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formerly **Militant**

LYING, CRONY TORIES OUT



- **Starmmer's Tory-lite Labour no alternative**
- **Build a new mass workers' party**
- **Join the socialist fightback!**

TRADE UNIONS AND THE FIGHT AGAINST COUNCIL CUTS
- COME TO TUSC CONFERENCE 6 FEBRUARY - see p8-9

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

We need a workers' alternative to big business Tories and Labour

WHAT WE THINK

Every day Boris Johnson and his government are more and more mired in scandal. As we go to press the findings of the inquiry into 'Partygate' revelations have not yet been made public and are now being investigated by police, and so may be delayed. But already there have been new allegations of Islamophobia, and blackmail by Tory whips.

These scandals are further fueling working-class anger at the rising costs of energy, food etc, while benefits have been cut and wages are falling behind inflation.

When lifelong Tory Christian Wakeford defected to Labour, he was abandoning what is increasingly looking like a sinking ship. Some polls suggest the Tories could lose as many as 42 of



PHOTO: MOHAMMAD HASSANZADEH/CC



PHOTO: PAUL MATTHESSON

the 45 'red wall' seats if there was a general election tomorrow.

In his short time as an MP, Wakeford has already voted for extending the government's welfare cap, voted against measures to reduce tax avoidance by big business and against measures to end low pay. Yet he was welcomed into Starmer's Labour with open arms. "I was elected as a moderate and a centrist and I am still a moderate and centrist. I'm just wearing a different rosette", he declared.

Meanwhile, Jeremy Corbyn remains suspended from the Labour Party - and not by accident. This is all part of sending a clear message to the capitalist class about who the Labour Party would represent if it formed a future government in the face of growing disillusionment with the Tories.

The Labour leadership is redoubling its efforts to show that the party would be a safe pair of hands for British capitalism. Shadow chancellor Rachel Reeves hammered home the point, stating that Labour now has a "different mentality" and is a proudly pro-business party following the removal of Corbyn.

There is clearly no enthusiasm among working-class people for more of the same. But with local elections coming up in May, what are working-class people expected to do? Where are they expected to put a cross on their ballot papers when the only difference between the Tories and Labour will be the colour of their rosette?

The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC), of which the

Socialist Party is a constituent part, will be standing candidates as widely as possible in May. We are appealing to all trade unionists, community and social campaigners who want to fight the cuts to consider standing under the TUSC banner and join us in the fight to build a genuine political alternative to the pro-austerity policies of the establishment parties.
● See also pages 8 and 9



PHOTO: RIVENLAND/CC

● Government considers green levy cut

Energy bills are going through the uninsulated roof and the government is under pressure. The Energy Company Obligation could be under threat. This £1 billion levy on energy bills pays for energy efficiency measures in homes.

Far from obliging companies to put up cash to make homes more energy efficient, the levy is placed on ordinary people's bills, costing an average of £29 a year.

Insulating homes is necessary, so is action to reduce energy bills. The solution is to make the energy bosses pay for both, by nationalising energy to provide affordable energy to well-insulated homes.

● NHS consultants raking in dividends

Profit-seeking capitalists are crawling over all aspects over our NHS, looking for ways to extract money. 481 health consultants in England have shares in profit-making joint ventures, according to think tank Centre for Health and Public Interest. Since 2015, these have generated over £1 billion in revenue. £31 million in dividends has been paid to consultant shareholders.

These 'joint ventures', and other private enterprises profiting from our ill health, must be nationalised and integrated into a fully public NHS. So that rather than untold millions going into shareholders' pockets, the money is invested in the high-quality healthcare we deserve.

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Lords reject parts of anti-protest bill

Keep up the fight to defend the right to protest



Protests in Bristol, 2021 PHOTO: MIKE LUFF

IAIN DALTON
SOCIALIST PARTY NATIONAL COMMITTEE

In a blow to the Tory government, several parts of its anti-protest Police, Crime, Courts and Sentencing Bill were rejected by the House of Lords on Monday 17 January.

These included a raft of amendments added by the government in December, including giving the police the power to stop and search at a protest without suspicion, and giving courts powers to ban individuals deemed to have caused "serious disruption" from specific protests.

The anti-protest provisions in the amendments, and those left untouched in the bill itself, rather than reflecting the strength of the government, reflect its weakness. The bill is a pre-emptive strike against the potential for mass struggle to develop. The Tories can sense huge anger against the cost of living crisis and their attempt to make the working class pay for the costs of the pandemic.

Government weakness
Any ratcheting up of police powers to restrict protest must be opposed. But it is a mistake to underestimate how difficult a weak and divided government would find it to use repressive legislation against a popular mass movement.

During the pandemic, some protests have been broken up by police, with organisers issued fines under the Covid restrictions. However, no such action was taken against the huge Black Lives Matter protests that swept many cities.

Indeed, attempts to restrict the right to protest can spur further protests. Kill the Bill protests in Bristol

last year gave a taste of this. Attempts by the police to repress protests, misreported in the media as protesters attacking the police, fuelled further and bigger protests in Bristol and across the country.

The Lords, many of whom are ex-grantees of the major political parties, were more aware of this potential than the government, which is why they opposed the government pushing too far. Instead, they supported a number of positive measures to deal with other aspects of policing provoking public anger.

The so-called Hillsborough amendment was added to require police officers to speak with "candour" in court proceedings. Another demanded an urgent review of spiking cases, and the recording, investigation and sentencing of crimes motivated by sex or gender.

Other changes have already been conceded to by the government in the hope of increasing support for the bill, including making assaulting a frontline worker an aggravated offence.

While Labour MPs have voted against the bill as a whole, Keir Starmer's initial position was to abstain, only forced into a U-turn by the backlash against the police assault on the mass vigil for Sarah Everard. But Labour's strategy in the Lords and in the Welsh Assembly (which has to give legislative consent on some parts of the bill) has been only to oppose parts of the bill.

In the Welsh Assembly, Labour whipped its members to support making "intentionally or recklessly causing public nuisance" a new offence; protesters could be punished if a "serious annoyance" is caused to a member of the public.

In the Lords, Labour opposed a new amendment to criminalise protests interfering with the operations of the road transport network, by proposing their own amendment to criminalise blocking a highway leading to major routes or motorways!

Police powers
With all its changes, the bill still contains serious attacks on the right to protest which must be opposed. These include police-imposed restrictions on the location start and finish times of marches to be extended to cover static demonstrations, and extending the sentence for damaging statues or monuments from 3 months to 10 years.

Some reports suggest that the government's approach might now be to 'bank' the bill as it stands with its remaining repressive powers, and then introduce a new bill in the next parliamentary session to further extend restrictions against protest, including the provisions rejected by the Lords.

Neither the unelected House of Lords (still containing 92 hereditary peers), nor Starmer's Labour can be relied upon to defend the right to protest. It is vital, not only to oppose the bill, but to put forward a political programme that tackles the issues forcing working-class and young people onto the streets to protest: inequality and poverty.

Key to this is linking the struggle against the bill with the organised working class in the trade unions. Ultimately, a mass movement could not just win inflation-busting pay rises and sweep away this bill, but take this rotten government hanging on by a thread with it.



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.

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!

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.

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Social care providers put profit before residents’ needs - nationalise care now

A CARE WORKER IN THE SOUTH WEST

Five years ago, I wrote for the Socialist explaining what it was like working in care, the limited time we had to get people washed, dressed, and to help them eat and drink.

It is now 2022 and, writing again, I would love to say that things have got easier, but I can't. That would be lying. I know what I'm about to tell you isn't unique to my workplace, or the difficulties created by the times we are in (although they would love to blame everything on Covid). It could be, and is, repeated every day in every care home in the country, and that just makes it more worrying.

The home I work in is part of a big company. We have some of the most vulnerable people in our care, all of whom are coming to the end of their lives. They need help with everything, are often scared, lonely and

sometimes in pain. But because of inadequate staffing levels they will spend a lot of time on their own, waiting for things we all take for granted: food, drinks, a human voice telling them they are not on their own, or even just a hand to hold.

It's a typical weekday evening. It's 8pm, and my colleague and I should be going home but we can't, as we have paperwork to finish. On our unit of 22 residents there have been just three of us on shift - two carers and one nurse. It's been that way since 3pm.

We have to put our residents first, so we've sorted out supper, then assisted all 22 residents with their incontinence needs, made them comfortable in bed and apologised to them for not being able to have a chat. In the back of my head I'm thinking: "Please don't ask for another drink as I still have 12 people to check and it's 7.30pm already".

It gets to 9pm and I can finally go

home having been in the building since 8am. My colleague and I are tired, hungry and angry. I work in care because I care and it is a job I love. But a lot of the time it feels like I'm working on a production line just going from one person to the next, to the next.

The culture coming from above seems to be that the residents we look after are not people at all, but rather bodies in a bed who provide a way of making the shareholders their dividends.

If you watch the news, read the papers, or listen to the radio, you will hear time and time again government ministers blaming the crisis in care on Covid. And yes, it hasn't helped. But the crisis in care has been happening for years as privatisation has run rampant. Covid has brought it to the surface, but the care crisis is really about people at the top not caring and, once again, putting profit before residents' needs.



