

# UNITE AND FIGHT FOR A DECENT PAY RISE

**While bad weather batters the country, another storm is raging. A growing number of workers are taking action as the cost of living squeeze tightens. This is the most significant strike wave for over a decade.**

With real inflation heading towards 8%, while energy costs are set to explode on the back of the Tory National Insurance hike, increasingly workers are forced to fight back to keep their families' heads above water.

This strike wave has been developing since the summer of 2020, when many workers resisted the bosses' brutal 'fire-and-rehire' offensive that saw workers in British

Gas and elsewhere have their wages slashed by over £10,000. Outrageously, the Labour council in Tower Hamlets, east London, led by supporters of Keir Starmer's Tony Blair-style 'New Labour', lined up with the likes of British Airways in using these attacks.

But as the economy has 'recovered' and lockdown has lifted, for some workers the balance of forces has tilted a little in their favour, with supply lines stretched and labour shortages in some sectors. But the bosses and their Tory government want us to sacrifice ourselves. The governor of the Bank of England demanded that workers should forego pay rises because he claimed it would feed inflation.

So this fat-cat executive, on basic pay of nearly half a million pounds, lectures the likes of the low-paid outsourced Barts NHS strikers, who have risked their lives amid Covid, to tighten their belts.

This at a time when the gap between rich and poor has never been wider. During this pandemic, the wealthiest ten men in the world have doubled their wealth to a

gargantuan \$1.5 trillion!

It's not workers' wages that cause inflation, but the crisis-ridden management of the economy by the capitalists. Many workers have already endured a decade and a half of pay cuts - since the 2008 recession and subsequent austerity. As we've seen with fire and rehire, if it's a choice between their profits or workers' incomes we know what the bosses and their political representatives will prioritise... all at our expense.

This is the reality rather than the myths of national unity. We need workers' unity to maximise the fightback. In this context, many workers will welcome the fact that the Trades Union Congress (TUC) has now called a national 'Britain Needs a Pay Rise' demonstration for Saturday 19 March.

It is essential that the many different disputes across the private and public sectors are brought together. This could act as a pole of attraction to all those workers looking for a lead as the real value of their pay packets is slashed.

• Continued on page 3



PHOTO PAUL MATTSSON



**the Socialist**

formerly **Militant**

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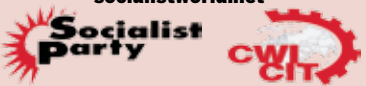
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#### OUR NEWSPAPER TEAM

##### Editor of the Socialist

Sarah Sachs-Eldridge  
[socialistparty.org.uk](http://socialistparty.org.uk)  
Judy Beishon

##### Circulation manager

Chris Newby

##### Editorial staff

Dave Carr  
Scott Jones  
Ian Pattison  
Josh Asker

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

Karl Marx

# Crisis in the Ukraine reaches boiling point

# Workers' unity against capitalist warmongers and imperialist meddlers

#### COMMITTEE FOR A WORKERS' INTERNATIONAL (CWI) REPORTERS

**R**ussia's President Vladimir Putin has recognised the 'independence' of two Moscow-backed separatist regions in eastern Ukraine. He declared that 'peacekeeping' forces will be sent to the territories.

Prospects of a revival of talks arising from the Minsk agreements of 2014 and 2015 between France, Germany, Russia and Ukraine - with proposals for "special status" elections and a constitution for the Donbas areas - are now dead in the water.

Putin made the announcement during a televised meeting of Russia's Security Council on 21 February. He claimed the decision was in response to pleas from the leaders of the 'People's Republics of Donetsk and Luhansk' for the Russian government to recognise them as independent states and to protect them from "genocide" by Ukrainian forces. Moscow claims an evacuation to Russia has begun of 700,000 of the three million still living in these areas.

Over 14,000 people have died in the conflict in eastern Ukraine since 2014. This followed the coming to power in Kiev of a pro-Western reactionary regime involving Ukrainian ultra-nationalists and far-right militias.

In his speech, Putin railed against Nato aggression but also went on to attack the revolutionary socialist legacy of the Bolshevik leader Lenin. "So you want de-communisation? That suits us. But let's not stop half-way. We are prepared to show you what real de-communisation looks like", Putin said.

In other words, the 'Greater Russian' nationalist Putin thinks that Ukraine, and other republics created in the early years of the Soviet Union, should not exist.

There is an ocean of difference between the right-wing, pro-capitalist nationalism of Putin, and the international working-class solidarity of



Russia's president Vladimir Putin is pushing ahead with his plans for a 'Greater Russia' PHOTO KREMLIN.RU/CC

Lenin. The 1917 revolution was able to succeed because of the socialist programme of Lenin, Trotsky and the Bolsheviks, which included supporting the right of nations oppressed under Tsarism to self-determination, while advocating that the republics formed a voluntary and equal union of socialist states.

The Western powers said Putin's claims of Ukrainian attacks on the Luhansk and Donbas Russian 'enclaves' was a pretext for an invasion. Yet the west has a long history of 'false flag' operations. The 1964 Gulf of Tonkin incident was a fabrication which the Democratic US president Johnson used to justify a massive stepping up of US military involvement in Vietnam. Infamously, the US and British governments' false 'Weapons of Mass Destruction' claims were used in the run-up to the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

The Nato powers furiously denounced Putin's latest move as a flagrant invasion of a sovereign country, and announced a serious of new sanctions, including against public figures in the breakaway

Russian enclaves.

Here again, the West is guilty of nauseating hypocrisy. The same western powers do little about Nato member Turkey's continuing 'illegal' occupation of Northern Cyprus after the 1974 invasion, which led to ethnic cleansing and division of the island, or its invasion and occupation of northern Syria in 2019.

As we go to press, Germany has reportedly pulled the plug on the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline with Russia. In reply, Russia can squeeze gas and oil supplies to Europe. Such tit-for-tat actions can have big consequences for the world economy and the cost of living squeeze currently affecting hundreds of millions in the west alone.

#### Nato's eastwards creep

Russian troops have been gathered near Ukraine's Eastern border for months now. As we explained last April, when at least 100,000 soldiers were said to be in the area: "An overarching reason for the military tensions lies in the steady expansion of Nato up to the borders of Russia since the dissolution of the former Soviet Union."

Nato forces have been aggressively strengthened throughout the states that border Russia and Belarus, as well as Ukraine. Nato powers have been delivering military hardware, in abundance, to Ukraine, and are training permanent and volunteer forces in military combat skills.

Putin will hope that by appearing powerful on the international arena he can boost his falling popularity at home. His overriding concern is to protect the billionaire elite in Russia and to retain his closest circle's position at the

head of it.

He doesn't want an independent country with a large Russian-speaking population opposed to him on his doorstep. And he wants to be sure Ukraine does not follow other former members of the USSR, such as Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia into the Nato Alliance.

This week has seen an escalation of the conflict. It has been suggested that, once started, Russian forces could push to establish a land corridor between Russian-claimed Crimea and the so-called 'Republic' of Donbas. This could be costly in terms of loss of life on both sides.

Socialists oppose any slide into war which means the suffering of millions of working people, already the main victims of the conflict. Socialists stand against repression of any national minority.

These events show the desperate need to build forces in both Ukraine and Russia that can unite workers and the poor against capitalists and warmongers and meddling western imperialism, with policies for workers' democracy and socialism.



Russian special forces in training PHOTO MIL.RU/CC



The **Committee for a Workers' International (CWI)** is the international socialist organisation which the Socialist Party is affiliated to. The CWI is organised in many countries. We work to unite the working class and oppressed peoples against capitalism, and to fight for a socialist world.  
[socialistworld.net](http://socialistworld.net)





Coventry bin workers' picket line PHOTO: UNITE WEST MIDLANDS

# 19 March demo must be start of campaign against cost of living squeeze

## ►► CONTINUED FROM FRONT

The potential for such a mobilisation would be huge, particularly if it was well-organised and prepared, with the full forces of the union movement thrown behind it. But the fact that a national demonstration has been announced at four weeks' notice without any prior discussion in the unions - at NEC level, for example - and has been called in Blackpool, outside the Tory spring local government conference at 11am, raises big questions about whether it will match up to what is needed right now.

In the first weeks of 2011, the TUC and the unions called a demonstration for 26 March in response to the vicious cuts offensive launched by the Tory-led ConDem coalition government of David Cameron, George Osborne and Nick Clegg.

With over 800 coaches and ten trains organised, the streets of London were filled with 750,000 workers and their families. It started the ball rolling for action that led directly to what was effectively a public sector general strike in November that year (N30) with two million workers in 29 unions walking out to defend their pensions.

As university staff, teachers, Coventry bin workers, Barts health workers and tubeworkers take strike action, and workers from Airbus to Teesport get their picket lines ready, such a national demonstration called now in London could be massive.

Many workers will be suspicious that the TUC has targeted the Tory

conference to give a boost to Starmer's Labour council election campaign. But if this is the case, it won't enthuse the RMT members in London Underground to travel 250 miles in five hours to demonstrate. These workers have been forced to strike because Labour Mayor Sadiq Khan is passing on Tory cuts.

## Strike-breaking Labour

Nor will it persuade the bin drivers in Coventry to get on the bus when the cutting Labour councillors in their city have spent nearly £2 million trying to break the strike and smash their union Unite. These workers would justifiably demand that, given the stakes in the dispute, the TUC demonstration should be in their city, to take on the attacks of all employers, including anti-union right-wing 'Red Tory' Labour councillors.

The demonstration should be moved to an easily accessible city where struggle is currently taking place, or at least supplemented with regional or city protests. But whatever is organised for 19 March it is essential that the day is really built for. This means the unions launching

a massive publicity effort and putting on transport throughout the country. But 19 March must be the start not the end of the campaign. It could launch the real national demonstration and industrial action that is needed.

