1 1NB
- Monday 29 May, Leeds, 7pm, the Adelphi, 1-3 Hunslet Road, Leeds, LS10 1JQ
- Tuesday 30 May, Leicester, 7pm, Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate, LE1 1WB
- Wednesday 31 May, Birmingham, 7pm, Top floor of The Wellington, Bennetts Hill, Birmingham City Centre, B2 5SN
- Thursday 1 June, University West of Scotland, Paisley, 4:30pm, UWS Paisley Student Union, Level two, Storrie Street
- Thursday 1 June, Glasgow, 7pm, Glasgow city centre, Red Rosa's, 195 London Road, G40 1PA



Socialist Party members organised a lobby of the Nigerian High Commission with the Movement of the People against the continued imprisonment of musician and activist Seun Kuti, son of Fela Kuti. They stood in solidarity with young people and workers in Nigeria fighting against all police repression.

SOCIALISM 2023 Tickets at 2022 prices until the end of August!

25 & 26 November, Institute of Education (IOE), 20 Bedford Way, London WC1H 0AL

Socialism 2023 is the place where hundreds of workers, socialists, trade unionists, and young people discuss how we can fight back, win and change the world!

Includes 40+ different session topics and the Saturday night 'Rally for socialism'.

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- How can we save the NHS - what would a socialist NHS look like?
- Lessons: 40 years since the miners' strike
- Is another financial crisis beginning?
- 100 years since Trotsky's Left Opposition formed
- Can we change the world? Tasks for revolution today
- What is Marxism?
- Met scandal, Brexit and the police

Socialist Party
founded by the Socialist Party



Swansea march for independence open to socialist ideas

ROGER BUTLER
SWANSEA SOCIALIST PARTY

The Socialist Party found a lot of support at the Swansea march for independence for our socialist programme on the way forward for Wales.

The march, held on Saturday 20 May, through the centre of Swansea, and rally were organised by Yes Cymru and All Under One Banner Cymru, who estimated up to 6,000 people took part.

Socialist Party members handed out bilingual leaflets and sold the Socialist.

We had a ready response from marchers who were open to our ideas, snapping up all 600 of our leaflets with an interest in finding out more about the Socialist Party.

It was clear that the overwhelming mood among marchers was to use independence as a way of tackling social and economic problems, with complete disillusionment in Westminster. There was a wide range of people on the march, with no one organisation dominating, and an openness to discussing ideas on how to go forward.

Our leaflet (text below) clearly set out Socialist Party Wales's position:

Join the fightback

JOIN THE SOCIALISTS

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

Socialist Party

Increasing support for socialism at Salisbury campaign stalls

ALASDAIR COOK
DORSET SOCIALIST PARTY

In Salisbury the Socialist Party has been campaigning to save the NHS. At the moment it's particularly resonating with people, such is the anger at the state of it. We smashed the record amount of fighting fund raised on the first Saturday of the month, then the following Saturday we beat the record again!

The donations were generous and from a wide range of people, including an Irish war veteran sick of the Tories and what they had done to the NHS, a travelling French actor who recognised the similarities between what we had to say and the eruptions in France, and a sympathetic Jeremy Corbyn supporter who had left the Labour Party the moment Keir Starmer was in charge.



Help fund the fightback

DONATE

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SOCIALIST PARTY FIGHTING FUND

AREA	\$ RECEIVED	\$ TARGET	Q2: APRIL-JUNE 2023	DEADLINE: 30 JUNE 2023
Wales	1,974	2,300		86%
Eastern	953	1,200		79%
South West	1,098	1,800		61%
London	2,027	4,600	44%	
Southern & SE	1,033	2,350	44%	
Northern	319	750	42%	
East Midlands	587	1,850	32%	
West Midlands	809	2,600	31%	
Yorkshire	713	2,550	28%	
North West	295	1,150	26%	
Other	950	3,850	25%	
TOTAL	10,758	25,000	43%	

For a Socialist Wales

Enough is enough of all austerity politicians
Working people in Wales have had enough of the establishment parties in London and Cardiff Bay.

And it's hardly surprising after 13 years of austerity which has destroyed one third of our public services, depressed wages for the longest period in history, and thrown thousands of people in Wales into homelessness.

Desperate For Change

The increase in support for Welsh self-government, the support in Wales for Jeremy Corbyn and the determined strike wave by workers across Wales showed the huge appetite for change in favour of working people.

But we won't get this from either Labour or Plaid Cymru politicians. This desire for change must be given a socialist direction to begin to solve the problems of working people in Wales.

Limited devolution—no solution

The limited devolution settlement of 1998 has delivered very little for Wales. In 25 years Welsh Labour and Labour/Plaid coalition governments have presided over the decline of public services.

