

Unite to...

FIGHT FOR PAY AND NHS WE DESERVE

ADRIAN O'MALLEY
UNISON HEALTH SERVICE GROUP EXECUTIVE
MEMBER (PERSONAL CAPACITY)

Staff shortages, sickness levels and burnout. These are the issues facing workers in our hospital trust. Issues that were there before the pandemic have only been made worse.

People are leaving left, right and centre - with older workers taking their pension early to escape the stress.

More and more private sector companies are coming in to cherry-pick services and make a fortune. There is massive profiteering going on, exploiting staff shortages. Workers are leaving the NHS to work for agencies for more money and less hassle.

It feels like it is a deliberate policy of the Tories to grind down the NHS workforce. They have overseen huge vacancies, and not trained enough staff. A student nurse now qualifies with £60,000 worth of debt.

At our trust they can only staff 16 out of 25 theatres. A private company, Pioneer, has been brought in to assist tackling the growing waiting lists - set to reach six million nationally in the new year. Private companies, looking to maximise profits, typically opt for simpler, cheaper

operations leaving the unprofitable ones for the NHS. The pandemic has been used by the Tories to transfer billions of pounds from the NHS budget to the profits of the privateers.

With inflation heading towards 6%, the Tories paltry 3% NHS pay offer for 2021 is already a pay cut - not the way to retain staff, or attract new joiners. Members of health unions - Unison, GMB, Royal College of Nursing (RCN) and Unite - have already voted to reject the offer.

Socialist Party members, including those of us on the Unison health service group executive, have argued that all the unions should have moved straight to an industrial action ballot, and worked together to coordinate action across the health

service unions. Unfortunately, the union leaders have lost momentum by carrying out, in Unison's case, two indicative ballots.

RCN similarly carried out an indicative ballot. But the mood of health workers was reflected in the votes for action. 77% in Unison for 'sustained industrial action', and in the RCN, which historically has opposed strikes, the vote for 'action short of a strike' was over 90% and up to 56% for strike action.

We don't agree with the right-wing trade union leaders that strike ballots shouldn't be called because the Tories' undemocratic 50% turnout threshold wasn't reached in the indicative ballots. Actually, with Unison balloting in local government, if a strike ballot is moved to in

the NHS, the potential exists for co-ordinated action across the public sector on pay.

But at the same time, the health unions must prepare now for the 2022 pay offer, which is set to be announced before 1 April by the, allegedly independent, Pay Review Body. The union leaderships have got to say 'this is what we want, and we want it in our pay packets on 1 April. If there is no sign that it is going to be there, then we start balloting for action.'

Now there is a new left executive in Unison, its priority should be to unite all public sector pay campaigns. We should unite like we did around pensions in 2011, to fight for the pay rise we need and deserve.

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

Workers' politics needed to exploit Tory scandal and splits

WHAT WE THINK

The proportion of voters, 63%, who think that capitalist politicians 'are just in it for themselves' is at its highest since the MPs' expenses scandal in 2009. No wonder. The money-grubbing approach of many MPs was highlighted by Johnson's hamfisted attempts to save the career of Tory MP Owen Paterson, who broke parliamentary rules to lobby for companies that paid him over £100,000 in 2020.

In total, a quarter of Tory MPs apparently can't make ends meet on their £81,932 a year - which puts them in the top 5% of earners - and so have 'second jobs', often furthering the interests of big business; from private healthcare to gambling companies.

At the same time, it has now been confirmed that more than 46 contracts for PPE, worth over £5 billion, were handed out in 2020 to companies with 'political or Whitehall connections' without any proper checks. It wasn't just Matt Hancock's neighbour, but numerous others who made a fast buck via their mates in parliament. The Blairite 'Labour' MPs and the other capitalist politicians have no principled differences with their Tory counterparts on these issues but, being further away from power at this stage, are less likely to be considered by companies to be worth 'hiring'.

The feeling that the Tories are just in it for themselves and their cronies is only heightened by the Christmas party farce. Government spokespeople are engaged in ludicrous twists and turns to avoid admitting that a Christmas party was held at Number Ten last year, when the rest of the population faced huge fines for breaking Covid rules, and were not even allowed to visit dying relatives in hospital.

Levelling down
This sleaze has been combined with the Tories' total failure to deliver any 'levelling up' for working-class communities in the Midlands and North. In fact they've failed to even come up with any proposals, never mind implement them. Instead, they are implementing benefit cuts, public sector pay restraint, and tax increases, which will only further 'level down' working-class people. At the same time, public transport, far from being expanded as promised, is being slashed, with rail funding to be cut by 10% in 2022.
As the cost of living soars, anger at Tory austerity is growing. Sensing the social explosions ahead, the parliamentary tory Party is beginning to doubt that Johnson is the man to see them through. His popularity



PHOTO: ARNO MIKKOR EU2027EE/CC

has plunged with voters. Only 29% of people think he is doing a reasonable job. The Paterson scandal, where he whipped them to vote for his mate, and then did a rapid U-turn, still rangles, because it exposed them to the anger of their constituents for no purpose.

At the fancy awards dinner, where the right-wing Spectator magazine gave out its 2021 prizes to various parliamentarians, the editor joked that they had had to exclude the obvious clear winner of the award for 'who has done most to cause chaos for the government'. Had Boris Johnson been included, no other candidate would have had a look in.

Weak and divided
Despite its parliamentary majority, in reality this is a weak Tory government. It is split in numerous different directions, as the recent backbench rebellions on social care and mask wearing have indicated. Every section of the Tory party wants to act to defend the capitalist system, and attack the interests of the working class, but they do not agree on the best way to do it. From the scale of state intervention, to tax levels, to the 'right' level of austerity, the Tories are in conflict. It is not impossible, however, that they could unify on the need to ditch Boris Johnson, as he increasingly becomes a liability for them.

“” Coordinated strike action against public sector pay restraint could force the Tories into a U-turn

Why do these splits in the Tory Party matter for the workers' movement? Firstly, because they point to the possibility of defeating this weak and divided government. For example, coordinated strike action against public sector pay restraint could force the Tories into a U-turn. So could determined strike action against the cuts to rail spending, which if implemented would mean major attacks on the pay, pensions and conditions of rail workers.

It is also important because it poses urgently the need for the working class to have its own voice in parliament. The capitalist class is more relaxed about the chaos in the Tory party than they would once have been, because they know that in Keir Starmer's New Labour they have a reliable reserve team.

While Johnson was burbling about Peppa Pig to the big business CBI conference, Starmer made a

speech that was music to their ears, emphasising "fiscal discipline", "never spending money just for the sake of it", and "stable government", all thinly disguised code for acting in the interests of the capitalist class. He reiterated that Labour would leave the energy companies in private hands, and then drove the point home by removing Ed Miliband as business secretary. Miliband is far from being on the left, but had had the temerity to reportedly support some form of public ownership of energy companies, so was ditched as part of a reshuffle that created an ultra-Blairite shadow cabinet.

Clearly, the capitalist class can rely on Starmer's New Labour. The task facing the working class is to begin building a new mass workers' party. The Socialist Party will support every step towards the workers' movement founding such a party. This includes standing candidates as part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition in next May's local elections. It also includes encouraging as many trade unionists as possible to stand as anti-austerity candidates in those elections. And, of course, it includes arguing for workers' representatives, when elected, to only take a workers' wage, and to use their platform to fight for socialist policies.

Government social care plans: Where is the money?

GLYNN DOHERTY
SOCIAL CARE TRADE UNION ORGANISER

The government's white paper on adult social care in England has been met with an almost universal reaction - where is the money? This is despite workers having to pay an extra 1.25% in National Insurance to fund it.

"Chronic workforce shortages are the biggest concern...with uncompetitive pay the main culprit. There is nothing in the paper to suggest the government has any real strategy." Those are the damning words of the director of charity Age UK.

The 'promises' in the paper fall well short of tackling the crisis in the system. Reading the 100-page document is soul-destroying, it bears no resemblance to reality or what workers and specialists in the sector project is necessary.

Even the government predicts 7% of care home staff will leave by the end of this year, either through their 'no job, no pay' policy or disenchantment with pay, workloads and working conditions.

Data published in October 2021 showed the number of registered nurses in adult social care in England has declined again and is down by almost 17,000 (33%) since 2012.

Inadequate
The Tories are ploughing ahead with extending their vaccination policy throughout health and social care, which will cause further haemorrhaging of staff.
Ministers have made much of their plans to raise the minimum wage in 2022 by 6.6% to £9.50 an hour (if you're aged 23 or over). This is completely inadequate.
The most staggering statistic is that average pay across the whole sector

will have to rise by 5.5% to remain legal under the new rates! Current average pay is just £9.01 an hour.

It is not just the level of take-home pay which needs addressing. Many workers are paid less than minimum wage to work 'sleep-ins', time in a service user's premises overnight to meet vital care needs. A recent judicial ruling concluded that this is not considered working, and so workers aren't entitled to the minimum wage.

Others, who work in the community, don't get paid for time travelling between service users' homes. There are increasing problems with staff not getting properly paid for under-going compulsory training.

A paragraph saying "We also want to work with commissioners and providers to make sure care workers are paid for all the hours they work", is not clarified. There are, instead, unexplained references to "coaching", "support psychological wellbeing and resilience", and "a range of holistic interventions".

The paper glosses over the recent change in policy concerning the cap on costs, which means many will still have to sell their homes to access care (see 'Poorer pensioners fleeced by social care cap' at socialistparty.org.uk)

A recent survey suggests 400,000 people are currently awaiting assessment of their needs. The number

waiting six months or more rocketed from 11,000 reported in September to over 40,000. 1.5 million hours of commissioned home care were not delivered in the three months to November.

The Labour Party mouths words of opposition in parliament, but the manifesto commitments given by Jeremy Corbyn to tackle underfunding, low pay and profiteering have been long-forgotten, and Labour councils continue to cut adult care.

Strategy needed
The trade unions must step into the breach left by Labour. The GMB union's call for £15 an hour for social care workers is supported by the Socialist Party and many in the leadership of the other major care unions - Unison and Unite. But without an accompanying strategy for implementation, it remains simply a slogan.

The unions should combine resources to tackle low union density. They must quickly develop a pay strategy targeting some of the larger private and independent providers, threatening strike action if necessary.

Alongside this, the unions must demand the return to the public sector of all social care before the system collapses completely. Our health and wellbeing should not be for the private profits of the rich.

Privatised care home's snap closure

Half of councils have had to respond to care homes going bankrupt or closing in the last six months. One care home, Berkeley House in Kent which cares for adults with severe

learning disabilities and autism, gave ten hours' notice of its closure. It had been unable to properly staff the home and provide safe care.

Residents and their families were left in the lurch. Meanwhile, the care home operator Achieve Together has no doubt made a handsome profit - why else would its owners be based in Jersey?



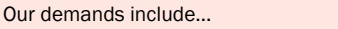
PHOTO: LONDON SP



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.

