

TORIES' COST OF LIVING SQUEEZE



BUILD THE WORKERS' FIGHTBACK

TOM BALDWIN

SOUTH WEST SOCIALIST PARTY REGIONAL SECRETARY

This year is set to inflict more pain on working-class people as rising costs outstrip incomes, meaning real-terms pay cuts.

Inflation hit 5.1% in November, the last month for which figures are available. That continues a steady rise throughout 2021 and takes it to the highest level in ten years.

Statistics showing high wage growth reflect a bounce-back from lockdown, and not the real position for workers. The average pay deal last year was worth just 2%, and a survey of employers found they were only planning 2.5% raises this year.

Some employers have been even worse, using fire-and-rehire threats to try and slash workers' pay. Last year also saw the removal of both the £20-a-week Universal Credit uplift, and the triple lock for pensions, meaning they will also rise slower than prices.

At the same time, thousands of workers isolating because of Covid are left to struggle on just £96-a-week sick pay.

A series of changes due in April will pile even more pressure on ordinary people. The energy bill cap will be lifted. While the exact figure will be announced next month, the Energy Saving Trust predicts £240 rises for a three-bedroom house, an increase of over 20%.

National Insurance will also rise, meaning workers will pay an extra 1.25p in every pound earned over the threshold. For the average worker that means an extra £255 a year. The tax threshold will be frozen, a tax increase by stealth that means more of people's incomes will be taxable. Increased council tax bills will also be dropping on people's doormats.

Not only are prescription charges set to rise as well, the government is also considering introducing charges for those aged between 60 and the state pension age, meaning millions more people having to pay for medicines.

The Resolution Foundation think-tank estimates that all this means an additional cost from April of a whopping £1,200 a year for a typical family. It says this risks a "cost of living catastrophe" and describes 2022 as the "year of the squeeze".

All this, while the government minister Liz Truss wined and dined trade officials at a rich Tory donor's private club, with the taxpayer picking up the £3,000 bill!

Workers are not passive onlookers to this onslaught though. Strikes have successfully defeated fire and rehire, like the Clarks workers in Somerset; or won pay increases, like bus drivers in Wales. We need a concerted trade union fightback on wages. The working class also needs a genuine political alternative to fight on issues like pensions, energy costs and more.

We demand:

- Full pay for all workers isolating or at home because of Covid
- Wages to automatically rise at least in line with inflation
- Minimum wage of £15 an hour
- Living pensions and benefits for all who need them that increase with inflation
- Take housing, energy, supermarkets and big stores into public ownership under democratic workers' control so they are run for people's needs and not profiteering
- For a new mass workers' party

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The Socialist is written, read, sold and bought by ordinary workers, trade unionists, young people and Socialist Party members. We want you to write for the Socialist.

Send us reports of your workplace and community campaigns, short letters on working-class issues, or ideas for other articles.

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

Karl Marx

Blair knighted for services to the rich and powerful

Tony Blair has joined current Labour leader Keir Starmer in being knighted, rewarded for his services to the bosses' establishment. Socialist Party political secretary **Peter Taaffe** was interviewed by Andrew Castle on LBC radio on 2 January. Below we print a shortened version of the interview. The full recording can be found at globalplayer.com from 13 minutes:

Interviewer: What do you think? Tony Blair, highest honour?

Peter: It depends who you are talking to. To the millionaires and billionaires which his governments unfortunately benefited, he perhaps deserves this. It's no more than we expected. But for the suffering masses of Britain, and particularly Iraq - it's been an unmitigated disaster. We are still living with the legacy of the Iraq war: the broken lives and the broken limbs of the population of Iraq, and also the consequences worldwide in the initiative it has given to terrorism

and so on, to inflict further suffering on working people who had no responsibility for the war. That was a decision taken by a cabal at the top, by the ruling class, by the Blair government, and we and the Iraqi people are still paying the consequences.

Interviewer: What about Northern Ireland and the national minimum wage, and also the fact that Tony Blair got elected?

Peter: We have consistently opposed Blair, who came from the right. He demonstrated, before he was elected as Labour leader, the kind of person he was likely to be. He was a plaything of the powerful economic and social forces in Britain and worldwide to do the bidding of capitalism, the rich and the powerful - not the working people.

There are some things in the course of the Labour government that he was forced to introduce, in relation to the minimum wage and so on. But there are many things on the other side of the balance sheet which are entirely negative: the privatisations that were carried through, which was a Tory policy and has left a legacy on which the Tories have been able to build. The cuts that were carried through at national and local level.



Tory test shortage failure

There is a shortage of Covid tests. You may have failed to book a pack of seven rapid lateral flow tests (LFTs), and people are struggling to books slots at PCR test centres.

Ask a government minister, and their advice is almost always the same - refresh the website. Even though they know there aren't enough tests.

The Tories boast that testing capacity is 900,000 a day. That means everyone in Britain can take a Covid test once every two and a half months. Scientists are rightly worried that lack of available tests will encourage people to go to work and about their lives untested, inevitably spreading the virus.

The testing system is privatised. Deals to provide Covid tests in Britain amount to £3.7 billion. Innova, Britain's biggest supplier of tests, sold £1.9 billion LFTs to the government in the first three months of 2021, no doubt making a hefty profit.

Just four private companies make lateral flow tests for the UK. At the start of the pandemic, then health secretary Matt Hancock said he couldn't rely on hundreds of laboratories - mainly in the public sector - like counterparts in Germany, without admitting this was a failure of privatisation.

There is a global shortage of all the components needed in Covid tests. And this is part of the capitalist system's wider failure in dealing with Covid.

Decisions - about what should be produced, what work needs doing, what work can be done at home, and what other safety measures are required - must be taken by the people best placed to make them: the working class looking after their lives and livelihoods, not the bosses and Tories chasing profit.



More fares misery for passengers

● Renationalise the railways

For many hard-pressed households this Christmas, news of a hefty 3.8% increase in regulated rail fares (the largest rise since 2013) will add to the prospect of a gloomy New Year.

It means that average rail fares on the privately operated/government-subsidised railways have risen by nearly 50% over the last decade. Since privatisation in 1996, all rail fares have risen by over 20% in real terms. This rise seems an odd way to encourage people to use public transport.

However, the government is keen to claw back public expenditure, having thrown shedloads of cash at private companies (especially ones owned by their chums) during the pandemic.

Last year, the RMT transport union found that Britain's private rail companies stood to make almost £500 million in profits out of the Covid-19 crisis on UK railways over a 12-month period. But if that money was instead invested in the railways, it could mean a 5% cut in rail fares.

Network Rail, the public body responsible for running the rail

network infrastructure, has now been clobbered with a £1.5 billion annual cut in funding.

Union fight

Rail unions are gearing up to fight the expected attack on jobs, working conditions, and services.

And, while the government bragged about its 'green' credentials at November's COP26 climate change summit, the fact remains that over the last decade rail fares have risen at or above the rate of inflation, whereas fuel duty on petrol and diesel has shrunk in real terms.

Privatisation and successive government policies have resulted in an expensive and dysfunctional railway industry which is simply a milch cow for private operators.

Renationalisation under democratic workers' control and management, as part of an overall economic plan of production, could instead result in cheaper and more frequent trains via a programme of massive public investment. This would then incentivise a switch to rail travel.

