

END PROFIT-FUELLED CRISIS



DANIEL CASE/CC

Make big business pay, not workers

Queues at petrol stations causing traffic chaos, fuel bills rising with energy firms going bust and the risk of empty supermarket shelves for Christmas - all symptoms of a system that is sick.

A £20-a-week cut to Universal Credit, the end of furlough and a hike in national insurance - all ways in which the government is making ordinary people pay. The reality of what 'levelling up' actually means

appears to be rising prices and increasing child poverty.

Inflation, a measure of the cost of living, is heading towards 4% - that means higher rents and bigger bills. But the wage slip isn't getting 'levelled up'. Workers in the NHS have been offered 3%, council workers 1.75% and many others a pay freeze. Living standards are being driven down.

The avalanche of bosses' attacks needs to be met with determined resistance from workers organised in the trade unions. Already, NHS workers have voted overwhelmingly to reject the government's real-terms pay cut. Now it is the responsibility of the leaders of these unions to coordinate and build for strike ballots. With the role NHS workers have played throughout the pandemic, working with

inadequate PPE, this would get huge public support.

Years of poor pay and conditions have forced lorry drivers off the roads. To maximise profits and fill the vacancies, haulage bosses have relied on exploited migrant workers. Now the effects of the Covid pandemic, and the disorganised end of the Brexit transition period, have tipped the industry from crisis into chaos.

The solution starts with a drivers' pay rise. Lasting improvements need national trade union-agreed pay and conditions, including for EU workers. But the bosses won't want to give up their profits without a fight. Left unchallenged, short-term pay rises will come under attack, and bosses will seek to maintain their profits by increasing prices.

The haulage industry - publicly owned and democratically planned, would have the long-term stability and security of supply as a motivator, not the ruthless drive for profit.

The same is true for the energy industry, where ordinary people are being forced to pay for the failures of privatisation, the market and the pursuit of profits through higher prices. The industry needs to be renationalised and democratically run to meet need.

The pandemic catastrophe, and now the fuel and energy chaos, show that a capitalist market system based on profit, is riddled with crisis. And when a crisis hits, the working class is made to pay. What is needed is a system based on the democratic public ownership, and rational planning, of all society's resources - socialism.

the Socialist

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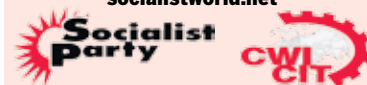
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"The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it."
Karl Marx

Starmer consolidates post-Corbyn Blairite transformation of Labour

Trade unions must fight for a new workers' party



WHAT WE THINK

The person who said New Labour was "intensely relaxed about people getting filthy rich" is now intensely happy about the results of this year's Labour Party conference. Architect of Blairism, Lord Peter Mandelson, is "just thrilled" at this "tremendous win for Keir Starmer". He said: "What these rule changes mean is that when they are asked to vote for Keir Starmer, they can know with almost complete certainty, that they are not going to wake up one day and find Jeremy Corbyn there instead".

Since Starmer took over as Labour leader in April 2020, he has been systematically removing the threat to the capitalist class posed by Corbynism, including from Labour's rules and structures. The main conclusion from his conference measures must be that the workers' politics that is so urgently needed, alongside workplace, youth and community struggle, requires the building of a new mass independent party of the working class.

The threat that Corbynism had

been able to pose to the defenders of capitalism is confirmed both by the euphoria among Mandelson and his ilk and by the measures taken by Starmer. The mass support for Corbyn's anti-austerity programme, limited though the programme was, contained within it the danger that working-class and young people could be emboldened to fight for more, including measures that threatened the position of the capitalist class in society.

In 2015, the anger against the first five years of Tory rule needed an outlet. The right-wing trade union leaders had betrayed the mass strikes of 2011 and offered no lead. Ed Miliband's Collins Review was an attempt to remove the last vestiges of the trade union voice from Labour. But the law of unintended consequences swung into action. His £3 fee for participation in a leadership vote as a registered supporter - aimed at creating a US-style primary contest to bolster 'moderate' candidates - instead opened a channel for anti-austerity rage, and Corbyn was elected.

Among the measures Starmer sprang on the conference was the removal of the registered supporters category, with six months of membership now required to vote in a leadership election.

Corbyn needed the support of 15% of Labour MPs to get on the ballot

paper. He just scraped on - including with the support of some right-wingers who thought a defeat for Corbyn would see off the left for good. However, when their system is in crisis the capitalist class cannot always control the outcome of their actions. Corbyn reduced the threshold from 15% to 10%, but Starmer has now upped it to one in five. With just 33 of the 199 Labour MPs nominally members of the Socialist Campaign Group, the left has no chance of getting a candidate on the ballot paper.

The Socialist Party warned from the offset that the Labour Party could not continue indefinitely under conditions of civil war between the Blairites who dominated the Parliamentary Labour Party and the councils on the one hand, and a potential new anti-austerity party on the other around those who'd joined to fight austerity. Among the measures needed to transform the party was deselection of the Blairites. Unfortunately, the Labour left did not organise for this, accepting the false idea that unity with the pro-capitalist wing under Jeremy Corbyn was possible.

Starmer's measures reduce even further the opportunity for constituency parties to remove right-wing MPs. He has increased the threshold for trigger ballots to a majority of local party branches and affiliate branches combined, rather than just one or the other.



Workers' politics is urgently needed and requires the building of a new mass independent party of the working class



Starmer's changes will also mean that the number of motions debated at the annual party conference will be cut from 20 to 12, while a revamped national policy forum process will shape what goes in the manifesto.

These measures constitute some of the finishing touches of Starmer's project to return the Labour Party to Blairism: that is a party that acts in the interests of the capitalist class. His 'essay', published prior to the conference, reflects this. It mentions 'business' 27 times but 'socialism', 'public ownership' or 'nationalisation' not at all.

Meanwhile, the Tories are carrying out 'socialist' measures - but for the rich. In response to the fuel crisis, Grant Shapps has suspended free-market laws to allow different companies to coordinate the distribution of petrol. Capitalism isn't working - and the government has been forced to intervene in order to shore up the capitalist system, as it did with its interventions during the pandemic.

The working class, not the billionaires, is now being expected to pay for that Covid spending through 'fire and rehire', pay freezes and pay cuts, and falling working-class life expectancy and living standards.

The building of a new mass working-class political voice is needed as part of the fight for a society where measures are taken in the interests of humanity and the environment. The Socialist Party is working with the RMT rail union and others in the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition to take steps in that direction, preparing to stand candidates in next May's elections against Starmer's New 'New Labour' councilors who've axed so many jobs and services.

Labour conference shows that this is an urgent task for the trade union movement. This must be under the democratic control of the membership. The last-minute support of the Unison delegation was significant for Starmer's victory - but Unison members had no say. Part and parcel of building a new mass workers' party is the struggle for democratic, fighting trade unions.

STOP PRESS

Bakers' union votes to disaffiliate from Labour

As we go to press the BEAWU's recall conference has voted virtually unanimously to disaffiliate from the Labour Party. The union says: "The decision taken by our delegates doesn't mean we are leaving the political scene, it means we will become more political and we will ensure our members' political voice is heard, as we did when we started the campaign for £10 per hour in 2014. Today we want to see £15 per hour for all workers, the abolition of zero-hours contracts and ending discrimination of young people by dispensing with youth rates.

"The BEAWU will not be bullied by bosses or politicians. When you pick on one of us you take on all of us. That's what solidarity means".

- More in future issues
- See also 'Interview: Bakers' union to vote on Labour disaffiliation' at socialistparty.org.uk



WHAT WE STAND FOR

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

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

PUBLIC SERVICES

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

- 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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Driver shortages - a view from the inside



Millions of workers have been travelling to work, hoping that they have enough fuel to get home or complete the school run. A shortage of fuel tanker drivers has led to late deliveries of fuel and panic buying, many petrol stations have had to close.

Low pay and poor working conditions have driven HGV drivers away from the industry. Now in a massive U-turn, the government is moving to grant temporary visas to EU drivers in the hope that vacancies will be filled. It may also use the army to carry out deliveries. In an admission of capitalist market failure, the government's own competition rules have been suspended!

Khalo Demenie, a member of Basingstoke Socialist Party, outlines their experiences working in the industry.

The driving industry is neglected. Conditions are so bad that fewer and fewer people want to do the job. Now there are serious issues with petrol stations with no petrol because of a lack of drivers, empty shelves in supermarkets, and it could get worse, impacting the whole economy.

I was an HGV driver for five years and really loved the job, but I had to stop because of poor working conditions and stress.

I have read in the papers recently that it costs £2,000 to get an HGV license. This is a lie. Most people don't pass at the first attempt, and it costs £500 to take an exam. I passed at the third attempt, costing me a total of £3,500. I also chose to do 'HIAB' training to be able to operate a crane on the back of a lorry. Overall, I spent a total of £5,000 on my class 2 license. That doesn't even qualify me to use a trailer, which needs another expensive exam.

