

WORKING CLASS UNDER ATTACK

LOW PAY

BENEFIT CUTS

TAX INCREASES

PRICE RISES

THE FIGHTBACK STARTS NOW

ADAM HARMSWORTH
COVENTRY SOCIALIST PARTY

The bosses and the Tories are putting millions of workers through even more hell. The cost of living has soared with inflation rising to 3.2% - following its highest-ever recorded monthly increase.

Rent outside London is rising at its fastest pace in thirteen years. Energy prices are about to jump an average of £280 per household. These harsh rises will worry millions of people across the country, not least the estimated 2.4 million who have already faced destitution.

At the same time, the Tories are launching swathes of attacks on lots of different workers. The rise in National Insurance comes along with the end of the furlough scheme, cuts to Universal Credit, an insulting pay offer to NHS workers, and a pay freeze for millions more public sector workers.

The working class are being

squeezed from all sides by an unforgiving capitalist class. Millions more ordinary people will be forced to cut back spending, eat into savings, and fall into debt, condemning them to yet more hardship.

And in all this outright theft from working people, the Tories decide to launch a ludicrous 'Levelling Up' agenda with a renamed 'Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities' - a name worthy of The Thick Of It! The idea that the Tories will help workers 'level up' or raise living standards, while at the same time they take from workers already being robbed by price hikes, is a sick joke.

How do we challenge the agenda of this rotten government and its capitalist backers?

Workers in the health unions have made an excellent start. Members of Unison, GMB and the Royal College of Nursing have all voted with a big majority to reject the 3% pay insult (see page 5).

This is a crucial moment for the trade union leaderships, not just in the health sector but across the movement. They must begin building a coordinated campaign for industrial action now to force this government back.

The price rises, economic chaos, and sharpened attacks by this

government prove that capitalism is in crisis.

The unions taking decisive action now would empower the workers' movement and win big support from youth.

It would pave the way for socialist ideas and a political programme to raise living standards: rent controls, mass building of council housing, nationalising the energy companies - a socialist democratic planned economy where all workers get a decent wage and can live without fear of poverty.

But first, the trade union leadership must lead the fightback, and show workers that they can win!

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

Workers’ politics won’t come from Labour

Unions must prepare to build a political alternative



In addressing TUC Congress, Sir Keir Starmer claimed that “Labour will always stand with the unions”, standing “shoulder to shoulder” with them over vicious attacks such as ‘fire and rehire’.

But the reality is very different. With regards to most Tory anti-working-class policies, Starmer’s responses are vague at best or totally inadequate, as was shown when the Tories hiked National Insurance, hitting workers hardest.

When Johnson initially indicated that NHS workers fighting for a 15% pay rise would only get 1%, Starmer promised 2.1%! The Tories then put forward 3%, still less than current inflation, and totally rejected by health workers in consultative votes.

Apparently, Starmer has now written a 14,000 word ‘essay’ which will be released for Labour Party conference to set out his programme!

Under Starmer’s leadership, Labour has been a slightly critical voice in Parliament as the Tories have presided over their catastrophic response to Covid. He has seen his role as reassuring the capitalist establishment that Labour is now a safe option for them, if Johnson’s chaotic government crumbles.

This means consolidating the Labour right’s victory over Corbynism. Starmer may talk ‘unity’ at the TUC but his offensive against the

left, including in the unions, gathers pace. On the very day that he will rise to address delegates at Labour’s annual conference, the BFAWU bakers’ union will be meeting in a recall conference to discuss disaffiliation from Labour because its national president Ian Hodson is facing expulsion from the party. In addition, Unite assistant general secretary Howard Beckett is still suspended.

Council cuts
Starmer’s lack of fight against Johnson in Westminster is replicated at local level as Labour councillors dutifully continue to carry out Tory cuts. He opposes fire and rehire, but it was a Labour council in Tower Hamlets which was one of the first employers to roll it out, forcing Unison members to take strike action. Teachers are currently taking brave action in Redbridge against bullying and union victimisation, while the Labour council effectively colludes with school management.

Yet left union leaders, along with the likes of Jeremy Corbyn and the socialist film director Ken Loach, are disciplined, while cutting Labour councillors will no doubt be praised at Labour Party conference.

In the immediate aftermath of the Unite general secretary election, Starmer hoped that Sharon Graham’s victory, on the message of ‘back to the workplace’ would make Unite more amenable to him, or at least neutralise the union politically. However, true to form, when the Daily Mail informed him that Sharon had made a speech to the National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) conference two years ago, where she argued that the union should challenge the law if necessary



Labour leader Keir Starmer

to protect its members, he was quick to distance himself from her. After Starmer’s TUC speech, Sharon tweeted: “Unite is focused on defending our members’ jobs, pay and

conditions. This is the only way we can make sure that workers do not pay the price for this pandemic. This is happening now. Labour must do the same.” Her scepticism of Starmer’s

Interview: Bakers’ union to vote on Labour disaffiliation

Earlier in the year, members of the Bakers’ union (BFAWU) responded to a survey in favour of disaffiliating from the Labour Party. Now, with their president facing expulsion from the Labour Party, the union has arranged a recall of its conference, to vote on the issue, coinciding with the Labour Party conference. The Socialist spoke to Baker’s union executive council member Dumitru Manole for his views.

It looks as if Bakers’ union president Ian Hodson is set to be thrown out of Keir Starmer’s Labour Party. Why does Starmer want rid of a key trade union leader?

To quote the President of the BFAWU himself: “Because I’m a socialist”. As we all know, members and MPs who stood behind Jeremy Corbyn are being hunted down and expelled from the Labour Party. Starmer and his acolytes have gone so far to the right that we can call them ‘Blairites’. We can also say that Starmer no longer believes in unions, in my opinion.

The union has now called a conference for 28 September to discuss disaffiliation from Labour. How do you think most Bakers’ union members view Labour under Starmer?

Our members responded to that

question in a survey a couple of months ago, just before the national conference. The result of the survey was to disaffiliate, but the rule book says that we need to have more than just a simple majority ‘yes’ vote at a conference to disaffiliate, that’s why we have a recall conference on the subject. I think that our members will take the right decision and vote for the disaffiliation.

The Bakers’ union, along with other trade unions, helped establish the Labour Party over 100 years ago, because workers needed a political voice. Do workers still need a political voice, and how can we fight for that in the 2020s?

Yes, workers still need a political voice. The only way we can fight for that is for workers, and the trade unions who represent them, to build a party that can lead us further and listen to us.

You stood for the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition in the May council elections, to take a stand against cuts. Is there anything you would say to other trade unionists that want to build a political force for the working class?

My only response to other trade unionists is - look into the TUSC manifesto and platform, and realise that this is the future for socialism. Solidarity!



PAUL MATTSSON

revived New Labour being able to provide the fighting political lead against the Tories was echoed at the TUC congress by Dave Ward of the Communication Workers’ Union (CWU).

We agree that the unions shouldn’t ‘wait for Labour’. We support the resolution moved by the CWU that is now TUC policy that calls for a national demonstration next spring on

the theme of a ‘new deal for workers’. What’s more, the motion also promises that the TUC and the unions will organise ‘town hall meetings’ around the country to build for this mobilisation.

This programme, if filled out and concretised, could provide a manifesto to attract workers, taking up all the issues they face - fire and rehire, NHS and public sector pay, privatisation, and also service cuts.

The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, which the Socialist Party is part of, alongside the RMT transport union and Chris Williamson’s Resist organisation, is organising a series of ‘Peoples Budgets’ this autumn - setting out the needs of working-class communities and putting forward alternative no-cuts budgets to those of the cutting Labour councillors when they set out their spending plans. A vital element of this is the need to build an electoral challenge in the council elections next year.

Workers’ candidates

All this could be the basis for the ‘workers politics’ that Sharon Graham put forward during her general secretary election campaign, and as she begins her leadership of Unite. This would give a real alternative to the ‘Westminster bubble’ of pro-capitalist politicians of all parties, including Starmer’s Labour, particularly if a call was made for ‘workers’ candidates’ in the council elections, standing for no-cuts budgets.

Furthermore, it would mean marrying the immediate industrial challenges that face workers and the action they need to take with the political programme that is needed to decisively change their lives.

One of the first serious disputes in Sharon’s tenure is the indefinite strike called by Unite at the GKN plant in Erdington in Birmingham in order to prevent its closure. It begins in the middle of Labour Party conference. Unite members will be taking all-out action, and the most serious action may be posed such as a plant occupation. But in this stark period, workers such as those at GKN fighting for their futures will need a political vehicle that can support the call to nationalise the plant to save jobs and communities.

Such a political alternative, rooted in the unions and working-class communities, is a vital necessity that must be built.



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 (CWU) 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!

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- or text your name and postcode to **07761 818 206** to find out more today!

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End the teaching workload crisis

Vote Martin Powell-Davies for NEU DGS



PHOTO: PIQSELS/CC

SHEILA CAFFEY
NEU NATIONAL EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR SOUTH WEST (PERSONAL CAPACITY)

Everyone has felt the pressure of work at some point or other, but it is regularly cited as why so many teachers leave the profession, including one in four in the first two years of teaching. The Department for Education's survey shows that teachers work an average of 54 hours a week; National Education Union (NEU) research says over 60, and I know I have often had work weeks of over 70 hours. It is not a job that is sustainable.