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

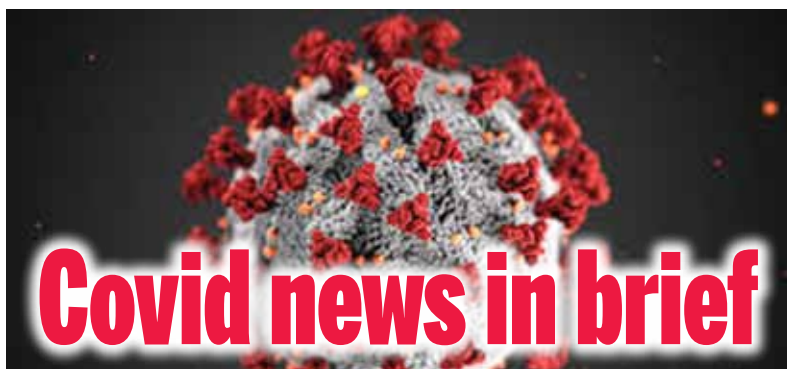
- For a mass workers' party drawing together workers, young people and activists from workplace, community, environmental, anti-racist and anti-cuts campaigns, to provide a fighting, political alternative to the pro-big business parties.

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!

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Covid news in brief

● Javid tells GPs to drop health checks for elderly

Facing up to the potential effects of the new Omicron Covid variant, and anxious to avoid introducing further lockdown measures, the government has declared its mission to deliver a booster vaccine.

Unlike privatised test and trace, initial UK vaccination benefited from a coordinated, public, National Health Service. But that same service is starved of funds and overwhelmed by a backlog - six million on waiting lists by the new year, according to the health secretary Sajid Javid.

Far from offering a remedy, the government has given GP practices permission to postpone minor surgery and routine health checks for over-75s to enable GPs to deliver the booster. Many more health conditions will no doubt go undiagnosed and untreated.

The move has been welcomed by some GP leaders, enabling them to avoid some 'bureaucratic demands' and 'unnecessary paperwork'.

But fundamentally the problem is one of staff and resources. Decades of cutbacks, underinvestment and privatisation from Tory and Labour governments have left the NHS unable to cope - and lacking staff willing to work under high pressure for low pay. That's why the Socialist Party backs the NHS workers' call for a 15% pay rise, and campaigns for a fully funded, public NHS.

Largely as a consequence of public services being unable to cope, emergency measures have needed to be taken at different points throughout the Covid pandemic. Those decisions cannot be left in the hands of Johnson and his government, which has proven it always puts the interests of big business first. Instead, it should be the working class and trade unions that decide democratically what measures need to be taken in the interests of the majority.

● Government cuts left NHS 'woefully underprepared'

"This report makes clear that the NHS went into this pandemic woefully underprepared and under-resourced, and the only reason the health service was able to provide care and services at the level it did was because of the unwavering dedication of frontline workers who gave their all - including their lives..."

"Brutal cuts to public health services in their hundreds of millions over the last decade left the UK without adequate testing capacity resulting in the outsourcing of test-and-trace operations. This wasted £37 billion of taxpayers' money on an ineffective system that failed to identify the spread of the virus."

These are the words of British Medical Association (BMA) council chair Chaand Nagpaul in response to the publication of the People's Covid Inquiry.

What's needed is a struggle for resources, led by the trade unions including health unions like the BMA, to demand the funding needed for decent health care. That includes funding a 15% pay rise for NHS and care staff, and bringing privatised services back in-house.

● The cost of vaccination

The cost of an undervaccinated world is new variants and millions of preventable deaths, particularly in the world's poorest nations. Just 9.2% of Afghanistan's population is fully vaccinated, 11.7% in Iraq. According to the Gates Foundation, \$25 billion is what it would take to vaccinate the entire planet.

A lot of money, but dwarfed by the \$89 billion in profits made by the top ten pharmaceutical companies in 2019. It is also put into perspective by the \$20.2 billion annual air-conditioning bill for the US military in Afghanistan and Iraq!

Left in the hands of the billionaires, the world's wealth will continue to be hoarded by a tiny few, or be squandered on murderous wars. We say nationalise the pharmaceuticals, big business and the banks under democratic workers' control and use the wealth to look after our health!

● See 'Covid-19: New variant emerges but same old capitalist disease' at socialistparty.org.uk



PHOTO: PAUL MATTSOON

Uni staff and students must unite to end marketisation and for free education

ADAM POWELL-DAVIES
OXFORD SOCIALIST STUDENTS

The Office for Students (OFS) has reacted to last week's impressive UCU strike turnout (see opposite) by seeking to divide university staff and students, with OFS chief Nicola Dandridge bemoaning the 'disruption' caused by strike action on students' education.

What Dandridge and others fail to mention is the far greater disruption that will face students if the university bosses do not meet the union's demands. The slogan 'staff working conditions are student learning conditions' has been blazoned across social media and repeated at UCU rallies and picket lines, and rightly so.

University staff do not strike in opposition to students. The 58 UCU branches taking action from 1-3 December - on the issues of pensions, low pay, casualisation, workload, and discriminatory pay - were fighting against symptoms of the marketised higher education system that sees both students and staff exploited at the hands of university management.

A UCU victory would not only mean an immediate improvement to workers' living conditions and students' learning conditions, it would pave the way for further action that could potentially reverse marketisation altogether. This would require

a shift to 100% direct government funding for higher education instead of the current system which pushes universities to maximise income from students in the form of rent and tuition fees, while cutting jobs, services, and even entire departments that are deemed 'unprofitable'.

Scrap fees

The OFS has also suggested that universities offer partial tuition fee refunds as one way to 'make up for' strike action. Socialist Students has supported the demand for tuition fee refunds because of the effects of Covid on student learning, but we want full refunds, as a first step to scrapping tuition fees altogether and the cancellation of all student debt.

We demand that higher education be run democratically by staff and students, as a free service open to all in society. We reject the idea that education should come with a price tag, as something that can be discounted in response to 'consumer' (i.e. student) dissatisfaction.

Tuition fee refunds must come as part of a fundamental restructuring of our higher education system, not as a one-time attempt to appease students while scapegoating staff. Refunds should also come from the government, not from individual institutions. The Tories have shown that the money is there by

bailing out big business during the pandemic.

For all of this to happen, students and staff must stand united. Despite the divisive rhetoric of some student unions, such as the Leeds University student union officialdom that disgracefully used the guise of protecting 'marginalised students' to justify not supporting the strike, the National Union of Students (NUS) has chosen to officially back the strikes nationally.

But aside from some well-worded petitions and social media posts, NUS offers little in the way of leadership, and this has been the case for some time. What students need is an actual fighting national students' union, one that fights for free education and puts words into action by organising walk-outs, occupations, protests, and rent strikes as part of its strategic arsenal.

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Monthly magazine of the Socialist Party

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Universities strike - build the action and stand united to win

University and College Union (UCU) members at 58 universities took three days of strike action last week, launching two separate disputes over pensions, pay and working conditions. They were the first UK-level disputes the union has taken strike action over since the 2019-20 wave of industrial action was prematurely concluded at the onset of the pandemic. 64 UCU branches will now begin a campaign of action short of a strike, working strictly to contract

to highlight the excessive workloads undertaken by university staff which goes unvalued and unpaid.

There are plans to announce further, escalating action in the new term if management do not concede to the union's demands, which includes the employers revoking pension cuts, agreeing to a £2,500 pay increase for all staff, and action to tackle unmanageable workloads, pay inequality and insecure contracts. Additionally, 42 branches that were close to achieving the 50%

turnout required under the Tories anti-union legislation are being re-balloted so they can legally join action next term.

Socialist Party members in UCU support this strategy of escalating the action, both in terms of action taken and the number of branches taking part. We also say that the disputes would be strengthened if other education trade unions ballot to join the action, and if further strikes are co-ordinated with other unions fighting back against the bosses' attacks.

Bristol

Over 500 people gathered for the main rally for the UCU strike at the University of Bristol on 1 December. Members from Bristol Socialist Party and the University of Bristol's Socialist Students Society attended, handing out our leaflets to raise the importance of staff and student solidarity to fight back against university management's attempts at divide and rule.

Speakers at the rally highlighted how the lack of an above-inflation pay rise and the rising costs of living, have left many of them struggling to heat their homes while management continue to exploit university staff through poor working conditions, precarious contracts and attacks on pensions. Socialist Party member Roger Thomas, speaking on behalf of Bristol Trades Council, raised the importance of linking struggles, such as the one currently being undertaken by UCU members, with other campaigns in order to build a fight-back against the bosses' attempts to make workers pay for the multitude of crises heading in our direction - together we can win!

AMY SAGE
BRISTOL SOCIALIST PARTY

Durham

Despite the rain and snow, university staff and their supporters persevered in their strike around Durham across the three days of industrial action. Their placards and banners made it clear what was being fought for: an end to casual contracts, bridging the gender and race pay gaps, and fighting against the cuts to pensions. The students' union supplied free tea and coffee to fight off the cold; some students even bringing doughnuts to the strikes in a demonstration of solidarity with their protesting teachers and staff members. In place of cancelled lectures, UCU organised online teach-outs for students on anti-racism and social change to highlight the importance of the issues they were on strike for.

These are issues that have gradually been worsening since the privatisation of higher education began, issues that will impact lower-band university staff and working-class students especially hard. Speaking as a student from a low-income background, I see this strike as vital to fight back against the poverty gap that corporatised universities are widening.

JAMES CROSBY
DURHAM SOCIALIST STUDENTS



Leeds IAIN DALTON

Leeds

Members of Socialist Students Leeds took part in the UCU industrial action at the University of Leeds. Leeds University UCU branch voted to strike over both the USS dispute and the 'Four Fights' dispute, and our members were on the picket handing out fliers, and convincing students and staff alike to join in the strikes and to support the union activity.

For one of the strike days, the entrance we picketed was entirely attended by members of Socialist Students Leeds, which gave us the opportunity to link the dispute to the wider need for socialist change within the tertiary education sector, and the need for an end to the marketisation of education.

Over 100 people attended the rally on 3 December, where several members of the union spoke of the atrocious conditions for staff.

Unfortunately, the students' union, LUU, came out against the strikes. Socialist Students Leeds published a letter condemning the lack of solidarity from the students' union, and its abandonment of its own post-graduate members who took part in the strike action.

ANTHONY BRACUTI
LEEDS SOCIALIST STUDENTS AND UCU STRIKER

Bradford

As a Socialist Party member and a second year student at Bradford university, I went down to show solidarity with the staff. I talked to staff about the government cuts over the past ten years and about the treatment of them, and also about the student union ban on political societies which they also disagreed with. There was passion shown by the staff, showing discontent with the government's policy towards universities and Labour's lack of support for the strike.

TOM GIBSON
BRADFORD SOCIALIST STUDENTS

Birmingham

Myself and other Socialist Students members went down to the University of Birmingham's main campus to show solidarity with striking staff members. Morale alone the line was high despite the cold. The day wound up with a rally with rousing speeches from students and staff.

ASH FORBES
BIRMINGHAM SOCIALIST STUDENTS



See the Facebook page of Socialist Party members in UCU
[facebook.com/SPUCU](https://www.facebook.com/SPUCU)



London PAUL MATTSSON

London

Socialist Party and Socialist Students members attended UCU pickets across London to offer solidarity and discuss with strikers the way forward for the disputes, receiving a warm response from picketers.

