

'LABOUR BY NAME - TORY BY POLICY'

Blue, Red and Yellow Tories need challenging



■ **Solidarity with the Coventry bin lorry drivers**
■ **Build a movement to defend living standards**

DAVE GRIFFITHS
COVENTRY SOCIALIST PARTY

“Labour by name, Tory by policy,” chanted Coventry’s HGV drivers’ convenor Haydn Jones as he marched through Coventry along with his striking colleagues.

The supposed ‘Labour’ council has ignored their needs and has escalated the dispute by using agency drivers paid up to twice the council drivers’ normal wages to try to break their six-week-long strike over pay.

The council seems prepared to waste up to £4 million of our city’s

money to beat down the bin workers rather than find the approximately £300,000 needed to fund the workers’ claim. It obviously has the money to pay them.

This ‘out-Torying the Tories’ by the council led Unite general secretary Sharon Graham to declare: “Let me be very clear - the remaining financial support of the Labour Party is now under review. There will be no Labour politician in the Midlands who will get one single penny from my members or any practical support of any kind while this strike is going ahead.”

Disgustingly, Labour’s HQ dismissed Unite’s views saying: “Labour is under new management”. That says it all. Starmer’s Labour is about managing capitalism for the bosses, not defending workers’ interests.

Working-class people are facing the worst cost of living crisis in

decades, and we have no party - in Westminster or the council chambers - fighting on our side. On the contrary, Labour nationally appears to be backing Coventry council to the hilt.

The trade union movement nationally needs to build solidarity with the strike, as part of building a mass movement to fight for a living wage for all workers. Fifty years ago tens of thousands of Birmingham workers demonstrated at Sattley Gate in support of striking miners, resulting in victory (see page 12). We need that kind of solidarity today.

An emergency national demonstration in Coventry, organised by the Trades Union Congress (TUC) and linking support for the Coventry HGV strike with a call for a living wage rise for all workers, and a minimum wage of at least £15 an hour, would be an important step forward and help build coordinated strike

action to defeat inflation austerity.

If the TUC doesn’t take such action, left trade union leaders should form a ‘coalition of the willing’ to do so, while keeping up the pressure on the TUC as a whole to act.

Alongside an industrial fightback, workers also need a mass party that stands in our interests. The disaffiliation of the bakers’ union from Labour, and now Unite’s threat to withhold funds in solidarity with the Coventry drivers, are clear indications of trade unionists’ growing anger at Starmer’s New Labour.

Discussion is now urgently needed in the trade union movement on how to begin building a new party that would fight in workers’ interests. Individual trade unionists standing as anti-cuts candidates in May’s local elections would be an important first step.

▶▶ CONTINUED ON P2



Dave Nellist (above), Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) candidate in the Birmingham Erdington by-election, said:

“For a party that calls itself Labour to pay twice the hourly rate to outside drivers to break a strike than the council pays its own drivers is scandalous.

“Sharon Graham is right to be angry, and the Coventry HGV drivers are right to fight for a decent pay rise. In the months ahead, working-class families in Erdington face a £1,000 - £2,000 cut in their living standards as food, fuel, energy, and taxes rise. With 111 live disputes calling for decent wages to combat the cost-of-living rise, Unite is showing how to fight back.

“I hope Unite members will consider standing as independent, anti-austerity candidates in the May elections. Blue Tories, Red Tories, and Yellow Tories need challenging. Labour doesn’t deserve union support when it attacks workers like this.”

● **For more on Dave’s campaign see pages 8, 9 and 11**

the Socialist formerly Militant

Issue 1167 17-23 February 2022

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Friday before publication, or Monday morning for urgent news, unless otherwise agreed with the editors.

The Socialist goes to press on a Tuesday night. We publish online on Wednesday and in print on Thursday.

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The Socialist is the weekly newspaper of the Socialist Party, the England and Wales section of the Committee for a Workers' International socialistparty.org.uk socialistworld.net



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ISSN 1366-9621

Published by Socialist Publications, PO Box 1398, Enfield EN1 9GT Registered as a newspaper at the Post Office Printed by trade union labour at Reach Printing Services

Militant issue 1: October 1964 The Socialist issue 1: 7 February 1997

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

Britain's economic growth figures mask fragile false recovery



DAVE REID SOCIALIST PARTY NATIONAL COMMITTEE

The capitalist media celebrated the announcement that the UK economy grew by 7.5% in 2021. The Financial Times headlined: "UK economy rebounds to post strongest growth since second world war". But of course, the growth figures in 2021 were compared to those of 2020 when the economy contracted by 10% in the pandemic. Underneath the headlines, the serious economic commentators were much more sober.

The Financial Times quoted one commentator: "The UK economy's performance continues to underwhelm relative to its peers in the G7". The reality is that the UK economy has recovered from the economic lockdown slower than its capitalist counterparts. In the third quarter of 2021, investment was 4% below pre-pandemic levels, the lowest in the G7. Trade has still not hit the levels of 2018.

Long-term sickness

This is partly because of the Johnson government's incompetent handling of the pandemic. But it also reflects the chronic long-term sickness of British capitalism. Technically the fifth biggest economy in the world, British capitalism has relied on financial investments and speculation rather than seriously competing in world manufacturing markets. The dominance of finance capital has skewed the economy, contributing to record trade deficits and record levels of inequality.

British capitalism's serious commentators look with trepidation to the future. Even as the British



PHOTO: PAUL MATTHEWSON



In the third quarter of 2021, investment was 4% below pre pandemic levels, the lowest in the G7

economy slowly recovers from the pandemic, problems common to all capitalist economies are even more acute for British capitalism.

A certain level of inflation, officially at 7%, can be tolerated by capitalist economists - it will help lower the real levels of government and corporate debt and cut real wages for workers. But the prospect of further big rises in prices threatens a new slowdown - and big class battles. The Bank of England has warned that growth in 2022 will be dragged down by the largest contraction in household real income in 30 years, caused by rising inflation, higher taxes, and surging energy costs.

The weakness of British capitalism has them caught between an economic rock and a hard place. To hold down inflation, they might have to raise interest rates, but that would slow growth even further, possibly even precipitating a new recession.

And the ruling class fears big strike waves by workers trying to maintain their living standards. That is why the Governor of the Bank of England

- from the comfort of a £575,538 salary - urged workers for restraint when negotiating pay increases.

There have been a number of strikes won by workers who have felt in a strong position to regain some of what has been lost in wages in the last 20 years, particularly workers in transport and related occupations. A Financial Times editorial on the US economy on 1 February observed: "Capital has dominated labour for half a century. But the tables are turning. Employers, take note".

Trade union leaders take note: the same could be said of Britain. To turn the tables on the bosses means getting organised and being prepared to coordinate workers' strikes for pay rises. For the TUC to immediately call a national demonstration would be a good first step to prepare the ground.

A new mass party of the working class, backed by the trade unions and armed with a programme for socialist change, would strengthen our hand further.

Tory stealth taxes burden 'packhorse generation'

Young workers are set to shoulder the burden of Covid spending and addressing the crisis in NHS and social care, according to the Intergenerational Foundation think tank. A recently published report outlines how the 'packhorse generation' are being taxed by stealth. For example, graduates earning £27,000 can expect to see their disposable income drop by nearly 30% in the next four years.

With inflation rising, workers are fighting to win pay rises. But as the report outlines, in some cases pay

rises will push workers into the next income tax bracket, not helped by the fact that the government has deliberately frozen these thresholds. By 2025-26, the Treasury expects this to increase government revenue by over £13 billion a year. Meanwhile, those with unearned income, landlords' rents and bosses' dividends, escape.

Likewise, by freezing the student loan repayment threshold at £27,295, the government has ensured that thousands of graduates who get even a modest pay rise this year could be

forced to begin repaying loans, wiping out any pay rise before even considering the true rise in the cost of living.

Finally - less by stealth, more like a punch in the gut - national insurance contributions are being raised.

The report tells us what we already know: the government wants to make workers pay for the cost of Covid. The report is correct when it states that those with unearned income should be made to pay. What it doesn't make clear is that it is the capitalist class that collects the overwhelming

majority of 'unearned income'. It is incorrect, as the report does, to pose it as a question of intergenerational conflict.

What is needed is to build intergenerational solidarity of the working class, to build the strongest possible movement to challenge for the wealth hoarded by the bosses. This includes fighting in the trade unions for inflation busting pay rises, but also building a political movement that challenges for the vast wealth hoarded by the capitalist class and fights for socialism.

Coventry bin lorry drivers in bitter fight to defend living standards



Bin workers march through Coventry city centre PHOTO: LENNY SHAIL

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

When striking HGV workers marched to Coventry Council House, no-one was 'available to speak to them'. No surprise to the increasingly angry workforce.

The council has combined employing agency drivers on twice the striking workers' wages with a stream of lies and distortions against the strikers. Speaking at an online rally on 9 February, Unite General Secretary Sharon Graham said of the Labour council: "Time and again totally misrepresenting the union's claims, adding they should be "ashamed of the spin" being used.

"These dreadful misrepresentations are deliberately designed to enrage the general public which directly risks the welfare of workers", she said. "Your behaviour and mistreatment of our members will not be accepted. It's time to act like Labour, be the party for workers."

The council - with dubious legality - is using a private firm it bought two years ago, supposedly to supplement their operations, to be a centre of strike-breaking. It is bullying non-driving crew members into working with the scab agency drivers. The crew's anger is growing.

The workers and their union are responding to this challenge, taking the campaign to the streets of Coventry. The strike committee will make further plans this week to push the strike on to victory.

Workers also vow never to support these shameful Labour councillors again - councillors who have always been quick to grab funds

from Unite, but who now ruthlessly attack its members. Unsurprisingly, the councillors are nowhere to be seen, hiding away behind council officers.

The council's disgraceful policy is a result of years of choosing to fight their own workers and cut the services of the people of Coventry, rather than stand up to government cuts. However, when it comes to employing strike-breakers, the council can afford to pay double. Clearly the money is there to pay drivers a decent wage.

The raised stakes make the Coventry bin dispute of regional and national importance as workers across the country fight to defend their living standards. The workers can win, and need the support of the wider trade union movement.