So, what is the solution? Well, teachers have to say no. And I don't mean in the way managers blame individuals with 'you just need to work smarter, not harder' or 'don't stay too late' (which just results in taking the work home). I mean, that teachers need to be organised in unions to fight back all the extras that are piled on each year.

Socialist Party members on the national executive of the NEU last year put forward a contract for education workers, outlining what needed to be fought for so teachers and support staff could do the job they are paid to do, but still have a work-life balance. Firstly, ensuring that adequate time is provided during directed hours to plan and prepare lessons by doubling release time (known as PPA) to 20%, with additional time for those with extra responsibilities, or those who are new to the profession.

Furthermore, limiting class sizes, with funding to ensure sufficient staffing. With class sizes ever creeping up, marking, parents' evenings

and accountability increases. Last year's class of 32 meant that with three main subjects a day, if I spent five minutes marking each book I would do seven hours of marking a night! That's before even considering preparing the next day and adapting teaching to respond to pupil's learning.



If I spent five minutes marking each book I would do seven hours of marking a night!

But the major campaign would be changing the legal wording that demands "additional hours as may be necessary to enable the effective discharge of the teacher's professional duties". We need a legal limit to working hours to stop the hundreds of unpaid hours each teacher does during evenings, weekends and holidays.

All union reps are taught, before starting a campaign, to consider: is it deeply felt and widely felt? Well, there's no question that excessive workload is! However, having a written contract as policy within a union does not change the minds of the government or the reality in the classroom.

What is needed is the threat of national action. We would need to be 'ballot ready' with support for reps

and checking all members' details. The campaign would need to be taken to every member through rallies, online meetings, physical meetings and regular information by text, letter and social media. The motion also proposed counting ballots by employer too, so we could fight in a disaggregated way if needed. It would also mean involving parents and the wider communities to see how a national education contract supports and improves education and the learning conditions of students of all ages.

Leaders stalling

Unfortunately, the national executive as a whole were not confident enough to take this approach. There have been many examples of stalling, which lowers confidence of members to campaign on the issues. Our plan would work to reverse this and, although it was defeated, we would have another chance to put this on the table if Martin Powell-Davies were elected as deputy general secretary.

Martin is running on a platform as a proven class fighter. A platform that believes that it is action, and not just words that brings workers together to fight and win demands. A platform that clearly lays out plans starting from the reality to build what is possible: an education system that is a pleasure to work in, while supporting every child and young person to engage, enjoy and achieve!

● **Vote Martin Powell-Davies for NEU deputy general secretary, election runs from 4-29 October**

Tory cuts to Universal Credit: we need a union fightback

PCS UNION REP IN DWP

Families will shortly begin receiving notification that from 6 October their Universal Credit (UC) will be cut by £20 per week, or around £1,040 per year. Work and Pensions Secretary Thérèse Coffey, recently reconfirmed in her cabinet post, demonstrated the extent of Tory indifference by claiming that this could be offset by an extra couple of hours' paid work.

In fact, because of the way benefits are cut as people take up employment, it would instead take up to nine hours for an average worker to recoup the amount lost. For every £1 earned in work, the government subtracts 63p from benefits. For a young worker earning the minimum wage of £6.56 per hour, it would take even more than 9 hours to recover the loss.

Prior to Covid-19, around three million people claimed Universal Credit, of whom around one million were in work. Now around six million people are claiming Universal Credit, with two million of these in work. The uplift costs the treasury £6 billion annually. The government wants rid of this additional cost and, at the same time, wants poverty to force people into work.

If there were decent jobs to go to, accessible and based on people's existing or acquirable skills, there would be no need to use a threat of poverty. In reality, despite the wage rises seen in some parts of the economy as a result of labour shortages, the capitalist response to the

pandemic has been the proliferation of low-wage jobs that don't make ends meet.

Socialist Party members in the Public and Commercial Services (PCS) union, which represents workers in the benefit system, call for a minimum wage of £15 per hour, alongside a universal welfare system that protects the rights of claimants, and which does not involve sanctions. We want the £20 uplift retained, but more besides.

Attacks on the benefit system have been constant over the last decade. Benefits were frozen in the year before the pandemic, and either frozen or subject to below-inflation increases during the previous decade. Tax credits have been cut, Child Benefit moved to means testing, and specific payments for certain sick and disabled claimants have been removed.

At the same time, utility prices and other costs have been skyrocketing. Workers will also be hit with extra taxes from the regressive National Insurance rate increase. In this context, token opposition and fine words from the great and the good, about the impact of removing the £20 uplift to UC seems almost to mock the desperate situation many working families will find themselves in.

To push back the attempt to erode working-class living standards, we need fighting, democratic trade unions with socialist policies. We call on all workers, in work and unemployed, to get organised in a union and demand better!

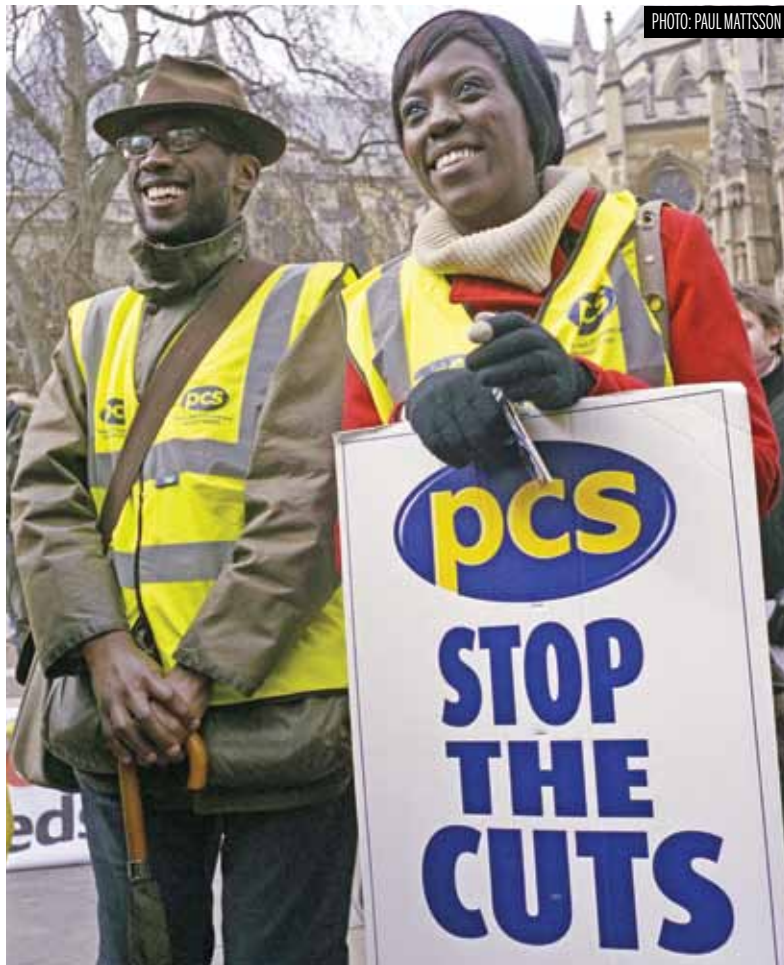


PHOTO: PAUL MATSSON



Energy market chaos makes the case for nationalisation

SIMON CARTER
EAST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

Millions of gas consumers face price hikes and uncertainty in supplies as energy companies go bust. Yet again, privatisation and the market has failed.

Faced with a surge in wholesale gas prices, smaller energy suppliers, who signed up customers onto lower-paying tariffs, are now going bankrupt. At the start of the year there were 70 suppliers in the UK. By the end of the year only the 'Big Five' domestic energy companies, and a handful of others, are likely to be operating.

The government tells us not to worry as affected customers' accounts will be transferred to the remaining energy companies. But there's no guarantee that existing tariffs will be honoured. Most likely these customers will be put onto higher tariffs.

In October, the government's energy price cap will be lifted allowing companies to ramp up our gas and electricity bills. Now, the Tories are refusing to rule out another raising of the price cap this winter to prevent energy companies collapsing.

Coming on top of increased rents, rising food prices, higher transport fares, the ending of furlough, a hike in national insurance and a cut in Universal Credit, these energy price hikes will mean many families facing financial ruin and even homelessness. The gas price hike also threatens the meat supply industry, possibly leading to shortages in supermarkets.

This crisis situation is not simply a consequence of a one-off 'perfect storm' of events, but is inherent in

the profit-driven market economy. Boom and bust is the norm under capitalism, not the exception.

Moreover, the big energy multinationals also invest in oil and gas fields. So any hike in wholesale prices will benefit them.

Now, the profit-hungry energy company executives are demanding government subsidies or 'rescue loans' to keep them afloat. The same people who enjoy bloated salaries, gold-plated private pensions, and sumptuous lifestyles.

The Johnson government, whose predecessor Thatcher Tory government sold off nationalised gas for a song in 1986, may well oblige these parasites by sinking more public funds into these failed enterprises.

For most people, however, privatisation has been a disaster, with energy prices rising in real terms and profits increasing.

Clearly, the rational solution to the energy crisis is to renationalise the big companies, under democratic workers' control and management, as part of a 'green' plan of production.

However, the Labour Party does not call for such a measure. In the 2019 general election, along with a 'windfall tax' on energy giants, Jeremy Corbyn proposed bringing the "supply arms of the Big Six energy companies... into public ownership". Under Starmer, there isn't even the hint of a windfall tax, let alone this call for partial nationalisation.

That's why the fight for cheap, renewables-based energy supplies must be tied to the fight for socialist policies and building a new mass workers' party to implement them.

