



AND



US

Organise to fight the cost-of-living crisis

Millionaire Chancellor Rishi Sunak's spring statement was another Tory declaration of the 'them-and-us' society.

For 'us', the working class, it's the biggest cost-of-living crisis since World War Two.

For 'them', big business bosses, it's obscene riches: the 'Big Four' supermarkets' operating profits rose to £693 million in 2021, up 42% in a year!

On our side, hungry children are unable to concentrate in lessons. A pensioner eats a teaspoon of toothpaste in the hope his stomach believes it's food. And so much agonising stress.

This 'them-and-us' system - capitalism - is based on the exploitation of the working class by the boss class. What doesn't go to us, goes to them.

By refusing to increase benefits and pensions in line with inflation, Sunak, in effect, cut them by £9 billion! That's on top of the £6 billion cut he made last October to Universal Credit (UC).

Around 40% of UC claimants are working; in other words workers are underpaid by 'them'. Workers are right to organise action to fight for pay rises in the context of the price rises.

In Britain today, the richest tenth of the population now owns 43% of wealth. The entire bottom half has just 9%.

This means that fighting the cost-of-living crisis means ending the 'them-and-us' system. There is no lack of resources to provide everyone

with a decent standard of living - it's just hoarded away by 'them.'

Sunak thinks he can get away with this because he sees no serious opposition from Labour under Sir Keir Starmer - the 'Sir' referring to services in defence of the 'them-and-us' society.

However, the real opposition is 'us' - the working class. Even some Tories are warning Sunak that there's a danger of provoking anger that can spill over into action that could threaten the Tories' right to rule.

Let's give our anger an organised expression. Let's organise mass working-class action and a political alternative, around socialist ideas. We can turn this 'them-and-us' world on its head so it's the working class making the decisions. Then we can plan democratically for everyone to have a decent living standard.

- **Support the strikes.** Workers are fighting back across the country. These need to be co-ordinated by trade union leaders for maximum impact on the bosses
- **Build for the 18 June TUC demo.** Let's push for the Trades Union Congress to pull out all the stops to mobilise for a mass working-class march through London
- **Campaign for no-cuts candidates in the local government elections on 5 May.** For the trade unions to build a new mass workers' party - an independent political voice for 'us'
- **Join the Socialist Party!** Fight for socialist ideas to end the 'them-and-us' society - and the war, poverty and inequality it brings

Seething anger at P&O sackings continues

Workers’ mobilisation needed to save jobs

ROB WILLIAMS
SOCIALIST PARTY TRADE UNION AND WORKPLACE
ORGANISER

The chant “Seize the ships!” has rung out again in the last few days on protests in Hull, Dover, Larne, Liverpool, Cairnryan and Glasgow, organised by the RMT and Nautilus International unions in support of the sacked P&O workers.

The protests were the biggest yet, as workers and supporting members of other unions reacted with fury at the brazen words of P&O CEO Peter Hebblethwaite, who admitted that the company broke the law because “no union could accept our proposals”. As when notorious convicted wealthy tax evader Leona Helmsley was once heard saying: “Only the little people pay taxes”, workers will now draw the conclusion that laws only apply to us, not the bosses and the rich!

Hebblethwaite’s comments were even too blunt for Boris Johnson and transport minister Grant Shapps, who have called on him to resign. However, it won’t be lost on ordinary people that the Covid rules were flouted by many in Johnson’s clique.

But it will be no consolation for the sacked workers to replace one brutal boss with another. All P&O ferries and ships should be immediately impounded and the workers reinstated to their jobs on their agreed pay, terms and conditions.

The pressure is building on the Tories as the outrage increases. Moreover, the government’s Maritime and Coastguard Agency has now had to impound two P&O ships because of concerns about their safety, given the brand-new crews and safety equipment and procedures. This shows the crucial role that the unions play in upholding safety.

When dismissing the workers, P&O management tried to justify their vicious actions by arguing that the company couldn’t survive by paying workers their contracted pay. They then employed, or rather super-exploited, workers on less than £2 an hour, a fifth of the minimum wage - a practice shamefully common place in the industry.



P&O should be nationalised and taken into public ownership under democratic workers’ management and control

In an unprecedented step, Shapps has now written to senior P&O management demanding that the workers are reinstated on their current terms. His letter implies that if P&O don’t step back, new crews will have to be paid at least the national minimum wage. But this outcome would still be unacceptable, as new workers would be on less than the sacked workers.

If P&O or its parent company DP World claim that they can’t make a go of the business on the basis of paying workers their previously existing wage, the books of both companies should be opened and inspected by the workers and their unions.

To defend the jobs on their agreed contracts, and the communities in which the workers live and work, P&O should be nationalised and taken into public ownership under democratic workers’ management and control. The same goes for other ferry operators super-exploiting workers.



The best way to support the sacked workers and their unions would be for the TUC to call a national demo at one or all of the ports in the next week

Trades Union Congress (TUC) general secretary Frances O’Grady posted an article in the Financial Times, ‘P&O abuses expose the UK’s embrace of cowboy capitalism’. In it, she correctly details the litany of company abuses of which P&O’s is just the latest.

Brutal capitalism

But the search for the ‘good employer’ is increasingly in vain. Covid has merely brought centre stage the brutal character of capitalism, which is becoming the ‘new normal’. Unite the Union has alone estimated that 10% of its members have been affected by ‘fire and rehire’. P&O has given an even more vicious twist to this practise. How many companies will now look to see if they too can emulate P&O if they get away with it?

But the response of too many of the union leaders in the depth of the pandemic was to capitulate to an illusory national unity with the bosses and the Tory government.

In September 2020, O’Grady stood with Chancellor Rishi Sunak and the head of the employer federation CBI when the Tories were going to water down furlough, a step that they had to retreat from given the threat to the economy and the likely backlash from workers.

However, workers have fought, in a growing strike wave, both against the fire-and-rehire offensive and to demand above-inflation pay rises to keep their heads above water. It’s workers’ action that has challenged P&O, with Dutch dockers refusing to load ships, but more is needed now as the fight is at a crucial point.

The best way to support the sacked workers and their unions would be for the TUC to call a national demonstration at one or all of the ports in the next week, to mobilise thousands to blockade the ports. This would send a mighty message to P&O, DP World and the Tories behind them that the fight is still on and the sackings must be stopped.

Scrap freeports: No government cash to P&O owners

News that DP World, owners of P&O Ferries, are set to pocket £50 million in government funding has added to the enormous anger of sacked seafarers and RMT members. Under the Tories’ flagship levelling-up scheme, Freeports have been reintroduced, avowedly to create jobs.

DP World runs Thames Gateway and Southampton docks, the second and third largest ports in the country. The government says funding is for infrastructure investment but, in reality, it is a subsidy to big business. DP World is a UAE state-owned company with a turnover of £8.2 billion in

2020. Hardly short of a few quid for investment!

Now, linked to the mass sackings at P&O, this hugely undermines any credibility in the Freeports initiative. Under the enormous pressure of events, DP World’s UK commercial director has been forced to resign from Solent Freeport’s board. Further evidence the Tories are desperately trying to salvage their discredited project.

At the time of its announcement, the RMT and Unite unions were quick to oppose the scheme as ‘sinkholes’, warning deregulation would lead to attacks on jobs and conditions in the

drive to profits. DP World’s action at P&O has demonstrated just that.

P&O’s mass sackings show workers can have no confidence in capitalism to ensure secure jobs and decent wages. As P&O seafarers have chanted: “Seize the ships!” This is the only way to protect jobs and services, the trade unions must come out firmly and oppose the Freeport scheme, and instead call for the renationalisation of the docks and the restoration of secure employment with decent pay and conditions for all.

NICK CHAFFEY
SOUTHAMPTON SOCIALIST PARTY



Hull

Sacked P&O crew, together with rail members of the RMT union, joined Hull and District Trades Council activists for a rally and protest at King George dock in Hull.

After a short rally, we marched to the main access roundabout and held up the traffic, effectively stopping lorry drivers and car passengers who had booked onto the P&O ferry. Recognising that a successful protest would cause inconvenience, the Trades Council produced flyers to explain why the protest was taking place.

Throughout the entire day, no more than three cars were hostile to the protest. Typically, the ‘would-be-P&O passengers’ were actually supportive of the protest. Many said that it was only because they had

pre-booked that they were intending to go, and they would never use P&O again.

When the police tried to stop the roundabout protest, the march headed into town, blocking the main road. This unplanned march added to the delays and highlighted the protest.

Protesters were further encouraged by the news that the ‘Pride of Hull’, which had sneaked out of Hull earlier in the week and sailed to Rotterdam, had returned with its cargo unloaded. Dutch dockers had refused to unload in solidarity.

Moving forward, the Trades Council is leafletting the docks to try and ensure that Hull dockers boycott P&O goods. We will continue to work with the RMT to ensure a victory.

MICK WHALE
SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBER AND JOINT PRESIDENT
HULL AND DISTRICT TRADES COUNCIL



Dover

The demo in Dover on Saturday in support of the sacked P&O workers was loud, energetic and full of anger. Anger at the P&O chief who openly admitted in the Commons that he broke the law sacking 800 workers and astonishingly said he would do it again.

500 people took part in the march from Maritime House to the Dover

ports. There is huge public support for these workers; many joined as the demo progressed, or cheered. Car and lorry drivers tooted, and those in their homes came out with pots and pans to cheer us on. The demo started and ended with a rally. Eric Segal, a member of the Socialist Party, spoke and brought solidarity from the South East Kent Trade Union Council.

ISAÏ PRIVA
LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

Liverpool

Hundreds met at Crosby Seafarers centre to march in defence of the 800 sacked P&O workers.

There was a good activist turnout and contingents from many unions: PCS, Unite, Unison and GMB. There

was a huge turnout from RMT members; the Belfast branch crossed the Irish sea to attend, and the black and ethnic minorities conference, which was meeting in the city on the same day, sent a delegation.

NEIL DUNNE
LIVERPOOL SOCIALIST PARTY

Coventry bin worker protest takes on anti-union Labour council



ADAM HARMSWORTH
COVENTRY SOCIALIST PARTY

We are not lambs in your hands. You’ve created a pack of wolves and when you come for one of us, you come for all of us”. Those were the words of a defiant striking driver addressing the Coventry Labour council on 26 March.

Hundreds of protesters, from across the trade union movement, travelled into Coventry city centre in support of Coventry’s striking Unite bin lorry drivers. These workers have been taking all-out strike action since 31 January over pay, against a Labour-run council determined to break the union.

Among the speakers was Unite General Secretary, Sharon Graham. She announced the suspension of Coventry’s Unite-member Labour councillors from the union saying: “You won’t be getting your hands on any of my members’ money for your elections in May!” (see right)

Coventry council has slandered the drivers for months, brought in scab workers on more than the drivers are even asking for, and suspended rep Pete Randle in a blatant act of trade union victimisation. The council has now cost the city around £3 million trying to break the strike.