The cost of living squeeze, fire and rehire, and threats to jobs are only going to get worse. And after getting a measly pay rise, if one at all, millions of public sector workers in the NHS, councils, education, civil service and beyond would be open to coordinated pay demands, strike ballots and action, in the same way that those unions combined in 2011 on pensions.

But the other lesson of 2011 also needs to be drawn: when the N30 strikes were not followed up but cut short by right-wing union leaders. This time, the left trade union leaders must ensure that action is escalated and linked with workers in the private sector who are taking action on a far greater scale than a decade ago.

This is the programme of struggle that is needed that can unite workers to force back the bosses and defeat Johnson's divided Tory government.

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## 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 dominate the British economy, and run them under democratic working-class control and management. Compensation to be paid only on the basis of proven need.
- A democratic socialist plan of production based on the interests of the overwhelming majority of people, and in a way that safeguards the environment.
- No to the bosses' neoliberal European Union and single market. For a socialist Europe and a socialist world!

Do you agree? Join the fightback!

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## Fight for trade union control of workplace safety

At every stage of the pandemic, Johnson's Tory government has made decisions motivated in large part by the objective to protect bosses' profits.

Johnson's announcement - of an end of legal requirements for people with Covid to self-isolate, an end to enhanced Statutory Sick Pay, the self-isolation payment and free Covid testing - seeks to further 'open up the economy', but also politically boost

a prime minister racked by partying scandals and a police investigation.

Throughout the pandemic, the Socialist Party has explained that there can be no trust in the bosses and their politicians to act in the interests of our safety. We have argued for workers' and trade union-led control of workplace safety (see 'Covid pandemic: Fight for full sick pay and trade union control of workplace safety' at [socialistparty.org.uk](https://socialistparty.org.uk)).

### We say:

- Trade union control of all workplace safety measures
- Full pay for workers when sick, and an end to punitive sickness absence policies
- 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

# Vote Nellist for a workers' MP in Birmingham Erdington

CLIVE WALDER  
BIRMINGHAM SOUTH WEST SOCIALIST PARTY

"I've already voted for him" said a young mother with a postal vote walking past Erdington railway station. The perfect way to round off a day's campaigning for Socialist Party member Dave Nellist, Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) candidate in the Birmingham Erdington by-election.

Many of Dave's supporters were canvassing for the first time. One commented that he hadn't been told to get lost anything like as much as he'd expected. There has been next to no hostility to TUSC from voters on the doorstep, which is more than can be said about the main parties. Time and again voters have told us how they don't trust the main parties. The parties' already limited support is rapidly evaporating.

### Workers' wage

We have been trying to persuade non-voters to vote by explaining that TUSC is standing to give them an MP who will stand up for workers in Parliament. Workers are getting fed up with the greed, corruption and sleaze of mainstream politicians.

In contrast, Dave's commitment to taking a workers' wage is proving incredibly popular among voters. You can often see their faces light up when this is mentioned.

TUSC canvassers have had a number of good discussions with former Tory voters who can now see that they only act in the interests of the rich.

We have been canvassing every day of the week, as well as doing street stalls and leafleting schools and railway stations, with helpers from as far afield as Liverpool, Leeds and Plymouth. By contrast, Labour seem to have had problems even getting canvassers from Birmingham. A



large proportion of their helpers consists of councillors and the odd MP.

Is it any surprise? Labour candidate Paulette Hamilton, as council cabinet member for Health and Social Care, carried out cuts, including the attempted closure of Fairway Day Centre - overturned by campaigners after a high court ruling.

Dave, on the other hand, has been able to mobilise 40 to 50 canvassers on a weekend. He has an impeccable record standing up for workers and voting against cuts as an MP and councillor previously.

Many people on the streets of

Erdington agree that workers need a new mass party to fight for our interests. And Dave's campaign is winning support from the trade union movement further afield. While at this stage Dave is unlikely to win, thousands of Birmingham workers are hearing our socialist message and will have the opportunity to vote for a 100% anti-austerity, workers' candidate on 3 March.

### Do you agree?

**JOIN THE CAMPAIGN**  
[nelligstforerdington.com](https://nelligstforerdington.com)



# Bus services under threat Fight for free, green, publicly owned transport

ADAM GOULCHER  
GLOUCESTERSHIRE SOCIALIST PARTY

Nearly one in five households do not have access to a car. For those in the bottom 20% of households by income, the figure is one in three.

The bus is literally a lifeline for many households, providing the only means of access to health services, education, work and shops. Research by the RMT transport union found that six million people do not live within one kilometre of an hourly bus service.

The pandemic led to a catastrophic reduction in bus fare income and the government was forced to bail out operators. With passenger levels still only at 70% of pre-pandemic figures, subsidies coming to an end in March, and further local authority cuts, this will inevitably mean cuts in services.

A third of bus services are under threat, according to the operators'

representative body. So much for the government's 'levelling up' and 'bus back better'. The £3 billion promised for buses in March 2021 has already been cut to £1.4 billion. Council bids for this funding currently stand at £9 billion.

### Privatisation

Bus services outside London were privatised and deregulated by Thatcher in 1986. Following the ludicrous, dangerous and polluting spectacle of 'bus wars' - where private operators raced to capture an unregulated market, 70% of services were operated by the big five operators.

Consequently, local monopolies dominate, leading to high fares and poor service. Fares have doubled in real terms since 1987, and bus trips outside London have halved from four billion to two billion annually.

Profit-making operators are subsidised by councils to provide services on unprofitable routes. This



accounts for about 40% of their income. Since the 2008 crash, council spending on these services has fallen by 45% in real terms, devastating the lives of millions losing access to vital services.

Every cut in services represents real hardship for the millions dependent on buses for everyday life. Nearly 40 years after deregulation we see a handful of monopolies sharing the loot from profitable urban services and scrounging subsidy for 'supported' services, replacing the previous system of cross-subsidy which provided superior coverage and frequency.

Yet another example of rotten privatisation transferring wealth from the poorest in society to the corporations and their shareholders. We demand a free, integrated, green publicly owned and operated transport system, run democratically. This would provide the backbone for an efficient needs-based socialist economy.

## Transport costs pile on to cost of living squeeze

SARE O'NEIL  
SOUTH EAST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

The cost of living crisis reaches every aspect of working-class living - from fuel, to food, to wages, to rent, to the cost of travel.

Petrol and diesel prices have reached a record high, and Transport for London, under the leadership of Labour mayor Sadiq Khan, is set to raise fares by 5%.

When travel prices increase, and wages do not, workers' pay is indirectly slashed. We go to work, and come back with less in our pockets than the week before. Unable to afford to live close to the workplace, many of us are forced into long, expensive commutes.

"I understand the pressures people are facing with the cost of living," insists Rishi Sunak, the richest person in the House of Commons. How could such an individual empathise with the struggles of working people? With MPs' basic wage increasing to £81,932 in the last few years (minus expenses and lobbying, of course), it has become a position far away removed from the people it is meant to serve.

That's why Dave Nellist's pledge to take only a workers' wage if elected for the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) in the Erdington by-election (see page 3) is so important. The salaries and lifestyles of MPs mean they can make cuts, and back profiteering fuel companies, without ever feeling the sting.

Every year we are told to hold out

hope that the next will be better. But even when the economy grows, by 7.5% in 2021, the working class is still worse off - 'neither median nor household living standards went up at all', according to the Financial Times.

### Workers fight back

Public transport workers are showing how to fight. With strikes winning pay rises on the buses, and RMT tube strikes underway.

Strike action to defend services and for pay rises is needed, but the cost of living crisis also shows the need for a new mass party of the working class, backed by the trade unions, that fights for renationalisation of the railways and public transport, the fuel companies, and the polluting oil companies.

Free and efficient public transport, and social housing near workplaces, is also vital. This way, workers could get to work without seeing a significant dent in our pay cheques.

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## Council must use powers to save Liverpool's 86 night bus

ALEX SMITH  
LIVERPOOL SOCIALIST PARTY

Stagecoach's 86 night bus from Liverpool city centre to Speke via the Smithdown area - popular with students looking to get home safely and relatively cheaply - has been cut. A petition now has over 10,000 signatures demanding that the service be reinstated immediately, especially in the context of spiking incidents and sexual assaults against female students in Liverpool city centre.

Disgracefully, Labour politicians in the city and elsewhere refuse to act. Yet Liverpool City Council has 'usable reserves' of over £50 million which could be used to reinstate the night bus immediately, and stop wider council cuts and council tax rises for at least a year. The time bought could be used by Liverpool's councillors to wage a

campaign against central government, demanding that reserves spent defending the working class of Liverpool be replenished.

It is against this backdrop that Liverpool Socialist Students is pushing, through Liverpool Trade Union Council (LTUC), for the reinstatement of the night bus as a first step in a wider campaign for all bus services to be renationalised under democratic workers' control and management.

The LTUC is currently writing to local politicians demanding that they meet an LTUC and Socialist Students delegation to discuss the reintroduction of the night bus.

Socialist Students is also approaching bus depot trade union branches in the city, with LTUC, to seek support for the campaign. UCU branches at Liverpool universities and colleges will also be approached, as will other

trade union branches, community organisations, and left-wing councillors in the city (a number of whom have now been suspended or expelled from Labour).

Liverpool Socialist Students understand that there is an alternative to cuts. When LTUC drew up a costed no-cuts budget proposal last year - written by Trade Union and Socialist Coalition supporters - six Liverpool Labour councillors picked it up and wrote to the city's then acting mayor, Wendy Simon, describing the LTUC proposal as a "workable strategy".

So this 'workable strategy' should be adopted now. Liverpool's councillors should fight the cuts instead of doing the Tories' dirty work. Help to increase the safety of students and young people by reinstating the night bus. And fight other cuts as well. No more excuses.

## Tories instruct teachers to wipe Britain's real history

CHRIS HOLMES  
NORTH LONDON HISTORY TEACHER, CAMDEN AND HARINGEY SOCIALIST PARTY

The Tories in the Department for Education (DfE) are issuing guidelines to teachers about impartiality in the classroom. In particular, the teaching of the history of the British Empire and the legacies of 'significant historical figures'. They claim to want to ensure that teachers are presenting complex issues without 'bias'. What they mean of course, is that they want to assert their own biases in the classroom!