NHS workers reject 3% insult

Unions must coordinate strike ballots now

● GMB

HOLLY JOHNSTON
GMB REP AND NHS WORKERS SAY NO

GMB union members have voted 93% in favour of rejecting the 3% pay deal for NHS workers, triggering the union to go straight to an industrial action ballot. We need to keep the pressure on in all the health unions to co-ordinate ballots for strikes. We have seen encouraging turnouts so far across the board and need to act on the overwhelming reject figures decisively and quickly.

Another consultative ballot would risk causing ballot fatigue. The results we are seeing suggest there is enough of an appetite for strike ballots now, and delaying may lead to a decrease in the turnout.

GMB hasn't released its turnout figures, but there are indications of a turnout well over 50% in some areas. Turnout in the consultative ballot of Royal College of Nursing (RCN) members was 25.4%, with 91.7% voting to reject. This is the highest ever turnout for a consultative ballot in RCN.

We need to see joint decisive action from our unions. We call on the unions to move to formal industrial action ballots and coordinate big campaigns to help mobilise the numbers we need to reach the threshold set out by the Tory anti-trade union laws.

We need strike ballots now, to give confidence to our members and send a clear message to this government

that NHS workers have reached our limit, and we are willing to take action for ourselves, our patients and the future of the NHS.



We need strike ballots now, to give confidence to our members and send a clear message to this government that NHS workers have reached our limit

● Unison

NHS workers organised in Unison have voted to reject the Tories' insulting 3% pay offer in a consultative ballot. 80% of those who voted opposed the real-terms pay cut, demonstrating the depth of anger among staff.

The growing mood for change cannot risk being derailed. Unison should now move to an industrial action ballot to demonstrate to both members and the government our willingness to fight. Socialist Party members on the Unison health service group executive have argued for this approach; delaying is only diluting the mood of anger.

Unfortunately, a move to ballot now was defeated by the right-wing majority on the health executive.

As the Socialist goes to press, Unison health conference is ongoing. Socialist Party members supported an emergency motion arguing for the conference to overturn the position of the health executive, forcing the leadership to move straight to an industrial action ballot.

Leaders delay

Undemocratically, the Unison health leadership ruled emergency motions out of order, denying delegates the opportunity to overturn its decision. The deadline for motions to the conference closed weeks ago, long before the health executive's decision to delay.

Tory anti-trade union laws mean that any strike ballot needs to have a turn-out of over 50%, with a majority voting to strike. The turnout in Unison's pay consultation did not reach this threshold but the union leadership's inaction meant many workers were unaware the online consultation was even taking place!

The best way to ensure that the threshold is met is to build the momentum, go to an industrial action ballot, and back this up with a concerted campaign, using the full weight of the union's resources. This means workplace leafleting, mass meetings and linking with other health unions. The leaderships of the health unions must come together immediately to coordinate strike ballots across the NHS.

SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBERS IN UNISON HEALTH



PHOTO: PAUL MATSSON

Workers at 13 colleges to strike over pay

UCU MEMBERS IN THE SOCIALIST PARTY

University and College Union (UCU) members at 13 colleges across England will begin strike action on 28 September in a dispute over pay, leading the way for other public sector workers seeking to fight back. Eight colleges will walk out for three days, and five colleges for ten days, with more action planned if the union's demands are not met.

The union is demanding a pay increase greater than 5%, after college workers were yet again offered, real-terms pay cut. The employer's bodies recommended just 1% last December, despite a £400 million funding increase for the sector.

Further Education workers have been hit by a 30% real-terms pay cut in the last decade, alongside huge increases in workload. Therefore, 5% is a small fraction of the wages really owed to college workers. However, it is understood by members to be a step in the right direction, with success in these current disputes strengthening the campaign for a 10% pay rise this year, which was adopted as UCU policy at the last UCU further education conference.

15 colleges beat the Tories 50% threshold back in the summer, with 89% voting to strike, on an average turnout of over 62%. City College Plymouth has successfully used its strike mandate to negotiate a better deal, which has been accepted by members, meaning 13 will be taking part in this wave of action.

Initiating coordinated strike action is an important step towards strengthening the collective organisation of college workers, which is vitally needed to win nationally on pay and workload.

Workers' efforts are currently hampered by the lack of national collective pay bargaining. This means even the employers' bodies meagre recommendations have to be fought to be adopted on a college-by-college basis.

Any victory for college workers will be a victory for all workers under attack, as the Tories and bosses attempt to make workers pay the cost of Covid.

The UCU should reach out to other unions to discuss coordinating the fightback on pay in the public sector, including health workers fighting their 3% pay offer.



MOJ pay deal accepted - we demand 10% and no strings attached



DAVE BARTLETT
PCS GROUP EXECUTIVE MEMBER
(PERSONAL CAPACITY)

PCS members in the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) have just voted to accept a deal recommended by the leadership which trades conditions for pay. Socialist Party members in the union and the Broad Left Network opposed the deal.

Although I opposed it, I am not surprised the offer was accepted. For many members on the lowest grades, the attraction of a two-year back pay deal in the next pay packet, and a pay increase of 11% over three years, became, in the absence of any national campaign, the only alternative that was in view.

However, it would be a huge mistake to interpret the result as a massive endorsement for the union and satisfaction with the outcome. This deal is a classic case of concession bargaining where there is a clear line between gainers and losers. What you got in the offer depends on who

you are, how long you have been in service and where you work.

For some members of many years' service, at the top of their grade, the offer falls well short of the 11%. One legal adviser said to me: "If you add in the recently announced national insurance increases then the offer amounts to just 0.75%".

The MOJ says this deal makes the department competitive with other sections in the civil service. It doesn't. The lowest bands still trail behind and the average salary for legal advisers is £8,000 less than their equivalents in other departments, such as the Crown Prosecution Service.

Also, a number of allowances and other payments will be cut, which reduces the value of a pay deal as it will barely keep up with the expected rate of inflation over the three-year life of the deal.

The union has declared that 600 new members have joined during the ballot. It's always a positive development when we see new members joining. The union must now make

every effort to keep these members and, indeed, get some to become involved in union activities. If this is not done many of those who joined on the promise of a vote on the pay offer might just fade away, having cast their ballot.

Some members will gain from this deal in the short term. But if we are to avoid further deals which reward some and not others and trade conditions for pay, we need to absorb the lesson that there is no substitute for national collective bargaining and the need for a proper pay campaign around a minimum demand for 10% with no strings.

The national union leadership abandoned conference policy of a fight on pay at the outset of the pandemic, telling members as well as senior management "now is not the right time". The effect of this was to weaken the confidence of members and strengthen the hand of the employer. Out of this failure we have now seen a shotgun marriage of concession bargaining, first in HMRC and now in the MOJ.

Stop press: Sparks walk out

Over 200 NG Bailey sparks and fitters walked off site at AWE Burghfield on 20 September over suspected blacklisting. The row started when workers were selected for transfer without notice, and told by the employer that it was AWE who had requested their removal. Anger spread through

the workforce at the treatment of their colleagues. Workers held a meeting and sought answers from the management. The firm has responded with what workers saw as a lockout threat, while also sending official statements saying they would dock any workers taking part in an agreed meeting on site. The Socialist Party sends solidarity to the workers, who played a key role in the defeat of deskilling earlier this year by the construction electricians.

RMT announces new strike dates in East Midlands Railway guards dispute

CLARE WILKINS
NOTTINGHAM SOCIALIST PARTY

RMT East Midlands Railway train guards have started a new series of strikes in their long-running dispute about pay cuts for new staff and safety concerns. The strike of senior conductors on EMR Intercity over staffing and safety is also continuing.

Picket lines continue each Sunday morning at Nottingham and Kettering.

Talks took place between RMT reps and EMR management. Although management had said that they had set aside two weeks for negotiations, one of the managers concerned is on leave for a week and spent two days in London for the National Railway Awards.

Despite this, one manager has now said that they will not talk to the RMT because more strike dates have been set. He says that the strikes should be called off for talks to take place. Apparently, this is management being committed to settling the dispute with RMT. Nevertheless, there are more talks taking place next week.

The strike remains solid, with no one crossing the picket line at Kettering.

It seems to be getting harder for EMR to get managers to volunteer to run trains on strike days. Even more trains were cancelled than on previous strike days, and EMR was also having problems hiring sufficient replacement buses. Passengers were advised that if they could not travel

today, their tickets would be valid tomorrow.

RMT has demands for the talks. If a resolution is not reached, then they will look at escalating the action and striking on another day in the week as well.

EMR management told the RMT reps that the station staff were fed up with the dispute. The branch did a nine-question survey of the station staff that confirmed this was not true. It also showed that the station staff are also extremely unhappy. The branch is considering balloting the station staff for industrial action as well.

Strike dates have been called on Sundays from 17 October to 21 November. The current ballot (the second) is valid till December.



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HELEN PATTISON

SOCIALIST PARTY LONDON REGIONAL SECRETARY

In October 2011, unemployment hit its highest level for 17 years, with youth unemployment on the rise and heading for one million. Tuition fees had been trebled and the public sector pensions dispute was raging. Since the 2007-08 economic crash, living standards had begun to fall, throwing families into poverty, with home repossessions reaching a 14-year high.