The exam is strict, which is fair enough because of the risks and responsibilities of being a driver; where a driver's actions could kill people in an instant. But there are no grounds for appeal. They can fail drivers for not driving confidently enough. It's a big money machine for the driving schools.

I first worked for an agency, but found out very quickly from other drivers that you lose massive amounts of money in agency fees. A typical hourly wage is £12 an hour, but the agency charges the

company between £20-25 an hour - they make huge profits stealing drivers' wages.

It's not just the pay that is bad, but the huge amount of stress, responsibility and liability that's put on drivers. You can lose your job for minor incidents, or be made to pay for damage: damaging a wing-mirror on a country road, for example.

Bosses' pressure

Bosses also apply time pressure on drivers. If you're not quick enough, don't take the most direct route, or can't find the location, it just adds to the pressure. Being a driver needs concentration for every single second of the working day, it is absolutely exhausting.

The driving hours regulations are an absolute piss-take, lots of companies know ways around them. I have heard stories of companies that only pay drivers for deliveries made, because they don't want to pay for waiting time. They ask drivers to turn off their 'tachograph' device, which records everything the driver does, including the rest times while drivers are waiting. But this is still work, the driver is still in the lorry! This can mean that drivers can do over 70 hours a week, but the maximum by law is 45 hours a week.

For female drivers the facilities are an absolute nightmare, there are no hygiene facilities. I have spoken to a number of women drivers who have had to quit because they had

constant bladder infections after going without access to toilets.

The huge crisis that is now unfolding is because bosses and the government have neglected lorry drivers and the industry for decades. There are problems with every aspect of the industry. In my experience, lorry drivers are relatively unorganised and not in trade unions. Many workers are sceptical of the unions and their ability to be able to organise and improve things. One of the challenges is that workers are often isolated - working for agencies or self-employed. I think the unions have to step up, and find a way to meet the drivers. They need to go to places where the drivers are - service stations and distribution centres.

Without trade union organisation employers are not held accountable to the law. Government cuts mean that the DVLA is short-staffed and unable to enforce the law. In five years of driving, I was never stopped by officers and subjected to checks.

Drivers' pay has to increase, and the industry should be made to pay for driver recruitment and training. There needs to be a major investment in training centres, and major improvements in hygiene facilities and overnight stations. These facilities need to be free and publicly owned to give drivers safe, decent places to rest. It should be the industry bosses, who have been making huge profits, that should be made to pay for it.



Drivers can do over 70 hours a week, but the maximum by law is 45 hours a week



Poorest hit hardest

One million will be 10% worse off due to the £20-a-week Universal Credit cut. And with income going down, the costs of food, gas and electricity are going up. The poorest tenth of the population spend 21.1% of their income on these items, the richest tenth, 9.5%. For the poorest, it hits hardest - that is the consequence of Tory attacks.

Shorter lives and longer waits

Not only are the lives of the poorest in society getting shorter, but the amount of time spent on a NHS waiting list is growing too. If you live in the most deprived areas, the time spent waiting for a routine treatment on the NHS is up 50%, compared to 35% in more affluent areas.

Something else that is growing is the wealth of the super-rich. We say, use some of the £106 billion that was added to Britain's billionaire's bank accounts last year to pay for decent healthcare for all.

Two-faced Tesco

Two-faced Tesco has been speaking in riddles, telling the government one thing and unions another. The company has told the government that it is facing a driver shortfall that could lead to empty supermarket shelves at Christmas, but claims in pay negotiations with the union that it has a 400-driver waiting list to join the company. The reason for this doublespeak is revealed when Tesco says that it "does not believe it needs to substantially raise the wages of lorry drivers" in negotiations!

Child poverty

The government "has no strategy and no measurable objectives" to reduce child poverty, according to the chair of the cross-party work and pensions select committee. Before the pandemic, 31% of children in the UK were in poverty - 4.3 million. The pandemic will almost certainly have increased those figures.

You could argue that the government has a plan to increase child poverty. That is the effects of its policies - £20-a-week cut to Universal Credit, public sector pay freeze, rise in national insurance, etc.



Socialist Students has always opposed tuition fees and supported free education

Sunak's student special

A cruel cut to the loan payback threshold

ADAM HARMSWORTH
COVENTRY SOCIALIST PARTY

In another determined effort to take money off the working class to pay for the pandemic, the government is set to slash the threshold at which students pay back their loans. No details have been revealed yet, but in 2019 the Augar review demanded a threshold of £23,000. Lowering the threshold from the current £27,295 will hit the pockets of tens of thousands of graduates every year, already facing a national insurance hike when they go into work. Bear in mind a £23k salary is still below £12 an hour working full time.

The Tories want to put this change across as an act of 'fairness', because they say taxpayers are paying for higher education rather than graduates. Let's be clear, this is an excuse for getting an estimated £2 billion out of graduates. If it were about fairness, the Tories might look at the Sunday Times Rich List. Taking that £2 billion off the richest man - Sir Leonard Blavatnik - would still leave him with a £5.2 billion gain this year!

The second Tory excuse is that this is part of the 'levelling up' agenda, because it will push more young people into technical and vocational training. To quote the Financial

Times: "The government believes too many students are racking up debts studying 'soft' three-year university courses in arts and social sciences".

That's not levelling up. With wealthy graduates paying their loans up-front, this move will mainly push lower-income working-class youth away from university. Tory ideology comes through clearly: youth from wealthier backgrounds can study what they like, but working-class youth should study only if it's profitable for capitalism.

What also comes through clearly is that the tuition fees model is an absolute failure. The fees system, started by Blair and expanded by the Con-Dem coalition, tried to get more money out of young workers, who were falsely sold the idea of university leading to a good well-paying career.

Many of Britain's 14 million graduates are in entry-level, low-paying jobs, and the bosses aren't prepared to change that. The fight for free education and for real graduate careers must come from the student and wider workers' movement. The trade unions should oppose this threshold change and stand with students in reinforcing that important demand for free university education.

• More on pages 10-11

Join the student fightback!

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Visit socialiststudents.org.uk/join
or call 020 8988 8761
or text your name and school, college or uni to 07749 379 010

NHS workers reject 3% pay insult

Unions must now prepare to strike together

SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBERS IN UNISON

It's in our pay packets now - the Tory government's miserly 3% 'pay rise' for NHS workers. It is becoming clearer by the day to our fellow NHS staff that this amounts to effectively nothing.

With many having also had pension adjustments, experiencing price rises, and looking at an upcoming National Insurance hike, we all know what a kick in the teeth this is. At the same time, waiting lists are growing and the strain on NHS workers is immense. Anger can only grow.

Even before the effects of tax hikes and price rises really started to sink in, members in the health unions - Unison, RCN and GMB - voted overwhelmingly to reject the 3%, giving a clear indication of willingness for action. And this was in a situation where there was, at best, a lacklustre official campaign from the union leaderships.

At the time of writing, Unite has still to announce its ballot result. But Unite members in Wales have clearly rejected the deal, and there is every expectation that the Unite result will be the same as the others.

It is essential now that the health unions get together to plan a campaign and a timetable for coordinated

industrial action ballots to demand a substantial pay rise.

A good start would be for the newly elected left majority on Unison's National Executive Council (NEC) to arrange to meet with the Unite's NEC following the victory of Sharon Graham as Unite general secretary.



It is essential now that the health unions get together to plan a campaign and a timetable for coordinated industrial action ballots

Outrageously, as we reported in the Socialist, the right-wing majority in Unison's health service group executive rejected calls from Socialist Party members and others to move to an industrial action ballot, accompanied by a massive campaign. Instead, they are proposing an indicative ballot next, which risks diluting the mood.

Making it up as they went along in order to get the outcome they wanted, they have declared that in the indicative ballot there needs to be a 45% turnout. Then at the Unison

health conference, they declared that emergency motions cannot be taken at online conferences, thus ensuring that their decision could not be overturned. Neither of these things are in the rulebook. The recently elected left majority on Unison's NEC cannot let them get away with this.

The Tory anti-trade union laws demand a 50% turnout in an industrial action ballot. That means we have to launch almighty campaigns of workplace meetings, rallies and protests. Leaflets need to go out and discussions take place ward by ward, canteen by canteen, desk by desk.

Whichever union we are in, we must also plan in our workplaces. Can our union branch reach out to the other unions in our hospital? If there are moves by the right-wing locally to block action, workers can come together under the banner of NHS Workers Say No, for example. Can we call a meeting now to prepare a campaign? What about calling pay day protests at the main gate?

Like everyone else in the public sector, NHS workers know 'there's too much month at the end of the money!' But the Tories can be pushed back - look at the fuel crisis they are currently in. We can win, but to do so we have to fight and prepare to strike together.