Solve the staff shortage crisis

- An immediate 15% pay rise or £15 an hour wage, whichever is higher, for all social care workers including apprentices
- Full pay for overnight stays and travel time, including expenses
- A maximum 32-hour week, without loss of pay
- Free childcare for all
- Free comprehensive training for all those who need it
- Trade union recognition in all social care employers

End profiteering

- Open the books. Let the residents, their families and the workers' trade unions see where the extortionate fees really go
- Reverse privatisation. Nationalise care service providers, with compensation to small shareholders only on the basis of proven need
- For publicly owned care services to be run democratically by elected bodies of service users and their families, care workers and the community

High quality care for all

- Scrap unfair 'client contributions' for services
- End council cuts, re-open closed services - for councils to set budgets based on need
- For democratic workers' and community control of care needs assessments
- Free social care for all those who need it

2/3

Two-thirds of care homes have stopped or limited new admissions, unable to staff services

44%

of those leaving employment in social care are seeking better pay elsewhere, according to the National Care Forum

55%

of domiciliary care workers are on a zero-hour contract, according to charity Skills for Care

● Care costs and bosses’ pay

Privatised care bosses are worried. The costs of running a care home is set to rise by around 30% as food and energy prices soar, and worker shortages hit.

The chief executive of one care chain, Barchester Healthcare, received a £250,000 pay rise last year, taking his pay packet to £2.27 million, according to the Financial Times.

I think we can see where that boss chose to spend some of the £12.6 million of Covid grants the firm received during the pandemic!

But who is going to pay for the increased costs? Not the millionaire bosses, but the residents. The company plans to raise fees by over 7%.

● Staff agencies’ exploitation

Other capitalist vultures circle. They won't let the opportunity for profiteering pass by. With 18% of social care vacancies unfilled, care agencies charge providers up to £60 an hour to supply agency nurses - not that the workers themselves see anything near that amount. 71% of care workers are paid below the real living wage.

Government figures put inflation at 5.4% in December - the highest in 30 years, and this is an underestimation. Even the more realistic Retail Price Index at 7.5% is not a true reflection of the cost of living crisis. After two years of a Tory government promising to 'level up', workers are increasingly worse off. This is before the effects of the planned lifting of the energy price cap and increase in national insurance contributions.

While workers are squeezed, those at the top are doing very well indeed. £94.1 billion was paid in dividends to shareholders of UK companies in 2021, an increase of 46.1% on the previous year.

Socialist Party members outline what the cost of living crisis means for them.

● Energy bills forced me out of retirement

Covid put paid to a long-awaited holiday, so I retired early in August. My fixed-rate energy tariff ended in October, so I was back cleaning at a school for two months. My energy bill is up about 60%, roughly £4 a day for my one-bed property in winter, with more increases on the way.

I consider myself lucky with a work's pension (not gold plated) and a council property with no draughts or leaks. Decent accommodation should be a right, not good luck!

A recent error on my tax code meant I paid an extra £190 in tax, instead of getting the refund of about £500 I was owed. I had to cancel payments for rent, council tax and energy bills until next month when the tax refund will come through, and I start to receive my state pension.

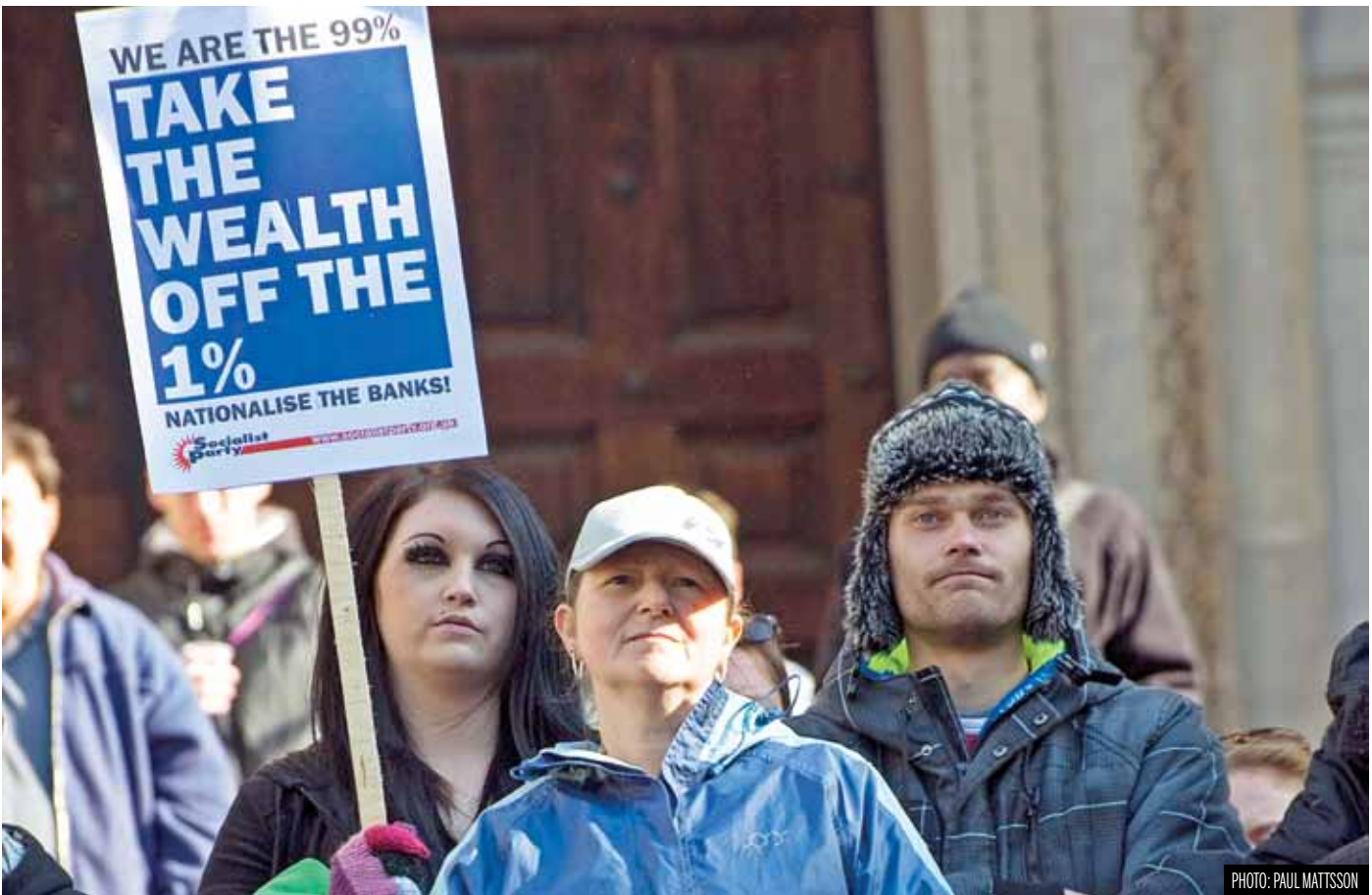
It's about time the trade unions did a 'Real Price Inflation' index. I would guess it's 10%, 20% plus. After all, the current 'Retail Price Index' includes champagne!

Unexpected expenses, replacing broken fridges, etc, are pushing many from poverty to extreme poverty. There are people far worse off than me, especially youth on zero-hour contracts with no sick pay and pensions.

JOE FOSTER
BIRMINGHAM NORTH SOCIALIST PARTY

33%
Unemployed benefit claimants will be paying an estimated 33% of their income on energy bills come April. (Citizens Advice)

Cost of living crisis Make the super-rich pay



● Most of our income on a tiny studio flat

My partner and I rent a studio flat in Epsom, Surrey. We are both working professionals, and yet the best we could afford was a studio space in zone 6, on the outskirts of London.

The situation with housing in and around London is truly terrifying.

The idea, as an adult in London, of having 'your own private space' is increasingly unrealistic. Sharing a space with a partner or friends sounds great, but the reality is that most do so because it is unaffordable to do otherwise.

Returning back to our little studio space, it's astonishing that an employed single adult might not be able to afford even a studio space almost as far from the centre of London as possible!

Renting far from the city centre is becoming more problematic; not only is the rent increasing, but the further from the city you are, the higher the council tax. If you are already struggling to pay the rent plus bills, £200+ worth of council tax can become a real challenge.

It is ridiculous that in a city as big as London, where new buildings are built all the time, working-class and poor people are facing a constant housing struggle. While new overpriced flats are sold to rich investors,

we are forced to give most of our income to landlords, just to afford a tiny space.

JULIA RUSEVICA
SOUTH WEST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

● Millionaires: ‘Tax us now!’

So-called 'Patriotic Millionaires', a 102-strong group of super-rich individuals, published an open letter ahead of a meeting of the World Economic Forum which ended on 21 January. In the letter they say: "Few if any of us can honestly say that we pay our fair share in taxes".

The group suggest a wealth tax - 2% on those with more than \$5 million, rising to 5% for dollar billionaires. A levy as small as this would raise more than \$2.52 trillion - enough to provide the entire world with vaccines and universal healthcare. Imagine what could be done if this vast wealth was seized and transferred into democratic public ownership!

The letter ends: "It's taxes or pitchforks. Let's listen to history and choose wisely," revealing the authors true motivation - fear of the working class and poor internationally getting organised to fight back.