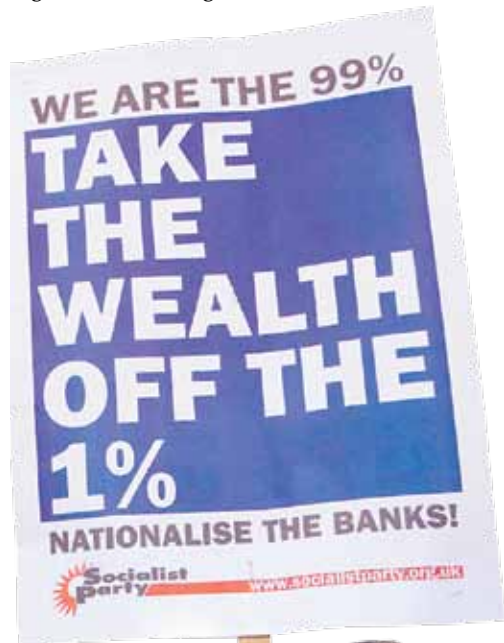
A generation was going to grow up worse than its parents for the first time since the 19th century. It was on the back of this huge ferment in society, capitalism having bailed out the banks to the tune of £600 billion to protect its system, that protests and strikes began to break out, including the Occupy movement, targeting the banks and financial sectors.

There was growing anger in society that the banks were being bailed out and wouldn't be expected to pay for the crisis of their making. People were also being inspired by events both here and around the world. The Egyptian revolution had begun when millions of protesters converged on Tahir Square, Cairo and then refused to leave. There were similar movements and uprisings in other countries in North Africa, as well as protests in Greece and Portugal, where austerity was hitting hard. In Spain, the Indignados movement emerged, which laid the basis for the left-wing political organisation Podemos.

Starting with Occupy Wall Street in New York, the Occupy movement spread around the world, taking up slogans such as 'we are the 99%'. In London, protesters set up outside St Paul's Cathedral. The Occupy camps were largely young, and understandably extremely angry. People could see their futures crumbling before their eyes and the impact of the growing crisis was being faced. There was



There was growing anger in society that the banks were being bailed out and wouldn't be expected to pay for the crisis of their making



an energy to the growing movement, with protests targeting their anger at the rich and tax avoiders.

The Socialist Party was also enthused by the move towards action. This could be the beginning of people turning towards socialist ideas to challenge capitalism. We supported the protests and took part in the huge variety of actions, but not simply to boost numbers. We went to highlight the need for an organised working-class and socialist movement. Such a movement would be strong enough not only to challenge the Conservative and Lib Dem coalition government, but also ultimately challenge the broken system which had produced the crisis.

The Occupy movement was part of the first round of struggles and movements following the economic crisis, along with the public sector pensions and tuition fee battles. Following the previous period of relative calm, working-class people were being forced to make a decision - either put up with being made to pay for the capitalist crisis or organise a fightback. For many, it was their first step into taking action. But that also meant that many of those involved in the movement hadn't been organised before.

Working-class power

In reality, the Occupy protesters did not really seen in previous years the power of mass working-class struggle and the ability of generalised strike action to bring the whole of the economy and society to a standstill. The impressive public sector pension strikes which occurred in March 2011, and the coordinated strike which eventually took place across the public sector on 30 November, were examples of the potential capacity of the trade unions to mobilise millions of workers. Socialist Party members fought in the trade union movement over the subsequent years for the trade union leaders to coordinate a 24-hour general strike to force the Tories out of power and end austerity.

Because the full strength of the working class hadn't been clearly shown, people were looking for ideas and methods to fight and win. They asked: 'Where could the strength of 'the 99%' come from? How should it be organised?' Many looked to those working in the banking sector to revolt against their own industry as a route to solve the problem. They wanted to include those who might describe themselves as capitalists, even the likes of Richard Branson who said he believed capitalism existed to make people's lives better but had "lost its way", as people who could help reform the system.

The chairman of the London Stock Exchange urged the protesters to target the government not the banking sector. By appealing to and appeasing this layer, the protesters were probably hoping to build a big and broad movement. In reality, Occupy would have been much more powerful had it turned to the huge layer of disenfranchised and angry working-class people who were being hit hardest by the crash. There was huge sympathy for Occupy, the student movement and strike action by the trade unions, from a layer who hadn't yet been mobilised into action.

While the Occupy camps were lively places of discussion, the demands which came out of the camps didn't offer a clear way forward. They

10 YEARS SINCE OCCUPY

Lessons for generation Covid



The occupy movement, starting on Wall Street, expressed class anger at the banking crisis referring to the rich "1%", and the rest: "the 99%" PAUL MATTSSON

highlighted what was wrong with the system and what they wanted - to fight against an undemocratic, unjust and unequal society. But other than standing in solidarity and wanting an alternative, they couldn't outline what was needed next. Reports in the Socialist at the time mentioned that people wanted to discuss "how to break the monopoly of the top 1% over political and financial decision-making and create a society that would benefit the 99%".

Mass workers' party

It was strikingly evident to the Socialist Party the impact that a mass workers' party could have had on the events. A party which genuinely defended the working class against the billionaires and bosses, which could help organise

all those who were angry. The Labour Party had not only been responsible for neoliberal governments in the late 90s and early 2000s, but had also been part of the war in Iraq, which had been opposed by millions of people. It was not a reliable political force to represent the working class.

Then, when the crash happened, Labour had bailed out the banks, leading to huge government debt, which it planned to pay off with attacks on the welfare state. The Lib-Dems had appealed to the youth vote by promising not to treble tuition fees, and then sold them out completely, joining a coalition government with the Tories. There was a huge feeling that particularly the main political parties couldn't be trusted, and that a new way of organising was needed.

In reality, anger against the mainstream parties resulted in a more general 'anti-party' mood, which meant people were even mistrusting of working-class and socialist organisations. There was a feeling that the old traditional ways of organising had failed, such as the trade unions and strike action. 'Direct action' and 'new methods' were the watch words, and all forms of action were put forward as equally effective.

It's true that every movement is made up of a variety of actions from protests, to occupations, to strikes. And each action plays an important part, pulling together all those who are ready to be part of the fight. Before a strike you might have protests and rallies, which if big enough, force concessions. But if these protests don't

win, they can prepare the ground for more decisive action, such as a strike which stops the normal running of either a business, or in the case of a general strike, the whole economy.

Occupy, though a numerically smaller movement, was a product of huge anger in society at the economic system - a system which works for a few at the top, but fails millions below. A general strike, bringing the economy and business to a standstill, would have been fitting. But many of the trade union leaderships had become accustomed to the quiet and relatively low level of strikes in the previous decades.

Along with a 'new way of organising' was the idea of 'structureless forms' which the Occupy camps took. This was a product of both the Labour

Party and also most of the trade union leaders failing to offer a lead. In fact, they were politically and organisationally behind the growing mood to fight. The first conclusion was to have no leaders, therefore there would be no one to hinder the movement going forward. But even some commentators and 'leaders' from the time now recognise this wasn't the case. No leaders or structures mean no accountability. It means there isn't a democratic process from which decisions are agreed, and if they aren't implemented, no mechanism to hold people to account.

De facto leaders typically step into the gaps and are unaccountable to the rest of the movement. In reality, this means that people who are less able to be involved have no way of having their voices heard in the movement. These so-called 'leaders' do not represent the most ardent ideas of the movement, and come under huge pressure to accept limited concessions. Democratically elected leaders, subject to recall by those it represents, are accountable not to the pressures of the media, bosses or capitalist representatives, but the movement which elected them. If they fail to stand up to the bosses they can be removed.

Battle for slogans

It was clear from the beginning of Occupy that the movement would face many pressures to not seem too radical. On the first day of Occupy London outside St Paul's, a big banner read 'Capitalism is Crisis'. It reflected the basic feeling of the protesters, that capitalism had crashed but it was ordinary people who were paying the price, rather than those who had profited from the system. But very quickly that banner was replaced with one that said 'real democracy now', following a disagreement in the camp, despite the fact 'capitalism is crisis' as a slogan probably more accurately reflected the anger in society and among the protesters.

Events have not just stood still. Occupy was for many, the first step out of the blocks, running alongside the public sector pensions dispute and after the tuition fees movement. It is still remembered as a watershed moment for many who have campaigned on different issues and opposed austerity since.

It only involved a relatively small number of people, but a much greater layer was sympathetic to the cause. Most recently we have seen the huge marches against the attacks on Palestine, the Black Lives Matter movement and, before the pandemic, the student climate strikes. There are huge similarities between the movement a decade ago and the anger which exists in society today. But the last decade has seen services cut, privatised and sold off. The benefits system has been slashed, and millions have been forced to turn to food banks.

The decade since 2011 has been a learning curve for many who have been thrown into struggle. Around the world there have been movements, as well as political parties, which have come to the fore and then faded, sometimes crumbling - unable to stand up to the objective political situation and tasks of fighting austerity head on.

The working class in many countries, including in Britain, continues to search for the formation, the organisation and party that can properly represent it. Corbyn's leadership of



From a raw and anti-capitalist mood which knew what it was against rather than what it was for, there is now a lot more openness and agreement with the need to fight for socialism

Labour was the most recent attempt, but before the tidal wave of support for him, both the Greens and even UKIP had seen a surge in support and votes. This represented people looking for an alternative, and testing out different political parties. UKIP had given itself an anti-establishment visage, despised being led by a banker and having no answers to the actual reality of problems facing working-class people.