DAVE CARR



Schools: union action needed for Covid safety

STEPHEN BROWN
OXFORD SOCIALIST PARTY AND NEU MEMBER

As we head into a new year and a new term, teachers are just as unimpressed by the Department for Education's performance as ever. This time last year, school staff were collectively using Section 44 of the Employment Rights Act to refuse to go into unsafe workplaces, and schools were being threatened with legal action for closing amid ever-increasing numbers of staff absences, only for the government to announce a second full lockdown just one day after the return in January.

As schools staggered towards Christmas this year, it all felt like groundhog day. There is incontrovertible evidence that schools are not safe. The Office for National Statistics has stated that, in November, teachers were 37% more likely to catch Covid than other workers.

Few teachers will be surprised by this or the fact that, around the same time, over 200,000 students were absent because of Covid. With Omicron said to be three times more

transmissible than Delta, and siblings of infected pupils expected to continue to attend school, class teachers will continue to be exposed to a higher risk than most.

In what we have come to expect, the government's intervention came a day or two before schools reopened, giving school leaders little time to implement changes. But, in effect, all it amounts to is face masks in secondary classrooms (something many schools have already implemented because of outbreaks), combining classes that have been affected by outbreaks (superspreader events waiting to happen), and 7,000 air filters for classrooms.

As many have pointed out, all classrooms in England could be kitted out with air purifiers to significantly reduce the spread of Covid, for the cost of half of a royal yacht. The 7,000 air filters promised amount to around one for every 40 classrooms, and are unlikely to be with us until February.

Meanwhile, the National Education Union (NEU) has highlighted the fact that the situation is likely to get worse through January. The

headteachers' union, NAHT, explored government ministers to do better. But it is now past the time for concerns and imploring. It is time for teaching unions to stand up for the health and safety of teachers who are placed in danger each day, in poorly ventilated rooms, full of potentially infected children, with only a paper face mask for protection.

The NEU has issued Covid safety guidance, including isolation for siblings of those with a positive test, staggered start times and CO₂ monitoring. But the national union must be clear - if any school does not meet union guidelines, it will fully back local union members in the action needed to win.

Teachers up and down the country will face whatever comes in January with the same dedication they have shown throughout the pandemic. 'Blended learning' may well be the order of the day, with doors and windows open. The hope is that soon it will be this government, riddled as it is with incompetence, callousness and corruption, that will be out in the cold.

Stop Press: Invergordon posties mutiny

As we go to press, Communication Workers Union (CWU) members in the Royal Mail delivery office in Invergordon, north of Inverness have walked out. This is in support of a

temporary worker who has had his contract terminated, outside of the agreed industrial relations framework.

The CWU nationally flagged up the possibility of a flash point over this

issue just before Christmas, forcing Royal Mail management back on a UK-wide basis. However, the local bosses have continued the attack, forcing the posties' action. CWU members are determined to get the worker reinstated. This action shows that posties will continue to fight to defend their agreements.

WHAT WE STAND FOR

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

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

Our demands include...

PUBLIC SERVICES

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

RIGHTS

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

MASS WORKERS' PARTY

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

SOCIALISM AND INTERNATIONALISM

- No to imperialist wars and occupations.
- Tax the super-rich! For a socialist government to take into public ownership the top 150 companies and the banking system that dominate the British economy, and run them under democratic working-class control and management. Compensation to be paid only on the basis of proven need.
- A democratic socialist plan of production based on the interests of the overwhelming majority of people, and in a way that safeguards the environment.
- No to the bosses' neoliberal European Union and single market. For a socialist Europe and a socialist world!

Do you agree? Join the fightback!

JOIN THE SOCIALISTS

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

to find out more today!

Help fund the fightback!

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TUSC appeals for widest possible anti-austerity socialist unity for May elections

We print the following appeal from the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, of which the Socialist Party is a constituent part. Socialist Party members will be among those standing as part of the coalition in May's elections.

The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) has issued an appeal for the widest possible united anti-austerity socialist challenge at the local council elections scheduled for 5 May 2022.

Launching the appeal, the TUSC national chairperson Dave Nellist, a Labour MP from 1983-1992, said: "As every day goes by, it becomes ever clearer that the Labour Party under Sir Keir Starmer will not provide alternative anti-austerity policies to those the Johnson government is seeking to implement to make working-class people pay for the effects of the Covid crisis, through cuts in public services, wage freezes, and rising prices and taxes".

"In the polls taking place next May, in which over 6,500 council seats are up for election, while there may be a handful of Labour candidates still defending the anti-austerity policies that Jeremy Corbyn supported, voters in the vast majority of cases will have no choice other than that between different varieties of austerity politicians - unless fighting trade unionists, socialists, and working-class community campaigners get together to offer a united, anti-austerity alternative at the ballot box".

If Jeremy can consider standing, why can't you?

"One thing that Starmer has been firm on, as he stated again in a BBC interview on 26 November, is that Jeremy Corbyn will not be re-admitted to the Parliamentary Labour Party and, if so, will therefore not be able to contest the next general election as a Labour Party candidate".

"Although there has been no formal announcement from Jeremy the indication is that, as reported in The Guardian on 27 November, 'backers

now expect him to follow the example of Ken Livingstone, who stood as London mayor in 2000 despite not having been selected to run for Labour".

"But while Jeremy may be looking to the next general election to stand against Starmer's Tory-lite Labour, as Ken Livingstone did against Tony Blair's New Labour, we do not have to wait until then. The May local elections are just months away".

Trade union candidates

"TUSC is extremely encouraged by the growing determination of many trade unionists not to let Labour councillors get away with cuts to local authority services, jobs and conditions without a challenge, including at election time".

"The Unite union conference in October agreed that 'Unite must now adopt a policy calling on Labour councils to set legal, balanced no-cuts needs-based budgets' rather than meekly accept the Tories' austerity agenda. This will now be a challenge made to every Labour councillor and candidate. And if they don't meet it, why should they expect to be unchallenged at the ballot box, either by Unite members standing themselves or backing other anti-cuts candidates?"

"Meanwhile BFAWU, the Bakers' Union, has disaffiliated from Labour while making clear that they are not stepping back from politics. We would warmly welcome BFAWU members, and other union members too, standing as independent trade union candidates in these elections. And we commit to ensuring that the TUSC name - or one of our legally registered descriptions like 'Trade Unionist and Socialist Candidate' - will be made available for them to use on the ballot paper if they wish to



Campaigning in Staines, July 2021 SURREYTUSC

do so, to help distinguish them from other independents standing".

TUSC umbrella open to all

Clive Heemskerk, the TUSC national election agent, stressed that the TUSC umbrella is open to all: "The only qualification to candidates being able to use the TUSC name and logo on the ballot paper is that they accept the ten core policies in our local elections policy platform (see 'Vote for a socialist recovery from the Covid crisis! TUSC core policies for May's elections' at tusc.org.uk)".

"TUSC stands for a socialist recovery from the Covid crisis. So somebody who is unwilling to pledge that if they are elected they will go into the council chamber and vote against cuts, closures, privatisation and other austerity politics cannot be a TUSC candidate. None of the establishment parties require that from their candidates, but we do".

"In the same way that using the TUSC name distinguishes candidates

from other 'independents' on the ballot paper - some well-meaning but many of them ex-Tories or former UKIPers hiding their policies - so the core policy pledges show TUSC candidates' distinguishing commitment to defending working-class people and their local public services".