On 3 December we also joined a regional mobilisation of UCU members, which included a rally addressed by the general secretary, Jo Grady, as well as the RMT general secretary Mick Lynch. The rally was followed by a march starting from

Bloomsbury and picking up picketers from various other London campuses on the way to lobby outside financial institutions that have a stake in the USS pension.

It was a positive step that the rally was addressed by representatives from the RMT given night tube drivers were on strike later that day. More collaboration between different unions in struggle will be an important step moving forward for workers.

BEA GARDNER
ENFIELD SOCIALIST PARTY AND UCU MEMBER

Sheffield

At the University of Sheffield, workers were also striking over the closure of the Archaeology Department, and the restructuring of the School of Languages. The UCU branch won an additional local ballot for strike action against these cuts.

I visited the picket lines with other members of University of Sheffield Socialist Students to show support for university staff in these disputes. Staff described the lack of security as the most frustrating element of their contracts - many of which are renewed every 12 months at short notice. Postgrad students struggle to balance mandatory teaching with their own studies, and research staff are constantly applying for external funding and evaluating their finances to even continue their work.

The recent reshuffling of the School of Languages and Cultures has also left students and staff outraged and disappointed at the impact this will have on the quality of the learning for languages degrees, and this same anger is carried towards the department's attitude on pensions.

These disputes are fully justified, as management attempts to curb pension benefits and wilfully impose closures - including redundancies - despite the university having an annual profit of £127.1 million and an endowment fund of £45.5 million.

DAN GLASER AND HELENE TRISTER
SHEFFIELD SOCIALIST STUDENTS

Brighton

Brighton Socialist Party and University of Brighton Socialist Students joined with UCU for its three days of strike action. This industrial action is a continuation of the dispute that sent shockwaves across the country in 2019. Each day of the three-day industrial action our members joined pickets across Brighton, encouraging staff and students not to cross the picket lines.

On 1 December, a demonstration was attended by over 100 students at the University of Sussex, where the students' union demanded the university support the demands of the UCU, and uphold promises made prior to the pandemic.

Students again proved their support for the strikes by turning out in their hundreds at two separate demos. Sussex students barricaded themselves in Sussex House on 3 December.

JOSHUA BOYLE
BRIGHTON SOCIALIST STUDENTS

Nottingham

At the University of Nottingham, the mood music on the six picket lines was very positive. Around 150 UCU members and supporters then attended a rally.

Andreas from the UCU branch gave a damning indictment of the role of the university's senior management who sit on national bodies.

GARY FREEMAN
NOTTINGHAM SOCIALIST PARTY



Birmingham

Napo ballots for trade dispute, but members need strategy for industrial action

ADAM HARMSWORTH
NAPo NATIONAL EXECUTIVE MEMBER
(PERSONAL CAPACITY)

Probation staff in the Napo trade union have made their anger clear at the insulting pay freeze. Recently, members rejected the pay offer by an outstanding 99%, and with a very encouraging turnout. Then at Napo's 2021 annual general meeting, a huge majority of attendees backed two motions calling for ballots for industrial action if the pay freeze remained.

On the back of this, and with the pay freeze firmly in place, Napo's national executive committee (NEC) has met to discuss the next steps of the pay campaign. The result was most of the NEC voting for the general secretary's recommendation to ballot the membership on lodging a formal trade dispute with the employer, and reserve the option of balloting for industrial action.

This will likely deliver a firm result in favour, but I couldn't support it because the recommendation represents the leadership backing away from supporting a ballot for industrial action at this time. The general secretary, among others, expressed doubts about balloting for industrial action. First they said that they did not think Napo could get the turnout, then adding that even if we did the Tories just will not budge. Bizarrely, among those holding this view was the national chair, who proposed one of the previously mentioned motions at AGM!

Napo's leaders fear they face a loss similar to that when the union opposed the part-privatisation of probation. But just seven years on we are in a different era. They do not acknowledge the great victories that have been won by trade unions in this period.

Unfortunately, there is a real danger that this retreat - and it is a retreat however it may be dressed up - will be noticed by the active layers in Napo, not least the hundreds of members who attended AGM, and the branches who proposed motions backing a campaign involving strike action.

By wanting to avoid the risk of a ballot failing, Napo's leadership risks demoralising its members, partly because the democratic decisions of AGM itself are being undermined. A window of opportunity to build the fightback is rapidly closing. A trade dispute is a fight between classes, but without the weapon of strike action readily available the union is weaker from the start.

However, the NEC decision has been made. Now, the agreed ballot should be called as soon as possible. If, as we hope and will campaign for, that delivers another clear vote and strong turnout, then a meeting of the NEC should be called to discuss a plan to build a campaign for industrial action.

Napo's branches should submit motions to the NEC backing a cross-union campaign for industrial action in probation and across the public sector to break the pay freeze.

Clarks strikers defeat 'fire and rehire'



TOM BALDWIN
SOUTH WEST SOCIALIST PARTY

After two months on strike Clarks workers have defeated the shoe firm's plans to fire and rehire them on considerably reduced wages. The company had been trying to impose a 15% pay cut, reducing hourly pay to just £9.50, along with a whole raft of other attacks. It came up against determined resistance from members of the Community trade union who began all-out strike action in October.

Clarks has now backed down from the plans to fire workers at the Westway distribution centre in Street, Somerset, to force them to sign up to the new terms. The existing pay of £11.16 an hour has been protected,

and newer staff will have their pay raised to this level, in line with their workmates.

Full details of the deal have not yet been made public and may include some concessions by workers as well as management. Nonetheless, beating fire and rehire is a victory, and staff have voted to accept the deal and end the strike.

The deal between the firm and the union was struck at Acas, the third party mediation service. However, it was only possible due to concerted struggle pushing the company back. They had only agreed to mediation after the strike had already been in place for over a month and they'd already had to improve their offer to £10.03 an hour.

Strikers had kept up well-organised

pickets covering every shift for two months. Support from other trade unionists was shown through donations to the strike fund, large numbers joining the picket lines for solidarity days, and the hundreds-strong demonstration which was applauded at every turn as it marched through the village of Street.

The successful fight by this relatively small group of workers will have much wider repercussions. Other employers will have been watching the outcome and may now think again before attempting to inflict similar attacks on their workforce.

Likewise, all workers will need to learn from this example, that struggle and solidarity are vital to defending their interests.

Thousands of Tesco warehouse workers to strike in run-up to Christmas



Tesco Dagenham warehouse workers strike in 2018 RICHARD GROVES

SCOTT JONES
SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBER IN USDAW

Supermarket giant Tesco is set to be hit by a series of strikes at its distribution centres in the run-up to Christmas.

Unions representing Tesco warehouse workers and HGV drivers, Usdaw and Unite, have announced industrial action in three disputes, all over pay.

In reality, Tesco is trying to force workers into a real-terms pay cut, despite Tesco predicting an operating profit of £2.6 billion for the current financial year and praising its staff as 'key workers' during the pandemic. These workers helped keep the country fed, resulting in increased profits for the bosses - a 16.5% increase in the first half of the year. Now Tesco risks empty shelves during the busy Christmas period.

The workers should take confidence from Morrisons where, after the threat of a walkout, over 1,100

warehouse workers have won improved pay. Tesco warehouse workers have also walked out before, at Dagenham in 2018, when 80% of Tesco stores in Greater London were affected, showing the power of the workforce. Strikes at a combined 12 sites across the UK would create shockwaves.

Ushaw's two disputes involve over 5,000 members at nine Tesco distribution centres in Daventry Clothing, Goole, Hinckley, Lichfield, Livingston, Magor (both trunk and main sites), Peterborough and Southampton. Members rejected a 4% annual pay increase and voted 73% and 84% in favour of action. Unite members at depots in Antrim, Belfast, Didcot and Doncaster will strike after also rejecting 4%.

Ushaw members will strike at the nine sites starting on Monday 20 December and concluding on Christmas Eve, while Unite members at the Didcot and Doncaster sites will see an initial 48-hour stoppage

beginning on 16 December, followed by a further five-day pre-Christmas stoppage beginning on Monday 20 December.

There will be a further 48-hour stoppage beginning on Thursday 30 December and a three-day stoppage beginning on 5 January at Doncaster and Didcot.

Unite members at the Antrim and Belfast Tesco distribution centres will begin an all-out continuous strike on 16 December.

The Socialist Party sends solidarity to the workers. One of our members and Usdaw rep Max McGee is appealing his sacking by Tesco (for 'exaggerating' an injury in his warehouse), which took place while Ushaw was starting the indicative ballot for strike action. Max is now on his second appeal against this outrageous decision. His victimisation shows Tesco bosses are frightened of militant trade unionists and the mass strike action in the pipeline can beat them.

Sandwell bin workers beat Serco and win pay rise

RICHARD GINGELL
BIRMINGHAM NORTH SOCIALIST PARTY

It's a good thing Serco runs refuse centres, because they certainly belong in the trash. This time there's trouble up in Sandwell in the West Midlands, where over 100 refuse workers have been on strike citing poor pay, dangerous conditions and bullying from management.

The strikes started with a few days here and there from August, increasing in intensity, with a plan to escalate in the build up to Christmas. However, following a 90% ballot to accept a deal from Serco, those plans are no more.

The offer itself is a 4% increase, as well as an uplift of around £1,000 for drivers, and a promise to bring agency workers onto permanent contracts and fix safety issues around the site.

While this is a welcome victory, the issues are far from solved. The Sandwell refuse workers still face a

huge pay discrepancy versus those doing the same role in neighbouring authorities, a difference as high as £7,000 in extreme cases. There's also the obvious problem of that 4% raise being almost entirely wiped out by inflation within a year.

Instead, workers need to continue to press their advantage and fight to get their compensation bought into line with their neighbours - a demand that Serco will bitterly oppose as their profits come directly from the wages of those under their employ. If Serco won't listen, then this battle needs to be brought to the local Labour council to finally put the interests of those in our community above that of the profits of the multinationals.

If the council won't do that, then they need to be challenged at the ballot box - which is what the Socialist Party will be doing as part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition this May!



Workers on the sixth day of the strike GMB SANDWELL

DAVE REID



Panasonic workers break company pay freeze

DAVE REID
SOCIALIST PARTY WALES

Panasonic workers at Pentwyn in Cardiff have won a significant victory against the multinational giant. The company has caved in and increased its pay offer from zero to 5.5% over two years, plus a £300 bonus. The fourth day of strike action has been suspended while the offer is put to the members.

This represents yet another victory in Wales by workers taking determined strike action to try and get a decent pay rise in the face of rising inflation. Stagecoach bus drivers in Gwent recently won a 10.5% pay rise, and Arriva drivers in North Wales have won £12 an hour.

Panasonic had originally offered a 1% rise - in effect a pay cut. But when this was rejected by the workforce the company withdrew even this miserly offer. GMB members began a series of four one-day strikes on 15 November. Clearly the

strike was having a big effect on production, with reports of thousands of pounds worth of production lost or even wasted by agency workers sent across picket lines.

The success of the strike was even more significant because not all the workers took strike action. But those who came out on strike and stood on the picket lines showed incredible resolve and determination which, clearly, the company realised would not be broken, despite a culture of management bullying. The strikers included a number of east European workers.