Socialist consciousness

From a raw and anti-capitalist mood which knew what it was against rather than what it was for, there is now a lot more openness and agreement with the need to fight for socialism. When Corbyn was first elected as Labour leader he described himself as a socialist. A flurry of young people, who had only ever known capitalism in crisis, latched onto the word socialist, even if they weren't entirely sure what it was or how to get there.

It is the job of Marxists to help flesh out this raw mood for change with ideas and a programme, as well as methods of struggle to win. That's the history of the Socialist Party, from the fight against the poll tax with a programme of mass non-payment to take down Thatcher; to the mass austerity being heaped on the working class through local government cuts, where the Socialist Party has advocated 'needs budgets' and councillors to vote against austerity.

As well as pointing a way forward in the Labour Party when the right wing circled Corbyn like wolves, we pointed out the 'two parties in one' that the Labour Party effectively was at the time, could not exist indefinitely, and that the Corbyn supporters would need to rid Labour of the right wing and Blairites.

The final big difference between 2011 and today, are the eye opening events of Covid. They have helped draw even clearer class lines between the haves and the have nots. It has helped expose how profit is the driving force rather than the health, lives and livelihoods of ordinary people. As well as showing how it's the working class that truly makes society run.

There's a growing understanding that the working class must organise for its own interests. This is what the Socialist Party has been fighting for during Covid. It is why people have joined at the fastest rate in decades. It is no longer enough to know what you are against - you have to know what programme you are fighting for, and do it, and that programme has to be a socialist one.

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Oaks Park strikers call eleven days’ more action

LILY DOUGLAS
WALTHAM FOREST SOCIALIST PARTY

The Oaks Park picket line on 15 September was as angry and determined as the day it began, when school workers said ‘enough’ to bullying management and the unjust letting go of National Education Union (NEU) rep Keiran Mahon. As before, McDonald’s and homemade cookies were bought to fuel the strikers, while school rep Bill Stockwell played morale-building tunes on his cornet.

To the school workers’ delight, two past students attended the picket, stating that they had found the movement on social media and wanted to find out more after being told that the allegations and strike were not real. The news that the

union had announced eleven more days of strike action, starting on 29 September, only served to add to the mood of the pickets before going to lobby their local MP.

When strikers went to the office of Blairite Labour MP Wes Streeting - who has so far refused to back the union - the office was locked, with the blinds down. School workers, who just wanted to speak to Streeting and his staff, peeked under the blinds and saw they were in, but hiding!

So far, the strikers have also been talking to parents and organising meetings to build a strong force against school management, which has proven to be a useful auxiliary tactic in the school strikes. This as was also shown with the Avenue

Primary School strikes in Newham, when parents supported picket lines and even occupied the office.

While parents storming the school reception is not promised to happen every time, it shows the power of school workers, parents, and the union united. The strikers also took their campaign to the council chamber, asking questions and unfurling banners.

The strikers heard a message of support read out from Socialist Party member and NEU deputy general secretary candidate Martin Powell-Davies. While recognising the incredible significance of supporting local districts and schools like the Oaks Park strike, he also campaigns for the union to be prepared to build for strike action nationally.

Leeds taxi drivers and disabled passengers unite to fight station changes

IAIN DALTON
LEEDS SOCIALIST PARTY

The anger of taxi and private hire drivers at the Labour-run council is palpable. Socialist Party members joined drivers in the Unite union, disabled taxi users and Unite Community activists to protest redevelopment plans by the council and Network Rail which will move the taxi rank outside the station.

Wasim, one of the drivers at the protest, explained to us: “The taxi rank is just outside one of the

entrances, with a sheltered area for four taxis and space for 33 taxis in total to queue on a private road leading up to it. Under the new arrangements, this will be moved further away, with space for just six taxis in total, which is totally inadequate given how busy the station gets.”

Despite a consultation run by the council, a Unite survey showed 76% of respondents were unaware of the plans. 75% said it should remain at its current location.

One driver told me that at the planning meeting to discuss the

redevelopment, all the Labour councillors just deferred to the decisions of the full-time officers, rather than take a stand in defence of taxi drivers and disabled people. He had been a Labour Party member, but had now left in disgust.

Unite members on the protest were clear - the redevelopment plans will cause chaos for them, and for those wanting to use their taxis from the station. Therefore the campaign to oppose it will continue until the council and Network Rail are forced to revise these plans.

Fighting evictions in Cornwall

ROB ROONEY
CORNWALL SOCIALIST PARTY

Violent County Court bailiffs and police were no match for a well-organised and determined human wall defending a private tenant from eviction.

Cornwall’s housing crisis was brought into sharp focus on Friday 17 September, when four bailiffs, backed up by five police officers, turned up at Mike Osbourn’s rented property in Penryn, near Falmouth.

I was among twenty-plus members of tenant defence union Acorn, who gathered to block the entrance to Mike’s house. We watched as the bailiffs arrived and walked past to consult with police, who had already arrived in two cars and a van. The bailiffs then approached and spoke with Acorn’s appointed liaison person, Elly. A police officer who intervened, referred to the bailiffs as “our colleagues.”

Confronted by a determined human barricade, bailiffs and police retreated down the street. When, after about 20 minutes, the bailiffs drove off, followed soon after by the police, it looked like victory had been achieved.

This was only a bluff, as they returned an hour later. This time, the

bailiffs forced their way through, throwing people aside and breaking down the wooden gate. Police, whose opening remark was “we’re here to prevent a breach of the peace” were at their backs, aware of everything and oblivious to calls to take action at the assaults being carried out.

Bailiffs had a go at breaching the second line of defence outside the tenant’s door. But when it became obvious that there was no way through without an escalation of the violence, police called off the operation.

This was a morale-boosting victory for the fledgling Acorn branch in Falmouth. Any further attempts to dislodge Mike, before he has found somewhere to live, will be defended.

Mike, who has been living in the quiet residential street for four years with his son Max, was given notice late last year. Since then, he has been unable to find alternative accommodation as rents skyrocketed. He appealed to his landlord, in advance of Friday’s confrontation, with a list of demands.

It now looks like a tenancy may be available in Truro, ten miles away. It was not possible to complete the move before Friday and the landlord refused to postpone the planned eviction.

York: Non-binary and trans rights protest

On 19 September, 40 people protested for the legal recognition of non-binary people, and to end trans discrimination under the current Gender Recognition Act. Earlier this year, the government rejected a petition to legally recognise non-binary people. This decision has worsened the situation for non-binary people, who have been let down by cuts to health services, and by the education system.

This appalling situation we are in means we need change. We need to fight for the legal recognition

of non-binary people and end the struggles they face. The only way to do that is through unity, solidarity and cooperation.

To win the resources needed to improve services for non-binary people, we need to take the wealth out of the hands of the big corporations and business in society, and instead run society under the democratic control of the working class, which could fund decent jobs, housing and services for all.

WILL MACKLE
YORK SOCIALIST PARTY

Yorkshire Youth Fight for Jobs relaunched

Work and education are being closed to us



The Youth Fight for Jobs (YFJ) campaign was relaunched in Yorkshire at an online public meeting on 17 September, in anticipation of the end of the furlough scheme. This is ahead of the Yorkshire Youth March for Jobs in Leeds on Saturday 9 October.

The meeting heard why the campaign is vital for young people. Around one million workers are expected to lose their jobs when furlough ends, many of them young. Speakers included Hull branch secretary of Unite the Union, Alex Hutchinson, the Yorkshire and Humbershire rep for young members of civil service union PCS, Melissa Newman, and Leeds Gets Organised project worker, Jamie Rodney.

Kat Gwyther, Leeds Youth Fight for Jobs, chaired the relaunch. She said: “With the government’s furlough scheme expiring at the end of the September, youth unemployment is set to grow, especially as avenues like education become closed to some students. University of Leeds

is offering students money to defer courses, and University of York is ‘offering’ students accommodation at most 50 miles away in Hull!

“There are stories of large numbers of vacancies in many sectors, but lots of these require specialist training for which there is a lack of affordable and adequate provision. Youth Fight for Jobs is fighting for a decent job, education or access to quality training for all young people. We will be taking our message to the streets of Leeds on 9 October.”

Youth Fight for Jobs was originally launched in 2009 following the rise of youth unemployment after the 2007-08 financial crisis. YFJ organised a 330-mile march, along the lines of the Jarrow Crusade, to mark its 75th anniversary, and raise the need for measures to tackle youth unemployment. YFJ has been at the forefront of the campaign against the exploitative nature of zero-hour contracts, and has supported drives to unionise workers in McDonald’s, Wetherpoons, and elsewhere.

- No to mass unemployment - for a programme of creating socially useful, high-quality jobs
- For decent jobs - for a £12-an-hour minimum wage as a step towards £15. Scrap zero-hour contracts
- No to a future of debt - fight for free education and access to training, write off student debt

• youthfightforjobs.com

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Socialist Students: Youth lit up when they saw us on campus

• Birmingham City University

Socialist Students have received an enthusiastic response from students at Birmingham City University and its neighbouring colleges. Setting up our campaign stall outside the

welcome fair, many young people passing by were visibly lit up when they saw there was an active socialist group on campus.

62 students signed up to receive more details about our meetings and campaigning activity - including the local ‘march for jobs’ we’re organising in October. Nine people attended our first meeting, with a lively

discussion about a range of topics. Everyone there walked away with a copy of the Socialist.

NICK HART

- March for jobs and a future for young people on 9 October
- West Mids regional demo
- 1pm, Victoria Square, Birmingham

• Greenwich

At our campaign stall on 17 September we focused on the needs of students today, and building a Socialist Students society on campus. 18 students left their contact details. South East London Socialist Party is organising regular meetings and activities

on campus to channel the frustrations of students into effective action.