A coalition of equals

"But the core policies are a minimum commitment, not a maximum, and individuals and organisations participating within the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition are unequivocally able to preserve their own identities, promote the organisations they may be members of, and highlight any further policies and issues that they may also wish to campaign on".

"TUSC is an inclusive coalition of equals with no one group able to dominate over others, operating on a consensus basis - nothing is agreed unless everyone agrees. This applies to the All-Britain steering committee

which comprises the current participating organisations - the RMT transport workers' union, the Socialist Party, and Resist - the elected TUSC Individual Members' representative, and senior officer or national executive level individuals from the BFAWU, NAPO, NEU, POA, UCU, UNISON and Unite trade unions, sitting in a personal capacity".

"But it also applies locally as well. So, for example, TUSC has invited the newly-formed Beacon Liverpool Party to participate in a local TUSC group with the same rights as the local branches of the organisations participating nationally, and the same offer is there for all other local or regionally based organisations wanting to take a stand".

"The TUSC 'umbrella' federal approach, we believe, is well-adapted to the situation we face with Starmer's revival of Tony Blair's New Labour politics - to achieve the widest possible united anti-austerity socialist challenge in May".



PHOTO: MARY FINCH

How you can become a TUSC candidate

Candidates who wish to appear on the ballot paper using the name and logo of a registered party have to submit to the council election staff, along with their nomination forms, a Certificate of Authorisation to use a Party Description, signed by the registered Nominating Officer of the party. TUSC has produced a form to process applications for a TUSC certificate for local council elections, which is available on the TUSC website at tusc.org.uk/txt/454.doc.

There is also a summary guide for candidates and election agents looking to contest the local council elections available as a downloadable PDF at tusc.org.uk/txt/455.pdf, which prospective candidates and agents are encouraged to read before submitting an application form.

West Mids metalworkers strike over pay



NICK HART
WEST MIDLANDS SOCIALIST PARTY

Metal workers at Somers Forge in Halesowen made history just before Christmas after taking strike action for the first time in the factory's 155-year history. Over 30 GMB union members joined the picket line, leading to a shutdown of the metalworking shop.

When the pandemic was raging at the end of 2020, management closed the enhanced sick pay scheme overnight, with workers losing thousands of pounds in contributions paid in over many years.

Then earlier this year, the company withdrew from the existing two-year pay deal, and is now refusing to backdate the new one to April, after stringing out negotiations.

This follows years of pay freezes and attacks on pensions under the ownership of the Folkes family, and is despite the company being consistently profitable pre-pandemic and, by their own admission, having a healthy order book.

Principal shareholder Constantine Folkes himself clocked in at 37th on the Birmingham Post rich list last year (though he's currently resident in Jersey, having previously been under investigation for tax evasion and misappropriation of company funds).

Workers at Somers have now taken two days of strike action, with more planned following the Christmas shutdown to make sure they get a better share of the wealth their work has created throughout the pandemic.

Strike threat forces Tesco to improve pay offer

Now step up the campaign to reinstate victimised Tesco rep Max McGee

IAIN DALTON
USDAW BROAD LEFT CHAIR AND
SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBER

The run up to Christmas is the busiest time of year for retail workers. Despite this, Tesco workers, Usdaw members and other supporters joined an online public meeting on 14 December convened by Usdaw Broad Left.

The meeting discussed the dispute and potential strike action by Tesco distribution workers organised in the Unite and Usdaw unions, as well as campaigning for the reinstatement of Usdaw Tesco Hinckley branch secretary and rep, Max McGee, who was sacked by Tesco in the period the distribution workers were balloting for strike action.

The potential for coordinated strike action between the two unions across 13 distribution centres,

a majority of which distribute for Tesco, would have been historic. As one of the negotiators who attended the meeting commented: "Tesco threw every dirty trick at members to stop them voting for strike action but to no avail." They praised the resolve of members in voting for strike action which has won the increased offers from Tesco.

The offers are more than the 2.5% and 4% Tesco had previously offered, with Unite members at four sites forcing a revised offer of a 5.5% pay rise backdated to July, with a further 0.5% in February. In addition, they have won some concessions on overtime and holidays at some specific depots, and Usdaw has subsequently reached a similar offer at nine sites.

Strike action has been suspended while these offers, which the unions have recommended be accepted, are balloted on.

But the victimisation of Max McGee has yet to be resolved. Outrageously, Max was initially dismissed for 'making up an injury', later revised to 'exaggerating an injury', a clear victimisation of a key union activist.

Max spoke of the mood of anger among warehouse workers who have seen Tesco profit during the pandemic while exhorting their workforce to work ever harder. This, alongside the impact of inflation, had fuelled the mood to vote for strike action, with 80% voting in favour at Hinckley.

While welcoming the concession from Tesco, Max warned of the need for the union to remain vigilant in case the company tries to snatch back the increased pay through altering performance software to speed up work and force workers into unsafe working practices.

Unfortunately, the morning after the meeting we found out that Max's delayed second appeal had been turned down. The same energy which was beginning to mobilise behind the strikes must now be channelled into forcing Tesco to reinstate Max. Usdaw branches and trades councils should invite Max to speak about his case and pledge their support for his reinstatement.

● *Invites to speak can be sent to reinstate.max.mcgee@gmail.com*

● *Donations to fund the campaign to reinstate Max can be made via gofundme.com/f/reinstate-max-usdaw-rep-socialist*



Sheffield JustEat couriers escalate dispute as action spreads

In the week before Christmas, JustEat delivery couriers in Sheffield, employed by Stuart Delivery, extended their targeted strike action to hit four Greggs shops. This is in addition to the six McDonald's outlets affected since 6 December.

The couriers, with around 100 now organised in Sheffield in the IWGB union, are striking against Stuart's cut in the base rate of pay from £4.50 a delivery to £3.40.

The 18 days of strike action, estimated to have cost Stuart and McDonald's around £250,000 so far, is the longest continuous food delivery app strike in UK history.

These self-employed workers, whose employer is an app, get no basic pay, no sick pay and no holiday pay. They are fighting this pay cut by demanding a pay rise, paid waiting times after ten minutes and recognition of the IWGB.

Their action has inspired trade

unionists and students in Sheffield to support their pickets, and £13,500 has been donated to the strike fund.

Before Christmas, the strikes spread to Chesterfield, Huddersfield, Sunderland, Blackpool and Liverpool. International messages of support have come from South Korea, Australia, Italy, France, Austria and the USA.

Stuart, a subsidiary of the multinational DPD Group, is clearly rattled by the action. Before Christmas, it sent every JustEat courier in the country an insulting email implying that the drivers couldn't count! And in the first week of the New Year, Stuart organised an invite-only couriers' 'focus group' at a secret location in Sheffield.

It turned out that the secret location, which was tipped off by one of the 'invited' drivers, was so secret that even the hotel manager didn't know about it, nor the two security guards Stuart employed. Consequently, the

secret meeting was cancelled and the Stuart manager reportedly escaped through a back door. Another Stuart PR disaster!

After this successful protest, the couriers will resume targeted strike action.

All trade unionists and socialists should support this important struggle and try to spread it to your city or town by contacting couriers picking up deliveries from any major fast food outlets, and organising meetings and protests.