Left Labour MPs under pressure over Erdington

Zarah Sultana, the Labour MP for Coventry South, is under threat of deselection for being one of the small number of Labour MPs who has publicly called for Jeremy Corbyn to be reinstated as a Labour MP.

Unlike Birmingham Labour MP Steve McCabe, who outrageously compared Unite General Secretary Sharon Graham's support for the Coventry refuse strikers to the way Putin-supporting Russian oligarchs behave in the Tory Party, Zarah Sultana has at least put the emphasis on the Labour council retreating rather than the workers. She said the council should put forward "a new offer" to the strikers, which would meet "their concerns".

Therefore, when she tweeted that there was nothing she'd "rather do on Valentine's Day than door knock in Erdington in the rain" for Paulette Hamilton, she received over 200 angry and disappointed

responses. As one message said, "I live here. Ex-Labour member. Voted and campaigned for Labour in 2017 and 2019. I have the utmost respect for you but how can you knock doors asking people to vote for a party that hates and expels socialists and welcomes Tories. There is an alternative. Vote TUSC. Vote Nellist. I will."

Hamilton, as a Birmingham City Council cabinet member, was responsible for attacking the Birmingham refuse and home-care workers' pay and conditions (see pages 8-9). Yet Zarah Sultana is taking to the streets to argue for a vote for her instead of Dave Nellist, standing for the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition.

With Labour councillors and candidates from across Birmingham instructed to canvass in the Erdington by-election, left Labour MPs are making a mistake if they think that

following orders to campaign for right-wing candidates like Paulette Hamilton will prevent Starmer's Labour trying to get rid of them.

Following the disaffiliation of the bakers' union from Labour, and Unite's withholding of funding in support of the Coventry refuse strike, discussion is beginning in the trade unions on how to create a political voice for the working class.

Therefore, this won't be the last time Labour MPs will face similar choices. Will, for example, Zarah be campaigning for a Starmer-imposed candidate in Islington North against Jeremy Corbyn, should he take the positive step of deciding to stand outside the constraints of Labour?

Come to that, would she be prepared to take the same positive step herself if she is undemocratically deselected by the right-wing Labour machine?



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.

WORK AND INCOME

- Trade union struggle for an immediate increase in the minimum wage to £15 an hour without exemptions. For an annual increase in the minimum wage linked to average earnings. Scrap zero-hour contracts. All workers, including part-timers, temps, casual and migrant workers to have trade union rates of pay, employment protection, and sickness and holiday rights from day one of employment. An immediate 50% increase in the state retirement pension, as a step towards a living pension. Scrap Universal Credit. For the right

to decent benefits, education, training, or a job, without compulsion. Scrap the anti-trade union laws! For fighting trade unions, democratically controlled by their members. Full-time union officials to be regularly elected and receive no more than a worker's wage. Support the National Shop Stewards Network. A 35-hour week with no loss of pay.

ENVIRONMENT

- Major research and investment into replacing fossil fuels with renewable energy and into ending the problems of early obsolescence and un-recycled waste. Public ownership of the energy generating industries. No to nuclear power. No to Trident. A democratically planned, low-fare, publicly owned transport system, as part of an overall plan against environmental pollution.

RIGHTS

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

MASS WORKERS' PARTY

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

SOCIALISM AND INTERNATIONALISM

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

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Met police boss ousted

• No trust in the bosses' establishment

• For democratic working-class control of the police

SARAH SACHS-ELDRIDGE
SOCIALIST PARTY NATIONAL ORGANISER

In September 2021, Cressida Dick was offered a two-year extension to her £230,000-a-year role as Metropolitan Police Commissioner. The decision was made by the Tory Home Secretary, Priti Patel, in consultation with the pro-billionaire Labour London mayor, Sadiq Khan, and Boris Johnson.

Dick was in charge when Jean Charles de Menezes, an innocent man, was killed by Met officers in 2005. But she was appointed commissioner in 2017. In her first year in the role the use of special stop-and-search powers allowing officers to search anyone without suspicion quadrupled, with black and Asian people disproportionately targeted.

Only six months before the extension was offered, the Clapham Common vigil for Sarah Everard, who was raped and murdered by a serving Met officer, took place. Protests at the heavy-handed policing of that event happened afterwards.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, only one in 20 violent crimes has led to a prosecution, and charge rates for rape have fallen from 5.9% to just 1.3%. No wonder trust is plummeting in the police!

But only in February 2022 was Dick told that she had lost the confidence of Khan, and resigned. The straw that broke the camel's back was the lack of a plan to deal with racism, homophobia and sexism within the Met, which had been

particularly exposed in a leaked of-ficers' WhatsApp chat.

No trust in Khan

A row has broken out between Khan and the Police Federation (not a trade union), and a spat between Khan and the Tories over selecting Dick's successor. London's working class can't trust any of these with our safety and our interests. Khan is currently passing on billions of transport cuts to transport workers and passengers - ie carrying through the Tories' agenda of defending the profits of transport bosses.

A change at the top will not transform the Met. Decisions about operational priorities, firing, hiring, training, and funding of the police cannot be left to the police themselves or to capitalist politicians. They ultimately reflect and defend not our interests but the capitalist profit system, a system which is based on exploitation and inequalities of power, wealth, gender and race.

Ending exploitation and inequality, including the discrimination that is prevalent within the police, includes fighting for democratic working-class oversight through local control of the police by the community and trade unions, but also points to the need to transform society along socialist lines.



West Sussex care campaigners' victory

Now let's fight to end all cuts and scrap 'disability tax'

SARAH WELCH
WEST SUSSEX SOCIALIST PARTY

West Sussex Tory council will not cut adult services in 2022 or 2023. Our campaign has certainly made an impact.

But cuts could come in 2024, so we have to keep fighting. In the meantime, we are campaigning against the care charge or, as we call it, the disability tax.

The council says £132 a week for under-25s and £152 for over-25s is enough to live on. Anything disabled residents receive in benefits above this, they have to pay to the local authority.

To claw back a bit of income, people can submit evidence to the council finance department. This involves a lot of time and effort that quite frankly carers do not have.

I cannot tell you how many hours I have spent collating and submitting evidence on behalf of my son. To

go cap in hand to a load of number crunchers is demeaning. They have no empathy towards disability and treat us with contempt.

One mother is dying, and the centre that her son attends is trying to support the family. But the family are being hounded for the care charge, and are not in a position to pay.

Centre staff have told the council of the situation. But the council is adamant it will continue to pursue arrears, as it says it has received no evidence.

Many have stopped accessing support, as they can no longer afford the charge. People are broken and unable to cope. Many have had suicidal thoughts.

Outrageously, the council privatised its finance department in 2012, before deciding that it should be brought back in-house eight years later. A lot of money has been wasted on outsourcing. This shortfall is being passed on to disabled people.

A council committee gave the full council eight months to make an improvement plan - this is a completely inadequate response. It does not appreciate the pain their policy is causing.

There must be an immediate moratorium on the charges. Our aim is to scrap the care charge altogether.

Amanda Jupp, West Sussex council cabinet member for care and health, said: "In most cases, higher charges were due to people having higher incomes than the last time they had been assessed, and most complaints have now been resolved".

This is complete rubbish. Some charges have gone up 400%. Benefits have not gone up by 400%! 'Resolved' complaints for the council means that people have exhausted themselves and given up.

Our campaign, Warrior Carers, is gathering momentum. We have the council on the back foot. The fight goes on, and we are not going away.

Australian nurses strike against understaffing and low pay

JON DALE

Tens of thousands of New South Wales nurses and midwives at 150 hospitals held a one-day strike on 15 February. They were driven to this after years of understaffing has been acutely worsened by Covid. 99% of New South Wales Nurses and Midwives Association branches voted to strike.

The Omicron wave has made workloads unsafe for patients and unsustainable for staff. Working up

to seven consecutive 12-hour shifts without breaks is leading to burn-out. "The only way to get a break is to catch Covid," one nurse said. "The way it's going is unsustainable. We just want to provide safe care to our patients."

They are demanding a maximum of four patients to one nurse, and a pay rise above the 2.5% government offer. Pay was frozen in 2020. A ruling by the Industrial Relations Commission that the strike should not go ahead was ignored.

The nurses marched in Sydney and other towns and cities across the state. Emergency staff levels were maintained at work.

Right-wing coalition

The right-wing coalition government of Liberal and Nationalist parties rejected the demand to increase staffing levels. But New South Wales Labor Party leader Chris Minns also refused to commit to support the nurses' and midwives' demands.

Nurses and midwives need to link with all health workers to demand decent pay and staffing levels. A one-day strike is a warning shot to the government but further action will be needed. This should be built to include all health workers with other trade unions in support. And as Labor's failures show, trade unionists need a new mass workers' party to fight for their interests and the socialist programme needed to properly fund decent health care for all.

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Premature scrapping of Covid restrictions

Fight for full sick pay and trade union control of workplace safety

KATRINE WILLIAMS
CARDIFF EAST SOCIALIST PARTY

Numbers of Covid cases and hospital admissions are at a similar level to February last year. There are still over 200 deaths per day. But, for political reasons, the Tories are using a drop from the record-high Covid case rates to abandon the last of the Covid protections.

The government plans to stop publishing the number of deaths, an inconvenient reminder of their reckless plans. Scrapping self-isolation requirements will cause chaos and increase risks in workplaces and on our health and care services - forcing workers to return to the workplace while they are still unwell and infectious, unable to afford to lose pay.

It is necessary for the trade union movement to resist this latest attack. Employers still have a responsibility to protect our health, safety and welfare. Where trade unions have won full pay for self-isolation and a relaxation of the sickness absence policies for Covid-19 there's been a reduction in overall sickness absence. Workers unwell with cold and flu-like symptoms have stayed away from work to get a Covid test.

'Presenteeism', where workers attend work when sick, means bugs spreading around workplaces like wildfire. Many come in, worried about harsh sickness absence policies and dismissal. Bringing Covid-19 into normal sickness absence policies puts workers even more at risk.

Since December, the government has been reimbursing employers for

the statutory sick pay they have paid to workers who need to self-isolate. But not all workers, especially those on low pay or in bogus self-employment, qualify for the paltry £96.35 per week. The pandemic has shown the need for full-pay for all workers during sickness absence, paid for by the employers; this is what the unions should be fighting for.