While the 5.5% hardly keeps pace with the rate of inflation, it marks a big increase on the company's original offer and represents a spectacular victory for workers in Panasonic after years of plant closures, job losses and declining real pay.

They have turned the tide and have a real opportunity to strengthen union organisation throughout the plant.

Worksop Wincanton logistics workers on strike

JON DALE
CHESTERFIELD SOCIALIST PARTY

A slice of pizza and a bacon butty was all Wincanton bosses thought workers deserved in reward for working throughout the pandemic. 460 Unite members are now on strike at Worksop, North Nottinghamshire, the main warehousing and logistics site for B&Q.

Unite senior reps Patrick McGrath and Dave Staniforth outlined the background:

"Workers are demanding a cost-of-living pay rise - not the 4% offered, a pay cut in real terms. They are also fighting management's attempt to undermine their union. Reps have been threatened with false disciplinarys, and redundancy, and bosses even tried to pay off a senior rep to leave.

"In the past the union has got agency workers paid at the same rate as new starters, £9.96 an hour instead of minimum wage. Kingfisher (B&Q's parent company) and

Wincanton have seen massive profit increases in the past year. The workers who have made this possible are determined to win.

"They plan a week on strike followed by a week's overtime ban, running up to Christmas. If the company hasn't conceded by then, there may be an all-out strike in the New Year - normally the busiest time. B&Q stores will start running out of some lines by next week.

"Over 100 have been present at times on the 24-hour picket line, on the site of the former Manton Colliery. The last time mass pickets were here was the 1984-85 miners' strike. Police have not been seen this time, except for one patrol car that stopped to find out what was going on - and then wished the pickets good luck - very different to the mass police presence last time!"

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Newham Sixth Form College begins strike against academisation

Staff at Newham Sixth Form College (NewVIC) in east London walked out against privatisation on 1 December.

The 'chief executive' (headteacher) of this community college wants it to become a privately run 'academy'. That means private firms can profit from the budget, there's no limit on management salaries, and national terms and conditions for staff don't apply. Naturally, there was no consultation!

The National Education Union (NEU) now has over 100 members at NewVIC, with many signing up because of the strike. They voted overwhelmingly for the action. Dozens joined the picket line on the first day.

As the Socialist goes to press, workers are due to strike again on 8-9 December. More days will likely be needed to force management back. The NEU is ready to call further action after the Christmas break.

Louise Cuffaro, secretary of Newham NEU and Socialist Party

member, said: "We are going to fight to keep this a community college. If you don't fight, you can't win.

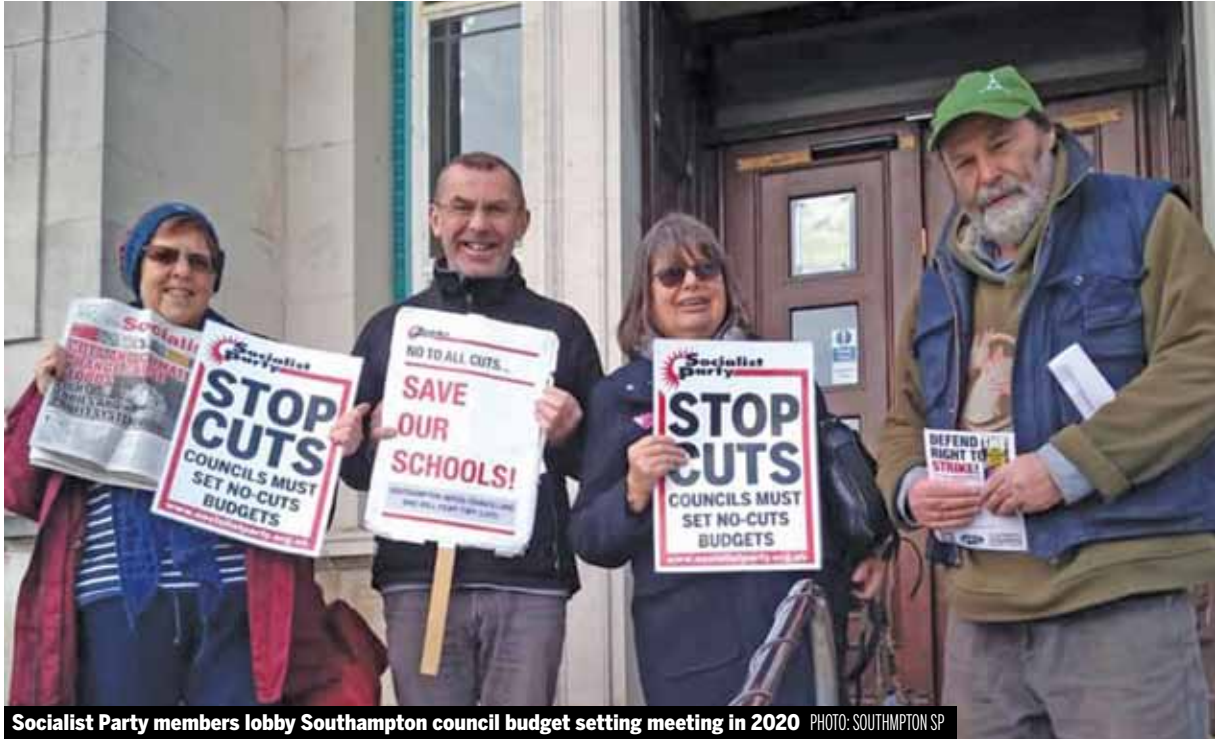
"We've kept places in this borough away from academisation. They're not accountable. We'll keep going week in, week out. He thinks you're going to be worn out after a day, or after two days. We are not going anywhere!"

NEU reps from the neighbouring borough of Redbridge also joined the picket line, fresh from the 33-day strike against bullying at Oaks Park secondary school. Oaks Park rep Bill Stockwell led rounds of Solidarity Forever on his cornet, and victimised rep Keiran Mahon joined in solidarity.

The culture of bullying is also a problem at NewVIC, and at schools and colleges around the country. National action to reduce workload and improve pay is the best way to start changing this.

JAMES IVENS

EAST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY



Socialist Party members lobby Southampton council budget setting meeting in 2020 PHOTO: SOUTHAMPTON SP

Southampton People's Budget

CATHERINE CLARKE

SOUTHAMPTON SOCIALIST PARTY

Southampton TUSC hosted a People's Budget meeting on 13 November. The meeting invited representatives from the trade unions, Labour councillors, councillors from Alton in Hampshire who have resigned from Labour, the Breakthrough Party, the Workers' Party and other community organisations.

Solidarity messages were received from the chair of Hampshire Fire Brigades Union, the Bakers' union (BEAWU) and RMT transport union presidential candidate Sean Hoyle.

Introducing the discussion, Nick Chaffey, secretary of Socialist Party Southern and South East region, explained that the Tory austerity programme, implemented by Southampton's Labour council over the past ten years, has seen a cut of £160 million each year for the city, a cumulative withdrawal of £1 billion. The consequence: a loss of Labour's support and ultimately its leadership of the council to the Tories in May this year.

In 2013 two Labour councillors, Keith Morrell and Don Thomas, were forced out of the Labour group for opposing cuts, including the closure of Lordshill swimming pool in their ward. With the support of TUSC and the Socialist Party they proceeded to move an alternative no-cuts budget proposal using reserves and borrowing. The Labour mayor refused to allow the proposal to be discussed and voted on.

Unsurprisingly, the councillors' fight was popular, and both Keith and Don were re-elected, standing against Labour. Under pressure, the Labour council miraculously found £1.5 million to keep the pool open. This shows how effective campaigns can save services, and fighting the cuts is hugely popular!

There are approximately 10,000 people on the council housing waiting list in Southampton it was suggested in the meeting that the council is refusing to let any more people join. A People's Budget should oppose

any increases in council rent or service charges. A willing council could also use its powers to implement rent control in the private sector. One contribution outlined how many of the council houses on the 'Flowers Estate' in Southampton have been sold off. Those in council accommodation pay £400 per month, while a privately rented house next door pays £1,500 per month.

Council housing

A People's Budget should include building council housing as well as retrofitting compulsory bought empty homes. Such a programme, carried out in-house and with input from the trade unions, should employ thousands of workers on £15 an hour or more, as well as creating well-paid apprenticeships. Environmentally friendly technologies and building techniques could be applied throughout.

Declan Clune, Secretary of Southampton Trades Union Council, works in homelessness services in Southampton. The homelessness department of the council is avoiding referring people for shelter in over-stretched underfunded hostels. When council workers are sent out to count the homeless, individuals are not included in the statistics if their bedding is in a doorway, but not currently being slept on. If the homeless individual has a tent, they are considered as having shelter. As well as building more homes, a People's Budget should include expanding the support services available to those made homeless.

Adult social care provided through the council is driven by targets dictated by cost saving and disregarding the needs of people. The support packages provided for those who need residential care have been drastically cut. The council used to employ 30 members of staff to support those needing social care. They now employ just seven full-time staff.

Bus services in Southampton, run privately for profit, are unreliable and expensive. Many workers, unable to be sure of getting to work on time, are

forced to drive. Bus companies have received vast public subsidies during the pandemic. They were operating as normal when no one was using them, making huge profits.

Bus drivers are leaving their jobs in droves. In the past, drivers were allowed a break every four hours, now this has increased to five. With drivers leaving, companies are now offering pay rises of 6.7% to attract people into the industry, proof that they do have the money to pay higher wages!

A people's budget should include bringing bus services back into public ownership. Until as recently as 15 years ago in Southampton, there were a number of free bus services in the city centre. In Luxembourg, a free bus service has resulted in a 74% decrease in car usage. Free, publicly owned transport in Southampton could help transform the city's dangerous air quality.

The meeting in Southampton was a starting point towards developing a needs budget for the city. The discussion will continue on 22 January. Proposals will be developed further ahead of the council budget-setting meeting on 23 February.

New workers' party

It is vital that trade unions and socialists begin to seriously organise politically to fight for our interests. It is positive that the Bakers' Union (BEAWU) has now disaffiliated from Labour. The Communications Workers Union (CWU) conference voted to suspend donations to the national Labour Party beyond its affiliation fees. Unite the Union has reduced its donations to Labour by 10% and general secretary Sharon Graham has pledged to "adopt a policy calling on Labour councils to set legal, balanced no-cuts needs-based budgets".

We must present a bold programme as a clear alternative to working-class people, and prepare to stand candidates in the council elections to get our message out there. Candidates prepared to fight the cuts in the council chamber, stand with us as part of TUSC next May!

BUILDING PEOPLE'S BUDGETS

An alternative to Tory and Labour cuts

As local authorities begin discussing their spending plans for 2022-2023, which they will finally agree at budget-setting meetings in February or March, we can already see the scale of cuts that are being prepared. Labour-led Manchester City Council is talking about an £85 million budget shortfall within the next three years. Liverpool City Council is planning £19 million of cuts next year, including 6% of its current spending on adult social care.

There are 125 councils that can be considered 'Labour-led' in Britain - 103 councils in England and ten in Wales. In advance of the 2022-23 budget-setting meetings, the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC), an electoral coalition including the Socialist Party, the transport union RMT, Resist and others, has compiled statistical profiles of the budgets and reserves held by these councils (see 'How much reserves have they got?' tusc.org.uk).