We say

- No rise in the energy price cap. Nationalise energy and other utilities under democratic workers' control and management
- Scrap the planned rise in National Insurance - tax the rich
- Above inflation pay rises, a £15-an-hour minimum wage and decent benefits, with regular rises linked to the cost of living, as agreed by the trade unions
- Introduce rent control. Fair rent to be decided by elected bodies of tenants, housing workers and trade union representatives
- Mass building of high-quality council homes
- No council tax rises, councils to set needs-based budgets and demand funding from government
- Nationalise the top 150 companies and banks to be run under democratic working-class control and management, with compensation only on the basis of proven need
- For a socialist plan of production to guarantee a living income, decent housing and the necessities of life for all

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Universities: Strike action at 68 in two disputes



PAUL MATTSOON

SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBERS IN UCU

Strike action is soon to be announced at 68 universities, following reballots in the University and College Union (UCU), resulting in 12 more branches passing the 50% turnout threshold in at least one of the two separate disputes the UCU is currently battling against vicious attacks on pensions, pay and conditions.

Some of the reballoted branches were extremely close to the threshold, missing the 50% mark by just a handful of votes in some cases. These branches should have the right to appeal the results and issue new ballots if they decide to.

No strike dates have been announced, but in an email to members, UCU general secretary Jo Grady stated that the higher education committee has decided on a programme of “rolling UK-wide and regional industrial action”, which will involve “strikes in different regions and devolved nations on different dates, as well as UK-wide strike dates”. She also announced a marking and assessment boycott in the summer, should employers refuse to budge in the disputes.

It is the correct decision to announce further strike dates. As a minimum, there should be an escalation from the three days of UK-wide action taken last term. Coordination with other campus trade unions and students is also critical.

The UCU should look to link up any action with Unison, whose ballot result of higher education members will be known later this month. The student strike for education announced by the National Union of

Students for 2 March is a big opportunity to unite students and workers around the demand for free education, and the UCU should announce strike action for this date.

A key strategic question is how to involve those branches without a legal mandate for strike action; a complication of fighting a national dispute on a disaggregated basis. Engaging the entire membership in the disputes will put more pressure on the employers to concede and build momentum for an aggregated ballot, if the current strike mandate expires without a victory.

Regional and national demonstrations around the strike action could play a part in this process, as could inviting members from striking branches to general meetings of branches not yet in the dispute.

The strategy of regional and UK-wide strikes is a new tactic for the union, yet to be tested. Given the attempts by some in the union to downplay the significance of the current strike mandates and use targeted action to step down the disputes, the left must organise at all levels to maintain the national profile of the disputes and fight for an effective strategy that builds unity and confidence of different sections of the union's membership.

The experience of the last few months has shown that determined struggle has won significant gains and victories for workers. This should give confidence to UCU members that the strategy of mass action during the pandemic, workers are demanding a pay rise at least keeping up with inflation. With prices rising fast, the longer Wincanton hold out, the

Strike action by Carmarthenshire winter gritters wins concessions from council

SOCIALIST PARTY WALES

Winter gritters working for Carmarthenshire County Council have won big concessions from the council which will now have to adhere to an agreement to pay decent shift allowances that it has been trying to cut back.

Members of GMB, Unison and Unite unions have taken three nights of strike action and operated nine picket lines in a dispute caused by the council's refusal to adhere to a two-year old agreement. Clearly, the council realised it could not maintain a winter gritting service without the workers, so has been forced to concede. A Unison spokesperson said: “It will not be lost on those

involved that three nights of action achieved far more than two years of negotiations.”

The council offer, which will be taken back to the members to vote on, is to pay the gritters £25 per shift (an increase of £8) if they are retained for winter gritting on a weekday. On the weekend, when a shift is longer, the employer will pay £40 per shift. On top of this, workers will get the agreed overtime rate.

The dispute was also a model of how three unions could work in partnership to take coordinated action that forced an intransigent employer to back down.

The well-supported picket lines clearly had an impact on the council. Unison Carmarthenshire said:

“While it was the action of members that forced the council to concede to our demands in the main, the good turnout on the picket lines was also a crucial factor. We would like to thank other members, Swansea Trades Council (to whom our branch is affiliated), Rob James, Labour opposition group leader of Carmarthenshire County Council, and Socialist Students and Socialist Party members for showing solidarity and support by attending our picket lines.”

Unison also criticised Hazel Evans, the Plaid council cabinet member for environmental services, who attacked the unions in the press but refused to meet union representatives to resolve the dispute.



Socialist Party and Socialist Students members on the picket line SWANSEA SOCIALIST PARTY

Workshop Wincanton logistics workers begin ninth week of strike action

JON DALE MANSFIELD SOCIALIST PARTY

450 Unite members are in their ninth week of strike action against Wincanton - the logistics company running the vast Workshop site for B&Q.

After helping B&Q's parent company, Kingfisher, and Wincanton rack up massive profits during the pandemic, workers are demanding a pay rise at least keeping up with inflation. With prices rising fast, the longer Wincanton hold out, the

higher the cost to them will be!

Workers are also fed up with management harassment. As one picket said: “It's like we've gone back 100 years.” Trade union reps have also been pressured (unsuccessfully) to leave the company.

The workers have been strengthened after a 100% vote to strike (on a 97% turnout) by drivers at the Cambuslang depot near Glasgow. The Unite union members are employed by GXO, another massive logistics company. Drivers at Doncaster and

Workshop depots are also to vote on whether to strike, which would leave B&Q and Screwfix stores without deliveries.

If the depot workers and drivers strike together, it will maximise pressure on B&Q to press Wincanton and GXO to settle.

Already there is evidence of the pressure the strike is causing, with bare shelves in local stores. Trade unionists and socialists are leafleting staff and customers in stores in solidarity with the Workshop strikers.

DWP reps demand action from PCS leadership

CRAIG WORSWICK SECRETARY, PCS DWP GREATER MANCHESTER BRANCH (PERSONAL CAPACITY)

More than 60 DWP PCS reps and activists met in a national Zoom meeting called by PCS DWP Greater Manchester branch on 19 January. The meeting agreed a number of demands that urgently need to be placed on the bosses. It also called for real leadership from the PCS DWP group executive committee, dominated by the Left Unity leadership of the union.

The demands agreed include a renegotiation of Covid-19 safety measures, permanent jobs for thousands of members employed on short-term contracts, and a root-and-branch evaluation of working conditions and work pressures throughout the largest government department. The meeting further called for a national strike ballot of all members if the demands are not met.

The meeting was formally endorsed by around a dozen branches and two regions but was outrageously deemed to be unconstitutional by unelected full-time officers, who, rather than engage with activists demanding more from the leadership, outlined their limited successes over the period of the pandemic. The Greater Manchester branch executive committee defied the Left Unity

attack on the democratic right of branches to meet with each other to discuss the urgency of a national response to the issues we face.

The DWP provides vital services to millions of people across the country, including ensuring that social security payments are made to those made unemployed by the pandemic. The leverage conditions are there to ensure members can win huge concessions, but the Left Unity leadership has been unwilling to place confidence in members and lead any campaign. Despite verbally committing their support to branches willing to fight, little in the way of effective coordination of branches is done.

The mood among members has reached boiling point, and activists and reps demand firm leadership and an effective strategy.

The Broad Left Network which brings together activists wanting to rebuild the strength of the union, and which includes Socialist Party members, backed the reps' meeting, and continues to call for better leadership and for a campaign to be developed.

A second reps' meeting was agreed which will take place after the scheduled two-day group executive committee meeting on 26-27 January. This next meeting of reps is to discuss what will be required if the group executive is unwilling to act.

Get all the latest union news...



10,000 tube workers vote to strike - don't make workers pay for TfL funding crisis



CCPGREY/CC

ALISTAIR TICE SHEFFIELD SOCIALIST PARTY

“Just Eat-Stuart, you're no good, pay your workers, what you should!” was the chant as over 100 trade unionists and students in Sheffield rallied in support of delivery drivers on their 31st day of targeted strike action against company pay cuts. Banners in four languages reflected the ethnic minority background of most of the couriers, and also the international reach that this gig economy dispute has had.

One of the drivers, Bryn, described how because of the 24% cut in the

base rate of pay introduced by Stuart on 6 December he had to work longer, drive much further, and saw his family less, just to pay the bills. Another driver, Pastor Luke, called the strike “a war” against Stuart and Khalil said: “We're winning, and we will win!”

Lots of supporters expressed their solidarity, including Socialist Party member Holly Johnson, speaking on behalf of ‘NHS Workers Say No’.

On day 32 of the strike, 25 drivers, mostly members of the IWGB independent union, met at the weekly strike committee and voted to step up the action by targeting Greggs shops (which only use the Just Eat

delivery app) across teatime, and locking down six outlets (including McDonald's, KFC and Subway) in the afternoons at Woodseats retail park, and refusing to accept any orders at any client at any time for less than £4.

Having forced Stuart into face-to-face meetings, won improvements over car insurance renewal and the restoration of paid waiting times, and with strike action restarting at Sunderland, Chesterfield and soon in Blackpool, the drivers are determined and confident that they can stop the pay cuts and win recognition for the IWGB. Then they will take the fight to UberEats and Deliveroo, whose pay is even worse.



The mass rally ALISTAIR TICE

JARED WOOD LONDON TRANSPORT REGION REPRESENTATIVE ON RMT NATIONAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE (PERSONAL CAPACITY)

Transport union RMT members working for London Underground have voted overwhelmingly for strike action to defend jobs, conditions and our pensions.

RMT balloted over 10,000 members on London Underground, getting a 94% yes vote for strike action on a 52% turnout.