The brunt of Covid legislation has taken aim at individuals, not employers. Workers breaching lockdown restrictions face fines up to £10,000, the same applies to employers. With the end of self-isolation rules, the government wants to ditch this limited measure which could be used to pressure bosses to keep workplaces safe.

But the most effective fights for Covid safety have been organised by workers, health workers' fights for PPE at the beginning of the pandemic, and the teachers refusal to work in unsafe schools in January 2021. The battle continues for workplace ventilation and other measures to keep us safe at work.

Our trade union movement must campaign and mobilise collectively to ensure that workers are not put into danger. We should fight for:

- Supportive sickness absence policies and full pay for workers when sick to keep all viruses out of the workplace
- Proper ventilation of workplaces and public spaces, subject to trade union-agreed ventilation standards
- No forced return to the workplace. Return only when safe, with agreement from trade unions
- Maintain access to free Covid testing for all



Government hypocrisy

Just weeks ago the government was insisting that tens of thousands of NHS staff, including outsourced

workers, should be sacked on 1 April if they had not had the first two doses of the Covid vaccine.

Now they are saying they may scrap all Covid restrictions in late February, a month earlier than planned, including the legal duty to self-isolate for people who test positive for Covid!

This underlines the utter hypocrisy of the government. No wonder many people have lost trust in government advice on Covid. Not only do large parts of the government not follow their own rules, but they are in total confusion.

NHS WORKER

Neither Washington, London nor Moscow



Labour Party leader Keir Starmer has declared his devotion to Nato - the US-led Western powers' military organisation, established during the period of the 'Cold War' with the former Soviet Union.

Starmer visited Nato HQ in Brussels at the start of February to express his party's loyalty to the Western alliance in the latter's conflict with Putin and the developing East-West geopolitical struggle in Ukraine. "The Labour Party support for Nato is unshakable", he grovelled.

Starmer also took the opportunity to round on former left Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn. He attacked Corbyn's political opposition to Nato and for speaking at a Stop the War Coalition online meeting.

"Some on the left may be sympathetic to those siren voices who condemn Nato. But to condemn Nato is to condemn the guarantee of democracy and security it brings," claimed Starmer.

Well, Jeremy Corbyn might have

something to say about Starmer's 'democratic' credentials, having been suspended as a Labour Party MP on spurious grounds.

More broadly, Starmer should explain Nato's 'guarantor of democratic rights' to women, trade unionists and oppressed minorities in Nato countries such as Poland and Turkey, whose authoritarian governments are relentlessly stripping away democratic rights.

He should also tell that to the relatives of the tens of thousands of civilians blown apart by bombs from Nato forces and affiliates, in Afghanistan, Iraq, and so on.

And yes, genuine socialists do condemn the rotten Putin regime and its assault on democratic rights, both in Russia and elsewhere. This includes Putin's export of repression - seen in Belarus, where the pro-Moscow despot Lukashenko stole the 2020 election; and in the workers' uprising in Kazakhstan this January, where Putin sent troops to

help crush the revolt against dictator Tokayev.

It is capitalism and imperialism that has a long and inglorious history of oppressing the working class and poor people on this planet. In contradistinction, socialists - not to be confused with Stalinists - are, and always have been, to the fore in fighting for democratic rights and an end to war.

Ukraine

Western political leaders have been sounding the alarm of potential Russian military invasion of Ukraine for weeks. As the Socialist goes to press, there are reports of Russia withdrawing some troops from the border. For socialist analysis of the developing situation in Ukraine visit socialistworld.net, including article 'Workers' unity needed to resist war, and end inequality and poverty'.

Barts NHS strike

First round of solid action ends - all out again on 28 February

LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

Following two weeks of solid strike action by 600 workers with big, bold and angry picket lines, the Barts hospital strike in east London has ended - for now.

The workers, who provide essential services as cleaners, porters, patient food catering workers, reception staff, and security guards, work in the NHS on a contract run by private company Serco. As well as fighting for an improved pay rise, 15% for all NHS workers, they are fighting to bring the contract back in-house.

Serco has given the NHS Trust 18 months' notice that it will be ending its contract in April 2023. It has made huge profits over the years by driving down the conditions of outsourced staff and keeping pay low.

Serco Group PLC had a turnover

of £3.9 billion last year but the multinational has eventually offered just a 3% pay 'hike'. The staff, which include cleaners and porters, are paid up to 15% less than directly employed NHS staff.

Picket lines have been huge, and strikers have been attending rallies at each hospital to bring the pickets together. The latest was a tremendous rally at Barts hospital on 9 February. The strike action has also encouraged more workers across the hospitals to get organised, and new reps have come forward.

Socialist Party members have been down to support the pickets every day and encouraged other trade unionists and campaigners to come. Other staff, patients and passers-by have all given enthusiastic support to the fight.

We say: bring services back



Unite members are set to take more strike action over pay and conditions PHOTO PAUL MATTSOON

in-house now! The Barts' bosses should be held accountable for the disaster which privatisation has

mean for the staff. The Barts workers will start a further fortnight of action on 28

February. Socialist Party members in East London will continue to stand with them on the picket lines.

National Education Union strike at girls' school chain over pensions

1,500 members of the National Education Union (NEU) at 23 independent schools within the Girls' Day School Trust (GDST) have taken strike action over plans to withdraw staff from the 'Teachers' Pension Scheme'. Socialist Party members joined them on picket lines.

Nottingham

Jean Thorpe, Nottingham Socialist Party member, spoke to Emma Furness, NEU shop steward at Nottingham Girls' High School.

"This is the first strike here in 149 years! The issue is pensions. The employer is threatening firing and rehiring us to get through a massive attack on our pensions. They are threatening to withdraw from the Teachers' Pension Scheme and replace it with one through Aviva that would leave the average teacher 20% worse off in retirement. There was a brilliant ballot turnout - an 84% turnout with a 95% yes vote. We have four picket lines today."

Northampton

Picketers lined the roads outside Northampton High School on 10 February as teachers stood together in solidarity against attacks on their pensions. There was a noticeable display of support from every HGV driver who passed the pickets.

Northampton High School is part of a chain of GDST independents. The company intends to slash pensions through removal of membership from the Teachers' Pension Scheme (TPS) and threatened fire-and-rehire tactics if this move was resisted. All before any consultation with the staff.

One teacher said: "A contract used to be binding, forever, now they just tear them up."

One of the NEU organisers told us this is the first strike for this school which had an even bigger turnout.



NEU members picket Northwood College for Girls, London PHOTO STEVE HARBORD

The majority on the picket lines were women. When I asked one teacher what her pupils thought of the strikes she said: "I consider it part of my role to teach the girls to stand up for themselves, what kind of example

would I be setting if I didn't fight?"

Five further days of action are planned for the 23-24 February and the 1, 2 and 3 March.

KATIE SIMPSON
NORTHAMPTON SOCIALIST PARTY

Just Eat strike spreads and forces concessions from bosses

The Just Eat/Stuart delivery drivers strike is spreading. Couriers in Middlesbrough and Dewsbury have joined the action, with drivers in Leicester meeting to plan action. Chesterfield and Sunderland couriers have rejoined the strike, and hopefully Blackpool will as well. This is now the longest running gig economy strike in UK history, starting in Sheffield on 6 December last year, and spreading.

The dispute involves self-employed, largely black, Asian and migrant workers, some organised in the independent IWGB union.

They are taking targeted strike action against Just Eat's biggest clients McDonald's, Greggs and others, to put pressure

on Stuart, the delivery contractor for Just Eat takeaways, to reverse its 24% cut in the base pay rate imposed before Christmas.

This inspiring and often exciting action has already forced concessions from Stuart, such as the promised restoration of paid waiting times. However, Stuart, which does not recognise the union and has previously never even engaged with the IWGB, has not yet shifted on pay. So the union and Sheffield strike leaders are intensifying and spreading the action.

There are plans for a national day of action in support of the Just Eat strike to try to reach into more towns and cities.

SHEFFIELD SOCIALIST PARTY

Join the scaffs mass picket at Scunthorpe steelworks

On 22 February, all roads will lead to Scunthorpe's steelworks, but none will get in! A mass demonstration and picket of the site has been called by Unite, the union representing the 60 scaffolders employed by contractor Actavo, who will be in their 16th week of indefinite strike action demanding the industry rate for the job.

Twice before, the scaffs have blockaded the main site entrance gate, stopping traffic getting in and jamming the roads around.

The union leverage campaign intensifies with early morning flying pickets visiting scabbing firms Altrad, High Peak and Brand. Scaffolders and construction workers have refused to cross picket lines at

nearby Lindsey Oil Refinery, Keadby power station and VPI Chemicals.

Striking scaffs and Unite organisers have toured Ireland and Scotland to expose Actavo's billionaire boss and major shareholder Denis O'Brien, and to gather support among workers for their dispute and the national day of action on 22 February. O'Brien is a Celtic supporter whose fans have also protested in solidarity with the scaffs.

Join the mass demonstration in support of the longest running current strike in the country - from 6am to 10am, Gate D, Brigg Road, Scunthorpe Steel Works, DN16 1DL.

ALISTAIR TICE

Workshop Wincanton workers win pay rise after strike

450 Unite members in Worksop, North Notts, have returned to work after winning a much improved pay deal. Wincanton, the logistics company running the B&Q depot, had originally offered 4%.

Week-long strikes started in November, and were escalated to a continuous strike after Christmas. Large and lively pickets kept morale high. As B&Q stores started running low, Wincanton returned to talk with the union.

The workers have accepted a 6.75% rise backdated to last July, with a £200

bonus, worth 10.75% in all.

Senior rep Patrick McGrath told the Socialist: "Worksop is the only site on the B&Q contract not tied to a two-year deal. Hopefully, when they come back around the table this year, the company will make a decent offer which reflects the true cost of living and have learned that their workforce are not prepared to accept under-inflation pay offers, and most certainly not by companies boasting record profits."

JOHN DALE
MANSFIELD SOCIALIST PARTY

University workers striking back

Ten days of action begins in the pensions and 'Four Fights' disputes

Workers at 44 universities in the University and College Union (UCU) walked out on 14 February after bosses refused to withdraw cuts to the Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS). University management organisation UUK's proposals, which will see 35% cut from the guaranteed retirement income of members, are set to be formalised on 22 February.