Socialist Party members came in force from across the country to support this important protest, recognising its political significance. Coventry council’s actions lay bare what the Labour Party has become, rotten to the core with right-wingers

Unite suspends anti-worker councillors - take them on at the ballot box too!

Coventry Labour councillors, by attacking striking union members, deserve suspension from their union, Unite, and more. Unite General Secretary Sharon Graham’s announcement will be applauded by trade union activists up and down the country who have faced over a decade of attacks from Labour and Tory councils.

Pressure will grow on Unite, and other Labour-affiliated council unions Unison and GMB, to consider whether Labour councillors are acting in members’ interests, and what action should be taken against those that don’t.

Labour councillors have a choice:

they can adopt Unite’s policy of setting no-cuts budgets to defend jobs and services, and address the cost-of-living crisis their workers face by paying a decent wage. If they fail to do so, or attack workers who stand up like they have in Coventry, then they should not just be suspended by the union, but be unseated at the ballot box too.

That’s why the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, of which the Socialist Party is a constituent part, will be standing candidates in the local elections in May, and is encouraging all trade unionists that want to fight back to consider standing too.

and anti-worker careerists leading it.

Socialist Party members were busy throughout the demo, handing out our latest strike bulletin to protesters and discussing it. We called for an electoral challenge to Labour as a step to building a new mass workers’ party.

A number of striking drivers have torn up their Labour membership cards; some have said they will help build a socialist challenge in Coventry by supporting Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition candidates in May’s local elections. Some striking workers have already joined the Socialist Party, and we came away from the protest with a bundle of names

of Coventry workers and youth who want to join.

In her speech as president of Coventry TUC, Socialist Party member Jane Nellist pointed out the strike was already inspiring other workers to fight for the wages they need. She added that “capitalism is incapable of meeting all our needs. That’s why we fight to change our society along socialist lines so that the wealth is used for the majority, not the few”.

She also recalled the reputed dying words of Coventry socialist Tom Mann: “Tell the comrades to be of good courage, go on with the work”. After this fantastic protest, the Socialist Party and the striking workers will certainly be doing that!

theSocialist

formerly **Militant**

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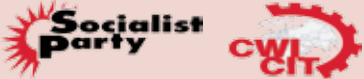
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"The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it."
Karl Marx

Resisting Rishi's cost-of-living squeeze



The main aims of Rishi Sunak's 'mini-budget' were blatant: blame the cost-of-living pain on the war in Ukraine; line up a little pre-general election sweeteners - mainly a future one percentage point cut in income tax; dishonestly paint himself as a tax-cutter in the hope of gaining personal support among Tory members.

But, amid the crisis of their system, the defenders of capitalism cannot determine the outcome of their actions.

Virtually all the right-wing newspapers, normally loyal to the Tories, expressed outrage on their front pages the next day.

The Financial Times, warned that Sunak might be forced to take further measures quickly, given the falling living standards which he had utterly failed to address in the budget.

In a snap YouGov poll, just 6% of people said Sunak had done enough to tackle the cost-of-living crisis. Seven in ten people felt he had not done enough. The Resolution Foundation says that of every £3 of new



Of every £3 of new help provided by the chancellor, £2 will go to people in the top half of the income distribution

help provided by the chancellor, £2 will go to people in the top half of the income distribution. The idea that falling living standards are a product of the war also doesn't wash.

The Tories' approach is causing concern among the defenders of capitalism who wish to maintain their system of exploitation. The threat to it comes from the working class turning its anger into organised collective action industrially and politically.

L'Atelier, which is part of the BNP Paribas bank, warned of the danger of "social unrest, protest and extremism" in Britain. John Egan, the bank's chief executive, said: "Some factors are unavoidable... But others, such as the high cost of essential ingredients of living such as housing, could be fixed with the right set of policies."

The 'right set of policies' are easier said than done for Sunak. He has his own personal ambitions to attend to, a reflection of the split and divided nature of the Tory party.

Many Tories fear that measures to protect working-class living standards will not satisfy and that appetite will grow with the eating.

Inevitably, in the absence of a mass workers' party, some of this anger can seek expression by some voting Labour at the upcoming local government elections, many 'holding their noses'. But it's clear that Starmer's Labour has no programme for fighting poverty.

That's why the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition will be standing candidates in the election on 5 May, pointing out what role fighting councils could play in the cost-of living war.

Labour-led councils have a combined spending power greater than the gross domestic product of nine EU countries and the state budgets of sixteen! And this doesn't take into account the borrowing powers councils also have to add to their spending power.

This shows the possibilities there are, not only to resist further austerity but to make significant improvements to peoples' lives in the here and now.

No one need have their energy cut off - because councils could provide grants, while also putting their shoulder to the campaign for nationalisation of the energy companies. No services need be cut - councils could set budgets based on what is needed and join the fight for the Tories to pay up.

There is much more that councils with the will and a programme to fight to improve the lives of working-class people could do.

But standing candidates in the local elections is just the first step towards the urgent task of building a mass working-class political alternative that can fight for an end to this unequal, crisis-ridden capitalist system.



In a snap YouGov poll, just 6% of people said Sunak had done enough to tackle the cost-of-living crisis



PHOTO PAUL MATTISON

We say:

Pay, benefits, pensions

- An immediate above-inflation pay rise for workers to restore wages after over a decade of pay freezes and below-inflation rises
- Regular pay increases for all, linked to trade-union agreed measures of inflation
- Raise the minimum wage to £15 an hour, without exemptions
- Restore the pension triple lock
- Restore the additional £20-a-week Universal Credit payment. End the benefit cap
- Living benefits and pensions for all who need them, rising with the cost of living

Housing

- Freeze council and social housing rents
- Rent controls to cap rents - decided by

elected bodies of tenants, housing workers and trade union representatives

Make the rich pay, not the workers

- No rise in national insurance or council tax, scrap student debt
- No worker should be made to pay more tax, raise tax thresholds in line with inflation
- Take the wealth off the super-rich, nationalise the top 150 companies and banks to be run under democratic working-class control and management, with compensation only on the basis of proven need

Price rises

- Reverse the rise in the energy price cap. Nationalise energy and other utilities under democratic workers' control and management to reduce bills by removing the profit motive

- No increase in public transport fares. Return transport into public hands, to guarantee a fully funded, free, environmentally friendly, sustainable transport system
- Stop price rises, end bosses' profiteering. Open the books of big retailers to inspection by trade unions. Nationalise the big retailers under democratic workers' control to be run to meet need, not for profit

New workers' party

- No trust in Starmer's Labour to fight in our interests. For a new mass workers' party based on trade union and workers' struggle

Socialism

- End the chaos of the capitalist market. For a socialist plan of production, based on the need of the overwhelming majority, not for profit



The multi-millionaire Tory Chancellor's latest budget has pushed millions more households into poverty PHOTO TO DOWNING ST/CC

Sunak slams benefit claimants and pensioners

JAMES COLLETT

GLOUCESTERSHIRE SOCIALIST PARTY

Rishi Sunak's budget statement exemplified the ruthlessness, hypocrisy and violence towards the poor which the British ruling class has been practising for centuries.

From this government stuffed with millionaires we get a budget which spits on the working class.

The Tories removed the £20 uplift in Universal Credit in October. Now, with official inflation due to hit 8.7% (and already at 45% on some basic

goods), benefits including Universal Credit will only increase by 3.1%. With one hand they take, with the other they give us the finger.

This real-terms cut in benefits is an issue for the whole working class. Many people on Universal Credit are in work, but paid poverty wages or facing underemployment.

The state pension remains well below the poverty line. Disabled people are tried like criminals in Work Capability Assessments. Carers' Allowance will go up by just 10p a week: the well-fed dinosaurs in parliament

think £69.70 a week is good enough for people who work 24 hours a day caring for family members.

Crushed

The working class is already being crushed by rising energy prices. Many are forced to privately rent and see their rent going up year after year.

I live in a deprived area, and what I hear people talking about as they queue up at the shop, the laundrette or the bus-stop, is inflation austerity: "They don't pay us more, but they expect us to pay more all the time".

5p fuel insult just doesn't cut it

CALVIN FOWLER

WORCESTER SOCIALIST PARTY

The Tory government's announcement that they are cutting the price of petrol by 5p and saying that is the greatest fuel reduction in years, is an absolute joke!

They have actually reduced the price of petrol not by years, but merely weeks. Hardly Back To The Future is it? 'Hey Boris, I'm setting the time machine back to 20 February 2022!'

With the 54% increase in electricity and gas, 'doing us all a favour' by taking the price of fuel back three

weeks is insulting.

On a personal level, I essentially have to work an extra shift to pay the cost of commuting. As recently as last summer, £30 a-week was enough for the 30-mile round trip, five days a week in my small car.

Last weekend I had to put in another £36, and have started doing an extra shift on Saturday morning to cover the cost. My wife's commute takes our weekly spending on fuel to around £100, just to get to work!

5p does not hack it. Yet again the bosses and the government use any excuse to crush the working class:



Covid, Ukraine crisis, anything to deflect attention from their greed.

● Childcare costs push families to the brink

For free childcare and paid parental leave

BEA GARDNER

ENFIELD AND LEA VALLEY SOCIALIST PARTY

Britain has the second highest childcare costs in the world. And the cost-of-living crisis is pushing them yet higher.

For many, one parent's wages barely covers the bill - and that's before rent, gas, water and food. I've seen numerous posts on social media from other new parents, and even parents-to-be, desperately trying to find nursery places.

Over 40% of local authorities do not have enough places for children under two. One friend, a social worker and single mother, is unable to return to work because she can only find six hours a week of childcare.

For those who do find a place, they face extortionate costs. I saw one post from a teaching assistant who is only paid for term-time work, but could only secure a childcare place on basis of paying all year round - more than her yearly wage!

Unsustainable costs

Two-thirds of parents recently surveyed were paying as much or more on childcare costs than on housing. It is often only sustainable by relying on family and friends for help, normally grandparents. Otherwise, people end up working multiple jobs and long hours with no family time. So many parents I know work shifts or weekends to share childcare.

More than 11,000 childcare places

have been lost during the Covid-19 pandemic. Privatised nurseries have shut up shop, unable to make a profit. It doesn't have to be this way and shouldn't be this way.

Local councils should subsidise childcare costs, invest in council-run services, and reopen the thousands of children's centres closed over the last decade. Childcare should be a publicly owned service, employing well-paid, fully trained professionals and run to meet the needs of parents and children, not profit.

Parents, especially women, are being priced out of work - and families forced into poverty. We need to fight for free childcare, and the option of extended, paid parental leave until children reach school age.



WHAT WE STAND FOR

The Socialist Party fights for socialism - a democratic society run for the needs of all and not the profits of a few. We also oppose every cut, fighting in our day-to-day campaigning for every possible improvement for working-class people. The organised working class has the potential power to stop the cuts and transform society.