PHOTO: PAUL MATTHEWSON

College workers walk out in pay dispute

“We are the ones who can change things”

BEA GARDNER
SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBER IN UCU

University and College Union (UCU) members at 13 colleges across England began strike action on 28 September in a dispute over pay. The union is demanding a pay increase greater than 5%, after college workers were yet again offered a real-terms pay cut.

At the College of North East London Tottenham campus, workers walked-out as part of the 13-day strike, and as part of the capital city colleges group, which is also taking action over workload, holiday pay and a new assessment regime.

Further education workers are experiencing all of the same problems of marketisation as higher education. As one striker put it: “When

management see students they just see money, we see potential”. Another, who later asked to join the Socialist Party, put it best when he said: “Short termism and profit is what matters to them. We have to change that through strikes, protests and education. Some people know there is a problem but think they aren’t the one to address it, they are waiting for a messiah. But that is us, all of us have something to contribute. We are the ones who can change things”.

Solidarity with all other further education workers taking action. We in higher education might be joining you on strike this term as we collectively fight back over marketisation and austerity.

● See further reports in the next issue

All out for victory - fightback to save Birmingham GKN jobs!



BIRMINGHAM SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBERS

Rank-and-file members of Unite in the Chester Road GKN workforce in Erdington, Birmingham have voted overwhelmingly for an all-out strike. 95% of the 500-strong workforce voted ‘yes’ against plans by vulture-capitalists Melrose, who plan to shut down and ship the jobs abroad.

The strike has now been suspended until 18 October, following Melrose pausing the removal of machinery and operations from Chester Road. GKN Driveline workers will want to see firm guarantees over the plant remaining open before the strike is called off completely. The threat of action has already brought previously hard-nosed Melrose management to the table.

We believe any potential deal should be put to Unite members at GKN for full debate and discussion before being settled. But Melrose won’t give them five minutes to hear the detailed alternative plans to save the plant, British automotive manufacturing and working-class communities.

Parliamentary motions, rallies, lobbying and an extremely detailed and innovative 90-page alternative production plan for a green-automotive transition were put forward, but were all ignored and dismissed by the asset strippers Melrose.

If workers have to flex their industrial muscles through collective industrial action then so be it. If the pandemic has shown us anything, it’s that these key workers are the

ones who really keep factories and other workplaces running, not investment managers.

The Socialist Party says GKN and Melrose Industries need to open the books and have the accounts reviewed democratically and transparently by Unite and rank-and-file workers, to truly see what resources are available and where the money is going.

It was only two years ago, in preparation for their hostile takeover of GKN, that the top brass of Melrose received large ‘incentive packages’. The top four executives received £41.7 million each, equalling an eye-watering total of £166.8 million! It’s not like top management aren’t raking in some healthy looking salaries already: Melrose CEO Simon Peckham receiving a pay packet of £976,000 in 2019. This is even more of a slap in the face when you consider that the Chester Road plant is situated in Erdington, with a climbing unemployment rate of 12.5%.

So it goes without saying this closure will not just be devastating to the workforce but a huge blow to this working-class community as a whole - as we all know when these type of jobs go, they never come back. Birmingham Socialist Party members have seen the immense local community support from the people of Erdington and North Birmingham to keep the plant open when we’ve been campaigning to save the GKN plant high street stalls near the factory.

As Frank Duffy, Unite convenor at the Chester plant states:

“Birmingham has been here before. When the massive Rover factory at Longbridge closed in 2005 the impact was felt for years. Unite’s predecessor union, Amicus, supported research which showed that despite 90% of the workers finding alternative employment, 66% were financially worse off, average incomes fell by more than £6,000 and 25% reported being in debt or being reliant on savings to get by.”

We fully support the alternative production plan drawn up by GKN reps tapping into the decades of on-site experience to both save costs and help kick up a ‘green revolution’ for more sustainable cars and transitioning the sector as whole, echoing the spirit of the 1976 Lucas Plan to convert and retrofit Lucas Aerospace plants for socially beneficial production. Democratic workers’ control and management, with all the years of collective experience, will be what can save the British automobile industry, not the greed of shareholders hell-bent on asset stripping. The only long-term solution is to nationalise the industry.

Sharon Graham, with the support of the Socialist Party, was recently elected Unite general secretary on a promise to “immediately ramp up the resource required to defend jobs, fight cuts and protect pay”. Now is the time to turn these words into action, with the building of a mass campaign throughout the Birmingham community and further afield, applying pressure on both Melrose and companies involved in the wider supply chain.

National Education Union deputy general secretary election

A fighting strategy to win on workload, pay and cuts

SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBERS IN THE NEU

This government left it to the very end of last term to confirm that its ‘reward’ to teachers for all their relentless hours of work during the pandemic would be to cut their pay!

The Tories want school and college staff, and the communities they support, to foot the bill for their pandemic expenditure through cuts to pay, conditions and education funding. Trade unions must use their collective strength to defeat these attacks.

The successful use of ‘Section 44’ legislation in January 2021, holding back the unsafe reopening of schools, showed how acting together can force this government back. The National Education Union (NEU) should now be launching an urgent plan of action to build for the union-wide strike action that can defeat these attacks on pay, and win on workload too.

In response to the ‘pay freeze’, Socialist Party member and candidate for NEU deputy general secretary, Martin Powell-Davies, immediately issued a call for the NEU to launch a union-wide campaign to defend members’ pay, bringing together other unions to build joint

action, starting with setting a date for a trade-union led national demo against austerity.

Martin has set out a clear strategy to win:

- Urgently convene rallies and meetings to mobilise members
- Campaign in our communities for the funding schools need
- Organise energetically at every level of the union to prepare for - and then win - national ballots for strike action
- Take action to win a claim for a new ‘national contract’ with:
 - The NEU conference claim for a pay rise of at least 7%
 - Binding pay scales on all employers
 - No performance pay
 - Maximum limits on overall working hours

In contrast, when the NEU’s national executive met at the start of September, no plan for action was tabled by the leadership.

Weakness only invites aggression. The Tories have now attacked incomes further with the National Insurance increase. This will also add further pressure to already overstretched school and college budgets, threatening more cuts to jobs and resources.



Martin Powell-Davies SENAM

That’s why the five Socialist Party members on the NEU national executive, alongside others supporting Martin Powell-Davies’ deputy general secretary stand, will be putting forward his fighting strategy at the next national executive.

They have submitted a motion making clear “that it will only be through a massive national campaign and industrial action that the government’s attack on our pay can be defeated”. It sets out the steps that need to be taken to prepare for a successful ballot, then to take determined action to win our claim next year. The ‘NEU Left’ majority on the executive will have to decide whether it supports this call, or, once again, finds reasons to delay action.

Teachers in England are one of the only groups of public sector workers to be offered no pay rise at all for 2021-22. They rightly expect their unions to be organising urgently to defeat this attack. This October’s election for NEU deputy general secretary gives NEU members an opportunity to elect a union leader who is ready to give the determined lead needed to defend members.

As deputy general secretary, Martin would provide a clear lead from the top, giving members the confidence to act together in their workplace. His election as deputy general secretary would be a clear signal that teachers and support staff want their unions to put words into action and take a decisive stand.

● The postal ballot opens on 4 October. Vote for Martin and for a fighting strategy to win! See martin4dgs.co.uk for more

Corby and Burton Latimer Weetabix engineers strike against fire-and-rehire pay cut

HEATHER RAWLING
LEICESTER SOCIALIST PARTY

Engineers at Weetabix worked throughout the pandemic to feed the nation. Weetabix profits increased by nearly 20% to £81 million in 2020, yet the company is intent on using ‘fire and rehire’ to drive down wages and conditions.

“We were expecting this,” Corby pickets told the Socialist Party. Weetabix was taken over by Post Holdings in 2017 for £1.4 billion. Soon

after, consultants were brought in to streamline the operation. Engineers, members of Unite the Union, say that the company didn’t talk to the workers on the shopfloor, who have a much better idea of how the plant operates. “It was clear that something was coming down the line and it wouldn’t be for our benefit.”

Sure enough, management put plans forward to fire and rehire the engineers. Changes to shift and working practices will mean that workers will be up to £5,000 a year

worse off. Pickets were also concerned about health and safety, as fewer engineers would be on site at any one time, and they are already straining to complete maintenance and repair jobs adequately.

There was plenty of conversation on the Corby picket line. Older workers reminisced about the struggle to save the steelworks and the ‘good old seventies’ when unions held more sway. This was the first 48-hour strike in a series of weekly strikes due to finish at the end of November.

Solidarity action by all workers facing fire and rehire would send a strong signal of resistance to employers thinking of going down the same route. As one picket said, we are not just fighting for ourselves, we are fighting for everyone.