This is a thinly disguised offensive in the culture war launched by the 'anti-woke' brigade to reverse some steps that have been taken to decolonise the curriculum, which have been happening for years and

crystallised around the Black Lives Matter movement of a couple of years ago. It is a thoroughly reactionary move, which is not only an insult to the professionalism of teachers, it is also very bad history.

If Education Secretary Nadim Zahawi has his way, we will return to the days when students learned about Elizabeth I defeating the Spanish Armada, but not about her partnership with John Hawkins in establishing the slave trade. Or about how inventors of new machinery like Richard Arkwright drove Britain to become the first industrial nation, but not how the new industries were financed by slavery. Or how the Black presence in Britain goes back centuries before the Windrush generation arrived in the 1950s.

In truth, the DfE guidelines will

have very little effect and will be widely resisted. Most teachers will continue to promote critical thinking and questioning, because that is why we entered the profession, and it is what we trained to do! We also know that to engage students, they need a curriculum that reflects the multicultural society we live in, and that also actually reflects the academic developments in their subjects.

The work of popular historians such as David Olusoga, and his television series, means that many of the public are better informed about the legacy of slavery and empire than most of the Tory cabinet. The real significance of the new DfE guidelines is not that they will change what teachers are doing, it is that they betray quite how reactionary and out of touch this government is!





## Coventry bin strike goes all-out against strike-breaking Labour council



COVENTRY SOCIALIST PARTY

At a rally and march of striking Coventry bin lorry drivers on 22 February, the mood was really determined as workers marched from the picket line to Coventry council offices. They were lobbying Labour councillors who were meeting for a budget-setting meeting, calling on them to resolve the dispute.

The workers are fighting for pay parity with other local councils, some of which pay equivalent workers £5,500 more. The council has spent millions more trying to break the strike than it would cost to settle.

At the rally, Pete Randall, senior Unite shop steward on the bins, said he supported Unite general secretary Sharon Graham's decision to stop funding Labour while this strike goes on.

Onay Kasab, Lead for Local Government in Unite the Union, said that one of the Labour councillors had been offended when the shout of "scab" went up as he entered the

council offices. "When it walks like a duck and swims like a duck, it's a duck!" replied Onay. When Labour councillors employ strike-breaking methods then scabs are what they are. Onay said that Unite's policy of calling on Labour councils to set no-cuts needs budgets should be implemented in Coventry to settle the dispute.

Labour MP Barry Gardiner addressed the rally offering support, and called the Coventry Labour council "shameful". Yet many present at the rally were aware of the contradiction when he said he had been campaigning for Labour in Erdington. There, Socialist Party member Dave Nellist, who has wholeheartedly supported the Coventry bin workers strike, is standing against a Labour candidate who has been part of a Blairite council that has attacked bin workers in Birmingham.

Over 100 supporters joined the bin workers, including Socialist Party members and the National Shop Stewards Network.

## Scunny scaffs action forces bosses to the table

ALISTAIR TICE

YORKSHIRE SOCIALIST PARTY

16 weeks of indefinite strike action by the scaffolders at British Steel Scunthorpe, solidarity strike action by other construction workers, and an extensive leverage campaign against company bosses and scabbing companies, have forced employer Actavo back to the negotiating table.

After nearly 100 days of strike action, the Scunny scaffs are hoping for

a deal and therefore agreed, under Unite the Union's national advice, to postpone the mass demonstration that had been called for 22 February.

But there was no doubt on the picket line on that the scaffs are determined to see the strike, to force Actavo and British Steel to pay the national industry rate for the job, through to the end. If talks this week don't produce a result, then the flying pickets and leverage campaign will be back on.

## Usdaw: 'Reinstate Max' week of action

Three months on from exhausting all appeals, Socialist Party member Max McGee is preparing to take Tesco to an employment tribunal over his trade union victimisation and sacking. Max was sacked by Tesco on the spurious grounds of 'exaggerating an injury', and his dismissal was confirmed by the company in December. This took place at the same time as ballots for strike action at Tesco depots, including Max's, that forced a pay rise.

A GoFundMe page has been set up to donate to Max's reinstatement campaign, and trade unionists are encouraged to raise the campaign at their union branches and trades councils over the coming

weeks. (Visit [gofundme.com/f/reinstate-max-usdaw-rep-socialist](https://gofundme.com/f/reinstate-max-usdaw-rep-socialist))

To keep the pressure on Tesco in the run-up to the forthcoming employment tribunal, the funds raised will be used to produce leaflets drawing attention to his case. We are asking trade unionists and supporters where they can, to distribute leaflets outside their nearest Tesco and take photos of themselves holding posting Max's, that forced a pay rise.

Messages of solidarity, invites for Max to speak on his case at trades councils and union branches, and photos can be sent to [reinstate.max.mcgee@gmail.com](mailto:reinstate.max.mcgee@gmail.com).

# University workers continue strike against bosses' attacks

University and College Union (UCU) members began the second round of strike action in the current national dispute on 21 February. This is happening because university managers and their national representative, Universities UK (UUK), have not agreed to the UCU's demands. UCU members are striking over changes to their pension scheme, following a valuation carried out during the pandemic-induced financial crash, which UUK is using to justify cuts and changes to terms. They are also striking over the 'Four Fights': pay, casualisation, equality, and workloads.

### Leicester

The co-chair of the UCU branch at Leicester University told the Socialist:

"This is a serious dispute for us. Yes, it's about pensions, pay and conditions and the gender pay gap. But it's also about our right to be treated with dignity as human beings working inside the university. We have seen a massive erosion of our wages and pensions over recent years. We can't take any more of this, we are standing up for our rights. We've had brilliant support from the students' union and the other trade unions in Leicester."



Leicester STEVE SCORE



Queen Mary's, London JAMES IVENS

### Bradford

As both a second-year student at Bradford University and Socialist Party member, I went down to the picket line at Bradford Uni to show my support. I spoke to many passionate staff members, including some of my very own lecturers, who are bravely fighting for a fair pay system and a fair pensions system.

For the past 12 years, education has been under attack from a government that only cares about profit instead of paying university staff fairly, and providing students with top-quality education. Now, both of these groups are out on the picket lines fighting for a fair and equal university system. I'm proud that our party is supporting these strikes and I hope this sends a message that university staff will not put up with any more unfair attacks on their pay and pension.

TOM GIBSON

BRADFORD SOCIALIST PARTY

## PLACE A MAY DAY GREETING IN theSocialist



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- Show solidarity and fund the socialist press with a 2021 greeting
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- £55 for our most popular size, 1/16 of a page or £90 for 1/8 and £170 for 1/4,
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- Visit [socialistparty.org.uk/mayday](https://socialistparty.org.uk/mayday)



# Tube workers strike in defence of pay, pensions and conditions

HELEN PATTISON

LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY SECRETARY

Tube workers in London are facing some of the biggest attacks in decades. The RMT union, having staved off many attacks during Boris Johnson's time as London mayor, now faces a huge battle for their members' pay, pensions and conditions under Labour's Sadiq Khan.

The rotten Tory government has demanded huge cuts to Transport for London's budget in the capital. Rather than take the fight to the Tories, Khan has chosen to carry out these cuts and oppose strike action by RMT members fighting to defend their jobs.

Having a Labour mayor has not protected transport workers from the Tory government. Instead of attacking the unions and cutting services, Khan should be mobilising the support of workers and the public to demand the funding needed from central government.

The only solution to the funding crisis is for the government to accept that self-funding of London's public transport system can't work. Proper



PAUL MATTSSON

## Barts NHS workers to walk out again on 28 February

Barts hospital workers will start a further fortnight of strike action on 28 February, following two weeks of solid strike action by 600 workers between 31 January and 13 February.

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.

We say, bring services back in-house now! The Barts' bosses should be held accountable for the disaster which privatisation has meant for the staff.

Support the strike and join the picket lines!

## Just Eat couriers continue action to fight 24% pay cut

### SHEFFIELD SOCIALIST PARTY

The most recent Sheffield Just Eat drivers' strike meeting was inspired by Mohammed's report from Chesterfield. There, picketing by Stuart couriers and supporters has succeeded in getting McDonald's, Greggs and other restaurants to turn off their takeaway delivery apps during the targeted strike action.

In Sheffield, where the strike against Just Eat delivery contractor Stuart's pay cuts began on 6 December, action continues, targeting Greggs, McDonald's and KFC. Pickets ask couriers not to accept or pick up deliveries during the strike times, and some sympathetic managers to turn off the delivery app. With strikes breaking out in several other towns and cities, the pressure is beginning to tell on Stuart.

Bear in mind that Stuart is a huge multinational company, part of

the DPD logistics group, owned by La Poste, ultimately backed by the French state. It does not recognise the IWGB, a small independent union that many of the drivers have joined. Yet the strike and adverse media publicity have forced Stuart's global chief executive Damien Bon and its UK general manager Mark Hamill to have a meeting with Justin Madders, the Labour shadow minister for workers' rights.

It is hoped that this will lead to a reversal of the 24% pay cut on the basic delivery rate and recognition of the union. If not, then what is already the longest gig economy strike in the UK will continue, spread and intensify. To do that, the IWGB urgently needs trade union donations to fund the strike action. You can donate by BACS to: Account name: Couriers and Logistics branch; sort code: 23-05-80; account number: 17001094

funding of public transport is needed, and an end to the gravy train of public money going to shareholders of the private rail sector.

This battle is starting with two days of strike action on 1 and 3 March. But this will have to be the beginning of a determined struggle. The RMT has a huge mandate for action and is leading the way. But tube workers aren't the only transport workers who are angry. Workers on National Rail are facing a pay freeze. Bus drivers have been let down by 'son of a bus driver' Khan, who failed to implement Covid safety on the buses, is planning cuts to routes, and is not standing up to attacks from the bus companies.