As a small independent union, the IWGB has no strike fund, so is appealing for trade union donations to sustain and spread the strike action. You can donate by BACS to:

● *Account name: Couriers and Logistics branch*
● *Sort Code: 23-05-80*
● *Account number: 17001094*

ALISTAIR TICE
SHEFFIELD SOCIALIST PARTY

Scunny scaffs enter twelfth week of strike action

Before Christmas, the 60 or so scaffolders who work at British Steel Scunthorpe finished their twelfth week of strike action with a protest demonstration outside the offices of their contractor, Actavo, in Wakefield. They took a 14,000-plus signature petition demanding that they be paid the national industry agreement rate for the job.

This followed on from the week before when scaffolding, decorated with Xmas lights, was erected across the main gate entrance to the steel plant early one morning, blocking vehicles and causing miles-long tailbacks lasting two and a half hours.

Unfortunately now, due to the Tory anti-trade union laws, the Unite union members are having to reballot as legal immunity from dismissal due to industrial action only lasts 12 weeks. So the strike has had to be paused for the ballot. But the workers are confident of winning a new mandate and hope to resume their indefinite strike on 24 January.

South Yorkshire Stagecoach workers start indefinite strike

Around 560 Stagecoach bus workers in South Yorkshire began an indefinite strike from the start of the New Year. This all-out action in Sheffield, Rotherham and Barnsley, comes after two one-week strikes in pursuit of an above-inflation pay claim. When Socialist Party members Angie Waller and Lucy Howson visited the "all singing, all dancing" Barnsley picket line just before Christmas, they were enthusiastically greeted with copies of the Socialist held aloft for the group photo. This reflects the Unite union members' confidence and determination to win at all four depot picket lines.

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A FLAILING CAPITALIST ECONOMY UNDER A ROTTEN TORY EXECUTIVE

With a fighting leadership, the renewal of workers' militancy could become a decisive force in Britain

HANNAH SELL

SOCIALIST PARTY GENERAL SECRETARY

“One more strike and he's out,” declared longstanding Tory MP Roger Gale in the wake of the kicking his party got from voters in the by-election in Shropshire North, previously held by the Tories for almost two centuries.

Gale meant that Johnson is in the last chance saloon with the Tory backbenches, but for the working class this should be a rallying cry for 2022, not just to get rid of Johnson but the whole rotten Tory government and the capitalist system they defend.

The Tories' by-election disaster is a reflection of the rising tide of fury at the government. The by-election was triggered by the ousting, as a result of his blatant corruption, of ex-Tory cabinet minister Owen Paterson, despite Johnson's inept attempts to change the rules in order to save him.

This is just one of a series of events that have driven home to millions of people the self-serving cronyism of this Tory government. From the 46 contracts for PPE handed out to the mates of politicians or Whitehall officials, to the disdain for the majority summed up in Downing Street's blatant breaking of the lockdown rules they'd imposed on the country.

The root cause of anger at the Tories is not, however, their many individual acts of corruption and incompetence, but what the majority have suffered under Tory rule. The appalling levels of poverty in Britain are summed up in the tragedy of child mortality, which, according to the British Medical Journal, has been growing for three years in succession, and is now 30% higher than the average in the EU.

With inflation soaring past 5%, living standards are being squeezed hard for all but a few. That is set to get worse as the government's National Insurance hike kicks in next year, and energy bills increase by an expected average of £500 a year.

Millions of people are already struggling to pay their bills and feed themselves and their families. They include the 5.6 million public sector workers given a real-terms pay cut by the Tory government, plus all those who've had their Universal Credit cutback.

If the soaring levels of the Omicron variant lead to a new economic slowdown there could also be a new surge of job losses. Even without that, however, there will only be one way to prevent 2022 being a year of Covid austerity, and that is a coordinated working-class fightback.

Rising tide of struggle

The potential for such a fightback has been clearly shown in the closing months of this year. Unite the union reports that in the first 100 days since Sharon Graham took over as general

secretary, £25 million extra has been won in members' pay packets. This is not only as a result of Sharon's support for Unite members taking action, but also a growing determination to fight back, which is resulting in victories for strikers in Unite and other unions.

The UCU union's higher education strike is an example of the angry mood, as are the RMT's Transport for London strikes. However, it is the growing number of localised all-out strikes of private sector workers that are the clearest indication of the sea change which is taking place.

In recent weeks, the pages of the Socialist have been jam-packed with reports from strikes, with many pushing the employers back: from the Clarks' workers defeating 'fire and rehire' to the Wincanton lorry drivers gaining a 24.4% pay rise.

A rise in the number of strikes is not only a phenomenon in Britain. In the US, corporate profit margins were the highest in 70 years in the third quarter of 2021, which has been followed by record end-of-year bonuses for Wall Street. In the same period wages fell in real terms by 0.5%.

Global phenomenon

In response, the rise in industrial militancy, which began before the pandemic, has resurged. In October 2021 it was estimated that strikes had taken place against 178 US employers, with other workers winning victories just by threatening strike action.

As the Washington Post put it, “The strike drives in 2021 run the gamut of American industry: nurses and health workers in California and Oregon; oil workers in New York; cereal factory workers in Michigan, Nebraska, Pennsylvania and Tennessee; television and film production crews in Hollywood; and more.”

In many countries of Europe a similar increase in strikes is beginning, with sections of workers, often spearheaded by transport workers, acting to demand wage increases. These include teachers in Hungary, nursery staff in Austria, rail workers in France, and many more. In Belgium, even the police unions have been organising mass protests over wages and pensions.

While strikes are still at a relatively low level by historical standards, they are on an upward curve. Already there are rumblings from big business trying to blame workers' wage rises for inflation. This is total nonsense. How are wage rises responsible for soaring global energy prices and shortages in semiconductors?

In reality, the share of wealth taken by workers in Britain, along with the US and many other countries, has been shrinking for many decades, while the wealth of the capitalist class has soared.

In Britain around £130 billion a year from 1980 to today has been



While strikes are still at a relatively low level by historical standards, they are on an upward curve

transferred from the pockets of the working class to the capitalist class. That process was already in full swing before the 2007-08 Great Recession and has accelerated since.

The working class has no control over the decisions by capitalist governments, banks and employers that can lead to inflation, but if it is able, via struggle, to force the bosses to transfer some of their vast wealth back into the pockets of the majority, it would in itself have no inflationary effect whatsoever.

The capitalist class, or at least its most thinking sections, sense the rumble of the coming earthquakes, rightly fearing the inevitable mighty workers' fightbacks ahead. The pandemic has not only enormously heightened the underlying anger in society, it has also increased awareness that it is working-class people who are 'essential' to keep society running, and therefore have the power to change it.

Potential for new movements

Outbursts of struggle in 2022 are inevitable, therefore. Not only workers' strike action, but also new and resurging social struggles, whether a new phase of the Black Lives Matter movement, mass protests for action against climate change, or others. Social movements on economic issues are also brewing - including against the rising tide of evictions and among students on the issue of free education.

The fact that the National Union of Students, after a decade of virtual inactivity, has called a national day of protest for free education, including a mass demonstration in London, shows how deeply students' outlook has been altered by the pandemic.

Prior to Labour calling for free education under Jeremy Corbyn's leadership, this demand had seemed unrealistic to the majority of several generations of students. Once Corbyn called for it, students overwhelmingly turned out to vote for Labour's manifesto in the 2017 and 2019 elections.

Then, during the pandemic, students have experienced paying £9,000 a year for a largely online education. Some have also taken part in the biggest student rent strikes since the 1970s, successfully winning back at least some of the rent they'd been forced to pay for accommodation they weren't even living in for most of the year.