ALASDAIR COOK

Join the student fightback

JOIN socialist students

socialiststudents.org.uk/join



West Sussex ‘disability tax’ - our protest is not going away

SARAH WELCH
WEST SUSSEX SOCIALIST PARTY

Warrior Carers protested outside West Sussex County Hall on 15 September. We were protesting about the unfair client contribution, also known as the ‘disability tax’.

It was well attended by parents and carers, who are extremely angry about this charge. Our banner against West Sussex County Council read: “WSCC benefit snatchers – DWP gives WSCC takes away”

The protest was an opportunity to show our disgust, and a real opportunity for parents and carers to connect, share stories and support each

other. So many of us have felt isolated and alone.

The charge got people into debt, and has caused great hardship and misery. As carers our lives are already difficult, and this charge is the last straw.

The local press, including the BBC, covered our story. Our campaign is gathering momentum, and we are gaining confidence.

We will protest at the next health and social care committee on 26 November. We hope our numbers will increase, as our campaign gathers strength. We want to show the council we are not going to go away. We are here for the duration, and will fight this to the end.

Who pays for the climate crisis?

SAM MORDEN
SOUTH TYNE AND WEAR SOCIALIST PARTY

It is the world’s working class and poor that will suffer the most from climate change. Just 100 companies are responsible for 71% of global emissions. But in carrying out their ‘plan’ to tackle the climate emergency, the bosses want to make workers pay - with price increases, taxes and our health.

In March, after just six months, the government’s £1.5 billion ‘green homes grant’ was scrapped. The scheme was designed in part to replace natural gas boilers with low emission heat pumps. Domestic heating is a significant part of national CO2 emissions. So much for ‘building back greener’!

Other suggested measures include replacing natural gas wholly or partly with hydrogen. But government

predictions suggest that hydrogen could be up to five times more expensive than natural gas by 2040.

With the market-led approach of the government, the financial burden falls on homeowners, many of whom have been hit hard by austerity and Covid, to arrange for a private company to install green technology. Landlords, housing associations and already cash-strapped councils are likely to avoid improvements, or pass on any costs to tenants.

Green energy, including wind and solar, is becoming less expensive as technology develops - but the in-terminent nature of energy generation means a complete overhaul of the National Grid is needed, storage included. Privatised National Grid, run for profit, is likely to continue to increase prices to help finance this with costs eventually passed onto customers by the utility companies.

In August it was announced that eleven million households will be facing a price hike on their energy bills. Under pressure from profiteering energy suppliers, government regulator Ofgem agreed to raise the price cap.

National Grid, along with the privatised energy companies, should be brought into democratic public ownership; that way energy prices can be set at a democratically decided, affordable level. The investment needed to transform energy production can be planned, unpolluted by the drive for profit.

This needs to be broadened with a socialist programme, so the global working class can democratically plan a path through the next century, using the wealth of the capitalists and control of the economy, to divert money to where it is most needed to save our planet.



Committee for a Workers’ International (CWI) facebook live e-rally

Capitalist Climate Catastrophe - the socialist solution

26 September - 2pm (BST)

Join us live to hear from socialist activists around the world who are fighting for socialist change to end the climate catastrophe.

The CWI is the socialist international organisation to which the Socialist Party is affiliated.

Famine in Madagascar

Climate change and the profit system to blame

THEA EVERETT
SOUTH EAST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

The problems that climate change will pose for food production are already being felt in Madagascar. The country’s south has faced four years of back-to-back droughts which have wiped out harvests. As a result, the country is facing a severe famine - one of the first in the world that the United Nation’s World Food Programme is calling ‘a direct consequence of climate change’.

People have been relying on raw cactus fruit, seeds and locusts to sustain them, as this is all they can find to eat, in a situation that is due

to get worse. The number of Madagascans facing extreme starvation is predicted to hit 1.3 million at the end of this year. The unequal effect of climate change, where countries with little wealth and which produce little CO2 will see the worst impacts of the warming planet, is laid bare.

The devastating extreme heat in the country will only worsen as the planet warms further, and it is only through a socialist planned economy that we can really alleviate the threat of climate change. In order to move climate heating industries to zero-carbon emissions we need democratic international planning and investment.

To do that we need to eradicate the market-based system which is concerned only with short-term profits, and takes no account of non-mon- etisable factors like climate or pollution. Even capitalist economists talk of the ‘market failure’ inherent in the capitalist system, which will therefore never allow us to reach zero-carbon.

Socialism means removing the profit motive, and allocating resources democratically on the basis of need. Under socialism, the environment would be respected, and production would be organised to ensure what we create is geared towards meeting needs.

economy (£3 billion) and avoidance (£1.5 billion).

However, the think tank said some forms of fraud, such as profit shifting by multinational companies, is not included in HMRC’s calculation, nor is fraud from Covid-19 support schemes. This means the amount of tax lost to fraud will be significantly more than the £15.2 billion identified. An estimate of at least £20 billion would not be “unreasonable”.

Yet the government has increased taxation for ordinary working people to raise just £5.4 billion over three years in a vain attempt to ‘fix’ social care.

DAVE GORTON
CHESTERFIELD SOCIALIST PARTY

WHAT’S YOUR VIEW?
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Gleision mine deaths: Still fighting for justice ten years on

SCOTT JONES

South Wales thought the days of mining tragedies were in the past. The death toll during almost two centuries of mining is over 6,000, even more when Aberfan is included. Ten years ago, in September 2011, years after most pits were closed by the Tories, four more lives were added to the total. This led to shock, and had a significance right across mining communities in South Wales.

The BBC has marked the anniversary of the disaster, and the fight of the families and survivors still looking for justice and answers, with a documentary ‘Trapped Underground: The Gleision Mine Disaster’.

By 2011, only a few hundred were still employed in mining in South Wales, mainly in very small ‘drift’ mines, especially following the closure of Wales’ last large colliery at Tower in 2008. The documentary shows the conditions in Gleision in the Swansea Valley. Despite being among some of the last miners in Wales, the mine is a throwback to the 19th and early 20th centuries. The miners, all experienced older men, had to spend most of their working day on their hands and knees in tunnels only two-and-a-half feet high in places.

The disaster occurred when the mine manager set off a planned explosion to yield more productivity and profit, but instead filled the manned part of the mine with water, quickly and terrifyingly. “The blast was followed by the sound of a jet engine,” one survivor described. He

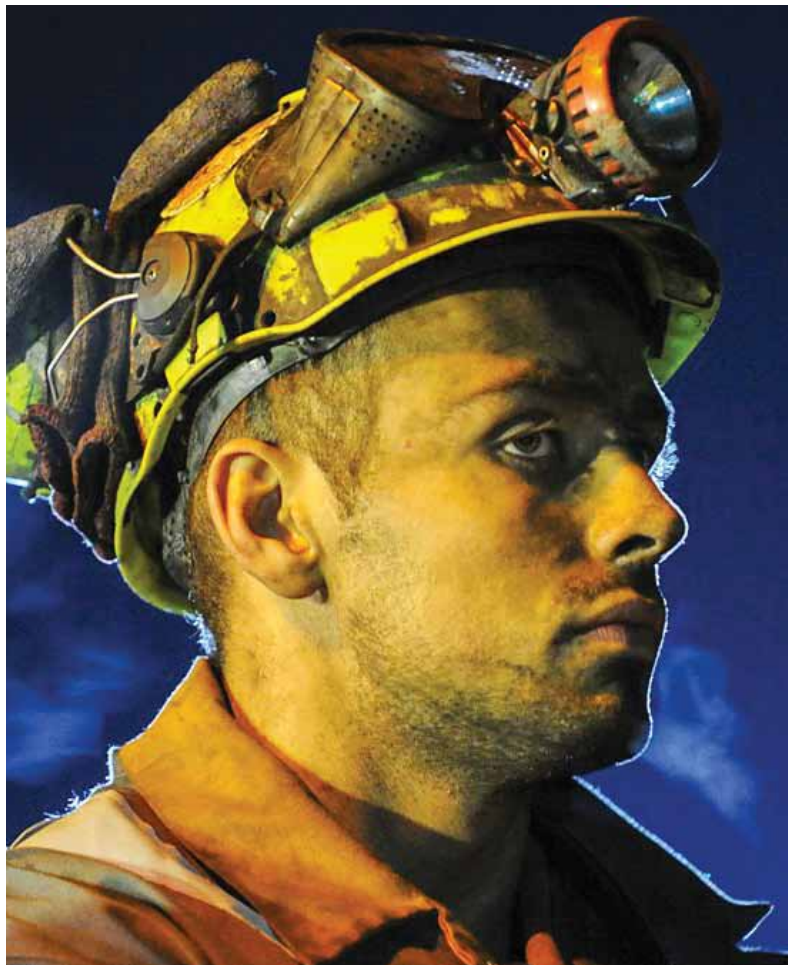
said to his buttY at the time: “They’re dead down there,” referring to the men in one particular tunnel, 90 metres below ground.

The documentary shows how the working-class community, mostly current or former miners, rallied together and rescued workers, working through exhaustion and refusing to stop until the missing were found. It took days to recover them, and they were all dead.