On 22 February strike action over pay and working conditions will also start, with 24 further universities joining the action, bringing the overall total to 68 universities.

This dispute is over a 20% real-terms pay cut over the past 12 years, unmanageable workloads, pay inequality, and the use of exploitative and insecure contracts. Altogether, more than 50,000 staff are striking. Unison members at ten unis are also taking action on pay and pensions.

Socialist Party members joined the picket lines, including:



Socialist Party member Oisín Mulholland showing solidarity on the UCU picket line at Swansea University

Leeds

UCU members were back out on the picket lines at the University of Leeds in their long-running dispute over attacks on their pension scheme.

Despite the inclement weather, a number of first-time picketers took part in this first day of ten days of strike action.

Several of those striking saw the dispute as about more than just their pensions, saying that if university bosses get away with attacking these, other employers could see it as a green light to attack their workers' pensions too.

IAIN DALTON
LEEDS SOCIALIST PARTY



A confident UCU picket line at the University of Nottingham PHOTO GARY FREEMAN

Swansea

Swansea Socialist Students and Socialist Party members joined the UCU picket line at Singleton campus, supporting university staff against cuts to pay and pensions. Socialist Students and Socialist Party member Oisín Mulholland addressed the strikers about how they can link up with students in the upcoming student walkout on 2 March.

SWANSEA SOCIALIST STUDENTS

Birmingham

The latest round of strikes by lecturers to defend pensions has begun, and Socialist Students were out in Birmingham showing solidarity with them.

Scandalously, the university is now threatening to dock 50% of the pay of lecturers who don't reschedule lectures cancelled due to the strike.

Victory to the lecturers in their campaign for decent pay, pensions and learning conditions!

BIRMINGHAM SOCIALIST STUDENTS

London

Socialist Party members joined picket lines at Queen Mary University, King's College London, and Goldsmiths College in London. Stop the UUK pension cut! End low pay, job insecurity, high workload and inequality in universities!

LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

Sheffield

The Socialist Party supported the UCU pensions' strike at Sheffield University, at five picket lines. The UCU strikers held a joint rally with the Just Eat couriers' strike.

ALISTAIR TICE
SHEFFIELD SOCIALIST PARTY

Future strike plans

The full strike dates, with numbers of institutions involved, are:

Week 1 - (USS pension dispute only, 44 institutions): 5 days; Monday 14 to Friday 18 February

Week 2 - (both the pension and the pay & working conditions dispute, 68 institutions): 2 days; Monday 21 and Tuesday 22 February

Week 3 - (pay & working conditions dispute only, 63 institutions): 3 days; Monday 28 February, Tuesday 1 and Wednesday 2 March

● Read more about the strike at 'Support the university strikes!' at socialistparty.org.uk

"If we don't fight, we won't win!"

Strike action in education on pay needed

SHEILA CAFFREY
NEU NATIONAL EXECUTIVE MEMBER
(PERSONAL CAPACITY)

Gas and electric bills up 30%. National Insurance increasing soon. Rent, mortgage and food costs continuing to skyrocket. Yet pay stays the same.

In real terms, this means pay cuts. No-one should have to make a choice between heating or travel costs, rent or food, but this is the reality for many workers. Unions are feeling this pressure from their members and are having to start to show some signs of action.

The National Education Union surveyed support staff before Christmas and teacher members this month. Socialist Party members in the union had been instrumental in calling for

action, and were pleased that this would be a first step towards more meaningful action. We outlined in January that a 25% turnout would be a step towards the 50% needed in a formal ballot, and would help us to identify what to do next.

Well, we got a 28% turnout, with a clear mandate of over 70% of members willing to strike, an excellent start to a national campaign for a union that has been (understandably) very focused on school-based defence of health and safety over the last couple of years.

Unfortunately, the confidence of the leadership of the union is very low. In a recent emergency executive meeting, it was continually repeated that members weren't confident and that 28% would be an embarrassment

in a ballot. Instead, it was suggested that, as this was a two-year pay deal, it would give us two years to fight back, and that we should concentrate on model letters to MPs, local days of action and looking to organise a national demo with the TUC against the cost-of-living crisis.

But is this the actual fightback we need? Although cross-union, mass mobilisations are good for publicity and boosting morale, do they make much difference to the government or big business?

Ultimately, we need to hit them where it hurts - in their profits! And that is why Socialist Party members on the national executive of the National Education Union, along with other activists in the Education Solidarity Network, put forward a clear



timeline of events and discussions that would build up to a ballot for striking in July.

Trying to overturn budgets in every school following an announcement from the government will be extremely difficult. We believe that by continuing to build on the momentum we've already begun, coupled with the demos, publicity, the reality of bill increases, and good union organising, we could achieve the turn-out needed.

Some executive members who voted against our timeline tried to justify their position by saying they would call for a strike at the 'earliest opportunity'. But as this was supported

by claims of knowing when the time would be right in their gut, and talking about next year, it is clear that these are words only, and not the call to action that the 200,000 teachers who responded to the survey clearly wanted.

If we don't fight, we won't win! We need to show the government (and our members) that we are serious about winning what we deserve.

We call on activists in education who are serious about fighting against the pay cuts to join us and keep up the pressure to move to meaningful industrial action this year to achieve the pay rise that is needed for all education staff.

Birmingham Erdington by-election

SHAKING UP THE ESTABLISHMENT

For a £15 an hour minimum wage now. End zero-hour contracts

For an immediate 50% increase in state pensions and benefits

For rent control and a major building programme of high-quality council homes

Abolish the anti-trade union laws

Combat climate change, including with a free-to-use expanded public transport system, instead of congestion charges

Stop the cost of living squeeze! Wage rises for all that at least keep pace with inflation

Save our NHS. No cuts, closures or privatisation. Free social care for all

Renationalise energy companies, rail, Royal Mail and the other privatised utilities

For free education for all, from nursery to university. Abolish tuition fees now

For a socialist society, where the economy is planned sustainably and run democratically

KRIS O'SULLIVAN
BIRMINGHAM NORTH SOCIALIST PARTY

“You'll be sending someone who is the working-class enemy of the Westminster elite, to completely shake up the establishment top to bottom, a worker's MP on a worker's wage - someone who can't be bought by the system.”

This is a snippet of what was said at the public launch meeting of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) candidate in the Erdington by-election in Birmingham, Dave Nellist.

The enthusiasm and energy in a packed-out room in a local Erdington community centre was palpable, the prospect of a truly anti-austerity pro-worker candidate had brought over 80 people across the constituency and city together.

There were representatives and members present from local saving green space campaigns, tenants unions, community watch groups, local media, trade unions etc.

It became very clear during the meeting, the one thing that tied all the local campaign groups and different working-class communities together - people want an alternative! They are sick and tired of the same old Tory



A worker's MP on a worker's wage - someone who can't be bought by the system

sleaze and betrayals by Labour.

Erdington, like many parts of Birmingham, was seen as a Labour 'safe seat' for decades, and as such was taken for granted by the party. Many people in the meeting said how they only ever saw Labour around election time. This is in stark contrast to the Socialist Party, local constituent member of TUSC, which is out campaigning in Erdington every week, all year round, fighting to save jobs and services against the vicious austerity cuts passed on by the Labour council.

Tenants union and local housing group members asked what TUSC and Dave will do about the housing

crisis in the constituency. It was clearly stated that TUSC will fight for the right of every person to have a roof over their heads. On a grassroots and national level TUSC will campaign for a public works programme of mass affordable social house building based on needs not private profits, and for a compulsory register of all landlords in the city. Many in the room were shocked to find out that several current Birmingham councillors are themselves landlords!

People came to the meeting to listen to Dave and the socialist ideas he was putting forward because of the lack of faith they have that either the Tory or Labour candidate will be

prepared to fight on behalf of ordinary workers. As a member of the union Unison pointed out, it was only a couple of years ago that the Labour candidate for Erdington, Councillor Paulette Hamilton, was leading the attacks on the low-paid Birmingham homecare workers!

TUSC can be the major minor party in this election, building on the support of regular working-class people who are flooding in to back Dave's campaign, donating their money and their time, campaigning every day - morning, noon and night in all weathers - for a socialist alternative to big business and establishment sleaze.

COVENTRY STRIKER AND SENIOR UNITE REP PETE RANDLE SENT A MESSAGE TO THE LAUNCH OF DAVE'S CAMPAIGN:

"I'm a striking HGV driver from Coventry, under attack from the Labour council. Dave has stood on the picket line with us, showing he is for workers; he is for the people in a community. He is honest and if you have the opportunity to have Dave as your MP he is for you."



CORINTHIA WARD
BIRMINGHAM NORTH SOCIALIST PARTY

On my way back home from the high street I walk up a road so dimly lit I can barely see the broken pavement where, after years of neglect, the tree roots have eroded the surface. I turn the corner to my road and up against the side of my neighbour's house someone has left broken furniture and bags of rubbish. A few months ago, one of the vulnerable tenants placed in my road died from an overdose.

This could be any inner-city working-class suburb across the country, torn apart by years of austerity. But this is Erdington in Birmingham - a town currently under the spotlight because a parliamentary by-election is taking place here on 3 March. And Dave Nellist is standing as the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition candidate to 'shake up the establishment'.

Erdington is a marginal seat which voted for Brexit. Labour won by only 3,601 votes in the 2019 general election. There is a lot of frustration and anger here - at both central and local government.

And how could people not be angry? £730 million has so far been gutted from public services in Birmingham. Because Erdington is a poorer working-class area these cuts have hit the community especially hard.

When in 2010 the Conservative and Liberal Democrat coalition leading the council made cuts, the Labour Party councillors criticised the sheer brutality of the austerity. But after the 2012 local elections, when the Labour Party won a majority on the council, Labour councillors went ahead with planned cuts anyway. Since then, the Labour-led council has set a further £85 million in cuts to be implemented by 2023.

£730m
The amount that has so far been gutted from public services in Birmingham

The scale of these cuts means that the council, once one of Birmingham's biggest employers with over 21,000 staff, has almost halved that number to just over 12,000. These fresh attacks will see an additional 1,500 staff gone by next year. This skeleton crew of staff is expected to look after the largest council in Europe with a city population of over 1.1 million.