Instead of defying the UK Tory government and refusing to implement their cuts, they have imposed them. Spending on services has been cut by £5 billion since 2010 and many public services have been privatised.

Cost-of-living strikes

And the Welsh government has followed the lead of the Tories in cutting the real wages of public sector workers in Wales as prices soar. It has been left to trade unionists to fight for decent pay rises against the Welsh government, exposing the emptiness of their 'social partnership'.

Need for a new workers' party

We need a new party in Wales initiated by our trade unions which fights for the working class. A party that fights for wage rises that at least match inflation, fights the cuts, and fights for a socialist Wales.

For a Socialist Senedd

And the Senedd has significantly less powers than even the Scottish parliament because the Welsh government has not fought Westminster for those powers. Socialist Party Wales calls for the Senedd to have full legislative and tax raising powers so that it has the legal ability

to make real changes to Welsh society. And for a government that will use those powers to fight for the working class.

Socialist change
Socialist Party Wales calls for socialist change.

For the Senedd to have powers to carry out socialist policies with the ability to:

- Reverse all the cuts—for the Welsh government and Welsh councils to set no-cuts budgets, pool reserves and build a mass campaign to force the UK government to return the funds robbed from Welsh services
- Give our health workers above-inflation pay awards now! Invest in the NHS to expand local hospitals with free training of doctors and nurses.
- Ban compulsory zero-hour contracts
- Raise the minimum wage to £15 an hour for all
- Renationalise rail and the utilities
- Nationalise the commanding heights of the economy
- For a socialist Wales as part of a voluntary socialist confederation of Wales, England, Scotland and Ireland

Germany: 'Building Energy Act' row shows failure of capitalism to deal with climate change

SASCHA STANICIC
SOZIALISTISCHE ORGANISATION SOLIDARITÄT (CWI
GERMANY)

A debate in Germany over the 'Building Energy Act', the so-called 'heat transition', has been boiling for weeks. The conservative CDU has announced that it will make the fight against this law an issue in every upcoming election campaign. The liberal FDP (which is part of the government in the so-called 'traffic light' coalition with the social democrats and Greens) has only conditionally approved the bill in the federal cabinet.

Criticism comes from all sides. According to a survey by n-tv news, 79% of the population think that the federal government does not take enough account of people's financial situation in its climate protection measures. The topic of 'heat transition' shows that climate protection becomes a contradiction within the framework of capitalism. Therefore, there is no alternative to a socialist solution if the mass of the working population is not to pay for it.

The draft law stipulates that from January 2024, new heating systems must be powered by at least 65% renewable energy. From 2045, there is to be no more oil or gas heating. There is a need to banish fossil fuels from heating systems. After all, up to one-third of all greenhouse gas emissions are generated in buildings.

Reducing the social burden

Around 42% of the population live in their own homes. The installation of a new heating system or a heat pump

can cost homeowners tens of thousands of euros. The federal government has presented a subsidy plan that provides a basic subsidy of 30% for everyone - regardless of whether the person is wealthy, a pensioner, a welfare recipient, or a worker. In addition, there are socially graduated bonuses that allow for a maximum subsidy of 50% - but this also means that the other half has to be financed out of everyone's own pocket, regardless of whether they are rich or poor.

It is understandable that this is a horror scenario for many people. Instead of using a watering-can approach, we need a truly socially graduated relief for working- and middle-class homeowners. Depending on the income and wealth situation, this could mean that the state takes over these costs entirely or supports them with interest-free loans, or that the relief should not go beyond covering the saved energy costs over a certain period of time.

Tenants' rights

Tenants must be protected from rent increases. The costs of the so-called 'heat transition' must not be passed onto the rent. To this end, the modernisation levy (which gives landlords the possibility to raise rents after modernisation measures) must be abolished. It is already often misused by landlords to carry out unnecessary 'modernisations' in order to drive up rents and drive out existing tenants.

The costs must be borne by the profits of the energy and real estate corporations, which should be taken into public ownership with democratic control by the working people

and compensation paid only on the basis of proven need. The necessary money could be raised through higher taxation of corporate profits, assets and inheritances.

Planning needed

But the Building Energy Act raises not only the question of who should bear the costs of converting heating systems to renewable energies but also how this conversion should be fundamentally designed and how energy can be saved in buildings.

The latter would be possible through comprehensive building renovations, which would have to include façade insulation, the installation of modern windows and roof insulation.

The measures envisaged by the 'traffic light' coalition are now, in a one-sided fashion, oriented towards the electrification of heating systems and focus on the installation of heat pumps. This also creates a large market in the short term, in which capitalists can enrich themselves subsidised by tax money, without prices being controlled.