On Woolwich Ferry, workers have faced down victimisation, and the battle continues on issues of pay and safety. Action across the network could be posed to win the funding needed for a decent transport system in the city, which protects jobs and services.

There is also huge public anger that ticket prices are going to increase, while a reduction in services is being mooted. The pandemic has shown how fragile the network will be without sustained funding. But none of the political parties are going to fight for proper renationalisation and the funding that is needed.

The RMT has been a part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) from the start. A bold anti-austerity and trade union stand in May, can back up the important strike action workers are having to take.



ISAI PROVA

## Rail workers strike in Sheffield

The second weekend of a four-week Sunday strike at TransPennine Express took place on 20 February.

Sheffield Socialist Party joined RMT members on their picket line

in solidarity with their campaign for a fair pay deal and restoration of the rest day working conditions.

SIMON JENKINS

SOCIALIST PARTY SHEFFIELD



SIMON JENKINS

### Aslef

On the back of so much Tory sleaze and betrayals by Labour, many working-class people can't be blamed for having no faith in any of the establishment parties.

That's why I put forward a motion in my union branch in Birmingham, to go to our annual Aslef rail workers' union delegate conference, that we should support and encourage our rank-and-file members to stand as anti-cuts candidates in the upcoming May local council elections.

The motion was passed undisputed. It calls on our members to stand for any party that truly represents trade unionist, socialist and anti-austerity values.

And with a motion on the conference's unofficial agenda to disaffiliate from the Labour Party, the idea of standing anti-cuts candidates, including against local Labour councillors could soon be building up more support in the union.

KRIS O'SULLIVAN

ASLEF MEMBER

### RMT

At a Piccadilly and District West RMT branch meeting, Dave Nellist, Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) candidate in the Erdington by-election, spoke on the need for a political alternative.

His speech was well received and the branch donated £200 to his election campaign.

A number of RMT members have committed to stand as TUSC candidates in the upcoming local elections. For a long period, the RMT was alone as a trade union in supporting other candidates to the left of Labour. But the decision by the 18,000-strong Bakers' Union to join the campaign for political representation has not gone unnoticed by a large section of the RMT, and has given a further impetus in the campaign for a new mass party of the working class.

GARY HARBORD

RMT MEMBER



The Tories have used the cover of the Covid pandemic to speed up their agenda of opening up the NHS further to the profiteers in the private sector.

And Labour’s health spokesperson, Wes Streeting, has welcomed more use of the private sector in the NHS, following in the footsteps of the pro-big business governments of Tony Blair and Gordon Brown. How did we get here and how can we fight back?

# Started by Labour...

JON DALE  
MANSFIELD SOCIALIST PARTY

Despite the heroic efforts of health workers, the NHS has been ill-prepared to cope with the Covid pandemic. The roots of this lie in years of neoliberal policies, including the drive of the Labour governments of Tony Blair and Gordon Brown to turn the NHS into a capitalist market.

Ten years of Con-Dem coalition and Tory austerity left over 100,000 unfilled staff posts (one in twelve), 17,000 fewer beds at their lowest level ever, and equipment and PPE stockpiles run down. These resulted from annual 1% funding increases, when 4% was needed just to stand still.

The Tories’ 2012 Health and Social Care Act allowed NHS services to be delivered by ‘any willing provider’ – private companies could tender to win contracts. In a dire financial situation, the lowest tenders were always likely to be picked, whatever the quality.

## Accelerated

The Health and Social Care Act followed the tracks left by Labour. Although Labour had been elected in 1997 pledging to end Thatcher’s NHS ‘internal market’, within four years Blair reintroduced and accelerated it.

Blair said: “We must develop an acceptance of more market-oriented incentives with a modern, reinvigorated ethos of public service. ‘Market-oriented incentives’ meant big business profits.

Blair saw the role of the NHS, and other public services, as planning and monitoring (ie the ‘regulator’), paying private companies to be ‘providers’. Labour health secretary Alan Milburn negotiated a ‘Concordat’, inviting the private sector to take over clinical services paid for by the taxpayer.

After leaving government, Milburn became a well-paid adviser to Bridgepoint, a venture capital company closely involved with NHS privatisation. Another Labour health secretary, Patricia Hewitt, took a similar path after government, working for Syngenta.

Capitalism tries to turn everything into commodities to be bought and sold. Profit-seeking corporations were happy to accept Blair’s invitations to carry out X number of hip replacements or Y number of MRI scans. Less well-defined areas of healthcare, such as contingency planning for a possible pandemic in the next 20 years, were never likely to attract the marketeers.

Turning the NHS into a market led to a huge increase in health workers’ time measuring activities that could be priced and paid for. Contracts

needed negotiating, results counted, procedures invoiced and paid for, disputes legally challenged etc.

Blair’s first health secretary, Frank Dobson, complained that “paper-work used to cost 4% of the NHS budget, but now costs 15-16%”. The proportion of NHS staff in management increased from 2.7% in 1999 to 3.6% in 2009.

Foundation Trust status was created by Labour. Hospitals and primary care trusts could become semi-independent, no longer under direct Department of Health control. They were able to borrow money on the private market, enter into commercial agreements with private providers, and generally run as commercial companies.

## Profit

Although ‘non-profit making’, Foundation Trusts could form profit-making joint ventures with private corporations, and also sell off NHS assets, especially land. Competing for patients – who brought in payments – with other trusts undermined the collaboration needed to plan services to meet community needs. The scandalous treatment of elderly people with Covid in privatised care homes, cared for by insufficient staff paid even less than the pitifully low NHS rates, is also partly a result of this competition.

The proportion of GDP national economic output spent on the NHS under Labour went up from 5.4% in 1996-97 to 8.5% in 2009-10. However, much of this increase ended up in private bank accounts through contracted-out services and Private Finance Initiative (PFI) construction.

Labour commissioned a former Nat West bank head, Derek Wanless, to report on future NHS funding. With his background, he was regarded as ‘someone the government could trust’.

Wanless wrote: “Individuals are ultimately responsible for their own and their children’s health. People need to be supported more actively to make better decisions about their own health and welfare”.

Ill-health was supposedly an individual’s failings, rather than society’s. A COPD (chronic lung disease) sufferer needed support to stop smoking. Of course some did, but air pollution, damp housing, dusty working conditions, lack of accessible exercise facilities and other factors outside individual control got much less priority.

Boris Johnson’s government echoed this approach with its initial Covid advice, placing responsibility for controlling the epidemic on handwashing and coughing into our elbows, rather than testing, tracing, isolating and financially supporting Covid contacts. Ventilation of public



buildings, CO<sub>2</sub> monitoring and air filtration were later shown to be vital too.

Labour transferred the functions of the Public Health Laboratory Service to a new ‘arms-length organisation’. Its specialised laboratory work was hived off to hospital laboratories, becoming a poor relation to the pressures of daily clinical tests in an NHS increasingly cash-starved by the Tories.

And Labour privatised NHS Logistics, handing an integrated system of purchasing, stockholding and distributing NHS supplies to giant German courier DHL. ‘Just-in-time’ principles mean that when there is a major outbreak, the system is already at full capacity, and therefore struggles to meet extra for demand PPE, for example.

In 2018, DHL failed to win a new contract, resulting in further fragmentation into 13 different contracts for procurement, warehousing, distribution and marketing. In January 2020, a managing company started reducing NHS PPE stock levels – right when Covid was developing in China!

We are paying the price today for

decades of NHS underinvestment, cuts and privatisation. Public health services, laboratory facilities, hospital beds and equipment, PPE and social care have all been strained to breaking point. Where was the robust contingency planning for infectious disease pandemics – predictable in their occurrence, if not their timing and cause?

## Jeremy Corbyn

As a backbench MP, Jeremy Corbyn did vote against the Labour government’s Foundation Trusts. Unfortunately, when he was Labour leader, he did not disown the record of the Blair and Brown governments.

And after the defeat of Corbynism, Labour has returned to its pro-privatisation position. Labour shadow health secretary Wes Streeting said that the last UK Labour government “showed using the private sector to bring down NHS waiting lists is effective, it’s popular with patients. No doubt the next Labour government may have to use private sector capacity to bring down NHS waiting lists, and I won’t shirk that for a minute”.

Labour won’t reverse NHS privatisation; instead the working class needs its own party. To reverse the damage the NHS has suffered, one of the first steps of a future socialist government would be to abolish Foundation Trusts, renationalise privatised services, take over private hospitals, and scrap PFI.

Globally, the shortage of tests, vaccines and lack of anti-viral treatments show a negligent pharmaceutical industry only concerned with short-term profit. The industry needs to be taken into public ownership.

All the big corporations should be nationalised, with no compensation except where there is proven need – nothing for the fat cats. Democratic planning by workers in the industry including scientists, medical experts, engineers and trade unions, together with community representatives and socialist governments, would ensure production was geared to meet need, not profit.

● This is an edited version of an article that originally appeared in Socialism Today – find ‘New Labour’s real NHS legacy’ at socialismtoday.org

ALISON HILL  
WALTHAM FOREST SOCIALIST PARTY

One of Boris Johnson’s key weapons in trying to deflect attention from his many lies and failings is to boast about the Covid vaccination scheme. The efforts of the scientists who developed the vaccines are to be admired. It illustrates that if you invest properly in research and development, many other important drugs could be developed quickly.

The Vaccine Manufacturing and Innovation Centre was built in 2020, with £200 million of government money, and is run as a not-for-profit company. Big business couldn’t deliver a vaccine in time, so the public sector did!

Now Boris wants to sell it off. “Clearly government needs to work hand in glove with the private sector”, he said. It’s more like ‘hand in wallet’.

This disgraceful fiasco shows that the Tories’ mission to break up and privatise the NHS is continuing unabated. And, disgustingly, they are using the achievements of healthcare workers, in keeping the NHS going through a pandemic, as a smoke-screen for their attacks.