Starmer has been studiously silent on tuition fees ever since winning the Labour leadership - while his mentor, Tony Blair (originally responsible for introducing fees in 1997) is asserting it is essential to drop Corbyn's pledge for free education.

No longer able to look to Labour to deliver free education, students are starting to look to their own strength. The potential exists for the biggest student demonstrations since the

“The root cause of anger at the Tories is not, however, their many individual acts of corruption and incompetence, but what the majority have suffered under Tory rule

2010 mass demonstration that occupied Tory Party HQ after the Tory-Lib Dem coalition increased tuition fees threefold.

The students could have been victorious if the leadership of the trade union movement, which took coordinated action the following year, had backed them in a joint struggle against the Tory government.

Coordinated action will be required in 2022. A starting point would be co-ordinating strike action for a decent pay rise for all public sector workers. That doesn't mean that the fightback can move at the pace of the slowest, but that left union leaders organise a 'coalition of the willing' to maximise the possibilities for joint action.

The Tories' anti-democratic anti-trade union laws are an obstacle to national action. But while defying them cannot be done lightly, without weighing up the relative balance of forces and possible consequences, they cannot be allowed to block effective action.

Coordinated and well-prepared strike action would be able to defeat both the Tories and their repressive anti-trade union laws, which unfortunately the trade union leaders allowed to pass with only token resistance.

Tories in crisis

Whatever movements erupt in 2022 they will face a deeply divided weak Tory government, led by a lame duck prime minister. Back when Johnson won the 2019 election, we predicted, against the prevailing mood, that he would prove to be weak. On 13 December, the morning after the general election, we declared:

“The seeming strength of Johnson's government will be shattered by coming events. In 1987 Margaret Thatcher had a majority of 102. Within 12 months the campaign of mass non-payment against the poll tax, led by Militant, now the Socialist Party, had begun. It turned the Iron Lady into iron filings, forcing her resignation in 1990.

“Today the Tory Party is far weaker than it was then. It is bitterly divided, and Johnson has only been able to win by distancing himself from his own party, using populist rhetoric to falsely claim he is standing up for 'the people'. This was a 'snapshot', a very ephemeral result with even Johnson having to acknowledge workers had only lent him their votes.”

Now Johnson's authority is completely shot. That he became prime minister - elected as Tory leader in 2019 by just 92,153 Tory party members - is ultimately a reflection of the anger and alienation felt towards all governmental parties that act in the interests of the capitalist class.

The posturing of Johnson, the 'poundland Trump', rhetorically attacking his own party, was the only

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>>> CONTINUED FROM PAGE 7

means by which the Tories could win a general election.

The Johnson government is now fractured in multiple ways. Even before Omicron the economy had stalled, with virtually no growth, and is still 0.5% smaller than it was pre-pandemic. Divisions within the capitalist class - and the Tory party - abound on how to respond. In the end, their splits are caused by the fact that nothing they do can solve the problems of their ailing system.

Such are the difficulties they face, however, they have had no choice but to rip up the policies of the previous neoliberal era and, for example, spend £1.7 billion bailing out the Bulb energy company.

This effective nationalisation bears no resemblance whatsoever to socialist nationalisation, however. That would mean taking the company from the private owners, with compensation paid only on the basis of proven need, and running it under democratic workers' control and management. Johnson handed taxpayers' money over to Bulb's owners, leaving them in charge of the company.

These kind of measures are being combined with a continuation of privatisation of public services, in an attempt to find more profitable fields of investment for the capitalist class. Chancellor Rishi Sunak's visit to the US featured negotiations with private healthcare companies about buying parts of the NHS! At the same time, Covid austerity - cuts to benefits and public services - continue to bite.

Now, with Omicron leading to new economic difficulties, the divisions among the Tories on the way forward are growing. It is likely that, over the coming months, the one thing they unite on is the need to ditch Johnson! Who to replace him with, and what direction the party should go in, will be another question, however.

Tory Trumpists

The right-populist wing of the Tory Party has been dramatically strengthened under Johnson. It cannot be excluded that he would be replaced by someone more 'Trumpian' even than Johnson.

The Northern Ireland protocol is another illustration of the Tories' problems. The timing of the resignation of David Frost, the Brexit minister, was triggered by the disagreements on how to deal with Omicron, but what lay behind it was a bust up on the Northern Ireland Protocol negotiations.

Throughout the whole process, for both the EU and the British government, the risk of escalating sectarian conflict has come second to defending their own narrow interests.

However, the Johnson government is under massive pressure to avoid the damaging economic and political consequences of triggering Article 16, including from US President Biden. Therefore the search for a 'compromise' deal is on.

Doing so remains, however, extremely difficult given the EU's need to defend the single market, the objections of many of Northern Ireland's Protestants to any border in the Irish Sea, and the threat Johnson faces from the right of his party if he is seen to make concessions to the EU - as has been graphically demonstrated by Frost's resignation.

Clearly, a united struggle of the

Pressing need to build a new working-class political alternative



Johnson's crisis-ridden premiership is nothing short of a motorway pile-up for Britain's capitalist class PHOTO 10 DOWNING STREET/CC

“
The fundamental character of Starmer's New Labour was summed up by his speech to the bosses' CBI conference

working class against Covid austerity could force this motley crew out of office. The question is then posed, however, of who would replace them.

For Britain's capitalist class, looking on at yet another Johnson car crash, they have one cause for comfort. Their fear that a Corbyn-led government might have taken serious measures in defence of the working class has been replaced with confidence that the opposition can now be relied on to act in their interests.

Safe 'second eleven'

Already Johnson has had to rely on Labour votes to pass the latest Covid prevention measures. Yet Labour did not take the opportunity to demand, to give just one example, full pay for all those who have to self-isolate.

In the coming months there are likely to be further examples of, in reality, an element of a national government, as Starmer's Labour loyally does the bidding of the capitalist class on different issues.

It is not even clear if Labour members of the House of Lords are going to be instructed to vote down the brutal, anti-democratic additions to the already anti-democratic police and crime bill.

These additions include, for example, being able to ban named individuals from participating in demos, and would be defeated if

Labour voted against them.

Yet under Starmer, previously responsible for jailing protestors as Director of Public Prosecutions, Labour has had a woeful record on defending the right to protest, with only 34 Labour MPs voting against the 'Spies' bill which gives undercover police immunity.

Starmer has donned Tony Blair's clothes. When New Labour was in power under Blair and Brown, every anti-trade union law remained on the statute book.

The fundamental character of Starmer's New Labour was summed up by his speech to the bosses' CBI conference. While Johnson was burling about Peppa Pig, 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.

This urgently poses the question of the workers' movement fighting to create its own political party, which fights in the interests of the working class. Such a party will not be created in one act, but will be essential for the struggle ahead.

Jeremy Corbyn remains excluded from sitting as a Labour MP, with seemingly no prospect of that changing. Were he to declare his intention to stand as an independent that could have a certain galvanising effect.

“
In the class battles likely to rage in 2022, the Socialist Party will be fighting for every possible step forward for the working class...

Regardless of this, however, most important is the action taken by the trade union movement. Sharon Graham, general secretary of Unite, which is still affiliated to Labour, has correctly talked about the need for 'workers' politics'. The decision of this year's Unite conference to call on Labour councils to set "no-cuts, needs-based budgets", gives a clear starting point for a 'workers' politics'.