The fact that the electricity with which these heat pumps are operated may not be generated from renewable energies plays no role in the government's considerations. Nevertheless, electricity is considered renewable.

At the same time, the electricity price for the industry is to be subsidised by the state, while the mass of people continue to struggle with high and rising electricity prices.

Instead of working on a comprehensive plan for society as a whole, the solutions are oriented towards

the installation of new heating systems or heat pumps in individual houses. Above all, this fails to include the enormous potential of district heating and neighbourhood solutions. Experts point out that heat pumps are not the universal solution, and that communal heating plans and neighbourhood solutions are needed that use different renewable energy sources, for example, solar energy, deep geothermal energy, biomass, biogas, etc. This also raises the question of whether the overall eco-balance of the conversion will be positive at all if, for example, the possibility of running gas heating systems on biogas is excluded.

Capitalism fails

The debate about the Building Energy Act shows the limits of the capitalist market economy in the conversion to renewable energies and the necessity of an overall socialist, democratic plan oriented towards the needs of people and the environment.

This also applies to the fact that the heating conversion in the timeframe now envisaged means an enormous demand for production capacities and labour. The heating industry in Germany is strongly characterised by small and medium-sized enterprises, and these companies have understandable concerns that they will not be able to meet the demand and will not be able to withstand the competition from large suppliers from the USA or Asia. So, the potential for creating new jobs could have the

opposite effect. Here too the state should ensure that publically owned production capacities are built up, skilled workers trained and jobs created.

The best way to do this is by nationalising large corporations and enterprises under democratic control and management. A public investment programme could support smaller companies at the same time but should be accompanied by democratic control for trade unions and employee representatives over working conditions and the use of funds. If this were part of the environmentally urgently needed change in transport policy - away from individual transport to the expansion of local and long-distance public transport - a conversion of the car industry could be used not only for the production of more buses and trains but also of products necessary for a real heat transition, such as large-scale heat pumps, geothermal drillers, etc - without having to lose a single job.

The 'Wuppertal Institute for Climate, Environment, and Energy' has calculated that a heat transition, including the necessary housing renovations, would be possible by 2035 and would cost an additional €50 billion a year. This money would be there if the enormous assets, fortunes and profits of the capitalist class were taken and state funds were put into climate protection, instead of into the German military for example. But that would require a government prepared to break with capitalism and its profit-orientated logic.



Northern Ireland local elections: Nationalist and Unionist polarisation squeezes smaller parties

NIALL MULHOLLAND

COMMITTEE FOR A WORKERS' INTERNATIONAL

Sinn Féin, the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) and the Alliance Party emerged as the main winners in the recent local government elections in Northern Ireland.

This shows a greater political polarisation taking place among nationalists and unionists in a society already dominated by sectarian politics. The so-called 'moderate' parties of unionism and nationalism, the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) and the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP), saw a further decline, ending up in fourth and fifth place. At the same time, the Alliance Party, which is viewed by many as moderate and neither nationalist nor unionist, won third place.

Sinn Féin was able to mobilise greater support by playing on widespread nationalist resentment at the continued DUP boycott of power-sharing. This has blocked Sinn Féin's deputy leader, Michelle O'Neill, from becoming first minister.

Sinn Féin is now the largest party in local government, overtaking the DUP, and is the first nationalist party to hold the most council seats. The party secured control of six of the eleven councils. Overall, it won 39 more council seats than in the last election in 2019. Indicating its ability to win over more middle-class voters, Sinn Féin almost doubled its vote in Balmoral, a relatively well-off area of Belfast.

While the DUP's stance on the Stormont Assembly drove many more nationalists to vote for Sinn Féin, it also consolidated the DUP's support among unionists. Although second place behind Sinn Féin, as in last year's elections to the Stormont Assembly, the DUP held all its 122 seats. Unlike in the Assembly elections, the DUP did not suffer big losses to the more hard-line Traditional Unionist Voice (TUV) party.

Going into the local elections, the DUP leadership maintained its opposition to the Irish Sea border and the Windsor Framework, and refused to go back into the power-sharing Assembly. This meant the DUP was able to hold its own against the TUV's appeal.

The DUP opposed the customs border in the Irish Sea that resulted after Brexit, regarding it as diminishing Northern Ireland's place within the UK. The party says the Windsor Framework, which softens trading rules, does not go far enough.