As capitalism dominates the globe, the struggle for genuine socialism must be international. The Socialist Party is part of the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI) which organises across the world.

Our demands include...

PUBLIC SERVICES

- No to ALL cuts in jobs, public services and benefits. Defend our pensions.
- No to privatisation and the Private Finance Initiative (PFI). Renationalise all privatised utilities and services, with compensation paid only on the basis of proven need.
- Fully fund all services and run them under accountable, democratic committees that include representatives of service workers and users.
- Free, publicly run, good quality education, available to all at any age. Abolish university tuition fees now and introduce a living grant. No to academies and 'free schools'!
- A socialist NHS to provide for everyone's health needs - free at the point of use and under democratic control. Kick out private contractors!
- Keep council housing publicly owned. For a massive building programme of publicly owned housing, on an environmentally sustainable basis, to provide good quality homes with low rents.

WORK AND INCOME

- Trade union struggle for an immediate increase in the minimum wage to £12 an hour without exemptions as a step towards a real living wage of at least £15. For an annual increase in the minimum wage linked to average earnings. Scrap zero-hour contracts.
- All workers, including part-timers, temps, casual and migrant workers to have trade union rates of pay, employment protection, and sickness and holiday rights from day one of employment.
- An immediate 50% increase in the state retirement pension, as a step towards a living pension.

- Scrap Universal Credit. For the right to decent benefits, education, training, or a job, without compulsion.
- Scrap the anti-trade union laws! For fighting trade unions, democratically controlled by their members. Full-time union officials to be regularly elected and receive no more than a worker's wage. Support the National Shop Stewards Network.
- A 35-hour week with no loss of pay.

ENVIRONMENT

- Major research and investment into replacing fossil fuels with renewable energy and into ending the problems of early obsolescence and un-recycled waste.
- Public ownership of the energy generating industries. No to nuclear power. No to Trident.
- A democratically planned, low-fare, publicly owned transport system, as part of an overall plan against environmental pollution.

RIGHTS

- Oppose discrimination on the grounds of race, gender, disability, sexuality, age, and all other forms of prejudice.
- Repeal all laws that trample over civil liberties. For the right to protest! End police harassment.
- Defend abortion rights. For a woman's right to choose when and whether to have children.
- For the right to asylum. No to racist immigration laws.
- For the right to vote at 16.

MASS WORKERS' PARTY

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

SOCIALISM AND INTERNATIONALISM

- No to imperialist wars and occupations.
- Tax 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.
- 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 bosses' neoliberal European Union and single market. For a socialist Europe and a socialist world!

Do you agree? Join the fightback!

JOIN THE SOCIALISTS

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

Help fund the fightback!

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socialistparty.org.uk/donate





100 days in: Just Eat/Stuart strikes continue to spread

On Friday 1 April, Just Eat/Stuart takeaway delivery drivers in Sheffield will pass 100 days of taking targeted strike action against pay cuts. This inspiring strike, organised with the IWGB independent union, has spread to over a dozen other towns and cities, especially as fuel price hikes and inflation eat into drivers' earnings. The spreading strike, plus direct action against Greggs, one of Just Eat's main clients, have forced the company into a meeting with the Sheffield strike leader.

ALISTAIR TICE
SHEFFIELD SOCIALIST PARTY

● Morley and Birstall drivers join Just Eat/Stuart strike

On 24 March, drivers in both Morley and Birstall in West Yorkshire joined the ongoing strikes by gig economy food delivery drivers, started last year by drivers in Sheffield.

Since Valentine's Day, Socialist Party members from Leeds and elsewhere in West Yorkshire have been supporting drivers taking weekly strike action in Heckmondwike, on a retail park including McDonald's, on both Just Eat and UberEats platforms.

Meetings to organise those strikes have led to contact with drivers from Leeds, which could spread the strikes further. While many of the striking drivers are not unionised, many are joining the IWGB, which initiated the strikes in Sheffield and has organised a strike fund for its members which urgently needs donations.

Details at: <https://actionnetwork.org/fundraising/sheffield-justeat-riders-are-going-on-strike-pay-rise-not-pay-cut>

IAIN DALTON
LEEDS SOCIALIST PARTY



Protests at Greggs HQ in Newcastle ELAINE BRUNSILL



Sweet factory workers walk out in York

“Valeo is profitable only thanks to our hard work”

MAURICE COOPER
YORK SOCIALIST PARTY

Valeo sweet factory workers in York walked out on 21 March. A GMB union organiser said: “GMB members never make the decision to take industrial action lightly. However, as inflation and the cost of living soar, our members have been left with choosing whether to buy food or heat their homes.

“Valeo is profitable thanks to the hard work and commitment of our members, and they deserve to have this recognised through decent

rates of pay and having the terms and conditions respected.

“Instead, Valeo chooses to offer our members a derisory below-inflation two-year pay deal, reduce annual leave and overtime premiums, and attack their right to organise for better pay and conditions through the GMB as their trade union.”

“This is an absolute kick in the teeth for a workforce that bent over backwards to keep the supply chain going right throughout the pandemic.” Workers in other sites around the country also face derecognition of the GMB by Valeo.

PCS pay vote: Build now for statutory ballot

J-P ROSSER
BRANCH SECRETARY HMRC WEST MERCIA PCS
(PERSONAL CAPACITY)

The latest stage of the Public and Commercial Services (PCS) union's national campaign was a consultative ballot, which ended on 21 March. Members were asked whether they supported the national pay claim of a 10% pay rise and a demand for the return of overpaid pension contributions.

The turnout was 45.2%, around 70,000 PCS members, with 97.3% supporting the pay claim, and 80.7% willing to take industrial action to achieve it. This is a strong result in the circumstances, and is similar to the last consultative ballot in 2017. This achieved a 49% turnout, with

79% willing to take industrial action to break the government-imposed pay cap.

The 2017 indicative ballot lead to statutory ballots in 2018 and 2019, the latter achieving a 47.7% turnout. These statutory ballots failed to clear the Tory-imposed 50% turnout threshold; in part because, as Broad Left Network (BLN) members argued at the time, the demands were too narrow and disaggregated ballots should have been considered.

It was a dereliction of leadership that the national executive committee (NEC) then halted the national campaign and made numerous fundamental errors.

In 2020, against the background of the Covid outbreak, the NEC signed up to the concept of national

unity by “parking” the PCS pay claim. Unsurprisingly, the government didn't reward PCS for this gesture, and within weeks the NEC made a U-turn to reintroduce the full pay claim.

No leadership

The NEC then moved to petition the government, aiming for 100,000 signatures. This threshold was achieved five months after the petition was launched, and was celebrated as a significant victory for members. Yet with no central leadership, departmental groups were left to fend for themselves as best they could.

Then 2021 saw concession bargaining and multi-year pay deals being agreed in HMRC and the Ministry of Justice, with NEC support. The

national campaign ground to a halt, with the union leadership informing the government that the union was prepared to sell conditions for pay rather than challenge their pay restrictions.

Against this backdrop, the turnout of 45.2% is a success story for members and activists. However, the sombre mood of the Left Unity ruling group on the NEC tells a different story. They are imploring that members “don't mourn” the result!

Members will understandably question what happens next. The Left Unity top-down approach won't work. It's clear that a serious, concerted campaign is needed to shift the government.

The next step must be to build for a statutory ballot for action. The PCS leadership needs to engage with groups and branches, not simply impose demands on them by diktat. It needs to inform members of the type of action needed to shift

the government, and what that will look like. It must also contact other unions, outside of the Trades Union Congress's formal structure where necessary, to create a coalition of the willing to fight on pay.

These aren't new demands. Yet five years after the first indicative ballot of members we're still waiting for this to happen. A Left Unity-led NEC has consistently failed to take up these demands.

In April 2022, PCS members will have the opportunity to elect Broad Left Network members to lead a radical, fighting PCS campaign. The Broad Left Network is already gaining support, having increased the number of branch nominations. We ask that PCS members cast their vote for Marion Lloyd as president and for all Broad Left Network candidates.

● For more information about the BLN see pcsbln.wordpress.com

Glasgow equal pay – working-class women force council climbdown

SOCIALIST PARTY SCOTLAND STATEMENT

Working-class women in Glasgow have once again defeated the SNP-led council over equal pay. Faced with a 48-hour strike on 29 and 30 March by 12,000 low-paid workers, the council leadership has climbed down.

The strike would have closed all primary schools and nurseries. Homecare, cleaning, catering, residential homes, homelessness hostels, addiction services and admin functions would have been hugely impacted.

The SNP leadership in Glasgow had torn up the equal pay agreement that followed the successful 2018 strike. The SNP hoped to divide the workers into the ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving’, and thereby cut the pay bill by hundreds of millions of pounds.

Many thousands of workers who were due interim payments in compensation after years of unequal pay would, under the SNP's plan, be excluded. £500 million was paid in compensation following the 2018 strike action. The trade unions have opened the door to hundreds of millions in further payments being made to low-paid women workers in Glasgow.

As the workers pointed out, they were paid out in 2019 because their pay was unequal – nothing has changed since then, it's still unequal. The same jobs in the same unequal pay scheme.

Unison, GMB and Unite unions launched a joint campaign. This led



The council tried to dump the deal won by the 2018 strike PUBLIC SERVICES INTERNATIONAL/CC

to a huge ballot return – Unison and GMB members voted by over 90% in favour of strike action. 9,000 Unison members and 3,000 GMB members would have been out on strike.

Facing a united workforce, and with a council election campaign due to begin, the council has now pledged that all those entitled to payments will receive them on the exact same basis as agreed in 2019. Moreover, payments will also be made to cover 2018 to March 2022.

Unison says strike action planned for 20 and 21 April is still on the table, “because we want an implementation plan produced by the council in the coming weeks that is acceptable”. If that “is not forthcoming then we will not hesitate to implement the strike mandate.”

Socialist Party Scotland members are part of the leadership of Glasgow City Unison, and have played an important role in the dispute. As the Glasgow City Unison statement makes clear: “This important concession has been won for one reason and one reason only – the willingness of trade union members to take strike action.”

The outcome proves once more that militant industrial action is essential to defeat cuts-making councillors and the bosses.

Socialist Party Scotland and the Scottish Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) will be taking those lessons out to working-class communities in Glasgow as part of the upcoming election campaign.

● Pathetic pay offer brings south London bus strike

BERKAY KARTAV
SOUTH WEST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

Bus drivers in south London were on strike on 28 and 29 March after rejecting a pathetic 1.5% pay offer from Arriva bus company. If the dispute is not resolved, Unite the Union is planning further strike action.

98% of drivers voted in favour of strike action against this pay offer – a real-terms pay cut.

Even the threat of a strike brought the employers to the negotiating table, and they doubled their derisory pay offer to 3%. Given the fact that inflation is 8%, workers have rejected the ‘pay cut’ offers and demanded a decent pay rise.