These councils together control budgets of at least £82

billion. This gives Labour-led councils a combined spending power greater than the gross domestic product of nine EU countries and the state budgets of sixteen!

At the same time, these councils together hold around £15.32 billion in General Fund reserves, £2.07 billion in Housing Revenue Account reserves, and £2.59 billion useable capital receipts reserves. Councils also have the ability to borrow much more, financed by reserves in the short term.

In towns and cities around the country, TUSC is initiating People's Budget meetings bringing together trade unions, activists and community organisations to draw up an outline for council budgets based on the needs of local communities.

A council prepared to introduce such a budget, which draws upon councils' reserves and borrowing powers, would win popular support. With the support of the trade unions, a campaign could be mobilised to win back funding from central government.



Council workers protest in Southampton, 2010 PHOTO: SOTONS/SP



Socialist Party members campaigning in Birmingham PHOTO: BIRMINGHAM SP

Birmingham People's Budget

JOE FOSTER

BIRMINGHAM NORTH SOCIALIST PARTY

Birmingham TUSC hosted an initial forum to discuss the pressing issues facing working-class communities in Birmingham on 27 November. The meeting looked at what steps could be taken by Birmingham City Council, and how to campaign for the necessary funding from central government to carry them out.

In attendance were members of ten trade union branches, including RMT, Unite, ASLEF, CWU and UCU, the chair of the Birmingham branch of Acorn tenants' union and the local coordinators of TUSC and the Workers' Party of Britain. Save Our Schools West Midlands also sent a written submission.

The meeting heard how over £770 million has been cut from services by Birmingham City Council since 2010, which, along with outsourcing and schools being transferred to academies, has resulted in the council workforce shrinking from over 50,000 twelve years ago to less than 12,000 today.

Despite this, the council still controls a total budget of over £3.3 billion and useable reserves of over £1 billion.

TUSC believes that these reserves and the council's borrowing powers could be used to implement a People's Budget based on properly resourced public services and an accelerated council house building programme, while mounting a campaign to win the necessary funds on a permanent basis from central government.

Throughout the discussion, those in attendance raised what measures they thought could be taken by the council to improve people's lives.

Housing

The lack of available, affordable and suitable housing is the most pressing issue facing working-class people in Birmingham today. There is an urgent need for more council-owned homes available at genuinely affordable rents to tackle the waiting list of over 18,000

households and the tens of thousands more who have been excluded from even joining the waiting list.

As well as being a problem in its own right, poor housing creates an additional burden on the NHS and social care by aggravating health problems, and is less environmentally friendly.

By Birmingham City Council's own estimate there are currently brownfield sites available for 45,000 new homes in Birmingham. The council should use its powers to compulsory purchase this land to build the next generation of environmentally sustainable council homes on these sites.

In addition, the council could use its powers to set up a compulsory register of private landlords and refuse to recognise those letting out substandard housing or with a history of rent hikes and unfair evictions.

Schools

Save Our Schools highlighted the need to bring schools that have been transferred away to academy trusts back under local authority control. This could be linked to a programme of enriching the curriculum across schools to engage pupils, and ignite the imagination of children who find the rigid and restricted nature of exam-focused lessons so hard to manage.

Support for pupils with special educational needs (SEND) is particularly lacking. Additional training for early intervention in schools, youth centres, play groups and activity clubs which include children with SEND, are desperately needed.

The closure of all 14 council-run nurseries in 2019 has affected the poorest communities the most. These should be reopened to provide free, good quality pre-school education for all children.

For older children, a People's Budget could restore funding to the 43 council-run youth clubs and local projects which have been closed. A reintroduction of the Education Maintenance Allowance for 16-18 year-olds could offer young people a positive future away from crime and anti-social behaviour.

Council workers' pay

Local authority workers in Unison, GMB and Unite are all preparing for potential strike action against the government's below-inflation 1.75% pay offer.

The current lowest pay band at Birmingham City Council is equivalent to £9.50 an hour, barely more than the minimum wage for over-25 year-olds. The council should implement a real living wage of £15 an hour. Existing equal pay disputes at the council must be resolved by levelling up wages and conditions. There must be no repeat of the 'fire-and-rehire' tactics used against grade-three refuse collectors in 2017, which led to strike action and ultimately victory for the Unite-organised workers.

Domestic violence services

Support for Birmingham and Solihull Women's Aid to provide services for those fleeing domestic violence has previously been cut by £500,000. However, this year the organisation received an emergency grant of £3.2 million from central government. This funding and more should be made permanent to maintain and extend services.

Climate change

Birmingham City Council has the powers to intervene in the running of privatised bus services and stop the axing of routes between suburbs. It is possible for the council to introduce free travel, including for under-25s and jobseekers.

To encourage the roll out of electric cars, especially in terraced streets where people don't have private driveways, the council could fund a network of public vehicle charging points.

TUSC is planning further meetings to develop these demands ahead of the council's budget setting meeting in February.

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How can we mount a challenge to the cutters and the evictors in Waltham Forest Council? On 5 December, there were people from many different campaigns and trade unions at a meeting organised by the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC). Councillors in this low-waged east London borough are promoting the development of unaffordable flats as they acquiesce to property developers' drive for profit. While sitting on usable reserves of £177 million, the council has cut services, put up rent and council tax, and effectively cut council workers' pay. The council recently nodded through plans to redevelop the local hospital, Whipps Cross, but not as a facility to serve the growing local population. Whipps Cross will be

Challenge cutters and evictors in Waltham Forest Council

smaller and surrounded by another private housing estate, making expansion impossible. Socialist Party member Nancy Taaffe said standing a large slate of TUSC candidates could show a real alternative to cuts and austerity. When we stood TUSC candidates before, we argued for rent control.

That demand is even more relevant now as the council tries to turn the borough into a property developers' paradise. TUSC is a coalition, providing a platform for local campaigns and trade unionists - far more effective than standing as individual 'independent' candidates. Anyone who

agrees with TUSC's core policies of no cuts and no privatisation can stand under this umbrella. Speakers from the floor backed up this approach. They pointed to the election of the new Sharon Graham leadership in Unite the Union, and Bakers' union BEAWU disaffiliating from Labour, as signs that the voice

of working-class people is beginning to be heard. TUSC can inspire people by putting forward no-cuts budgets based on what working-class people need, not what the Tories and big business say can be afforded. Discussions in Waltham Forest are still at an early stage, but the meeting provided an important opportunity to build a real alternative in the 2022 elections, when every seat in the borough is up for grabs. We plan to take the no-cuts proposal around local union branches and community campaigns to seek input on what a needs budget for Waltham Forest should include, and invite working-class fighters to join the TUSC electoral challenge. ALISON HILL WALTHAM FOREST SOCIALIST PARTY

Remembering Tony Davison's contribution to socialist and union movement



PHIL CULSHAW HULL SOCIALIST PARTY 40 people came together on 4 December in Hull to remember Tony Davison and his incredible contribution to the socialist and trade union movement. They were Socialist Party members, trade unionists and members of Tony's family. Tony, a Socialist Party member for 40 years, sadly died in October. Young Socialist Party member Lucy Nuttall spoke of Tony's kindness when she first moved to Hull, making her feel welcome. Tony was proud when his granddaughter, Kirstie, organised climate change school strikes and participated in Black Lives Matter demonstrations. Socialist Party member Trevor Grewar met Tony on the Easington gas terminal construction site. Political discussions in the locker cabin led to Tony joining Militant (now the Socialist Party) in 1983. At the height of the miners' strike the following year, over 60 workers on the site every week

would buy a copy of Militant (now the Socialist) from Tony and Trevor. Tony and Trevor raised thousands of pounds in support of the miners' struggle. Les Dobbs, GMB union regional organiser, said Tony received a standing ovation at the last GMB conference he attended speaking against austerity. Alistair Tice, Yorkshire Socialist Party secretary, spoke of Tony's commitment and contribution over the years, including building an anti-poll-tax union in Beverley, a predominantly Tory market town. The financial appeal raised £1,586.65. The memorial meeting was brought to an end with musician Joe Solo leading everyone singing No Pasarán and the Internationale. Rest in power comrade. • Read Tony Davison's obituary at socialistparty.org.uk - "I work for Militant, but Laing's pay my wages"



Fighting Fund: Help us reach over £50,000

CHRIS NEWBY SOCIALIST PARTY FIGHTING FUND ORGANISER

2021 is set to end on a tremendous note for the Socialist Party. We have already raised just short of £50,000 in the October-December quarter thanks in the main to the fighting fund appeal at Socialism 2021. The pages of the Socialist are full of different strikes and community campaigns which our members are involved in and support. From 1 to 3 December, we were at universities supporting members of the University and College Union (UCU) on strike

with our leaflets and the Socialist newspaper (see page 5). The Socialist Party is also campaigning in town and city centres on many different issues - from defending the NHS, to fighting for a living wage of at least £15 an hour for all workers, to nationalising the energy companies. Tories and bosses As the Tories and the bosses attack workers, working-class struggle is likely to increase. We need to get our socialist message out as widely as possible.

By smashing through the fighting fund target, we will be able to produce far more leaflets and posters for the stormy events of 2022. What can you do to raise extra fighting fund, whether it is planning an extra campaign stall or organising a Christmas meal? New donations for the Socialism 2021 appeal still continue to come in from those who were unable to attend. More than £10,000 of pledges are yet to be redeemed. It is vital that unpaid pledges are paid in urgently. The current fighting fund quarter ends on 3 January.

SOCIALIST PARTY FIGHTING FUND									
AREA	& RECEIVED	& TARGET	Q4: OCTOBER-DECEMBER 2021						
South West	5,923	1,800							329%
Northern	1,660	750							221%
East Midlands	3,300	1,850							178%
London	7,624	4,600							166%
Wales	3,452	2,300							150%
Eastern	1,615	1,200							135%
North West	1,448	1,150							126%
Yorkshire	2,679	2,550							105%
West Midlands	2,334	2,600							90%
Southern & SE	1,588	2,350						68%	
Other	18,316	3,850							476%
TOTAL	43,923	25,000							200%

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Organise to win the NEU's 8% pay demand



MARTIN POWELL-DAVIES SOCIALIST PARTY IN EDUCATION (SPINED)