The UK government is using a 'carrot and stick' approach towards the DUP. On the one hand, harsh budget sanctions have been introduced on the working class that will pressure the DUP to return to Stormont. On the other hand, the government are seeking to entice the DUP to re-enter Stormont by promising to "copperfasten Northern Ireland's place within the UK". The DUP finds itself in a complicated balancing act between hardliners and working people who



Militant Left and CWI members campaigning for Donal O'Cofaigh who unfortunately lost his seat during these elections
PHOTO: MILITANT LEFT

are really feeling the impact of sanctions. A section of the DUP may seek to drag out the party's boycott of Stormont until after the summer 'marching season', which always raises sectarian tensions. Another section of the DUP appears prepared to return to power sooner rather than later.

In this highly polarised election, it was always going to be very difficult for smaller parties and independents, including those on the left. All of these forces were badly squeezed, with many losing their council seats.

Militant Left (CWI in Ireland) is part of the Cross-Community Labour Alternative (CCLA), which stood two candidates, Donal O'Cofaigh, in Enniskillen, and Gerry Cullen, in Dunganon. Both candidates have a long history of left activism and high public recognition in their areas. Standing for the first time in 22 years, Gerry scored a very credible 268 first preference votes (Northern Ireland has a single transferable vote system in local elections).

Donal was an outgoing CCLA councillor, with a tremendous four-year record as a socialist fighter on class, social and environmental issues. On the doorsteps, CCLA canvassers found a warm appreciation

of Donal's hard work on behalf of working-class people and especially regarding his leading role in the mass campaign against cuts to the South West Acute Hospital. However, the big squeeze from the main sectarian-based parties meant that Donal's impressive 504 first preference votes were not enough to carry him through the necessary rounds to pick up the required transferable votes to retain his seat.

Donal and Gerry's vote was also cut into by the false prophet of the Alliance Party. In recent years, Alliance has gained impressively, particularly amongst youth, by portraying itself as an anti-sectarian and 'progressive' alternative to the 'Orange and Green dinosaurs'. But this largely middle-class party, which takes a neoliberal position on economic issues, will fail to solve any of the key problems facing working-class people and youth.

Many people in the Enniskillen area will be greatly disappointed that Donal, despite his outstanding role as a voice for working-class communities, was not returned to Fermanagh and Omagh District Council. But Donal's votes, like those for Gerry, while relatively modest, indicate the basis for the continuing growth of class-based politics across the North.

The broad alliance of left and community activists from Catholic and Protestant backgrounds that makes up CCLA can be confident they have the basis to make gains in the future, by participating in the social, economic and community struggles of the working class with bold class policies.

And the fortunes of the left will also be more favourable in future elections, as working-class people from both communities experience the results of the pro-market policies of Sinn Féin, the DUP and the Alliance Party in local government and a future restored Assembly Executive. Sinn Féin, for example, will find it very difficult to deliver even on its very limited social and economic policy commitments after the devastating cuts imposed by the Tory government in health (Northern Ireland has the longest waiting lists in the UK) and education, as well as other public services. Sinn Féin and the DUP have both shown in practice that they simply manage the system within the limited budget provided.

Militant Left will be fully involved in the process of developing working-class politics, while also building the forces of Marxism in the North and South of Ireland.

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the Socialist

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CLIMATE CHAOS TO GET WORSE



PHOTO: PAUL MATTHEWSON

MILA HUGHES
COVENTRY SOCIALIST PARTY

Average global temperatures are likely to rise to 1.5°C and beyond by 2027, according to recently released figures from the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO). The report confirmed that this would send the world into “uncharted territory” with a “marked acceleration of human impacts.” But it is inhumane corporations that are the main driving force of

this global catastrophe. As a system geared towards profit, the capitalist system is unable to solve the climate crisis.

Countries are also advised to stay prepared for health, food security, and water management issues. We are already seeing this and other consequences of the climate crisis rapidly getting worse, and will continue to do so.

Parts of northern Italy recently received half the average annual rainfall in just 36 hours. Rivers burst banks and thousands of acres of farmland flooded, with an estimated 20,000

people left homeless and 13 killed.

The hidden hand of private ownership means giant corporations dominate the economy. Rather than remedying this cry for help from the planet, the capitalist class will look for more ways to profit from it. Competition between capitalist states, and between individual capitalists, prevents the global collaboration needed.

The WMO’s report says that it is 66% likely for us to reach 1.5°C, despite countries committing to not go beyond it under the 2015

Paris climate agreement. The promises made by capitalism and its political representatives are empty.

In order to stop and reverse climate change and fight its effects, a global systematic change is required. A socialist society, with nationalisation of energy, transport and the world’s biggest banks and companies can allow for the use of resources to be planned democratically by the working class. This is what is needed to provide tangible solutions to climate crisis, and ensure a safe and decent life for all.

WHAT WE STAND FOR: THE SOCIALIST PARTY’S MAIN DEMANDS >>> see column on page 10



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