Hundreds of bus drivers in Croydon, Thornton Heath and Norwood took strike action, causing severe disruptions in south London. Socialist

2 July NSSN conference

Our chance to discuss union fightback to bosses’ offensive

ROB WILLIAMS
NATIONAL SHOP STEWARDS NETWORK CHAIR

It's never been more necessary for the trade unions to give a fighting lead. Workers are facing the biggest squeeze on their living standards for generations.

The cost of living is going through the roof with real inflation heading towards double figures. Yet the bosses and their Tory government want to make us pay the price.

Boris Johnson is continuing to hold down public sector pay, while turning a blind eye to the brutal illegal sackings by P&O on the back of the vicious employers’ ‘fire and rehire’ offensive.

Two years of Covid have shown that workers are the key force in society. We have had to get organised to keep workplaces safe and resist the bosses’ attacks.

Many workers have been prepared to take action and have forced companies to concede significant wage rises. Other important victories have been won, such as the Manchester bus workers and at Barts NHS Trust in London.

But the dispute at P&O shows that with the bosses’ profits at stake, they will use brutal measures against us. Disgracefully, Coventry Labour council has spent millions trying to break the bin strike (see pages 2 and 3).

The National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) was initiated by transport union RMT under its late, great

general secretary Bob Crow in 2006. We continue to build solidarity and support for unions and their members taking action. We have always argued that mass united action can push back the Tories and bosses.

In March 2011, 750,000 union members marched through the streets of London on the Trades Union Congress (TUC) demonstration against the austerity offensive of the Tory-led government. It led directly to the two million-strong public sector general strike that November on pensions.

We welcome that the TUC has finally called the ‘Britain Needs a Pay Rise’ demo on 18 June. We will help build what needs to be a massive mobilisation that could be the platform for industrial action across the public and private sector.

2 July will be the 15th national NSSN conference, and as usual will be a vital forum for union reps and members, along with anti-cuts campaigners, to come together to talk about their struggles and discuss out the strategy, tactics and programme needed for the fight of our lives.

● We're pleased to announce that Unite general secretary Sharon Graham has agreed to speak at the conference

2022 NSSN conference

- Saturday 2 July
- 11am-4.30pm
- Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1R 4RL

Get all the latest union news...

nationalshop stewardsnetwork

with the NSSN bulletin shopstewards.net

PLACE A MAY DAY GREETING IN the **Socialist**

Support the working-class press

- Calling all trade union branches and committees, community campaigns and student groups!
- Show solidarity and fund the socialist press with a 2022 greeting
- Prices start at £30 for a small box - minimum price negotiable
- £55 for our most popular size, 1/16 of a page or £90 for 1/8 and £170 for 1/4,
- £300 for 1/2, £500 for a page and a 20% discount until 31 March!
- Visit socialistparty.org.uk/mayday

Party members were on the picket lines supporting the strikers.

Workers shouldn't pay for the cost-of-living crisis. There should be an

immediate above-inflation pay rise for bus drivers to make up for below-inflation pay rises over the last decade.

BOSNIA: 30 YEARS ON CAPITALISM CONTINUES TO FUEL NATIONALIST AND SECTARIAN DIVISION

Bosnia-Herzegovina declared independence from Yugoslavia 30 years ago, on 5 April 1992. However, the referendum vote in favour of that decision was largely without the participation of the Bosnian Serb minority – around a quarter of Bosnia’s population. Ominously, war had broken out in neighbouring Croatia the previous year following the declaration of independence there. War followed too in Bosnia, and the concluding peace agreement formulated at Dayton in the US in 1995 didn’t overcome the nationalist and ethnic division - rather it was more entrenched than ever. Today, with war in the Ukraine raging, there is speculation about its effect on the Balkans, and whether it will be a factor that will accelerate the break-up of Bosnia. **Judy Beishon**, Socialist Party executive committee, looks at what happened in the Bosnia war and the prospects and lessons for today.

The war 30 years ago

The 1992-95 Bosnian war arose in connection with the collapse of multi-ethnic Yugoslavia, which was controlled by a bureaucratic elite. After initial progress on the basis of a Stalinist-type planned economy, the Yugoslav economy had descended into crisis by the 1970s, with workers suffering declining living standards. The introduction of elements of capitalism in an attempt to overcome the problems added to economic disruption. The breakup of Yugoslavia in the early 1990s, in the absence of a socialist alternative, opened the way to the restoration of capitalism. Increasingly, to safeguard or develop their own status, wealth and privileges, the ruling bureaucrats were turning to promoting nationalism as a way to secure themselves a social base and head off revolt from below by fostering division. Under the conditions of growing financial insecurity and poverty, the leaders, firstly in the Yugoslav

republic of Slovenia, and then in Croatia and Bosnia, gained an ear for their promises of improvement on the basis of breaking away from Yugoslavia. However, the minority populations inside the six republics in the Yugoslav federation were thrown into fear of being discriminated against or, even worse, of facing expulsion and violence. The fear was justified. When Croatia moved towards independence, the Serb minority suffered discrimination rather than having its rights protected. That led to war. Then, when independence was declared in neighbouring Bosnia, which was a patchwork of Serb, Croat and Bosnian Muslim communities, war broke out there too. The interventions of the world’s capitalist powers only worsened the polarisation, division and bloodshed. Whether they used diplomacy, sanctions, an arms embargo, the creation of so-called ‘safe havens’, or brutal bombardment of the Serb areas, none of it ended the war. The militias on the ground fought until their leaders viewed the potential for seizing more territory was mainly exhausted.

As well as a terrible death toll in the war, deliberate ‘ethnic cleansing’, together with people fleeing from the violence, created a capitalist Bosnia which, post-war, had much greater separation between nationalities and ethnicities than before the war. Serb, Croat and Muslim civilians had all been subjected to atrocities, but the Bosnian Muslims had suffered the highest death rate and were viewed by workers in many countries as the main victims. The name Srebrenica particularly sticks in minds, due to the barbarity of Bosnian Serb forces killing around 8,000 Muslim men and boys just outside that town. That, and other slaughters, led to calls internationally - including from many on the left - for the capitalist powers to send arms to the Bosnian Muslims. The imperialist powers had hypocritically imposed an arms embargo while, at the same time, Nato jets were sent to try to bomb the Bosnian Serbs into submission. The UN also intervened militarily under the guise of ‘peacekeeping’, with troops drawn from 42 countries. It was certainly true that the Serb and Croat warlords were fighting to carve up Bosnia. While recognising that was the case, we in the Socialist Party also argued that the Bosnian Muslim elite was not fundamentally different in its aspirations. It was acting in its own interests by trying to extend its influence and profit-making opportunities, and not those of the Bosniak working class. The Bosnian Muslim elite also used nationalism in a divisive way, antagonising the Bosnian Serb and Croat minorities. Arms sent into the hands of the pro-capitalist Muslim elite would inevitably be used in the class interests of that ruling layer, as it would have overall control of their use. So we didn’t call for the sending of arms to it, or for imperialist intervention in any other form, whether an embargo, sanctions or military action. At the same time, we were not pacifists calling abstractly for ‘peace’. Those who did so were in reality calling for a deal between capitalist elites that would carve up Bosnia between them, as happened at Dayton. We called for the building of democratically run workers’ organisations that could both organise armed defence and make appeals against division at

working-class level to the rank-and-file of the opposing militias. Had such organisations been present then in Bosnia, we would have called for the sending of finance and weapons to them. Securing that objective would have required the intervention of workers’ movements internationally, because the imperialist powers are only willing to send arms to regimes or forces that they believe will help serve their own interests - ie that will aid their exploitation of foreign markets, labour or natural resources. They rightly fear that armed workers’ organisations might go beyond the objective of ending a war, to then pursue the task of removing the entire system of the capitalist warmongers and exploiters.

Dayton agreement

The Dayton agreement rubber stamped internal boundaries within Bosnia mostly corresponding with the territory that had been seized by each side. The country was declared to be intact and multi-ethnic, but was effectively partitioned into two mainly self-governing parts: Republika Srpska (RS) and an unstable Muslim-Croat-led federation. Those two entities were linked by a frail all-Bosnia government, with the highest political authority being an internationally appointed, foreign, High Representative with extensive powers. A Constitutional Court with nine judges was set up, three of them non-Bosnian and selected by an EU court, and two each for the Muslims, Serbs and Croats. One of the Serbs’ grievances is that the foreign judges, together with the Bosniak judges, can outvote any positions of the Serb judges, even when the Serb judges combine with the Croats. Since Dayton, successive High Representatives have taken steps to increase the all-Bosnia state institutions based in Sarajevo at the expense of those in the two subentities - powers which RS is trying to reclaim. Last year and this year, tensions have been mounting in Bosnia, with the background of one of the worst Covid-19 death rates in Europe relative to population size, and related economic turmoil. This follows years of anger in the population over poor living standards, inequality and corruption at the top of society. The inability of capitalism in Bosnia to provide decent living standards for the overwhelming majority of people has continued to lay the ground for nationalist leaders to promote their own national or ethnic section of society over others. It serves to try to boost their standing, maintain their positions, and distract from the underlying cause of the mass discontent – the failings of the system that gives the ruling layer its profits and privileges.

“The interventions of the world’s capitalist powers only worsened the polarisation, division and bloodshed

Currently, right-wing nationalism is being whipped up by the Bosnian Serb regional government headed by Milorad Dodik. He has threatened to withdraw the Bosnian Serb entity RS from all-Bosnia institutions such as the rudimentary army, judiciary and tax authority, to instead have separate Serb-run equivalents of them in RS. This would be in keeping with his stated threat to secede from Bosnia. He stepped up that threat after a decision last July by the all-Bosnia High Commissioner – an official imposed by the western capitalist powers – to criminalise genocide denial, with genocide being defined by international and all-Bosnia authorities. This law was calculated to incriminate some of the RS leaders. Their response has included increasing military spending, and marking the 30th anniversary of the RS in January 2022 with a paramilitary police parade in Banja Luka, the largest RS city. The creep towards secession is still largely at the stage of preparation and propaganda and no doubt is linked to Dodik and Co trying to boost their popularity in the run up to Bosnia’s October elections, and also at trying to avoid corruption investigations. However, the interferences of regional and international capitalist powers, and the actions of the various nationalist dominated

authorities in Bosnia, are providing fuel for the RS to move further towards separation, and that is the trajectory. Meanwhile, the whipping up of nationalism in RS has triggered ugly racist incidents by right-wing Serbs against Muslims, such as firing in the air near mosques when prayers are taking place. At the same time, in Bosnia’s other component entity, the Muslim-Croat federation, the Croat leaders are in dispute with their Muslim (Bosniak) counterparts over the electoral system, arguments that are leading the Croat representatives in the same secessionist direction as the Serbs. October’s elections could become a further step on the road of centrifugal tendencies, as the Croats are threatening a boycott, which would trigger further turmoil.