The Health and Care Bill is going through the House of Lords at the moment. It is the brainchild of Simon Stevens.

## Capitalist parties

Stevens has been happy to work with either of the main capitalist parties to privatise the NHS. He was Tony Blair’s health policy adviser, and was later appointed NHS chief executive by former Tory prime minister David Cameron.

Stevens was president of United Health Europe, while Boris Johnson’s health policy adviser Samantha Jones is former CEO of Centene. Both these companies administer public funds in the US through health maintenance organisations (HMOs).

The Health and Care Bill will create 42 new Integrated Care Boards (ICBs), uncannily similar to HMOs. If these had been implemented prior to Covid, they would have left the NHS pandemic response disjointed.

Private companies will be able to be part of the ICBs. ICBs will decide how the budget will be distributed. And they can use ‘provider collaboratives’, which is just Tory-speak for more private companies.

Bearing in mind that companies like Serco, Capita and many more are already all over the NHS, the concept of a universal and comprehensive NHS is fading away.

ICBs will not meet the needs of their local populations. They will have no explicit duty to provide, for example,



emergency services for everyone in their area.

They will be able to pick and choose who they serve. No doubt they will continue their current practice to take all the relatively easy cases to treat and hived them off to the private sector, all paid for with public money.

The pandemic has allowed these companies to slide more firmly into the NHS. A testing station may have a big NHS sign outside. The workers may have NHS on their shirts, but they’re working for Serco.

Services for infectious disease control, and public health in general, have been cut to the bone by

successive governments. When the pandemic started, there was no way of running an effective test-and-trace system. Capacity in the NHS laboratories was not there.

## What about workers?

Instead of rebuilding that capacity, the government threw £37 billion to the private sector, often to companies with no experience in this work. Serco alone got £350 million for managing test centres. Serco’s shareholders got £17 million and the chief executive got £4.9 million.

Meanwhile, the workers actually doing the work are often poorly paid,

trust in east London (see pages 6-7). Serco pays them as little as it can get away with, less than their fellow workers on NHS contracts.

And these methods are not confined to porters, cleaners etc. Many NHS trusts and commercial GP surgeries are forming companies to supply services like physiotherapy, laboratories and diagnostics.

Temporary, insecure employment is no way to run a proper health service. Patients on long waiting lists are being softened up to the idea of seeking treatment in the private sector.

One of the most shocking things when the pandemic started was the thousands of needless deaths in care homes. Elderly people were being discharged back to care homes without being tested.

But care homes, in spite of being a multibillion industry, are founded on low pay and precarious working. Agency workers were working in more than one home a day, often with inadequate PPE. If you had Covid symptoms, but you couldn’t get sick pay – you had to work.

83% of care homes are run for a profit, often by multinational chains. 5,500 different providers operate 11,300 care homes.

## Sold off

NHS and local authorities have closed or sold off nearly half a million care home beds through the cuts of previous decades. Community and long-stay care is even more privatised and fragmented in the UK than it is in the US.

The NHS, one of the most important achievements of working-class people, is being undermined and blatantly sold off. The expertise and dedication of healthcare workers is being offered up to ruthless multinationals. These companies have honed their business plan in the expensive and ineffective US system.

But we can take our lead from the workers who are fighting back, not just for their pay and conditions, but to defend and rebuild the NHS itself. This struggle needs to be generalised. Many people probably don’t know much about the latest round of attacks as they rumble through the House of Lords, but they would join a generalised struggle to stop them.

## The Socialist Party says:

- An immediate 15% pay rise for all health and care staff including those in privatised sectors. Minimum wage of £15 an hour. Scrap zero-hour contracts immediately
- Reverse all privatisations. Scrap

the Health and Social Care Bill and Private Finance Initiative. Bring all outsourced workers and services in-house on permanent contracts

- A fully publicly funded NHS and care system, free at the point of use. Scrap prescription charges in England, dental and all health charges

- Nationalise the private healthcare sector, care homes, the medical supply industry and the pharmaceutical companies - integrate them into the NHS
- Reinstate student bursaries and scrap tuition fees
- We can’t trust pro-privatisation, pro-austerity, anti-working-class

politicians. Fight for the building of a new mass workers’ party

- A socialist NHS - democratically run by elected and accountable committees, including service workers and users
- A socialist planned economy to end oppression, poverty and inequality



# Brighton Green and Labour cuts - workers and communities fight back

BRIGHTON SOCIALIST PARTY

Austerity has left Brighton without vital services, a housing crisis and rising poverty as wages are cut, with bills, council tax and charges on the rise. Over £170 million a year has been cut from the annual council budget by Tory central government since 2010.

Failing to resist Tory cuts, Brighton Green and Labour councils have carried out massive cuts to jobs and services. The Green council is now preparing to cut a further £18 million.

But council workers and communities have fought back. Moulsecombe Primary School fought academisation, and the GMB union won £4 million in wage increases for

the lowest-paid council workers in Brighton.

Despite inflation being over 7%, the council is only setting aside 2% for the council workers' pay award. The council is sitting on £39 million in reserves, and this doesn't include assets they own or could borrow against to protect and improve services.

These resources could be used to set a legal, balanced, no-cuts budget and launch a mass campaign to restore government funding. There must be an end to cuts, closures, increased taxes, rents, parking charges and asset stripping.

We need a council budget to meet the needs of the city, and councillors who are prepared to fight. And

we want to build a mass campaign uniting council workers, their trade unions and our local communities to fight for the £170 million stolen from Brighton by the Tory government, so we can reverse the cuts and build a socialist recovery for all.

The Socialist Party is part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC), with transport union RMT and others, to provide an electoral alternative to the pro-cuts political establishment.

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

## Surrey: Unions and campaigns say stand as an anti-cuts candidate

PAUL COUCHMAN

TUSC CANDIDATE IN STANWELL NORTH

Every week we hear about cuts to services – local bus services, public toilets closed, older people's homes closing, community centres – the list goes on. This is on top of cuts by stealth – 'efficiencies' forced on public sector workers, and cuts in support for special educational needs (Send) children, mental health and other services.

With 14 trade union branches affiliated, Save Our Services in Surrey has battled against cuts in services for years. The campaign has met online throughout the Covid pandemic, but now we have decided that we need to be out campaigning.

We also agreed to develop a People's Budget for Surrey, and encourage supporters, trade unionists and community activists to stand as council candidates. The campaign hopes for a surge in anti-cuts candidates in future years, particularly the county council elections in 2025.

TUSC

But the Socialist Party isn't waiting. I think candidates should come forward now and stand under the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC).

I'm standing in the Stanwell North by-election on 23 February. And Surrey Unison has already written to all

its members encouraging them to stand too.

The meeting didn't mind what party or banner candidates stand for, as long as they support a People's Budget. But TUSC is the only force standing that fully backs no cuts.

We have called a conference on 25 June, and will invite every trade union, anti-cuts campaign and community organisation we can reach. It is time for the voice of ordinary working-class people to be heard in the council chambers, and for a line in the sand to be drawn to protect our public services and public sector workers.

- See 'A socialist voice in Stanwell North' at [socialistparty.org.uk](https://socialistparty.org.uk)

# 1 March: Socialist Party new website launch

JUDY BEISHON

SOCIALIST PARTY WEBSITE EDITOR

A new Socialist Party website will be replacing the present one on Tuesday 1 March. The existing website has played an important role for two decades in getting out the Socialist Party ideas – but now it's time for this change, to make use of more up-to-date coding and presentation.

The weekly online version of the Socialist will continue to be a central feature of the site, with a number of key articles from the paper accessible from the home page. The entire paper – and back issues – will be available on the 'paper issue' pages.

The address of the new site – [socialistparty.org.uk](https://socialistparty.org.uk) – will remain the same. There may be some downtime during the changeover, at most for just a few hours. Viewers should try refreshing or clearing their browser cache if they have difficulties viewing the new site.

The launch version is not fixed in its design and scope, and there will be ongoing development work done on it. Donations to the Socialist Party



fighting fund will of course be possible via the new site, and please welcome it by making one – [socialist-party.org.uk/donate](https://socialist-party.org.uk/donate).

Socialist Party members paying in fighting fund and money from sales

of the Socialist will be able to do so using the 'Members resources' section at the bottom of the new homepage, which can also be accessed via the 'Contact' tab at the top of the homepage.

# “We want it back” – Restore Cardiff’s slashed services



Protesting against arts cuts outside the Welsh Senedd in Cardiff MARIAM KAMISH

TARYN TARRANT-CORNISH

CARDIFF EAST SOCIALIST PARTY

At the People's Budget meeting called by Cardiff Trades Union Council, speaker after speaker spoke movingly about their personal experience, outlining the human cost of cuts. Councillors must not pass on cuts from Westminster or the Senedd. Instead, they should dip into the city's significant £150 million reserves.

But despite an increase in funding from the Senedd – £52.6 million in cash terms – Cardiff City Council has only proposed a 'break-even' budget, with more cuts to come. Cardiff Trades Union Council secretary, Dave Bartlett, said: "In the last ten years, 2,500 jobs have disappeared from local government, and £200 million of services have been cut in this city."

Ruined lives

Wales Socialist Party secretary, Ross Saunders, spoke about youth workers and the hole left by their absence. "It's a very skilled job that made the difference for the young people they worked with between a life that went off the rails in the world of addiction, chaos, a ruined life, or getting through a difficult period."

Mia Hollings previously worked for Welsh Women's Aid. She said waiting lists for domestic violence services rose 140% during the Covid lockdowns, and she demanded a 140% rise in funding.

"We need trauma support. We

need counselling therapy, group work. We need prevention. We need interventions for perpetrators of abuse. We need different forms of community support.

"And of course, we can't just stop at domestic abuse services either. This is all linked to other things. So we need council housing because people need rehousing. Refuge is only a temporary solution."

Slipping through cracks

George Phillips works for brain injury charity Headway, which "really does change their lives. But because of the cuts to our funding, people are slipping through the cracks, and we can't provide the level of care that we need to provide."