At long last, concrete steps are being taken by the National Education Union (NEU) to build towards the national strike action that will be necessary to win a pay rise that reverses the continuing decline in teachers' real salaries. But the delay in launching a clear campaign means that urgent steps now need to be taken at every level of the union if we are going to ballot successfully for union-wide industrial action. Ever since July, when the government confirmed it would be imposing a 0% pay freeze on teachers' pay in England for 2020-21, the five Socialist Party members on the NEU's national executive, alongside others, have been pushing for the union to launch a clear campaign to prepare for a national ballot. It was a demand also taken up in my campaign for election as NEU deputy general secretary. In my election address, I spelt out that "we should already have responded with a plan of action" and warned that "hesitation only invites further attacks." Faced with rising prices, pressure

has also been building from below. When teachers see their pay frozen, at the same time as even official inflation rates are rising to 5%, they expect their union to be giving a lead! Of course, the cost of many essentials is rising even faster - like petrol and gas bills. NEU members will therefore be pleased to see Kevin Courtney, NEU joint general secretary, call for a fully funded 8% pay rise for teachers, both in 2022 and 2023. This follows the meeting of the NEU national executive in November when, for the first time, there was a serious discussion about how to urgently mobilise across the whole union. A real sense of urgency is now required to make up for lost time. As things stand, the latest campaign email issued to members still fails to mention a national pay campaign at all! That has to urgently change. Winning on pay must become a priority focus for all - staff, local officers and activists alike. No section of the union can be allowed to drag its feet over the issue. Nor must the members' survey planned for mid-January be used as an excuse to back away from action. It's inevitable that, with such a

short run-in to the survey, turnout will not yet be at the levels needed to beat the legal thresholds in a formal strike ballot. Instead, Socialist Party members on the NEU executive are urging that the survey is seen as part of an escalating campaign, and used as an opportunity to identify both areas of strength and those where we need to build more engagement. A good turnout could then be built further in a full indicative ballot later next term. NEU annual conference over Easter could then be used to launch a formal strike ballot. Such a bold campaign could not only help to win the NEU's pay demands but also start to reverse the 'race to the bottom' for all workers. That will also need to include winning for support and supply staff members of the NEU who have seen their already low incomes falling further. It can also start to rebuild the confidence and organisation of NEU members as a whole, spurring on our fight on all the other issues we face, like workload, testing, safety and academisation. • Read the full article at mpdnut.com

Sheffield Just East couriers picket and march for pay rise

SHEFFIELD SOCIALIST PARTY

On 28 November, Sheffield couriers employed by Stuart Delivery, which handles deliveries for Just Eat, took part in a motorcade through the city centre before they rallied outside the town hall, and then marched down Fargate to hold a mass picket of around 100 outside McDonalds. These food delivery couriers, members of the Independent Workers' Union of Great Britain (IWGB), started six days of strike action on 6 December, initially picketing McDonald's outlets from 5pm-10pm. They are striking because Stuart Delivery is slashing pay on most deliveries from £4.50 to £3.40, an effective pay cut of nearly 25%, as part of a new pay structure that will force couriers to work even longer to make the same money. Despite undertaking high-risk key work through the pandemic, Stuart's couriers still live on poverty pay, are denied basic worker rights such as sick pay, and are forced to cover their own vehicle and insurance costs. With rising costs of living and fuel spikes, pay cuts will push these key workers further into poverty. Instead of a pay cut, the IWGB union is demanding a pay rise, for a minimum of £6 per drop plus mileage and paid waiting times after ten minutes.



Bryn Atkinson-Woodcock, Stuart courier in Sheffield, says: "With the rising cost of living, and minimum wage and national living wage rising too, we should be getting a pay rise, not a pay cut. The pay at Stuart is bad as it is. Stuart advertises pay between £15 and £20 an hour online, but this is totally unrealistic. Once you take out the rising price of fuel, insurance, vehicle maintenance, and tax, we're making far

below minimum wage. I work six to seven days a week, between eight and twelve hours, and it's obliterated my savings. I'm on my third car since I started working with Stuart because I'm doing 50 to 100 miles a day, and the wear and tear costs take a considerable amount of my earnings. All we're asking for is fair pay so we can pay our costs, earn a decent living, and have the time to see our families."



Yorkshire Stagecoach bus workers complete week-long strike and prepare for more in pay rise pursuit

ALISTAIR TICE YORKSHIRE SOCIALIST PARTY

560 Stagecoach bus workers across South Yorkshire, members of Unite, have completed a week of strike action in pursuit of an above-inflation pay rise. The strike at four garages in Barnsley, Rotherham and Sheffield was absolutely solid, with big turnouts at all the picket lines and big support from the public. In fact, more than one driver has said that they've had more support from the public while they've been on strike than they usually get when driving buses! While the Barnsley and Rotherham depots had a strike ten years ago, as far as anyone can remember, going back at least 27 years, there has never been a strike at the Sheffield depots. One driver at the Ecclesfield garage told me: "I've worked here eleven years and my pay has only gone up by £1.61 an hour!" It's this low pay, combined with rising prices, work overload, poor conditions and bullying management that has led to the strike and a determination and confidence to stick it out till they win.

an improved offer. But if that doesn't happen, the bus workers will be back on strike for another week from the weekend of 11-12 December. While the union has made a public undertaking not to strike over Christmas, to allow passengers to visit family and friends, they will start an indefinite strike from 1 January if their pay claim is not met. While the Barnsley and Rotherham depots had a strike ten years ago, as far as anyone can remember, going back at least 27 years, there has never been a strike at the Sheffield depots. One driver at the Ecclesfield garage told me: "I've worked here eleven years and my pay has only gone up by £1.61 an hour!" It's this low pay, combined with rising prices, work overload, poor conditions and bullying management that has led to the strike and a determination and confidence to stick it out till they win.

Defying unjust laws - a rich history of working-class struggle

NORMAN HALL
SOUTH TYNE AND WEAR SOCIALIST PARTY

The impending passing of the ‘Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill’ has raised a question among some activists that its list of restrictions on the right to protest will, in effect, mark the end of protest in the UK.

However, capitalism in crisis, with its relentless attacks on living conditions, will not allow the working class to remain silent for long. These attacks will force people into protest and struggle, irrespective of what restrictive legislation is on the books.

Unfortunately, up to now, the trade union movement has not seriously taken up the issues in the anti-protest bill. However, it cannot remain indifferent for long, as there is no doubt the bosses will seek to use the provisions of the bill against the organised workers’ movement.

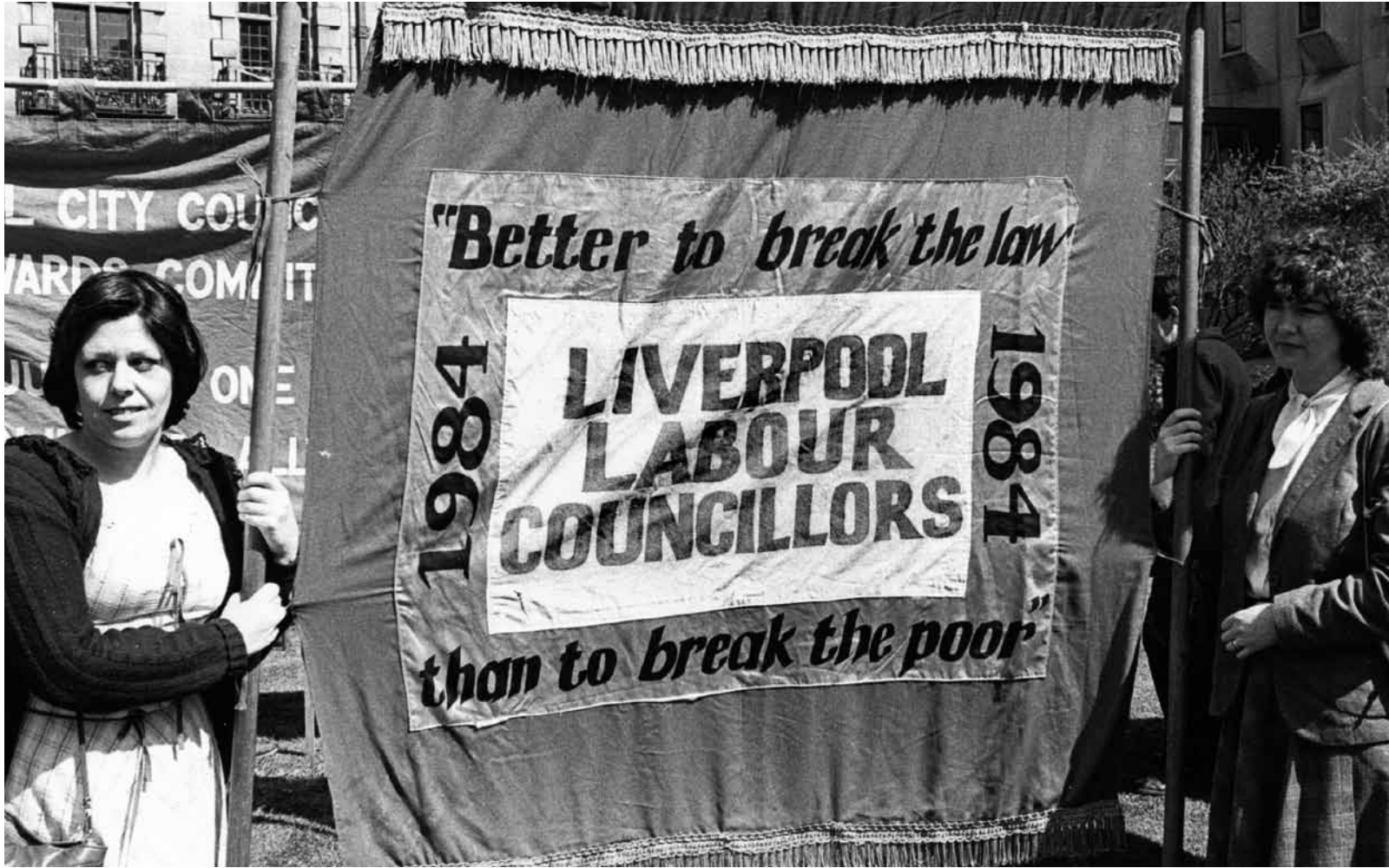
We need to be clear that this is a trade union issue. Just as in the past the provisions of the anti-terrorist legislation enacted to deal with the threat of the Provisional IRA was used against shop stewards (union reps) and others, today’s legislation will also be used in a similar way.

The capitalist class will use any means at their disposal to protect their profits and their rights to exhort profit. But sometimes the movement requires the ‘whip of reaction’ before understanding the need for action. And sometimes the lesson has to be repeated before a full understanding is achieved.

Therefore, even if the movement has not mobilised against the bill beforehand, this does not mean it will be passive in the face of an attempt to implement it.

All the great socialist revolutionaries - Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Trotsky - constantly explained that experience is the biggest teacher of the working class.

On trial for his part in the 1905 Russian revolution, Leon Trotsky said in the Tsarist court: ‘It’s not revolutionaries that prepare revolutions. It is



The fighting slogan of the defiant Poplar councillors who were jailed was reasserted in the 1980s’ Liverpool council struggle PHOTO DAVID SINCLAIR

capitalism itself that creates revolutions. Revolutionaries only prepare for revolutions. These questions are not decided by what is recorded on pieces of velum but by the class forces involved in the struggle, both their numerical strength, their understanding and their determination.’

The history of the workers’ movement in Britain, and even the history of our own party, is filled with examples of defying the law to defend the right to organise and protest. From the formation of the early trade unions in the face of the repressive Combination Acts in the early 19th century, to the illegal strikes of the

prison officers in recent times.

From the stand of the left-wing Labour councillors in Poplar, east London, in the 1920s - who refused to implement government attacks on the poor under the slogan: “It’s better to break the law than break the poor” - and who went to jail for their belief.

Liverpool struggle

This slogan was again taken up in the 1980s by the 47 Liverpool Labour councillors who, following a successful struggle for more resources conducted by the Militant-led socialist council, were undemocratically removed from office and surcharged

under the Tory Thatcher government

To the defiant protest of the 18 million-strong, ‘can’t pay, won’t pay’ anti-poll tax movement that was victorious in the face of fines, bailiffs and even jailings, including the Militant-supporting MP Terry Fields.