Global interference

In January 2022, following a call by the Netherlands-based campaign group Platform BiH, protest rallies against the Bosnian Serb secessionist threat took place in 13 European countries and in the US. Platform BiH was quoted by Al Jazeera as saying: “The secession of Republika Srpska would be a reward to the Serbs for ethnic cleansing and genocide against Bosniaks. Many

fear the country is slipping back into divisions and conflicts.” They argued that protesters “want the EU and the USA to act in time, preventively, not reactively like in the 1990s”, and even added: “Although the Office of the High Representative in Bosnia has the power to remove any politician who violates the constitution, current High Representative Christian Schmidt has so far avoided doing so even though Dodik has repeatedly broken the law.” Along similar lines, the conflict analysis and advice organisation, International Crisis Group, has called on the EU to “seek to dissuade Serb separatists... by threatening to impose harsh sanctions on any leaders and businesses who take major steps in the direction of secession, such as re-establishing a Bosnian Serb army or rejecting the jurisdiction of the Constitutional Court”. These illusory ‘solutions’, though, would help push events towards the opposite of their intended outcome. They would also be

counter-productive for the western capitalists’ interests by driving the Bosnian Serb leaders and population closer to the influence of Russia and China. Socialists must have a very different, class-based standpoint. While the world’s imperialist powers - globally or regionally - often do try to head off conflicts, that doesn’t stem from humanitarianism, but rather is aimed at maintaining a level of stability to protect their own interests. They express only muted concern over the Kurds’ suffering following Nato member Turkey’s invasion of Afrin in Syria, as they don’t view it as in their interests to take it up forcefully. Nor do their interests always lie in preventing countries from breaking apart, as the recognition of Kosovo by many governments showed. Also, the imperialist powers themselves are often the underlying propelling force behind the conflicts in the first place, arising from them competing among themselves for influence and profit-making opportunities in smaller countries like those in the Balkans. As capitalism is

based on nation states, there is no international law or sanctions (which, by the way, the US applied on Dodik in January) that can stop capitalist elites from resorting to military action if they see it as in their interests to do so. Another important point for socialists is that ‘unity’ within the boundaries of a capitalist state shouldn’t be imposed on any group or nationality. Instead, their right to self-determination must be recognised. Borders in the Balkans, as everywhere, have not been decided democratically, but by edicts of rulers. As Lenin, a key leader of the 1917 Russian revolution explained, countering division between peoples cannot be done by advocating any coercion in relations between them. They should be free to democratically decide their own future and, on the basis of transforming society to socialism, can then choose to link up with other peoples in a voluntary federation.

Preventing war

Under present conditions, is a new Bosnian war approaching? The 1992-95 war arose from a particular set of conditions connected with the dissolution of Yugoslavia. Today the country has more territorial separation between the different ethnic, religious and national sections of society than it did then; it has no large-scale armed forces; and emigration has been used as an outlet for a substantial number of its people. The trajectory is towards break-up, but even that doesn’t inevitably mean outright war. However, military conflict can erupt again in the future, especially as a result of interference from regional or international powers. The only way of surely preventing it, is through the working class building its own organisations and adopting a socialist programme for the removal of capitalism. Last year, protests in Bosnia included a march in Sarajevo against the government’s abysmal and corrupt Covid pandemic response; a protest of hundreds of health workers in Mostar over pay; a stoppage and demonstration by thousands of coal miners against planned cuts to jobs and wages; and a protest of thousands in Banja Luka against the Bosnian Serb government. There have also been significant protest movements in other Balkan countries, including in Slovenia and Albania. When those protesters move to reject any trust in pro-capitalist leaders of any stripe, and instead organise democratically in workers’ interests, the prospect of a new future will open up, one free from poverty, division and war.



Nuclear power: Government invests in privatised power plant

DAVE CARR

EAST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

The Johnson government is stepping up its commitment to expand nuclear power with the announcement that it is to take a 20% stake in the new 'Sizewell C'. The pressurised water reactor, being built in Suffolk by the majority state-owned French energy company EDF, is the same design as EDF's Hinkley C nuclear plant under construction in Somerset.

Government ministers justify this underwriting of the controversial project on the grounds that it is transitioning the economy away from fossil fuels to achieve its net-zero carbon dioxide emissions 2050 target, and to improve 'energy security' in the light of the Ukraine war.

Fossil fuel tax breaks

None of this is true. The government continues to give tax breaks and other incentives to 'big oil', and the amount of Russian gas imported into the UK makes up less than 4% of what is used. Incidentally, concerns over 'energy security' haven't prevented China's state-owned General Nuclear Power Corporation from acquiring a minority stakeholding in Hinkley C.

In reality, the government is trying to prop up EDF's deeply flawed nuclear power programme in the UK.

The existing eight nuclear power stations were sold to EDF after



IMAGE: PIGSELS.COM

Labour privatised British Energy in 2007, but these old reactors are coming to the end of their useful life and are due to be phased out by 2030.

Brown gave the go-ahead to EDF to build Hinkley C with a new design of pressurised water reactor in 2008. Tory chancellor George Osborne signed the deal in 2012 when the estimated cost was £16 billion.

Under the deal, EDF was guaranteed a wholesale price for its nuclear energy, linked to inflation. If the price (more than double the cost per kilowatt hour compared to renewables) fell below the benchmark, then domestic consumers (us) would make up the difference.

In June 2017, the National Audit Office report on Hinkley C said: "The department (BEIS) has committed electricity consumers and taxpayers to a high-cost and risky deal".

By January 2021 the estimated construction cost for Hinkley C had risen to an eye-watering £23 billion and it continues to rise. Its start-up date of 2023 has been pushed back to June 2026.

Hinkley C must be the most expensive government job creation programme in history!

However, it's conceivable that it won't start at all. Hinkley C's design is a mirror of EDF's Flamanville 3 nuclear reactor in northern France, which began construction in 2007. It has been dogged by safety concerns and construction delays. In 2020 it

was five times over budget, and the 'ten-year project' isn't expected to actually start generating electricity until 2024. The then French energy minister Barbara Pompili called the project "a mess".

Why does the UK government push ahead with such a 'white elephant'? In large part it is ideological, wanting to promote a profit-driven 'market-based solution' to meeting energy needs. This is despite the fact that no private consortium would touch large-scale nuclear energy with a barge pole without the investment of massive amounts of public finance.

But as the Guardian revealed, the civil nuclear power industry also provides the necessary technical know-how to upkeep the government's Trident nuclear weapons capability.

The alternative to phasing out fossil fuels is not expensive and toxic nuclear power but investment in green renewables such as wind, solar and wave power. Moreover, a nationwide programme of home and workplace insulation and energy efficiency would massively reduce overall energy demand and create hundreds of thousands of highly skilled jobs.

However, such a green energy programme is predicated by public ownership as part of a democratically agreed plan of production - a socialist system.

TV review: Skint

'Too real' dramatisation of working-class life in cost-of-living crisis

SARE O'NEILL

SOUTH EAST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

"People like us aren't allowed to make mistakes" is said by Tara, a waitress struggling to support her widowed mother, to the camera. This is just after the Saw-like scene of a woman tied to her bed is revealed.

A little bit of a fantasy for anyone who has worked in customer service, Tara monologues revenge against a customer who tried to get her fired for bringing the incorrect starter.

This shows the two sides of the same situation, frustrating for both but in different ways. The woman sees the mistake as something annoying, a way to show off to her friends through putting someone else down. For Tara, it's her life. Losing her job means losing anything she's managed to scrape together.

Skint is made up of a series of 15-minute unflinching monologues, detailing the experience of a single working-class character. It offers an uninterrupted insight into their lives; these are working-class main characters, not a supporting cast. They're not the butlers or servers, there to support the upper-class characters. They look directly into the camera, and talk about their lives and

experiences. Think Fleabag but less middle class.

The class divide, and the conflict that comes from it, is seen in all of the stories. These individuals have been pushed to the limit, something familiar in the current cost-of-living crisis. From tenuous housing, to renting, to mental health, to grief; it gives an insight into the ease with which people can go from struggling, to absolute poverty. There's simmering frustration and rage, but an inability to do anything about it. It's not personal failings, its systemic.

The characters each have an overarching storyline, but throwaway lines show the difficulty of surviving day to day as a working-class person. It might be a case of missing a day's pay due to sickness, or asking "how long will I be able to work for?" when given a fatal diagnosis.

Even with the more understated monologues, like Hannah working a zero-hour contract job with a newborn, who thought "if we were both working, we'd stand a better chance of a decent rental". She isn't afforded the Instagram maternity leave she sees on social media, forced back into precarious work in order to keep her head above water. Women in zero-hour care work were among those hit hardest by the pandemic, forced



Skint is available to view on bbc iplayer until February 2023

into precarious situations for long hours, for little pay. She wants more for her child, a promise of a better life for the next generation. "It's a rough patch, that's all it is," she says unconvincingly. It shouts of asking the public to struggle through this year, and the next, as a way to get through 'hard times'.

The thing is - these pieces aren't speculative. Each one is written and directed by people with direct

personal experience of poverty. The novelist Kerry Hudson, for example, is the writer of Hannah's monologue, with this and her other works being based on personal experience of a difficult and deprived childhood. However, just like the series shows elements of community being used to help others also struggling, this project is being used to create all-important first credits, a foothold into the industry.

Each monologue seems like a deep chat with your friend, not preachy, close enough to tragedy but too real to be overdramatic.

All the characters are trapped in their circumstances, with small glimpses of hope from their community or families, but unable to escape. A show not to be missed. But with Rishi Sunak's recent budget, it sounds like he may have given it a pass.

P&O, Coventry bins, TUSC elections

Our socialist message costs money



CHRIS NEWBY
SOCIALIST PARTY FIGHTING FUND ORGANISER

We are now just £1,603 short of our £25,000 fighting fund target. Socialist Party members and supporters have responded brilliantly to help us smash through. Let's have a real drive in the next few days, before the quarter ends on 5 April.

Just a look through the pages of the Socialist each week shows the number of workers and community struggles that Socialist Party members are participating in with our socialist message.

On the demos in Dover, Hull and

Liverpool in support of sacked P&O workers, our nationalisation placards went down well. While campaigning on the demo in Hull our members raised £28 for the fighting fund calling for the nationalisation of P&O.

On the demo in Coventry in support of the striking bin workers, our placards calling for the reinstatement of sacked bin worker Pete Randle and to stop all cuts and union busting were well received too. Coventry Socialist Party has also produced ten issues of a Socialist Party bulletin for Coventry bin workers.

In addition to this, we are producing tens of thousands of leaflets supporting hundreds of Socialist Party

candidates, standing as part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC), in the May council elections. But all of this costs money. That is why we are asking all our members to continue their fundraising efforts.

There is still time to organise extra campaign stalls to help us reach our target. The anger that the vast majority of people feel at the huge cost-of-living crisis is beginning to be reflected on our Socialist Party campaign stalls.