Some of these new savings will come from dimming street lighting and shortening the time it is switched on. Fees for bulky and green waste collections will be increased while fly-tipping enforcement resources will be reduced. It was only in 2017 that bin workers won a victory defending health and safety roles on the trucks via strike action. Now the council has found new attacks on the waste management service.

Arts and cultural organisations will lose £1 million in funding; since 2010 spending on cultural and related services has already been slashed by 44.4%. Paulette Hamilton, Labour council cabinet member and the Labour candidate for the Erdington by-election, must have forgotten about this last figure. In a recent social media post she praised the Erdington Arts community group while doing a promotional visit!

Adult social care

Councillor Hamilton has been cabinet member for health and social care since May 2015. Under her watch, by April 2025 cuts to adult social care funding will amount to £7.8 million a year. She has also proposed plans to increase some existing charges while also introducing new charges on other services.

In 2018, a bitter campaign broke out over saving Fairway Day Centre in another Birmingham constituency. This is a place for disabled service users to go and engage in activities while

also giving their family members some respite. There are a few of these day centres scattered across the city.

In February 2020 Councillor Hamilton and the Labour Party were holding meetings announcing they were planning to close a number of these centres in order to promote 'independent living'. The Covid pandemic happened a month later and the council closed all the centres.

Since then, the local news has reported how service users have deteriorated without the service, suffering failing mental health, violent outbursts and increased self-harm. The council has not yet announced if it intends to keep the service running.

Ex-Birmingham council chief Mark Rogers acknowledged that eligibility for adult social care has been restricted so that only people with "substantial and critical" needs now receive help: "We are having to be much more stringent about that eligibility. We get the legitimate criticism that people providing home care support are only there for 15 minutes."

It was the hollowing out of services which led to home care workers in 2018 taking nearly 50 days of strike action over a period of 20 months. New rotas were being imposed which meant they would have three-hour gaps between service-user visits as well as pay cuts equalling some £11,000 per year.

Councillor Hamilton condemned the service that her party had helped diminish! The home carers even collectively created new rotas which met all the council's demands but with minimal pay cuts. The council accepted these new rotas only to reject them a few months later. The home carers were eventually victorious in 2019 but it wasn't without a long and vicious battle, with some of the workers being locked out of the council house during a protest.

Housing crisis & domestic abuse

Cuts to homelessness prevention services is one of the reasons why rough sleeping in the city has quadrupled since 2010. In 2019, 20% of homelessness cases in Birmingham were domestic abuse related.

There are no council-led women's refuge services in Birmingham, they are all charity-based. Birmingham City Council has donated a pitiful one-off £350,000 to support just 60 spaces for women. And yet from April to October last year, Birmingham and Solihull Women's Aid had over 19,200 calls and 1,150 webchats.

These 60 spaces are not enough. Women fleeing domestic abuse are being placed in the burgeoning market of 'support living' - unregulated, hostel-style accommodation. In some cases women are having to share houses with perpetrators of domestic abuse.

Between 2010 and 2017, spending on housing was slashed by 53.8% in real terms. Any new houses built haven't been affordable council homes but luxury flats, or they have been built via property developers who were sold the dwindling green spaces around the city.

The local community wants to work with the council to tackle the housing crisis, but it should not be at the expense of the limited greenery which working-class areas have.

Short Heath playing fields is one of these green spaces which had been under attack in Erdington, but a community group so far has been able to keep the developers at bay.

Youth services slashed

Birmingham is the youngest city in Europe. Under-25s make up nearly 40% of the population. Yet the services for young people are near non-existent. Since 2011, 43 youth centres have been closed, including the one

in Erdington. The 16 still open are under threat.

In 2019, just £1.9 million was spent on youth services, with just 39 full-time youth workers; that's one worker per 3,800 10-19 year olds. During this same period there's been an 85% increase in knife crime alone, with young people being most likely to be both victims and perpetrators.

Education and children's services

Birmingham schools are having to close early in the week due to cuts in funding, and thousands of jobs are currently at risk as the council plans to scrap school nurses. And since 2010, 12 council-run nurseries have closed and 14 handed over to the private and charity sectors.

This is alongside the closure of 21 children's centres, with only seven kept open through alternative ownership. The council's own findings last year show that 42% of Birmingham children are growing up in poverty. The absence of these nurseries and centres have hit the poorest areas hardest.

The council's five children's homes were privatised to the Priory Group (a celebrity rehab firm) in 2016 for a £40 million contract. These homes looked after some of the most vulnerable and overlooked children in the city, including children who had suffered sexual abuse.

By 2020 the Priory had run the homes into the ground and closed all five of them with a loss of around 80 jobs. All children had to be found alternative housing in the private sector.

In 2018, Birmingham City Council transferred all its remaining children's services except schools into a trust, and in January this year the trust came under fire for placing children in unregistered care homes.

£976m
The amount that Birmingham council has in reserves

Political alternative needed

These listed cuts may seem bleak, and sadly this is only a few of them. But we can conclude that when a fightback is made, a victory is possible. The bin workers, home-care workers and Short Heath community campaigners are just some examples of those who stood up and won.

Let's use the Erdington by-election as the starting ground for building a new fightback and pushing the socialist struggle forward!

The need for a political alternative for Birmingham has never been greater than it is today. The Labour council has proven it will not stand up for working-class people. So it's up to socialists, trade unionists and community campaigners to fight for working-class political representation.

That is why Birmingham Socialist Party, as well as standing Dave Nellist as a TUSC candidate in Erdington, will be contesting the local elections on 5 May. And we are also encouraging local trade unionists, community and social campaigners to stand too.

We are campaigning for the setting of no-cuts budgets which reflect the real needs of the local community: using council reserves - of which Birmingham has £976 million - and prudential borrowing in the short term to keep services funded, while building a mass campaign for more funding from central government.

Birmingham City Council isn't scared to use prudential borrowing powers for its vanity projects such as the Commonwealth Games and Grand Central Station - just when it comes to social care, youth and the other services working-class people need!

Let's build the fightback now.

Do you agree?
JOIN THE CAMPAIGN
nellistforerdington.com



East Sussex: Poverty and cuts bring people to Socialist Party

JAMES ELLIS
EAST SUSSEX SOCIALIST PARTY

38% of children in Hastings are in poverty. Neighbouring Eastbourne doesn't fare much better - 33%. These are some of the worst child poverty figures in the south of England, well above national average.

The reality is probably worse. These statistics do not include the impact of the recent rise in energy prices, the cruel slashing of Universal Credit by £20 a week, and soaring inflation. Average rents went up by 10% in Hastings in 2021, compared to an average 4.2% rise across the south east.

What is our Labour council proposing to tackle this? It is making further cuts of £465,000 - in addition to the £446,000 it cut in 2021. The local Conservative opposition, far from focusing on 'levelling up', seem to relish the cuts by portraying council budgets as wasteful spending.

The Labour cabinet minister for finance had the cheek to suggest that, despite the cuts, public finances were in a "relatively good place". What a shameful thing to say! There is nothing 'relatively good' about 38% of children living in poverty.



James (left) and the Socialist Party campaigning in nearby by Folkestone

In this context, it is hardly surprising that a lot of people in the area have been contacting the Socialist Party asking about becoming a member. We already had Socialist Party branches in Brighton and Kent, and have recently launched a branch in West Sussex. And we want to build a new branch in East Sussex, covering Hastings and Eastbourne.

People are looking for an alternative to the grinding misery that capitalism offers working people. Labour offers no alternative. Many of our newer members are ex-Labour Party members, disgusted by the direction taken by Keir Starmer.

Key to tackling child poverty are

demands such as a £15-an-hour minimum wage and rent controls. Councils should be stepping in to alleviate child poverty too. They should set needs budgets by using their borrowing powers, while building community campaigns to win more funding from national government.

This is what East Sussex Socialist Party will be fighting for in our campaigning, as well as the socialist transformation of society, the only way to end child poverty for good.

Do you agree?
JOIN THE SOCIALISTS
socialistparty.org.uk/join

Save St Mary's Leisure Centre Is Southampton council working for people or asset strippers?

SAVE SMLC PRESS RELEASE

Closed before Xmas, the Tory council in Southampton locked out hundreds of users from St Mary's Leisure Centre (SMLC) halfway through a council consultation on its future.

86% of the 1,758 of people who responded oppose the closure. Yet council leader Daniel Fitzhenry said the result would be ignored, the centre will close, and the land sold to developers.

Council cabinet member for finance, John Hannides, says: "If you are going to pay a significant amount

of public money, you have to be able to justify where you are spending it." We asked, how much money?

The council budget for 2022-23 is £213 million. The funding for the leisure centre is £148,000 - less than 0.001% of council spending!

Is the council's priority providing leisure and health facilities to the Southampton community? Or are they asset strippers working for the property developers?

Councillor Hannides says the long-term future of the building will require 'millions' in investment, but has no evidence to back his phantom figures.

Solent University does not provide access to the same facilities as priority goes to students and staff. Neither does the council have any control over Solent University.

St Mary's Leisure Centre remains safe to use, and we call on the council to immediately reopen the centre, while conducting a full survey of the building which then can be the basis of a genuine assessment of the long-term life of the building.

- Join the march - Saturday 19 February, 11am, assemble at SMLC at the top of Clovelly Road, and march to the Bargate



AUTONOMOUS WINTER COLLECTIVE

Stop eviction of Camden homeless collective

NICK AUVACHE
UNITE HOUSING WORKERS

A collective of homeless people is facing eviction. They took over a disused hostel owned by One Housing Group (OHG). They have called a protest for 17 February.

Ironically, this building - in Clerkenwell, London - was initially owned by homelessness charity St Mungo's. St Mungo's then sold it to OHG.

It is a scandal that such a resource, owned by organisations claiming to care about homelessness, has been unoccupied for so long, while people die on the streets. Official figures show that one homeless person dies every month in the London Borough of Camden. The reality is obviously higher.

The only contact that the occupants have received from OHG is the eviction order. Without any hint of irony, OHG's director for health-care, Martin D'Mello, said: "One of our priorities... is helping to address London's growing problem with rough sleeping."