Members are furious that they are being told to pay for a £2 billion funding gap in Transport for London (TfL) while senior managers have just been awarded a £12 million bonus pot - rewarding them for making cuts.

The drop in passenger numbers using TfL services during the Covid pandemic has brought the funding crisis to a head. But its root cause is the policy of self-financing adopted by the Labour mayor, Sadiq Khan, at the behest of the Tory government.

No similar transport system anywhere around the world can operate

without government subsidy for its operations.

Fares cover around 30% of operating costs in Paris and 47% in New York. The London Underground, just before the pandemic, was raising 134% of its operating costs in fares.

But the idea that fare revenues can keep increasing year after year is ridiculous. Passenger demand will not continue to rise forever and, even if it did, capacity cannot keep pace. In reality, passenger numbers had plateaued even before Covid became a factor.

With a sudden drop in passenger numbers during the pandemic, TfL has been left with a gap of around £2 billion between its planned spending and its income.

The government has refused to provide adequate funding to replace lost fares and has tied the limited support it has provided to further cuts and attacks on workers.

Instead of resisting, Khan has gone along with the plan. Having previously boasted that he would cut ‘wasteful spending’, now he has instructed TfL bosses to review all

elements of operational spending, starting with workers' jobs, pensions and conditions.

RMT reps and members are now considering what strike action to take as we move towards the end of the short-term funding deal with the government in February, and the announcement of management's intended pension attacks in March.

This could be a protracted dispute as members cannot afford to accept management's proposals. We need to take action to ensure that we force the mayor, the government and TfL bosses to think again.

Even after the pandemic, London's big businesses make millions every day. Public transport is a key part of the infrastructure that makes that possible.

Just a small levy on City bonuses would easily clear the £2 billion funding gap. We need to change the conversation, from one about making essential transport workers pay, to outlining the need to make the super-rich elite cover the funding gap.

TRADE UNIONS AND THE FIGHT AGAINST COUNCIL CUTS

Interview: Unite's strategy on fighting the cuts

Socialist Party member **Onay Kasab**, recently appointed Lead for Local Government in Unite the Union, spoke to the Socialist about the union's strategy for fighting to defend the pay, jobs and conditions of local authority workers and local council services.

WITH INFLATION RISING, WHAT IS YOUR STRATEGY FOR SECURING A DECENT PAY RISE FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT WORKERS?

Unite is balloting our members across England, Wales and Northern Ireland for strike action for one reason and one reason alone: we will not allow local government workers to pay the economic price of Covid. The employers' offer for 2021 of 1.75% is an insult. Our claim for 10% - with the RPI rate of inflation now at 7.1% - shows how right we were to make that claim.

In our view, the RPI rate, the trade union preferred measure, is no longer representative of the true cost of living. We believe it is time for the trade unions to come forward with a far more accurate measure of the true soaring cost of living for workers.

Our ballot strategy is a 'disaggregated' ballot, breaking the ballots down council by council, and sometimes

down to workplaces, so that where we meet the legal 50% threshold for turn out in the ballot, we can take strike action, pulling out those key areas who vote for action.

It is, of course, the case that we should be able to run one national ballot - but the fact that anti-trade union laws regarding thresholds exist, means we have to adapt until we win campaigns to repeal these laws. This is despite so many MPs being elected on far smaller turnouts.

Our ballot allows for the anger that currently exists to be channelled into a national campaign on pay. Anger not just about parties at Downing Street, but about the fact that MPs live a subsidised existence while our members hold down multiple jobs on poor pay to make ends meet.

Our strategy includes setting up 'combines'. The first local government combine, bringing together local government reps, both directly employed and outsourced, met on 14 January. This will be a campaigning, fighting body that will take the union's industrial campaigns forward. This is well overdue. Rather than fighting council by council, or outsourced contract by contract, we now have a body that can take the fight to the employers on a national basis, not just once a year on pay, but time after time all year round.

Our waste service members in Coventry taking strike action are

“What we need is for councillors to grow a spine and to mount a fight, instead of wielding the axe for the government”

leading the way. We will form combines bringing waste service workers together to decide on rates for the job and to campaign nationally. We will do the same for other areas including housing and care services.

WHAT ROLE CAN UNITE PLAY IN FIGHTING AGAINST CUTS TO LOCAL SERVICES?

Our policy, agreed at conference last year, calls on local authorities to agree legal, needs-based no-cuts budgets. This is absolutely key. I remember talking to a councillor in Lewisham, telling her why services should not be cut. Her appalling response was to ask me which service I preferred to save - in other words, shall we save children's services by cutting services for the elderly?

Our policy now allows our union not just to say "no cuts", but to also to say that we have a solution.

No longer can councillors hide behind the red herring of illegality. It is perfectly legal to agree a needs-based no-cuts budget with borrowing and use of reserves to fill gaps in the short term, while uniting the community and trade unions to fight and demand the funding that is needed for the longer term.

This last part is so important. We know that central government has been cutting funding - we don't need councillors to tell us that. What we need is for councillors to grow a spine and to mount a fight, instead of wielding the axe for the government.

Let me be very clear: this applies to all councils, no matter what the political colours. It is political will that is the issue, not legality. We will organise through mass mapping exercises - centrally held data showing figures and what services are being cut, when are outsourced services due to be reviewed, what pay and conditions are outsourcers paying - this will then allow us to plan national responses.

WHY HAS UNITE AGREED TO SEND A SPEAKER TO THE TRADE UNIONIST AND SOCIALIST COALITION (TUSC) CONFERENCE?

On Channel 4 news recently I heard Anneliese Dodds, Labour shadow secretary for women and equalities, repeatedly quote "the cost of living crisis". Yet her party, in power in council after council, has cut service after service, job after job, ruining exactly the lives that she is the shadow secretary for. The equation is a simple one. If you accept that specific groups within society are discriminated against, and then you cut the services that those people rely on, who is going to be hardest hit? Is it not going to be those who are supposedly covered by the portfolio of the shadow secretary?

Unite is formally speaking at the TUSC conference because the cost of living crisis will not be solved by the current parties prowling the corridors of Westminster. Unite has agreed what is a groundbreaking policy against cuts. We want not just to explain our policy. We want to actively promote it and make clear that we will fight cuts, we will fight for better pay, we will fight with communities, whatever the political colours of councils.



TUSC campaigning in Bristol in 2021

Please consider moving this model resolution in your union branch

1. This [union branch] believes that despite talk of "levelling up", it is clear that the Tory government and bosses intend to continue to make working-class people pay for their crises. This includes attacks on jobs, pay, conditions and services, alongside tax hikes and price rises. As part of this, we anticipate further austerity being inflicted in local government, which is responsible for over one-fifth of all public expenditure.
2. We agree that we oppose Labour councils continuing to carry out Tory cuts.
3. [We acknowledge that our union is affiliated to the Labour Party] does not currently have any political affiliation]
4. Nonetheless, this [branch] resolves to encourage our 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.

Unite housing workers commit to fight for needs-based council budgets

UNITE HOUSING WORKERS' BRANCH LEI11

"Conference agrees that Unite must now adopt a policy calling on Labour councils to set legal, balanced no-cuts needs-based budgets." This sentence, taken from the recent anti-cuts resolution, which was passed unanimously at Unite's policy conference in October last year, was reinforced by the Unite housing workers' branch at their January meeting.

Needs-based budget

The branch passed a resolution which commits us to write to every Labour candidate and elected representative to ensure that they agree to adopt this uncompromising approach to cuts in services and jobs. That means not simply opposing the cuts in words, but in deeds.

This means Labour councils and councillors not simply blaming the Tories for cuts, but joining together in fighting austerity, refusing to implement cuts where in power, and identifying an alternative 'needs-based budget' around which we can campaign where Labour is in opposition.

Resources available

It is estimated that local authorities will implement £1.3 billion worth of cuts in the next year. Whether the jobs of our members are directly threatened or not, we are all affected by the cuts. Many of our members' jobs are dependent on local authority contracts, and unless there is a concerted, organised fightback, it is

clear that councils will seek to pass on the cuts to their outsourced services as well.

Some Labour representatives argue that as the revenue to local authorities has been cut, councils have no alternative other than to implement these cuts. Unite utterly refutes this false choice. We also reject the argument that there are no resources available. Local authorities in London alone have seen their joint reserves increase by £1.2 billion over the last year. General reserves held by Labour councils throughout England and Wales stand at £15.32 billion. There is £2.07 billion in their housing revenue accounts and £2.59 billion in the usable capital receipts reserves.

Prepared to sack our members

Labour authorities could coordinate their efforts to fight to resist cuts - they do not have to implement them. These huge sums of money could be used to prevent the need for any further austerity. So don't let anyone tell you that the money isn't there as these figures show clearly that it is!

This is why the Unite housing workers branch is supporting Unite general secretary Sharon Graham's call for those Labour representatives who are not prepared to support their trade union brothers and sisters to stand aside for those who will. Unite cannot afford to waste our members' money and goodwill in supporting political representatives who are prepared to sack our members and dispense with essential local services.

“Whether the jobs of our members are directly threatened or not, we are all affected by the cuts”

Standing candidates

The Unite housing workers' branch is keen to maximise the support for our anti-cuts strategy, which is why we are calling on members to stand for election as councillors if they support the idea of setting no-cuts, needs-based budgets. We also confirm our commitment to any Labour representative who is disciplined by the Labour Party for refusing to vote for cuts.