Unfortunately, however, it is clear that Labour councils under Starmer will not follow this road. On the contrary, they are planning to continue to cut already decimated services, plus workers' pay and conditions.

In London alone, Labour councils actually accumulated an extra £1.2 billion in reserves last year instead of spending that money on defending services while launching a campaign to demand the government cough up what is needed.

A workers' political voice

That is why Socialist Party members are moving resolutions in their trade union branches up and down the country, to encourage branch members "to consider standing as anti-cuts candidates in the council elections scheduled for May 2022, noting that there is nothing that prevents them standing as candidates, in a personal capacity, for any party which truly supports trade unionist and socialist principles."

If hundreds, or even thousands, of trade unionists agreed to stand as anti-cuts council candidates in next May's elections, from both affiliated and unaffiliated trade unions, it will be an important step forward in the fight for a new mass workers' party. For those that wish to use it, the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition will be available as a banner under which they can stand (see also page 4).

In the class battles likely to rage in 2022, the Socialist Party will be fighting for every possible step forward for the working class, including for the defeat of this rotten, Tory government and for the creation of a mass party of the working class. At the same time, we will be campaigning to increase support for our socialist programme.

No wonder that the search for an alternative to capitalism is on the rise; with a majority of young people considering themselves socialist. Capitalism is no longer able to take society forward.

Only by taking decisive socialist measures will it be possible to harness the enormous wealth, science and technique that capitalism has created through the labour of the working class, to start to meet people's needs, and to safeguard the environment.

That would require breaking with profit-driven, ailing capitalism and taking the major corporations and banks which dominate the economy into democratic public ownership, allowing the development of a democratic, socialist planned economy in Britain and internationally.

The priorities of a socialist economy would be decided democratically. Instead of filling the coffers of corporate chief executives, priorities would include providing a real, living income for all, mass building of high-quality and carbon-neutral housing, and creating and expanding decent public services, health care and education.

If you want to join the fight for a socialist world, join the Socialist Party in 2022.

Obituary: Kate Jones - 1953-2021

A life of socialist struggle

We were saddened to hear of the loss of long-standing Socialist Party member Kate Jones on 20 December. Most recently a member in Swansea, Kate was previously a member in Brighton and Llanelli.

A lifelong Marxist, Kate became politically active in her teens and joined Militant, forerunner of the Socialist Party, in 1975. During the 1984-85 miners' strike, Kate organised the Brighton support group, fundraising and organising accommodation for touring miners, and their wives.

She and her comrade Geoff got together at this time. They married in 1985.

Kate was a Labour councillor in Brighton, but never hid the socialist programme of Militant. In the 1988 elections, Labour won control of Brighton council. She was one of the leaders of the left minority in the local Labour group.

During the poll tax struggle, Brighton Labour council proposed paying bailiffs to reclaim poll tax debt. After a mammoth ten-hour meeting, the administration was only able to get this passed with the help of the Tories. This led to the suspension of Brighton Labour Party and Kate's expulsion from Labour, something she wore as a badge of honour.

Kate was a contributor to the Global Warning section of Socialism Today, the Socialist Party's monthly magazine. She would speak engagingly about the environmental movement.

After Brighton, Kate worked supporting people with Aids in Powys, and eventually worked on the tills in the local Co-op. There she played an active role in retail union Usdaw.

I first met Kate when I joined the Socialist Party in 2011. Kate was instrumental in setting up and building the now strong Swansea branch

of Unite Community, the union for people not in work. Kate served as branch chair, and was well liked and respected within the union in Wales.

Kate became active in the campaign to save the Oriel Ceri Richards Gallery, which Swansea University was intent on shutting. Her love of public art and culture was a cause dear to her heart.

Kate was a valued and well-respected member of the Socialist Party branch in Swansea. Her contribution to our collective struggle will be missed.

The Socialist Party wishes to send condolences and solidarity to her husband Geoff, son Bryn and daughter-in-law Baru, and their newborn daughter Emilia, born on 1 January 2022, as well as friends and family across the world and all those who had the privilege to call her comrade.

GARETH BROMHALL

SWANSEA AND WEST WALES SOCIALIST PARTY

Trinity Community Centre: Shameful eviction by Newham Council



NIALL MULHOLLAND

On 22 December, local groups in Canning Town in east London - tutoring for kids who've fallen out of the school system, a food bank, and religious groups - found their community centre locked up by Newham Council. The council community centre was scandalously unused for years before these groups started making use of it and refurbished it.

What are the council's plans - knock it down and build more unaffordable homes? The kids have exams this month, and all their educational

equipment is locked in the community centre.

This is more shameful, outrageous action by this 100% Labour council that seems hell-bent on gentrification for the well off, and social cleansing for the rest of us. These evicting councillors are up for election in May. They should expect a challenge from trade unionist and anti-austerity activists.

I attended the protest at the eviction that day, bringing solidarity from the Socialist Party.

NIALL MULHOLLAND

EAST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

Selling the Socialist

Just some of the events where the Socialist newspaper was sold recently...

COVENTRY SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBERS

At our last Socialist Party campaign stall of the year on 18 December, we gathered more signatures in support of the bin workers' strike.

That strike was delayed until the new year, because the workers forced the council back to the negotiating table with a better offer. So much for being told that the council couldn't pay more!

And we gathered dozens more signatures against parking charges at the hospital, including from NHS workers. The headline on the last edition of the Socialist was relevant: "Tory cuts and privatisation leave NHS in crisis," and there was an article about the bin strike inside (see socialistparty.org.uk), which meant more people wanted to buy the Socialist.

An operating theatre nurse signed our petition telling us she cannot even get a staff pass that would let her pay 'only' £50 a month, because her shift pattern of three 12-hour shifts disqualified her. So she is paying £30 every week, £1,560 a year, to work for the NHS! And the vast majority of that goes right into the pocket of private company ISS that runs the car park.

Among other people signing was a woman who told us her son had a brain tumour dealt with at the hospital. The cost of visiting was a fortune.

No staff, patients or visitors should be paying to use the car park. The car park shouldn't be in the hands of a private company making gigantic unchecked profits off ordinary people's misery.

Coventry: Private profits from hospital parking charges



Coventry Socialist Party campaigning against hospital parking charges

The Socialist Party says:

- End all hospital parking charges
- End all PFI schemes and privatisation, renationalise the NHS
- A 15% pay rise for all NHS workers
- For a fully funded, socialist NHS

Fighting Fund - 162% of target, £162,000 raised

ADAM HARMSWORTH

COVENTRY SOCIALIST PARTY

Congrats to Socialist Party members and supporters for raising 162% of the fighting fund target for 2021 - £162,000. We hit the annual fighting fund target with three months left, and then obliterated the final quarter's target with 242%, raising over £60,000 in a quarter for the first time!

That funding comes from donations in support of our campaigns and our politics from members, plus a bigger number of people who support our work.

I know in Coventry that our Socialist Party stalls have had donations from NHS workers, especially when we're campaigning on the issue. We also get money from working-class pensioners, and young workers and students - they often make a big donation relative to the money they have.

Workers put money towards us in the hope it will make a difference. That money goes towards vital parts of the Socialist Party's work:

- Running our national centre and printing press
- Buying material for reams of leaflets, pamphlets and posters

You might be reading this and not be a member of the Socialist Party. Maybe you like something in particular that we fight on, like climate change, the NHS or LGBTQ+ rights.