Get all the latest union news
[nationalshopstewardsnetwork](http://nationalshopstewardsnetwork.org)
NSSN bulletin: shopstewards.net



PHOTOS: HEATHER RAWLING AND UNITE EAST MIDS

NORTHAMPTON SOCIALIST PARTY

Northampton Socialist Party members visited the second morning of strike action at Burton Latimer Weetabix factory on 22 September. We were greeted by workers who were dividing their forces to cover the two entrances. The mood was high-spirited, with car horns constantly sounding support for the workers on strike.

The support included workers from the adjacent factory shouting solidarity greetings from their cars as they left their shifts. According to Weetabix workers, the neighbouring company had tried similar tactics on its workforce and was met with industrial action.

One Weetabix worker told us the factory is cutting engineers by half. This is overwhelmingly a safety issue, as it is the engineers who maintain the machinery and ensure that it is running as it should. He explained that there had been no changes to warrant these cut backs, and that the remaining engineers will need to work harder to make up the shortfall.

The entire workforce continued working through the pandemic, and were dismayed that the company bosses are ‘thanking’ them with fire-and-rehire tactics, especially as the company has, by all accounts, maintained profits. We remarked on the similarity of the tactics used by the Weetabix bosses to those used against Banbury workers by Douwe Egberts. Similarly, the majority of the staff are long-term dedicated workers who had one key message to the Weetabix management: “Treat us fairly to get what you want out of us.”

SOCIALISM TODAY

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Save our services

PREPARING FOR NO-CUTS PEOPLE'S BUDGETS

The Socialist Party is part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC), alongside the RMT transport union and other organisations.

TUSC nationally is promoting the idea of local conferences to draw up no-cuts People's Budgets as part of its campaign against the post-Covid austerity that looms.

Here we print extracts from TUSC's campaign material. It can be read in full at tusc.org.uk

What can councils do in the face of government cuts to funding for local public services? Actually, they can do a lot.

Councils in England are responsible for over one-fifth of all public spending, with responsibilities for housing, adult social care, education support, transport, recycling and waste collection, libraries and many other services. The 120 or so Labour-led councils have a combined spending power greater than the individual state budgets of 16 European countries. That's a powerful starting point from which to organise a fightback against relentless Tory austerity.

Covid has revealed both the drastic situation our local public services are in - with councils massively underfunded by central government - but also some of the many things local authorities have the power to do to improve our lives.

In the first lockdown, for example, councils acted against homelessness in their local areas through the 'Everybody In' scheme. Many councils stepped in during autumn half-term to continue free school meals. But they could go so much further.

Most current councillors, however, including unfortunately the majority of Labour's 7,000 or so local representatives, would say they cannot use their legal authority to act without first getting funding from the government. But that's the wrong way round. TUSC argues that councils should first spend what's needed - and then demand the money back from the government.

The multiple U-turns made by Johnson and his chancellor during the pandemic, spending billions when public pressure was on them, show that if just a handful of councils used the powers they have to refuse to implement any more cuts and spend what is necessary instead, the Tories could be made to pay up.

A glimpse of what is possible

Early in 2021 the TUSC steering committee published a report examining the policy pledges made in Labour's 2019 general election manifesto under Jeremy Corbyn's leadership, which councils have the legal powers to implement today if they had the political will to do so.

The report identifies 46 separate policies which councils could carry out immediately that would transform peoples' lives. Even just a selection of these policies could form the basis of a People's Budget to present to a local council.

But inviting local trade union branches, campaign groups, community organisations, student groups and others to contribute would undoubtedly come up with more ideas - and lay the basis for a campaign for the local council to implement them now, using their reserves and borrowing powers to temporarily finance them while launching a mass campaign locally and nationally for permanent funding from central government.

Here are some simple policies that any council could implement instantly.

Housing

- **Build council homes now!** By using councils' borrowing powers for capital spending to build council homes, while campaigning for the government to divert its subsidies for private developers to finance a mass programme of public housing
- Use councils' powers to compulsorily register private landlords and set up council-run lettings agencies, as the means to tackle repair standards, high rents, over-occupancy, extortionate letting fees, etc, for private rented homes.
- Restore full council tax benefits, to be funded from council reserves not council tax rises, and campaign for the government to reimburse councils that do so
- Councils could make sure those suffering on the streets were given immediate, decent and comfortable accommodation and support to transform their lives
- Councillors on local fire authorities could enforce tomorrow policies on cladding and fire safety to ensure the safety of local people
- Councils could act immediately on cladding and fire safety - by doing the work and billing the government. They could compulsorily purchase the buildings of private and housing association landlords which do not also act immediately



Jobs, pay and conditions

- Councils could immediately ensure a year-on-year above-inflation pay rise to begin to restore lost pay as Labour promised in 2019. They could ensure that any work undertaken by or for the council is done by workers paid at least £12-15 per hour and could immediately reduce the working week for their workforces with no loss of pay
- Councils could introduce a high-quality apprenticeship scheme with trade union rates of pay, proper training, and a guaranteed job at the end
- They could end the use of zero-hour contracts by the council and by any company undertaking work for them. They could provide facilities and public support for trade unions fighting in their local authority area for such standards in the private sector, and have powers to exclude firms that have participated in blacklisting from tendering for public contracts
- For care workers councils could implement the Unison trade union's ethical care charter to end '15-minute maximum' visiting slots, zero-hour contracts, and unpaid travel time to support workers and make sure those in need get the care they need



Education and children

- Reinstate childcare provision in Sure Start centres where this has been cut, and reopen all the centres closed since 2010
- Bring in free school meals for every school pupil, including during holidays
- Introduce local replacements for the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) for all 16-18 year-olds who stay on in education

Health and social care

- Social care in local authorities could be transformed if they adopted and put into place the foundations of the National Care Service, promised by Labour's manifesto, of community-based, person-centred support, underpinned by the principles of ethical care and independent living. With free personal care, beginning with investments to ensure that older people have their personal care needs met, with the ambition to extend this provision to all working-age adults



The myth that it is 'illegal to resist'

The right-wing Labour council leaders sabotaging the call for anti-austerity resistance do not justify themselves in the main by defending the consequences of the cuts, privatisations and other measures that they are implementing.

Instead their 'defence' is to say that there is no alternative, that introducing no-cuts budgets is 'illegal'. They even got a rule change agreed at Labour's 2016 conference that a backbench councillor supporting "any proposal to set an illegal budget" could "face disciplinary action".

Unlike in the US, a council in Britain cannot go bust in the same way as a private company can. A court could appoint a receiver if a council defaulted on its liabilities, but it would not be the equivalent of a private sector bankruptcy in which a company is wound up (and creditors risk losing their money). Because only an act of parliament can dissolve a local authority, council finances are implicitly underpinned by central government.

To maintain some control by central government of council finances, local authorities are legally required to set a 'balanced budget' each year before they can issue council tax bills, set service charges, etc. If a council meeting was to deliberately approve an 'unbalanced budget', the council chief finance officer would serve a Section 114 notice to block council departments from non-statutory expenditure and prevent the issuing of council tax bills.

That is why TUSC does not advocate presenting deliberately 'unbalanced budgets' to council budget-making meetings or using the meetings to not set a budget at all, which would precipitate an immediate legal conflict. But presenting a no-cuts budget that is formally 'balanced' by the use of prudential borrowing powers and reserves, to buy time to build a mass campaign for government funding while still maintaining the functioning of the council, is a different matter. This is the strategy that has been pioneered by TUSC.

Services

- Councils could immediately end outsourcing and return all outsourced and privatised services to council control, restoring them to an even better standard of service than before
- All closed libraries, schools and care homes, and other key services and community assets could be reopened, fully funded and updated to meet the needs of local people. And PFI contracts could be scrapped
- Councils could act now to provide the very best support and facilities to help all those less abled be part of society and their community by investing what is necessary in disabled services and support
- Reverse all cuts to domestic violence support services and women's refuges and cuts to street lighting

Youth facilities

- Councils could reopen closed youth centres and restore lost youth services, starting now to put into place the foundations of a genuine national youth service, as Labour promised
- Every council could stop the sell-off of playing fields and sports facilities to developers and private leisure companies, and invest in sports and recreation facilities and services
- Empty high street shops, for example, could be taken over and transformed into sports facilities and spaces for all sections of society



Climate emergency

- Local authorities have powers to intervene in the provision of bus and transport services, which can be used to ensure they are run in the interests of local people, to boost the use of public transport. They can introduce free bus travel schemes for under-25s now
- Councils could start now a mass home insulation energy efficiency programme. They could restore spending on street and drain cleaning, and bring back standards and governance to ensure quality of work long-term
- They could call in all development projects in order to review environmental impacts - for example, impact on infrastructure, concreting over green space (as well as the quantity and quality of social housing, etc)
- Councils could draw up a detailed local risk assessment and plan to combat flooding risks, taking the necessary action and works needed to protect services and communities both short and long term
- In drawing up local Climate Emergency plans, councils could set targets based on the carbon footprint, not just of council-run services but capturing total emissions for the local area, giving a real picture of what needs to be done to tackle the climate crisis



What steps can groups take?