We recognise that using reserves and borrowing facilities alone will not defeat the cuts, but it will certainly give us the breathing space to develop a powerful political campaign throughout the UK to prevent further cuts this year. It will also show what can be achieved politically, and give huge confidence to workers and trade unions in building a movement that places public need and workers' welfare above private profit.

Not enough

As Sharon Graham puts it: "We know that central government is not giving councils the money they need. But it is not enough for councillors to shrug their shoulders and pass the buck. Local authorities can agree balanced, legal budgets that do not make cuts."

"It is perfectly possible for them to use their reserves and borrowing powers to plug gaps, while at the same time campaigning for adequate central government funding to safeguard council services. I would like to see my union at the heart of integrated campaigns inside communities, fighting for better services and giving council workers the proper pay rise they deserve."



Onay Kasab MARY FINCH



PAUL MATTSOON

TUSC AGAINST CUTS

TUSC LOCAL ELECTIONS CONFERENCE

11am Sunday 6 February on Zoom

**Register by entering
Zoom ID: 867 5383 4352
or online visit: bit.ly/3qFIUec**

Platform speakers from the constituent components of the TUSC steering committee - the RMT transport workers' union, the Socialist Party, Resist, and the individual members' representatives - will introduce the discussion.

Visit tusc.org.uk to see TUSC's draft platform, core policies and how to stand as a candidate.

Confirmed speakers include:

- Ian Hodson, BFAUW president
- Onay Kasab, Unite Lead for Local Government

Waltham Forest, east London

Eviction resistance on the march

MIKE CLEVERLEY
WALTHAM FOREST SOCIALIST PARTY

Every London borough has thousands of families on housing waiting lists and hundreds of empty homes. The benefit cap and the end of the eviction ban are creating a rising tide of evictions. But Labour councils refuse to use their reserves to compulsorily purchase these homes or to build sufficient council housing. Waltham Forest Council is typical. The local trades union council set up the Housing Action Network, which is organising 'eviction resistance' in response to this emergency. The campaign has been approached by four families being evicted. In each case, the council has refused to offer permanent homes in the borough, instead, giving them 24 hours' notice, and a rail ticket to far-off places they may never have even been to, like Derby or Stoke-on-Trent. These 'offers' are accompanied by a threat that, if they don't accept the move, the councillors will wash their hands of any responsibility for their fate. Some have been offered rodent-infested rooms in shared houses, or



single rooms for the whole family in another borough too far for them to get to work. This policy particularly affects single mothers in part-time, low-paid jobs. On 22 January, 50 people met in Wood Street Square, which used to be surrounded by social housing, but now has been handed over to developers selling flats for £500,000. The 'open-mike' allowed two of the evicted mothers to speak. Socialist Party members Nancy Taafe and Linda Taafe spoke from the Housing Action Network and trades union council, respectively. They expressed their anger at the methods used by the Labour council - expelling working-class families in order to carry out gentrification. We then marched to five empty flats. There I spoke to call on the protesters to consider standing for the council themselves. During the last full council elections, the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) polled 2,841 votes across Waltham Forest. And in last year's London Assembly elections, Nancy Taafe won 3,236 votes in the North East constituency. We were surrounded by local people, signing our petition, taking leaflets, buying the Socialist. In the coming weeks, we know we will be defending these families from bailiffs, and campaigning for the council elections in May.

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Wakefield TUSC – Fighting for low-paid workers and NHS

Wakefield Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) held its

first public meeting of the new year on 20 January, in person and via Zoom, to deal with the urgent question of working-class political representation. Sarah Woolley, bakers' union (BFAWU) general secretary, spoke. Socialist Party member Mick Griffiths spoke for Wakefield TUSC. Unfortunately, the other speaker, Trevor Howard, transport union RMT regional

organiser, had a family emergency, and was unable to be there. Sarah said her union is breaking the political barrier to non-Labour Party workers. She outlined the role of the Bakers' union in backing their members who contested seats for parliament while upholding the union's principles. This would bring recognition for those employed in the food industry,

where she originated, as they were largely unappreciated by society. The critical role they played in feeding the nation was hardly publicised, so it would help get the message over. Mick Griffiths, our candidate standing as part of TUSC, explained the huge threat the Tories' Health and Care Bill posed to the NHS, and why local council elections should be utilised to fight it. Mick is the retired

secretary of the local Unison union health branch. He has led incredibly successful struggles to defend Pinderfields hospital and its workers. JOHN VASEY
WAKEFIELD SOCIALIST PARTY

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CWSocialistParty

Selling the Socialist
Just some of the events where the Socialist newspaper was sold in the past week...

Cardiff – Overwhelming backing for energy nationalisation

On our Socialist Party campaign stalls about rising gas and electricity prices, we have spoken to lots of people concerned and angry about the situation. On the most recent one, on 21 January, outside my local shops, people often mentioned that they already have to ration their heating in order to pay for food and rent. They are worried what will happen when the price cap is lifted, and their bills go up even further. One homeless man explained he had been evicted due to falling behind on his rent, because he was paying high



energy bills to keep a cold and damp property warm. Everyone who stopped, both young and old, supported our call to nationalise the energy companies. Older people realised that it had been a mistake to privatise these industries, and that ordinary people are contributing to the wealth of the rich, on top of paying for energy. One young woman brought up nationalisation before we could even

mention it. Conversations quickly moved on to what else we should nationalise, and how appallingly out of touch both the government and the opposition are. 17 people bought a copy of the Socialist, and several people wanted to find out more about the Socialist Party, as they realised that capitalism cannot provide for our most basic needs. CATHERINE PEACE

Southampton – Anger at Johnson and alertness to NHS privatisation are growing

Everyone we spoke to at our Socialist Party campaign stall on 19 January signed our petition about NHS pay. Many were concerned about underfunding of the health service. There was a marked upturn in the number of people wanting to stop and talk to us. There is much more awareness of the threat of privatisation hanging over the NHS. Fair pay for NHS staff is also an issue of concern. "We all need a pay rise", one person reflected over the impending cost of living crisis. There was unanimity regarding Boris Johnson – time for him to go! When the health service was barely coping, and ordinary people were suffering through lockdown, parties were going on in Downing Street. Johnson is seen as deceitful and a total hypocrite.

Several people lamented that the Labour Party would do no better in protecting the NHS than the Tories. They were interested to hear what we said about the socialist policies needed for the NHS - full funding, fair pay and to keep the health service in public ownership. Many have no faith in the two main parties. People we met, particularly ex-Labour Party members, were at a loss, and felt there was no party that they could support. They showed definite interest in the idea of a new mass workers' party. Of the people we met, a good number were keen to find out more, and were pleased to buy a copy of the Socialist newspaper. We pointed out some of the articles they might find interesting. One person said: "I will read this, you don't get anything like this in my paper". We raised £52, including selling 14 copies of the Socialist. JANE WARD

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Hundreds protest to save St Mary's Leisure Centre in Southampton



NICK CHAFFEY
SOUTHAMPTON SOCIALIST PARTY

Southampton Tory council closed St Marys Leisure Centre on 22 December, locking out hundreds of users. They falsely claim that the building requires "millions" to maintain. The decision has been met with widespread anger. Campaigners gained coverage for the fight to keep the centre open, with interviews on local TV, radio and in the local press. The petition is gaining support, hundreds have filled in the council's consultation opposing closure, and hundreds attended a protest on 23 January. The campaign has taken a clear position, arguing that to have any sustainable future the centre should remain as a council-funded, council-run community sports and leisure facility. It's clear this has widespread support. While the Labour Party has given support to the campaign, and called the latest protest, it has refused to back the campaign, call for council funding and remaining a council facility. This is because when Labour was in control of the council

it attempted to farm St Mary's out to the private sector. With no takers accepted, Labour lost control of the council, with no plan in place to keep the centre going. This has been used by the Tories, unjustifiably, to undermine the case for the centre. The centre remains popular. Despite being an old building, it remains safe to use. Incredibly, the council already has £148,000 allocated to run the centre until March. Yet they have closed it, losing potential income at the same time. Madness! The consultation has now ended. Campaigners are seeking a meeting with the council to discuss its plans. A freedom of information request has revealed that the council has no surveys of the building to back up its claims that 'millions' are needed. We demand the Tory council withdraws its claims. Socialist Party members have played a key role in launching this campaign, working with user groups, the local community and building support for the centre's future. A community march is now being organised to build support and to increase pressure on the council. We call on local Labour councillors

to come out publicly to support the call for the centre to remain with the council. If they took a clear no-cuts position on the centre, and backed reversing the recent council cuts, Labour would have a strong chance of rewinning control of the council, and therefore keeping the centre open. But it's unlikely Labour will take this stand. After controlling the council for nine years, Labour lost seven seats last May as a result of carrying out massive cuts. This included cuts to the local youth club, which was then handed over to the YMCA to run, leaving the building massively underused. Many conclude that Labour's support for the campaign is lukewarm. Socialist Party members are making the case to stand anti-cuts candidates across the city as the only way to build a real alternative to the on-going cuts to local jobs and services. This campaign shows how a wider mass movement could be built to restore the £60 million of government funding stolen from Southampton.