Sharon Graham, the new general secretary of Unite the Union, has raised the importance of defending the rights, pay and conditions of members and not being constrained by anti-union laws.

We agree. There is no doubt about the incompatibility of the provisions of this bill with the protection of working-class rights and conditions.

We therefore need to raise the warning most importantly in our union branches but also in our community organisations.

The capitalist class will discover to its cost that the union movement is in the process of rediscovering its power and its claws.

● Liverpool: A City That Dared to Fight

A must read on how the socialist council defied the Thatcher government.

£12 including postage from leftbooks.co.uk

Film review: The Harder They Fall

A unique Western about black cowboys

IAN PATTISON
NORTH LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

‘The Harder They Fall’ is a new Western on Netflix. The movie sets are stylised and the gunfights are majestically choreographed. But the film also stands out for its all-black cast, something that is almost entirely unique for a cowboy film.

The film, roughly set in the late 19th century, is actually closer to the reality. A quarter of cowboys were black. The filmmakers were

motivated to make the audience aware of the history of black people in the ‘Wild West’.

The majority of the plot is an engaging story of revenge between rival gangs. But politics does come up.

The question is left hanging whether the terrible things the characters do are justified. Is it the only realistic means of survival for black people in the racist landscape?

There were hundreds of all-black towns in the US in this time period. Even the film’s most loathsome



characters mobilise support for themselves by offering to defend these municipalities.

The range-cattle industry was as close to equality as black people got in this era. On the surface, wages were equal, although black cowboys

were expected to work longer, harder, do more demeaning jobs and were rarely promoted.

Black and white cowboys would share sleeping quarters and even blankets. But the travelling black workers would be banned from

restaurants.

The Harder They Fall doesn’t portray any of the solidarity that black and white cowboys would’ve inevitably shared. But it does open the viewer to a world Hollywood has hidden.

Mass movement needed to defend abortion rights in the US

CLARE WILKINS
NOTTINGHAM SOCIALIST PARTY

On 1 December the US Supreme Court began hearing arguments about a Mississippi law to ban abortions after 15 weeks, even in the case of rape and incest. The challenge has been filed by the last remaining abortion clinic in the state. A ruling is expected in June.

The Mississippi case differs from other attempts to restrict abortion rights in other states in that the anti-abortion campaigners are also explicitly seeking to overturn the Roe v Wade 1973 Supreme Court judgment, which gave American women the right to have access to abortion. However, the right to choose has never been codified into law, even when the Democrats had a ‘super-majority’ in Congress under Obama, which has left it open to constant attack.

Now the Supreme Court has a 6-3 majority of conservative judges who have already signalled that they are ready to seriously restrict abortion rights. If Roe v Wade is overturned, around half of states are likely to make abortion illegal. Even if Roe is allowed to stand, a ruling in favour of the Mississippi law would be a huge blow to the right to abortion.

Abortion is technically legal in the US, but for an increasing number of women it is not accessible due to cost and lack of facilities. This is particularly the case in the south and Midwest.

Christian evangelical conservatives have sought to remove abortion

rights in the US for decades. They were emboldened during the Trump presidency and his appointments of Supreme Court judges. They claim to be ‘pro-life’ but concentrate exclusively on the right of the unborn child and not the lives of women and children who are already born.

States have restricted access to abortion by refusing to license clinics. Missouri refused to license its last remaining clinic in 2020. Targeted Restrictions on Abortion Providers (TRAP) laws have been used to refuse to license clinics and hospital facilities to carry out abortions. The requirements are difficult to meet and are not imposed on any other medical facilities.



Unfortunately, organisations campaigning for reproductive rights have concentrated on legal action rather than building a mass movement to defend the right to abortion.

On 31 August, Texas passed a law banning abortion once a foetal heartbeat is detected (around six weeks) and encouraging people to sue anyone who they think has aided or abetted an abortion. Many women do not even know that they are pregnant at six weeks.

In October the Biden



Campaigners in the US protesting against new state laws banning abortion PHOTO FIBONACCI BLUE/CC

administration asked a judge to place a temporary block on the law. The state appealed and it was reinstated.

There have been some demonstrations against restrictions on abortion rights, but, unfortunately, organisations campaigning for reproductive rights have concentrated on legal action rather than building a mass movement to defend the right to abortion.

The massive ‘women’s march’ of 2017, when millions were mobilised onto the streets to coincide with Trump’s inauguration as president, was effectively demobilised and derailed by being channelled into electoral support for the Democrats.

Working people were told that electing Biden would be the only way to protect abortion rights, despite Biden voting for the Hyde Amendment, that prevented federal funds being used for abortion provision and supporting a constitutional amendment in 1981, which would have allowed states to overturn Roe v Wade. Abortion rights have been eroded under both Republican and Democrat administrations.

60% of Americans believe abortion

should be legal in “all or most” circumstances. A woman’s right to choose when and whether to have children should be a fundamental right.

In Mississippi alone one in three children live in poverty. One third of parents have no full-time year-round employment and the number of lone parent families is the highest in the country. Two-thirds of jobs do not pay enough to afford to rent a two-bedroom apartment.

Healthcare campaign

A campaign that linked defence of abortion to a broader campaign for free healthcare for all, affordable childcare, well-paid jobs, access to housing etc, could have a mass appeal and mobilise millions on the streets.

Roe v Wade itself was won at a time when there was mass struggle by women alongside strikes, mass movements against the Vietnam War and for civil rights, and in the context of revolutionary movements internationally.

Campaign groups need to be built now in every workplace, community,

school and college to defend a woman’s right to choose, organising mass protests, demonstrations and strikes. The power of the unions and the labour movement should be mobilised as a central feature of any campaign. Relying on judges or Democrats to do the right thing is not a viable strategy. The maximum pressure has to be brought to bear through a mass movement involving the whole working class.

- Defend the right to choose whether and when to have children
- Provide free reproductive services, including contraception and safe, accessible abortion as part of free, high quality, universal healthcare for all
- Teach comprehensive and inclusive sex education in schools, including the issue of consent
- Paid family and medical leave for all
- Universal, high quality, affordable and publicly run child and eldercare
- Build a mass workers’ party with a socialist programme to provide a fighting political alternative for the working class

Mail attacks tube strikers by stealing socialist’s image

The Daily Mail’s disdain for working-class people will not surprise many of our readers, neither will its shoddy journalism. The right-wing rag has used Socialist Party member **James Ivens’** image, taken from Twitter. In response James has written to the Mail:

Dear Daily Mail,
I am writing to you to demand that you remove a photograph that is my intellectual property and you have used without my permission - without even attempting to seek it, in fact.

The photograph is of an RMT picket line in Leytonstone on the evening of Friday 3 December. You took it from Twitter, which

you wrongly credit as holding the copyright. The photograph is mine, and its publication on Twitter does not put it in the public domain, as any competent journalist would know.

If you were using the photo to support the heroic struggle of tube workers, I would take no issue. This strike is defending the terms and conditions of night tube workers - many of them parents or women who need part-time work with decent pay - against cuts by right-wing Labour mayor Sadiq Khan. This is round one of his brutal onslaught on the whole London transport network, caused by him accepting Tory government funding cuts rather than even trying to lead a mass campaign against them.

Your rag has used my photo - without permission - to try to smear striking drivers as responsible for a dangerous accident. Years of underfunding and underinvestment

- especially cuts to station staff, the real issue here - have reduced safety on the network. The fault lies with Johnson and Khan, not RMT members who have fought their attacks. Management’s cavalier insistence on allowing strike-breaking drivers to run a much-reduced and therefore crowded and unsafe service during the strike is also to blame.

If you were really concerned about passenger safety, you would support the strikes to keep the night tube grade and prevent knackered drivers becoming the norm.

You must remove my photo immediately, and I trust that you will.

You should also withdraw this shameful article and apologise for it, but I don’t hold out the same hope given your long record of hatred for the working class.

Regards, James Ivens

I’ll just add - workers need an independent political voice. The Tories and their rags like the Mail ain’t it. Labour under Starmer and Khan ain’t it. The unions should stand their own, independent candidates to fight for working-class interests. The RMT is part TUSC - Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition which is a step in this direction.

Victory to the strike!

- If the dispute goes unresolved, night tube drivers who are members of the RMT union will take strike action again on Central and Victoria lines from 10-12 December and 17-18 December. They will be joined by all train operators and instructor operators on night tube lines for 24 hours from 4.30am on 18 December.

Wider working-class and union struggle needed to win St Vincent nurses’ strike

SAM SKINNER
INDEPENDENT SOCIALIST GROUP (CWI CO-THINKERS
IN THE USA)

The Massachusetts Nurses Association (MNA) strike at St Vincent Hospital in Worcester, USA, is now the longest in Massachusetts’ history.

Nurses first walked out of the hospital in March 2021 in response to unsafe patient limits, inadequate personal protective equipment, and unsafe working conditions.

Hospital owner Tenet Healthcare has continued its dangerous tactics of chronic understaffing, union-busting, and underfunding that led to the strike in the first place.

Tenet Healthcare recently reported a \$448 million profit in the third quarter of 2021 from \$4 billion in revenue. Tenet has also received \$523 million from federal relief funds over the course of the pandemic.

In August, Tenet and the MNA reached a tentative agreement on new safer staffing rules, only to have Tenet turn around and refuse to allow over 100 striking nurses to return to their jobs.

The nurses targeted by Tenet include many senior nurses at the top of the pay scale who have been active in the current strike and were part of the last MNA strike at St. Vincent in 2001.



In order to fight for workers’ rights on a mass scale, we need to start organising a political party for working people...

This is a clear attempt to break the nurses’ union at St Vincent by removing the most experienced and militant members of the MNA. As well, prolonging the strike this long has cost Tenet over \$3.1 million; mostly spent on hiring police officers from the Worcester Police Department, in order to ensure that scabs and management can continue to keep the hospital running at its reduced levels.

Job openings at St Vincent suggest that Tenet is still struggling to replace the nearly 800 MNA nurses who walked out, advertising 500 open positions for new nurses. St Vincent is failing to replace striking nurses because of the infamous conditions inside the hospital and because of the national shortage of nurses.

St Vincent is keeping over 100 highly experienced strikers out of the positions some have spent decades working in. After being on strike for over 200 days, the nurses face added pressure from both Tenet and the state government through the



This is a clear attempt by the owners to defeat the nurses’ strike and break union representation at the hospital

cancelling of their unemployment and health insurance.

Tenet’s lawyers have declared an ‘impasse’ in their negotiations with the nurses - legalese meaning that Tenet can now unilaterally implement a contract that does not meet the nurses’ demands.

Declaring an impasse is being used as a threat to coerce striking nurses to cross the picket line and abandon the nurses who Tenet refuses to rehire.

Returning to work under these circumstances would mean a defeat for the union and would pave the way for even worse contracts and working conditions in the future, even an attempt to decertify the union and remove all protections that come with union certification.

As Tenet brings its “last, best, and final offer” to the MNA, the striking nurses must in turn deliver a decisive blow to Tenet’s bottom line to win the strike.