Local TUSC groups should look to meet and lay out plans to host a People's Budget conference before the end of 2021, to draw together the local set of demands and campaign issues to take to the council ahead of their 2022-23 budget-setting meeting, which will take place in January or February 2022.

After deciding on a date for the People's Budget conference, a plan of action should be discussed and drawn up to build for it, by contacting trade union branches, campaign groups, community groups, residents associations and so on to take part - co-hosting if they wish - but certainly inviting them to contribute with their ideas and proposals for what is needed in the local area.

Drawing up a local People's Budget can sound daunting - but it doesn't have to be. Getting across the idea that council budgets should start from what local communities need - not what central government austerity policies demand - can begin with just one local campaign.

And election planning too

People's Budget campaigns can play an important role everywhere in organising a local fightback to the efforts the pro-capitalist politicians will make to pass the costs of the Covid pandemic onto the shoulders of working-class people. But in areas with local council elections next year, they could be central in laying the foundations to pull together the broadest possible anti-austerity electoral challenge - a powerful means of building the pressure on austerity establishment politicians.

But that means election planning too, appealing for candidates early on, getting an election agent (or agents) in place, and so on.

Liverpool socialist council showed the way

From 1983 to 1987 Liverpool City Council was led by supporters of Militant - predecessor to the Socialist Party. When faced with cuts from central government, they refused to pass them on. Instead, with the slogan "better to break the law than break the poor", they made huge advances for working-class people in Liverpool, defeating Tory prime minister Margaret Thatcher and winning £60 million for the city.

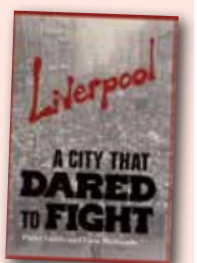
While other councils were implementing cuts, Liverpool council built 5,000 houses and flats - gardens back and front in many cases. It cancelled all cuts and redundancies planned by the outgoing council, built six new nursery schools and five new sports centres, three new parks, and rents were frozen for five years. 2,000 additional jobs were provided for in the Liverpool City Council budget.

This was made possible by mobilising tens of thousands of local people on demonstrations. On three occasions the Joint Local Authority Shop Stewards Committee organised 30,000 council workers in strike action to defend the policies of the council.

Liverpool: A City that Dared to Fight

The definitive account of the working-class struggle against Thatcher's cuts by Peter Taaffe and Tony Mulhearn

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More market chaos: York students given digs in Hull

Over 100 incoming University of York students have been burdened with a 72-mile round trip between the university and their accommodation. Less than a month before beginning their courses, they were informed that "there are no available rooms across the city of York, either on or off campus", and were instead given rooms in Hull.

There have been similar problems in Bristol and elsewhere. This promises huge disruption at a crucial point of the university experience.

Decreased public spending and the increasing encroachment of market forces into higher education have driven imbalances in admissions across universities. As tuition fees form a progressively greater majority of their income, universities compete to attract as many students as possible.

This leads to wealthier and more prestigious institutions becoming oversubscribed, while many others struggle to meet admission quotas. Covid has further deepened the tension between the financial interests of a university and the wellbeing of its students and staff.

Oversubscription also adds to the already increasing workloads of university staff, without a corresponding rise in pay. The same market forces driving oversubscription push attacks on pay and pensions and widespread casualisation. These, along with pay inequality, form the foundation of the 'four fights' dispute by the University and College Union.

We must oppose marketisation, and fight for an education sector which is adequately funded and democratically run according to the interests of staff and students.

ALI MANSFIELD
YORK SOCIALIST STUDENTS

Youth climate protests are back



● London

On 24 September, hundreds of students walked out of their classes and gathered in Parliament Square to demand that the Tory government acts now to end climate change and save our future. The demo was part of other protests, organised by young people, around the country and across the world.

The Socialist Party message was very well received. Our young members went out into the crowd with leaflets and sign-up sheets for Socialist Students, with many leaving their details.

Unfortunately, the organisers refused to allow us, or anyone outside of the planned speakers' list, to give a speech to the crowd. This is highly undemocratic.

It is essential that we have a free discussion, where young people can put forward their solutions, even if there are disagreements. Otherwise, we can end up with nobody putting forward the strategies we need to fight the failure of the Tories and Starmer's Labour.

We need a democratically organised, mass, working-class movement for the climate. Capitalism is the cause of climate change. We have to fight against it, and for socialist change.

MAURICE COOPER

● Leeds

Socialist Students was part of a 150-strong protest organised by the student-staff Climate Coalition at Leeds University. Staff at the university won the right to have an hour stoppage at work, which facilitated a march from the uni down to the 'youth strike for climate' rally in the city centre.

Our leaflets for the Youth March for Jobs on 9 October were well received. Our banner and placards calling for 'socialist change to end climate change' drew attention. This led to Leeds Student Radio interviewing us, and someone joining us on the protest who wants to get active in Socialist Students.

Lots of sign-ups for Socialist Students at freshers



South Bank, London

term, with upcoming meetings on climate, sexual assault, and racism.

KATHERINE GWYTHYR

● Birmingham

We held campaign stalls outside the University of Birmingham, leafleting and talking to students and lecturers about a range of issues, including education, the environment and workers' rights under capitalism.

62 people signed up for more information, and 20 joined the first Socialist Students meeting. There we had a lively discussion, and tackled questions about socialism, Marxism and the practicalities of democratic ownership of the means of production. We are looking forward to future meetings and activities with these new members.

RUBY CUNNINGHAM

● King's, London

The queue for the freshers fair at King's College in London was 45 minutes long at its peak, plenty of time for those waiting to talk to Socialist Students.

Making our way along the queue, students snatched the clipboards as we made calls to scrap tuition fees and fight for free education - paid for by the super-rich. Many were enthused to see campaigning socialists and signed up - over 100 in total.

The other character walking the line was a man dressed up as a £100 note shouting: "Make money not babies". He was advertising a recruitment app that matches students with temporary low-paid work.

We invited the students we met to the Youth March for Jobs on 9 October, campaigning to organise working students in the trade unions. We will also be supporting staff in the University and College Union (UCU)

who are balloting for strike action this term to defend pay and pensions.

JOSH ASKER

● Liverpool

Students were crossing the square to sign up to Socialist Students. Students had been on protests around issues like Black Lives Matter, Kill the Bill, Palestine, climate and more. They agreed with our posters that 'capitalism is crisis', and wanted to take the next step to join the socialists.

Eleven new students came to our post-freshers meeting. After a wide-ranging and fruitful discussion, we agreed to organise to show solidarity with the UCU strike against job losses in the life sciences department.

An injury to one is an injury to all. The strike has already saved the jobs of 47 workers, but there are two people still facing compulsory redundancy. We want to fight against the divide-and-rule tactics of the bosses, fight for free, high-quality education, and to make the bosses pay for it.

● Sussex

There is a mood for change among young people, and Brighton is no different. Rising rents, bloated university fees, and dismal job prospects are inspiring anger at the unjust system of capitalism.

At the University of Sussex freshers, options for socialism were limited. This is where we come in.

Unfortunately, due to the Covid pandemic, we had not been able to get a Socialist Students society started, but the tide is changing. With the campus opening up, there has been significant interest in Socialist Students, with our first public meeting due on 29 September.

GEORGE FAIRWEATHER

● Falmouth

This was the first time we had a presence at Falmouth University. One student, who works part-time in a bar, even came back to the Socialist Students campaign stall to ask for more leaflets to put up at work.

We had five lecturers stop to buy a copy of the Socialist and show support. They commented that it was a breath of fresh air to see socialists organise at the university.

● Plymouth

Students were keen to hear about our call for an end to tuition fees and for a £15-an-hour minimum wage. Many were keen to get behind a campaign to tackle the atrocious housing conditions they are subjected to.

One student asked us if we covered workplace issues. They had worked for two months at a fast food chain, and hadn't been paid. They were relieved to come across our members who are trade union activists.

Three new people came to the Socialist Party branch. They didn't want to wait until the following week to come along to our first Socialist Students meeting. Two of them have already joined the Socialist Party, and the third took a form with them.

RYAN ALDRED

● Exeter

Socialist Students set up by Exeter College, also catching university students heading towards campus. We even had a couple of £5 donations, no small sacrifice for A-level students.

Join the student fightback
JOIN socialist students
socialiststudents.org.uk/join

London tenants v greedy contractors

NANCY TAAFFE
WALTHAM FOREST SOCIALIST PARTY

On 23 September, the Socialist Party and Waltham Forest Housing Action Network in east London responded to the call from tenants at John Walsh and Fred Wigg towers to help them keep their car park.