First consider joining us and getting involved in this urgent work of fighting for socialism. Then, whether or not you join right away, consider giving the Socialist Party a donation as a symbol of support. Every penny goes into the struggle for socialism.

Help fund the fightback
DONATE
socialistparty.org.uk/donate



SOCIALIST PARTY FIGHTING FUND

AREA	£ RECEIVED	£ TARGET	Q4: OCTOBER-DECEMBER 2021	FINAL CHART
South West	6,340	1,800		352%
Northern	2,031	750		271%
East Midlands	4,683	1,850		253%
Eastern	2,852	1,200		238%
London	9,443	4,600		205%
Wales	4,122	2,300		179%
North West	2,008	1,150		175%
West Midlands	4,061	2,600		156%
Yorkshire	3,734	2,550		146%
Southern & SE	2,764	2,350		118%
Other	18,580	3,850		483%
TOTAL	60,617	25,000		242%

New unionism - when mass workers' action changed Britain

In the second of our occasional series on the history of working-class struggle in Britain, Iain Dalton looks at 'new unionism'.

Imagine the Port of Shanghai, the busiest in the world, with 125 docks and 19 terminals, serving over 2,000 container vessels, was paralysed by strike action for a month. Such a display of working-class power was the high point of the 'new unionism' movement. 100,000 dockers were on strike at the Port of London in 1889, then the busiest port in the world, at the heart of a world-spanning empire.

Karl Marx's lifelong co-thinker Friedrich Engels greeted the strike: "This host of utterly despondent men, who every morning when the dock gates open fight a regular battle among themselves to get the closest to the fellow who does the hiring.

"This motley crowd thrown together by chance, and changing daily in composition, has managed to unite 40,000 strong, to maintain discipline, and to strike fear into the hearts of the mighty dock companies. How glad I am to have lived to see this day."

Impossible

New unionism spanned 1888 to 1892. Wave after wave of 'semi-skilled' and 'unskilled' workers, who many had said were impossible to organise, took strike action to win recognition of their unions and improvements in pay and conditions.

Up to this point, trade unions had largely been 'craft' organisations, based on 'skilled' workers - engineers, boilermakers, plumbers, compositors, etc. While they did organise strike action from time to time, in the main their leaders sought to secure higher wages by restricting the numbers of skilled workers who paid substantial membership fees.

There had been sporadic attempts to organise unions among other workers. But many of these organisations were short-lived, and strikes ended in defeat. But a number of things were about to change.

Firstly, since the mid-1870s, the British economy had been in a period of depression which increased unemployment. But new unionism coincided with a temporary recovery, where workers sought to improve their conditions and win back past losses.

Secondly, the new unions had much lower membership fees than the old craft unions. The new unions sought to sustain themselves by winning concessions from the employers to improve their members' living standards.

Thirdly, many of the leaders of the new unions were socialists. They had been through previous struggles, and applied what they had learned.

The new unions grew at a tremendous rate. In 1888, in Hull, the local class-collaborationist dock union had 400 members.



Hull docks 1882



Keir Hardie 1908

By the beginning of 1890, the Dock, Wharf, Riverside and General Labourers Union had 4,000 members in Hull. By September, it was 12,000. And, by December, there was 100% union density on the docks.

New unionism spread as victories among one group of workers gave confidence to others. The matchwomen's strike at Bryant and May in London in July 1888 gave confidence to the dockers.

Many of the matchwomen were the wives, sisters and daughters of dockers. Dockers sometimes worked at the gas works in neighbouring areas when work at the docks was slack in the winter.

Left-over money from the dockers' strike fund was donated to striking tailors in the East End who successfully took action in 1889 to win a ten-and-a-half-hour day and a limit on overtime.

As the economic climate worsened and unemployment surged, many of the new unions fell back to half the size they'd been at the height of the movement. Some smaller new unions disappeared entirely.

Strike-breaking by the employers and state was also a key factor. This was most pronounced on the docks.

Shipping Federation

There, the vast majority of employers organised themselves as the Shipping Federation. They sought to smash the new unions.

In Southampton, the dockers' union organiser was imprisoned for three months following a five-day strike. The Shipping Federation wanted to introduce 'free labour', i.e. scabs, to break the 'closed shop' the new unions had established.

The most brutal repression occurred in Hull. In 1893, there was a

bosses' lockout against 15,000 dockers and seafarers. Substantial forces were moved to Hull to break the strike - 1,000 strikebreakers and 250 soldiers.

Two gunboats were stationed in the Humber estuary. Regular baton charges by the police and stone throwing by strikers were exchanged.

Similar treatment was meted out to workers elsewhere. In Bristol, a lantern procession in December 1892 to build support for the strike at the sweet factory was broken up by 200 mounted troops, known as Black Friday. Dockers' leader Ben Tillet was charged with incitement to riot even though he wasn't even present!

In Leeds, there was a gas workers' strike in 1890 to preserve the gains the workers had won when they founded their union the year before. The Liberal council owned the gas-works. It brought in strike breakers

from around the country, housed them in the town hall, and supplied them with food, drink and tobacco.

A police and armed military escort marched the strike breakers to one of the city's gas works. But the workers and their supporters physically blocked large numbers from entering the gas works, and convinced many to return home, with train fares paid by the union.

In 1892, the predominantly women workforce in Manningham Mills in Bradford were on strike. They faced hostility from the Liberal council that refused permission for meetings, Liberal 'poor law' guardians who refused strikers out-of-work assistance, and the Liberal watch committee that set the police on them. As the repression intensified, the need for political action alongside industrial action became clearer to many workers.

Eleanor Marx reported to an international socialist meeting: "Great as the victories of the new unionism have been, magnificent as the work is of organising thousands upon thousands of hitherto unorganised workers, this growing class consciousness of the British workers is a greater, a more noteworthy fact, than either of the two others."

Initially, this was sporadic and most concentrated around West Yorkshire, where the role of Liberal councils in strikes had broken the domination in the local workers' movement of those who favoured achieving labour representation through the Liberal Party.

In May 1892, the newly formed Bradford Labour Union elected a councillor unopposed in Manningham, where the mill strike had taken place. And, in November, a second councillor was elected.

In the 1892 general election, the Bradford Labour Union nominated dockers' leader Ben Tillet to stand in the Bradford West parliamentary constituency. He won 30.2% of the vote. More spectacularly, in West Ham South, Keir Hardie was elected as an independent Labour MP.

Workers elected

West Ham's Liberal mayor had already sacked his bakery workforce after they put in a wage claim, and leaders of the new unions, such as Will Thorne of the gas workers, had been elected to the local council. These developments were brought together with the formation of the Independent Labour Party (ILP) in 1893.

Even though Hardie lost his parliamentary seat in 1895, the employers' offensive forced the question of working-class political representation more to the fore. A motion from one of the predecessors of today's transport union RMT led to the formation of the Labour Representation Committee (LRC).

The Taff Vale judgement in 1901 made unions liable for companies losses during strike action. It quadrupled the numbers of trade unionists affiliated to the LRC, paving the way for the development of the Labour Party.

Although no two eras are ever the same, there are enormous lessons to be learnt from this period for the struggle today to rebuild fighting unions and a new mass workers' party.