MNA nurses will need a lot more support from other unions in the area, as well as non-union workers in Worcester and beyond.

Several organisations such as the Independent Socialist Group, Jobs for Justice, and others, have held events on the picket line in solidarity with the nurses.

Rallies, community pickets, and standouts across the city must

become more common, larger, and more militant, and be called by the MNA and other unions in addition to community organisations.

Without a strong picket line, there is no chance to defeat Tenet. The MNA and other unions should organise regular mass rallies at the picket line, drawing in their members and workers from all over the state.

Unite struggles

Uniting the struggles of workers in central Massachusetts and beyond will beat Tenet, not the hollow promises of local and state Democratic or Republican politicians.

Over the 200-plus days of the strike, dozens of corporate party politicians have visited the St Vincent picket line. They’ve had their pictures taken with the nurses a few times, then they disappear.

While they claim to be ‘working behind the scenes’ to ‘put pressure on Tenet’, there is no evidence that any of this is effective. Strongly worded letters will not put an end to Tenet’s attack on nurses’ and patients’ safety.

At the end of the day, it is these same politicians who vote for laws that weaken union rights, prevent mandatory safe staffing limits and other real improvements to health-care, and provide tax cuts to these same hospital corporations who

profit off of everyday working people.

In order to fight for workers’ rights on a mass scale, we need to start organising a political party for working people, independent of the Democratic and Republican parties. A workers’ party of unions, community and progressive groups would provide a way for organised and unorganised workers to join together and fight back against big corporations like Tenet.

A unified struggle of working people in Worcester must begin with solidarity between unionised workers at St Vincent. The UFCW 1445 and Teamsters 170 union leaders have refused to honour the picket lines at St Vincent.

If the MNA is defeated at St Vincent, it will only be a matter of time before Tenet goes after the UFCW and Teamsters workers at the hospital. If the Teamsters and UFCW had gone out with the MNA nurses on day one of the strike, all three unions could have won the strike quickly.

It is not too late for these unions to join the MNA on the picket line. Apologists for the Teamsters and UFCW have pointed out that this would be a violation of these unions’ existing contracts, and illegal. However, the West Virginia teacher’s strike a few years ago was also illegal, but it was also one of the most successful strikes in recent memory.

The working class will always come up against the law when it fights for its rights. We didn’t win rights by losing strikes on account of legal technicalities, but by fighting corporate greed with militant workplace action and solidarity.

The Independent Socialist Group has stood with the MNA nurses since the first day of the strike, and even before the strike began. It is in the spirit of solidarity and as part of our continued support for the strike that we offer the following proposals:

- Regular mass rallies to strengthen the St Vincent strike.
- Regular standouts, leafleting, and canvassing across the city by MNA members and supporters to raise awareness about the MNA strike.
- Members of the Teamsters and UFCW at St Vincent should take job action in support of the nurse’s strike. Unions should not be crossing each other’s picket lines.
- State and nationwide workplace actions in support of the MNA strike at St Vincent.

We also encourage anyone who wants to support the nurses on strike to visit the MNA web page for the strike and donate to the union’s strike fund, send messages of support, and visit the strike headquarters and picket line.

● **This article can be read in full on socialistworld.net**

Solidarity in face of unprecedented floods in British Columbia

CLARE HUDSON
BRITISH COLUMBIA, (CWI, CANADA)

After a year like no other, which has seen record-breaking heatwaves and wildfires ravage towns and lead to thousands of hectares of land being destroyed, British Columbia (BC), Canada, has faced yet another historical disaster in the form of unprecedented floods.

Undoubtedly linked to global climate change, the resulting loss of life, homes and livelihoods, has impacted all who live in BC, which is now under its third state of emergency this year.

Unprecedented deluge

On 11 November, meteorologists warned of extreme rainfall coming to Southern BC. A month’s worth of rain fell in just 48 hours and the devastating impact that ensued is hard to fathom.

News agencies struggled to keep up with the fast pace of events that were unfolding, and by the evening of 12 November all roads and railroads going into and out of the lower mainland were cut off from the rest of Canada.

Mudslides and washed-out roads trapped thousands of motorists and severed the supply arteries into and out of the lower mainland, which includes the city of Vancouver.

Aerial footage showed railroads, which are vital to transport goods

to and from the lower mainland, severed apart with train carriages hanging off the edges of cliffs created by mudslides that tumbled down mountainsides.

The town of Merritt, with a population of 7,000, was evacuated, which was closely followed by thousands of residents being evacuated from Abbotsford, which lies approximately 70 kilometres southeast of Vancouver.

Many more communities have been left isolated and only reachable by air. The southern part of Vancouver Island was temporarily cut off from the rest of the Island due to the Malahat stretch of highway being washed out. The resulting loss of life and damage, including that of thousands of animals in agricultural centres, such as Abbotsford, is on an epic scale.

A state of emergency was declared a few days later which sets limits on how much gas and food people can buy. But panic hit fast, and many gas stations and grocery stores were empty before the state of emergency was enforced.

Supply routes are being used through the US border, and limited access is now open on a few routes to only essential vehicles. A full evaluation of the extent of damage to infrastructure is in its early stages as the flood water continues to recede.

The cost of repairing the damage will run into billions of (Canadian) dollars. This price tag will be expected to be paid by the working



The town of Merritt was destroyed in the floods, only months after devastating fires swept the country PHOTO STEPAN/CC

class of BC and Canada, who will suffer the most in the aftermath of this disaster.

Merritt now joins Lytton, the town that was destroyed by wildfires in the summer, as another town in the province destroyed by the consequences of global climate change - which, under capitalism, is fuelled by the drive for profit over people.

BC’s many problems

British Columbia has lost 7,000 people to an opioid overdose epidemic since 2016. Housing in BC is unaffordable for the majority. Low-paid workers and youth are at the mercy of an overinflated rental market, which forces many to continue to live in poverty.

The ongoing injustice and discrimination faced by First Nation communities, such as a lack of access to

clean water, destruction of land, and access to safe housing, and services such as health care and education, continue to disproportionately impact their communities.

This is a fight for all workers and youth - and can see working-class people gaining knowledge of the plight of the First Nation communities, with both building class solidarity.

These issues, combined with living with the fallout from the Covid-19 pandemic and a crippled healthcare system, have taken their toll on the mental health and wellbeing of many.

However, despite the devastation of the past few weeks, community solidarity and human ingenuity have helped to pull people together, showing the true power workers have when organising together. The line

workers, construction workers, city workers and more have been working tirelessly to regain power, dig and rebuild roads, and lift those left stranded to safety.

These acts of solidarity can form the basis for a reevaluation as to how we can fight together, organise, and rebuild our communities.

Global climate change is here, and what has taken place in BC in 2021 is a warning as to the type of events that will likely continue to unfold internationally.

The need for a socialist society, based on democratic planning for the needs of the majority, has never been more urgent. Capitalism as a system has proved it is unworkable - the task ahead is to change it.

● **This article can be read in full on socialistworld.net**

Chile presidential election - stop the far-right candidate

PATRICIO GUZMÁN
SOCIALISMO REVOLUCIONARIO (CWI CHILE) CHILE

José Antonio Kast, the Republican party’s far-right presidential election candidate, who defends the brutal Pinochet dictatorship (1973-90), is a threat to the freedoms and social reforms of the people of Chile.

In the first round on 21 November, Kast received 28% of the vote, while his nearest challenger, Gabriel Boric of the social-democratic Social Convergence party (part of the Broad Front alliance), got 26%.

Kast does not hide that he wants to end social benefits for families or children who are outside marriage, and would close the Ministry of Women and Gender Equality. He rejects the rights of the LGBTQ+ community.

He also wants to extend the current

retirement age for men from 65 to 75 years, and proposes that the first three withdrawals people have made from their pension funds are paid back into it.

His party deliberately conflates ‘narco-terrorism’ with the oppressed Mapuche indigenous people.

He has promised to release the Punta Peuco inmates (the prison which holds those who carried out killings and torture under the Pinochet regime) through presidential amnesty.

This includes Miguel Krasnof who was convicted of so many crimes that he already has sentences for more than 840 years ratified by the Supreme Court!

In the first round, only 45% of the electorate voted. Socialismo Revolucionario did not support any of the candidates. We did not vote

for Gabriel Boric in the first round, because he is a regime politician. Together with the right-wing Independent Democratic Union deputies, he threw a lifeline to right-wing billionaire president Sebastián Piñera when he was about to fall in October 2019 - due to the social uprising against economic hardship and social inequality - by supporting the misnamed ‘Pact for Peace and the New Constitution’.

Imprisoned youth

Boric does not support the release of the young people unjustly imprisoned for participating in the revolt. The repressive anti-looting and anti-barricade laws have contributed to keeping thousands of young people in jail. His campaign is characterised by ambiguity and evasion on this issue.

However, Socialismo Revolucionario now calls for a vote for Boric (holding our noses!) in the second round on 19 December in order to defeat Kast and to prevent the coming to power of the extreme right. But we do not give a blank cheque to Boric.

Whatever the character of the next government, we have to rely on social mobilisation as the main tool of struggle. We declare ourselves in opposition to any neo-liberal government of the bosses, be it that of the neo-fascist Kast or that of Boric.

A struggle must be prepared against all of them. Part of this is taking the necessary steps to build a real political

alternative for workers and young people on a socialist programme.



AFFORDABLE HOUSING FOR ALL



Councils must offer a socialist solution to the housing crisis

REECE WILSON

BASINGSTOKE SOCIALIST PARTY

The cost of living is going up - you can feel it. Your food bill, your gas bill and electricity bill go up each month. Your biggest expense is almost certainly rent, which is also rising rapidly. Are your wages?

Average private rents are up 4.6% on last year according to Zoopla, and if you're in the south west, rent increased a staggering 9%!

The 'living' wage is set to rise to just about cover inflation. But what about the millions who have faced sub-inflationary pay rises at best, if even that? This is not to mention those in precarious work, whose payslips vary from one month to the next, or those who no longer have their job after the ending of furlough and have been forced onto unemployment benefits.

On the other hand, profits for companies continue to rise, dividends increase, and the bosses get richer. Housing companies have increased their profits significantly this year, and have done so building extortionate low-standard housing that is out of reach for many working-class families.

We say the top-ten home builders must be nationalised, with compensation paid only to small investors and shareholders in genuine need. But this will not happen under the Tories, who received £891,000 in donations from property developers in the first quarter of 2021.

Rent control

We need rent control and a massive building programme of publicly owned housing, on an environmentally sustainable basis, to provide good quality homes with low rents. Councils have the power to take these measures; London councils alone have increased their reserves by more than £1 billion since 2018. The money is there, what rainy day are they saving it for?

Labour-run councils have shown they are not prepared to take the steps needed to provide genuinely affordable homes for working-class people. Therefore, we need our own workers' party that will fight for our interests and elect councillors who are prepared to set needs budgets and take on the Tories to demand the funds.

The Socialist Party, as part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC), is helping to develop those needs budgets in our communities, and preparing to stand in the local elections in May (see pages 8-9).

Now is the time to join us, to help build a new mass workers' party that defends our interests and fights for a socialist solution to capitalism's housing crisis.