Socialist Party member John Williams called on the council to bring in rent control (see pages 4-5). "The council already licenses landlords and they should make charging a fair rent, a condition of being registered."

The council should improve the fractured bus services and public transport to make it easier for people to travel and reduce pollution. Education provision is falling desperately short, especially following the impact of lockdowns. And services for children with additional needs are inadequate.

The meeting summed up the anger felt by many in a city where residents feel their futures look bleak, as the services they rely on are cut and privatised.



JAMES IVENS

## Newham City Farm – closed with no consultation

NIALL MULHOLLAND

EAST LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY

Newham City Farm, run by the local council, has been a well-known community and educational resource in east London since 1977. Generations of local school children and residents, in an overcrowded and poor urban borough, have visited the home of farm animals, beehives and pond wildlife.

But the city farm never reopened when the coronavirus lockdown ended. Newham council cabinet, with no community consultation, voted to close it in September.

100 protesters – including local residents and children, with many

in animal costumes and masks – turned up to lobby a meeting of the council cabinet on 8 February. The council has ignored a petition signed by over 46,000 people opposing closure.

With only 90-minutes' notice, campaign organisers were denied a deputation to the cabinet meeting. Alison McLucas asked to attend via Zoom after contracting Covid, but the council said no.

Lois Austin, east London Socialist Party, also addressed the crowd, condemning the council's closure of many community resources and facilities. The council made £25 million cuts last year, yet it has hundreds of millions of pounds in reserve.

Lois added that the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) will stand candidates in May's local elections in Newham, as will others involved in Newham Resists – a coalition against cuts and for a council budget based on local needs.

The Save Newham City Farm wants to see the farm "reimagined, redeveloped, and reopened as a valuable educational and community resource". For socialists, a reopened council site should come under real democratic local community control, involving trade unions, which would include a discussion and agreement about animal welfare and how an ethically run 'farm' should look today.

## London Socialist Party women’s meeting

### Discussing ideas to fight women’s oppression

HELEN PATTISON

LONDON SOCIALIST PARTY SECRETARY

Violence against women has been brought to the fore by recent events. There have been angry vigils and protests against sexual assault and attacks. This was the backdrop for our meeting of women members of London Socialist Party.

The Covid pandemic brought to the surface all of the divisions of capitalism, including sexism. Mainly women were further trapped in violent relationships, simultaneously trying to work from home and homeschool their children.

Socialism

The experience of the pandemic has helped working people, including women, want to get more involved in socialist politics.

The meeting started by discussing a Marxist approach to women's oppression and Friedrich Engels' book 'Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State'. It was really useful to put women's oppression in its historical context, before talking

about the movements currently taking place and our own campaigning work.

Another attack could see the movement against violence and sexism burst onto the streets again, and the Socialist Party is ready to support such protests. We also discussed the local elections in May, where councils will once again be passing on Tory austerity.

Cuts to refuges, council housing, and local services often have

the biggest impact on women, who rely on them the most. It was a good meeting, and women members of the Socialist Party in London left brimming with confidence for the battles ahead.

- See 'Engels on the origins of women's oppression – and its relevance to today's struggles' at [socialistparty.org.uk](https://socialistparty.org.uk) to learn more about Engels' book, or read 'It Doesn't Have to be Like This' - available from [leftbooks.co.uk](https://leftbooks.co.uk)

AREA	£ RECEIVED		£ TARGET		Q1: JANUARY-MARCH 2022		DEADLINE: 31 MARCH 2022	
	Wales	1,299	2,300				56%	
South West	856	1,800					48%	
East Midlands	778	1,850					42%	
Yorkshire	1,059	2,550						42%
West Midlands	866	2,600					33%	
London	980	4,600					21%	
Southern & SE	380	2,350	16%					
Northern	115	750	15%					
Eastern	86	1,200	7%					
North West	66	1,150	6%					
Other	297	3,850	8%					
TOTAL	6,782	25,000					27%	

# TV review: This is Going to Hurt

## Crucial story from NHS coalface



SISTER/TERRIBLE PRODUCTIONS/AMC STUDIOS/BBC STUDIOS

HOLLY JOHNSTON

NHS NURSE

'This is Going to Hurt' is a groundbreaking look at the pressures and strains on clinicians and the NHS. The dark comedy is based on Adam Kay's book of the same name – a collection of diary entries from his time as a junior doctor, even before the Tories' austerity onslaught.

The story is emotionally driven. It centres around Adam Kay's failing relationship with his boyfriend and his struggle to cope with a serious adverse incident at work.

Navigating the system

An important theme that the programme uncovers is that healthcare workers can be flawed, that we are human, often navigating around a difficult system, and are hard working. This brings into focus the necessary fight for fair conditions, not only for the safety of patients and efficacy of the service, but for the productivity and effectiveness of staff.

The latter episodes contain interesting commentary on union action. While the work unions can do fighting for better pay and conditions is not talked about, it does bring into focus their role in representing members.

In my own experience, the sheer workload and difficulty in getting protected union time make it hard to engage workers with the unions. This means we are up against it when it comes to reaching the threshold for strike action over pay.

Some have accused 'This is Going to Hurt' of misogyny. This is understandable, given the context, but

it misses the nuanced approach to looking at obstetric violence and the patriarchal system of maternity services.

The series presents a realistic and very emotive look at the gendered issues in maternity care. The misogyny shown is a fair representation of the experiences of most women in this flawed system.

Representation of 'idealised childbirth' exists in the media, so 'This is Going to Hurt', uncovering the violent truth of most maternity units, is necessary and accurate. It highlights the effects of maternity service cuts, and the need for adequate NHS funding.

The series is well timed. The crucial message – that damage is being done to mental and physical health by an underfunded NHS – is both heart-wrenching and very true to life. This well-produced and well-researched account of life on the NHS coalface is well worth a watch, and hopefully will result in a greater political understanding of the urgent nature of the NHS crisis we face.





# FIGHTING FEES AND MARKETISATION AFTER 2 MARCH STUDENT WALKOUT

Socialist Students national conference takes place in Birmingham on 26 February. The Socialist Students steering committee has put forward this motion to be debated and voted on.

The crisis on campuses for students and staff has reached a new stage in the last two years. Early in the Covid pandemic, stories of students brought back to campuses under the false pretences of face-to-face teaching were rife.

Students were then locked down on their campuses, due to the spread of the coronavirus, with rent payments and tuition fees taken from us for online-only teaching, which we could have participated in from home.

This crisis came on top of years of attacks to our education and campuses. Years of jobs cuts, cuts to support services, and outsourcing on campuses has damaged the quality of education students receive.

Since the lockdowns, cuts on campuses have continued unabated. The closure of entire courses has been posed, with those courses seen as 'low value' by big business in the sights of both the Tories and university managements, who rely on the Tories for funding.

The deep rot in higher education, which has been caused by years of underfunding and marketisation, has been brutally exposed by the pandemic. It has revealed the inability of the tuition fee funding model to deliver students a high-quality university education.

Instead of being run in the interests of students, staff and wider society, universities are increasingly run

to satisfy the needs of the Tories and the capitalist system they represent, including by opening our campuses up to profiteering private companies. This has made the need for a fightback against marketisation and for free education clearer for many students.

## Free education

The anti-austerity programme which Jeremy Corbyn advanced while he led the Labour Party, which included the demand to scrap tuition fees, popularised the idea of free education. For the first time in a generation, a leader of a major political party spoke about the possibility of scrapping tuition fees by taking the wealth off the 1%.

Despite the defeat of Corbynism by the forces of the Labour Party right within the boundaries of the Labour Party, the ideas of free education have remained popular among young people.

But the Covid crisis on campus has contributed even further to this process. Much more powerfully than by argument alone, the crisis has demonstrated in experience to a big layer of students why scrapping tuition fees entirely, and replacing them with full government funding, is a necessity to end the crises on our campuses.

## Protesting on campus

Students have not simply tolerated what has been meted out to them by university managements and the Tories in the last period, however. The rent strike campaigns which were launched by students, the most widespread since the 1970s, were an important step up in the fight against marketisation, and significantly succeeded in winning partial rent refunds for students.

More recently, students on campuses across the country have been protesting against the pandemic of violence against women. And in 2020, the protests of A-level students forced the government to U-turn. At their base, these have been movements against marketisation and its effects on the university campuses.

Socialist Students has played an important role intervening into this process, attempting to link these initial struggles against the effects of marketisation to the need to build a national student movement to scrap tuition fees entirely. Socialist Students organised a national day of action on 21 April 2021 on 26 campuses, demanding rent and tuition fee refunds for the year, paid for by the Tory government, as a first step towards scrapping fees entirely.

## National student strike

It is all of this which has culminated in the calling of a national student strike by the National Union of Students (NUS) on 2 March.

This has the potential to act as a sort of 'lightning rod', giving expression to the accumulated anger of students - anger not only at events relating to the campuses, but also at the wider issues affecting working-class youth, including the lack of decent jobs for young people and graduates, the housing crisis and austerity generally.

After years of the NUS failing to organise and lead students in struggle, however, it is not clear how many students will mobilise. If the turnout on 2 March is small, this will have nothing to do with the lack of willingness of students to struggle, but will be down to the failures of the leadership of the NUS. Nonetheless, among other things, the NUS has demanded 'fully funded education, free at the point of use', as part of its 2 March demands.

For Socialist Students, 2 March isn't an end, but on the contrary, represents the first potential step towards relaunching and rebuilding the student movement nationally on a fighting footing, putting the

demand for free education boldly to the fore.

It now seems likely that on 2 March, there will be a combination of a London demonstration with students turning out from some campuses around the country, as well as local actions on campuses.

The fact that the final day of the University and College Union (UCU) strike is on 2 March provides an opportunity to build links between students and staff in the fight against marketisation.