Refurbishment contractors want to take the tenants' car park for their shipping containers to carry out their work. They had no regard that the people who live in the blocks need their cars for work.

The tenants are the ones who have fought for these referrals for over a decade, while the council has flirted with various guises of privatisation for the blocks. For nearly ten years residents have defeated these privatisation plans, with the support of the Socialist Party.

The Flats - a vast area of common land - sit behind the tower blocks. Tenants point out that this could be used for the shipping containers. This has been dismissed because

of the cost, even though various multinationals were allowed to use this space during the London 2012 Olympics.

Residents proposed free parking in the streets surrounding the blocks for those from John Walsh and Fred Wigg. Again they were ignored.

The contractor informed the tenants the shipping containers were coming, end of. But these tenants have a history of being organised.

They put a call out to protest and block the shipping containers from taking the space. The Socialist Party turned up at 7am to support them.

The lorries carrying the shipping containers were getting stuck in narrow residential streets. The authorities promised permits for tenants who need them, one of the demands that was dismissed when the tenants originally asked. The battle is on to make these promises cast iron.

We are also asking tenants to join the anti-austerity electoral challenge to the useless Labour councillors in May 2022.



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Sabina Nessa vigil Enough is enough - end violence against women

Six months and here we are again, remembering another woman murdered. That was one of the big emotions on the vigil for Sabina Nessa near her home in Kidbrooke, south London.

The Socialist Party leaflet read: 'Enough is enough - end violence against women'. Many people wanted our leaflets, and some requested posters saying they would put them in their windows.

Women face violence at alarming levels, both inside and outside the home, in education, and at work. Although, this time, we didn't face the same violence from police which we saw at the vigils and protests for Sarah Everard.

Many will ask, what has actually

been done to oppose violence against women? Local authorities continue to cut refugees services, turn off street lighting and let women live in violent homes.

The Tories are removing the £20-a-week Universal Credit increase which will leave many women out of pocket. One of the speakers linked the cuts to services women rely on and inequality in society with the demand to end to violence against women.

The anger and grief was palpable. Let's use it to build a movement to challenge and end all violence against women, and fight for a real alternative to the vicious sexist and oppressive system of capitalism.

HELEN PATTISON

LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY REGIONAL SECRETARY



KEVIN GREENWAY

Bromsgrove protest for NHS fair pay

KEVIN GREENWAY
BIRMINGHAM SOUTH WEST SOCIALIST PARTY

On Saturday 12 September, I spotted in the Bromsgrove Advertiser that a Nurses United protest was taking place in Bromsgrove at Tory Health Minister Sajid Javid's party office. That was it; down I went to be met by the best and liveliest protest in the town for a long time. Nurses travelled from Essex, Northampton, Lincoln and Brighton. Local nurses and retired nurses turned out as well, plus Acorn activists and a Socialist Party member from Birmingham.

They were a brilliant, inspirational group, and are up for the fight for fair pay. The 15% demand was prominent. Nurses United had written to Sajid Javid but without reply. Some activists went into Wetherspoons

and got the public to write their views about the NHS on placards, which were then left for Javid to see.

On 17 September, local nurses went to Javid's office again, but there was no reply.

We moved to the high street, including four of us from the Socialist Party, where we helped distribute their leaflets. We got a great response from the public and gratitude from the nurses for bothering to help.

When two of the nurses returned to their cars after the stall, they saw a police presence outside Javid's office. There'd been no hint of trouble at either protest, but it seems the Tories thought more about getting police there than meeting nurses.

We are now planning more high street activity with the local nurses and other activists.

NICK AUVACHE
UNITE HOUSING WORKERS BRANCH

Flexibility to suit workers not the bosses

'Agile working' is often described as an approach to work which entails maximum flexibility and minimum constraints. That might sound good, but all too often the flexibility is designed for the benefit of the employer, rather than employee, and workers are encouraged to show minimum constraint in pursuit of 'greater efficiency'.

However, agile working is something that has crept up on us. Previously, hot desking, home working and the use of new technology have all contributed to a move away from the office, but the lockdowns have been an opportunity for employers to significantly accelerate that process.

Some workers positively welcome this process, and unions should not oppose this outright, but instead use this as an opportunity to give workers more choice and control over their working lives.

Fundamentally, employers who embrace agile working will only do so if they see some benefit, and the biggest benefit to them is a massive saving on rent of office space, as well as the cost of electricity that comes with it. Organisations which rent city centre premises, especially in London, will stand to make huge savings and workers should take this into consideration when negotiating these agreements, and demand a share of that pie.

Many workers may seize on the freedom to work from home, but that should not mean that the bosses bear none of the costs associated with it. Workers should ensure that any agile working agreement adequately compensates them for the cost of heating, air conditioning, and lighting that they will have to incur.

There is also the question of broadband and mobile phone costs. Workers should ensure that their signal strength is sufficient for them to cover all aspects of their work, and this should be paid for by the employer. If the signal goes down, workers should not be penalised for their inability to work. This needs to be reflected in any agreement and not left to the goodwill of the employers!

Some workers do enjoy a more relaxed atmosphere by working from home, but equally workers should ensure that they are not being monitored in such a way that they become prisoners in their own home. Employers' insistence that cameras or monitors be attached to workers' work devices should be opposed or tightly controlled (subject to agreement) both for the protection of workers and those with whom they live.

A major concern with home working is always the question of when to take a break and when to stop work. A draining, 'always-on' work culture was a problem before the pandemic but has worsened considerably since, so workers need to make sure that measures are in place to prevent this from entering the home.

A US workplace expert, Jennifer Moss, recently claimed that we are currently in the middle of a 'burnout epidemic'. Her survey stretched over 46 countries and showed remarkably similar trends across all nations. Official UK statistics showed that people working from home last year completed six hours of unpaid overtime each week (compared with 3.6 hours for those who have never worked



from home). No wonder the bosses are so keen on agile working!

The World Health Organisation claims that long working hours killed thousands of people each week! This should be a warning sign to workers and an opportunity for unions to insist that tight boundaries are put in place to prevent these abuses. Where overtime is worked it should be recorded properly and overtime rates should reflect the extra effort.

Out of hours emails are a particular bugbear and unions must seek to outlaw this unnecessary and often unproductive practice so associated with agile working. Recently, a police union in Australia won the right to 'switch off', Ireland has introduced a code of conduct dealing with similar issues, and workers at Orange Telecoms in France have negotiated a protocol around work messages.

Other companies in France have even reached agreements which allow workers a whole day solely devoted to catching up on emails when they return from leave. These examples reveal the growing pressures of modern work and the extra dangers associated with so-called agile agreements, but they also show how unions can successfully fight back.

It is a sobering thought that workers who fought for and won the demand for the eight-hour working day in the 19th century are having to fight to safeguard those victories in the 21st century, despite the massive development in technology. Post-pandemic, workers need to reset the economy in their favour. Agile working agreements should become a turning point. Workers should not allow a global pandemic and the growth in technology to favour the interests of the bosses. Unions must play a central role in pushing forward the interests of ordinary workers.

The government is proposing to give all employees the right to request flexible working when they start new jobs.

The plan would allow all UK workers to request a flexible working arrangement from their first day at a new employer. At the moment, workers have to wait until they have been in their role for six months.

The proposals would also see bosses have to respond to requests for flexible working more quickly than the current maximum of three months.

But changing the time that workers are allowed to ask for flexible working is one thing, forcing bosses and companies to accept the request is another. At the moment, even after six months, bosses regularly reject, ignore or postpone requests for flexible working, even for workers with child and caring responsibilities.

The trade unions should lead the fight to make flexible working requests a reality from day one or at any time workers make the request. We say:

- For the right to flexible working hours that put the needs of workers first
- Remote working should be a right but never compulsory
- End zero-hour contracts. Full employment rights from day one at work
- No cuts in working hours unless requested by workers themselves
- A maximum 35-hour week with no loss of pay

Black history month and its relevance today

ISAI PRIYA
SOCIALIST PARTY BLACK AND ASIAN GROUP

Since 1987 in the UK, October has been Black History Month. It's a month specifically to learn, share and celebrate the proud black history of Britain. For socialists, we focus on remembering the struggles of black, Asian and migrant workers, learning the lessons to fight for the rights of workers and youth today, and in the future.

The rich, proud history of black struggle in Britain goes back centuries. Even in the depths of the slave trade and imperialism, black workers played a key role in the struggle to abolish the slave trade and slavery itself. Confidence was drawn from the various rebellions and uprisings taking place in colonial countries, including the Black Jacobins of the Haitian revolution. Sons of Africa, which is seen as the first black political organisation in Britain, was formed in the mid-18th century and included two ex-slaves who arrived in London after purchasing their freedom. They spent the rest of their lives campaigning against slavery and speaking on tours around the country.