In Leeds, our members have raised £30 campaigning on this issue, calling for the renationalisation of the energy companies. In Waltham Cross, in Hertfordshire, our members raised £28 saying it's the rich that should pay for the cost-of-living crisis.

It is still not too late to make a donation to help fund all our campaigning work. As well as donating yourself, is there someone else you can ask to make sure we reach our target, and ensure we have enough campaigning material to raise our socialist message in the stormy events that lie ahead?



SOCIALIST PARTY FIGHTING FUND

AREA	£ RECEIVED	£ TARGET	Q1: JANUARY-MARCH 2022	DEADLINE: 5 APRIL 2022
Northern	1,049	750		140%
North West	1,466	1,150		127%
Wales	2,736	2,300		119%
South West	2,138	1,800		119%
East Midlands	1,622	1,850		88%
Yorkshire	2,117	2,550		83%
Southern & SE	1,905	2,350		81%
London	3,317	4,600		72%
West Midlands	1,549	2,600		60%
Eastern	199	1,200	17%	
Other	5,299	3,850		138%
TOTAL	23,397	25,000		94%

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End rent and service charge rip-off

Housing associations have a collective surplus of over £4 billion. There is no need for them to raise rents or hike up service charges. Some associations have even managed to increase their surpluses, even after the government instructed them to cut rents in 2016.

By contrast, a survey by the Social Housing Action Campaign (Shac) revealed almost one quarter

of respondents could not afford the rent rises being inflicted on them from April 2022. And 85% face cutting back on other essentials.

One Shac member reported she had "recently received a new rent and service charge letter from my landlord Clarion Housing. The increase will contribute to a dramatic shift in my current living costs,

Private hire drivers anger at Leeds Labour council

IAIN DALTON
LEEDS SOCIALIST PARTY

Not one, but two groups of workers lobbied Leeds City Council on 23 March. The larger gathering – 500 private hire drivers – followed strikes and go-slows. The council has broken its promise and refused to review its Suitability and Convictions Policy.

This was adopted on the basis of improving passenger safety, but carries severe penalties for drivers, leaving them suspended for months, unable to drive their taxis, with no income. For example, a driver who was racially abused by a passenger, who challenged such abuse, could be suspended if a complaint was made against them!

Seething anger towards the Labour council was present, with placards stating "Don't Vote Labour", and several speeches to the same affect. Many of the drivers, particularly those from a Pakistani or Kashmiri background, feel that their votes are taken for granted by Labour. Although GMB pulled out of jointly calling the demo, many drivers

who are members of that union still attended.

While some platform speeches talked about voting any party except Labour and the Tories, Socialist Party members on the demonstration leafleted with the appeal for trade unionists to stand themselves in elections. We also explained how the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) banner was available to workers to stand on a common socialist and anti-austerity basis rather than simply appearing as independents.

● Hitachi Zosen Inova facility – more broken Labour promises

Members of GMB and Unite the Union also gathered outside the council on 23 March against an energy-to-waste facility being constructed outside the union-agreed 'NAECI' terms, which the council had previously pledged to insist on – another Labour betrayal.

East London: Public housing not MSG Sphere

NIALL MULHOLLAND
EAST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

The monstrous MSG Sphere, which would be built in the Maryland/Stratford area of east London, took a decisive step closer to being realised on 22 March. The enormous new Vegas-style music venue will have events throughout the day and night.

It was opposed by most local councillors who sit on the London Legacy Development Corporation, but it went through on the approval of unelected appointees. The final say now lies with London Labour mayor Sadiq Khan.

A large public turnout of local activists at the planning meeting, including the Socialist Party, were told by security at the planning meeting that we were not allowed to unfurl and photograph a banner from the campaign opposing the sphere.

Stratford station is already the busiest in London. The station and local area will not cope with the daily surge of over 60,000 people, and 10,000 more car and taxi trips. Newham already has some of the

worst air pollution in Britain. 7% of deaths in the borough are caused by air pollution.

The outer surface of the huge sphere will be used for advertising, causing unprecedented light pollution. Outrageously, developers have said that local residents should use "blackout blinds". They also ludicrously claim that the 24-hour advertising is "freestanding art".

This proposed site could have been used for desperately needed public housing and community facilities. Newham has one of the longest housing waiting lists in the country and some of the worst overcrowding.

The site was public land until it was sold to Westfield, with a huge shopping centre in Stratford, for £9 million in 2015. In 2017, Westfield sold the site to MSG for £60 million.

Sadiq Khan must feel the pressure of Newham residents, with protests and demonstrations. Maryland resident, Socialist Party member Ferdy Lyons, will be standing for the Trade Union and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) in the local elections on 5 May, firmly opposing the MSG Sphere.

especially when combined with an increase in energy bills, council tax and other household bills."

If the government instructed social housing providers to cut the rents before, it can do it again, and end rip-off service charging too.

Tenants and residents can also get support from Shac to leaflet their local estate. Email shac.action@gmail.com.

com with your address and the quantity of leaflets you would like.

If you would like to organise a local protest or demo outside your landlord's offices, please let Shac know. They can provide leaflets and publicity, and will mobilise support.

● **Protest 9 April, 12 noon at the Department for Levelling Up, SW1P 4DF**

War in Ukraine: Workers voices behind the lines

Clare Doyle, of the Committee for a Workers’ International (CWI - the socialist international organisation to which the Socialist Party is affiliated) spoke to socialists and worker activists in Ukraine and Kazakhstan on 25 March about the devastating impact of war, not only on lives and infrastructure, but also its political effects on the workers’ movement.

Ukraine

Half of Ukraine’s capital city, Kyiv, is now wrecked by shelling and bombing from Russian forces. I spoke to ‘V’ a trade union and political activist from that city. He has succeeded in taking his wife and son from the crowded school basement they shared with no less than 300 people. Now they have one room in a hut of a ‘Pioneer’ youth camp in the North-West of Ukraine.

“A number of organisations have been banned, broken up,” he tells me. “But they are mostly pro-Russian groups. Trade unionists and political people have not been able to form separate units.

“We have never been able to officially form a party. You had to have ten thousand signatures to do that! We had about 1,200 at one stage in our union.

“As a war-time ‘necessity’, all our TV news channels have been amalgamated into one. We do get news and videos through social media of one sort or another, including cartoon films for the children.”

We discussed the prospects for the war. V commented that Ukraine’s president Zelensky had clearly dropped the aim of joining Nato, the Western military alliance. There would be a compromise, but it was obviously not clear what and when. Already 800,000 refugees have left Luhansk which, along with Donbas, is one of the hotly disputed regions between the regimes of Russia and Ukraine.

The Russian army is reported to have lost at least 15,000 fighters on

the battlefield. Conscription is for two years in Russia. “Of course, there will be great distress when the young men fail to return home.”

Support for Putin in Russia remains high with all the state-controlled media propaganda about ‘fascists and Nazis ruling Ukraine’. The Russian-led USSR lost 20 million people in World War Two following the Nazi invasion, and therefore invoking the spectre of ‘Nazism’ undoubtedly affects public consciousness.

There are ‘Azovtsi’ and ‘Banderovtsi’ (far-right groups) in the Ukrainian army, but the majority of Ukrainians see Russians as ‘family’. You have the military horror and the deep shock and disappointment.

V and I spoke about the defection from Russia last week of Anatoly Chubais - chief architect of the rapid transition to market capitalist relations in the early 1990s. We also spoke about the area in southern Ukraine where the revolutionary leader Leon Trotsky spent his childhood and student days now coming under bombardment.

Odesa, in the sights of Putin’s forces, is an historic and beautiful city. It is the scene more than a century ago of a major battle and mutiny in the Russo-Japanese War of 1905 - a defeat that led to revolt and revolution in Tsarist Russia.

Kazakhstan

Andrei in Astana, the largest city in Kazakhstan, speaks of a major fuel shortage developing because of a broken pipeline.

But the authoritarian Tokayev



800,000 people from the region of Luhansk have fled the war

government is not likely to put up the price of fuel, given what happened last time he tried in January this year when a mass uprising followed a doubling of LNG supplies at the pumps!

Nor is the shaky dictatorship likely to accede to any demand from Putin to supply young men from Kazakhstan for his war in Ukrainian as pay-back for Russia’s military ‘assistance’ in January to quell the uprising.

Andrei speaks of ‘Communists’ in the Russian Duma (parliament) and in the Moscow City Duma urging Russian forces be sent to ‘retake Kazakhstan!’ and bring it back within the borders of the old USSR (now defunct for over 30 years). “This is by no means aimed at re-establishing

a workers’ state of any kind!”, says Andrei.

The party of veteran ‘communist’, Gennady Zyuganov has been a loyal collaborator throughout the process of establishing dictatorship, oligarchic capitalism in what was - long ago - a totally voluntary federation of soviet socialist republics.

The president of Kazakhstan, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, is torn over relations with Russia, explains Andrei. He lived in Russia a long time and was part of the clique of gangsters at the top. “His broader family and his wealth are in Russia. They are all robbers at the top of society, but thieves fall out!”

Tokayev seems very uncertain about the future - fearful of any new

upsurge that could push him aside. His government seems wary of the growth of independent trade unionism and the possible establishment of a workers’ party - especially if it has socialism as its aim.

“The bosses are incompetent, the state-controlled trade unions cover up for them and the government looks to us for ‘advice’! There are plenty of spontaneous walk-outs taking place and some substantial strikes,” says Andrei.

The cessation of the ghastly war in Ukraine, when it comes, will open up a period of turmoil, of reappraisal and of workers’ struggling to build strong, independent unions and socialist parties in Ukraine, in Kazakhstan, and in Russia itself.

French presidential election Five more years of Macron?

LEILA MESSAOUDI
GENERAL SECRETARY OF GAUCHE
RÉVOLUTIONNAIRE (CWI, FRANCE)

Anger at rising prices, record profits for French multinationals and shareholders, the destruction of public services, reduced rights of the unemployed, and ongoing strikes over wages for several months... As in the rest of the world, instability is the rule in France.

President Emmanuel Macron’s last five years in office are synonymous with heightened social tensions: the ‘Gilets Jaunes’ (Yellow Vests) movement, movements for more social justice, mobilisations against the pension reform in 2019, and more besides

The Covid crisis has, for a time, anaesthetised the struggles. Using the pandemic and unable to protect the population, Macron preferred to impose a very repressive state of health emergency during the first lockdown.

The aforementioned struggles did

not lead to a decisive victory against Macron and the capitalists, even though the government was forced to back down temporarily on the pensions attack. And on the political front, no party or political force has mobilised a coordinated opposition of workers and the general population against these policies.

Only France Insoumise (FI), with its 17 deputies (MPs) in the National Assembly, and its leader, Jean-Luc Mélenchon, has represented a consistent opposition to Macron.

What does Macron want?

Macron officially announced his candidacy for the presidency at the end of February, just six weeks before the first round of the election, which will be on 10 April. The war in Ukraine serves as a justification for not campaigning and for saying his re-election is a foregone conclusion.