An inquest never took place, and this is what families are calling for. A trial did take place, bringing manslaughter charges against the owner and manager, who were found not guilty. But according to the surviving miners, the trial was a “farce”. The manager at the time had ignored warnings from his predecessor. There were safety concerns raised during previous ownership. A mine surveyor had alleged that new mine workings were being dug in a so-called ‘illegal zone’, where new workings were outlawed due to their proximity to old workings, and dangers including flooding. Much of this did not come out in the trial.

The small mine clearly ignored regulations, some of which do not even apply to drift mines, to eke out as much profit as possible, resulting in dangerous working conditions that killed four men.

● *Read more, and what we said at the time: ‘Wales mine deaths: Privatisation comes under the spotlight’ at socialistparty.org.uk*
● *Trapped Underground: The Gleision Mine Disaster is available on BCC iPlayer*



TV Review Help: Heart-wrenching portrayal of Covid care home crisis



KATIE SIMPSON
RELIEF CARE HOME WORKER

‘Help’ is a heart-wrenching story of a care home in Liverpool for people with dementia. When the Covid-19 crisis hits the home, the main protagonist, Sarah, is faced with loss, pressure and difficult decisions.

Prior to Covid-19, this was still a situation many carers faced, but the film puts a spotlight on the crisis in care homes during the height of the pandemic. In particular, the huge number of struggling care homes in the private sector.

The film does an excellent job of portraying the day-to-day work and difficulties for care staff. It also accurately portrays how dedicated and hard-working some of Britain’s most low-paid underappreciated staff are.

A poignant scene, which brought back memories from my work in a care home last year, included an exasperated care home manager having to explain to emergency services and his own staff the discrepancies

between government guidelines and the PPE available to them.

The staff in the film wear bin liners and dust masks from a building company while nursing the sick and dying, without the training, equipment nor staffing levels to support them. At one point, Sarah is left to cover a night shift alone after already completing an afternoon shift.

This is a common occurrence, and one I have experienced. Unfortunately for Sarah, the shift proves overwhelming when one of the residents displays advanced symptoms of coronavirus and no emergency services are able to assist.

During the height of the pandemic, care homes were left to struggle with sick and dying residents; many carers lost their lives too. In the film, Sarah panics and loses professionalism, which can happen. But, in reality, in times of crisis care staff overwhelmingly are able to maintain composure.

The story takes a dramatic turn when Sarah’s bond with a resident leads her to take the responsibility of his care into her own hands. While

most carers want to take a resident home with them at some point in their career, in reality the majority of care staff understand the strict boundaries of their professional relationships with those they care for. Sarah removes the resident feeling that he was being oversedated. In reality, the doctors under the protocol of the NHS will not prescribe sedatives for the reasons the care home manager described in the film. There are also procedures carers can follow if they feel that institutional abuse is taking place.

In summary, the film depicts the struggles of careworkers and care home residents very well. The portrayal of NHS staff and services abandoning care homes could be construed as pinning blame on the NHS services rather than the government. In reality, the NHS workers who came to the aid of our care home residents during the pandemic were incredible. At the end of the film we are reminded of the Covid-19 death toll in care homes - over 40,000 - and the average wage of a care home worker - £8.50 an hour.

Corbyn had a social care plan

An edited version of the following letter, sent by Socialist Party executive committee member and Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition National Agent Clive Heemskerck, was published in The Guardian.

It may be impolite to suggest it in the pages of The Guardian, but here’s an idea for Labour policy on social care - the one presented in the 2019 general election manifesto.

This was a costed proposal for an extra £10.8 billion spending to establish a National Care Service including free personal care for over 65s, an end to 15-minute maximum home care visits, and an increase in the Carer’s Allowance.

The Grey Book accompanying the

manifesto calculated that taxing capital gains and dividends at income tax rates would yield £14 billion, even after possible “post-behavioural reductions”.

While Labour’s 2019 policy should have committed to ending the social care market to really achieve its goal of “ensuring care is delivered for people not for profit”, it still would incontestably have been a step forward compared to any alternative being proposed today.

Unfortunately, the fact this was the policy of Jeremy Corbyn, that persona non grata to Keir Starmer’s revived New Labour, meant that Johnson’s bluster about a non-plan for social care was met with a vacuum not an opposition.

Life expectancy falls - a condemnation of capitalism

NANCY TAAFFE
WALTHAM FOREST SOCIALIST PARTY

I often think when I hear that a member of the royal family has died at the ripe old age of 101 - ‘didn’t they have a good innings, they mustn’t grumble!’

And yet a report from Public Health England shows that life expectancy for the great mass of people in 2020 dropped to its lowest level for over a decade. For men, that meant 78.7 years and for women, 82.7 years. Men have lost around 1.3 years of life and women 0.9 of a year. You could say: ‘Well of course these figures show an ebbing in life expectancy because we’ve just been through a world-wide coronavirus pandemic, the hundreds of thousands of people have died prematurely!’

But what is revealing is the growing chasm that exists between those that live longest and those that live

shortest, according to social deprivation. From 2011 to 2021 better off men on average live 10.3 years longer than the poorest men, and better off women 8.3 years longer.

What the stats show, is that if you were poor before the pandemic and prone to illnesses due to your poverty then, much like the virus’s effects on other aspects of society, the pandemic has accentuated your propensity to suffer.

I wasn’t shocked by the results of this report; poor, sick people were made sicker and poorer during the pandemic, and really sick people died before their time.

Longevity for those from the upper classes shows what’s possible for all of us, given the right resources. The drop in life expectancy for the working class and poor shows that capitalism is sick. For the sake of societal and individual health, we need to kill it off as soon as possible!



Socialists and the four-day week



IAIN DALTON
SOCIALIST PARTY NATIONAL COMMITTEE

In the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, with fears of rising unemployment as the furlough scheme is wound up, and the full extent of the economic scarring from the pandemic is revealed, there are also increased demands around improved work-life balance after a year of many working from home.

This has resulted in the idea of moving to a four-day week being raised, even by the government's own 'Covid Recovery Tsar'.

Britain is notorious for some of the longest hours worked in Europe. Average weekly hours worked for full-time employees in 2018 were 41.8 - 26th out of the 37 OECD countries at the time. Alternative figures from Eurostat give the average hours in the UK, including unpaid hours, as 42.5, only outdone by Greece, averaging 44.2 hours.

The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development's UK Working Lives Survey found that 60% of workers work longer hours than they want, and 24% overwork by ten or more hours a week.

A report by the World Health Organisation and the International Labour Organisation suggested that long working hours (55 or over) led to an additional 750,000 deaths from heart disease and strokes around the world between 2000 and 2016. The UK government's own 'skills and employment' survey in 2017 found that 47% of men and 55% of women 'always' or 'often' went home from work exhausted.

The four-day week

So it's hardly surprising that the proposal for a four-day working week was among the radical policies put forward by Jeremy Corbyn when he was the leader of the Labour Party.

In the 1970s, when the three-day week was in operation during the Tories battle with the miners, 80% of existing production levels were maintained in only a 24-hour week!

The capitalist class hoped that this, like other demands raised in the Corbyn period around nationalisation, free school meals, and more, would be banished after Corbyn's defeat in the 2019 general election and his replacement by establishment-friendly Kier Starmer. Those hopes have been dashed on the reality of the Covid-19 pandemic and the unprecedented intervention into the economy by the Tory government.

Trades Union Congress (TUC) General Secretary Frances O'Grady pledged to campaign for a four-day week at the 2018 TUC Congress, and a motion calling for it was passed this year without opposition. The Scottish SNP government, supported by the Greens, is currently trialling a four-day week.

There are also now a number of companies that have adopted a four-day working week - although the majority of those listed by the UK-based '4 Day Week Campaign', backed by Class and a number of other left-leaning think tanks, are mostly small companies including charities and consulting firms.

Can society afford a four-day week?

Whenever the question of increasing workers' pay or reducing the working week without loss of pay is raised, sections of the capitalist class and their media mouthpieces react with indignation at the idea. Each time they cry 'how can this be afforded'?

Because of this, many of the existing four-day week campaigns are based on the idea of convincing the bosses that it is in their interests to reduce the working week, often making other concessions in return. One of the larger companies that has adopted a four-day week for some staff, Morrisons, is an example of this. The company has shortened the

working week at its head office from 40 to 37.5 hours and spread those over a four-day week, leaving staff working a nine-hour working day, and also working a six-hour Saturday once a month.

Even the '4 Day Week Campaign', which calls for a four-day week of a maximum of 32 hours with no loss of pay, states in its FAQ that it supports a 20% cut in holiday allowance.

However, research by the New Economics Foundation showed that if pre-1980 trends of reduction of the working week had kept up with even the UK's sluggish productivity growth, workers would be working 13% less hours a week. The TUC's own compiled figures on unpaid overtime suggest that in 2018 workers in Britain did a shocking £32 billion worth of unpaid overtime!

Back in the 1970s, when the three-day week was in operation during the then Tory government's battle with the miners, 80% of existing production levels were maintained in only a 24-hour week!

Such figures demonstrate that reducing the working week isn't just a question of whether it can be afforded, but by whom.

Battle over the working week

There has been a long battle between workers and their employers in Britain and internationally over the length of the working day and the working week. For the capitalists, any additional labour they can extract from workers without increasing their pay means an increase in the surplus produced above the cost of raw material and workers' wages, and therefore greater profit.

So the capitalist employers have a vested interest in maintaining a longer working week, or having the lost profits compensated by increasing the intensity of work or through cuts to pay and conditions. Only by

organising collectively through their trade unions can workers force employers to concede a genuinely reduced working week with no loss of pay.