OHG claim that it wants to develop the building, which is good news. But

this does not mean that they need to evict people.

If repairs require decanting the occupation, this should be done in consultation with the people who live there. When Unite housing workers and the Social Housing Action Campaign (Shac) visited the building, we were welcomed by residents.

They have repaired the bedrooms, bathrooms and kitchens. Not only have they provided shelter for approximately 25 people, they also took additional homeless people in during the coldest winter nights.

Instead of being evicted, these people should be praised for the work they have done. OHG should make amends by speaking to the occupants.

Camden council should instruct OHG to reach an agreement with the residents, failing which the council should take over the building itself, and discuss directly how it can help the existing residents.

OHG behaviour comes as no surprise. OHG treats its workers and tenants with equal contempt.

- Protest outside OHG's main offices, 64 Pratt Street, NW1 0DL, Thursday 17 February, 12pm

SOCIALIST PARTY FIGHTING FUND

AREA	£ RECEIVED	£ TARGET	Q1: JANUARY-MARCH 2022	DEADLINE: 30 MARCH 2022
Yorkshire	1,059	2,550	42%	
South West	679	1,800	38%	
East Midlands	661	1,850	36%	
Wales	813	2,300	35%	
West Midlands	456	2,600	18%	
London	698	4,600	15%	
Southern & SE	349	2,350	15%	
Northern	105	750	14%	
Eastern	777	1,200	6%	
North West	30	3,850	3%	
Other	165	1,150	4%	
TOTAL	5,091	25,000	20%	

• Fund us to fight for socialism

Socialist Party branches are doing campaign stalls and other activity to help us hit our quarterly fighting fund target of £25,000. We are currently on 20%. Can you help either by going to one of the Socialist Party stalls near you to raise socialist ideas and fighting fund, or making a donation yourself?

Alongside this, the Socialist

Party has launched a subs campaign to increase the regular financial contributions of our members. The membership subs of every member is the bedrock of our party. It is the stable steady income that ensures that we have the resources needed to fight for a socialist transformation of society.

In the many pages of our paper, the Socialist, you will see the campaigns, strikes and workers' struggle that we are involved in. We are putting resources into the Erdington by-election to fight for the working-class

political representation that is urgently needed (see pages 8, 9 and 11).

If you are already a member, can you increase your monthly subs by a small amount to help reach our subs target? If you are not a member, but agree with us, what are you waiting for? Join the Socialist Party today.

ISAI PRIYA
SOCIALIST PARTY NATIONAL TREASURER

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

JOE FOSTER
ERDINGTON RESIDENT AND BIRMINGHAM NORTH SOCIALIST PARTY

Worker we met said: "These MPs with two homes when some can't get one are a disgrace". They are now out leafletting with us for Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) candidate Dave Nellist. On every canvass in the Birmingham Erdington by-election campaign, we are getting positive responses.

The constituency has the eighth lowest turnout in the country; that's confirmed by those saying that they don't vote. But people are pleased to see a party that offers a genuine anti-establishment alternative.

One woman answering the door said: "Give me some of those leaflets to give out at work, that's what we've all been saying, we need a new party". Another remarked: "My dad's a socialist, but you can't say the same about Labour anymore".

Volunteers

So far, all of Stockland Green has been canvassed and leafleted - along with inroads elsewhere, that represents a quarter of the constituency. Socialist Party members have been out alongside supporters of Resist, including former Labour MP Chris Williamson, leading activists from trade unions - RMT, FBU, NEU, PCS, Usdaw - and volunteers from far and near.

As well as outnumbering Labour and Tory canvassing teams on the ground, we're also outdoing them on social media. Our Facebook and Twitter accounts attracted thousands of followers within the first week of the campaign, and hundreds of people are engaging with daily updates, showing the huge appetite for the pro-worker policies we're putting

Campaigning in Birmingham Erdington by-election 'Give me those leaflets, that's what we've all been saying'



LEWNY SHAH

Why I'm going to Socialist Students conference



NOAH EDEN
SHEFFIELD SOCIALIST STUDENTS

The financial screws are tightening on students. The government is freezing the threshold when students start to repay their loans, as opposed

to raising it in line with inflation, meaning they will have to pay more.

I have been an avid Socialist Students member since I joined - visiting and supporting strikes both on campus and outside of uni. Socialist Students conference, 26 February, is our chance to participate in the fight

back against the unfair marketisation of universities, campaign for free, democratised and good quality higher education, and help organise the 2 March student walkout called by the National Union of Students (NUS).

Inflation is reducing the value of student loans, meaning that the government is unfairly taking £2.3 billion from students. The parental earnings threshold has been frozen at £25,000, when it should have risen to £34,000, so fewer students are receiving what they deserve in maintenance loans. On top of all this, maintenance loans are set to increase by 2.3%, which is below inflation, meaning another real-terms pay cut for students.

We can build a socialist fightback and end the conditions that we have had to endure from both Tory and Labour governments. Under Jeremy Corbyn, students got a glimmer of hope of what a fair and proper education system could look like. But Labour has returned to its Tory-lite policies under Keir Starmer.

The Socialist Students conference has moved to Birmingham. So we'll also get a chance to campaign for Dave Nellist in the Birmingham Erdington by-election. Socialist Party member Dave Nellist is the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) candidate - standing to be a workers' MP on a worker's wage (see pages 8-9).

- Visit socialiststudents.org.uk to sign up for updates about the conference

Socialist Students - campaigning to make 2 March walkout happen

JOSH BOYLE
BRIGHTON SOCIALIST STUDENTS

Our march in Brighton on 2 March - from Moulscobm campus to the Level - will be a show of force that we do not support the marketisation of our education, we do not support further degradation of staff working conditions, and we do not support exploitation of postgraduate-research students as cheap labour.

The march is organised by teaching staff in the University and College Union (UCU), support workers in Union, and Socialist Students. UCU and Unison are walking out on 1-2 March - part of national strikes.

Infamously, Brighton Students' Union has taken an anti-strike stance in previous years. But we are organising an open letter to get the student union to represent our views.

We plan to use a diversity of tactics: joining the striking picket line, encouraging students to sign our

forward. A young woman worker who saw TUSC on Twitter has also helped the campaign, and has now joined the Socialist Party.

A council tenant said: "The council would not do a repair because they suspected kitchen fittings were installed by myself". I have the same problem getting my repairs!

One woman we met is next door to a multiple occupancy house for supported tenants that police are constantly being called to. The local councillor would not provide any solutions. The woman was not unsympathetic to the tenants, but angry at the £900-plus granted to landlords to supposedly provide support.

Pay and homes

Against these potential divisions between long-standing residents and those trapped in insecure and sub-standard bedsits, we put forward the need to fight for building high-quality, affordable council housing to ensure everyone has somewhere decent to call home.

In a relatively better-off area, a woman with a partner was holding down two jobs. Her anger at first was directed at "those on benefits", but we countered this with our policies of a £15-an-hour minimum wage and for wages to rise at least in line with inflation.

As well as campaigning on the issues facing working-class people in Erdington in the here and now, TUSC is standing to provide a programme to build a new workers' party to make these demands a reality. At last our message is getting out there.

- Campaign with us in Erdington nellistforerdington.com/join

Like, comment, share
facebook.com/
CWISocialistParty

open letter, teach outs, direct action, building a protest against council cuts with the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC). And we are organising joint action with Sussex students.

TUSC public meeting

- What do you want from Brighton council?
- Tuesday 22 February, 7pm, Phoenix Community Centre, 2 Phoenix Place, BN2 9ND

Brighton protest

- No to all cuts - for a council budget that meets the needs of people
- Thursday 24 February, 4pm, Kings Road, Brighton Centre/Hove Town Hall, BN1 2GR

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

From our history: 1972 miners' strike

The battle of Saltley Gate



BILL MULLINS
FORMER CARWORKER
AND PICKET AT SALTLEY GATES

Fifty years ago, the miners' strike for a fairer pay system saw some of the biggest demonstrations of workers' power since World War Two.

The Tory government, led by Edward Heath, was trying to enforce a pay restraint policy in the teeth of rising inflation, which was cutting workers' wages.

The miners were badly affected. But their strike and important victory not only won a fair pay rise but inspired and showed the way forward for other groups of workers fighting to defend their living standards.

The undoubted highlight of the strike was the gigantic battle around a coking coal depot in Saltley in Birmingham.

The significance of the depot to the miners and the bosses became clear to all as lorries from around the country headed for the depot. The 100,000-ton mountain of coke was needed to keep the steel industry, and hence manufacturing, going.

The National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) had called on the workers of Birmingham to join them outside the depot in a mass picket to stop the lorries coming in. The Birmingham police were equally determined to keep the depot open.

I was at the time a newly elected senior shop steward in the Rover Solihull car plant and a member of the National Union of Vehicle Builders (NUVB), which later merged with the TGWU and is now part of Unite.

Like many Birmingham trade union activists, I had been following the events of the miners' strike since it started and I had explained to my members the issues around the strike and what it meant to all workers.

But the call for solidarity picketing at Saltley Gate significantly raised the stakes for all workers in the city.

Arthur Scargill, at the time a Yorkshire NUM official, appeared at a meeting of the east Birmingham district committee of the AUEW engineering union.

There, he famously said that he didn't want just collections of money for the miners, he wanted Birmingham workers to come down to Saltley Gate and stop the lorries leaving with the scab coke.

My own NUVB district committee was meeting at the same time and made a call on Birmingham car workers to join the mass picket.

From the Monday onwards shop stewards around the Birmingham car and engineering industry, including myself, went down to Saltley Gate and joined the miners' picket lines.

But when it became clear that we would need far more 'bodies' to stop

the lorries, we agreed that we would try and get solidarity strikes off the ground.

I remember on the Thursday morning, 10 February, I and a number of other stewards from the plant, who had been going down regularly, went to see our union convenor.

We wanted to get him to agree to call a mass meeting of the 8,000 workers in the Solihull factory to ask them to go on strike in support of the miners, and for as many as possible to go down to the mass picket.

As we were speaking to him a knock came on the door. A shop steward came in and told us that the word had got out and the workers were already walking off the job without being asked!

Of course, we were delighted and went immediately to round up as many workers as possible to get down to Saltley Gate.