## Relaunching a national student movement

There are clear obstacles which the student movement needs to overcome to ensure the best possible turnout on the 2 March demos, and the strongest possible relaunch of a national student movement fighting for free education.

The biggest and most significant of these obstacles is the crisis of both organisation and leadership which exists for young people and students today. Chiefly among these is the complete abdication of the NUS, and on the campuses the students' unions, from their responsibility to help organise and lead students in struggle.

The NUS still has not learned the lessons of the defeat of the 2010 student movement. At the time, we called for an appeal by the leaders of the student movement to the trade unions to link up in order to escalate the struggle against the trebling of tuition fees.

The last two years have seen students in effect struggling on their own. The NUS, save for one or two public statements, did absolutely nothing to advance the struggle and help link the separate struggles of students into a national movement for free education.

And in the overwhelming majority of cases, students' unions on the ground - where they did engage leaders of the rent strikes - acted to try and put a brake on the movement, rein in their demands and conciliate students with university management.

This is in sharp contrast with the role Socialist Students attempted to play on the ground.

The dismantling of the NUS's democratic structures is part of a drawn-out historical process, with successive right-wing leaderships gutting the NUS and transforming it into more of a lobbying organisation, with a secondary campaigning 'arm' added on. This process has been mirrored on the campuses, with students' unions acting to manage students' expectations, instead of acting as fighting and democratically organised student organisations.

Despite being forced to call a demo on 2 March, at the time of writing, the NUS has done virtually nothing to build for it, not even announcing a march route or rally point!



## A fighting programme

However, Socialist Students is not a passive observer of these events. On the contrary, with a clear programme, method and strategy, we can act as a lever on events, mobilising students for free education and putting demands on both students' unions locally and the NUS nationally - and in the process pointing the way forward politically for students who we are able to reach with our campaigning work.

Crucial in the next period is the discussion on the programme that the student movement rebuilds around and fights for. The NUS has put forward the demands for "fully funded education, free at the point of use" 2 for March.

It is welcome that the NUS has called for this. But in the view of Socialist Students, it is necessary both to put flesh on the bone of this demand - by demanding the scrapping of tuition fees, cancellation of all student debt, and the replacement of student loans with grants - as well as linking the struggle for free education nationally to the day-to-day problems and concerns of students on the campuses.

The best way to do this would be to link the various attacks to campuses over the last decade - including cuts to support services, job and course cuts, rising rents - to the need for a struggle for funding for the campuses from the Tory government, linked to the question of fighting for free education. It is this approach and

programme that Socialist Students has consistently fought for and defended over the years.

We call not only for free education, but for the democratic control and oversight of our university campuses by democratically elected bodies of staff, students and the campus trade unions. Management have proven time and time again - from the cuts, to coronavirus, to the pandemic of sexual assault - that they cannot be trusted to run the campuses in the interests of students and staff.

Socialist Students has raised on campuses what concrete action students' unions need to take in order to mobilise students on 2 March, and for future actions as well. Primarily, this means demanding students' unions organise free or cheap transport to and from London for the day. Other demands on students' unions will be necessary, including the use of students' union resources to advertise the demo - posters on campus, leaflets distributed on campus and in every halls of residence letterbox, speeches in lectures etc.

If students' unions had called and organised mass, joint student and

staff assemblies in the run up to 2 March national demonstration, students could have been emboldened to turn out nationally.

Such assemblies could have discussed out not only the importance of building for 2 March, but also begun to chart out a strategy to build the struggle beyond that date. And by arguing for democratic student assemblies after 2 March, Socialist Students can continue to raise the need for building fighting and democratic student organisations in the fight for free education.

Alongside this, the NUS should use its position to call a national meeting after 2 March of all student campaigning organisations, free education campaigners, students' unions etc to discuss the way forward.

By campaigning for these demands, not only do we outline the kind of organisation and programme students need to fight for free education and their futures, but we also open the door for Socialist Students to call and lead such actions ourselves. These demands will be vital in the period after 2 March to continue the fight for free education.

### Socialist Students resolves:

- For Socialist Students to mobilise and support protests nationally on 2 March, wherever they take place and where we can intervene
- To call on the NUS to set a date now for a national meeting, bringing together all organisations, societies and students' unions fighting against the cuts and for free education, including the campus trade unions, to discuss what next steps need to be taken to build a national movement for free education
- To campaign locally after 2 March for mass assemblies of students and staff on campus to discuss a campaign to win back funding for our universities stolen from central government, linked to the building of fighting student organisations organised openly and democratically

JOIN

socialist students



## Join the student fightback!

- Visit [socialiststudents.org.uk/join](https://socialiststudents.org.uk/join)
- or call **020 8988 8761**
- or text your name and school, college or uni to **07749 379 010**



# The Erdington byelection and the fight for a new mass workers’ party

HANNAH SELL  
SOCIALIST PARTY GENERAL SECRETARY

In 2017, nearly 13 million people voted for Jeremy Corbyn’s anti-austerity manifesto, in the highest vote for Labour since 1997. Five years on, Jeremy Corbyn is not allowed to sit as a Labour MP.

Labour leader Keir Starmer has set out to drive every last vestige of Corbynism from the Labour Party, turning it into a totally reliable representative of the interests of British capitalism.

Corbyn’s earlier election manifesto pledges are being dropped in quick succession. Now, Labour HQ is trailing their latest ‘slaughter of the sacred cows of Corbynism’ with an announcement to pledge that they will definitely not nationalise rail, mail, energy or water!

Starmer’s Labour policies on all major issues are increasingly indistinguishable from the Tories. That leaves millions of workers and young people - who were inspired by Corbyn’s “for the many not the few” manifesto and are now facing a massive cost of living squeeze - struggling to find a way forward.

Given the lack of an alternative, many will ‘hold their noses’ and vote for Starmer’s Labour in order to get rid of the Tories. However, an endless future of voting for different brands of pro-capitalist politicians is no future at all.

If all that the workers’ movement offers is unending calls for a Labour vote even when - as with Coventry council at the moment - Labour is carrying out vicious strike-breaking policies, that will have consequences. Inevitably, increasing numbers of workers would not vote at all, or in some cases even express their rage by voting for right-wing ‘populist’ politicians.

So, what is the alternative? Some argue that trade unionists and socialists should fight within the confines of the Labour Party to push it to the left. However, the mass exodus from the Labour Party, now estimated at 200,000 members, shows that more

have concluded that, having failed to transform Labour under Corbyn’s leadership, it is not a realistic proposal now, especially when the left cannot even get Corbyn readmitted to the Parliamentary Labour Party.

Instead, what is posed is beginning to build something new, outside the confines of Labour.

Discussions on this are developing across the trade union movement, from the Bakers’ Union’s disaffiliation from Labour; Unite’s announcement that funds would be withheld from all Labour politicians in the Midlands while the Coventry refuse strike continues; and the resolutions submitted to the conference of the rail union, Aslef, calling for disaffiliation from Labour.

Other voices, however, continue to argue that it is impossible to contest elections outside of Labour, and will only result in marginal candidates getting very small votes.

Yet, to give one example, had Jeremy Corbyn, as the Socialist Party proposed, been prepared to stand outside of Labour for Mayor of London, on a socialist programme, he could have won, as Ken Livingstone did standing as an independent in 2000.

London Underground workers could then have had a mayor who stood with them in a fight against the Tory government, instead of Sadiq Khan, who is standing with the Tories to cut their jobs, conditions, and pensions. It would have also acted to galvanise and enthuse all those who are angry at the direction of Labour under Starmer.

Unfortunately, that opportunity was not taken. Should the trade union movement therefore stand aside and wait to see if Jeremy Corbyn, or another as yet unnamed ‘hero on a white charger’, steps onto the electoral field of battle? Had this approach been taken by those who founded the Labour Party, it would never have come into being.

## Labour’s origins

The Labour Party arose out of the trade union movement, but this process did not happen simply or quickly. The two major capitalist parties at the time were the Tories and the Liberals, with the trade union movement generally coming behind the Liberals.

The pro-Liberal ‘Labour Electoral Association’ pushed for Labour representation within the Liberal Party, and had delegates representing 750,000 trade union members at its 1891 conference. This was not the only trend, however; as late as 1899 one member of the Trades Union Congress (TUC) parliamentary committee stood in a byelection for the Tories!

Experience, however, led increasing numbers of trade unionists to conclude that they could no longer follow behind one or other capitalist party, but had to begin to build their own.

The beginnings were very modest. When, in 1892, one newspaper invited readers to write in if they would be prepared to join an ‘Independent Labour Party’, they received just 2,000 replies over five months. The following year the ILP, one of the



Erdington byelection TUSC candidate Dave Nellist (above centre) PHOTO PAUL MATTHEWSON

precursors of the Labour Party, was founded. Its first chairperson was the Scottish miners’ leader Keir Hardie.

The polar opposite of his namesake today, he was prepared to fight for political representation for the working class against seemingly overwhelming odds. He first stood in the Mid Lanarkshire parliamentary by-election in 1888, where he had led miners’ strikes. Nonetheless, he only got 617 votes.

The majority of his potential supporters undoubtedly voted for the ‘lesser evil’ of the winning Liberal candidate in order to stop the Tory, who came a close second.

It was not until 1892 that Hardie was elected to parliament, for West Ham South in east London, along with only two other independent working-class MPs.

Then came the creation of the Labour Representation Committee in 1900. A socialist newspaper at the time described the LRC, accurately, as “a little cloud no bigger than a man’s hand, which may grow into a united Labour Party.”

Many others continued to argue trade unions had no choice but to back the Liberals rather than this ‘little cloud’. However, from these small beginnings grew a mass force, which the majority of the working class identified as ‘their party’ for many decades.

Despite pro-capitalist leaders, the working class was able to exert pressure on Labour’s tops via the party’s democratic structures. Under Tony Blair, however, it was transformed into a thoroughly pro-capitalist neo-liberal party, with the unions’ power gutted.

When it began by providing, however imperfectly, a political arm for working-class struggles, it enormously strengthened them.