● **Read the first in our series 'Chartism: The world's first working-class movement' at socialistparty.org.uk**

Chile's working class delivers landslide vote against ultra-right candidate Kast

But struggle for social justice requires building a revolutionary alternative

CELSE CALFULLAN

SOCIALISMO REVOLUCIONARIO (CWI CHILE)

On 19 December 2021 the second round of the presidential election was held in Chile. Gabriel Boric, of the Frente Amplio electoral coalition, obtained an overwhelming victory, winning more than four and a half million votes (55.87%). The defeated ultra-right candidate, José Antonio Kast of the Christian Social Front, won just over three and a half million votes (44.13%).

Hundreds of thousands of people took to the streets across the country to celebrate Boric's triumph. For now, there are high expectations about what he will do. However, Chile's ruling class is putting massive pressure on Boric not to threaten their interests, and he has already tried to reassure them. But, under pressure from the mass movement and the demand for change, Boric could be pressured to go further than he wants to with political, economic, and social reforms.

Kast's ultra-right adherents thought the election would be very close. What they did not expect was that over 1.2 million more people would vote in the second round than in the first round. These were mainly young people who were deeply repelled by Kast, who had promised to carry out a series of extremely reactionary measures which would see society thrown back to the dark days of the Pinochet dictatorship (1973-1990).

Some argue that this election was much more than a simple election, that basically it was a plebiscite on the last remnants of the rule of Pinochet, and on anti-worker and anti-poor policies. Many also say that the election shows that people's hopes

for change overcame the fear that the ultra-right tried to whip up to oppose any changes.

Kast's ultra-right programme would have seen the acquittal of those perpetrators who are currently imprisoned for the atrocities they committed under Pinochet.

The masses voted against a candidate from the ultra-right who wanted to remove the few social benefits that the capitalist state gives to the most oppressed sectors of our society.

Young people also voted against a misogynistic candidate who promised to remove support for single mothers (benefits would only be given to women who were married), and who wanted to abolish the Ministry of Women and Gender Equality, and to prohibit some abortions.

Kast also wanted to raise the retirement age to 75 years and maintain the AFP - a private pension system that large sectors of the population have been demanding an end to for years. Millions of workers and their families have mobilised in the streets throughout the country to demand an end to the AFP system that only serves employers but not those workers facing retirement.

Kast promoted greater repression against the Mapuche indigenous people and a generalised militarisation of their territory. Kast is also virulently homophobic, and is unable to hide his hatred of the LGBTQ+ community.

In the election campaign, Kast tried to exploit to his advantage the concerns that exist among some voters over immigration, encouraging xenophobic policies against foreigners. He proposed to build a massive trench in the north of the country, to prevent migrants from entering Chile. It's a ridiculous plan but, like Donald Trump's US-Mexico border wall, was pitched to win the support of some racist and xenophobic sections of the population who, at the moment, are a minority.

Not a vote for Boric

For all these reasons, many on the left, despite not being fully convinced or having trust in Boric, called for a vote against Kast.

Socialismo Revolucionario (Chilean section of the CWI), was among those organisations that campaigned against Kast, which meant calling for Boric to be marked on the ballot. However, this did not mean signing a blank cheque for his policies.

Our position in the first round was to explain that there was no genuine left candidate to vote for. This was because Boric's candidacy, and other supposedly 'progressive' candidates, did not offer a real alternative to capitalism.

We opposed some of Boric's policies. Among other things, we



New president Gabriel Boric (above) will not threaten the interests of the capitalist ruling class PHOTO MEDIABANCO AGENCIA/CC

criticised the position he took on the mass struggles of 2019 against inequality, austerity and social injustice.

As a parliamentarian, Boric signed the November 2019 pact for 'social peace and a new constitution'. This was a political move to save the current right-wing president, Sebastián Piñera, from resigning, as millions of protesters were demanding, and mobilising on the streets to enforce.

Boric was also one of those responsible for passing repressive measures, such as the 'anti-barricade law', against young people who took to the streets to fight. As a result, to this day, there are still many political prisoners in Chile. Without the struggles of these young people, now in prison, who encouraged the popular revolt, nothing of what we are seeing today would be possible.

As we raised in the second round, notwithstanding the genuine widespread fears of Kast's ultra-right ideas, the two candidates, although with different policies, are both representatives of the elite of this country. Neither of them represents the interests of the working class and we cannot trust either of the two, although the candidate with fascist ideas was the most dangerous.

All those who took to the streets to fight for substantive changes in October 2019, including those who were killed, maimed and imprisoned,

were unfortunately not represented by any of the candidates. We demand the immediate release of all political prisoners.

Chile's working class needs its own political representation. We need a national assembly of delegates from the unions, social and popular movements, the Mapuche people and the students, to plan a struggle and discuss the need to build a workers' party.

Perspective

The next government headed by Boric will inevitably be under great pressure from the businessmen and the elite of this country to continue preventing the changes that the majority of the population is demanding.

We have to insist on a workers' government that clearly considers taking radical measures: nationalisation of the banks, the monopolies, the large landowners and forestry companies and the re-nationalisation of copper, lithium, water and all the natural resources that belong to all the inhabitants of this country and not the richest 1% of Chile that appropriated them. These must be under the democratic control and

management of the workers and the general population.

Only with these measures can we ensure decent jobs, decent pensions, quality health and education and housing for workers and their families. In other words, dignity for all working people.

If none of this is carried out, the enormous expectations that have been created with Boric's victory can quickly be reversed. If once again the promises that were made during the election campaign are not fulfilled, as has been the case in the last 30 years in Chile, the masses will take to the streets again.



Antonio Kast was routed in the election PHOTO BIBLIOTECA DEL CONGRESO NACIONAL/CC



NHS COVID STAFF CRISIS

► **Fight for a decent pay rise**

► **Fight for a fully funded NHS**

The number of NHS trusts which have declared critical incidents because of Covid staff shortages is into double figures and rising. Many more hospitals are cancelling operations or closing maternity units, unable to staff wards and operating theatres. This could develop into nationwide urgent care-only provision. It is reported almost one in ten NHS employees are now off sick.

A student nurse and Socialist Party member spoke to us before his shift on a busy ward at Great Ormond Street hospital:

"The main issue facing us in children's nursing is staffing levels, a lot of staff are testing positive and having to isolate. People are calling in last minute and wards are understaffed. Patients are not getting the level and quality of care that we would like to give them; we are unable to spend as much time with each patient. It's unsafe. We are responsible for administering drugs and monitoring patients. If overworked and tired staff miss something, it's potentially very dangerous.

"Mental health problems are common among staff. Having been working through the pandemic for ages already, and now with lower than ever staffing levels, staff are feeling overwhelmed and overworked. We are not getting



the leave we need because of the requirement to cover absence. It is difficult to cope with constant high workload. It's taking its toll.

"The whole government response to the pandemic and years of cuts and privatisation have led to the current situation developing. A lot of the existing issues with understaffing revolve around pay. Nurses and other NHS workers just don't get paid enough. Increasing numbers are leaving the profession without the pay, support, work-life balance and adequate leave we need. There is a lot of frustration on the wards with people talking about strikes. Nurses feel undervalued and are passionate about changing things."

NHS staff in unions Unison, GMB and RCN, have all decisively voted to reject the government's 3% pay offer for 2021-22. In consultative ballots 89% of RCN members voted for action short of strike action and Unison members voted 77% in favour of sustained industrial action. The fight continues to force the leadership of these unions to move to a formal ballot.

A cross-union battle for a decent pay rise and working conditions is what is needed to start to address the long-term NHS staff shortages, alongside a campaign for a fully funded, publicly run health service.