Geography played an important role in what happened next. The Solihull plant was about six or seven miles from Saltley in east Birmingham.

We organised as many cars as possible to get people there. But in the immediate vicinity of the Saltley depot there were many car component plants, all of them heavily unionised.

As we gathered outside the gates we could at first hear and then see a mass of workers coming over the hump-backed bridge from the

direction of some of those component plants.

They included those from SU car-burettors, who were mainly women workers, the tractor and transmission workers, led by a pipe band, and workers from the General Electric plant from Witton just down the road. The Valour gas heater plant workers were there, and many others.

Thousands of workers from at least five different directions began to pour into the area around the coke depot gates.

Until then the 800-strong police present had managed to get it all their own way. They formed a barrier against the pickets to allow the lorries unhindered passage.

But the balance of forces rapidly changed as the thousands of Birmingham factory workers entered the scene.

It is difficult to say how many were there but the police later estimated 15,000. The anti-union Birmingham Evening Mail that night said at least 10,000. I and many others thought it was a lot more than either of these figures.

Certainly, at least 50,000 workers came out on strike that day, of course not all going down to the picket line.

The cops knew then they were beat and with Scargill, who by now had got up onto a public toilet roof 50 yards from the gates, encouraging the massed ranks of workers forward,

“As we gathered outside the gates we could at first hear and then see a mass of workers coming over the hump-backed bridge from the direction of some of the nearby car component plants

TV: 'Death of Two Black Men: Police in the Spotlight'

An ugly story of police racism and brutality

JOE FATHALLAH
CARDIFF EAST SOCIALIST PARTY

The BBC Wales documentary 'Death of Two Black Men: Police in the Spotlight', shines a light on the horrific deaths of Mohamud Hassan and Mouayed Bashir, immediately after contact with South Wales Police.

Mohamud Hassan, of Somali origin, was arrested at his home in Cardiff on 8 January 2021, and released without charge the following morning.

His aunt Zainab Hassan, who is interviewed in the documentary, said that he left the police station "with lots of wounds on his body and lots of bruises... He didn't have these wounds when he was arrested and when he came out of Cardiff Bay police station, he had them." Mohamud tragically passed away later that day, having encountered 52 officers in the run up to his death.

Mouayed Bashir, living in Newport with his family, died in hospital on 17 February 2021, just hours after being forcibly restrained at his home by Gwent Police.

He was facing possible

deportation, and suffered a breakdown, causing his family to call 999. Police officers attended the scene as well as paramedics.

Mouayed already had a wound from having been stabbed a few weeks previously. He was restrained by officers, causing this wound to bleed, and he passed out. By the time an ambulance had been called, it was too late.

The documentary features interviews with grieving family members of both men who, a year down the line, are no closer to justice for their loved ones. They have faced a wall of silence from the police forces involved, and the Independent Office for Police Conduct, supposedly set up as a watchdog, simply says that investigations are 'ongoing'.

The suffering of the families has been beyond description. The footage of Mouayed's funeral in the programme, where the whole community came out in support to remember their friend, was close to bringing me to tears.

At the time of writing, six officers are facing investigation in relation to the death of Mohamud. However,

none have been suspended. No misconduct notices have been served relating to Mouayed's death.

The programme also includes an interview with Mikael Boukhari, a black man who was brutally beaten by an officer in Newport in July. The attack was filmed by a friend and shows Mikael with a baton being pressed against his neck, in scenes sickeningly reminiscent of the murder of George Floyd.

Mikael was treated in hospital for his injuries. Black people are statistically six times more likely to have force used against them by police officers than white people.

In response to these killings, the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement in South Wales gained new momentum. Friends, family, and community members were rightly enraged by the deaths of Mohamud and Mouayed and demanded answers.

The documentary asks the question of how to rebuild trust in the police in black and ethnic minority communities. However, even if some individual police chiefs genuinely want to push back against institutional racism in their forces,



Mural image of the original five Cardiff men fitted up for murder by a racist police force

TV: 'A Killing in Tiger Bay'

Another miscarriage of justice exposing police racism

JOHN WILLIAMS
CARDIFF WEST SOCIALIST PARTY

'A Killing in Tiger Bay' is an in-depth, three-part documentary telling the story of one of the biggest miscarriages of justice in British criminal history - 'the Cardiff Three'. These three men were falsely convicted of murder, although initially five men were charged, with two also spending time in jail.

Lynette White was a Grange town resident who was brutally murdered in the multi-ethnic working-class area of Butetown on Valentine's Day in 1988.

Immediately after Lynette's murder the police issued a description of a suspect - a white man seen outside the scene. But shortly after, despite no incriminating evidence, five black or mixed-race men were tried: her boyfriend Stephen Miller, and Tony Paris, Yusef Abdullahi, along with John and Ronnie Actie. Miller, Paris and Abdullahi were found guilty; while

the true culprit, eventually convicted, remained at large.

This was a case of police corruption and institutional racism. The documentary exposes the bigoted views in the police, who claimed the community held "illegal drinking dens" and were "lazy".

It also attempts to tell viewers what some working-class people really think about the police. Butetown residents said that it wouldn't be unusual for police to beat up black boys, and then charge them with assault.

One of the people interviewed describes how South Wales Police were a law unto themselves, "like the Wild West", and were well-known for taking bribes and paying false witnesses. This is a pretty damning and honest admission from someone who, in the documentary, disgracefully attempts to justify the actions of the police.

The documentary doesn't shy away or sugarcoat the awful actions of the police. It shows



Mohamud Hussain justice campaigners on one of several protests

potentially in fear of an all-out war resembling the situation in many American inner-city areas, the role and function of the police in a capitalist society puts limits on how far that process could go.

Under capitalism, the primary function of the police is, in the final analysis, to protect the power and property of the ruling elite. This has become clear to working-class communities through experiences such as the 1984-85 Miners' Strike when the police effectively became a paramilitary force, acting in support of the Coal Board and the Thatcher government.

'Divide and rule', and the targeting of vulnerable and oppressed

individuals and communities, are necessary tools to performing this function.

The Socialist Party participated energetically in the BLM protests and uprisings, raising the demand for committees democratically elected from local communities to have control over the police.

This would include powers to fire racist officers, and to ensure the release of the bodycam footage of Mohamud's arrest, which has conveniently never seen the light of day. These measures would make it possible for Mohamud and Mouayed's families to get justice for their loved ones and prevent similar tragedies happening in the future.

How Cardiff Bay's redevelopment led to 'social cleansing'

SCOTT JONES

'King Coal' in the late 19th century gave rise to Cardiff docks and the surrounding area, which became known as 'Tiger Bay'. As exports grew, so did the docks. It became home to 50 nationalities, including one of Britain's oldest black communities.

By the late 1980s and the time of the murder of Lynette White, the closure of the pits and industrial decline had led to the end of the docks, and redevelopment plans by the Cardiff Bay Development Corporation.

Many of those involved in the Cardiff Three campaign believed that the police were under pressure to solve the case because of the redevelopment. Having a brutal and unsolved murder was bad for business, and scapegoating the working-class, black and Asian community around the docks in Butetown also made it easier to try and gentrify.

The Corporation said at the time: "Many parts of the Bay lie close to socially disadvantaged residential areas which cannot provide sufficient numbers of people with the kind of skills needed by Bay businesses."

The brother of one of the Cardiff Three, Malik Abdullahi, said at that time: "We've always been ignored but now if you want to move you get a council house outside of this area straight away. They want to get us as far away as possible from the docks now."

The regeneration took place and the docks are a different place now. Even the police station where the brutal interrogations of suspects and 'witnesses' took place has been rebuilt.

But in 2021 a young, local black man, Mohamud Hassan, died after being held in police custody at the same station, showing that some things haven't changed.

PCS ELECTIONS 2022: TIME FOR NEW LEADERSHIP IN OUR UNION

Defend PCS support for the National Shop Stewards Network

DAVE SEMPLE

PCS REP, WIGAN AREA BRANCH AND FORMER NEC MEMBER 2018-2021

On 11 September 2011, 700 trade union reps from across the labour movement marched and demonstrated outside the annual conference of the Trades Union Congress (TUC), which was held in London that year. No one watching the march could be in any doubt about what these reps wanted – leaders whose actions would match their fine speeches.

Some leaders, such as then-PCS President Janice Godrich and current PCS General Secretary Mark Serwotka, spoke to the rally of demonstrators, pledging to back their call for a mass co-ordinated strike and to build a campaign of action to oppose the Con-Dem public sector pension robbery.

The rally and demonstration, called and organised by the National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) and supported by left unions, achieved its purpose. On 30 November, the largest single day of strike action since the 1926 General Strike was called, effectively a one-day public sector general strike. For a moment, the edifice of British capitalism shook just a little.

What has changed?

Ten years later, on 9 December 2021, the Public and Commercial Services (PCS) union's National Executive Committee (NEC) backed a call by the same Mark Serwotka to withdraw support from the NSSN. Has there been a change in the NSSN to justify this withdrawal?

The NSSN, which was initiated in 2006 by the RMT transport union, has not changed. In the last year, solidarity visitors from the NSSN have been on a host of PCS picket lines, including during the late 2021 dispute at the Royal Parks. This support was even welcomed on the PCS website in two posts last August and October. The NSSN actively publicises every dispute it can by a well-read email bulletin to all activists.

During key disputes for PCS members, such as the 2020 battle over union recognition in Interserve (now Mitie) at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, visitors from the NSSN attended the picket at King Charles Street, London, and half a dozen NSSN shop stewards attended the rally outside Interserve head offices to show low-paid staff they weren't alone.

The NSSN is inclusive. Each year it holds a conference, of which all affiliates are notified. Shop stewards from across the labour movement have been attending this now for 15 years, to air differences and to learn about struggles in other sectors. National union leaders with widely varying views have spoken regularly.

Nothing has changed in terms of how the NSSN is run or its role in mobilising support from across trade unions to help workers in struggle. I would argue that it is Mark Serwotka and his backers on the PCS NEC who have changed.

Outrageous slurs

The letter from Mark Serwotka to the NSSN, notifying it of the disaffiliation, is typically full of mistruths. It asserts that the NSSN's "leading organisers have engaged in a campaign of opposition to PCS for political reasons." No evidence of this is provided. In fact, no such evidence exists. It is flatly untrue.