Black activists and workers also took part in the first real workers' movement that emerged in 1836. William Cuffay, the son of a former slave, was a leading figure in the Chartist movement. He was involved in strikes for a shorter working day, for decent pay and working-class representatives in parliament. He was one of the leaders of the Chartist Convention, which organised a 25,000-strong demonstration in London in April 1848. A few months later, he was targeted by the state and sentenced to be transported to Tasmania for 21 years.

Despite many threats and attacks by the state, and state-fuelled racism, black and Asian workers have remained an anchor in the working-class fightback. During the various struggles, the most conscious black workers turned to the trade unions to link the struggle against racism and for better pay and conditions with the organised workers' movement. They saw the power and strength of workers in action.

The anti-racist movement, including the tremendous civil rights movement of the 1950s, 60s and early 70s, impacted black and Asian people across the world and gave them the confidence to fight back. In Britain,

BLACK WORKERS' CHARTER

The Black and Asian group of the Socialist Party has produced a Black Workers' Charter to start a discussion about the demands needed to fight for the rights of black and Asian people, and what programme is needed to end racial discrimination.

- Search Black Workers' Charter: socialistparty.org.uk



ALISDARE HICKSON/CC

that period saw a wave of protests and strikes.

The 1963 Bristol bus boycott was a big turning point. Led by the West Indian Development Council, the boycott lasted for four months until the company backed down and overturned the colour bar. It shows the power of a united struggle to bring down racist measures and to pave the way for change. The strength of the boycott pushed the trade unions to take the anti-racist struggle forward. It also led to the 1965 and 1968 Race Relations Acts, which banned employers from discriminating against a person because of the colour of their skin.

Numerous black and Asian trade unionists inspired a whole generation and leave a lasting impact. Jaya-ben Desai, a leader of the Grunwick dispute, is such an individual. In 1976, almost 200 mainly female Asian workers went on a strike against management bullying and for union recognition. They collectively fought and got backing from the trade union

movement. One of their strike rallies was attended by over 20,000, and the strike got national significance.

Black and Asian workers had to build mass action in their workplaces to put massive pressure on the trade union leaders to organise further action. This wasn't done automatically; today workers still have to organise to put pressure on trade union leaders to take action.

In the anti-racist struggle there have been many positive changes in the trade unions, but we still have a long way to go.

The lives of black and Asian trade unionists and socialists, and the history of black struggle, should be discussed. But this should be done throughout the year, not just in October. The lessons are essential for the struggles today, to build a mass movement to smash racism.

2020 was a year that will not be forgotten by many. It was a year where working-class and young people saw the crisis of capitalism and the failure

of the Tory government to protect us. 2020 was also a year that shone a light on the class and race inequality that exists within this exploitative, divisive system. Black and Asian people have been affected disproportionately by the pandemic, cuts to services and job losses. Black young people are 19 times more likely to be stopped and searched by the police and three times more likely to be unemployed.

2020 also gave a glimpse of the possibility of a mass movement to smash racism and capitalism. The Black Lives Matter movement has shown that police harassment and racism are not going to be tolerated. We are also seeing black, Asian and migrant workers at the forefront of the many disputes and strikes that are taking place against 'fire and re-hire' and trade union victimisation. As history shows, only a united mass struggle against this capitalist system can end discrimination and inequality, and win rights for the whole working class.

German election: A change of capitalist government, but disaster for Die Linke

SASCHA STANICIC

SOZIALISCHE ORGANISATION SOLIDARITÄT
(SOL, CWI IN GERMANY)

The result of the Bundestag elections on 27 September heralds a new political period for Germany. The two big 'peoples parties', the social-democrat SPD and Christian-democrat CDU/CSU bloc, have massively declined, winning less than half the votes cast. Back in the 1970s, it was over 90%.

It is almost certain that, for the first time, a coalition of three parliamentary groups will be formed. However, it is also certain that such a new development will not lead to the fundamental change in policy that opinion polls show 40% of the population favour.

The future government will continue to align its policies primarily with the interests of the capitalist class. No matter what coalition is formed, the neoliberal FDP will most likely be the most direct representative of these capitalist interests in the government.

The question of who should pay for the costs of the economic crisis and pandemic control will not be answered in the interests of the workers and socially disadvantaged by either an SPD-Green-FDP coalition or by a CDU/CSU-Green-FDP coalition, as both will operate on the basis of capitalism.

All this makes it even more urgent for trade unions and social movements to prepare for tough defensive struggles.

CDU/CSU in decline

Since 2013, the CDU/CSU bloc has lost seven million votes. The SPD received well over eight million less votes compared to its 1998 peak. Both the right-wing AfD and the left party Die Linke also lost votes.

23.4% of eligible voters did not participate in the election. The 'party

of non-voters' has become one of the strongest forces.

The next federal government will be weaker than the Merkel governments of the last 16 years, and the ruling class will have increasing difficulty formulating a unified policy.

The CDU's decline is an expression of the struggles over the orientation of the party and the vacillation between adherence to the Merkel course, which is partly oriented towards 'social partnership', for which party leader Laschet stands, and the urging of sections of the capitalist class for harsher attacks on the working class, for which Friedrich Merz stands.

SPD

Even if the SPD is jubilant, it cannot hide the fact that its 25.7% share of the vote is the third-worst result in its history. In recent weeks and months, the SPD benefited from the fact that the CDU/CSU had opted for the 'wrong' candidate and that, earlier this year, the establishment media and other capitalist institutions ended the Greens' soaring poll ratings with a campaign against their top candidate Annalena Baerbock.

This is because they feared the expectations of the population, particularly regarding climate protection measures, that would have arisen with a Green-led federal government. Above all, the SPD did less 'wrong' in the election campaign than the others.

The modest increase in votes for the SPD, especially the fact that it was able to mobilise 1.25 million previous non-voters, reflects the fact that social questions played an important role in these elections, and that the Social Democrats have once again blinked to the left with their promises of a €12 minimum wage, the introduction of a wealth tax, and 'abolition' of the neoliberal Hartz welfare system, etc.

However, this is not a comeback of



SDP leader Olaf Scholz. Despite its jubilation, the SPD's election result was the third-worst in its history PHOTO OLAF KOSINSKY/CC

the old 'workers' party', but rather an expression of the 'lesser-evil' alternative that most voters saw.

Greens and FDP

The FDP and Greens go strengthened into negotiations on a coalition formation - even if the Greens had to bury their Chancellorship ambitions. The fact that the free-market FDP was able to record significant increases in votes is mainly due to the fact that during the pandemic it had succeeded in appearing to some as a 'reasonable' critic of the government's coronavirus policy, and that in the election it focused less on its capital-friendly positions.

AfD

The right-wing AfD has lost votes, but at the same time continued to consolidate itself within the party system. In the eastern federal states of Saxony and Thuringia it became the strongest party, and is still generally twice as strong in east Germany as in the west of the republic.

This will shift the balance of power within the party further in the direction of the right-wing extremist forces around Björn Höcke, and the AfD remains a serious threat to the working class, women, migrants and minorities.

The left

The other loser of the election is Die Linke, the Left party, which has slipped below the 5% voter threshold and will only enter the Bundestag with 30 members because it won three direct constituency mandates in Berlin and Leipzig.

In addition, it is to be expected that a number of left-wing and social movement-oriented MPs will not return to the Bundestag, and thus the political orientation of the parliamentary group may shift to the right.

Die Linke leaders Dietmar Bartsch

and Susanne Hennig-Wellsow spoke immediately after the election about 'mistakes' that had been made and the need for a reappraisal. But they do not say the obvious: the strategy of pandering to the SPD and the Greens did not work.

On the contrary, as Sol has warned in recent weeks and months, there is much to suggest that many former Die Linke voters preferred to vote SPD and not the Die Linke copy, in order to ensure that the CDU/CSU does not become the strongest force.



Die Linke should ruthlessly come to terms with this electoral disaster. It should focus above all on what a left party is needed for

That a left-wing party does not gain strength in times of great systemic crises; that it achieves fewer votes than the FDP among workers and cannot mobilise the youth, and that it repeatedly fails to reach non-voters, is an admission of bankruptcy.

Die Linke's fundamental problems are that it has lost its credibility via its participation in government with the SPD and the Greens; has not stood out from the federal government in the coronavirus crisis, and is considered by many to be the 'left wing' of the political establishment.

Above all, this image blocks the way to the millions of non-voters, who apparently no longer feel addressed by any of the existing parties.

In marked contrast to its overall performance, Die Linke in Berlin-Neukölln, which has built as an

anti-capitalist and social movement-oriented force in the district, was able to achieve significant gains in votes in the election to the city's House of Representatives, at a time when the party's overall vote in the city fell.