The decreases workers have won, from a working week of over 60 hours at the time of the foundation of the TUC in 1868, have been won through struggle. The first May Day demonstrations were called by workers' organisations internationally fighting for an eight-hour day. Mineworkers fought for and won a statutory eight-hour day by 1909, while strikes by workers in the post-World War One period won a 48-hour week.

In the late 1970s, the TUC campaigned for a 35-hour week, down from the then prevailing 40-hour week. This has only been partially achieved in some sectors, such as on the London Underground, while the postal workers' recent agreement provides for a move from a 37-hour to a 35-hour week. In Germany in 2018, the IG Metall union negotiated a 28-hour week down from 35 hours, although this didn't preserve workers' take home pay.

The Socialist Party has long fought for a shorter working week, including our members leading struggles to win a 35-hour week, such as at Knowsley Borough Council.

Apart from gains in terms of workers' well-being, a 32-hour or four-day week could also offer an opportunity to tackle unemployment and underemployment.

According to a report by the Autonomy think tank, introducing a 32-hour week in the public sector would create 300,000-500,000 jobs. The introduction of the 35-hour week in France created an estimated 350,000 jobs.

However, any reduction should be implemented without loss of pay, or other forms of undermining it, such as loss of paid breaks, holiday entitlement or the introduction of annualised hours.

Neither should it just be a question of filling the vacant hours created by a 32-hour week, but also ensuring existing vacancies, such as in the NHS, are filled and additional jobs created to fulfil socially necessary projects, like a mass council house building programme.

All workers on less than 32 hours should be given the option, if they wish, to increase to 32 hours, with zero-hour contracts being banned. Any work above contracted hours must be agreed by trade unions and paid at a premium rate.

To accommodate the need for increased numbers of skilled and technical workers there would need to be more investment in apprenticeships and other training schemes, supervised by the trade union movement.

But any struggle for these demands would come up against the sabotage of the capitalist class, desperate to protect their profits. That's why the Socialist Party stands for bringing the decisive sectors of the economy into public ownership under democratic workers' control and management, so that their resources can be used as part of a democratic socialist plan to meet our needs. This would be drawn up by elected workers' representatives from across the economy, who would have the time to do so because of reduced working hours.

The Socialist Party stands for bringing the decisive sectors of the economy into public ownership under democratic workers' control

German general election

Die Linke party leadership ditches left policies

Opinion polls in the last weeks before the 26 September German general election have shown rapid changes, especially for the two main contenders - the conservative Christian Democrat CDU-led bloc and the Social Democratic Party (SPD). These two parties, currently in a ruling 'grand coalition', have seen big swings in their standings.

The CDU's support is down by a third since 2017 and, in some polls, is currently under 20% - its lowest ever. The SPD, which just over two years ago was as low as 12% in the polls, has recovered and is now polling around 25%, a big improvement but still way below the 38.5% it won in 2002. The left party, Die Linke, has seen its support drop to between 6% and 8%, perilously close to the 5% threshold to get into the national parliament, and seriously down on the 9.2% it won in 2017.

Die Linke failed to gain from the previous sharp fall in the SPD's support and, now, in desperation, its four national leaders have rushed out an 'emergency programme', which they hope can make Die Linke be seen as a potential coalition partner by the SPD and Greens, and thereby worth voting for.

Sascha Staničić, the national spokesperson for Sol (CWI in Germany) and a Die Linke party congress delegate for the Anti-capitalist Left current, explains the significance of this development.



As a delegate to the national party congress of Die Linke, one wonders these days why delegates bothered to read an election programme, discuss amendments, hold a special party congress in June and finally vote on it. Because on 6 September four people - the party and parliamentary group leaders - presented an "immediate programme for a change of policy" which effectively threw the party's election programme into the dustbin.

The issue is not only about what is in this emergency programme - which not even the party executive could read, let alone discuss, before it was published! - it is about the signal sent out by this publication.

Whoever thinks that this signal is a clever move to mobilise votes in the last weeks of the election campaign is mistaken. The opposite will be the case; endangering the chance of Die Linke being returned to the Bundestag.

Retreat

A government alliance with the SPD and the Greens would be a voluntary political retreat - the abandonment of left programmes and of the actual mission of a left and socialist party to propagate an alternative to the capitalist system and to organise and mobilise people for it. All experience with government participation of left parties in coalitions with pro-capitalist parties shows this.

If Die Linke wants to get out of its present hole, it must make its role clear to those voters who no longer feel represented by the established parties. It must make it clear that it does not belong to the political establishment, which fewer and fewer people trust.

But because they want to belong to the club of those who can govern, Die Linke's main leaders eat 'humble pie' and have a reflex reaction to soften policies when faced with any accusation of being too radical.

Janine Wissler

An example of political retreat was seen on the recent Anne Will TV talk show. There, Janine Wissler (co-chair of Die Linke) was confronted with her not-so-long-ago past as a member of the Marx21 network. Anne Will read out a long quote from Marx21's general socialist principles - which said many right things about the need to overcome capitalism.

But the co-chair did not respond confidently and take the offensive. The principles of the political current to which Wissler belonged for 20 years are suddenly, according to her, now just "some internet pages".

In particular, Wissler emphasised that what had been read out had nothing to do with her own position on a government coalition with the SPD and the Greens. After all, Wissler pointed out, she herself had held exploratory talks in the federal state of Hesse, and had demonstrated her willingness to form a coalition there.

Why didn't she say: "You know, Ms Will, this country and this world could do with a revolution. That means a fundamental change of circumstances, including changing the distribution of wealth, the power relations in society and, yes, also the ownership of resources to end the situation where a few dozen banks and large corporations control the world economy and thus determine the lives of billions of people."

I have no confidence that the SPD and the Greens want to change anything fundamental. They have had



Die Linke must make it clear that it does not belong to the political establishment, which fewer and fewer people trust

long enough and often enough opportunities to do so. I think something will only change if people stand up en masse, so that the millions of workers finally get wages they can live on, so that rents finally go down, so that climate change is stopped and armaments and wars are ended.

All this is a product of the capitalist system. It is clear to me that the ladies and gentlemen here do not want to talk about it. They profit from it. That's why it's so important that there is Die Linke, which doesn't take part in this game and wants to change the conditions."

But Janine Wissler cannot say anything like that because, with Die Linke sitting in coalitions in the federal states of Thuringia, Berlin and Bremen, and the party leadership begging Baerbock and Scholz (the leading candidates of the Greens and SPD), to recognise its ability to govern, the party's actual practice contradicts making any statements on the above lines.

It is precisely the problem of Die Linke that its drive for coalitions with pro-capitalist parties contradicts its claims to be a socialist party in action and not just in its formal party programme.

Socialist course

We call on all members and supporters of the party to fight together with us and other socialists in the party, such as the Anti-Capitalist Left, for Die Linke to take a militant, socialist course. Without this, the party's very future can be at stake.

It is also necessary to put an end to the unspeakable practice of party and parliamentary group leaders bypassing the democratically elected bodies of the party. The party executive, which has been seen as a 'left'

executive since its election in February, should call its two chairpersons and the parliamentary group's two chairpersons to order and end this method of operation.

• This article can be read in full on socialistworld.net



Committee for a Workers' International (CWI) facebook live e-rally

Capitalist Climate Catastrophe - the socialist solution

26 September - 2pm (BST)

Join us live to hear from socialist activists around the world who are fighting for socialist change to end the climate catastrophe.

The CWI is the socialist international organisation to which the Socialist Party is affiliated.

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Unemployment, low pay, rip-off uni fees, climate change...

JOIN THE FIGHT FOR SOCIALISM



PHOTO: MARY FINCH

AMY SAGE
BRISTOL NORTH SOCIALIST PARTY

This generation of young people is going to be worse off than our parents. In workplaces, young people are facing brutal and continuous attacks on our pay, terms and conditions. On the campuses, students are facing extortionate tuition fees and rent, course closures and a future wracked with debt. The immediate future for the young working class is looking progressively bleaker. And this is dependent on whether we actually have a future - something which is increasingly called into question with the climate crisis now well and truly upon us!

If we want any hope of a decent future, students and young workers must fight back. This is the message the Socialist Party will be

taking into the schools, colleges, universities and workplaces over the next few weeks.

The Youth Fight for Jobs day of action on Saturday 9 October will send a very clear message that young workers will not be the ones to pay for the crisis caused by capitalism. Youth unemployment, underemployment, bogus training schemes, exploitative contracts and detrimental youth rates are burdens we are no longer prepared to bear.

Meanwhile as university terms start, none of the issues that drove students to take action through rent strikes last year have been resolved. In fact, with talk of lowering the threshold for tuition fee repayments and course cuts already underway, the situation for students looks likely to get worse. We will be at university freshers fairs, calling on students to join us, to get organised and fight back for free education.

Linked to all of this is our demand for socialist change, not climate change. Intrinsic to our demand for jobs for young people is the demand for a mass programme of socially useful and environmentally friendly job creation. We call for a democratically controlled, publicly owned education system that prepares young people for work within sustainable industries.

The capitalists are unprepared to invest in a future for young people, and unwilling to take the steps needed to solve climate change. That is why on the climate strikes on the 24 September and at COP26 in Glasgow in November, we will be calling on students and young people to join the fight for socialism now, in order to provide every young and working-class person with a decent future. If there ever was a strong case for a socialist transformation of society, it is now.

Join the fightback

JOIN THE SOCIALISTS

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to find out more today!



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