As a socialist and a PCS member, I have made any number of criticisms of the leadership of my union, which I believe betrayed our pay claim in 2020, and which has been absent without leave on questions like Covid safety and workloads in Jobcentres. Conflating the leadership of the union with the union itself is a dishonest sleight of hand.

The NSSN, bringing together shop stewards from across the labour movement, pays witness to many complaints about the leadership of the trade unions. PCS reps themselves were bitterly angry in 2012 about the leadership of GMB, and Unison, signing an agreement with the Con-Dem government on pensions that saw millions of workers ripped off.

That anger, and those criticisms were not opposition to GMB, or Unison! It is an outrageous slur to say that any NSSN activist - and in reality Serwotka is aiming at Socialist Party members who play a leading role - has opposed PCS for political reasons. I invite Mark Serwotka to respond to my comments here, in the pages of the Socialist.

Parked pay claim

When it comes to the PCS pay claim, the change in the leadership of PCS is very clear. It is an incontrovertible fact that Mark Serwotka, without the consent of the union's NEC, wrote to the Cabinet Office in 2020, in the early phase of the pandemic, to water down our pay demands from the 10% Conference had approved to an "above inflation" rise.

Civil servants, who make up the largest group of workers represented by PCS, have lost between 15% and 20% as a result of pay freezes and pay rises significantly below the rate of inflation. A 10% pay claim was demanded as the first step on a road back from austerity, which had repeatedly been pronounced as over by chancellors and prime minister.

Watering down the pay claim was an attempt to seem reasonable to the Tory government. In fact, it simply advertised Serwotka's lack of belief that the union could win the demand set by the Annual Delegate

Conference (ADC). Sensing this weakness, the government rudely brushed Serwotka aside and imposed a maximum pay rise that still fell short of inflation, at 2.5%.

The NEC simply rubber-stamped this approach and, despite having been advised by the general secretary that ballots were possible, indefinitely put off a pay campaign because, they argued, how dare we – the Socialist Party and Broad Left – even think about pay?! No thought was given to the financial pressure the pandemic would bring for members.

In July of 2020, with the pay campaign having been in cold storage since Spring 2019, the NEC began beating the drum – not about a serious campaign, but about a petition launched on the Westminster Parliament's website. This was a stepping stone to a serious campaign, we were told.

Unsurprisingly, the government batted this aside and imposed a pay freeze for 2021.

Concession bargaining

At the Annual Delegate Conference in 2019, Serwotka and his coterie got up in front of the hundreds of assembled delegates to insist that the only valid approach was to campaign on pay alone – without attaching demands on other related issues like jobs. They also argued that the only possible approach was for one national ballot.

Socialist Party members and Broad Left supporters argued that this was mistaken. The anti-union Trade Union Act 2016 imposed new restrictions on unions designed to make it harder for workers to go on strike. This included making any ballot invalid if 50% of union members did not vote in it. This has made one national ballot very difficult to achieve.

In early 2019, the last time we balloted for strike action on pay, some areas managed to break the 50% threshold while others didn't. The University and College Union has faced similar difficulties across different campuses in their common dispute over lecturers' pensions. Yet they have managed significant strike action by disaggregating their ballot.

This means that any area which gets above the 50% threshold is free to take strike action, while the others can have more resources diverted to them in order to reballoon and get over the 50% threshold. We argued that this tactic must be considered. Serwotka, Heathcote and their clique called us saboteurs and shouted us down in every meeting.

They won the vote – barely – at ADC 2019, but then used this mandate from conference to do nothing significant on pay until January 2022.

What some union members will not know is that, in the meantime, some civil service employers like the Ministry of Justice and HM Revenue



and Customs, have used the absence of a serious union campaign on pay, and the increasing restlessness of staff in the face of rising bills, to push through cuts to terms and conditions in exchange for limited pay rises.

Despite their endless statements about restoring national pay bargaining – so that civil servants doing the same job in different departments get the same pay at the best rate – the failures of the union's leadership on pay has resulted in further divergence between the different groups of workers in the civil service.

Union democracy

Pay is not the only issue, however, that shows the retreats of the current leadership of PCS. Throughout the last three years, issues of accountability and democracy have repeatedly raised their head.

After cancelling elections in 2020 – despite admitting openly that they could have gone ahead – and cancelling the union's Annual Delegate Conference, the NEC then began tinkering with the rules that protect the democracy of the union for conference 2021. We take Covid safety precautions extremely seriously, but none of these measures can be justified as necessary pandemic measures.

They imposed a limit of four motions per branch on every branch in the union. They insisted that three of those motions must be on pre-ordained topics. Then they removed control of the conference agenda from branches, by preventing branches from collectively voting to overturn the decisions by the Standing Orders Committee.

Further, they insisted that because this was a digital conference, anyone who wished to speak had to volunteer well in advance, rendering delegates unable to respond spontaneously to what they were actually hearing in the debate. The result of this was a stale event with little of the democratic energy of previous conferences.

During 2020 and 2021, multiple "future of the union consultations" have been run, arguing that the union must either merge with another union or must be reorganised.

Hundreds of pages of NEC papers, branch briefings, consultation reports and conference motions later, no one has explained how either proposal would improve the ability of PCS to recruit or retain members in an era where the Civil Service is growing rapidly.

Attention is instead given to tinkering with branch and group structures, which are some of the few areas that are currently outside the control of the general secretary. This makes it pretty easy to infer what is actually aimed at with restructuring of the union.

The leadership has trumpeted supposed success in keeping the cost of PCS staffing within 33% of the total value of members' subscriptions. Arbitrary targets like this, and their ready resort to the language of targets, exposes how out of touch the current NEC is. This also applies to the bizarre changes to the union's website which deleted huge amounts of information, and to the segregation of PCS staff into distinct organising and bargaining specialisms, as if the two are not related.

Broad Left Network supporters have insisted that the NEC should exercise its democratic right to run the union. Decisions should not be made

by the general secretary's office and then nodded through by the NEC. The NEC should insist that much more information is provided, to enable effective democratic oversight of the management of the union.

When debating these consultations at NEC, the general secretary has stepped away from his one-time commitment to the election of a much wider selection of the union's full-time officers. When Socialist Party members and Broad Left Network supporters raised this, we were told that calls for the election of full-timers are "outdated".

Far from being outdated, electing all the most powerful positions within the union is crucial to ensuring the accountability of those officers to members and their needs. This should be one of the most basic demands of anyone calling themselves a socialist in the labour movement. It recalls the late Labour MP Tony Benn's five questions to ask the powerful, with the most central being, "how do we get rid of you?"

Rank-and-file NSSN vital

In September 2020, the TUC's General Secretary, Francis O'Grady, posed beside Tony Chancellor of the Exchequer Rishi Sunak and the head of the Confederation of British Industry to announce cuts to the furlough scheme, on which millions of workers were depending to keep them fed, housed and safe from coronavirus.

Eventually, these plans were abandoned, and the country went back into lockdown. What this demonstrates, however, is that it's not sufficient to simply take what the leaders of the labour movement say and do on trust.

As socialists, we must have the right to put forward a socialist programme for fighting, democratic trade unions and to hold our leaders to account when they fall short of what we need. A national movement of shop stewards is a crucial weapon in that battle.

Yet it is precisely this goal – of a fighting, democratic trade union with a socialist programme – that Mark Serwotka and the current leadership of PCS have distanced themselves from in practice. This is the real explanation behind the move to try and break the link between PCS and the NSSN. PCS members and activists will be asking why this decision was taken on their behalf by the NEC rather than bringing it to conference.

Therefore, those of us who have been grateful for NSSN support will ask the union's Annual Delegate Conference to reinstate that link.

It is now in the vital interest of every single PCS member to also replace the failed Democracy Alliance leadership. So we call on all branches in every group and area of PCS to nominate candidates from the Broad Left Network in the 2022 elections.

• Nominate Broad Left Network rank-and-file socialist candidates in the PCS elections. See full slate, search 'PCS 2022 elections' at socialistparty.org.uk

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the Socialist

Issue 1167

17-23 February 2022

formerly **Militant**

‘Stand together and fight’ STRIKE FOR A DECENT WAGE



PAULA MITCHELL
WALTHAM FOREST SOCIALIST PARTY

Abi is a hospital domestic, working nights at weekends. That’s just one of his jobs.

“Pay is so low I have to work more than one job. Food prices are going up. Fuel bills are going up, National Insurance is going up. My home is ok, but I know people who can’t pay their rent and could be evicted.

“Our work is so important to the hospital but the bosses treat us so badly. We worked so hard during Covid, it was so tough, and they gave us just £100. And even that was taxed.

What can we do?”

Abi is one of millions who are struggling with the soaring cost of living. But this conversation was a bit different from many others, because it took place on a picket line. Abi is a striking worker.

“I say what can we do, but actually this is what we can do. We have no choice. We have to stand together and we have to fight.”

Like Coventry bin workers, and the many others reported in the Socialist, Abi has decided to ignore the outrageous words of Bank of England governor Andrew Bailey who told workers not to ask for big pay rises.

Of course, the bosses and bankers will tell

workers not to demand more - real pay rises eat into their ever-growing bloated profits.

Instead of a handful of the super-rich eating all the pie, the Socialist Party supports all workers standing up and fighting for a greater share of the wealth created by their hard work.

Hundreds of localised strikes have taken place, many with substantial victories. Workers in the NHS, schools and local government have, in surveys and consultations run by their national unions, responded resoundingly that they reject the Tory government’s miserly pay offers - in reality, pay cuts. What’s needed is the same resolve from the national leaderships to harness that, to campaign and

prepare for national coordinated strike action. The thresholds set by the Tory anti-union laws make that harder, but the current strikes by university workers in UCU and Unison show that it’s possible.

Join us in campaigning for democratic, fighting trade union leaderships that are up to the task. Join us in campaigning for a political voice for working-class people. And join us in campaigning for socialist change: for public ownership of the big companies like the big energy and food corporations, for democratic socialist planning, so that no one has to scramble for crumbs while profits of a greedy few soar.

WHAT WE STAND FOR: THE SOCIALIST PARTY’S MAIN DEMANDS >>> see column on page 3