Die Linke should ruthlessly come to terms with this electoral disaster. It should focus above all on what a left party is needed for: to support and bring together trade union struggles and social movements, arguing for anti-capitalist and socialist perspectives and solutions.

Sol members will continue to work for this in the party. We call on all those who are disappointed by this election result to become even more active now - in trade unions and social movements, in order to counter the policies of the coming government and, with Sol, also in Die Linke in order to advocate a socialist change of course there.

Which government is coming?

One should not rule out any of the mathematically possible coalitions, but there is much to suggest that it will come down to a 'traffic light' coalition consisting of the SPD, Greens and FDP, even if FDP leader Lindner would prefer a 'Jamaica' coalition with the CDU/CSU and the Greens.

It is also possible that a new government will move in the direction of the current Austrian government model of the conservatives and Greens which gives members of the government extensive freedom in certain departments.

Whether such a government will come about, and if so, how quickly, cannot be predicted at this stage. However, it cannot be ruled out that this will happen much faster than it now appears in view of the confusing and new situation.

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



Die Linke's leaders pandering to the SDP and Greens failed miserably

CWI livestream rally report

Stopping destructive climate change requires socialist change

The Committee for a Workers' International (CWI) livestreamed a rally on 26 September on the critically urgent theme of a 'socialist solution to the capitalist climate catastrophe'.

Hosted by CWI secretary Tony Sainois, the worldwide panel of speakers delivered a devastating critique of how the unsustainable profit-driven global system is destroying our environment, and heating the planet to temperatures which threaten human civilisation.

Eko John Nicholas from the Democratic Socialist Movement (CWI in Nigeria) graphically explained how that tropical country is experiencing both prolonged drought in the north and extreme flooding events in the south due to climate change.

Likewise, Ashley from the Independent Socialist Group in the USA told the rally that this summer was the hottest recorded in US history. Parts of the country are experiencing unprecedented drought, with the federal government declaring for the first time a water shortage along the Colorado river.

And on top of never-before-experienced heatwaves, and even ice storms in Texas, the recent Hurricane Ida, second only to Hurricane Katrina in its ferocity, laid waste to Louisiana and devastated New York City - with people dying in their basement apartments from flash flooding.

Alexandra Setsume Ol from SOL (CWI in Germany) also reminded viewers of the terrible 'once-in-a-lifetime' floods in Germany, Netherlands and Belgium which left 186 people dead, hundreds injured, and many more homeless. The cost of destruction in Germany alone is estimated at €5 billion.

'New normal'

But such cataclysmic events are, in fact, becoming the 'new normal' as the planet heats up due to greenhouse gas emissions from capitalist production, transport and agribusiness.

Of course, it's always the poor and the working class who are forced to pay the price. As Tony stated in his introduction, most of the global victims of climate change are living in the ex-colonial countries.

Eko explained how the lack of investment in infrastructure in Lagos, Nigeria's commercial capital, means that more frequent floods have polluted drinking water. Only 10% of the city's population now has access

to clean water.

Despite the country's oil and gas wealth the living conditions of the masses have actually worsened. While the profits are siphoned by corrupt governments and big energy companies - which also continue to flare off gas from its oil platforms, contributing massively to greenhouse gas emissions - many people living in the oil producing delta region suffer ill health from terrible pollution.



Capitalist measures that have been undertaken are inadequate, uncoordinated, and based on market solutions like carbon-trading schemes, which don't actually cut greenhouse gas emissions

Rushme Madhavan from New Socialist Alternative (CWI in India) explained how the extreme nationalist Modi regime has given the green light to multinational companies to continue their polluting industries (especially the 'recycling' - ie dumping - of waste products from Western countries), while the workers only have an expensive privatised health-care system to treat their resulting health problems.

Judy Beishon, on behalf of the CWI International Secretariat, explained that capitalist governments around the world have failed to tackle this climate emergency and environmental catastrophe.

Any measures that have been undertaken are inadequate, uncoordinated, and based on market solutions like carbon-trading schemes, which don't actually cut greenhouse gas emissions.

She told viewers to expect much 'greenwashing' by the likes of Boris Johnson, Joe Biden, and other capitalist politicians, as well as by major corporations, at the forthcoming COP26 climate change summit in Glasgow.

As Ashley pointed out, Biden has allowed more oil exploration and gas fracking permits to proceed than

his reactionary predecessor Donald Trump.

In the UK, a large sum - £7.5 billion - of the government's so-called green initiatives (solar panels, home insulation, etc), is borne not by the treasury but by a regressive green tax on our energy bills, hitting the poorest hardest.

Governments and capitalist companies around the world do understand that the cost of not fixing climate change will cost their profit system dearly. This understanding of the need to act is writ large by the Covid pandemic.

According to the International Monetary Fund, if Covid is not contained it could cost the world economy £3.3 trillion by 2025. Whereas, the estimated cost of supplying vaccines globally is only £70 billion.

Yet, despite the fine words and pledges of vaccine supplies by Biden, Macron, et al, less than 2% of world's poorest populations have received one vaccine dose.

Meanwhile, pharmaceutical giants with their monopoly on vaccine patents continue to prioritise orders for the advanced capitalist countries. Yet millions of doses stockpiled in the West will be dumped as they reach their expiry dates this year.

Capitalist competition

In reality, as Judy explained, capitalism is incapable of acting collectively, at least to any meaningful degree, to halt rising levels of greenhouse gas emissions. In fact, the onset of economic crisis is leading in the opposite direction, with increased competition rather than cooperation between capitalist countries.

So what can be done to halt devastating climate change? Judy said that many young people are rightly sceptical and despairing at capitalist politicians ability to solve the climate emergency.

Some may look to the Greens as a political alternative. But as Alexandra explained, in Germany the Greens' radical rhetoric has not been matched when entering into coalitions with establishment parties. In short, they sell out at the critical moments (see 'German Greens: The image and reality' at socialistparty.org.uk).

Similarly, Ashley explained that the sizeable DSA left wing in the Democrats, while talking up a 'Green New Deal' has allowed such commitments to be watered down by the Democrats in Congress, including by radical figures such as Alexandria



Ocasio-Cortez, who want to make such a policy acceptable to the capitalists.

A green new deal has to be fought for outside of the Democrats and Republicans, which are wedded to capitalism. Policies to deal with climate change and the environment have to be part of the struggle to build an independent working-class movement for socialism.

Judy concluded by saying that what's needed is a fundamental change in capitalist production to provide clean, renewable energy, along with non-polluting economic growth, to deliver higher living standards for all.

This is only possible under socialism which, by removing the profit motive, would allow workers to democratically plan production internationally. We urgently need mass workers' movements to challenge capitalist governments, linked to thorough socialist change, ie taking the major corporations into public ownership.

Tony summed up by appealing to those new to the CWI to join our ranks in their respective

countries and fight for these ideals as the only realistic way to halt catastrophic climate change.

● See also 'Climate change, capitalism, and the struggle for socialism' at socialistparty.org.uk

● The CWI rally 'socialist solution to the capitalist climate catastrophe' can be viewed on socialistworld.net



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the Socialist

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formerly **Militant**

JOIN THE FIGHT FOR OUR FUTURE



- **£15-an-hour minimum wage**
- **Scrap zero-hour contracts**
- **Trade union rights now**

PROTEST 9 OCTOBER

MICHAEL MORGAN
COVENTRY SOCIALIST PARTY

With attacks on Universal Credit, the rising cost of energy, and the regressive changes to national insurance - a secure job with decent pay has never been more important for young people. As we come out of a pandemic which has seen the proliferation of 'fire and rehire', and as 'key workers' become more and more exploited, many young people feel they don't have a proper future to look forward to.

The so-called 'recovery' from Covid has seen youth unemployment rise, it now stands at 13.1% - higher than it was at this point in 2020. This figure won't include those who are in work and struggling to get the hours they need on zero-hour contracts. With the cost of living increasing, many jobs are not paying enough to get by on. That's why the Socialist Party calls for a £15-an-hour minimum wage, for trade unions to fight against 'fire and rehire' practices, and for benefits that people can survive on.

For young people in particular, the cost of living crisis means many will make it even harder to be able to move out from the family home. It has been reported that the Tories could lower the cap on making repayments for student loans from £27,295 to around £23,000 a year. This is a kick in the teeth for already exploited students, many of whom have to work to fund their studies. The cherry on top of all of this, is that as of 30 September, the government's furlough scheme will end, meaning that many young people will lose their jobs.

It's a desperate time for young people, and it's clear that Keir Starmer's Labour Party is unable to give us the political representation we need to fight the Tories. This is why young members in the Socialist Party will be joining the Youth Fight for Jobs protest on the 9 October. We cannot sit idly by as our futures are wrestled away from us. We will be marching in numerous towns and cities across the country. If you believe in high-quality, secure and well-paying jobs - join us and protest.

• Find details of your local protest, visit: youthfightforjobs.com