On 18 March, Macron announced his fighting programme for the interests of the bosses! He wants later retirement at 65, compulsory work for those receiving minimum social

benefits, dismantling the national education system by attacking the status of teachers and then others, a refocusing on leading sectors of energy supply (nuclear), and so forth. The same programme as the traditional right!

The capitalists thus have in Macron the political representative of their class and intend to keep him for another five years. The bourgeois (capitalist) parties, initially of the classical right, like Sarkozy’s Les Républicains or the ‘bourgeoisified’ Socialist Party (SP) of François Hollande and Anne Hidalgo, have collapsed for the moment. Indeed, little or nothing in their programme distinguishes them from Macron and his policies.

From the point of view of the election itself, Macron is hoping for a second round with Marine Le Pen, which would see him elected hands down. There is little chance that Le Pen’s RN (‘National Rally’, previously the National Front) can win. Its profile has not been able to develop over the last five years.

The nationalist right and the far-right have dominated the beginning of the election with a virulent anti-immigration campaign. But rising prices and the cost of living came back to the centre of the debate. The social issues remain central.

The right and the far-right are in crisis and are regrouping around Eric Zemmour, the racist, sexist, ultra-free-market politician. Le Pen is on the other wing, along with the Republicans.

How to fight back

The challenge is for workers and young people, who are most aware of the issues, to be able to express their own views as clearly as possible. We must have a vote against Macron and the capitalists, the right and the far-right, but also a vote that breaks with all the policies carried out on behalf of the capitalists by the PS and the Greens in government and in the local regions and departments.

On the political left, Jean-Luc Mélenchon of France Insoumise-Union Populaire is standing again. In the first round of the 2017 presidential election he won 19.6% of the vote, only narrowly failing to contest the second round against Macron.

Mélenchon is the only candidate capable of playing a central role in



Macron is the primary presidential candidate for the capitalist class PHOTO OECD/CC

reaching those among the working classes who want to fight Macron, but also the growing number of voter abstainers.

On the basis of his ‘Common Future’ programme, Mélenchon has succeeded in bringing together activists from social movements, organisations and parties in a grouping called ‘The Popular Union’ (Gauche Révolutionnaire - Revolutionary Left - is part of the Parliament of the People’s Union and has been building France Insoumise since 2017).

Registering between 13% and 15% in the polls, Mélenchon is in third spot, just behind Le Pen, and Macron, who is leading. Mélenchon is now ahead of Zemmour, who is losing points, and Valérie Pécresse of the right-wing Republicans. He leaves the Green and PS candidates far behind.

The PCF (French Communist Party), unfortunately, has chosen to go it alone this time, essentially to continue to exist, and its candidate is polling around 4% to 5%.

This is not insignificant, and shows the potential of a single FI-PCF candidate. The PS, on the other hand, is hitting an all-time low of 2%-3%, at the same level as the NPA (New Anticapitalist Party) of Philippe Poutou and Olivier Besancenot, who are also running, as well as Lutte Ouvrière (Workers’ Struggle).

Combative programme

Mélenchon’s programme calls for: freeing prices, expanding public services, creating real jobs and raising wages. These are the crucial pillars of the programme.

The only force capable of carrying out these measures is the working class through the establishment of a workers’ government. But ‘Common Future’ only goes halfway. It fails to deal with how to change society and end capitalism, and why we have to

fight for a socialist society.

For these reasons, Gauche Révolutionnaire’s campaign to support the candidacy of Mélenchon, in France Insoumise, and also with our own material, seeks to go further on certain demands by fighting for: the state monopoly of public health services, renationalisation under workers’ control; decent jobs for all; an increase in the minimum wage; pensions and wages; retirement at 60; increased resources for public services; the renationalisation of Energie de France and Engie; and of the railways.



Mélenchon is the only candidate capable of playing a central role in reaching those among the working classes who want to fight Macron

We also have disagreements, such as on international issues, and the illusions that Mélenchon has in international capitalist institutions, and on a supposedly historic role for France abroad.

In the streets, in the door-to-door campaigns, and in the workplaces, campaigning for Mélenchon largely facilitates political discussion around the ways of combating the capitalists. These also provide the basis for discussion about the role that a genuine mass workers’ party for socialism could have in the next period.

As Mélenchon’s latest poster says, ‘another world is possible!’ We say yes, a socialist world is necessary!

Ofcom bans Russian-state broadcaster

Fight for democratic public control and ownership of mass media



JAMES IVENS
SOCIALIST PARTY NATIONAL COMMITTEE

A recent high-profile addition to British capitalism’s sanctions against Russian capitalism is the barring of RT UK (formerly Russia Today) from the airwaves. Ofcom, the UK media regulator, has revoked the Russian state-backed news channel’s broadcasting licence.

The National Union of Journalists should make a clear statement that no redundancies will be tolerated. And socialists cannot put any faith in the ‘impartiality’ of any capitalist media outlet - private or state, domestic or foreign.

Certainly RT’s coverage of Ukraine has been aimed at obscuring the true horror of the war, and propping up the gangster-capitalist Russian government relative to internal and

international opposition. But any idea that this is some special feature of the establishment media in Russia is false.

Britain’s own state broadcaster, the BBC, produced highly sanitised coverage as coalition forces bombarded targets in Iraq. A fuller picture did not appear until later, once the invasion was established, and further delay of the truth risked too much loss of legitimacy.

Many working-class and young people have also noted the different attitude of Britain’s establishment media to war and refugees in Ukraine as compared to Yemen, Palestine and elsewhere. Of course, British capitalism’s interests are represented by the aggressors in those other conflicts.

Naturally, the BBC has never had its broadcasting licence put

in question. Despite legal niceties about ‘impartiality’, it is a wing of the capitalist state, and in crises will close ranks with big business and its politicians.

Ofcom’s main objections maintain this legal fantasy. The regulator’s decision cites the United Nations general assembly (the more important UN Security Council is permanently deadlocked) opposition to Russian invasion (as compared to its general support for US and British imperialist aggression).

It also cites Russia’s appalling new anti-free-speech law, which puts journalists calling the war what it is at risk of up to 15 years in jail.

These facts, and a high volume of complaints, gave Ofcom the grounds it needs. RT’s statement in defence is very weak. But this does not disguise the double standards.

In fact, while the main driver here is inter-imperialist jostling, the regulator taking action while there is pronounced anger will partly be to shore up the establishment’s legitimacy.

As class anger and struggle continue to rise, the state may move to take action against workers’ organisations and free speech.

Coincidentally, while RT UK did not have a big audience, its journalists could give a small platform to left voices - so long as criticism of Putin’s regime remained tame.

Certainly the rapid banning of a channel which was not able to broadcast due to EU sanctions anyway, for a war which Britain is not currently in, is a warning to the workers’ movement.

We fight for independent working-class media, and democratic public ownership and access to the mass media as part of a socialist plan.



Jean Luc Mélenchon addressing a rally in Toulouse in the 2017 presidential election PHOTO MATTHIEU/CC

Sri Lanka’s deteriorating economy fuels mass anger and protests

Tens of thousands took to the streets of Sri Lanka, on 16 March, demanding the government acts on the spiralling cost of all essential commodities.

Street protests have become a common feature and take place almost daily. Food prices had increased by a record 25% this year and are continuing to rise. The inflation rate passed 17.5% in February. Also, many commodities including medicine are simply unavailable for the wider masses, with queues at shops getting longer. Three people died recently while waiting, with hungry stomachs, in

some of the many mile-long queues.

The government finally admitted last year that its foreign reserves were depleted and the country faced its worst economic crisis since independence.

It is crucial to build a non-sectarian and democratic platform that can bring together all the struggles that are beginning to emerge in the country.

● Read this article by TU Senan in full on socialistworld.net - the website of the Committee for a Workers’ International (CWI)



April 1982: The Falklands War

Socialists opposed the war aims of Argentinian junta and Thatcher - and campaigned for working-class struggle to overthrow both

DAVE CARR
EAST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

On 5 April 1982, a hastily assembled Royal Navy taskforce sailed out of Portsmouth Harbour and headed 8,000 miles into the South Atlantic to battle Argentinian armed forces which, days earlier, had invaded a collection of sparsely inhabited outcrops of land known as the British Falkland Islands, or the Malvinas in Argentina.

How was it possible that, seemingly out of a clear blue sky, Margaret Thatcher's three-year-old government had declared war on the Argentinian military junta?



Argentina's dictator General Galtieri

The Thatcher government had previously shown little interest in maintaining the Falklands. In 1980 it had dispatched minister Nicholas Ridley to convince the Falklands Islanders and Argentina to accept a 99-year lease scheme - which both parties rejected.

'Cordial relations'

Moreover, before the conflict, the British government enjoyed cordial relations with General Galtieri's murderous regime in Argentina.

Indeed, the Argentinian junta's 'free marketeer' and Thatcher-admiring finance minister, José Martínez de Hoz, had been invited to 10 Downing Street in June 1980. And despite the widely publicised human rights crimes of the junta, he was reportedly feted by the executives of British Aerospace, GEC, Shell, Rolls-Royce and Plessey.

Thatcher's government had aggressively pursued arms deals with the junta, and Argentinian military

officers were trained every year in Britain.

The previous Callaghan-led Labour government had also sold arms to Argentina, but with the pathetic stipulation that they shouldn't be used to suppress dissent or invade the Falklands!

Days before the outbreak of war, in March 1982, David Joy, a British embassy official in Buenos Aires, praised the dictatorship, writing: "Although I am all for human rights... I am already beginning to have more than a sneaking suspicion that the country is more likely to progress materially under the present regime which re-established order and government, than any government elected by the rabid communist/left-wing Peronist taxi driver who drove me to the office this morning."

Pre-war politics

Argentina's generals had seized power in 1976 and, with US financial and military backing, launched a brutal 'dirty war' against militant trade unionists, socialists and other political opponents. Subsequently, up to 30,000 people were 'disappeared' ie rounded-up, tortured, and assassinated.

However, by 1982 the dictatorship was economically, politically, and socially spent.

The country's organised labour movement was bravely taking to the streets demanding the downfall of the junta. Just two days before the military seizure of the Malvinas, and despite mass arrests, the CGT union confederation called a widely supported general strike.

The regime's deep unpopularity, and the pressing social weight of the workers' movement, meant that the junta, in a desperate move for survival, gambled everything on a national-ist adventure of seizing the islands.

In Britain, Thatcher's Tory government was also unpopular. It had presided over rampant inflation, and then applied its savage curative of neoliberalism by engineering the deepest recession that century, leading to mass unemployment.

In response, in late 1980 and early 1981, the Labour Party, including the Militant-led Labour Party Young Socialists, and the trade unions organised huge demonstrations against the government in cities around Britain, something that would be unthinkable today under Keir Starmer.