● Southampton TUSC meeting: How can we reverse council cuts? Saturday 29 January, 2pm, Friends Meeting House, 1A, Ordnance Rd, SO15 2AZ



This is students' chance to fight back

Help build 2 March NUS walkout

NOAH EDEN
SHEFFIELD SOCIALIST STUDENTS

For too long now, students have been forced to pay for poor-quality higher education. Education should be a right, and free and available to all, not something to be marketised. Tuition fees were first introduced by the Labour government of recently knighted Sir Tony Blair. Blair promised not to introduce them at all, then promised not to increase them beyond £1,000 a year, before trebling them to £3,000. The most recent rise, by the Tory-Lib Dem coalition, increased them to £9,250 a year. During the pandemic, students were forced to pay £9,250 to sit in our rooms and look at a computer screen. We were lied to about in-person teaching, and lured back to uni accommodation to pay rent. On top of this, the government is talking about lowering the debt repayment threshold. Well it's time that students fought back. With growing student unrest, the National Union of Students (NUS) is calling a walkout on 2 March, with a demonstration in central London, 25 years after the start of tuition fees. This student strike is calling on the government to provide fully funded, free, accessible, lifelong, and a democratised education system.

Socialist Students supports all these demands. But we say the NUS should go further by calling for the cancellation of student debt, and the replacement of student loans with grants – funded by taking the wealth out of the hands of the 1%. Socialist Students will be doing everything we can to build for the walkout. We are organising local campus rallies, throughout the country, in order to prepare students for 2 March. Socialist Students is demanding that student unions provide transport to take students to London. It is important to support this cause and, through strength in numbers, show this corrupt government that we are fed up with this unfair system. It is crucial that we spread the word to as many students as possible to start the fightback for free and accessible education for all. ● Socialist Students annual conference is Saturday 26 February in London to discuss how to rebuild the student movement, and what next after 2 March - visit our website to sign up for updates about the conference

FUND THE FIGHTBACK DONATE TODAY
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Join the student fightback
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Oaks Park School: valiant strike exposed state of schools

JAMES IVENS

LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

The intrepid strike at Oaks Park School in Redbridge, east London, exemplified many of the problems facing school unions today. A culture of bullying, Covid safety, rep victimisation, industrial leverage and political representation all came under the spotlight.

The National Education Union (NEU) took 33 strike days in half a year - probably the longest strike since the NEU's formation in 1917.

Staff at the council-run secondary date problems back to 2016. A new head installed a top-down, punitive regime. Experienced workers left in droves.

Younger staff - viewed as cheaper and more pliable - entered a school with a culture of bullying and fear. This was in line with the national trend. Excessive workload and exam-factory conditions, under bosses who lead like sweatshop masters, not educators.

Almost every picket line at Oaks Park heard shocking tales of management bullying. Not just against workers, against students too.

There's been a crying need for national action on the issues beneath this culture, like workload and pay, for years. Socialist Party members have long campaigned for this within the NEU.

'Section 44'

In this context, reps led a successful fight against dangerous Covid reopening in January 2021. This was part of the national swell of 'Section 44' notices that forced Boris Johnson to U-turn and declare school opening unsafe.

Again in line with the national trend, management combed through both reps' records looking for slip-ups to weaponise. The head (and behind her the borough council) saw a combative NEU as too big for its boots.

Bosses wanted revenge for the Section 44 victory. They launched actions against both NEU stewards within a week of each other.

Realising this was too blatant, they



Oaks Park picket line June 2021 with Socialist Party members, including Louise Cuffaro (right), out in support JAMES IVENS

backed off from school rep and music teacher Bill Stockwell - but dismissed fellow rep and media teacher Keiran Mahon.

No sooner had the strike ended than they threatened Bill again, although lacking the confidence for formal action.

The NEU won a mandate for strikes on rep victimisation and bullying culture. Action began on Tuesday 15 June 2021.

In the summer term, two other staff who had lost their jobs after the Section 44 action won them back because of the strike. Bosses dragged their feet on everything else.

The national union maintained 100% strike pay and granted all requests for action. A small core of strikers fought an extraordinarily

determined battle. But unfortunately, a number of NEU members who had voted for action, perhaps too affected by the culture of fear, didn't join it.

Redbridge NEU explored every avenue for additional pressure. Strikers met with parents, leafleted feeder schools, lobbied the council, the MP, even London mayor Sadiq Khan.

Labour council

In the eyes of many workers, the Labour local authority should have had their backs. Instead, it gave tacit approval to a head's union-busting behaviour, ignoring a whole dossier of evidence.

Local Labour MP Wes Streeting, former shadow schools minister, rallied behind the bully boss. The

Labour mayor of London was silent.

Those lefts remaining in the ranks of Redbridge Labour did support the union. But one of the strike's memorable picket songs, set to the Wild Rover, was telling. Strikers would vote for Labour - or at least Redbridge leader Jas Athwal - "nay never no more". NEU national executive and Socialist Party member Louise Cuffaro got loud cheers when she called for independent, trade union candidates to stand against anti-worker Labour politicians.

In the end, the strike forced management to the table. Bosses conceded an independent inquiry into the 'breakdown in industrial relations'. They are already trying to renege on that.

Strikers marched back in to

supporters' applause on 26 November. They asked that consistent supporters, specifically including the Socialist Party, be invited to the end of strike rally. The National Shop Stewards Network was a picket stalwart too.

Keiran Mahon has still not had justice. He's due in court in February, the NEU supporting its victimised rep to the bitter end. Remedy Recruitment is under investigation for supplying strike-breaking agency labour.

This brave and resolute struggle exposed the appalling state of Oaks Park management. How many more Oaks Parks are out there? National trade union struggle, and a workers' political alternative, would give confidence to even more workers to join the fight for education.

Education: Workload and inflation goes up, incomes fall

SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBERS IN EDUCATION

This term has started just as last term finished: school staff under intolerable pressure from incessant workload and Covid absences. Yet in return for all our efforts, our real incomes are sharply falling as the cost of living rises. Fuel prices are set to rise further, as are the costs of mortgage payments.

Many support staff and supply colleagues are already struggling. The hourly rate of a newly qualified teacher working 50-60 hours

a week, but being paid less than £2,200 a month, is at minimum wage levels.

Years of below-inflation pay awards show how little value is being placed on both educators and education by this government. It's time to demand change. We deserve better. Education deserves better.

Between now and July, the School Teachers' Review Body will be deliberating over what pay increase they will recommend teachers get in September 2022. Once again, this government will be telling them to keep

any increase to a minimum. They certainly won't be looking to match an inflation rate that could soon be as high as 7%. In short, we are set for another pay cut - unless we take action to win our pay demands.

The NEU executive wants to know how strongly you feel about how badly educators are being treated. That's why a survey is being sent out to the email address of our union members from 14 January.

It's vital that members return the survey and say 'yes' to action on pay.



Britain's waterways choked with a 'chemical cocktail'

How capitalism is severely polluting our waterways and what could be done to clean up the mess

DAVE CARR

Yet more depressing news on pollution of our rivers and waterways has made the headlines in recent weeks.

A new House of Commons committee report on water quality in rivers found that "only 14% of English rivers met good ecological status and no river met good chemical status." It continued: "A 'chemical cocktail' of sewage, agricultural waste, plastic and persistent chemicals is polluting rivers..."

The report identifies the main culprits as agricultural pollution (mainly slurry from mega-farms) affecting 40% of water bodies; sewage and wastewater dumping by private water companies accounting for 36% of pollution; with a further 18% run-off from towns, cities and transport.

The report could have been penned in 1864 when a Royal Commission described British rivers as "poisonous". It seems that nothing much has really changed after one-and-a-half centuries of anti-pollution legislation under capitalism.

The notion that ever since the 1858 'Great Stink' - when human and industrial effluent in the Thames shut down parliament - the quality of our waterways has continually improved, is not borne out by the evidence.

For example, in the 1870s, six rivers produced 185,000 salmon yearly. By World War Two it had dropped to 50,000. In the River Tees, as a result of toxic industrial pollution and sewage, the 10,000 catch of 1867 had dropped to a mere 130 by 1930.

True, cholera epidemics don't happen today because large-scale sewer systems and water treatment plants were developed using public funds. But capitalist polluters continued to pollute our waterways.

Moreover, much of the improved water quality in the Thames and other important rivers in recent decades is due to deindustrialisation as Britain's capitalists have outsourced large parts of manufacturing to Asian countries.

Pathogens

The report adds: "The prevalence of plastic pollution, the presence of persistent chemicals and spread of antimicrobial resistant pathogens in rivers in England are all issues of



Only 22 Tory MPs voted for an amendment to the Environment Bill to make it illegal for water companies to dump sewage into rivers

grave concern."

Indeed, a global study led by the University of Washington on antimicrobial resistance (AMR) has coincidentally just been published in the medical journal, the Lancet.

It calculates that up to five million people globally died in 2019 from illnesses in which AMR played a role - on top of the 1.2 million deaths it caused directly.

By comparison, in the same year, Aids caused 860,000 deaths and malaria 640,000.

Public protection?

Sir James Bevan, boss of the Environment Agency (EA) - a non-departmental public body established in 1995 and funded by the government's Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs - told the Commons committee that water quality in English rivers was "flatlining" because the "the two main polluters, the water and farming sectors, are not yet... doing enough to protect and enhance the environment."

Bevan meanwhile has threatened to sack EA whistle-blowers who have pointed out that the agency, due to severe funding cuts and the need for inspections to be self-funding, is unable to fulfil its mandate to protect the environment (see below).