The 1906 Liberal government’s scrapping of the vicious anti-union Taff Vale Judgement, which had effectively made strikes illegal, was

driven by feeling the hot breath of the working class on their necks via the 29 Labour MPs that were elected.

Today, as the search for an alternative to Starmer’s pro-capitalist New Labour grows, the Socialist Party is encouraging as many trade unionists as possible to contest May’s elections.

We participate in the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) along with the RMT transport union, Resist – founded by the former Labour MP Chris Williamson - and other leading trade unionists, which provides a banner under which any trade unionist or community activist can stand on an anti-austerity programme.

## Class fighter

On 3 March, Socialist Party national committee member, Dave Nellist, will be contesting the Erdington parliamentary by-election on behalf of TUSC.

Dave stands in complete contrast to the pro-capitalist corrupt MPs of every establishment party. His candidature has enthused trade unionists up and down the country, not least because of his record of only taking a worker’s wage for nine years as a Labour MP.

Dave fought for the interests of the working class in parliament before being expelled by Labour’s right because of his refusal, in solidarity with millions of working-class households, to pay Thatcher’s hated Poll Tax, and his support for Militant, the forerunner of the Socialist.

Later, as a Socialist Party councillor in St Michael’s ward, Coventry, Dave continued to fight tenaciously for the city’s working class.

Given the enthusiastic response to Dave’s campaign so far, whatever the result on 3 March, like the campaigns of Hardie and others over a century ago, the Erdington byelection will play its part too in the fight to create a mass party of the working class.



**Dave stands in complete contrast to the pro-capitalist corrupt MPs of every establishment party**



**The Labour Party arose out of the trade union movement, but this process did not happen simply or quickly**

# Canada: Prime Minister Trudeau invokes Emergencies Act to end ‘Freedom Convoy’

ELISABETH WICHSER,  
CWI CANADA

On 14 February, Canada’s prime minister Justin Trudeau invoked emergency measures to deal with the ‘Freedom Trucker Convoy’ protests against mandatory Covid-19 vaccination.

Although police have now cleared the truckers’ occupation from the streets of the capital, Ottawa, the right-wing protest has left both the main establishment Liberal and Conservative parties looking crumpled.

The Canadian Civil Liberties Association had opposed the activation of the Emergencies Act to deal with blockades. The association’s executive director, Noa Mendelsohn Aviv, said: “Emergency legislation should not be normalised. It threatens our democracy and our civil liberties”.

The convoy that made its way across Canada had caused major disruptions in the capital Ottawa and in Toronto.

It also significantly disrupted cross-border trade between Canada and the USA by temporarily closing the key arterial Ambassador Bridge.

What started as a protest against forcing unvaccinated truckers to quarantine for two weeks upon re-entry to Canada spiralled into a general right-wing protest against the government, vaccines, masks, and much more.

While this particular measure only affected about 12,000 truckers (90% of Canada’s 120,000 cross-border truckers are vaccinated), this struggle caught the eye of far-right groups.

Some called this movement a “working-class revolt,” but the leaders, backers, and supporters of the convoy included Donald Trump, Ted Cruz, Elon Musk, and Ben Shapiro.

The crowdfunding platform GoFundMe took down the convoy’s donation page and vowed to return \$9 million to donors, citing “violence” and “harassment” by some protesters, but not before releasing \$1 million to protest organisers.

The original organiser of the GoFundMe page, Tamara Linch, is the

leader of a far-right fringe party in Alberta called the Maverick Party. This party calls for the Prairie Provinces to secede from Canada to form their own conservative nation.

After the donation page was removed from GoFundMe on 4 February, a new one opened up on the right-wing Christian funding platform GiveSendGo.

This platform helped raise money for Kyle Rittenhouse, the US 17-year-old who escaped conviction after shooting dead two unarmed Black Lives Matter protesters in Kenosha, Wisconsin, USA.

The protesters had demanded an end to lockdowns, a repeal of vaccine mandates where they were implemented, and a repeal of mask mandates. Confederate flags and flags with Nazi symbols are present at the protests. Some protesters compared the vaccine mandate to the Holocaust!

## Opposition to government

The majority of working people in Canada did not support the convoy but there is also opposition to the government.

In an Angus Reid Institute poll taken between 11-13 February, 64% percent of respondents said they opposed the protesters’ demand to end all pandemic restrictions, against 33% who said they were supportive.

However, nearly half of Canadians believed the prime minister and provincial premiers were partially to blame for the ongoing protest in Ottawa due to their “condescending attitude toward Canadians who disagree with vaccine mandates and lockdowns” (National Post).

What was once a protest against economic disruptions to some truckers’ incomes galvanised far-right and white supremacist elements.

There had been reports of harassment and violence against passers-by, with one homeless shelter in Ottawa reporting verbal and physical harassment from protesters who came in trying to get meals (despite not being homeless).

Healthcare workers had been particularly affected as trucks blocked



ambulance access to hospitals in cities they were driving through.

A counter-protest by healthcare workers outside Toronto General Hospital on 5 February demanded an end to harassment of health workers at hospitals and clinics, and also highlighted the backlog in surgery caused by the pandemic.

It is understandable that some working people may not want to be vaccinated due to a mistrust of exploitative pharmaceutical companies. Measures like Quebec’s proposed tax on unvaccinated people will not make mistrustful people change their minds.

People who are on the fence about getting the vaccine because of capitalism’s profit motive or the history of medical racism in North America have valid concerns; this mistrust is a direct result of the capitalist medical

system that puts profits over people’s health.

That being said, the majority of anti-vax protesters in Canada do not fall into this category and are instead members of or believers in far-right conspiracy or white supremacy groups.

Many trade unions, including the Canadian Union of Public Employees, support vaccines to improve workplace safety and reduce workers’ chances of getting Covid.

The union also rightly calls for locals (union branches) to make the final decisions on Covid and vaccination policy in workplaces as opposed to the government and bosses making them.

The solution to the pandemic is a workers’ programme for adequate health and safety, as part of the struggle to change society, for socialism.

The lack of vaccines in the neo-colonial world - ‘vaccine apartheid’ - has resulted in new variants; ending patents and intellectual property rights on the vaccines and distributing them globally would help to stop new variants from developing.

Ending intellectual property protections would also allow us to make all the information about the vaccine public and allow for collaborative research and development between health and science workers around the world.

Workplace safety committees should be formed in all workplaces, elected from the workers, not managers. These committees, along with local unions, should be in charge of all pandemic policy in the workplaces, democratically controlled by workers, not the bosses.

● This article has been updated

## One year after the military coup in Myanmar, mass resistance continues

“The regime’s failure to control the country has taken many by surprise. The new generation does not want to allow any form of political domination by the military.

“However, the regime continues to kill, torture and arrest the people who continue to rise up against them. To date, the junta has killed nearly 1,500 residents, over one hundred have been tortured to death, and nearly 11,300 have been arrested.

“We can expect these atrocities to continue and, with that, the anger and determination of the people to abolish Tatmadaw’s (Myanmar’s military) power will also grow stronger!”



The above is from an article by Yuva Balan, marking one year since the Myanmar military launched its coup on 1 February 2021, which can be read on the CWI’s website - socialistworld.net.

The coup d’état ousted the governing National League for Democracy of Aung San Suu Kyi and annulled the November 2020 general election result.

● See also ‘Myanmar coup - For a workers-led struggle for democracy and socialism!’ on [socialistparty.org.uk](https://socialistparty.org.uk)



Labour’s first MP PHOTO WALTER BAXTER/CC





# WORKERS AND STUDENTS UNITE AND FIGHT

## Walk out on 2 March

ADAM POWELL-DAVIES

OXFORD SOCIALIST STUDENTS

**T**he National Union of Students (NUS) has called a national student strike on 2 March in response to growing anger at our rotten university system - one in which students are exploited as 'cash cows' at the hands of vice-chancellors, executives, and private companies.

Anger erupted initially in the university rent strike movement of the first and second lockdowns, and has since found expression in impressive student turnouts at University and College Union (UCU) rallies and pickets.

Students are right to be angry. The experience of students over the pandemic - who were locked down in their rooms, paying sky-high rents and tuition fees for predominantly online tuition - has highlighted for many the rot at the core of the UK higher education system, which has spread from years of underfunding and marketisation.

But we should also direct anger at the 'official' student leadership. The NUS has been pushed by the vigour of the wider student body into calling a strike for free education, among other demands. But what has it done to build for it? Very few students will be aware that the strike is happening. Many others do not know what the NUS is.

This sorry state of affairs points also to the impotency of most students' unions on the ground. The vast majority are affiliated to the NUS, but consistently fail to link campuses to wider national actions.

Ultimately, both the NUS and students' unions have played regressive roles in recent campus struggles. In an online meeting at the height of the rent strikes last year, current NUS president Larissa Kennedy stated that the fight for free education was part of a "long-term project for the future", failing to channel the potential that existed at that time for a national movement for 100% publicly funded higher education. At the same time, students' unions attempted to rein in and conciliate the demands of local rent strike groups.

More recently, some students' unions have gone as far as opposing the latest round of UCU strikes, while many others have simply shirked responsibility and 'stayed neutral' - in effect implicitly siding with university management in their attacks against staff.

Yet the example of last month's referendum at University College London, in which thousands of students successfully voted in favour of UCU strikes, shows the mood for joint staff-student struggle at large.

Socialist Students argues for a leadership that can actually channel the momentum of the wider student movement. Whatever happens after 2 March, we will be organising locally for mass assemblies of students and staff to discuss a campaign to win full government funding for universities, as the means to end the market-driven exploitation of staff and students alike, while seeking to build fighting, democratic student organisations on as many campuses as possible. If you would like to get involved in this fight, join us.

• Come to Socialist Students conference in Birmingham on 26 February and build the fightback after 2 March on your campus, visit [socialiststudents.org.uk](http://socialiststudents.org.uk)



MATT DOBSON