Between April and July 1981, inner-city riots linked to mass youth unemployment and institutional racism erupted in London, Liverpool, Birmingham, Leeds and Manchester.

International standing

The remote Falklands Islands were an economically unviable remnant of 19th century British imperialism and, apart from stamp collectors, most people in Britain prior to the war had never heard of them.

However, from the perspective of Britain's ruling class, the Argentinian invasion, unless countered, would have represented a devastating humiliation for British imperialism, which had been in rapid decline since World War Two.

Its status and prestige internationally hung in the balance. Thatcher, like Galtieri, also gambled - but won.

The war and aftermath

The sinking, by a British submarine, of Argentina's battleship 'General Belgrano' (which, at the time, was sailing away from the conflict zone) led to an outpouring of jingoism in the establishment media. "Gotcha" was the infamous headline in the Murdoch-owned mass circulation Sun newspaper.

This mood of jingoism, affecting many workers, was only partly deflated when Argentinian jets, armed with French manufactured Exocet missiles, sunk HMS Sheffield two days later.

Thatcher rounded on France's Mitterrand government, which was publicly backing the British government, for supplying the Argentinian

military with technical support.

The US administration of president Reagan, an ally of both the Argentinian regime and the British government, initially called for a diplomatic solution to the conflict, but quickly came off the fence to support Thatcher as the war developed.

The short, ten-week, but bloody, war (1,000 killed and 2,500 wounded), led to a close-run military victory for the Tory government, and the defeat and swift collapse of Argentina's dictatorship.

Thatcher, basking in the radiated glow of nationalism generated by the war, went on to pummel the Labour Party, led by the hapless left-leaning Michael Foot, in a landslide Tory general election victory the following year.

Politically, along with the fortuitous economic largesse of North Sea oil revenues coming on stream, Thatcher, now nicknamed the 'Iron Lady', felt supremely confident to take on the 'big battalions' of the organised working class, notably the National Union of Mineworkers (coined "the enemy within" by Thatcher) in 1984-85, and others.

The miners heroically fought to preserve their jobs and communities, only to be abandoned by the TUC and Labour Party leaders.

The Militant-led socialist council in Liverpool (1983-87), mobilising the city's working class, also fought Thatcher, and succeeded in wresting significant financial concessions from her government.

But it would take the Militant-led anti-Poll Tax movement, eight years later, to reduce the Iron Lady to iron filings!



Tory prime minister Margaret Thatcher was dubbed the 'Iron Lady' by the media



Part of the Royal Navy task force steaming towards the Falklands war zone in the South Atlantic

The Rise of Militant

by Peter Taaffe



"Workers can give no support whatsoever to the lunatic adventure now being prepared by the Thatcher government... the Labour Party and the trade union movement could stop Thatcher dead in her tracks. The labour movement must declare that it has no confidence whatsoever in the policies or methods of the British government... Labour must demand a general election in order that a Labour government can support and encourage workers' opposition in Argentina."

Militant, 9 April 1982 and quoted in chapter 20, 'The Falklands/Malvinas War'

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Response of the left in Britain

The response of the Labour Party leadership to the war was lamentable. Its right-wing MPs fully backed the task force, while Labour leader Michael Foot called for a negotiated solution - as if either warring party was going to back down.

Foot was a lifelong supporter of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND), although, like Starmer today, he supported the Western military alliance of Nato. Nonetheless, his CND sympathies were seized upon by the right-wing media and political establishment who portrayed him as a pacifist who wouldn't stand up to dictators like Galtieri.

Left MPs, such as Tony Benn, towards the end of the conflict, called a 'peace march' and demanded that the United Nations (UN) mediate to stop the war - a utopian demand, given that the UN was in permanent paralysis due to the blocking vetoes of the 'Cold War' protagonists of Western imperialism on the one side, and the Stalinist states of Russia and China on the other.

Benn and co's demand cut little ice with the public, but it allowed the capitalist media to reinforce the notion that left-wingers were 'defeatists' who wouldn't defend 'democracy' and the 'freedom' of the Falkland Islanders.

Some revolutionary groups in Britain gave 'critical but unconditional support' to Argentina's national claims which, in reality, meant giving support to the junta. This alienated them from the overwhelming majority of workers in Britain who abhorred the Galtieri dictatorship.



Left Labour MP Tony Benn (above) appealed to the United Nations to halt the war

Militant supporters (predecessors of the Socialist Party), who condemned the ruling classes of both countries, were attacked in an ultra-left manner by these pseudo-revolutionaries who quoted, out of context, the Marxist revolutionary Leon Trotsky's opposition in the 1930s to British imperialism's threat to invade Brazil, which was then ruled by a dictatorship.

Trotsky had argued that as the British invaders would doubly enslave the Brazilian working class, both as a nation and as a social class, it would be necessary to give critical support to Brazil in the event of war.

We argued that if British imperialism invaded and occupied Argentina, thereby doubly enslaving Argentinian workers, the situation would have been akin to the scenario outlined by Trotsky. But that scenario was not, and was never likely to be, posed in the Falklands War.

Militant denounced both the junta and Thatcher, and opposed the war aims of both. We argued that the oppressed workers in Argentina had no interests in supporting the war aims of the generals. This was evidenced by Argentina's demoralised army conscripts of many poor youth, who saw little reason to fight.

Instead, we called for a revolutionary ousting of Galtieri by the working class in Argentina and a relentless struggle to overthrow capitalism and build a democratic socialist society.

In Britain, we also called on the labour movement to continue to wage a determined and widespread class struggle to force a general election and bring down the Thatcher government.

With workers' governments in power in both countries, only then could a peaceful and amicable resolution of the island's future be realised.

Home thoughts – anxious families as the war intensified

Living in Gosport, just across the harbour from Portsmouth naval dockyard, meant that the war was very much real. Everyone knew someone who was joining a ship or working in the dockyard to prepare the ships.

Once the fleet set sail all that the anxious families had to keep in touch with the events was the daily announcements from a Ministry of Defence spokesperson, who did indeed sound like a 'Speak Your Weight' machine! Not much humanity in those announcements.

A friend of mine invited me to come along to a support group for women with partners in the fleet. She had read what we had carried in 'Militant' and was impressed with our class position.

I went along, in slight trepidation, but I was welcomed. I just listened to what those stressed-out women said and I tried to portray it in the Militant newspaper (forerunner of the Socialist).

After a couple of meetings they were happy to read what I had written. Probably not many had ever heard of Militant but they were pleased their voices were being heard.

But when Thatcher sank the Belgrano it was like being punched in the stomach. Everybody feared retaliation.

Then the Sheffield was sunk. Gosport was suddenly crawling with international press. They all wanted to interview the partner of someone on the Sheffield.

The women knew they could easily be exploited and turned quite a few media crew away.

Then a BBC team turned up to one of the meetings, desperate to interview someone with links to the Sheffield. The women discussed it but the only person they knew was an



The infamous Sun headline following the sinking of the General Belgrano

officer's partner, probably through their kids' nursery. They knew he was the Medical Officer so they thought she might be OK.

Somehow the interview got fixed up. A group of us piled into several BBC cars, one of the women introduced me as from the Militant, "but it's only a small paper, you won't have heard of it." I think the BBC had actually!

As the casualties mounted, things were grim. Many sailors suffered serious burns from the polyester overalls they wore then.

There was a parade in Portsmouth at the end of the war. Not much of a victory parade with people with visible burns and many badly traumatised by what they had seen.

I spoke to a young sailor who had helped bring some of the dead bodies home. And who had, with the rest of his shipmates, refused to sleep below the water line for fear of being sunk.

Thatcher was lucky but many working-class people were not.

ALISON HILL

"We're all human beings"

Interviews with the wives of sailors on HMS Sheffield, HMS Invincible, and HMS Arrows, taken the day after the Sheffield was sunk (from Militant, 14 May 1982).

"Most wives are expecting more bloodshed. We are waiting to hear which ship will be next. We feel for the families of the Argentinian sailors too. They are in the same position as us, after all we're all human beings.

I don't like this 'officer and gentleman' business though: when the British officers invited the Argentinian officers to dinner, just after they'd had the men shooting at one another in South Georgia. That just shows they're all the same sort - Tories, or worse."

"Most people joining the navy for a job and training, not to fight a war. Lots of blokes haven't got much choice anyway. If there's no other jobs available, the Navy is the only way of getting a job."

"I think most of the men are just hoping that it will be over soon. They've been working long hours on the ships and conditions can't be good. On the

Invincible the messes are very overcrowded with Marines sleeping on the floor.

"They've been issued with dog tags, for identification if they get killed or badly injured, and they've filled in their wills. My husband's will arrived in the post the other day."

"You can't be sure of anything any-more - anybody who votes for this [Tory] government now after this must be mad. They've even reduced the overseas allowance, and if my husband's wages go down any more we'll have to give up our house and go back to a quarter (navy accommodation)."

"She [Thatcher] might go on about pride and stiff upper lip, but she didn't mind crying on TV when she thought her son was lost in the desert. I wouldn't have minded joining those people on telly in Buenos Aires the other night - tearing up Thatcher's photos and stamping on them!"

£1/£2 solidarity price

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the Socialist

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formerly **Militant**

War, refugees, poverty, environmental catastrophe...

WE WON'T PAY THE PRICE OF CAPITALISM!



PHOTO MINISTRY OF INTERNAL AFFAIRS OF UKRAINE/CC

THEO SHARIEFF
SOCIALIST PARTY NATIONAL COMMITTEE

The world is looking on in horror at the events which are unfolding in Ukraine. In an instant, life has become a living nightmare for millions of ordinary workers and families.

Images from Ukraine have generated an outpouring of sympathy from workers and young people

here in Britain. But it has also contributed massively to the anger many feel towards the rotten system of capitalism, which is at root the cause of this and other devastating wars across the globe.

From the murder of innocent civilians to the uprooting of millions from their homes, yet again its ordinary workers and families who are paying the price for the decisions of the rich and powerful. Capitalist

governments and powers are playing with people's lives in the pursuit of power, prestige, and new spheres of influence.

No future

It isn't just militarily, however, that capitalism poses a threat to our lives and futures. Capitalism for many young people in 2022 is a byword for environmental and ecological breakdown, racism, sexism and

oppression, a runaway cost of living crisis, and no chance of an independent and decent future whatsoever.

No wonder then that 67% of under-35s in Britain today say they want to live under a socialist economic system. Capitalism is a system built on the creation of profit for a tiny handful at the top of the system ahead of the security, needs and wants of the majority in society: young and working-class people.

It's in this blind pursuit of profit that capitalism wreaks its havoc on the lives and futures of billions of people. War is part and parcel of the capitalist system.

That's why the Socialist Party fights to channel the despair and anger that exists at the war into a mass movement capable of consigning capitalism to history, and replacing it with a socialist society free from all war, inequality and oppression.

WHAT WE STAND FOR: THE SOCIALIST PARTY'S MAIN DEMANDS ►► see column on p3



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