Liv Garfield, chief executive of Severn Trent Water, who has pocketed more than £17.3 million since 2014, the highest-paid in the industry, was criticised by MPs as being "disingenuous" by claiming sewer overflow discharges were "pretty much already rainwater".

In 2020, water companies, often illegally, discharged raw sewage more than 400,000 times over a period of

3.1 million hours.

Untreated sewage from discharges, apart from carrying pathogens and toxic chemicals, is also the main source of microplastics in waterway sediment.

Microplastic waste pollution could easily be minimised in the short term by installing filters in washing machines and upgrading water treatment plants.

Moreover, biodegradable plant-based synthetics could be developed for textiles and clothing, along with replacing the largely non-recycled ubiquitous single-use plastic bottles.

The snag is, manufacturing and the water companies are privately owned and run for profit. As the old socialist saying goes: 'You can't plan what you don't control, and you can't control what you don't own.'

Privatisation

The relatively low cost of fines for water pollution vis-à-vis the cost of substantial investment to make the industry's infrastructure fit for purpose, means that the private water companies, which prioritise shareholder dividends, will continue to pollute.

It was reported in 2020 that England's for-profit water companies paid an astonishing £57 billion in dividends between 1991 and 2019 - an average of £2 billion a year to shareholders since privatisation more than three decades ago. These hollowed-out, debt-laden companies simply screw their customers to pay for any investments.

Johnson's big business government, by squeezing the funding of the EA's environmental protection

work so it becomes utterly ineffectual, has effectively protected the polluters.

Last year, only 22 Tory MPs voted for an amendment to the Environment Bill to make it illegal for water companies to dump sewage into rivers.

A decade or more of cuts means that funding for this aspect of the EA has slumped from £170 million in 2009-10 to just £76 million in 2019-20, and £94 million in 2020-21.

An EA worker is reported as saying there had been a "drive to make the agency almost entirely self-sufficient, so if you can't charge for something it gets a lower priority, which is why a lot of the officer roles have been cut - those that go out to pollution events and inspect works... it's been cut and cut and cut..."

The Commons' report conclusions include lots of calls to 'increase monitoring', 'more transparency', 'more targets', 'tougher fines', and so on.

But what it doesn't call for is the one demand that will make the most difference - bringing the water companies back into public ownership!

By removing the profit motive from the industry it would then be possible to direct resources solely to protecting the environment and public health.

This is the very minimum required. Substantial public investment is needed for decades of chronic underinvestment and reservoir sell-offs.

But as part of an overall socialist plan of production, a workers' government could, after centuries of capitalist abuse and vandalism, restore our waterways to a pristine state.



The report could have been penned in 1864 when a Royal Commission described British rivers as "poisonous"

War in Yemen, made in Harlow, profit for rich

Three children were killed by an air strike as they were playing football in Yemen on 21 January, and more than 70 prisoners died when a detention centre was bombed. In all likelihood, these deaths were caused by Paveway IV bombs dropped by the Saudi Air Force.

The Paveway IV bomb was designed in Harlow by Raytheon UK. It is a disgrace that a company based in our town exports bombs to the tyrannical Kingdom of Saudi Arabia - bombs that are dropped on civilians in Yemen, bombs that are exacerbating the worst humanitarian crisis in the world.

Four million people have been internally displaced in Yemen during seven years of civil war. Last September, the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) warned that 16 million Yemenis were "marching towards starvation".

As arms manufacturers profit from the civil war in Yemen, the WFP has been forced to reduce food assistance to eight million people in need in Yemen because it is running out of funds. Affected families will get barely half the daily minimum ration from the WFP. It has warned that its food stocks are dangerously low and more severe reductions would soon be unavoidable.

Companies such as Raytheon UK and British Aerospace enrich their shareholders at the expense of the human rights of the people of Saudi Arabia, and the peace of the people of Yemen. There is no moral justification for the Saudi military intervention in the civil war in Yemen.

Those who supply weapons to the belligerents in that conflict are complicit in war crimes. The UK government is laying the ground for the growth of al-Qaeda and Isis by fueling the civil war in Yemen.

Harlow's Tory MP Robert Halfon must discover his moral compass, and insist that his party's government imposes an immediate embargo on the supply of the means of destruction to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and all other parties to the war in Yemen.

JOHN WAKE
HARLOW



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Somers Forge workers on strike WOLVERHAMPTON AND BLACK COUNTRY SP

Somers 'slaughterhouse' Forge

The articles concerning the Somers Forge strike (see socialistparty.org.uk) in Halesowen were interesting to learn that the company has the same disregard for its workers as it had in the 1930s. It was then Walter Somers Ltd, known locally as 'Somers slaughterhouse', because of the number of industrial accidents and deaths.

My late father, Tom Cartwright, worked there as a young man, and witnessed at least two fatalities, one so gruesome it gave him nightmares for years. What he experienced

turned him into an active trade unionist for life.

He was an overhead crane driver at GEC Coventry. Despite threats from the management, he would refuse to pick up and transport a load until he was convinced it was safely secured.

Workers in today's workplaces owe it to past and future generations, as well as themselves, to never compromise on a safe working environment, and to ensure they are protected by being a member of a trade union.

MARY MEDD
COVENTRY SOCIALIST PARTY



UK Covid-19 mortality similar to Spanish Flu

The total number of UK Covid deaths has exceeded 150,000. Laura Spinney, author of *Pale Rider*, reviewed by Socialist Party general secretary Hannah Sell (see socialistparty.org.uk), stated the number of Spanish Flu deaths in Britain was 210,000. Not a great deal different from today's pandemic mortality.

Furthermore, in the period of the Spanish Flu (1918-20), there was no vaccine discovery, because the current optical microscopes could not see the virus. And, during the pandemic's most infective period (1918), it was spread worldwide primarily by World War One.

No such calamity has taken place during the Covid pandemic. However, its spread and persistence worldwide is largely due to US, UK and leading EU countries hoarding vaccines. By the end of last year, there were 1 billion unused vaccines.

A hundred years on from the Spanish Flu, capitalism, despite great advances in medical science and mass production of vaccines, has meant that millions of people worldwide have suffered and died needlessly.

JOHN MERRELL
LEICESTER SOCIALIST PARTY



PHOTO: ANDREW PARSONS & I-IMAGES/CC

It's my party, and I'll lie if I want to

Tory MPs and members knew that Boris Johnson's entire career as a journalist and politician was littered with lies - that's why they selected him, to win a general election based on 'levelling up' lies.

They closed ranks over the Dominic Cummings affair. They showed no moral scruples over Tory corruption, crony PPE contracts, £37 billion wasted on Test and Trace, promotion of Tory donors to the Lords, or the latest privatisation and outsourcing of NHS services.

Johnson has clearly broken the law, and should be fined £10,000 as others have, and forced to resign. But the real reason why Tory MPs will remove him, now or later, are opinion polls and by-election results. They will do anything to save their £80,000-a-year jobs, and the lucrative contracts and directorships with big businesses that those bring.

They never took the protection of

people's lives seriously if it got in the way of them and their millionaire friends making more money. Self-serving and self-entitled, they all voted for Sunak's budget which is now cutting our living standards.

The problem is Sir Keir Starmer's 'Labour' Party just pursues the same fundamental economic policies for big business. He dishonestly broke his promise to keep pro-worker policies once he was selected as leader.

Now he has ditched his pledge to renationalise privatised energy, water and rail companies, supported by two-thirds of voters - just when we are being made to pay higher bills.

In the coming electoral reckoning, working-class people will need their own voice and a real alternative. It's now time for the trade unions to create a new party for working people to defend living standards through socialist policies.

BRENT KENNEDY
CUMBRIA SOCIALIST PARTY

"It's my party and I'll lie if I want to" sums up the arrogant attitude of the Tory leader. The universal condemnation from the media reflects public disgust that a set of rules, which divided families from each other during the pandemic, were flagrantly disregarded in Downing Street. Has 'bring a bottle' ever appeared on the agenda of a work meeting you attended?

The more pro-Boris MPs the BBC can produce, the more pathetic the excuse. "Downing Street staff work very hard", according to Dominic Raab, and by implication nobody else.

All those doctors and nurses were just sitting on their backsides, were they?

DEREK MCMILLAN
BRIGHTON SOCIALIST PARTY

WHAT'S YOUR VIEW?

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or, if you're not online, write to the Socialist Inbox, PO Box 1398, Enfield EN1 9GT



Trade unionists in the USA fighting back

JEFF BOOTH

AFSCME LOCAL 3650 (PERSONAL CAPACITY) AND
INDEPENDENT SOCIALIST GROUP (CWI - US)

In 2021, union workers were involved in at least 346 strikes across most sectors of the US economy including manufacturing, transportation, and services.

During October, there were 53 strikes of over 28,000 workers. "Striketober" and "strikesgiving" were terms used to describe a series of important, high-visibility strikes. Many union members were willing to stand up and risk a struggle against corporate power to improve their lives.

High profile strikes included 10,000 manufacturing workers in the United Auto Workers (UAW) union at four John Deere farm equipment factories; over a thousand bakery and distribution workers in the bakery workers union (BCTGM) at Nabisco; 2,000 healthcare workers in Buffalo, New York; and 1,400 BCTGM cereal workers at Kellogg's in four states.

Around 1,100 coal miners in the United Mine Workers (UMW) at Warrior Met Coal in Alabama are still on strike. Over 700 nurses in the Massachusetts Nurses Association (MNA) at St Vincent hospital in Worcester, Massachusetts, have just achieved a victory in the longest nurses' strike in Massachusetts history (see our coverage at independentsocialistgroup.org).

With union action on the rise, some mega-corporations were put on the defensive in 2021. The threat of a strike in November by approximately 32,000 healthcare workers in the Alliance of Health Care Unions (AHCU) forced the Kaiser Permanente corporation to quickly retreat from recruiting scabs at \$12,500 a week to strike-break.

Instead, the corporation offered a settlement, backing off from severe understaffing and attempts to cut wages for new workers by creating a two-tier wage structure.

IATSE, a union representing technicians and others in film, TV, and theatre production, held a strike vote for 60,000 workers in 36 of its locals. Among the 90% of eligible union members who voted, 98% voted to go on strike. It would have been the union's first nationwide strike. The members were ready to walk over issues like forced overtime, lack of

meal breaks, and time to rest in between shifts. The big entertainment companies were forced into concessions, but many IATSE members thought the contract proposal didn't offer enough. The vote to accept it barely passed.

There's a trend of more union members opposing concessionary contracts. In 2021, many union members refused to accept the usual givebacks. Recent examples of union members repeatedly rejecting contract deals include UAW strikers at Volvo, John Deere, and the bakery workers at Kellogg's.

Strikes in 2021 reflected a growing mood of anger and defiance among working people. Deliberate understaffing, forced overtime, and severe problems for many workers before Covid became worse in 2020-21. Workers churned out huge profits for corporations under pandemic conditions.

The two largest corporations in the US - Amazon and Walmart - grabbed \$10.7 billion in profits, a 56% increase in 2020. Despite record profits, corporations cut jobs and laid off workers in historic numbers with employment crashing.

In 2020, over 9.37 million jobs were cut. This is almost double the 5 million jobs that were lost in 2009 after the global financial crisis.

A recent Gallup Poll showed 68% of the U.S. approve of labour unions, the highest percentage since 1965. The same poll recorded 77% approval for unions among 18-34 year olds. In a 2017 survey, nearly half of non-union workers (48%) said they would join a union, a 50% increase since 1995.

Important sections of workers are striking, and there's new interest in unions from mostly unorganised industries, including food service (Starbucks, Burgerville), grad students (MIT, University of New Mexico), and big tech (Kickstarter, Glitch).

Struggles to intensify

2022 could be a year of renewed energy and growth in the labour movement.

However, mass organising of millions of workers into unions means radical change in union strategy. The pandemic pressures continue, and surging inflation is erasing wage increases won in recent strikes and contract negotiations.



10,000 United Auto Workers union members have recently taken strike action PHOTO JAY PEEPLES/CC

The 'Great Resignation'* shows workers looking for a way out of dead-end, low-wage jobs with minimal benefits. Instability, precarious jobs, and living paycheque to paycheque grind on, so many workers want to join unions.

There are basic changes the labour movement could implement to raise the profile of unions and make immediate gains in organising, including multiple unions organising together against Amazon, Walmart, and other corporations. It's not realistic for one relatively small union, the Retail, Wholesale, and Department Store Union, trying to organise Amazon on its own, as happened in Bessemer, Alabama.

Basic solidarity needs to be rediscovered, like refusing to cross other unions' picket lines. For example, in the strike of union nurses at St Vincent hospital in Worcester, Massachusetts, leaders of UFCW Local 1445 and Teamster Local 170 had their members crossing the nurses' picket lines throughout the strike.

Union leaders should also stop wasting money and resources supporting the corporate political parties, the Democrats and Republicans, and massively increase money and

resources for organising.

The problems preventing the organising of millions of workers into unions are systemic. Capitalism uses and abuses labour and nature on a world scale, exploiting cheap labour and natural resources around the globe for short-term maximisation of profits, no matter the cost to people and the environment. With the technology in place today, capital is even more mobile and dangerous than in the past.

Workers' party

Unions need to organise on an international scale to launch strikes and other job actions against multinational corporations, in many different countries at the same time. Capitalist political parties like the Democrats won't pass laws preventing corporations from laying-off workers and moving production to other countries. The Democratic Party won't seize the assets of runaway corporations or take big corporations under public ownership to save jobs and increase union power.

The labour movement needs to be the backbone of organising a mass workers' party in the US. Just beginning that process will push politics to the left, and could win crucial reforms like a \$20 an hour minimum wage and free, universal healthcare.

Social benefits are comparatively weak in the US mainly because there's no mass political party for working people. Workers' parties (labour, socialist, communist) in many other countries were essential to winning free or heavily subsidised healthcare, childcare, higher education, and housing benefits.

Socialists led the organisation of the first labour unions in the US. Every significant upsurge in the labour movement happened when the left and mass social movements were on the rise.

In the early 20th century, regional labour parties and the Socialist Party strengthened the labour movement.

The growth of the Communist Party and other left groups was central to the organising of mass industrial unions and the CIO (Confederation of Industrial Organisations) in the 1930s.

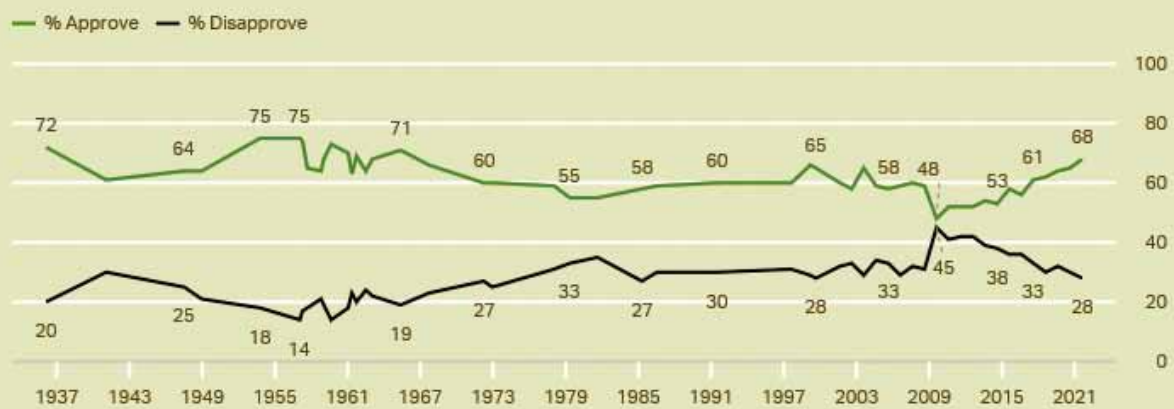
A large increase in public sector union organising in the late 1960s and 1970s was infused with the militancy of the Civil Rights and Black Power movements and the mass anti-Vietnam war protests.

Union density in the US has declined since 1954. At that time, the combination of the Taft-Hartley Act, 'McCarthyism' (political witch-hunts), and labour leaders supporting the Democratic Party severely weakened unions. Cutting the link between socialist ideas and the labour movement was a crucial reason for the decline of union membership and power.

Socialism provides the tools to analyse how the capitalist system works and why corporations are always out for higher profits regardless of the cost to society and the environment. Socialists have an alternative to capitalism: bringing democracy to the economy through democratic planning of labour power, social production, and distribution for human needs and a healthy environment. The labour movement needs the analysis, programme, and vision of socialism to fight and win against corporate power.

● *The 'Great Resignation' phenomenon began during the Covid pandemic, when millions of workers quit poorly paid, minimum benefit jobs. In November 2021, a record 4.5 million workers left their jobs. Some commentators have deemed it, alongside 'striketober' to be, in effect, a 'general strike'.

Do you approve or disapprove of labor unions?



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formerly **Militant**

BARTS NHS WORKERS STRIKE BACK

- **For a 15% pay rise for all**
- **Bring back outsourced services**

‘Why we’re striking’

UNITE SHOP STEWARD
BARTS HEALTH TRUST

Nearly 600 health workers employed at Bart's health trust across three hospitals - Royal London, Whipps Cross and St Barts - are striking for fair pay, and against increasing workloads and bullying.

Following a massive 97% vote for action the workers, member of Unite the Union, are walking out for two weeks from 31 January to 13 February.

They provide essential services as cleaners, porters, patient food catering workers, reception staff, and security guards.

Picket lines will take place every day at each hospital with rallies taking place at midday at the Royal London on 31 January, Barts hospital on 2 February and at Whipps Cross on 4 February.

Employed by private company Serco, the workers' pay claim for 15% reflects the pay gap between these outsourced workers and those directly employed by the NHS doing the same jobs. The threat of strike

action alone has forced the bosses to raise their derisory 1% pay offer to 3%, but this has also been rejected, especially given that RPI inflation has just jumped to 7.5%.

A porter told the Socialist: "We haven't got smaller shopping bills or rents than workers employed directly by the NHS doing the same jobs. It simply is unfair and that's why we have to take action."

Serco has made huge profits from the failed test-and-trace debacle and had a turnover of £3.9 billion according to the latest figures available.

The company has given the NHS Trust 18 months' notice that it will be ending the contract in April 2023.

We also demand that the trust board bring these workers and services back in-house as soon as possible.

Barts bosses, having privatised these services, bear responsibility for the situation that has developed. They must now intervene to ensure the union's pay claim is met in full.

Also, that the years of outsourcing are ended and that the workers are given full NHS pay, terms and conditions.



There was a massive 97% vote for action among Barts workers in the Unite union PHOTO SOCIALIST PARTY

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

